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Introduction

Jews and Roma in the Shadow of Genocide

Encamped Gypsies from Lithuania and Poland,
You bearded men, daughters like black earth,
Berlin ordered all of you killed,
Slaughtering a forest with song and laughter.
Together with the Jews they burned you,
For both, the earth ripped apart in ritual mourning,
A rain of ash purified the bones,
A rain of ash over Mother Vilija.
And your wagons, muddy and rotten,
Encamped Gypsies from Lithuania and Poland.

Pushkin revealed your splendor, your wandering.
His heart drummed within your bandura.
Will another memorialize the Gypsy extermination in song,
With the same melodious heroism?
Unless the nightingale will, the only elegist
That accompanied you to the snake pits.
The willow crowns darkly bend,
And absorb you into their green thoughts.
O tribe of honored poets above all!
It may be that Petro has remained the last of you.

AVROM SUTZKEVER, "ENCAMPED GYPSIES"
("TABOREN ZIGEINER")¹

WORLD WAR TWO inextricably linked Romani and Jewish history. Across Europe, Jews and Roma died together at the hands of the same murderers, often in the very same places. Yet the world did not register and acknowledge their destruction equally. In the years and decades that followed, Jews managed to have their accounts of persecution heard and documented. Roma, by contrast, struggled to gain recognition of everything they had suffered and lost.

It was this realization that compelled Avrom Sutzkever, the most famous Yiddish poet of the great Jewish calamity, to write about the Romani Holocaust. Who would tell the story of the Roma's wartime slaughter, he wondered, and how should their lesser-known mass murder be remembered? Sutzkever's poem "Encamped Gypsies," composed in Moscow and Paris between 1945 and 1947, raised these questions when few considered them. It conjures a shared native land whose soil mourns its children by tearing itself up, much as Jews mourn their dead by ritually tearing their clothing. Sutzkever's poem also invokes those whom he believed were most able to portray Romani life: either Roma themselves, or non-Romani writers such as the Russian author Alexander Pushkin, who penned a famous epic poem about "Gypsies" in the 1820s. Yet, Sutzkever suggested, the Roma had all but disappeared, and there was no new Pushkin in sight. The task of memorializing the Romani victims was left only to the melodious but wordless nightingale—and perhaps to the Jewish author himself.

Sutzkever wrote in Yiddish, the language of beleaguered survivors who had just lost everything. During these years, his Jewish readers struggled to come to terms with the murder of their families and the unprecedented scale of the genocidal campaign that had been leveled against them; they sought to honor the dead and to indict the murderers while finding ways to move on. It is hardly surprising that most Jews under these conditions did not share Sutzkever's point of view and felt no moral imperative to discuss the fate of people many of them hardly knew. We should not presume that people who have experienced oppression or persecution will necessarily have a greater capacity to hear others' stories of suffering or to feel connected to other victims.

What would Sutzkever have found if he had sought out the people he depicted as having vanished? He might have read the 1946 account of the Latvian Rom Vania Kochanowski about the murder of Roma not far from Sutzkever's native city of Vilna (Vilnius), or learned songs such as "Aušvicate hi kher báro" ("In Auschwitz There is a Large House"), sung by Romanies in Auschwitz and still performed in different versions today.² He might have also discovered Roma who compared their own experiences to that of Jews, such as Rudolf Braidíć, a

Yugoslav circus performer who in 1948 sought support for himself and his family from the International Refugee Organization. Describing his experiences under fascism, Braidic explained that the Italians “wanted to send me to Croatia, with the family, but I refused to go,” since “for us, GYPSEY, was very dangerous to go there, same as to Jews.”³ Across the Cold War West, which boasted some of the most effective infrastructure to document and study the Nazi genocides, many Roma sought to bring attention to their suffering by likening their fate to the better-known persecution of Jews. Whether they claimed monetary compensation, new residency status, or protection from discrimination, Romani survivors regularly drew parallels to Jews’ experiences during the war.

Braidic’s appeal has no equivalent in Jewish files, just as Sutzkever’s poem has none in Romani sources. This is not a matter of genre—Roma authored poetry and Jews submitted judicial appeals. Instead, the difference has to do with the way Jewish and Romani experiences of World War Two have been collected and recounted. Some Jews conceded that “Gypsies suffered like us,” while Roma routinely claimed, “we suffered like the Jews.” “We suffered like them” and “they suffered like us” might sound similar enough, yet they emerge from very unequal positions. This book is about this unequal relationship and the profound consequences it has for our understanding of the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Long before the Nazis targeted both groups, Jews and Roma faced similar stereotypes.⁴ For much of the modern period, members of each group appeared in European sources as alien and rootless.⁵ The idiom of ethnic nationalism that took hold in nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe raised the stakes of these negative portrayals for both groups. Nationalists in European countries with the largest Romani and Jewish populations envisioned the transformation of dynastic states into polities that would represent groups of descent, united by spiritual characteristics and embodied in culture, language, religion, and blood relations. The language of national self-determination easily translated into the notion that Jews and Roma were outsiders, or, at best, mere guests.⁶ Proponents of such visions also articulated their sense of Jews’ and Romanies’ innate differences in physiological terms that increasingly found elaboration in the language of racial science after the late nineteenth century.⁷

These similarities notwithstanding, the differences in the ways outsiders perceived Roma and Jews were just as crucial to their entangled histories.

