

This is the published version of a chapter published in *Russische und Sowjetische Geschichte im Film: Von Väterchen Zar, tragischen Helden, russischen Revolutionären und "kalten Krieger"n*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Kotljarchuk, A. (2016)

Invisible Victims: The Cold War and Representation of the Roma Genocide in Soviet Feature Films, Teleplays and Theater Performances.

In: Alexander Friedman ; Frank Jacob (ed.), *Russische und Sowjetische Geschichte im Film: Von Väterchen Zar, tragischen Helden, russischen Revolutionären und "kalten Krieger"n* (pp. 129-150). New York: ALTIJA

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-32100>



ALEXANDER FRIDMAN UND FRANK JACOB FÜRSE

RUSSISCHE UND SOWJETISCHE GESCHICHTE IM FILM  
VON BOLSCHEWISTISCHEN REVOLUTIONÄREN,  
ANTIFASCHISTISCHEN WIDERSTANDSKÄMPFERN,  
JÜDISCHEN EMIGRANTEN UND „KALTEN KRIEGERN“

# **RUSSISCHE UND SOWJETISCHE GESCHICHTE IM FILM**

Von bolschewistischen Revolutionären,  
antifaschistischen  
Widerstandskämpfern, jüdischen Emigranten  
und „Kalten Kriegern“

Alexander FRIEDMAN und Frank JACOB  
(Hrsg.)



New York

Geschichte und Film, Bd. 1

Hrsg. Frank JACOB und Alexander FRIEDMAN

Alexander Friedman und Frank Jacob:

*Russische und Sowjetische Geschichte im Film: Von bolschewistischen Revolutionären, antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfern, jüdischen Emigranten und „Kalten Kriegern“*

© ALTIJA, Frank Jacob, New York 2016.

Coverdesign: Judith Weber / Smakelig

ISBN: 978-1541360853

## Inhaltsverzeichnis

1.	Kino als „wichtigste aller Künste“: Einleitung Alexander FRIEDMAN und Frank JACOB	5
2.	„Das weite Land und die Reichtümer der Rus lockten die Eroberer an“ – Das bedrohte Russland im Film Alexander QUERENGÄSSER	15
3.	The Images of Dying and New Jewish Worlds in the Soviet Cinema: „ <i>The Jews on the Land</i> “ versus „ <i>Jewish Luck (Menachem Mendel)</i> “ Andrei ZAMOISKI	33
4.	„Kube, Hitlers Gauleiter in Minsk, war der leibhaftige Teufel“. Die Ermordung des Generalkommissars von „Weißruthenien“ (1943) und ihre Darstellung im sowjetischen und postsowjetischen Kino Alexander FRIEDMAN	55
5.	„Dieser Film ist nichts fürs arbeitende Publikum.“ Zur Rezeption des sowjetischen Films <i>Entschleierte Geheimnisse</i> in der Schauburg Dresden 1949 Mona HARRING	101
6.	Invisible Victims: The Cold War and Representation of the Roma Genocide in Soviet Feature Films, Teleplays and Theater Performances Andrej KOTLJARCHUK	129
7.	Der sowjetrussische Fußballfilm zwischen didaktischer und propagandistischer Intention unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des „Kiewer Todesspiels“ Jan Tilman SCHWAB	151
8.	Akira Kurosawas <i>Dersu Uzala</i> und die Visualisierung von Russlands „wildem Osten“ Frank JACOB	181
9.	Georgische Juden im Gelobten Land: Georgij Danelijas Spielfilme <i>Mimino</i> (1977) und <i>Passport</i> (1990) Alexander FRIEDMAN	197
10.	Audiovisionen und Geschichte: Die Fernsehfilme <i>Kortik</i> und <i>Bronzovaja ptica</i> nach gleichnamigen Erzählungen von Anatolij Rybakov Oxana MONTEIRO	231
11.	<i>Red Heat</i> und die Wahrnehmung sowjetischer Polizeigewalt im amerikanischen Kino Frank JACOB	257
12.	Autorenverzeichnis	273
13.	Index	275

## Invisible Victims: The Cold War and Representation of the Roma Genocide in Soviet Feature Films, Teleplays and Theater Performances

Andrej KOTLJARCHUK

### Introduction

About 73,000 Romani were victims of the Nazi genocide on the occupied territory of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Most of them were massacred by Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* and local collaborators on the spot and never deported to the extermination camps.<sup>2</sup> By 2014, 113 places of mass extermination of Roma were identified on the territory of Ukraine and 27 places in Belarus.<sup>3</sup> However, dozens of mass graves remain unknown or unmarked, many of which were destroyed through construction works and agriculture. The discussion over the exclusion of Romani minority cannot be isolated from the memory of genocide, which makes the struggle over the past a reflexive landmark for today's national movement and memory efforts. However, Soviet path

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk: Le génocide nazi des Roms en Bélarus et en Ukraine: de l'importance des données de recensement et des recenseurs. In: *Etudes Tsiganes* 56–57 (2016), pp. 194–215.

