

STRADANJE ROMA U EUROPI ZA VRIJEME DRUGOG SVJETSKOG RATA S POSEBNIM OSVRTOM NA STRADANJE U NEZAVISNOJ DRŽAVI HRVATSKOJ

ZBORNİK RADOVA
S MEĐUNARODNOG ZNANSTVENOG SKUPA

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SAVEZ ROMA U REPUBLICI HRVATSKOJ
"KALI SARA"

 **INSTITUT** DRUŠTVENIH ZNANOSTI
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I. STRADANJE ROMA U DRUGOM SVJETSKOM RATU U EUROPI

Roma and Sinti Self-Rescue in Occupied Soviet Ukraine During the Second World War: Escape, Hiding, and Identity Concealment

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Abstract:

This article centres on several ways of the Roma and Sinti self-rescue that are escaping, physical hiding, food sharing, and hiding of the Roma and Sinti identity. These ways of self-rescue did not require direct interaction with the occupiers or non-Roma population, and therefore can be considered as “passive self-rescue”, even though some actions were undertaken by the victims for their survival. The author also raises the issue of awareness of the Sinti and Roma about their persecution on the occupied territory of the USSR. Based on wide range of sources, including interviews with Roma and Sinti survivors, the author argues that escaping, physical hiding and concealment of identity were essential for survival under the occupation: and such ways of self-rescue not always can be defined as “survival strategies”.

Key words: *Roma, Sinti, Ukraine, the USSR, self-rescue, self-help, Holocaust, memory, extermination, survival.*

Introduction

There are few works published so far about the extermination of the Roma and Sinti in the occupied territories of the Soviet Ukraine. Yet, compared to other post-Soviet countries, Ukraine has the greatest number of researches on this topic. Historians pay special attention mostly to the territory under the Romanian authority – Transnistria – since majority of the Roma from Moldovan and Romanian territories¹ were deported there. Regarding other occupied Ukrainian territories that stayed under German Nazi and Hungarian control and on the

¹ Jean ANCEL, *Transnistria 1941–1944. History and Documents*, 3 vols. (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 2003); Elie Wiesel, Radu Ioanid, Tuvia Friling, and Mihail E. Ionescu, eds., *Final Report. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (Iasi, Polirom, 2004); Adrian-Nicolae FURTUNA, Delia-Mădălina GRIGORE, Mihai NEACSU, “Sostar na rovas? O Samudaripen thaj lesqi ciaci paramisi”, *Dece nu plâng? Holocaustul romilor si povestea lui adevărată. Deportarea romilor în Transnistria: mărturii, studii, documente* (Bucuresti: Amare Kromentza, 2010); Nikolai BESSONOV, “Etnicheskaia gruppa tsygan-kisheniiovsev”, *Journal of Ethnology and Culturology*, 9-10 (2011): 62-75; Anna ABAKUNOVA, “The Holocaust and the Destruction of Romani in the World War II: Oral History Interpretations on the Deportations of Romani and Jews to Transnistria Governorate”, Irina Vainovski-Mihai, ed., *New Europe College Black Sea Link Program: Yearbook 2012-2013* (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2014): 21-52; Viorel ACHIM, “Die Deportation der Roma nach Transnistrien”, Mariana Hausleitner, Brigitte Mihok, Juliane Wetzel, eds., *Rumänien und der Holocaust. Zu den Massenverbrechen in Transnistrien 1941-1944* (Berlin: Metropol, 2001): 101-111; Ion DUMINICA, “Deportarea si exterminarea țiganilor din Romania in Transnistria (1942-1944)”, *65 de ani ai verdictului Tribunalului de la Nurnberg: Învăță minte pentru Europa contemporană. Conferința științifică internațională, 19 decembrie 2011* (Chisinau: CEP USM, 2012): 38-62; Tatiana SIRBU, “Les Roms de Bessarabie sous le Gouvernement du Marechal Ion Antonescu”, *Revista de Etnologie si Culturologie*, 1 (2006): 240-250; Vladimir SOLONARI, “Etnicheskaia chistka ili borba s prestupnostiu? Deportaciia rumynskih tsygan v Transnistriiu v 1942 g.”, *Holokost i Suchasnist. Studii v Ukraini i sviti*, 1 (2008): 65-87, and other.

question of the Roma persecution there, only few isolated researches have been done.² The question of the rescue and survival of the Roma and Sinti on the territory of occupied Soviet Ukraine only recently attracted attention of the scholars.³

All aforementioned researches discuss the “survival strategies” of the Roma and Sinti. On the one hand, undoubtedly, asking for help or employing method of rescue was one of the “chosen” and sometimes deliberated strategies for survival. On the other hand, to examine help and rescue of Roma as “survival strategy” is not pertinent because not always Roma had “the choice” to ask for help and even if Roma did ask, not always such help was provided. In many cases, the way of self-rescue was spontaneous and depended on a chance and momentary circumstances rather than on deliberated strategy. Therefore, the term used in this paper for defining physical survival of the Roma and Sinti, achieved by their own efforts, is self-rescue. The concept of self-help has formed in the Romani Studies in the same manner as it was in the Holocaust Studies - within the topic of resistance of the Roma which started to be widely examined from 1990s.⁴ Models of survival that combined resistance, escaping and hiding were brought into account by scholars, in relation to the Roma fate in Transnistria, in early 2000s.⁵ However, not all actions and efforts led to survival. Another term employed here is a “self-help”: an action or series of actions that were directed to assistance and could but not always led to rescue. However, the self-helping is the necessary condition for self-rescue.

