

The Wehrmacht and the National Socialist persecution of the Gypsies

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The present paper explores the role played by the Wehrmacht in the National-Socialist persecution of the Gypsies. Inside the Reich, the Wehrmacht Supreme Command was actively involved in the social exclusion of Sinti and Roma. In the Netherlands and Belgium Gypsies were removed from the military 'security zone' along the coast 'in order to combat espionage.' In France, some 3,000 persons stigmatized as nomades or tsiganes were incarcerated in camps, often under appalling conditions; such camps were ultimately under the control of the German military administration. In Serbia, the Wehrmacht contributed substantially to establishing mass shooting as the principal policy toward both the Jews and the Roma. In the USSR the military police, secret military police, and the rear area Sicherungsdivisionen in particular handed over 'itinerant Gypsies' to the SS Einsatzgruppen to be shot. Over and above, Wehrmacht units provided considerable organizational and technical assistance in conjunction with the executions perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen.

Introduction

National Socialist persecution of the Gypsies hinged on the conception that the behavior of social groups was rooted in biological constants and genetic factors. In respect to the Sinti and Roma, this racist notion had two characteristic features: the primary target of Gypsy persecution in Germany were the putative 'Gypsy *Mischlinge*,' persons of 'mixed blood' who, according to the racial hygienics theorist Robert Ritter,¹ had 'deviated from their original

1. Ritter was head of the Research Institute for Race Hygiene and Population Biology (Rassenhygienische und Bevölkerungsbiologische Forschungsstelle) set up in 1936, which worked together closely with the Reich Criminal Police Dept. in classifying Gypsies in terms of racial criteria. The institute photographed, fingerprinted and examined Gypsies in the Reich, building a Gypsy Clan Archive (*Zigeunersippenarchiv*) and preparing so-called hereditary charts (*Erbtafeln*).

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biological nature.' Domestic policy did not target the small group of traveling Gypsies, who married only among themselves and were consequently classified as 'racially pure' (Ritter 1938: 79, Ritter 1939: 10). But in the German-occupied territories after 1939, precisely the reverse policy prevailed: wandering Gypsies were in greater peril than the sedentary Roma (Zimmermann 1996: 370–2).

This dichotomous feature of Roma persecution derived in turn from the focalizing of differing facets of the hostile image of the Gypsy Other. Outside the Reich, especially in the Eastern occupied territories, this phantasmal construct was projected chiefly onto the itinerant Gypsies. It was argued that their 'mobile' life style merely camouflaged spying activities against the Germans in the service of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik world enemy.' By contrast, within the Reich proper it was believed that the main folk-racial threat stemmed from the 'part-Gypsies,' partially or totally sedentary in lifestyle, who were allegedly 'degenerating' the 'German folk body' through their more intensive social contacts with the majority population.

National-Socialist Gypsy policy evolved over the six pre-war years of Nazi rule and was later radicalized into genocide during World War II. There was no unified central plan that guided this persecution; rather, it differed depending on geographical region and administrative area of authorization. Conflicts of interest arose with the system of Nazi rule, and sometimes policy proceeded down bureaucratic blind alleys. As a result, both in the Reich and the occupied areas in the Europe, Gypsy persecution under the Nazis was disjointed, marked by non-simultaneities and contradictions.

This lack of coherence also makes it difficult to establish the precise role played by the Wehrmacht in the overall persecution. The military's capability, possibilities and will to implement Gypsy policy were dependent on a multitude of factors, which the present paper explores for the Reich proper, Western Europe, Serbia and the Soviet Union.²

'Spies'

One evident element that had a formative impact on the Wehrmacht's attitude toward the Gypsies was the cliché of the 'spying Gypsy.' This stereotype was historically rooted in the projective anxieties that had arisen in Europe

2. For a brief overview in English, see also Zimmermann 2000.

toward the end of the fifteenth century. The first Gypsies to arrive reported they were from 'Little Egypt,' and struck the local population in any case as strange and alien. Consequently, they soon were suspected of being Turkish spies if not the advance guard of hostile Ottoman armies. Within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, Gypsies were formally first declared 'enemy agents' at the parliament in Lindau 1496. In numerous subsequent parliamentary mandates, imperial policy regulations and sixteenth-century decrees by state princes, the Gypsies were denounced as enemy agents, instituting in effect an open season on Gypsies: all now had the right to arrest, flog and kill Roma at will (Breithaupt 1907: 46–7, 54, Mode and Wölffling 1968: 147–52, Gronemeyer 1987).

In the chronicles and cosmographies of the seventeenth century, the stereotype of the Gypsy as Turkish spy was generalized into the image of the 'enemy scout,' now applicable to service for other foreign powers as well (Camerarius 1602, Fritsch 1602, Schönborner 1614, Thomasius 1702). One hundred years later, in 1781, the Enlightener Heinrich Grellmann, who had a special interest in the 'Gypsy question,' concurred that the accusation claiming Gypsies were 'traitors and spies' had 'a certain basis in reality.' Moreover, Grellmann alleged there were 'all sorts of other spies' roaming around 'in the guise of Gypsies' in order inconspicuously to gather information under this cover (Grellmann 1783). That claim represented a new facet of the vintage cliché, which would in future prove consequential.

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that a separate study was published in German on 'Gypsies as spies'; the treatise had little echo. Its author Theodor Zell came to the conclusion that 'on the basis of their psychological disposition,' 'Gypsies' were 'born' for espionage, especially since as a people close to nature, like bears, bees, reindeer and sled dogs, they had an analogous highly developed sense of orientation in the wild (Zell 1903).

The power of the Gypsy spy stereotype was especially manifest during wartime. Already in the Franco-Prussian confrontation in 1870–71, Gypsies in the Western border areas were branded as possible 'spies.' Moreover, by pillage and plunder, they exacerbated the 'horrors and terrors of the war.'³ In 1914, the Prussian War Ministry authorized the Army Regional Command Headquarters to institute restrictions on Gypsies, entailing severe limitations on their freedom of movement in the areas adjacent to the

3. Landesarchiv Speyer, Best H 3, No. 610, Circular Letter No. 37, 19 July 1870.

French-German frontier or in proximity to military facilities and other strategically important sites (Hehemann 1987: 327–40). What additional phantasms the cliché of the Gypsy informer was able to engender is illustrated by the example of the VIIIth Army Corps, stationed in Koblenz in World War I. In 1916, a report was passed on there regarding the presence of a suspicious ‘gang of Gypsies numbering some 20 persons’ in the Eifel Mountains near the Belgian frontier: though they claimed to be Turks, they were actually of Serb origin. According to the report, the ‘gang’ had ‘substantial funds’ along with ‘Russian steppe horses, maps of Germany and various notes written in code and in a Slavic tongue.’ Its ‘preference’ was to seek out Russian POWs employed as agricultural workers. Immediately following such contacts, a quite large number of prisoners had reportedly escaped, while others had refused to work. The report concluded it was therefore likely the ‘gang’ included ‘enemy agents with forged passports.’⁴

Under the impact of the revolutionary unrest after World War I, the Reichswehr amplified such constructions by contending that ‘owing to their way of life,’ Gypsies were especially suited as ‘agents for the spread of Bolshevik ideas.’⁵ This was the first fanciful nexus forged between the stereotype of the Gypsy as espionage agent and the hostile image of Bolshevism. That fateful yoking would come to shape decisions taken by the command echelon in the Reichswehr and later in the Wehrmacht.