Political leaders, state bureaucrats, and ordinary citizens often imagined “Gypsies” at the bottom of the social ladder while fearing what they perceived as Jews’ power, whether as radicalized poor immigrants or a cabal of influential elites. Neither the denunciations of Jewish finance capital nor fears about “Judeo-Bolshevism” had equivalents in anti-Romani campaigns.⁸ As a result, antisemites viewed Jews as a political threat worthy of the creation of entire movements dedicated to anti-Jewish activism, while xenophobic Europeans tended to portray Roma as a social problem to be dealt with inconspicuously by security forces and local authorities.⁹

Differences—more than the similarities—also came to characterize Romani and Jewish self-descriptions, their perceptions of each other, and the divergent resources they had at their disposal as they sought to respond to their marginalization. Jews lived disproportionately in the urban core, whether in large cities, mid-sized towns, or small villages, whereas Roma were often relegated to the urban periphery or rural areas.¹⁰ Roma also tended to have low rates of literacy, whereas Jews were among the most literate groups in Europe.¹¹ In some cases, Romani and Eastern European Jewish migrants to countries farther west looked similar to outsiders: bureaucrats often treated both with disdain and suspicion, for example.¹² Yet, by the second half of the nineteenth century, even indigent and disenfranchised Jews were able to participate in robust political movements that represented them while also drawing on the support of Jewish philanthropic organizations, opportunities that were largely unavailable to Roma.¹³

Interconnected local and transnational networks of Jews found support in a highly literate, economically mobile, urban population, including in small towns. Jews’ ability to draw on professional nongovernmental associations that transcended individual communities, and the absence of similar organizing among Roma, changed each group’s ability to react to persecution, aid migration, and commemorate events. While ethnic nationalism and biological racism increasingly inspired the exclusion of Jews and Roma on similar grounds, with the rise of modern politics, Jewish and Romani lives diverged more than ever. Members of each group connected differently to those with political power, followed different routes of economic advancement, and found that they had unequal opportunities to assert themselves individually and as groups throughout the nineteenth century.

These disparities in resources and forms of self-organization also hint at the ways the two groups related to each other. Underlying many discussions of marginality are spatial metaphors about insiders and outsiders.¹⁴ Like

depictions of state territories on a map, imagining insiders and outsiders requires only two dimensions. There are those who reside inside the ethnonational circle of unchallenged membership in the state, nation, or society, and those who do not belong there. Most commentators who rightly point to Jews and Roma as targets of nationalist ire think in these implicitly horizontal terms.

Yet, political mobilization against Jews and Roma, as well as their views of each other, also relied on assumptions about economic and social prestige in society. Sizing each other up from a distance on the street, trading with each other at the marketplace, considering possible romantic or sexual liaisons, Jews and Roma also measured their relative social standing in hierarchical terms, as people on the top and at the bottom of society. For many Roma and Jews, the vertical aspect of their relationship was paramount in defining their sense of each other.

The compensation claims of the Hamburg lawyer and businessman Edgar Behr illustrate this tendency to think of the world in terms of hierarchies and status. The Nazi regime had identified Behr as a half-Jew, since his father—the owner of the major import firm Ribeco—was Jewish. After managing to remain employed and free for most of the war, the Nazi regime drafted him into a forced labor battalion in September 1944. Some years after the war, in 1952, he requested compensation for his seven months of slave labor. To buttress his claims he explained how the work felt demeaning to him: “I experienced the shared work with Gypsies and prisoners as particularly discriminating.”¹⁵ Other Jewish witnesses may have been less blunt but still managed to communicate that they considered being placed next to “Gypsies” an affront to their dignity.¹⁶ Such individuals presumably believed that both officials and the wider public would understand their sentiments—a rational assumption given the pervasive anti-Romani prejudice that persists into the present.

Romani testimonies also sometimes express expectations of vertical hierarchies in interactions with Jews. The interviews that the sociologist Gabrielle Tyrnauer collected for the Fortunoff archive in 1991 are typical in this regard. Producing the first large set of audiovisual recordings with Romani survivors for a major archive, Tyrnauer purposefully highlighted her own identity as a Jew to help her interlocutors open up. In turn, these Romani survivors repeatedly appealed to connections they believed the Canadian scholar might have as a Jew to sway the German government on their behalf.¹⁷ The result is that her interviews on the Holocaust illustrate conflicting ideas about political influence among Jewish academics and their Romani interlocutors. While Tyrnauer tried to relate to her Romani interviewees as fellow outsiders, they often

treated her as someone with a fundamentally different role in society—in other words, as a Jew with power.