This paper is focusing on several ways of the Roma and Sinti self-rescue which did not require direct interaction with non-Roma population, including occupiers. These ways of self-rescue are escape, physical hiding with sharing food, and identity concealment. These methods can be characterized as “passive self-rescue”: even though certain actions were undertaken by the Roma and Sinti in order to survive, the survival to a great extent depended on circumstances and a chance. It contrasts, “active self-rescue”, such as changing identity by forging the documents and bribing occupiers, required deliberate strategy and direct interaction with the occupiers and/or local non-Roma. Discussing these methods of survival is impossible without paying attention to the question of how much the Roma and Sinti knew about their persecution by the Germans and their allies and from which sources this information could come. In this research, the attention is paid to particular cases of the Roma and Sinti “passive” self-rescue across the entire borders of the occupied Soviet Ukraine, however, the article does not aim to compare different zones of occupation or circumstances of self-rescue, that can be accomplished in further research. Thus, this paper outlines a research agenda and emphasizes the potential for further elaboration of the topic of the Roma and Sinti self-rescue.

The main source for this research is interviews with the Roma and Sinti survivors. The interviews were

2 Mikhail TYAGLYY, ed., *Peresliduvannia ta vbyvstva romiv na terenakh Ukrainy u chasy Druhoi svitovoi viiny: Zbirnyk dokumentiv, materialiv ta spohadiv* (Kyiv: Ukrainnyi tsentr vyvchennia istorii Holokostu, 2013); Mikhail TYAGLYY, “Nazi Occupation Policies and the Mass Murder of the Roma in Ukraine”, Anton Weiss-Wendt, ed., *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (London: Berghahn Books, 2013): 120-152; Mikhail TYAGLYY, “Chingene – zhertvy Holokosta? Natsistskaia politika v Krymu v otnoshenii tsygan, 1941–1944”, *Z arhiviv VChK–GPU–NKVD–KGB*, 2, (2007): 61-98; Martin HOLLER, *Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord an den Roma in der besetzten Sowjetunion (1941-1944)* (Heidelberg: Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 2009); Sławomir KAPRALSKI, “Zagłada Romów w okupowanym ZSRR w świetle nowych materiałów archiwalnych”, *Studia Romologica*, 3, (2010): 237-246; Oleksandr BELIKOV, „Tsygany Ukrainy pid chas Druhoi svitovoi viiny”, *Nauka. Relihiia. Suspilstvo*, 4 (2002): 64-73, and some other.

3 Mikhail TYAGLYY, “Were the “Chingene” Victims of the Holocaust? Nazi Policy toward the Crimean Roma, 1941-1944”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 23:1 (2009): 26-53; Nikolai BESSONOV, “Tsygane SSSR v okkupatsii. Strategii vyzhivaniia”, *Holokost i Suchasnist. Studii v Ukraini i sviti*, 2 (2009): 17-52; Sarah GRANDKE, “Strategii vyzhyvannia romiv pid chas natsional-sotsialistychnykh peresliduvan u dystrykti “Halychyna” u 1941–1944 rr.”, *Henocyd romiv Ukrainy v period Druhoi svitovoi viiny: vyvchennia, vykladannia, komemoratsiia. Materialy naukovo-praktychnoi konferentsii m. Kyiv, 4 zhovtnia 2016 r.* (Kyiv: Ukrainnyi tsentr vyvchennia istorii Holokostu, 2016): 46-98; Piotr WAWRZENIUK, ““Lwów Saved Us””: Roma Survival in Lemberg 1941–44”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20:3 (2018): 327-350.

4 Shannon WOODCOCK, “The Holocaust and Romani Romanians: deportation and resistance”, Colin Martin Tatz, ed., *Genocide Perspectives, IV. Essays on Holocaust and Genocide* (Sydney: Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, UTSePress, 2012): 353-380; Shannon WOODCOCK, “What’s in a name? How Romanian Romani were persecuted by Romanians as Tigani in the Holocaust, and how they resisted”, *Interstitio*, 2:4 (2009): 29-50; Dennis REINHARTZ, “Damnation of the Outsider: the Gypsies of Croatia and Serbia in the Balkan Holocaust, 1941-1945”, David A. CROWE, John KOLSTI, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1991): 81-92.

5 Michelle KELSO, “The Deportation of Gypsies from Romania to Transnistria 1942-44”, Donald Kenrick, ed., *The Gypsies during the Second World War. 2. In the shadow of the swastika* (Paris, Hatfield: Centre de recherches tsiganes, University of Hertfordshire, 1999): 95-130; Lucian NASTASA, “Zur Deportation der Zigeuner nach Transnistrien (1942-1944)”, Krista Zach, ed., *Migration im südöstlichen Mitteleuropa. Auswanderung, Flucht, Deportation, Exil im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: IKGS Verlag, 2005): 281-292.

obtained through different projects and can be divided into two groups. First group is the interviews collected by the author during several fieldworks in Ukraine and Moldova. Second group is the interviews recorded by other organisations: the USC Shoah Foundation and the Yahad in-Unum. The USC Shoah Foundation worked in different countries of the former USSR within the “Surviving in Shoah” project. Through 1994–1999, 135 interviews with the Roma and Sinti were recorded on the territory of Ukraine. The interviews used for this research were also recorded in Moldova and Poland. The Yahad in-Unum works on the territory of contemporary Ukraine, Moldova and Romania, amongst others, since 2004. The author used interviews in several languages: Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Romanian and Romanes (the last in translation). Majority of the interviews were analyzed through transcripts made by the author from audio and visual records. Visual records also were analyzed separately only as visual materials. Some interviews were accessed only through transcripts, particularly translated from Romanes.⁶ Examination of the interviews by combining work on video, audio and written materials, as well as accessing material in various languages, allows better understanding of the complexity of the topic and explore sources in a better way. There were 82 interviews analysed in this manner, however, not all of them were cited or mentioned in the text.