The German Reich after 1933

After the Nazi seizure of power in January 1933, the cliché of the foreign agent initially played no significant role in Gypsy policy. But as in World War I, hostile anti-Gypsy suspicions and allegations proliferated after the attack on Poland and outbreak of war on September 1, 1939. To take one representative example, in Gelsenkirchen the mayor, the local Wehrmacht garrison commander and firms such as German Petroleum Ltd., the German Iron Works and the Gelsenkirchen Mining Co. all believed that armaments production and the railroad lines were endangered by the presence of Gypsies in the city and demanded they be expelled immediately.⁶ In

4. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (hereafter: HStAD), Regierung Aachen 23.067, Stellvertretendes Generalkommando des VIII. Armeekorps, Coblenz, 22 Aug. 1916.

5. Landesarchiv Speyer, Best. H 3, No. 1.113.

6. Stadtarchiv Gelsenkirchen, o/II-5/1, Vermerk St.A. 22/1, 19 Sept. 1939; St.A. 22/1, 18 Nov. 1939; St.A. 22/1, 23 May 1940; Garrison Commander, 15 June 1940, to City Mayor.

the autumn of 1939, members of a Gypsy band performing in Magdeburg who had allegedly attempted to 'question' soldiers about 'military matters' were kept for several months under postal surveillance.⁷

Since autumn 1939 Gypsy persecution was escalated both locally and by the central government. Thus, the results of a discussion with bureau chiefs in the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) called by Reinhard Heydrich on September 21, 1939 were summarized in four points: '(1) [relocate] Jews as fast as possible into the towns, (2) Jews from the Reich to Poland, (3) the remaining 30,000 Gypsies to Poland as well, (4) systematic transport by freight car of the Jews from German areas.'⁸ These aims were bound up with the general maxims of 'folk-racial policy' of the National Socialist leadership and their goal of maintaining 'racial purity.' Such *Volkstumspolitik* envisaged a 'return' of 'Germans and ethnic Germans' from abroad and the expulsion of Poles, Jews and Gypsies from the expanded Reich (now incorporating Danzig-West Prussia and the Wartheland⁹) eastward into the Generalgouvernement, i.e. German-occupied Poland (Aly 1999).

On October 17, 1939 the RSHA cast these guidelines for how to deal with Gypsies in a concrete form, ordering restrictions on freedom of movement. 'Until their final deportation,' they are to be housed in 'special collection camps.'¹⁰ During another discussion in the RSHA the end of January 1940, it was decided the annexed Eastern provinces would first be 'cleared' of Poles in the spring; in the late summer or fall of 1940, the 'Jews in the new Eastern provinces [*Gaue*] and 30,000 Gypsies' were to be deported.¹¹

The military mishandled the implementation of these phased removals. On January 31, 1940, the Wehrmacht Supreme Command (OKW) requested Himmler to 'order a ban on Gypsies in the border area as soon as possible.' They were 'unreliable,' many were 'of questionable character and with a crim-

7. HStAD, RW 18.898, Gestapo Düsseldorf, 17 Oct. 1939.

8. Institut für Zeitgeschichte Munich (Institute for Contemporary History, hereafter: IfZ), Eich 983, Stabskanzlei, I, 11/Rf./Fh. 27 Sept. 1939. The Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) was one of the central offices of the SS and amalgamated the Security Police (Sipo), the Secret State Police (Gestapo), the Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst, SD), the Criminal Police (RKPA), the Order (Regular) Police (Ordnungspolizei, Orpo) and the Einsatzgruppen.

9. Western Poland, annexed into the Reich after the Polish campaign; its regional center was Posen (Poznań).

10. Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter: BAB), Erlaßsammlung Vorbeugende Verbrechensbekämpfung (Decree Collection 'Crime Prevention', hereafter: VV), RSHA Tgb.(Diary) No. RKPA. 149/1939 -g-, Express letter, 17 Oct. 39, Re: Seizure of Gypsies.

11. BAB, R 58/1032, fol. 35-43, IV D 4-III ES, 30.1.40, Re: Discussion, 30 Jan. 1940.

inal record.' In the light of 'defense needs,' their presence in the border area was 'intolerable.'¹² This request should be seen in the context of the imminent attack on France and the abiding cliché of the Gypsy spy.

In response, Himmler ordered the first deportation of Gypsies to the Generalgouvernement, scheduled for mid-May 1940.¹³ Down to the end of that year, it affected some 2,800 persons who were to be removed from the western and northwestern parts of the Reich, the assembly area for military operations against France, Belgium and the Netherlands. In German-occupied Poland, the majority of the Gypsy deportees were deployed like the Jews as forced laborers under SS guard, working in constructing roads, trenches, bunkers, airfields or concentration camps. Reliable estimates on the mortality rate of those deported in 1940 are available only for Hamburg, indicating that by 1944, 80 percent of the deportees from the city had perished.¹⁴

The original RSHA plans called for the deportation of additional Gypsies from the Reich to occupied Poland in the autumn of 1940. That proved impossible, due to political differences in the Nazi top echelon and organizational difficulties. For similar reasons, the planned 'resettlement' of the German Jews was also delayed until the autumn of 1941. Since only some 2,800 German Gypsies were deported in 1940, not the planned 30,000, the character of the camp detention in which Gypsies who remained in the *Alt-reich* (Germany in its 1937 borders) and annexed Austria were kept altered. What had been conceived as a short-term stopgap measure became a permanent fixture. In December 1940, its end was not yet in sight.

The ban on freedom of movement was now compounded by a raft of supplementary restrictions: prohibition on various kinds of employment, social isolation in 'Gypsy community camps' (usually municipally run) and new limitations in social welfare. The upshot was that Gypsies found their deteriorated situation increasingly resembled that of Jews and Poles. The

12. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Wehrmacht Supreme Command, hereafter: OKW), Amt Auls./Abw., No. 33117/40 g Abw. III (C 1), 31 Jan. 1940, Re: Gypsies in the border area, cited in: BA Potsdam, 31.01 Reichswirtschaftsministerium (Reich Ministry of Economy, hereafter: RWM), Vol. 30, Reichsministerium des Innern (Reich Ministry of the Interior, hereafter: RMdI), S V A 2 No. 230/41 g, P. Werner, 1 Nov. 1941, to RWM, Appendix 8 a.