Of course, status is not stable. It gets renegotiated in each new social or political context. Individual Romanies and their families might have a respected role in the local economy or acquire wealth, just as indigent Jews might encounter scorn and social ostracism. Yet in new encounters with people they could not easily place, members of each group frequently made assumptions about each other's status, reflecting the prejudices of their environment. The sense that Jews and Roma had different social and economic opportunities dominated relations between members of the two groups before, during, and after the Holocaust—even as the shared language of fighting exclusion (horizontally) eventually became central to commemorative efforts.

Measures targeting Roma and Jews also differed in how publicly they were set in motion, complicating the attempts of sympathetic members of both communities to document and discuss their persecution together. In most contexts, Roma experienced what I would call silent persecution—the kind of targeting that takes place at the level of experts and in local decisions that often leave few traces. By the end of the nineteenth century, their exclusion took its force from the power of administrators to decide that certain Romani individuals or collectives were not entitled to citizenship or legal protections.¹⁸ Such decisions met with limited objections. Even those who otherwise proudly upheld constitutional rights—including members of liberal parties and Social Democrats—rarely took exception when administrators decided to exclude “Gypsies” from the right to move across borders in spite of valid identity papers or to detain them as suspicious enemies during wartime.¹⁹ To most observers, the surveillance of Romani populations and limitations on their movement and freedom of occupation seemed reasonable. This racism toward “Gypsies,” which few Jews publicly objected to in the prewar era, also motivated and facilitated anti-Romani measures during Nazi rule.²⁰ The Nazis and their allies rarely campaigned with explicitly anti-Romani messages and left local actors a good deal of leeway in determining who qualified as a “Gypsy” for persecution measures.²¹ These decisions, therefore, left a considerably smaller paper trail than the extended debates over the identification, exclusion, and removal of Jews during Nazi rule.

Roma were only one among many groups facing such silent persecution, of course, and many Jews faced similar injustices. For example, Roma and Jews were equally the subject of refugee panics that led to new registration practices

and changes to citizenship laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²² Such measures caused deep disruptions to the lives of many Roma and Jews and forced them to suffer abuses by local administrators.

However, anti-Jewish activities both before and during World War Two were distinct from anti-Romani policies in so far as they were more likely to produce substantial political noise as well as a substantial paper trail. Parliaments discussed anti-“Gypsy” legislation, but these deliberations largely produced a consensus that transcended left-right divisions. By contrast, legislative debates on Jews were contentious and offered politicians an opportunity to clarify their positions on major social and political issues. In the first two years of the French Revolution, the National Assembly dedicated no less than thirty-two parliamentary sessions to the subject of whether to give Jews—who constituted less than one percent of the population—citizens’ rights.²³ One estimate claims that around 2,500 works on Jewish emancipation appeared in German lands between 1815 and 1850.²⁴ Such disproportionate attention to the rights and actions of a small minority only grew by the late nineteenth century, when parties on the right made the threat of Jews, Jewish money, and Jewish liberalism a signature theme.²⁵ Unlike much of the discrimination that was quietly leveled against Roma, with little debate, anti-Jewish sentiment was something people mulled over publicly and vocally—and also something that Jews opposed with just as much debate and ink. The challenge is to think of these dimensions—the relative silence or noise accompanying persecution and the traces it left—without creating hierarchies of suffering.

Comparisons between the experiences of Jews and Roma have their own checkered history. Even as their differences shaped relations between members of each group in palpable ways, attempts to compare them created new inequalities. This dynamic was evident in a legal case from 1952, when a German appeals court weighed whether a Romani family would receive monetary compensation for their persecution under Nazism. The family’s trial was one of a series of proceedings that concerned the deportation of German Sinti and Roma to Nazi-occupied Poland in May 1940, an event which many state offices did not consider racial persecution as defined under state law.²⁶ To evaluate the Romani applicants’ claim, the court looked closely at the intentions of Nazi officials and the conditions that the Romani deportees had experienced, comparing them to the conditions Jews had faced. In their interpretation of

deportation policies, the judges took Nazi administrators at their word: following the reasons provided in the relevant decrees, they argued that the deportations were necessary military and police measures and thus not a form of racial persecution. The comparisons they drew to the suffering of Jews were equally damning. The judges wanted to know about markings on prison uniforms, the existence of barbed wire fences, and whether the Nazis split up families. They concluded that none of the experiences of the Romani claimants counted as persecution “when we use Jewish fellow citizens as a comparison.” Whereas “Jewish families were torn apart mercilessly,” the “Gypsies” stayed together; whereas “all Jewish inmates of ghettos were shot,” the Nazis had not extended the same treatment to “Gypsies.” Remarking on the fate of the Romani claimant’s family when they lived briefly on the territory of the former Jewish ghetto in the Polish city of Siedlce, the court noted that the situation of Sinti and Roma improved when they gained additional resources after the murder of Siedlce’s Jewish population. In light of these differences, and without written evidence from the Nazis that they intended their measures as racial persecution, the court decided to reject these Romani survivors’ compensation claims.²⁷