The Roma and Sinti of the wartime could be roughly divided into three groups regarding their style of life: settled, nomadic and semi-nomadic (travelled in warm season and renting houses or flats for cold season). The style of life depended on the group division inside the Roma and local laws. The research does not discuss ethnographic groups of the Roma though the author is aware of their existence. Briefly to mention, there were several groups of the Roma resided or nomadized in Ukraine of that time, among them is the biggest Roma group in Ukraine called Servi or the Servitka Roma, who also often call themselves as “Ukrainian Gypsies” or “Ukrainian Roma”; Lovari; the Kalderash (Kalderaš, Căldărari, Kelderari) or Kotliary, Krimurja (Kirimlitika Roma) or Tatarika Roma,⁷ Sinti and others. Because this research does not reflect the differences between various groups of Roma in their self-rescue ways, all of them are mentioned according to larger groups Sinti and Roma.

Ukrainian lands under the German occupation were divided into four parts: the District of Galicia (Distrikt Galizien), Reichskommissariat “Ukraine”, the Military administrated zone, and the Transnistria Governorate (the last was transferred to Romanian authority after the occupation in August-September, 1941). Carpatho-Ukraine (Transcarpathia or contemporary Zakarpattia⁸) was an autonomous region of Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939 and in March 1939 was annexed by Hitler’s ally Hungary. First killings of the Roma began in August 1941: seventy nomadic Roma were killed in Odessa region near village of the 2nd Ivanovka.⁹ In October 1941-January 1942 mass murdering of the Roma and Sinti took place in several regions: Chernihiv, Zaporizhia, Crimea (Military administered zone), Dnipropetrovsk, and Kyiv (Reichskommissariat Ukraine), and Mykolaiv (Transnistria).¹⁰ From spring 1942 extermination of the Roma and Sinti occurred in all regions of occupied Ukraine. Moreover, in May 1942, the decision of the Romanian administration headed by I. Antonescu about the deportations of the Roma to Transnistria was made and actual deportations started already in June 1, 1942.¹¹

6 Courtesy of Mikhail Tyaglyy and the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies (UCHS).

7 Elena MARUSHIAKOVA, Vesselin POPOV, “A contemporary picture of Romani communities in Eastern Europa”, *Roma Culture: Project Education of Roma Children in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe): 1-8; Regarding “Crimean Roma”, see: Elena MARUSHIAKOVA, Vesselin POPOV, “Segmentation vs. consolidation: The example of four Gypsy groups in CIS”, *Romani Studies*, 5, 14:2 (2004): 145–191. I am grateful to Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov for providing me with their research.

8 Transliteration system for Ukrainian language follows National 2010, for Russian language – Passport (2013) ICAO. All names of locations are given in transliteration from Ukrainian language according to their contemporary spelling, e.g. Lviv (not Lwów, Lvov or Lemberg).

9 Aleksandr KRUGLOV, “Genotsyd tsygan v Ukraine v 1941–1944 gg. Statistiko- regionalnyi aspekt”, *Holokost i Suchasnist.Studii v Ukraini i sviti*, 2 (2009), p.106 with a reference to The State Archive of Russian federation (GARF): GARF, F. 7021, Op. 69, D. 75, L. 234.

10 Ibid., pp. 95, 92, 88, 101, 100, 106 respectively.

11 Viorel ACHIM, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, 2 vols. (Bucuresti: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 1:6, pp. 9-10; Elie Wiesel, Radu Ioanid, Tuvia Friling, and Mihail E. Ionescu, eds., *Final Report. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (Iasi, Polirom, 2004), p. 228.

The awareness of the Roma and Sinti about their extermination

The question of how much the Roma and Sinti, who resided (or nomadized) in Soviet Ukraine, knew about the plans of the occupiers and to what extent they were aware of the general policy of the Third Reich towards them, including the Nuremberg Laws, require a detailed research. When did the Roma and Sinti obtain first information about persecutions directed at them on the Soviet Ukraine territory? Did first information arrive before the actual occupation has occurred in June 1941 or during first months of the occupation? In other words, did the Roma and Sinti know about persecutions before the first killings have started or after? If after, how long did it take for the Roma and Sinti in Soviet Ukraine to receive the information? Did they trust the information source or simply believed in what they heard, saw or read? Did they know about the mass murdering of the Jews? If yes, how much information could they obtain and was that information trustworthy? Further, did the Roma and Sinti think that the Jewish fate might be their fate as well? Answering these questions may help to understand, to what extent did the Roma and Sinti rely on their own efforts to survive in occupied Ukraine by creating strategies for self-rescuing, on the one hand; and to what extent did their survival depend on other factors such as prevailing circumstances, helping by the local non-Roma population, or just a lucky chance not to be killed on the other hand.