13. BAB, VV, RFSSuChdDtPol.i.RMdI., V B No. 95/40 g, 27 April 1940; Instructions for Implementation: BAB, VV, RFSSuChdDtPol.i.RMdI., zu V B No. 95/40 g, 27 April 1940, Guidelines for the Resettlement of Gypsies.

14. IfZ, MA 1159, Report of the Committee of Former Political Prisoners, Hamburg, n.d. (c.1950).

military took an active hand in enforcing curbs on employment. At the end of 1940, the OKW declared that in order to prevent spying, it was 'inadmissible' to employ Gypsies in factories run by the Army or under military protection.¹⁵ A subsequent decree from the Reich Labor Ministry led to the dismissal of a number of Gypsies from defense industry jobs.¹⁶

The OKW, already hostile toward Gypsies as a result of the espionage stereotype, also engaged in racist stigmatizing of Gypsies in its own domain. As early as November 1937, the Reich interior minister's 'Guidelines for the Induction of Non-Jewish German Citizens of Foreign Blood into Active Military Service,' had ordered Gypsies excluded from active military service.¹⁷ Yet these orders had few practical consequences: at this juncture, the number of Gypsies classified as such and stigmatized by the police and racial hygienists was still small.

So on February 11, 1941 the OKW issued a new order: for 'reasons of racial policy . . . Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge*' were to be discharged from active military service. The Criminal Police (*Reichskriminalpolizeiamt*, RKPA) were to register those affected and pass on their names to the Alternative Service offices. Those who had been in the army, navy or air force were transferred to the Auxiliary Reserve II or the National Guard (*Landwehr*). Moreover, 'Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge*' were no longer to be inducted as recruits.¹⁸ In a corresponding move, the Reich Interior Ministry decreed that the names of Gypsies born in the 1923 cohort and liable for the draft should be specially coded in the Selective Service registry by the

15. Bundesarchiv Potsdam (BAP), 31.01 RWM, Vol. 30, Regierungspräsident (District Governor, hereafter: RP) Minden, 24 May 1941, to RWM, Paul Werner, RKPA, 1 Nov. 1941, fol. 14 in the enclosure: Reichs Labor Ministry, 19 Feb. 1941, V a 5432/609/40 g, Re: Intelligence checks on workers.

16. Staatsarchiv Würzburg, Gestapo Würzburg 17.425 and 17.426; Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, Wien (Documentary Archive of the Austrian Resistance, hereafter: DÖW) E 19.829, Rural Police HQ St. Valentin re Deportation of K. Baumgartner and his family to the Gypsy camp Lackenbach, 7 March 1945; Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter: AN), 72 AJ 287; Internement Sarthe, Camp de nomades de Coudrecieux et de Mulsanne, 'Les camps de concentration de nomades dans la Sarthe (Octobre 1940—Ao-t 1942)'; Statni Ustredni Archiv v Praze, RP II-4-5431 / 1941-1942, A I/1-5431, 8 Dec. 1942.

17. OKW, 11 Feb. 1941, 12 e/f/11 628/40 AHA/Ag/E (I a): Discharge of Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge* from active military service, according to: Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen, 8 (1941), 153:83 ff.; there also the reference to R.K.M. 12 i 10.36 AHA/E (I a) No. 1510/37 geh., 26 Nov. 1937.

18. OKW, 11 Feb. 1941, 12 e/f/11 628/40 AHA/Ag/E (I a): Discharge of Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge*, loc. cit.

symbol 'Z' (*Zigeuner*) or 'ZM' (*Zigeunermischling*).¹⁹ But initially few Gypsies were discharged, since it was not until February 1942 that the RKPA was instructed to gather more detailed information on 'Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge*' in the services. Most remained with their units throughout 1941; many participated in the attack on the Soviet Union. Yet the Propaganda Ministry and Party Chancellery learned that 26 Gypsies from Berleburg had, despite the ban of their recruitment, been inducted into the army; a number had even been awarded the Iron Cross for bravery in battle. The Party Chancellery passed on their names and several more from other localities to the OKW, which then ordered the soldiers discharged.²⁰

Analogous to the Nuremberg Laws, the February 1941 OKW order discharging Gypsies from active military service 'for reasons of racial policy' primarily targeted two categories: so-called 'racially pure Gypsies' (*vollblütige Zigeuner*) and 'part-Gypsies with a significant amount of Gypsy blood.'²¹ The lower ranks of officers often interpreted this to mean that 'Gypsies whose blood was largely German' should remain in service.²² But after consulting with the RKPA, in overall charge of Gypsy persecution, the OKW retracted its comparatively narrow definition of *Zigeunermischling*,²³ tightening its regulations on July 10, 1942: it now ordered all part-Gypsies, even those with one-eighth 'Gypsy blood,' discharged from the ranks.²⁴ Back on January 7, 1942, the Reich Aviation Ministry had already issued an almost identical directive, agreed upon after consulting with the RKPA: it denied

19. BAB, VV, Marking Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge* in registration of those born in 1923, RdErl.d.RMdI.v. 23 April 1941—I Rb 658 IV/40—500.

20. IfZ, MA 423, fols. 485.238–485.261, Memos and correspondence between Reich Propaganda Ministry, Reich Party Chancellery and the Gau Direction for Westphalia-South, 28 Feb. 1941 to 30 Sept. 1941. The other names involved three persons from the Salzwedel district (*ibid.*, fols. 485.242 and 243, Dessau, Meldung 12002, 6 Sept. 1941, and pm, 26.9.1941 an mchn fuehrerbau, pg. reischauer, No. 119.)

21. Verfügung OKW./AHA/Ag/E (Ia), No. 11.628/40, Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen 8(4), 21 Feb. 1941, No. 153.

22. BAB, VV, RSHA-Erlaß VA2 No. 2551/42., 26 Aug. 1942. Also BA—ZNK, Wehrstammbücher A. J. (1899), H. J. J. (1922), A. M. (1921), H. M. (1922), W. M. (1919), F. S. (1918).

23. BAP, 31.01 RWM, Vol. 30, RP Minden, 24 May 1941, to RWM, Oberreg.rat Werner, RKPA, 1 Nov. 1941, to RWM, pp. 21–3 of the enclosure: RMDI, S VA2 No. 196/41 g, Sept. 1941; pp. 24 ff. of the enclosure.

24. O.K.W., 10 July 1942—7985/42—AHA/Ag/E (I a): Discharge of Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge* from active military service, acc. to: Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen, 9 (1942), 576:305.