<sup>2</sup> In the occupied territory of western Belarus that became a part of the Third Reich proper, like elsewhere in the Nazi Germany, Romani were deported to the concentration camps. November 28, 1943 the first special train with Romani on board from Grodno/Hrodna and Białystok arrived to Auschwitz-Birkenau. A Gypsy girl, Weronika Walaniewicz from Grodno (born 1925, camp number Z-9611), is a single known person who survived in this group by escaping from the camp. The next train from the Belarusian-Polish borderland came to Auschwitz-Birkenau on 12 May 1943 and had 971 Romani on board. All of them were gassed few days later. See: Kotljarchuk: Le génocide nazi des Roms en Bélarus et en Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Tyaglyy (ed.): *Peresleduvannia ta vbiivstva romiv na terenakh Ukrainy u chasi druhoi svitovoi viini. Zbirnik dokumentiv ta spohadiv*. [Persecution and Killings of Romanis in Ukraine During World War II. Documents and Testimonies] Kiev: Ukrainian Centre for Genocide Studies, 2013; Andrej Kotljarchuk: Palityka pamiaci u suchasnai Belarusi. Memaryialy druhoi susvetnai vainy i etnichnyia menshastsi krainy [Memory Politics in Today's Belarus: World War II Memorials and Ethnic Minorities]. In: *ARCHE* 2 (2013), pp. 173–194.

dependency makes the ongoing process of remembrance complicated. How did the Soviet state deal with the memory of Roma genocide? Was the Nazi genocide of Roma represented in postwar feature films and teleplays? And if so, how? How did the Cold War and the specific aspects of Soviet memory politics affect the representation of Roma genocide on the stage and screen?<sup>4</sup>

### Background

In May 1937 a caravan of nomadic Roma came to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine and the third largest city in the Soviet Union. There were 27 families of *Kalderash* Roma known as good smiths and metal workers who wandered through the country. They camped on *Natalkin Luh* (*Natali's meadow*) in vicinity to Babi Yar. The chief of the caravan was called Lustan. There were 84 adults and 132 children in the camp, altogether 216 individuals.<sup>5</sup> The Roma sent a collective petition to the city authorities in which they asked for permitting to settle down:

We are writing to you with a great earnest request to help us in our grief. We are in a difficult situation living in a camp on the open space. Previously, we were nomads, a dark illiterate people – that is our nation. But now, thanks to the Soviet power, we began to work on the manufacturing and treatment of metal goods.<sup>6</sup>

In 1937 the area of Babi Yar become a center for Romani craft cooperative *Trudnatsmen* (Working Ethnic Minority). The authorities granted the Romani the former secret police building.

---

<sup>4</sup> This study was supported by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (Sweden) and Södertörn University as a part of the project “The Roma Genocide in Ukraine 1941–1944: History, memories and representations.” The author wishes to thank Piotr Wawrzyniuk, David Gaunt, Anders Blomqvist (Södertörn University), Matthew Kott (Uppsala University / Södertörn University), Alexander Friedman (University of Saarland), Frank Jacob (City University of New York) and anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on previous drafts.

<sup>5</sup> Spisok rodin-chleniv artili tsigan im. XX-ti richchnia Zhovtnia Petrivskogo raionu [Kiev] na Kurenivtsi. In: *Derzhavni Arkhiv Mista Kyiv* (State Archives of the City of Kiev, DAMK), fond R-1, opis 1, sprava 10715, list 1–28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The Romani craft cooperative produced metal fences and barrels for city needs and made a very good profit.<sup>7</sup>

In 1941 the Nazi Germany and their satellites Romania and Hungary occupied the territory of Ukraine. Since June 22, 1941 Kiev was under martial rule and Romani had very few chances to leave the city for the East. At Babi Yar during two days of mass killings on September 29-30, 1941 – nine days after the German occupation of Kiev – the Nazis exterminated more than 33,000 Jewish civilians. The Nazis also killed Romani at Babi Yar, most probably in September 1941.<sup>8</sup> According to Anatoly Kuznetsov, mass killings of Jews and Romani at Babi Yar caused alarm among their Slavic neighbors: “Jews kaput, Gypsies too, and then Ukrainians, then come you” – was a popular saying in Kiev at that time.<sup>9</sup>

On February 29, 1944, the Soviet press published a long report of the Extraordinary Commission for Investigation of War Crimes (aka ChGK) in Kiev led by Nikita Khrushchev. The Commission’s report did not specify the ethnicity of the victims but concluded that: “In Babi Yar over 100,000 Soviet citizens were killed, women, children and elderly”.<sup>10</sup> The decision to ignore ethnic aspects of the victims was taken despite the leadership’s knowledge of the results of the investigation by the ChGK, which provided detailed information on the massive

---

<sup>7</sup> DAMK, fond R-1, opis 1, sprava 10715, list 24–28.

<sup>8</sup> Svidetel'stvo zhitelei goroda Kieva khudozhnika Nikolaya Adrianovicha Priakhova i professora Ivana Nikolaevicha Zhitova i drugikh o massovykh rastrelakh v Bab'em yaru. In: *Central State Archive of the supreme power and administration of Ukraine* (TsDAGO). Fond R- 4620, opis 3, sprava 243, list 38; Ilya Levitas: *Nerazgadannye tainy Bab'ego Yara*. In: *Evreiskie vesti*, 17-18 (1993); Karel C. Berkhoff: *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 2008, pp. 41, 60, 221; Karel C. Berkhoff: *Babi Yar: Site of Mass Murder, Ravine of Oblivion*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2012, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Anatoly Kuznetsov: *Babi Yar. A Documentary Novel*. New York: The Dial Press 1967, pp. 101–102.