The sources for researching the question of awareness of the Roma and Sinti about their persecution can be grouped into three types: social media sources, archival sources, and oral sources. One of the most important sources is the Soviet Information Bureau (*Sovinformburo*) materials which could provide researchers with official information then made available for public in the Soviet Union. Created in June 24, 1941, *Sovinformburo* was a news agency responsible for delivering information to the people through broadcast and printed media. Thus, messages broadcasted mainly through Radio Moscow were the source for the Soviet propaganda but also provided an information about the front and warnings. The other main media sources were the Soviet newspapers: “*Pravda*”, “*Izvestiia*”, “*Krasnaia Zvezda*” and “*Komsomolskaia Pravda*”. The research towards the Jews and information about their annihilation prior and during the occupation has been already done based on these materials.¹² Though, there is no comparative work on the information received by the Soviets citizens about Jewish and Roma persecutions. Also, there is no study if any information about the persecution on Roma was published in the “*Eynikayt*”, the official newspaper of the Jewish Antifascist Committee. Published as a bulletin and appeared three times a month since June 1942,¹³ it later became a weekly periodical press published in Yiddish. “*Eynikayt*” informed Jewish population of the USSR about the front, Jewish heroism and the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis.¹⁴ Presumably, the information about persecution of the Roma and Sinti in the occupied USSR could be published there as well.

There is no doubt that Kremlin and Stalin personally were well-informed about the annihilation of the Jews and the Roma and Sinti by various sources, including the Soviet partisans’ reports, military intelligence reports, reports created by the NKVD (The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), and captured Nazi documents. This conclusion was made by the Holocaust researcher Karel Berkhoff analysing the Soviet archival materials.¹⁵ Moreover, the knowledge of the occupiers’ policy and the first mass murdering of the Jews in Ukraine were reported to Kremlin in late August 1941, immediately after the killings took place.¹⁶ Apparently, similar information about extermination of the Roma and Sinti could have been reported as well. Particular information about mass killings by the occupiers was received by Kremlin from the reports of the partisans acted in occupied Ukraine and Belarus. For instance, in January 1943, the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement created a report

12 Karel C. BERKHOFF, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

13 Shimon REDLICH, *Propaganda and nationalism in wartime Russia: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1995), p. 25.

14 Eynikayt, The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe: <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Eynikayt> [Access 22.10.2018].

15 Karel C. BERKHOFF, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 136.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

for Stalin, specifically about the persecution of the Jews and about the German crimes in the Soviet territories. Later that year, another report created by the military intelligence described extermination of the Jews and mentioned that the Roma as well were the subject of mass annihilation.¹⁷ Presumably, other partisan and intelligence reports also contained records of the Roma and Sinti murdering, but it is more likely that they were not sent to Kremlin and publicised. Even though the Kremlin was aware of the fate of the Roma and Jews, it is not clear if this information was spread among the Roma and Sinti on the occupied territories. The aforementioned documents still have a potential for further investigation about the Roma situation.

Oral sources reflect the question of the awareness of the Roma and Sinti about their persecution the best. This very quality can be explained in two ways: First, the Roma and Sinti were (and are) people of oral culture and therefore they have been receiving information mostly via rumours and stories of eyewitnesses who escaped from shootings. There is no statistical data available for the percentage of educated Roma in the beginning of the war. Although, considering that some of the families maintained nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, one can presume that at least a part of the Roma and Sinti in Soviet Ukraine could not read and write. In addition, majority of the Roma lived in the villages where reading Soviet newspapers after the occupation was impossible.¹⁸ Interviews recorded with the Roma and Sinti survivors show that some of them, thanks to word of mouth, became aware about the persecutions after the first killings of some Roma families:

“...A rumour was that Gypsies were killed. Those who nomadized. [We] heard about it. Those who nomadized with chariots¹⁹, were killed...”²⁰

Other Roma and Sinti heard conversations among local Ukrainians, Russians or Poles:

“...Russians spoke that the Gypsies and the Jews will be killed. But we did not know anything! Russians told us, and we started hiding...”²¹

Even though there is no possibility to produce a statistical data showing how many Roma and Sinti were informed about their upcoming extermination, undoubtedly, rumours were surely the main source of information. Interviews also describe every day life of the Sinti and Roma in Ukraine and reveal unique information about their ways to survive. This information can be accessed only through oral sources because the Roma and Sinti did not keep notes or diaries; archival materials are usually focused on the documenting of the persecution but not survival. Thus, interviews are the only source to analyse the Roma ways of rescue and helping each other.

Escape as a way of self-rescue

There were several most spread ways of self-help that could eventually become ways of self-rescue of the Roma and Sinti in Ukraine: escaping, hiding physically, hiding identity, acquiring false documents, bribing occupiers, and helping each other with food. All ways of self-help are described by the Roma and Sinti survivors and members of their families in their recorded interviews. It is important to emphasize that cases analyzed in this research considers only the situations connected with the self-help of the Roma and Sinti. Though, the cases of helping the Roma and Sinti by non-Roma (mainly Ukrainians and Poles) also existed but not referred in this article.

17 Ibid., p. 136.

18 According to the population census of 1939 in the USSR, 20,406 of Roma and Sinti lived in the cities whereas 67,836 – in villages. See: GARF, F. A-259, Op.1, D. 632, L.25-26, see: Nikolai, F Bugai, “Zabytye Stranitsy Zhizni Soobshchestva Tsygan v Soiuze SSR: 1930-1960-e gody”, *Privolzhskii Nauchnyi Vestnik*, 7:47 (2015), p. 47.