This judgment reminds us that comparisons between the experiences of victims are not academic matters. They have real-life consequences for victims and their families, as well as for those who identify as members of the larger group. Their claims to compensation as individuals and to historical redress for the group, even after the death of the victims, depends on their inclusion in capricious categories. Undoubtedly, some comparisons are unavoidable. As humans, we understand events in relative terms. This was true for the victims of Nazism who compared their situation to previous policies against their group and policies enacted against others at the same time. It is equally true for administrators and historians who seek to gather similar events into categories that allow them to make sense of a chaotic reality. Administrators sometimes needed to figure out whether a person’s particular fate counted as “racial persecution” as defined by law and legal precedent, much as historians have often sought to determine which cases of mass murder qualify as “genocide.” Such disputes often come down to empirical questions: What were the intentions of policy makers? Did they intend to kill all members of a group or was their approach more arbitrary? Did certain individuals suffer more or less than others?

The history of such comparisons should make us suspicious of the very questions that have spurred them. Scholarly debates on the murder of Europe’s Romani population show just how unproductive these questions can be. For

decades, historians and activists fought over the degree of similarity between the Nazi genocides of Jews and Roma. These conflicts have seen multiple iterations, often accompanied by recriminations from everyone involved that members of the other side were arguing in bad faith. In the 1980s and 1990s, Yehuda Bauer, one of the most senior historians of the Holocaust, emphasized in several essays that the mass murder of Roma was neither pursued as fervently nor as systematically as that against Jews. Opposing his view, the historian Sybil Milton argued that the crucial similarity consisted of collective deportations and murder due to heredity.²⁸ A few years later, these conflicts continued in a heated exchange between Bauer and the Romani civil rights leader Romani Rose.²⁹ Many others have also sought to take on the question of genocide, focusing on intent: together with Yehuda Bauer, Gilad Margalit and Guenther Lewy have claimed that the Nazis did not have a plan for the murder of all Roma, whereas Ian Hancock, Anton Weiss-Wendt, and a host of recent scholars emphasize the dynamic nature of Nazi intentions that corroborate an evolving desire for universal extermination.³⁰

Yet, these scholarly debates do not address how we should determine the relevant criteria for such comparisons. Like the administrators and the judges of the past, who tested whether a predefined category of “racial persecution” fit the history of the Romani survivors who stood before them, historians and activists in these debates tend to emphasize their detachment. As Weiss-Wendt puts it in his discussion of the murder of the Roma, he believes that the key term must be “genocide” because it offers “emotionally neutral scholarly terminology.”³¹ But this attempt to invoke scholarly neutrality clashes with the reality of genocide as a “normative action-oriented concept.”³² The use of the term aims at moral condemnation that allows for political intervention or judicial action and focuses on the collective intent of the perpetrators. In most societies, including Nazi Europe, where the state and other parts of society interacted to carry out mass violence, this means scholars must reduce the actions of many to a single idea or ideology. This tends to work better for the loud persecution experienced by Jews than for the relatively silent persecution experienced by Romanies. It is also dubious whether we can avert future genocidal violence—a frequent claim made by scholars of genocide—if comparisons lead us to rank the loud persecution that leaves more traces above the silent persecution that eludes casual political observation. Looking at both in their distinctiveness, we might wonder: how do we know that administrative persecution is not the more urgent subject to study, especially in an age of algorithm-driven policing and the expansive use of digital surveillance?³³ In

short, there is nothing neutral about the category of genocide, whether in scholarly, emotional, or political terms.

The mere fact that these comparisons have psychological, financial, and political stakes does not mean that the categories are biased. It does force us to come up with good explanations for choosing one criterion over another, however. There is no sensible way of adjudicating which questions are correct in the form that these debates usually take place. What we can find are categories that work better for one or the other case, or categories that allow us to make relevant and novel arguments. To do this, it is useful to consider how we come to know different instances of persecution and genocide. If we fail to reflect on how people left traces of past injustices and how these traces are passed down to us, we will easily reproduce the injustices of the past, as the postwar German court did when it took the explanations given in official Nazi orders at face value. With this aim in mind, I remain acutely aware that even the limited comparison that I have proposed here between silent and loud persecution could be understood as establishing a hierarchy between them. How to avoid this?