<sup>10</sup> Soobshchenie Chrezvychainoi Gosudarstvennoi Komissii po ustanovleniu i rassledovaniu zlodeianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov o razrusheniyakh i zverstvakh sovershennykh nemetsko-fashistskim zakhvatchikami v gorode Kieve. In: *Izvestiya*, 29. February 1944, p. 3.



mass killings of Jews and Romani at Babi Yar. The previous publications specifying the Jewish ethnicity of the victims at Babi Yar were also ignored.<sup>11</sup> The decision of the Communist Party to ignore ethnic grounds of the Babi Yar massacre was crucial for the post-war policy of forgetting the Roma genocide. Moreover, despite a number of testimonies collected by the ChGK, contemporary Soviet press and films totally ignored the extermination of Romani at Babi Yar.<sup>12</sup>

In 1945 Ukrainian Dovzhenko film studio realized the feature film *The Unvanquished* directed by Mark Donskoy.<sup>13</sup> The movie showed the massacre of Jews, filmed on the actual location of Babi Yar. Donskoy depicted the actors with David Star armbands in order to make ethnic origin of victims more visible. In reality the victims of the Babi Yar massacre never forced to wear such armbands.<sup>14</sup> The Roma were not mentioned in the film at all. In April 1945 *Pravda* informed the Soviet people about the decision to build in Babi Yar a memorial and a museum “to the memory of ten of thousand residents of Kiev”.<sup>15</sup> Despite the announcement, there were no memorials at Babi Yar until 1976.

### **Postwar Memory Politics and Roma Genocide: Denial? Forgetting? Paralysis?**

Soviet historians had created a historiography of what they termed the *Great Patriotic War*, without using the expression

---

<sup>11</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk: The Nazi Genocide of Roma on the Territory of Occupied Ukraine: The Role of Soviet Path Dependency in Contemporary Politics of Memory. In: *Holocaust and Modernity* 12 (2014), pp. 24–50.

<sup>12</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk: The Memory of Roma Holocaust in Ukraine. Mass Graves, Memory Work and the Politics of Commemoration. In: Tea Sindbæk Andersen / Barbara Tornqvist-Plewa (eds.): *Disputed Memories. Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2016, pp. 149–176, here 153–154.

<sup>13</sup> *The Unvanquished* (Непокоренные, IMDb ID 0037941 1945, D: Mark Donskoy). The film is based on the eponymously named novel written by Boris Gorbатов in 1943. In 1946 the film won the International Critics Award at the Venice Film Festival. Mark Donskoy (1901–1981) was a prominent Soviet film director, born in a Jewish family in Odessa.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremy Hicks: *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–1946*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2012, pp. 142–151.

<sup>15</sup> Pamiatnik pogibshim v Bab'em Yaru. In: *Pravda*, 3. April 1945, p. 3.

“genocide”. The keynote of Soviet memory politics was *heroization*. For Soviet leaders, this war was first of all a war of heroes: soldiers, partisans and underground resistance fighters, not victims. The victory supposed to be achieved by all Soviet nations, and the war was depicted then as a tragedy for all Soviet peoples without division on ethnic grounds.<sup>16</sup> Ignoring the ethnicity of victims, the authorities persistently used a vague concept of “peaceful Soviet citizens”. After the war the exceptional nature of the systematic Nazi extermination of the Roma people and the Jews, was not recognized by the Soviet state. The Cold War dramatically changed the discourse of the Western Allies and in a number of post-war Soviet war films former allies (*soyuzniki* in Russian) were represented as traitors of the victory that during the war had the conspiracy with the Nazis and after the war supported Nazi war criminals.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, countries, the former allies with the Nazi Germany (Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia and Hungary) became after the war members of the Soviet bloc. Therefore, the crimes of Romanian and Hungarian occupational forces in the Soviet Union were to be neglected. The normalization of political relations between the Soviet Union and Finland made the winter war and the occupation of Karelia by the Finnish army in 1941–1944 unpopular topics for Soviet cinema production. Exploiting the mythology of World War II in films had during the Cold War a practical international significance for Soviet leadership. This is not only by development of a special place for Soviet people as the last men standing against Nazism, but also the image of Soviet Union as only defender of peace in the world. The next point was supporting the myth of the fight taken up by the entire Soviet nation against the Nazi occupiers.

---

<sup>16</sup> Alaina Lemon: *Between two fires Gypsy performance and Romany memory. From Pushkin to Postsocialism*. Durham: Duke University Press 2000, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> Maia Turovskaya: *Filmy kholodnoi voyny*. In: *Iskusstvo kino* 9 (1996), pp. 98–106.

Thus, the participation of Baltic, Belarusian, Caucasian, Russian, Tatar and Ukrainian collaborators with the Nazis in the genocide was to be played down.<sup>18</sup>

With the Khrushchev thaw, new interpretations developed in Soviet Union regarding the significance of commemoration of the ordinary victims of Nazism. In 1960 Piskarevo Memorial Complex was opened in Leningrad dedicated to the victims died by starvation during the siege of the city. In 1965 a large memorial, “To the Victims of Fascism”, was opened in Donetsk. The State Memorial Complex Khatyn was opened in Belarus in 1969 on the site of a former village the Belarusian population of which was exterminated by the Nazis for alleged assistance to Soviet partisans. 19 September 1961 the well-known Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko published in *Literaturnaya gazeta* the epic *Babi Yar*.<sup>19</sup> The poem, whose first line is “To Babi Yar there are no monuments” became a strong public protest against the government’s refusal to recognize Babi Yar as a Holocaust site.<sup>20</sup> However Yevtushenko did not mention Roma in the epic.