19 Originally “shatry, meaning: big marquees”.

20 Interview with Mariia Sergeeva, USC Shoah Foundation, interview code: 49475.

21 Interview with Ekaterina Barieva, USC Shoah Foundation, interview code: 49386.

The first and, probably, the most spread way to rescue was escaping. Apparently, escape of the Sinti and Roma from German and Polish territories to the territory of Ukraine have started in 1939, before the German invasion into the USSR. The Roma and Sinti could be among refugees after the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed in August 23, 1939 and after the partition of Polish territories between Germany and the USSR has started. From the day of the Soviet occupation of Poland (September 17, 1939) until the day of elections in western annexed parts of Belarus and Ukraine, (October 22, 1939), the Soviets did not close the border. The Germans left border open from the day of invasion (September 1, 1939) until September 20, 1939.²² The exchange of the population from invaded territories was regulated by the Confidential Protocol attached to the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty signed by both countries in September 28, 1939. According to the Confidential Protocol, the Government of the USSR obliged not to create any obstacles to the “Reich nationals and other persons of German descent” if they would want to migrate to Germany and a

“...corresponding obligation is assumed by the Government of the German Reich in respect to the persons of Ukrainian or Belorussian descent residing in the territories under its jurisdiction...”²³

A joint Soviet-German resettlement commission was formed in October 1939, and in November 16, 1939 it produced a secret agreement with a detailed procedure for resettlement. This document was publicized neither in Germany, nor in the USSR.²⁴ An agreement article stipulated particular categories of the population that can be exchanged between Germany and the USSR: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians and Germans.²⁵ Neither Roma, nor Jews officially were among the nationalities which could have been exchanged between the USSR and Germany. Therefore, the Jews, and perhaps some of the Sinti and Roma, started their illegal fleeing from the Polish territories occupied by Germany to the USSR – western parts of Soviet Ukraine and Belarus. It is known, that the German authorities did not create any obstacles to illegal fleeing of the Jews, though the USSR frontier guards tried to prevent it since November 1939.²⁶

There is no direct confirmation from an archival document so far about that the Sinti and Roma have been crossing the borders in 1939-1941. However, interviews with the Roma survivors indirectly suggest that crossing the borders took place before the Germany invasion of the USSR territories in June 22, 1941. The Roma and Sinti survivors mentioned in interviews that “German Gypsies” and “Polish Gypsies” with their families moved to Lviv, Ternopil and Volyn regions before 1941. For example, Ludwik Dolinski told that his father Władysław was from a German Sinti family settled on the Polish territories and mother Wanda came from “Polish Gypsies”.²⁷ Mieczysław Goman’s mother was born in Hungary as well as his paternal grandparents. Because of the nomadic style of life, Goman’s father was born in Kielce, Poland where the family settled. Both parents met in Poland where they continued to nomadize. Goman differs his family from the “German Gypsies”. He mentioned that “German Gypsies helped his family in Lviv very much”. Answering the question of the interviewer, “What it means ‘German Gypsies?’”, Mieczysław explained that they were Sinti who lived in Lviv but could speak German well.²⁸ Some Roma had “Hungarian” origins. For instance, Władysław Guman’s ancestors were from Hungary

22 Yosef LITVAK, “Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939-1946”, Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 125.

23 See: Lituanus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences, 35:1, Spring 1989, http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89_1_03.htm [Access 22.08.2018] and Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, the Avalon project: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/conproto.asp [Access 22.08.2018].

24 Dmitriy TOLOCHKO, “The Problem of Refugees from Poland in Soviet-German Relations (September 1939 – June 1940)”, Aleksandr Dyukov, Olesya Orlenko, eds, *Divided Eastern Europe: Borders and Population Transfer, 1938-1947* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p.106.

25 Gennadii KOSTYRCHENKO, *Tainai Politika Stalina: Vlast i antisemitizm*, 2nd edition (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2003), p.187 with a reference to RGASPI, F.17, Op.162, D.26, L. 76-77.

26 Ilya ALTMAN, *Zhertvy nenavisti Holokost v SSSR 1941-1945* (Moscow: Fond “Kovcheg”, 2002), p. 378.

27 Interview with Ludwik Dolinski, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 44108.

28 Interview with Mieczysław Goman, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 32796.

and his father was born in Budapest but later moved to Poland.²⁹ Maciej Kolompart had a mixed family: his mother came from Hungary and his father was a “Polish Gypsy”.³⁰ All aforementioned interviewees, as well as some others not cited here, mentioned western Ukrainian territories where they settled or nomadized, particularly in and around Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lutsk. Though the evidence of the presence of German Sinti in southern part of Ukraine is also found in recollections of Kateryna (Katia) Shvets who survived in the village of Berezovka, Odesa region:

“...We are of German Gypsies. Our nation is German. I do not speak German, but my mom did...”³¹

In most cases the Roma and Sinti did not know when exactly their families arrived to western parts of Ukraine, though some of them mentioned the interwar period. However, there are two main questions. First is when exactly those Sinti and Roma have arrived in western Ukrainian territories: in 1920s or in 1930s, before or after the Nuremberg Laws? Second, what was the reason for those Sinti and Roma to move: was it directly or indirectly determined by the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws or by other reasons such as economic situation, social situation, and etc. There is evidence of the Sinti and Roma coming from the Polish territories annexed to the Reich and living in Lviv as of 1941. These Sinti and Roma could be among those Polish citizens deported mostly from Wielkopolska and Pomerania in 1939-1941.³² However, the question, if the Roma and Sinti were among refugees who arrived from the Third Reich territories to the annexed territories by the USSR, particularly western Ukraine, in between September 1939 and June 1941, needs to be researched.