This book, which is in part an attempt to answer that fundamental question, pursues a relational history. Historians looking at relations between groups often concede that there is no relational history without comparisons first.³⁴ If we cannot distinguish between Jews and Roma, we cannot write the history of their interactions. Yet, in dealing with entangled histories, the opposite is also true. It is impossible to compare these mass killings unless we first grasp how interconnected experiences, records, historical categories, and methods of collecting and disseminating information have determined what we know about each genocide. This is not the same as a history of people who share intimacy, familiarity, or cultural worlds. Instead, Jews and Roma have become inextricably connected by proximate experiences, overlapping archival labor, and comparative perceptions of their fates.



The first permanent exhibition on the Romani Holocaust that opened in 1997 in Heidelberg, Germany, welcomes visitors with a large sign that declares: “The genocide against the Sinti and Roma was executed with the same motive of racial hatred, with the same intention and the same will to systematically and definitively exterminate as the genocide against the Jews.” An identical sentence appears at the entrance of the Romani exhibit at the Auschwitz Museum and was also proposed, at an early stage, as an inscription for Berlin’s Monument to the

Murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe.³⁵ As suggested by prominent displays of this quote, which is derived from a speech by German president Roman Herzog (1994–99), the Jewish Holocaust has long played a central role in explanations of the Nazi persecution and mass murder of Romanies.³⁶ At nearly every location where Romani representatives have chosen to create museums, monuments, and archives dedicated to their history, a Jewish museum, monument, or archive already exists. What is more, Jewish Holocaust institutions have become principal sites for knowledge production about Roma. Take, for example, the case of the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation: the foundation’s 406 interviews with Romani survivors—which exist alongside over 50,000 interviews with Jewish survivors—makes its collection the largest repository of audiovisual testimony on the Romani Holocaust. Scholars interested in hearing the voices of Romani survivors often have little choice but to consult archives originally built to store the testimonies of Jews.

What does it mean for members of one minority group to control a large part of the archives and, thus, the history, of another? This may sound like an abstract problem, but to those who care about the Romani genocide, this was and remains a fundamental question with practical implications. Anyone who enters a Holocaust archive and searches for the words “Gypsies,” “Roma” and related terms in the catalog, will first encounter the mass of Jewish testimonies that mention Romani victims rather than the (many fewer) testimonies of Roma themselves. Romani history is thus filtered through Jewish history.

Grappling with this fact while writing an integrated account of the racialized victims of the Nazi regime requires breaking down the conventional barrier in scholarship between what happened during the Holocaust and how it has been represented ever since. Many decades ago, when the field was still in its infancy, Saul Friedländer challenged this boundary in his book *Reflections on Nazism*.³⁷ In that work, Friedländer demonstrated the uncanny resemblance between Nazi depictions of violence as a melodramatic story of heroism, sacrifice, and apocalypticism and later representations of the Nazis’ murderous policies, reminding his readers that we are prone to misread history if we ignore the connections between wartime and postwar accounts.³⁸

The division between the history of the Holocaust and its aftermath in thought and representation becomes particularly unconvincing in light of the sources we use. Many foundational documents of Holocaust scholarship came to historians’ attention thanks to the postwar prosecutors who collected them. This process began with the Nuremberg trials—the high-profile proceedings in the International Military Tribunal of 1945–46 and subsequent trials under

the auspices of the US—when prosecutors published twenty-seven volumes of evidence to supplement forty-two volumes of trial records.³⁹ Indeed, courts not only assembled but also produced evidence when they compelled witnesses to give depositions. Many of the most prominent books about the Holocaust could not have been written without these judicial efforts to amass documents and statements from perpetrators, victims, and everyone in between.⁴⁰ Legal and historical interpretations from the postwar period—and not merely sources “from the time”—have thus determined what we know about people’s experiences of Nazism.

Conversely, state documentation produced during the 1930s and 1940s has inevitably influenced both the unfolding and interpretation of history ever since. This includes the biased perspectives that perpetrators injected into their documentation, which postwar courts often took at face value when they adjudicated claims by Romani victims. Neglecting basic rules of historical source critique, they often accepted Nazi characterizations of Roma as “asocial,” for example, treating this claim as a reasonable administrative motive for lawful persecution and ignoring its underlying racialization of an entire population. Other cases are less clear-cut but equally salient. Even the most sophisticated interpreters consistently rely on state documentation that purposefully conceals information—whether for administrative reasons or due to the interpretive limitations of its original authors.