Gypsies and part-Gypsies the right to serve in the air force.²⁵ The revised 'Guidelines for the Induction of Non-Jewish German Citizens of Foreign Blood into Active Military Service' issued by the OKW in September 1943 modified this position once again. It scaled down the demand for the absolute discharge of all Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge*, stating instead only that 'in general' they should be mustered out. Moreover, under certain conditions the reason given for discharge should no longer be 'unsuitable' but rather 'recruitment by mistake.'²⁶ Gypsies of mixed race could be 'allowed to stay on' in service if they had demonstrated their 'absolute reliability' and had proven by their 'conduct in battle' that they were 'ready for action' and that their 'fundamental attitude [was] beyond reproach.' These cautious provisos may have been prompted by the growing shortages in military manpower, but were perhaps also connected with the vigorous way in which certain superiors came to the defense of their men stigmatized as 'Gypsy *Mischlinge*.'²⁷ Nonetheless, they were completely rescinded by a subsequent OKW order dated July 12, 1944.²⁸ Through the nexus between the RKPA and OKW, racism and the cliché of espionage, the military and paramilitary units of the Nazi state were largely 'free of Gypsies' already by early 1943. Starting in March of that year, a substantial number of those recently mustered out of the military were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau along with thousands of other Gypsies. That deportation was based on an order by Himmler on December 16, 1942, itself the product of an RKPA initiative. This decree

25. Reich Aviation Minister and Commander of the Air Force—Special Decree, 7 Jan. 1942, in: IfZ, MA 1159, Entschädigungsprozeß LG München I, Entschädigungskammer EK 2/51, LEA: 41.702/VIII/1607. On the agreement with the RKPA regarding this decree: BA Potsdam, 31 Jan. RWM, Vol. 30, RP Minden, 24 May 1941, to RWM, there P. Werner, RKPA, 1 Nov 1941, to the RWM, fols. 21–3 of the enclosure: RMdI, S V A 2 No. 196/41 g, Sept. 1941.

26. O.K.W., 22.9.43—3838/43 g—Wehrersatzamt/Abt. E (I a), cited in: Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen, 10(1943), 734: 443 ff., here III. 1. ' . . . During the war, the regulations of H.Dv. 82/5 b, April 15, 1941 are valid for the discharge of non-commissioned officers and enlisted men. All Gypsies and Gypsy *Mischlinge* who joined the ranks after this point in time and are considered for discharge should be released according to Para. 6 (2) b No. 6 of this regulation, not on the grounds of lack of suitability but rather due to recruitment by mistake.'

27. Example: Bundesarchiv—Zentrale Nachweisstelle Kornelimünster, Wehrstammbuch F. S. (1918). On March 4, 1943, F. S. was described by his captain and company commander as a soldier with an 'open, honest character,' a 'good buddy.' Nonetheless, he was discharged from the Wehrmacht. Similarly Winter (1999: 29–34).

28. I.e. 'judenfrei.' O.K.W., 12 July 1944—8114/44—Wehrersatzamt/Abt. E (I a), in: Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen, 11(1944), 374:218.

unified and radicalized the previously quite disjointed policy of Gypsy persecution.²⁹

There were some 22,600 prisoners in the Gypsy 'family camp' at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943–44. More than 60 percent of those registered were from Germany and Austria. Several hundred of them had previously served in the military (Zimmermann 1996: 308 ff., 329 ff., 343 ff.). More than 19,300 confined in the Gypsy camp were murdered. Of the approximately 3,300 who survived the camp, not all lived to see the collapse of Nazi Germany. A number of men and numerous women were subjected in early 1945 to horrible and sometimes lethal sterilization experiments in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Others died through forced labor in other camps or external satellites, while on death marches in the final weeks of the war or as impressed combat soldiers in the Waffen-SS division led by Gen. Oskar Dirlewanger. In the war's closing weeks, Gypsies who had survived Auschwitz, most former Wehrmacht veterans, were deployed in Dirlewanger's unit at the front against the advancing Red Army (Klausch 1993, Zimmermann 1996: 345–58). In summing up Gypsy persecution inside the Reich, it is clear that the Wehrmacht's part in its implementation, though quite important, was nonetheless subordinate. The dominant persecutory agencies were the RSHA and its RKPA. The Criminal Police understood its function based on an essentially racist view of what constituted 'security' and the 'combating of crime,' cooperating closely with the Research Institute for Race Hygiene within the Reich Health Office.

Western Europe and Serbia

In the German-occupied territories, the Wehrmacht participated in Gypsy persecution more on its own initiative and enjoyed considerable freedom. This latitude had some connection with the German conduct of the war

29. Himmler's deportation order was the result of long and vehement discussions on central state level during the fall of 1942 about the further development of Gypsy policy. Participants, in addition to the SS Führer himself, included the RKPA, the Research Institute for Race Hygiene, the Party Chancellery, the Race and Settlement Main Office of the SS, and the SS Office for 'Ancestral Inheritance' (*Ahnenerbe*), which here for the first time, on Himmler's order, intervened in Gypsy policy. The order foresaw the deportation of Gypsies 'to a concentration camp.' The RSHA, which was responsible for carrying out Himmler's order, chose the recently developed Auschwitz-Birkenau. The deportation involved Gypsies from Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and Moravia, from the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern France.

and was partially the by-product of the structure of the German occupation administration, where the military at times played a decisive role.

In the Netherlands and Belgium, the German military administration showed little interest in the Gypsies. Orders mentioning them as a special group were issued in the early autumn of 1940.³⁰ These stipulated that 'in order to combat espionage,' Gypsies, stateless persons, members of the French Foreign Legion, German emigrants and others foreigners should be removed from the military 'security zone' along the coast. The situation in France differed from that in the Netherlands and Belgium in that the French government had itself already introduced coercive measures against the traveling population. In a decree of April 6, 1940, the 'nomades' were stigmatized as potential traitors who might reveal military secrets to the Germans. Their transient way of life permitted them to observe and report troop movements, deployment sites and defense works to enemy agents. Consequently, for the duration of the war against Germany, they were enjoined from traveling about (Peschanski 1999: 131–6). In the autumn of 1940, the German military administration tightened the screws, making these French measures far more severe. *Nomades* living in unoccupied areas of France were now no longer permitted to cross the line of demarcation; those in German-occupied France were to be 'transferred to collection camps.'³¹ During the following years, some 3,000 persons stigmatized as *nomades* or *tsiganes* were incarcerated in camps, often under appalling conditions; such camps were ultimately under the control of the German military administration (Peschanski 1999).

While Gypsies in German-occupied Western Europe were subjected to harsh restrictions, in occupied Southeastern and Eastern Europe the very lives of Gypsies were in peril. Overall, this gradient dovetailed with the differing German war aims and practices in Western and Eastern Europe, which in Eastern Europe assumed the character of a racist war of annihilation.

30. Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdokumentatie (Institute for War Documentation), Amsterdam, Material Sijes, Regulations regarding caravan dwellers and Gypsies 1940–45, 7 Sept. 1940; Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (hereafter BA-MA), RWD 20/1, Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich, 22, 18 Nov. 1940, p. 300: VO über polizeiliche Maßnahmen in bestimmten Gebieten Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs, 12 Nov. 1940, 4—Verbot des Wandergewerbes.