In March 1963, at a meeting with Soviet writers, Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the country and the former head of *ChGK* in Kiev, devoted special attention to Babi Yar and Yevtushenko. He noted that Roma and Jews were among primary objects of Hitler’s extermination war, but denied the exceptional nature of Roma and Jewish traumas:

Let’s take the case of Babi Yar. When I worked in Ukraine I visited Babi Yar. Many people were murdered there. But comrades, Comrade Yevtushenko, you have to know that not only Jews died there, there were many others. Hitler exterminated Jews, exterminated Gypsies, but his next plan was to exterminate the Slavic peoples, we know that he also exterminated many Slavs. If we now calculate arithmetically,

---

<sup>18</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk: World War II Memory Politics: Jewish, Polish and Roma Minorities of Belarus. In: *The Journal of Belarusian Studies* 1 (2013), pp. 7–40.

<sup>19</sup> Babi Yar. In: *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 19. September 1961.

<sup>20</sup> Zvi Gitelman: Politics and the historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. In: Zvi Gitelman (ed.): *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1997, pp. 14–43, here p. 20.

how many exterminated peoples were Jews and how many Slavs, those who state that it was anti-Semitic [war] would see that there were more Slavs exterminated than Jews. It's correct. So why should we put a special attention to this question and contribute to hatred between our nations? What aims have those who raise such question? Why? I think this is completely wrong.<sup>21</sup>

But when the leading Soviet newspaper *Pravda* published their report on this meeting, it did not mention Roma at all. According to the censored text, Khrushchev said: "The author of the poem [Yevtushenko] showed an ignorance of historical facts, he believes that the victims of Nazi atrocities were only the Jews, in fact there [in Babi Yar] were murdered many Russians, Ukrainians and other Soviet people of various nationalities."<sup>22</sup> The liberal atmosphere of 1960s created some opportunity for the representing of Roma genocide victims in literature and films. The so-called Khrushchev thaw resulted in particular in the diversion of memory politics from a focus on heroic soldiers to the sufferings of ordinary people during World War II.<sup>23</sup> In 1966 Anatoly Kuznetsov, who grew up in the vicinity of Baby Yar and survived the war as a teenager in Kiev published in the literary magazine *Yunost'* in 2 million copies a documentary novel *Babi Yar*.<sup>24</sup> In 1967 the novel *Babi Yar* was published in 150,000 copies by the Komsomol publishing house *Molodaya gvardiya*.<sup>25</sup> The same year the novel was translated to English and published in New York. For the first time Soviet and Western reading public learnt about the Nazi massacre of the Roma at Babi Yar:

The fascists [the Nazis] hunted Gypsies as if they were game.  
I have never come across anything official concerning this,  
yet in the Ukraine the Gypsies were subject to the same im-

---

<sup>21</sup> Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: *Dva tsveta vremeni. Dokumenty iz lichnogo fonda N. S. Khrushcheva*, vol. 2, Moscow 2009, p. 547.

<sup>22</sup> Rech' tovarishcha N. S. Khrushcheva. In: *Pravda*, 10. March 1963, pp. 1, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Kotljarchuk: World War II Memory Politics.

<sup>24</sup> Anatoly Kuznetsov: Roman-dokument Babi Yar, chast' III". In: *Yunost'*, 8 (1966), pp. 11–62.

<sup>25</sup> Anatoly Kuznetsov: *Babi Yar. Roman-dokument*. Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya 1967.

mediate extermination as the Jews [...] Whole tribes of Gypsies were taken to Babi Yar, and they did not seem to know what was happening to them until the last minute.<sup>26</sup>

In 1966 a simple foundation stone was placed in Babi Yar with an inscription that there the memorial to the victims of Nazism will be build. The same year a feature film *Those Who'll Return Shall Love to the End* was shot at Dovzhenko Film Studio by the Ukrainian filmmaker Leonid Osyka (1940–2001).<sup>27</sup> The well-known Ukrainian actor Boris Khmel'nitsky played the starring role. The film was stopped by the censorship for two years, but finally was allowed for screening. The premiere held in Kiev on 11 March 1968. The movie averaged 3.5 million viewers in 1968–1969. The film tells a story of a young Ukrainian poet, a former Red Army soldier, who was surrounded by the Nazis and forced to wander through the Ukraine in the search of partisans (Fig. 1).

---

<sup>26</sup> Anatoly Kuznetsov: *Babi Yar. A documentary novel*. New York: The Dial Press 1967, p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Who return, shall love to the end (Кто вернется – долюбит, IMDb ID 0347362 1966, D: Leonid Osyka).



Fig. 1: Poster of the film *Those Who'll Return Shall Love to the End* (Dovzhenko film studio, premier: 11. March 1968, D: Leonid Osyka)

In order to survive he joined a caravan of Roma led by a woman played by the actress Elena Dimitriu. Through the figure of the poet, the viewers are encouraged to believe that the Nazi occupation of Ukraine turned this republic to a bloodland. Indeed,

the Nazis soon stopped the caravan and all of people with exception for the poet were murdered.