Actual escape of the Roma and Sinti started after the invasion of the Germans of the USSR

Escape of the Roma and Sinti from occupiers is mentioned in all interviews of the survivors on all stages of the occupation. Nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma and Sinti knew roads very well and tried to flee individually or by small groups, including children. However, there was a question, where to run? For some Roma and Sinti, it was possible to hide or just wander in the forests in western and northern parts of Ukraine. Matylda Kaminskarecalled how she, her mother, grandmother and four other children wandered in the forests in Galicia.³³ Ludwik Dolinski mentioned his hiding in the forest of Volodymyr-Volynskiy (at that time, Włodzimirz) in Volyn.³⁴ Władysław Guman recalled his escape together with seven other Roma from Yanovsky camp near Lviv, hiding in forests³⁵. Wandering in forests was dangerous and uncommon: the Nazi checked forests, searching for escapee Jews and Roma; partisans from both sides, Polish and Soviet, and Ukrainian nationalist groups could take wandering people for spies and shot them. However, changing the location could provide a better chance not to be discovered and therefore, meant better chance for survival. Another story of a group escape was told by a Roma survivor from central Ukraine: three chariots of semi-nomadic Roma, including teller of the story, decided to escape from Germans to a forest and after successfully escaping, they decided to find and join, a stranger but friendly Roma family camp (*tabir*) in Kyrovohrad region. However, on their way, they met a Roma woman ori-

29 Interview with Władysław Guman, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 46073.

30 Interview with Maciej Kolompart, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 33055.

31 Interview with Kateryna Shvets, author's archive.

32 Piotr WAWRZENIUK, “‘Lwów Saved Us’”: Roma Survival in Lemberg 1941–44”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20:3 (2018), p. 340. To make this assumption, the author refers to the State Archive of Lviv Region (DALO) and Maria Rutowska, “Wysiedlenia Polaków i Żydów z ziem polskich wcielonych do Trzeciej Rzeszy do Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w latach 1939–1941,” Wojciech Materski, Tomasz Szarota Polska, eds., 1939–1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami (Warsaw: IPN, 2009), p. 125.

33 Interview with Matylda Kaminska, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 47518.

34 Interview with Ludwik Dolinski, 44108.

35 Interview with Władysław Guman, 46073.

ginating from that family camp which they wanted to join. The woman was screaming and crying. She told the Roma that all her family camp was “taken” by the Germans. She was out to beg a piece of bread and when she returned, nobody was there. The Roma offered her to join them and run away together, but she rejected because her one-year baby also was taken. She decided to find a baby. Later, those Roma who escaped learnt that the family camp of about 100 Roma was shot by the Germans nearby.³⁶ Thus, sometimes the Roma and Sinti could escape and survive by chance rather than by deliberate strategies. Settled Roma did not know roads and ways to survive in the open-air; therefore, they tried to escape at least to neighbouring villages. For example, Bairam Ibragimova from the village of Chaplinka, Mykolaiv region, recalls:

“...German gathered all Gypsies ... But we were hiding. They wanted to catch us as well. But my father decided to run away over the steppe, in a pile of straw, to a [neighbouring] village...”³⁷ Later, her family wandered from one village to another, sometimes hiding among Russians and Ukrainians. A Roma survivor Tamara Tsynia, who was born and lived before the War in the village of Ivanivka (or Ivanovka, as the survivor pronounced in Russian), in Odesa region, recalled:

“...When the Germans arrived, we ran away. Stopped at a remote village. My father rented a house from Russians, and we told them we were refugees. We arrived in a small village in Odessa region. We spent the rest of the war there, nobody knew we were there, and then we went back to Ivanovka...”³⁸

Hiding and sharing food

After taking the first step for self-rescue and escape, the Roma and Sinti needed to hide themselves, at least for the cold season. In the testimonies mentioned above, one can find that after running away, Tamara’s father rented a place to live. Those Roma and Sinti who did not have means to rent a place (or were afraid to) managed to find shelter in abandoned houses in the countryside. For example, the Goman family hid in a Jewish house in Lviv region which remained empty after Jews were exterminated (or taken to the Auschwitz death camp, according to the words of interviewee).³⁹ Hiding in urban areas was much more complicated and dangerous than in countryside. The area of hiding in a city or town was limited by a certain building or a house where there was only one entrance to the premises which means that all neighbors could see anybody while entering and exiting. In the rural areas, a house with an unnoticeable entrance could be found. There were certain places where one could be hiding in a city building: attic, basement or secret room made between flats. In the village, people could be hidden not only in the building but also outside: in barns, pits, stables, in a pile of straw, and etc. Also, to construct a secret place in a rural area and house was easier than in urban conditions. The Roma and Sinti were able to adapt themselves to all conditions. For instance, Matylda Kaminska was hiding together with her relatives in basements of buildings in Lviv.⁴⁰ The Roma and Sinti used to rely on themselves and therefore, after or instead of escaping, tried to prepare secret places where family with children could be hidden. For example, in one such place in Lviv, a family with six children was hiding for more than year. Nadzieja Kwiek, upon a question of an interviewer about the war, immediately said:

“...I do not remember anything because I was in the hiding place all the time. Father kept us there ... It was under a building [shows a small square], that was in Lviv, not far from our accommodation. He made such a hiding place under the earth. (...) And we wandered in forests, but the father did not want to wander for so long

36 Witness # 1261UK, Archive de l’association internationale “Yahad-In Unum”.

37 Interview with Bairam Ibragimova, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview:49368.

38 Interview with Tamara Tsynia, Author’s archive.

39 Interview with Mieczysław (i) Goman, 32796.

40 Interview with Matylda Kaminska, 47518.

because [Germans] killed if found. [They] killed Jews and Gypsies in the first instance...”.⁴¹

Savelii Kaplan was hiding under a roof in the village of Kizomys, Kherson region.⁴² Matrona Kirichenko recalled how her family escaped from town of Lozova to village of Martynivka, both in Kharkiv region where the family worked in *kolkhoz*.⁴³

“...One day partisans appeared and killed two Germans. [In response], Germans killed all men and boys in the village. Only my husband remained. The rest [of men] was killed... We hid [at the place] where the cow was. There was a small room and we hid there and sat for a while...”.⁴⁴

Nadezhda Ruda survived the annihilation in the village of Nesterivka⁴⁵ of Kamyanets-Podilskytold that her mom hid her on the kiln when the Germans organized hunting for the Roma.⁴⁶ Anna Ryhorychenko who survived in the village of Polanochka, Cherkasy region recalled:

“...I did not look like a Roma, but, anyway, I and my little brother were hiding in the attic of our house [when somebody arrived]...”.⁴⁷

The Roma and Sinti helped each other to hide. Some of the Roma arrived at their relatives or friends of Roma origin who lived in neighboring villages and asked for hiding:

“...We were hiding, escaped. [We] left our hut and ran away not to be killed. We ran to the relatives: to an uncle [of the husband], we went to an aunt [of the husband] with a baby. [We went there] not to be killed and were hiding there in the basement...”.⁴⁸

Thus, hiding was an essential way for the Roma and Sinti self-rescue that occurred during whole period of the occupation. Some of the Roma and Sinti used only hiding as the main method for survival, particularly this method is related to those who maintained settled and semi-nomadic style of life.

While hiding, people had to eat and the easiest way to help each other for the Roma and Sinti was sharing food. A common life and sharing of food were an ordinary everyday life behavior for nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma within their communities.⁴⁹ In rare cases Roma pointed out that a person (usually a head of the family) gave money to another Roma but helping with food was an ordinary event and the Roma women often helped each other with food. Tamara Tsynia recalled:

“...Once, my father went to smithing and there was a Gypsy woman living there: she had this big house and a little boy and two girls. And the girl started begging: ‘Uncle, take us to Odesa! We have gold in the catacombs, I will give you all the gold you want!’ And Father says: ‘Where will I take you, girl? I’m a Gypsy too, I’ll be killed by the Germans along with you as soon as I go out! This is about surviving, not about gold!’ We gave them money, mom gave some bread, lard, and told them not to come to us because everyone was afraid...”.⁵⁰

41 Interview with Nadzieja Kwiek, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 35716.

42 Interview with Savelii Kaplan, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 49483.

43 Soviet collective farm.

44 Interview with Matrona Kirichenko, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 47281.

45 Some of the villages mentioned in the interviews currently do not exist.

46 Interview with Nadezhda Ruda, authors’ archive.

47 Interview with Anna Ryhorychenko, authors’ archive.

48 Interview with Ekaterina Barieva, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 49386.

49 Interview with Tamara Tsynia, Kateryna Shvets, and Yevgeniia Vurso., authors’ archive.

50 Interview with Tamara Tsynia, author’s archive.

Identity concealment

Often, the Roma and Sinti could not find a place to hide or were discovered by the occupiers or local collaborators. In this case, one of the ways to self-rescue was not hiding physically but hiding the Roma identity. This was quite easy for those Roma and Sinti who were blond and looked like local Slavic population. For instance, Kateryna Shvets from Odesa region stated:

“...The Germans did not know that we were Gypsies, since we were white. I did not look like Gypsy girl...”⁵¹

The importance of not looking like a Roma was confirmed by Maria Kwiatkowska: Upon the question of interviewer, “how were you saved, a Roma is visible from afar?”, Maria responded: “I walked as a Polish... I was not looking like a Gypsy.”⁵²

Not only appearance and outlook could help the Roma and Sinti in hiding their identity but also non-Roma names. The names carried by the Roma depended on locality where they lived or nomadized. The Roma and Sinti in western Ukraine officially had ordinary Ukrainian and Polish first and second names: Maria Kwiatkowska, Matylda Kaminska, Ludwik Dolinski, Julia Dolinska, and etc.⁵³ The Roma names in central and eastern parts of Ukraine were mainly Russian or Ukrainian: Anna Ryhorychenko, Aleksandr Kuzmenko, Pavel Andreichenko, Nadezhda Ruda and etc.⁵⁴ The Roma and Sinti in southern Ukraine, including Crimea, could have not only Ukrainian and Russian names but Tatar: Kateryna Shvets, Matrena Sliniavskaia, Seit Oglu, Bairam Ibragimova and etc.⁵⁵ Because of the local names, occupiers could not identify the Roma and Sinti without recognition of local collaborators.