31. AN, AJ 40-885,2, Chief, Military Administration in France, 4 Oct. 1940, Kommandostab Abt. I c (II).

The Wehrmacht invaded Yugoslavia at the beginning of April 1941. The country was partitioned and Serbia placed under German military administration, supervised by two staffs. The command staff was in charge of German combat units, while the administrative staff, headed by SS Lt. Gen. Harald Turner, superintended the provisional Serb government, the German field and district commands, the mobile task force (Einsatzgruppe) of the Security Police and the Security Service and Reserve Police Battalion 64 of the Order Police (Browning 1985: 39 ff.).

Serb resistance against the German occupation was initially low-key, but this changed after the massive German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. In early July, an uprising of communist partisans led by Tito erupted, surprising the occupiers by its magnitude. Right from the start, the tactics employed to defeat the partisans included 'reprisal executions.' Already on June 22, 1941, political prisoners suspected of being CP members and Jews were the first 'hostages' executed in a bid to quash the uprising. The guidelines for reprisal policy issued by the Commanding General for Serbia at the beginning of October 1941 upped the retaliatory ante. Now, for every German soldier or 'ethnic German' (*Volksdeutscher*) killed, 100 hostages would be shot; for every German soldier or 'ethnic German' wounded, 50 hostages were to be executed. The designated victims were males aged between 14 and 70. The executions were to be carried out wherever possible by the same units that had incurred losses in clashes with the partisans.³²

Since the Wehrmacht had too small a reservoir of victims for its 'reprisal executions,' the Einsatzgruppe stationed in Belgrade was asked to 'provide' the 'requisite number' of 2,100 'hostages' for 21 German soldiers who had been killed.³³ During the summer 1941, the Einsatzgruppe hauled the Jews of Belgrade and the Banat into a 'transit camp' and herded a large group of Jewish refugees into the overcrowded Sabac concentration camp, where Gypsies were also being held. The commander of the Einsatzgruppe decided on the 'removal' of 1,295 Jews from Belgrade and 805 Jews and Gypsies from the Sabac camp for the 'reprisal executions.' (Manoschek 1995: 62–6, 75–9). The Roma in Serbia thus fell victim to the German 'retaliatory measures.'

Gen. Harald Turner, commander of the military administrative staff, proposed on October 16, 1941 that an additional 2,200 'hostages' should be executed as retribution for ten soldiers recently killed and 24 wounded by

32. Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Nürnberger Dokumente (hereafter: STAN, ND), NOKW 891 and 557, Tgb. No. 2848/41. 33. *Ibid.*

Tito's partisans (Manoschek 1995, 98–102). One day later he wrote to his friend SS Lt. Gen. Richard Hildebrandt in Danzig:

About five weeks ago, I lined the first of 600 [Serbs] up against the wall. Since then we've liquidated another 2,000 in a mopping-up operation. In another mop-up we killed about 1,000 more. And in the meantime, over the past eight days, I've had 2,000 Jews and 200 Gypsies shot. According to the ratio 1:100 for German soldiers murdered in a barbaric manner. Another 2,200 are to be shot in the coming eight days, also almost only Jews. This is far from pleasant work! But it's necessary, we've got to make clear to people what it means to dare attack even a single German soldier. Besides, this is also the fastest way to solve the Jewish question.³⁴

Eight days later, under the pressure of new events, Turner was even more insistent on selecting Jewish and Gypsy victims for 'reprisal executions.' In the meanwhile, two Wehrmacht units had applied the guidelines for retribution policy on their own, murdering some 4,000 in two Serb towns. In the light of this massacre, Turner and Faulmüller, chief of staff of the Commanding General, worked out new guidelines, issued on October 25, 1941. They prohibited 'indiscriminate arrests and executions of Serbs,' since this only strengthened the rebels' hand. In future, in cases of doubt, it was first necessary to obtain authorization from the superior office before proceeding with the executions. On the other hand, Jews and Gypsies were a 'basic source of insecurity, thus endangering public order and safety.' Jewish intellect had 'conjured up this war'; consequently, it had to be 'destroyed.' And 'given his internal disposition and external construction, the Gypsy . . . could not be a useful member of the community of nations.' According to Turner, the 'Jewish element . . . had a significant hand in directing the gangs,' and 'Gypsies in particular' bore responsibility 'for special atrocities and providing intelligence.'³⁵

Turner's order, which fused anti-Jewish and anti-Gypsy clichés with biologicistic racism, provided *carte blanche* for the shooting of all Jewish males and numerous Roma. This meshed with the thinking of the Wehrmacht command in Serbia. It was also their view that the indiscriminate execution of Serbs diminished the occupier's latitude for action. On the other hand, the military command wished to adhere to the quota of 100 dead hostages for every dead German soldier and 50 hostages for every soldier wounded.

34. STAN, ND, NO 5810, Turner to Hildebrandt, 17 Oct. 1941.

35. STAN, ND, NOKW 802, Tgb. No. 44/41, g.Kdos., 26 Oct. 1941.

So there were no reservations about executing Jews and Gypsies. In the ideological phantasms dominant in the Wehrmacht's mind-set, the Jews were in any case the arch-enemies of the Reich, colluding with the communists in the cabal of a 'Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy.' The Gypsies were conceived to be spies operating in the service of the putative Jewish-communist adversary (Browning 1985: 53 ff., Manoschek 1995: 189–91).

The next 'reprisal execution' corresponded to the pattern indicated by Turner. Since the total number of available Jews no longer even amounted to 2,000, some 250 Roma were seized in Belgrade in order to fill the fixed quota of 2,200 victims.³⁶ The first shootings were carried out on October 27 and 30, 1941 by 9th Company, Infantry Regiment 734, commanded by First Lt. Hans-Dietrich Walther. Two days later, he reported to his superiors. Walther complained that the trucks put at his disposal by Field HQ 599 for transporting Jews and Gypsies were 'unsuitable,' since they 'had no canopy or awning, so that the city's inhabitants could see who we were taking and where we were going.' On the other hand, he had nothing but praise for the choice of the execution site: it was 'very convenient,' since any 'attempt by prisoners to flee' could be 'prevented by a small number of men.' The sandy soil there was also 'very suitable': it facilitated the 'digging of pits' and thus shortened the 'amount of working time' necessary for the operation. What required the most time was digging the pits, 'while the execution itself went off very fast: 100 persons in 40 minutes.' 'Jews face death calmly—they stand very quietly—while Gypsies cry and shriek and are constantly writhing about, even standing at the place of execution. Some even jumped into the pit before the shots were fired and tried to pass themselves off for dead.'

Walther summed up:

Initially it didn't phase my men. But by the second day it was already apparent that some don't have the nerves for executions over a longer period. My personal impression is that people are not troubled by inhibitions during the actual shooting. But after a while, in the quiet of the evening, when you get to thinking about it you begin to feel something.³⁷

A week later the unit was ordered to carry out a third shooting. Walther subsequently requested to be relieved of execution duty: the mental strain was too great. Some of the succeeding executions were assigned to another

36. BA-MA, RW 40.12, Appendix 56, Kogard to Böhme, 29 Oct. 1941.

37. STAN, ND, NOKW 905, Oberleutnant Walther, 1 Nov. 1941.

Wehrmacht unit, others to the 64th Reserve Police Battalion (Manoschek 1995: 102).