The scene of genocide takes place in minutes 38 to 44 of the film. The camera pans over Romani who slowly undress under the supervision of the German soldiers (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Fragment from the film *Those Who'll Return Shall Love to the End* (Dovzhenko film studio, premier: 11. March 1968, D: Leonid Osyka)

The Nazis confiscate the horses and rob the Gypsy wagons. The victims cry. At this time, the poet stands apart like a madman and reads a verse in Ukrainian with the refrain "Ominous Night over Ukraine". After that two SS officers with a German shepherd appeared on the site. One can see more dogs and the Nazi motorcyclists that surround the site. A Roma woman comes to the poet and says: "Tell them that you are not a Gypsy, because they will kill us". At that time the German soldiers pour gasoline over the people's clothes and set fire on it. A Roma woman tries to convince the SS officer that the poet is not a Roma. In the end, the officer orders quietly to an auxiliary policeman to bring the poet out of the crowd and leave him alone. As Sophie Wood points out, the visual representation of mass killings is problematic. Viewers often regard the action from the perspective of perpetrators. The image of mass killing of children is not ethically acceptable.<sup>28</sup> The scene of actual shooting is not

---

<sup>28</sup> Sophia Wood: *Film and Atrocity: The Holocaust as Spectacle*. In: Kristi M. Wilson / Tomás F. Crowder-Taraborrelli (eds.): *Film and Genocide*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 2012, pp. 21-44, here p. 33.

shown in the film. One can see only the eyes of victims accompanied by the sounds of machine guns and the burning clothes on the background.

Like in Donskoy's movie, the scene of genocide is a central image of the film. The racist, unmotivated grounds of the mass murder are stressed by the dialog between the poet and the Romani woman. The black SS uniform and the green uniform of Wehrmacht soldiers are clearly visible in the scene of the massacre. Moreover, some of the local policemen are briefly shown in the episode. Soviet star filmmaker Sergei Paradzhanov praised this now forgotten film for its advanced camerawork, creative language and philosophical nature. The movie image is almost motionless and the main character speaks exclusively poetry. To this day the film contains one of the most shocking visual representations of the genocide of Roma by the Nazis.

The movie *A Roma*, directed in 1967 at Dovzhenko film studio by the prominent filmmaker Evgeny Matveev, deals with the post-genocide trauma. The film was a leader of the 1968 box sales averaged 37.9 million viewers.<sup>29</sup> Budulai, a Red Army veteran and a Gypsy baron, played by the filmmaker himself, travelled through the Soviet Union looking for his family lost in the war. The movie starts with a scene from 1941 showing the Nazis hunting Romani and Russian civilian population somewhere in southern Russia. A German tank catches a Gypsy wagon and crushes it. All people in the wagon are killed except for a baby, which is adopted by a Ukrainian woman named Klavdiya. After 16 years of searching, Budulai finally found a grave of his wife with a help of hand-made wheel that remained at the site of murder. In the village lives a teenager remarkably like the main character. The film shows the temporary reunification of Budulai with his son and his falling in love with a Ukrainian mother, which symbolizes the integration of the Roma within

---

<sup>29</sup> *A Roma* (Цыган, IMDb: ID 0173366 1967, D: Evgeny Matveev). The premiere of the film was held in Kiev on 13 July 1967 and in Moscow on 11 September 1967. Evgeny Matveev (1922–2003) was a prominent Soviet actor and filmmaker, born in a Ukrainian family he graduated in 1941 at Kiev film actors' school.



the majority society. Matveev's film seems to be trapped in the Soviet canon of World War II. The film lacks the image of mass extermination of the Roma. The Nazis hunted both Russians and Romani and then murdered a Roma family, something that could happen to any family during the war.

In 1979 Alexander Blank directed the TV-serial *A Roma* at Odessa film studio. As the 1967 film the serial was based on the eponymously named novel written by Anatoly Kalinin in 1960. The 365-minute serial was a kind of remake of Matveev's film. However, Alexander Blank decided to not show a scene of the killing of a Roma family. Instead, the story of murder repeated orally during the film by different personages, including Budulai, Klavdiya and witnesses. A film provides a story of the war veteran, who 16 years after the war was still living with trauma. Budulai wears a soldier's blouse with combat medals on. The TV-serial *A Roma* is one of the most popular television films in Soviet history, with practically the entire adult population as its audience. This great success can be explained by the participation of two movie stars: the Moldavian actor Mihai Volontir, who played Budulai, and the Ukrainian actress Klara Luchko, who played Klavdiya. The frame stories of *Who return, shall love to the end* and *A Roma* sum up a new trend of post-war memory politics with its shift from the heroes to the victims or/and heroes as victims and their post-war trauma.

#### **A Host in Himself: State Moscow Romani Theatre *Romen***

The professional theatres in the post-war Soviet Union all belonged to the state. The system of the so-called "state drama theatres" embraced all regional centers. Soviet and autonomous republics had "national theatres" with a non-Russian repertoire. Two dispersed minorities of the Soviet Union (Jews and Roma) had their own state theatres. The Moscow State Romani Theatre *Romen* was established in 1931 and is the oldest professional Romani theatre in the world, and still functions today.

Since 1940, the theatre repertoire is based on the plays in the Russian language.<sup>30</sup>

In 1942–1944 Theatre *Romen* gave more than 600 performances for Soviet soldiers at the front. None of the plays was dedicated to the Nazi extermination of Roma. And this despite the fact that during the war the systematic extermination of Roma was discussed in the Soviet media and the actors themselves met eyewitnesses of mass executions in Ukraine and Caucasus. In 1942 the theatre presented the new play *On the Banks of the Dniester River* (Fig. 3). This play, which was performed several times during the war, tells the story of the Romani female partisan unit that fought against the Nazis in Transnistria. In reality, Transnistria, in southern Ukraine, was occupied by Romania. There a number of concentration camps were established by the occupation regime of Antonescu for the Roma deported from Romania proper.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Shneer: *Moskovskii teatr Romen*. In: *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*. Vol. 17:1, Moskva 1974, p. 115. Alexander Shneer (1892–1994) was a leading Soviet theater critic of Jewish descent, graduated at Bern University.