Sources produced by victims, from Jewish newspapers to the earliest testimonies of mass killings smuggled out of Nazi-occupied Europe, present similar challenges. Their blind spots become evident, for example, in Jewish commentators’ silence about the new detention facilities that German municipalities had already built for “Gypsies” on the outskirts of cities starting in the mid-1930s. Jewish observers at the time proved no more likely than their non-Jewish contemporaries to register the fundamental injustice of the forced removal of German Sinti and Roma to surveilled living quarters. Nor do they appear to have been any more insightful than others about the ways in which these institutions were laying the groundwork for more radical persecution. Postwar scholars—including survivor historians—similarly elided mention of this step in the development of a genocidal state infrastructure. In Romani history, as in the history of other groups whose marginalization has long appeared self-evident to their neighbors, these oversights result in a skewed view of the past that never reveals just how skewed it is.

The history I seek to tell in this book requires that we return to the very moments in which our sources came into being. One of the most influential

descriptions of this imperative comes from Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who argued that the complexity of history only becomes fully apparent once we have traced our story all the way back to its earliest articulations as well as to the original formation of our archives.⁴¹ Taking this approach not only reminds us to reflect on the various circumstances that compelled the creation of each source and collection but also to recognize that history and memory are not discrete phenomena. The case of shared Romani and Jewish archives similarly necessitates a return to the Nazi period, when perpetrators, victims, and various others created the first and most substantial holdings in the field. “Memories” of the Holocaust were formed long before the war’s end in 1945.

In many respects this book is not about “memory” as it is commonly understood but rather about the production of knowledge. This means, first, paying attention to the ways different entities register, collect, and make available traces of the past. New archives founded since World War Two to commemorate genocide and mass violence are pivotal in this regard. Holocaust and genocide archives are among the best-organized alternatives to the large, centralized collections of bureaucratic records—the traditional state archives—that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴²

They also offer another model for acquiring and grouping records and for making them available. Non-state collecting, including initiatives by private individuals, ethnographic societies, or local historical associations, initially focused on material ignored by well-funded state archives.⁴³ This changed with the Holocaust. The destruction of Jewish communities across Nazi-dominated Europe and the greater availability of microfilming and other reproduction methods led to the proliferation of new taxonomies of collecting, whereby archivists selectively copied official documents based on their significance for Jewish history.⁴⁴

Archives documenting Nazi persecution of the Jews were at the forefront of this shift. The two largest—Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—became vast repositories of recontextualized state documents, as well as testimony collections that they both produced themselves and incorporated from outside projects. Such institutions often collaborate with and build on the work of smaller institutions that preceded them, including the Wiener Library in London, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the Ghetto Fighters’ House

in northern Israel, and the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation/Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris. Many other institutions that were created to deal with Nazi crimes and antifascist resistance in a single state, such as the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation or the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance, pivoted to collect broadly on issues of genocide. Together these repositories of knowledge are nodes in a transnational network that has allowed for the massive duplication of documents through microfilm and digitization. Today the combined resources of these institutions match those of traditional state archives in the role they play in supporting Holocaust scholarship.

In recent years historians have grown increasingly attuned to finding submerged voices in the archives of the powerful. Many scholars have mined colonial and police archives for evidence of the anxieties and biases of the powerful bureaucrats who created them.⁴⁵ Yet they have rarely used the same methods to interrogate archives of powerlessness, including the many centers dedicated to documenting Jews' experiences of the Holocaust. The histories of these collections are complex: built by a minority that was increasingly recognized and empowered in the decades after the war, they tell the history of Jews' radical subjugation and powerlessness under Nazism. Yet their holdings do not merely record the experiences of the people they were meant to empower. Hidden within them we can find other silenced experiences that disclose relations between different victim groups. Moving beyond the binary of archives created by the powerful and those of the powerless, we can see how Jewish archivists, activists, and scholars concerned with registering Jewish victimhood inadvertently wove the history of another group of victims into the fabric of Jewish history.

The developments that made Jewish archives centers for the creation of new information on Romani history reveal the roles that funding, networks, expertise, and time-consuming labor play in the production of historical knowledge. There are disadvantages to using the metaphor of memory to understand how societies deal with their past. Chief among them is the fact that, for individuals, memory comes for free, while collective memory requires resources.

How much did it cost to know about Jews' lives and deaths in Auschwitz-Birkenau? How much to understand the fate of Romanies there? These questions might seem trivial, but traces of the expenditures required to produce historical information appear everywhere. The Nuremberg trial records that

form the bedrock of all source work in the field resulted from the efforts of dozens of experts who in turn worked for a massive legal and military bureaucracy. With many of the original wartime documents largely out of reach in archives of the Soviet Union and other communist states, prosecutors—primarily in West Germany—relied on these published collections. Yet, retrieving pertinent historical information remained a challenge that required extensive money, time, and networking skills. Well into the 1980s, entire teams of investigators continued to use all of their connections simply to locate original documents or discover basic facts about the Holocaust in academic books and journals.