Almost simultaneously with these murders, the German troops gained the upper hand over Tito's partisans. On December 22, 1941, a lower 'retaliatory quota' was ordered, slashing the figure by half: now there were to be 50 victims for every German or 'ethnic German' soldier killed, the toll of 25 victims for each soldier wounded. Along with 'unarmed communists' and 'criminals,' Gypsies and Jews were blanketed as 'retribution prisoners' (*Sühnegefangene*).³⁸ In the following years, numerous Roma were to fall victim to German 'reprisal executions' (Ackovic 1986: 130, Kenrick and Puxon 1995: 84-7).

At the same time, the German authorities were faced with a new question: what was to be done with Jewish women, children and the elderly and Roma women and children whose husbands and fathers had been shot? At the end of October 1941, they decided on a temporary solution, the construction of a camp in Semlin (Zemun) on the bank of the Sava River opposite Belgrade. The Southeastern Army command expressly endorsed the proposal. In the meantime, it apparently also considered women, children and the elderly as spies or informants for the communist partisans. On December 8, 1941, the Jews and most probably the Gypsies as well were transported to Semlin, now under the command of the German Security Police. Yugoslav authorities estimate the number of Jews incarcerated there at 7,500, along with 292 Roma women and children.³⁹

In the spring of 1942, the Jewish prisoners were gassed in an extermination van brought in especially for the purpose from Germany. The regular ten-day reports filed by the authorized Commanding General in Serbia kept a precise record of the continuously declining number of Jewish concentration camp prisoners.⁴⁰ By contrast, the Roma women and children were released from Semlin. The exact date of this release remains unclear. In his 1967 trial, the former Semlin commandant Herbert Andorfer testified

38. BA-MA, RW 40/14, fol. 107, BKG in Serbien, 22 Dec. 1941.

39. Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen Ludwigsburg (Central Office of State Justice Administrations, hereafter: ZS), V 503, AR-Z 36/76, Vol. 1, Supplementary File of the State Commission Serbia on Establishing Crimes by the German Occupiers and their Auxiliaries in Serbia. See also Browning 1985: 71 and Manoschek 1995: 178.

40. STAN, ND, NOKW 1221, Ten-Day Report, 31 March 1942, fol. 4; NOKW 1444, Ten-Day Report, 20 April 1942, fol. 4; *ibid.*, Ten-Day Report, 30 April 1942, fol. 4., BAB, R 70-Serbien-33, fol. 36.

he recalled that the Roma were released immediately prior to the beginning of the murder of the Jewish women and children, thus in March 1942 (Manoschek 1995: 178, Zimmermann 1996: 257 ff.). Yet memory can often be deceptive when it comes to time. So it is also conceivable that the decision to spare Roma women and children was linked with a discussion between Himmler and Heydrich held on April 20, 1942, recorded in Himmler's service diary with the words: 'No extermination of the Gypsies' (Dienstkalender 1999: 405). This entry by the Reichsführer-SS could help to explain the release of Roma from Semlin, an action whose motives have remained to date obscure. In 1942, Himmler began to develop interest in the Indian origin of the Gypsies. This led him to the notion that among the Roma, there was a small group of 'racially pure' Gypsies who, because they had originated in India, were bonafide 'Aryans' (Zimmermann 1996: 297–304, Margalit 1998, Lewy 1999). Although Himmler's diary entry does not have the force of a basic policy decision, seen from this vantage, that brief entry points up the differences the SS leadership made in extermination policy vis-à-vis Jews and Gypsies.

After the Jews held in Semlin were murdered, the local Security Police commander proudly declared Belgrade to be the only large city in Europe 'free of Jews.'⁴¹ Gen. Turner, his influence in the German power structure in Serbia on the wane, tried to offset this by accentuating real or imaginary activities of his own initiative (Browning 1985: 77). He went further, claiming at the end of August 1942 to Gen. Löhr, Wehrmacht Commander Southeast in Salonika, that 'Serbia was the only country where the *Jewish question* and the *Gypsy question* had been solved.'⁴² But in regard to the Roma, Turner was wrong. Fortunately, the murder of Gypsies was still limited in scope. According to available sources, down to the spring of 1942, the Wehrmacht and police in Serbia had shot between 1,000 and 1,200 Roma. Even assuming a substantial number of unreported victims over the course of the war, and thus a far higher total, the great majority of Serb Roma survived the German extermination policy. In 1943, even German newspapers indicated the number of Roma in Serbia to be an estimated 115,000, declaring it a 'question' that had to be 'solved as soon and as thoroughly as possible.'⁴³

41. BAB, R 70-Serbien-33, fol. 36.

42. IFZ, MA-685, fols. 576–85, Presentation by Turner, 29 Aug. 1942, at WB-Südost, Generaloberst Löhr, fols. 577 ff.

43. Donauzeitung, 16 Jan. 1943, Krakauer Zeitung, 4 June 1943.

In the Soviet Union

While the SS Einsatzgruppen in Serbia had selected the Gypsy victims and the Wehrmacht units had then proceeded with their execution, murder operations in the USSR involved a change of roles: the Einsatzgruppen tended to be executioners behind the front while the Wehrmacht figured primarily as accomplices.

Testimony by Otto Ohlendorf, commander of Einsatzgruppe D, at the Nuremberg Tribunal after the war cast light on the reasons mustered to legitimate the murder of Gypsies in the USSR. Ohlendorf's line of defense in 1947–48 argued (a) that he was acting under orders and (b) that a general murder order for the Einsatzgruppen had been issued shortly before the beginning of Operation Barbarossa and the attack on the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ While the truth of this apologia is difficult to uphold in the light of historical research (Streim 1981: 319–21, 325–7, Ogorreck 1996: 47–56), Ohlendorf's remarks on the motives underlying the murder of the Gypsies may be of greater historical relevance. In the course of the Nuremberg Einsatzgruppen trial in October 1948, he stated that it had been the mission of these groups 'to protect the rear of the troops by killing Jews, Gypsies, communist functionaries, active communists and all others who could pose a threat to security' (Krausnick and Wilhelm: 158). Ohlendorf thus tried to legitimate the murder of Jews and Gypsies in connection with the need to ensure the security of the German troops. Yet the structure of his argumentation reveals the patently racist character of these murders: at the latest from mid-August 1941 on, the Einsatzgruppen considered Jews and Gypsies *prima facie* as 'elements' posing a threat to security.