<sup>31</sup> In May 1942 about 25,000 nomadic and the so-called “asocial Romani” were deported by Antonescu regime to the occupied zone in Ukraine, the so-called Transnistria. About 11,000 of the deported died in 1942–44 in the forced famine. See: Viorel Achim: *The Antonescu Government’s Policy towards the Gypsies*. In: Mihail Ionescu / Liviu Rotman (eds.): *The Holocaust in Romania: History and Contemporary Significance*. Bucharest: Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History 2003, pp. 55–60; Vladimir Solonari: *Ethnic Cleansing or “Crime Prevention”? Deportation of Romanian Roma*. In: Anton Weiss-Wendt (eds.): *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma. Reassessment and Commemoration*. New York-Oxford: The Berghahn 2013, pp.96–119.



Fig. 3: Scene from the play *On the Banks of the Dniester River* (Theatre Romen, premier: 1942, D: Ivan Rom-Lebedev)

In February 1944 a satirical play, *The Dragon*, written by Evgeny Schwartz, was published.<sup>32</sup> The play tells the story of Sir Lancelot, who supposes to liberate people in a land suffering under the Dragon's brutal rule. In March–December 1944, the Leningrad Comedy Theater performed the play in Moscow with a howling success.<sup>33</sup> In one of the dialogues Lancelot discusses the destruction of the Roma with Archivist Charlemagne:

- L: What good did he [The Dragon] do for all of you?
- C: He has delivered us from the Gypsies.
- L: But the Roma are very nice people.
- C: What do you say! Horrible! I personally have never seen a Gypsy, but in school we were taught that they are a bad people.
- L: But why?
- C: They are vagabonds by nature and by blood. They are enemies of any state system ... They steal children. They

<sup>32</sup> Evgeny Schwartz: *Drakon*. Moscow: Vsesouiznoe upravlenie po okhrane avtorskikh prav. Otdel rasprostraneniya 1944; Evgeny Schwartz (1896–1958) was the well-known Soviet playwright born in a Jewish-Russian family.

<sup>33</sup> Evgeny Schwartz: *Prevratnosti sud'by. Vospominaniya*, Moscow 2013, pp. 10–11.

penetrate everywhere. Now we have completely got rid of them, but 100 years ago any brunette had to prove that he is no gypsy blood.

- L: Who told you all this about the Roma?
- C: Our Dragon ...<sup>34</sup>

The dialog is clearly inspired by the Nazi extermination of Roma people, but also by anti-Roma stereotypes. However, in 1944 it was interpreted as a political satire on Stalin's regime, and after the critical reception from the Soviet press the performance was banned and restored only in the 1960s.

With the coming of Perestroika, new interpretations of the memory of World War II developed regarding the significance of civilian victims. The Soviet government monopoly on memory ended and the significance of the Roma genocide underwent a substantial change. Perestroika led to the collapse of the strict Soviet system of censorship. In 1985, *Romen* performed in Moscow a spectacle *Birds need the Sky* dedicated to the victims of Roma genocide and directed by the renowned artist Nikolai Slichenko, a genocide survivor, whose father and relatives were murdered by the Nazis in Kharkiv (Fig. 4).<sup>35</sup>

The play was inspired by the real story of the mass execution of 176-settled Romani in the village of Aleksandrovka near Smolensk on 24 April 1942. The report on this crime against humanities was published in 1945 by ChGK and was the only official report on the genocide of Roma by the Nazis published in the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> The official press legitimated the efforts of Soviet Romani intelligentsia to commemorate the massacre at

---

<sup>34</sup> Evgeny Schwartz: *Drakon*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Nikolai Slichenko was born in 1934 in a family of the settled Ukrainian Roma, the so-called Servy. He survived the genocide in Kharkiv. Since 1977 he is a creative director of the Theater *Romen*. Slichenko is one of the most well known Romani actor and Romani romance singer on the post-Soviet space. In 1981 he was granted a most honorary title of the People's Artist of the Soviet Union. In 1987 he received the Soviet Union State Prize for the play *Birds need the Sky*. In 2013 he was granted the Russian Federation State Prize for the play *We are the Gypsies*. Interview with Nikolai Slichenko (6.02.2013) in the authors archive.

<sup>36</sup> *Dokumenty obviniaut. Sbornik dokumentov o chudovishchnykh prestupleniyakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov na sovetskoi territorii*, vypusk 2, Moscow: Gospolitizdat 1945, p. 197.

Aleksandrovka. It was the sole known initiative in the Soviet era to erect a monument on the mass grave of Roma genocide. In 1968, the *Romen Theatre* applied to the Smolensk Region Executive Committee with a petition. The aim of their appeal was to authorize the construction of a monument on the site of mass killing in Aleksandrovka. A group of Romani intelligentsia led by Nikolai Slichenko, Viktor Efremov and Fedor Kondenko, as well as the renowned writer and Jewish civil rights activist Lev Ginzburg, met witnesses, gathered evidence of the tragedy, and even offered to erect the monument at their own expense. But the authorities did refuse.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 4: Scene from the play *Birds Need the Sky* (Theatre Romen, premier: 16. April 1985, D: Nikolai Slichenko).