The 1987–91 trial of the Auschwitz SS man Ernst August König for crimes committed in Auschwitz’s “Gypsy camp” is a case in point. By this moment German courts had decided on hundreds of similar cases and could rely on the expertise of a central coordinating body, founded in 1958, for all investigations of Nazi crimes.⁴⁶ To assure König’s conviction, Hans-Joachim Röseler, a senior public prosecutor from Cologne, worked with a police officer named Matyssek to establish simple information about Birkenau and its Romani prisoners that they would need to build their case. It took the two men over a year to realize that the registry books from the “Gypsy camp” survived, allowing them to prove when witnesses arrived in Auschwitz and when victims died. Even after they learned of these documents, however, they struggled to locate a copy. The Auschwitz Museum, which held the originals of the registry books, did not respond to their requests in a timely manner, requiring German investigators to use survivors as intercessors who promised to lobby the museum’s director personally.⁴⁷ Eventually, Hamburg prosecutors informed Röseler that another institution, the International Tracing Service operated by the Red Cross, had a microfilm copy.⁴⁸ Although Röseler and Matyssek appear in court documents as well-meaning and sophisticated investigators, it took them months to identify and acquire material that is now available as a published book at most research libraries.⁴⁹ Accumulating testimonies was even more cumbersome. To interrogate three witnesses in three southern German cities, Röseler and Matyssek drove fifty hours and approximately 930 miles together in mid-December 1985.⁵⁰ Collective and institutional “memory” work requires a serious investment of resources, and these investments determine what reaches us.

The internet often seems to resolve such issues, and yet this is only the most recent chapter in the economic history of information processing and retrieval, rather than its conclusion. Undergraduate students in my Holocaust course compile bibliographies on specialized subjects and locate each text in

a day using digital resources, whereas previously scholars commonly needed months to get ahold of a single article. But the current availability of sources is the result of labor done out of sight, including the expensive original digitization of catalogs and collections. Such labor is paid indirectly through taxes, fees, endowment incomes, and—in the case of general search engines—the sale of aggregate user data. Even as the price of knowledge production and dissemination changes, the disadvantages of limited resources have persisted. The familiar gatekeepers who decide on the content of scholarly training, research funding, or professional certification are now joined by those who select what gets digitized first or control popular websites and podcasts. It has simply become harder to pinpoint exactly who makes these decisions.

Examining financial resources in the context of genocide memorialization may seem an uncomfortable choice given that some critics—and many dedicated antisemites—have accused Jews of cynically profiting from Holocaust memory.⁵¹ It is perhaps for this reason that scholars have resisted studying the mechanics of the funding that has supported and continues to support new Holocaust research. Yet, there need be no contradiction between caring deeply about the Holocaust and recognizing the importance of funding research on the subject. Understanding the history of the financial and institutional scaffolding that sustains the field of Holocaust Studies is especially important in the context of this book, which explores the relations between one group (Jews), which has historically had greater resources than another (Roma). Without understanding the economy of knowledge production about the Jewish Holocaust we cannot start to come to terms with the Romani Holocaust or the relationship between the two groups. The ethical and epistemological challenges that emerge from these parallel genocides come into view only when we add to our familiar moral vocabulary of “recognizing others” and “hearing silenced voices” less familiar formulas, such as “investing in knowing” about others. The voices of the past may be preserved in poems, songs, and petitions, but they reach us increasingly through digitization initiatives, research grants, and websites that make them available to scholars and the broader public.

Disparities in documentation reflect the unequal status of Roma and Jews almost everywhere they have lived in recent centuries. Most works on these two groups begin with introductions that illustrate one element of this imbalance: scholars presume that readers know who Jews are, but not Roma.

Beginning with book and article titles, scholars make choices about naming their subjects in Romani history that rarely arise in Jewish history. Should they choose the term “Gypsies,” the designation used in most historical sources, but which most people to whom the term applies understand to be insulting? Or do they choose one of many self-designations that exist, such as Roma? Each decision raises new methodological challenges. Those who retain the appellation “Gypsy” argue that it is inaccurate to translate the term into our current ethnicized language because the term shifted over time from an administrative category with a strong social component to one with clear ethnic and racial dimensions. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, European administrators usually used the word “Gypsies” to refer to a variety of people who roamed the streets and whom they suspected of engaging in criminal behavior.⁵² In some ways, this broader meaning informed the Nazi persecution of Yenish, non-Romani travelers in central Europe, and has remained politically important in other contexts such as the United Kingdom, where Romani and Traveller communities have combined forces for political self-organization.⁵³

At the same time, many scholars and Romani representatives argue that those who treat Roma as a figment of state officials’ imaginations silence their history in the process.⁵⁴ They insist that scholars write the history of Roma like that of any ethnic group with its own customs, practices, and linguistic traditions, even if their centuries-long marginalization makes it difficult to find their lives in historical sources. These reasonable demands for a national history—no more constructed or hazy than all other national histories—pose challenges for historians who do not wish to racialize the individuals and groups they encounter in official sources. It takes much effort and some informed speculation to claim that a “Gypsy” in a legal document from the seventeenth or eighteenth century was Romani.⁵⁵ Administrators in the past shared this challenge: they often did not agree on who was a “Gypsy” and found it difficult to count them through a census or civil registry. Roma also had few incentives to register themselves as “Gypsies” or under equivalent categories, which tended to have only disadvantages.⁵⁶