In commenting specifically on the Gypsies, Ohlendorf noted that the same regulations had been valid both for them and the Jews. Gypsy children had 'to be murdered' just like their parents, since the intent of their extermination was to 'bring about a lasting state of security . . . not just a momentary one.' As 'the children of parents who had been killed,' they posed 'no less danger' to the Germans 'than their parents themselves.' In addition, Ohlendorf cited the time-worn cliché of espionage as a motive for the murder, applied equally to Jews and Gypsies: just as 'the Jew . . . had performed espionage services for both sides in all wars,' the Gypsies, 'as a

44. STAN, ND, Case IX, No. A 6–8, fols. 669–73.

non-sedentary population,' were 'psychologically predisposed to changing locations.'⁴⁵

This accorded with statements made by the Einsatzgruppen during the war in seeking to legitimate the shooting of Gypsies. They cobbled an instrumental ligature between the customary anti-Gypsy stereotypes with the German conduct of the war and the German occupation regime. Along with stigmatizing the Gypsies as 'asocial,' notorious thieves and 'alien elements,' coupled with the claim that they represented 'an encumbrance in every respect,' they thus made special use of the standing cliché that Gypsies practiced espionage and had links with the partisans.⁴⁶

Along with Jews, functionaries of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), partisans and other 'undesirable elements,' Gypsies were indeed among the victims of the SS Einsatzgruppen on Soviet soil. Their initial target group had been Jews in the Soviet state and Party bureaucracy, the Jewish intelligentsia and any Jews considered ready to offer resistance. Yet already during the first month of the Soviet campaign, the Einsatzgruppen seized on a further group as victims for executions in 'retaliation' for real or imputed opposition in the population: in the main, Jewish urban males of military service age. In the face of stepped-up activity by Soviet partisans in the late summer of 1941, and probably also in line with the German aim to press forward to a 'final victory' over the Soviet Union before the onset of winter, the Einsatzgruppen radicalized their praxis: the practical objective was total extermination of the Jewish population in the occupied Soviet Union. At the same time, the mobile killing units expanded carnage to include Gypsy victims (Gerlach 1999: 628–55, 859–84).

The activity of the Einsatzgruppen was based on a hierarchically articulated image of the enemy. At its apex were Jews and communists and their phantasmal meld in the form of a 'Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy.' In this ideological pyramid, Gypsies occupied a subordinate though not insignificant rung. They figured as 'racially inferior,' purportedly 'asocial,' as

45. *Ibid.*

46. STAN, ND, NOKW 2072, 281. Sdv., 23 June 1942, Report on the shooting of Gypsies in Novorzhev; BAB, AK, R 58-217, EM 93, 24 Sept. 1941, fol. 321, Report, EG C; ZS, AR-Z 96/60, fol. 1892–1894, EG B, 1 Sept. 1942, Activity and Situation Report 16 Aug.-31. Aug. 1942, fol. 1893; BAB, R 58-217, EM 92, 23 Sept. 1941, fol. 299; BAB, R 58-218, EM 119, 20 Oct. 1941, fol. 239; ZS, AR 72 a/60, Verdict against Wiebens et al., fol. 34; STAN, ND, NOKW 2072, 281. Sdv., 23 June 1942.

'partisans,' 'spies,' and 'agents' of the imaginary 'Jewish world enemy.' Viewed by the Einsatzgruppen as fifth-column informers in the service of 'Jewish Bolshevism,' they targeted traveling Roma in particular whenever the killing units learned of their existence. Regarded solely as auxiliaries of the 'world enemy,' their liquidation was not given first priority. The Einsatzgruppen murdered the Gypsies who fell into their hands, but did not search for them with the zeal employed in ferreting out Jews and communists. Rather, as reflected in the formulations in diverse Einsatzgruppen reports, the Gypsies were 'handed over' to them by the Wehrmacht, reported to them by the Russian population, seized during 'inspection of a prison,' killed in the course of general 'inspections' of the civilian population in rear areas near the front or 'picked up' by a detachment 'en route' to its next appointed station.⁴⁷

But when the killing units lingered in an area longer-term, as in the case of Einsatzgruppe D in the Crimea, they also began systematic liquidation of the Gypsy population. In Crimea, more than 2,500 Roma fell victim to Einsatzgruppe D, concentrated especially in the capital city of Simferopol. This Crimean case also exemplifies the role played by the Eastern Army in this slaughter. Simferopol had a Gypsy quarter; in November and December 1941, a registry of its residents was prepared. One December day, the Roma were dragged from their homes, guarded by 20–25 armed German members of the Order Police. They were herded onto trucks driven up at short intervals. These vehicles had been provided by the Wehrmacht. Their drivers, co-drivers and armed escorts were likewise Wehrmacht personnel. The place of execution was sealed off by members of the Wehrmacht military police and Einsatzkommando 11 b.⁴⁸ Men from Einsatzgruppe D forced them to climb down from the trucks. Their coats, furs, money and valuables were confiscated. Assembled in groups, the Roma were led to the edge of an anti-tank trench some two meters deep. It had been excavated by a Wehrmacht sapper using high explosives. Several firing squads, each commanded by an SS officer, rotated at the line. In this manner, over the course

47. BAB, R 58/217, EM 92, 23 Sept. 1941, fol. 299; ZS, AR 72 a/60, Verdict against gg. Wiebens et al., fol. 34–6; IfZ, MA 701/1, BdS, EK 3, Kauen 1 Dec 1941, Full listing of executions carried out in the area of EK 3 to Dec. 1, 1941, fol. 31; BAB, R 58/219, EM 150, 2.1. 1942, fol. 364; BAB, R 58/218, EM 119, 20 Oct. 1941, fol. 239; for White Russia, see Gerlach 1999: 1063–7.

48. The Einsatzkommandos were individual detachments that made up the full Einsatzgruppe.

of a single day, Einsatzkommando 11 b executed several hundred persons.⁴⁹ The support provided the Einsatzgruppen by the military police and other Wehrmacht units in the shooting of the Simferopol Roma has numerous parallels in Wehrmacht complicity in the massacre of the Soviet Jews.⁵⁰

The Eastern Army did not only furnish organizational and technical assistance in such executions—often it also acted to initiate the Gypsy liquidations and delivered numerous victims into the hands of the SS mobile killing units. Thus, for example, in the ‘General Instructions on the Application of Military Administrative Order’ for the Soviet Union, issued in October 1941, it is stated that ‘itinerant Gypsies’ earned their ‘sustenance mainly by means of theft and robbery in remote localities.’ For that reason, they were ‘to be taken into custody and handed over to the nearest Einsatzkommando of the Security Police and SD.’⁵¹ Precise orders with an identical content, for example, were also issued by the Commanding General, Northern Rear Army Area. In the late autumn of 1941, he ordered ‘sedentary Gypsies resident for two years in their locality’ and against whom there were ‘no political or criminal suspicions,’ to be ‘left’ there. On the other hand, ‘itinerant Gypsies’ were to be ‘delivered over to the nearest Einsatzkommando of the Security Service.’⁵² If the vague formulation contra the ‘sedentary Gypsies’ covered any potential denunciation that might be directed to the Einsatzgruppen, the order against wandering Roma indicates that the Wehrmacht, in a division of labor with the Einsatzgruppen, actively abetted the murder of traveling Gypsies.