Therefore, the 1985 play could be seen as a part of efforts of Romani intelligentsia for commemorating the legacy of the genocide. In 1985–1991 *Birds Need the Sky* was performed by

---

<sup>37</sup> Martin Holler: Die Nationalsozialistische Vernichtung der Roma in der Sowjetischen und Russischen Erinnerungskultur. In: *Der Nationalsozialistische Genozid an den Roma Osteuropas*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag 2008, pp. 245–294, here pp. 263–279.

Romenin major cities of Russia and the capitals of national republics. *Izvestiya* in millions of copies published the appreciation in 1985.<sup>38</sup> This was the first media report on the Nazi genocide of Roma printed after 1946.<sup>39</sup> The author Nikolai Kishchik not only described the plot of the play, but also told about the systematic extermination of Roma in Europe. He also provided a brief introduction of the Nazi genocide of Roma in the Soviet Union. Avoiding the word genocide, he mentioned anti-Gypsy German legislation and the extermination of Belgian, French and Dutch Roma in Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Buchenwald camps. According to the author, “300,000 Romani fell victim to the systematic extermination by SS castigators on the occupied territory of the Soviet Union”.<sup>40</sup>

In 1988 Mark Zakharov directed a filmed version of Schwartz’s play *The Dragon*.<sup>41</sup> In 1986 the musical *We are Gypsies* directed by Nikolai Slichenko was made a teleplay and showed many times on the state TV channels one and two. The musical tells the centuries-long history of Roma in Europe. The World War II genocide is represented by a scene of mass killing of Roma by the Nazis and the song *Eshelony Tsygan* (Special Trains with Romani on board). In this teleplay listening is as important as watching. Well-known Russian-Romani musician Igraf Joschka composed the song.<sup>42</sup> The title seems to be quoted from Ilya

---

<sup>38</sup> Nikolai Kishchik: Obrashchenie k rodnikam. In: *Izvestiya*, 18. April 1985, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> With the help of the search database service *East View Information Services* the author conducted a frontal search of publications on mass destruction of Romani by the Nazis in the leading Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*. Search carried out on the basis of a list of different keywords in all the materials from 1947 to 1984. As a result, not a single article with a mention of the Roma extermination was found. However a number of wartime *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* publication told about the systematic (*pogolovnoe*) extermination of Roma people by the Nazis, see: Kotljarchuk: Nazi Genocide of Roma, pp. 31–32.

<sup>40</sup> Nikolai Kishchik: Obrashchenie k rodnikam. In: *Izvestiya*, 18. April 1985, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *To Kill A Dragon* (Убить Дракона, IMDb ID 0096329 1988, D: Mark Zakharov).

<sup>42</sup> Igraf Joschka was born in 1942 in the Nazi-occupied Kiev in a family of Hungarian Lovari Roma. He survived the genocide and become one of the most

Ehrenburg and Vasilii Grossman's *Black Book* – a monumental Soviet project dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust, which also included some information on the Roma victims.<sup>43</sup> The content of the song seems to be inspired by the following fragment from the *Black Book*: “Sometimes the special trains with Romani on board arrived [to Treblinka extermination camp] from Bessarabia and other lands”.<sup>44</sup>

In 1991, a few weeks before the fall of the Soviet Union, a monument was erected in the Roma village of Aleksandrovka. The ethnic origin of the victims, however, was ignored. The inscription says shamefully that: “Here lie 176 dwellers of the village of Aleksandrovka executed by German-Fascist invaders on 24 April 1942”. The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* briefly informed its readers “during the Second World War in 1939–1945 twenty thousand Gypsies were brutally exterminated by the Nazis in Central and Eastern Europe”.<sup>45</sup> The number of victims was largely underestimated.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the Soviet Union was not mentioned, and Nazi-occupied Soviet territory was not, according to the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, a place of the massacre of Roma people.

### Conclusion

As Olga Gershenson points out in the book *The Phantom Holocaust*, the image of Jewish catastrophe was marginalized and

---

popular Romani romance singers in the Soviet Union. In 1973 he established a musical band *Trio Romen* that toured about 120 countries around the world.

<sup>43</sup> The *Black Book* was banned in the Soviet Union. However, in 1946 it was published in the USA and Romania and later on in Israel and has been available to Soviet dissidents, see: *The Black Book: the Nazi crime against the Jewish people. Published by the Jewish Black Book Committee*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce 1946; Ilya Ehrenburg / Vasilii Grossman / Lew Ozerow (eds.): *Cartea Neagra*, Bucuresti 1946.

<sup>44</sup> Vasilii Grossman / Ilya Ehrenburg (eds.): *Chernaya Kniga*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1980, p. 355.

<sup>45</sup> Tatiana Ventsel: Tsygane. In: *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia*, vol. 28, Moskva 1978, pp. 606–607.