Good knowledge of local languages (Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Crimean Tatar and also Hungarian, Romanian and German) added to physical appearance and local names in helping the Roma and Sinti to prove their non-Roma identity. Julia Dolinska stated: “Because my family could speak German, we were not killed.”⁵⁶ Kateryna Shvets confirmed that because of knowledge of German, it was easier for her mother to communicate with the occupiers and family could survive.⁵⁷ Speaking Romanian could save the Roma in Transnistria, the Ukrainian territory under Romanian occupation. Sofia Bakro told the story of the self-rescue of her family:

“...The Romanians arrived ... Once open a time my cousin lived in Moldova, [he] could speak Moldavian⁵⁸. And my sisters’ mother-in-law also could speak a little bit in Moldavian. We sent them to [Romanian administration], - talk because we cannot. We could not [speak] in Moldavian! And they started to talk: [we] live in Ukraine, but our ancestors are Moldovans. There are our children, they grew up in Ukraine where we speak Russian, and they cannot [speak] in Moldavian. Understand? Then Romanians brought us salt, tobacco, light tobacco, sugar, matches and started to give gifts us, their Moldovans...”⁵⁹

Ironically, this helped them not only to save lives of the entire family but officially change their ethnic

51 Interview with Kateryna Shvets, author’s archive.

52 Interview with Maria Kwiatkowska, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 32103.

53 Ibid., interview with: Matylda Kaminska, 47518; Ludwik Dolinski, 44108; Julia Dolinska, 43584.

54 Interview with: Anna Ryhorychenko, author’s archive; Aleksandr Kuz’menko, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 49374; Pavel Andreichenko, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 50040; Nadezhda Ruda, author’s archive.

55 Interview with: Kateryna Shvets, author’s archive; Matrena Sliniavskaia, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 49387; Seit Oglu, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 49509; Bairam Ibragimova, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 49368.

56 Interview with Julia Dolinska, USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 43584.

57 Interview Kateryna Shvets, author’s archive.

58 They say Moldavian but in fact it was Romanian.

59 Interview with Sofia Bakro USC Shoah Foundation, code interview: 48389.

origin of the Roma: after the war the passports were given, and the Roma stated that they were Moldovans. Therefore, the whole family acquired their passports where their nationalities were written as Moldovans. Thus, hiding of the identity was another important way of the self-rescue of the Roma and Sinti even if in their personal documents they were officially recorded as “Gypsies”.

Conclusion

This paper discussed ways of the self-help and self-rescue of the Roma and Sinti on the occupied territory of Soviet Ukraine which were essential for survival: escaping, physical hiding, food sharing and hiding of the Roma identity. One of the important questions raised in this research is the awareness of the Roma and Sinti about their annihilation during the occupation and acquisition of this information. Further research of this topic can better explain when exactly the Roma and Sinti acquired certain knowledge about their persecution and in what regions they were better informed about the situation. Also, considering departure of Sinti from German and Polish territories, such research can bring possible reasons of why those Sinti and Roma arrived in western Ukrainian territories and when exactly they moved in. Indirectly, it also can refer to the way of self-rescue. All aforementioned methods did not require active interaction of the Roma and Sinti with non-Roma, including helpers and occupiers, albeit such interaction could help the Roma to survive. The Roma and Sinti could use either one of the described methods of self-rescue or combine all of them. There are no statistics in order to understand which of the ways was more successful for survival or which of the ways was used most of all. All options for survival had a high level of risk, no matter it was consciously chosen or occurred by a lucky accident. Escaping and wandering in the forests was possible only in localities with a certain landscape; mostly nomadic Roma survived in forests as they knew the landscape and roads well and were able to find food. High risk to be accused as a spy if running into partisans, or as a partisan, if found by German occupiers meant being shot on the spot, made this way of survival even more dangerous. Physical hiding also depended on opportunities and abilities of the Roma and Sinti to survive in urban or rural conditions. High risk of being denounced by the local non-Roma or getting discovered by occupiers by accident made this way of self-rescue complicated and dangerous as well. However, if physical appearance of the Roma and Sinti was similar to local non-Roma, hiding could be one of the best ways of survival, moreover, if the Roma and Sinti had local names and could speak one of the local languages. These factors allowed one to hide his/her Roma identity and blend in among locals or pretend to be “refugees”. Often, hiding identity and physical hiding were combined as well as hiding identity and escaping. For nomadic or semi-nomadic Roma and Sinti, it was easier to adopt all abovementioned ways of self-rescue than for settled Roma because of their style of life. Travelling through different regions and lands, nomadic Roma and Sinti knew locations better than the others, they were used to live a difficult life of wanderers; and they did not have connections with the local non-Roma population, therefore, had lesser chance to be recognized and denounced. Semi-nomadic Roma had even better chances because, first, aforementioned applied to them as well, and, second, during their settling in cold months they learnt traditions and languages of the local non-Roma that could help the Roma to adapt to different locations and conditions easier and faster. Majority of the Roma and Sinti, whose interviews were analyzed for this research, had certain experience in nomadic style of life in their childhood that means that their parents had considerable experience in travelling before the occupation started. This can be one of the possible explanations why exactly those Roma survived. This research also suggests that sometimes ways of self-rescue occurred by accident and was not a planned strategy, though in some cases the Roma and Sinti acted not according to their intuition but contemplating over the situation in which they found themselves.

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