An analogous pattern of murder also can be demonstrated for Latvia and the Generalgouvernement. There too, Gypsies considered by the German police, the occupation administration and the military to be itinerant were in greater danger than sedentary Roma (Wippermann 1992: 75–90, Zimmermann 1996: 267–76, Pohl 1997: 114). In fact, Nazi Gypsy policy outside the

49. STAN, ND, Case IX, A 54–55, fols. 4761–85, Interrogation Schubert.—Figures: BAB, R 58/219, EM 150, 2 Jan. 1942, fol. 378, BAB, R 58/220, EM 165, 6 Feb. 1942, fol. 316, and EM 170, 18 Feb. 1942, fol. 385; BAB, R 58/221, EM 178, 9 March 1942, fol. 64; BAB, R 58/221, EM 184, 23 March 1942, fol. 130; BAB, R 58/221, EM 190, 8 April 1942, fols. 267 ff.

50. On the broader question of Wehrmacht complicity in genocide, see Omer Bartov (1985/2001, 1992, 2000). Hamburg Institute for Social Research 1999.

51. Historical Archive Riga, fund 70, book 5, file 15, fol. 45.

52. The order (Kdr. Gen. 21 Nov 1941–VII 1045/41-) is partially paraphrased in: STAN, ND, NOKW 2072, 281. Sdv., 23 June 1942; ND, NOKW 2022, 281. Sdv., Abt. VII/I a, Tgb. No. 457/43 geh., 24 March 1943, Re: O.K. 534, Br.B.No. 193/43 geh. v. 22 March 1943, to Field HQ 822.

Reich, especially in Eastern Europe, was directed primarily against itinerant Gypsies, not settled Roma. It was alleged that their wayfaring was camouflage for espionage in the service of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik world enemy.'

Wehrmacht units themselves also occasionally received orders down the command chain to exterminate Gypsies. Thus, the commander of the 707th Infantry Division, Gen. von Bechtolsheim, issued the following directive in October and again in November 1941: 'When seized, Gypsies are to be shot on the spot.'⁵³ However, the concrete consequences of this particular order are not known. Yet we do have more detailed information on the activities of the 281st Sicherungsdivision (Pro-Division) in the Northern Army Rear Area. Thus, in May 1942, the local command in Novorzhev (70 miles SE of Pskov) had 128 Gypsies shot. This massacre was initiated by a unit of the secret military police. In addition, the local command in Novorzhev referred to an order by the Field HQ 822, dated May 12, 1942, that Gypsies should 'invariably be treated like partisans.' In actual fact, it was impossible to prove that the Gypsies near Novorzhev had given any assistance to the partisans. Which is why the local command wished to lend legitimacy to the murders post festum by claiming the Roma had 'not registered' with the municipality, were 'not regularly employed' and eked out a living 'by begging from place to place.' This chain of clichés was considered circumstantial evidence to corroborate the similarly stereotypical image of the Gypsy spy: 'The general experience, not limited only to Russia, was also reconfirmed here: namely that by dint of their itinerant way of life, the Gypsies are particularly suited as agents and virtually always prepared to provide such services.' Since 'in the case of Gypsies,' there was 'almost always a suspicion of partisan activity . . . likewise probable in the instance at hand . . . ruthless severe measures [had been] appropriate.'⁵⁴

The top echelon of the 281st Sicherungsdivision judged the murder of 128 Gypsies near Novorzhev to be 'materially justified . . . despite the presence of formal reservations.' Yet since the execution by Wehrmacht soldiers exceeded standing orders to deliver over 'itinerant Gypsies' to the Einsatzgruppen, they referred at the same time to the general regulations. These stated that the military itself should execute Gypsies only if they had been 'convicted' of partisan activity. Otherwise they were to be surrendered to

53. Commandant in White Ruthenia, Abt. Ia, 10 Oct. 1941, StA Hamburg 147 Js 29/67, Sbd. K.; similar idem, Order No. 24, 24 Nov. 1941, ZS 202 AR-Z 184/67, Document Vol. III, fol. 217, cited in Gerlach 1999: 1065. 54. *Ibid.*

the custody of the Einsatzgruppen.⁵⁵ Since no fundamental question was thus raised about the execution itself, but only as regards the unauthorized manner in which it had been carried out by the Novorzhev local command, the shootings were ultimately deemed a marginal matter and were not punished by any disciplinary sanctions.

Conclusion

In the light of the above, there can be no doubt about the Wehrmacht's complicity in Gypsy persecution. Inside the Reich, the OKW was actively involved in the social exclusion of Gypsies. The military authorities showed no interest in, let alone active concern for the fate of former soldiers from this group deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau as 'Gypsies' and most particularly 'Gypsy *Mischlinge*'.

In Serbia, the Wehrmacht contributed substantially to establishing mass shooting as the principal policy toward both the Jews and the Roma. There were probably fewer inhibitions on killing there than in the Soviet Union because the murders in Serbia tended to be rationalized as revenge or retaliation for German casualties.

In the USSR, by contrast, Wehrmacht units were less frequently directly implicated in the extermination of Gypsies. But the military police, secret military police and the rear area Sicherungsdivisionen in particular handed over 'itinerant Gypsies' to the SS Einsatzgruppen to be shot. Over and above, Wehrmacht units provided considerable organizational and technical assistance in conjunction with the executions perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen.

What psychological processes accompanied the mass murder in Serbia and its active promotion in the occupied Soviet Union? A primary factor was the military principle of obedience to orders; it acted to deaden the independent thought and stirrings of the individual's conscience. Especially in the USSR, the division of labor in the extermination operations also played a crucial role, since it both absolved those responsible while freeing them from moral inhibitions. The military authorities who were accesso-

55. STAN, ND, NOKW 2072, 281. Sdv., 23 June 1942, to the Field HQ (V) 822 in Ostrow, Re: FK. 822 geh. v. 12 June 1942; STAN, ND, NOKW 2022, 281. Sdv., Abt. VII/I a, Tgb. No. 457/43 geh., 24 March 1943, Re: O.K. 534, Br.B.No. 193/43 geh., 22 March 1943, to Field HQ 822.

ries to the killing of Jews and Roma tended to view their part in the mass murder as insignificant when compared with that of the Einsatzgruppen. This allowed them to exonerate themselves in their own eyes, while taking a hand in the shootings with far fewer moral compunctions.

Yet the decisive point of departure for Wehrmacht complicity in the murder of Roma in Serbia and the Soviet Union was ideological: the fanciful projection, springing from a folkish-racist construct, that in the guise of Bolshevism, the putative Jewish 'anti-race' had forced Germany into a life-and-death struggle—and the Gypsies were the secret agents of this 'Jewish Bolshevism.'

Translated from the German by William Templer

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