<sup>46</sup> The general number of the Romani victims of the Nazi genocide in Europe varies greatly and estimates by scholars range from 96,000 to 500,000: Anton Weiss-Wendt (eds.): *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma. Reassessment and Commemoration*, p. 1.

censored by the Soviet cinema.<sup>47</sup> The situation with the films on the Roma genocide, as one can see, was different. In 1960s–1980s millions of Soviet viewers have seen the movies and teleplays on the Roma tragedy. In Soviet imagery the Roma (unlike the Jews) was seen as domestic, insignificant minority, the issue was never complicated by international relations, emigration or state-run discrimination. To give the legacy of the Holocaust meant for the Soviet leadership to recognize that the absolute majority of civilian population killed by the Nazis were Jews. This fact could destroy the entire Soviet discourse of Nazi crimes. From this point of view, the acceptance of the trauma of the small Roma minority was less problematic for the Soviet leadership.<sup>48</sup>

According to Jeremy Hicks the cinematic images played a crucial role for inculcating public awareness of the genocide.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, during the Soviet era the Nazi genocide of Roma was represented exclusively through visual means (feature films and spectacles). By 1991 there was no single academic publication, museum exposition or memorial in the Soviet Union, which would be dedicated to the victims of Roma genocide.<sup>50</sup> However due to the feature films and teleplays the knowledge of the genocide of Roma by the Nazis reached the Soviet public. This trend has continued in present-day Russian historical culture. There is as yet no academic monograph on the Roma genocide written in Russian, nor a Russian museum or memorial dedicated to Roma genocide victims.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the films *Sinful*

---

<sup>47</sup> Olga Gershenson: *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2013.

<sup>48</sup> The 1970 census counted 175,335 Romani in the Soviet Union. The number of Jews at that time was 2,148,917. See: The 1970 All-Soviet census. <http://demoscope.ru> (accessed 10.01.2016).

<sup>49</sup> Hicks: *First films of the Holocaust: Soviet cinema and the genocide of the Jews, 1938-1946*, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk: *The Memory of Roma Holocaust in Ukraine*. Mass Graves, Memory Work and the Politics of Commemoration, p. 155.

<sup>51</sup> For the last ten years about twenty monuments dedicated to the victims of Roma genocide have been erected in Ukraine and three in Belarus. In 2004 the Ukrainian parliament recognized the Nazi genocide of Roma and the commemorating of Roma Genocide Remembrance Day. Following the EU



*Apostles of Love* (1995) and *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus* (2010) as well as the stock of the plays (*We are the Gypsies*, *Birds need the Sky* and *Gypsy Paradise*) put the Roma genocide on Russian list of Nazi crimes against humanity.<sup>52</sup>

As Egor Isaev points out the Second World War is still the mainstream of Russian film industry.<sup>53</sup> However, the revising of the Soviet myth of World War II has opened the closed flood-gates of memory. This regards not only the films on the genocide of the Roma, but also feature movies on the Holocaust, native collaborators and the cooperation with Western Allies.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, collaboration with the Nazis is often represented in Russian feature films as being a deed of Ukrainians.<sup>55</sup> This is a clear example of Soviet path dependency, when the present-day films develop the so-called “Bandera theme”.<sup>56</sup>

---

countries, Ukraine abandoned the use of the word “Gypsies” in favor of the politically correct name “Roma”.

<sup>52</sup> *Sinful Apostles of Love* (Грешные апостолы любви, IMDb ID 0382061 1995, D: Dufunia Vishnevsky). The film tells a story of Romani – prisoners of the Nazi concentration camp. Dufunia Vishnevsky, the Russian-Romani movie-producer and Viktor Merezko, the well-known Russian filmmaker, produced the film. Music was composed by Eugen Doga, the prominent Moldavian musician, who also composed in 1975 music for the film *Queen of the Gypsies*, the most attended movies in the Soviet history with 64.9 million tickets sold; Nikita Mikhalkov, the well-known Russian filmmaker, produced the blockbuster *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus* (Утомленные солнцем 2. Предстояние, IMDb ID 0403645 2010, D: Nikita Mikhalkov). The *Burnt by the Sun 2 Exodus* shows a scene of mass killing of Romani by the Nazi soldiers.

<sup>53</sup> Egor Isaev: *Istoricheskaya politika v Rossii: reprezentatsiya stalinskoi epokhi v popularnom kinematographe*. In: *The Journal of Social Policy Studies* 13:3 (2015), pp. 391–406, here p. 397.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, the Russian films on the Holocaust: *Shoes* (2012) and *Brut* (2015). See also: the film *Last Combat Action of Major Pugachev* (2005) about Russian collaborators with the Nazis in the Gulag and the film *Transit* (2006) about the ALSIB and the cooperation between Soviet and American Air Forces.

<sup>55</sup> See as example: *We from the future 2* (Мы из будущего 2, IMDb ID 1590125 2010, D: Alexander Samokhvalov). In 2010 this film was imposed a ban in Ukraine.

<sup>56</sup> About the Soviet films on the Ukrainian nationalists and the collaborators see: Miroslav Tomek: *Ukrainets iak voroh: Ukrainskie natsionalisty v chekhoslovatskii ta radianskii kinematografii*. In: Marcin Gaczowski (ed.): *Ukraina: narracje, języki, historie*. Wrocław: Trickster 2015, pp. 95–108.

The Cold War contributed to some features of Soviet film production on the Roma genocide. The mass killings of Roma people were seen only as a crime of the Nazis. The link between the extermination of Roma and Romanian and Hungarian war crimes was missing. Moreover, despite all the facts, the link between the local collaborators and genocide of Roma was obscured. The mass extermination of the Roma is still seen by post-Soviet scholars as a second-rate genocide and remains at the periphery of historical studies. Against this background the increasing availability of Soviet films, teleplays and spectacles on the Internet contributed to the extension of the knowledge of Roma genocide into the contemporary public sphere.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Only on youtube.com the first episode of TV-serial *A Roma* was seen by 88,944 viewers, the teleplay *We are the Gypsies* – by 37,623 viewers and the film *Who Return, Shall Love to the End* – by 21,346 viewers (accessed 15.02.2016).