Using an ethnic lens brings its own problems. Among these is the risk of giving the impression that Roma constitute a homogeneous group when, in fact, Europe’s Romani population hails from diverse communities whose relations were often tenuous and who likely only started to conceive of themselves as part of a larger ethnic whole in the course of the twentieth century—if they did at all. Historically, Roma adhered to different religious traditions—being predominantly Catholic (and sometimes Protestant) in Western Europe, Christian

Orthodox in Eastern Europe and Russia, and Muslim in certain parts of South-eastern Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East—although such divisions have recently begun to blur as growing numbers of Romanies around the world have turned to Pentecostalism. In different contexts, Roma have spoken mutually unintelligible varieties of Romani or indeed no Romani language at all, and they may have understood members of other Romani groups as following related traditions but still frowned on intermarriage with them. By the modern era, the majority of Roma in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe spent most or all of the year in one home, while many Western European Romanies traveled for longer periods. Romani groups and individuals also differ widely in their approach to commemorating their dead and past violence against them.⁵⁷ When scholars treat this diversity of people as a single group, they often highlight Romani groups' shared origins following their migrations from India to Europe in the Middle Ages. Though linguistic research supports assertions of the shared ancestry of Romani speakers, such perspectives have only relatively recently begun to come to the forefront of the ways that Roma think about and organize themselves. It was largely their shared desire to protect their rights and traditions in the face of societies that continued to constrain their freedoms as well as their shared experience of calamity that increasingly united Roma across Europe and the globe.⁵⁸

Romanies' earliest attempts to organize politically in the interwar period showcase the diversity of Romani constituencies even as they sought to unify them. Across interwar Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Roma established small organizations to represent them vis-à-vis the authorities and to further the education and social standing of fellow Roma. Some of these efforts were local, such as the Romani mutual aid society that formed in the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade, or limited to representatives of one occupation, as with the interwar Hungarian unions of "Gypsy musicians."⁵⁹ Other associations, such as those in Romania and the early Soviet Union, aspired to speak for all Roma in a single country.⁶⁰ Yet, these short-lived efforts by individuals often clashed with the self-perception of many Roma who identified the leaders of these organizations as speaking for only a particular Romani subgroup. Although these organizations sometimes reported in their newsletters and newspapers about "Gypsies" elsewhere, their focus was not on forging transnational alliances. Ideas about Roma as Europe's largest ethnic minority or as a global diaspora have existed as compelling motifs of common mobilization and political lobbying only since the second half of the twentieth century.⁶¹

The genocide of Roma during World War Two—and attempts to understand their murder as similar and related to the mass murder of Jews—played

a central role in this shifting perception.⁶² Since the 1960s, documentation, lobbying, and history writing among Romani scholars and activists as well as their allies has encouraged a view of Roma as a transnational minority. Perhaps not surprisingly, a sense of unity among Roma is strongest wherever politics matters most—for example in the Romani youth movement described in chapter 6—even when it is not a lived reality for all Roma.

Despite all this, I am convinced that the insights gained by framing their history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with terms such as “Roma” outweigh the costs. We can remain aware of the diversity of experiences, traditions, and outlooks among different communities and yet speak of the pressures, opportunities, and situations that many Roma have shared, and continue to share. This approach also makes it easier to think in terms of a relational history with another group—Jews—whose members are not asked to prove their shared history.

This is not to suggest that the idea of Jewish unity has remained uncontested. Jews regularly reject each other’s claims to Jewishness, look down on coreligionists who are different from them, and obsess over tensions between religious, nationalist, and non-normative definitions of Judaism. Yet anyone who ventures into both fields will be struck by the level of agreement between scholars and laypeople about the subjects of Jewish history when compared to the contentiousness of the topic in most Romani Studies settings.

The choices I make in this book reflect the semantic peculiarities of transnational Romani history. For the most part, I will speak of Roma and sometimes of Romanies. The former is the most common term, while the latter is a chiefly British usage but has the advantage of being more inclusive than the alternatives. It is generally understood to encompass numerous subgroups ranging from Romanian Kalderash to British Romanichals, including German Sinti, who often reject Roma as an umbrella term. The term Romanies also mirrors the adjective Romani, which is universally accepted in all English usage.⁶³ When I was certain that the vast majority of individuals in a particular situation would have identified as Sinti, the preferred name of Romani groups in German and adjacent lands, I have used that term, or the compound Sinti and Roma.⁶⁴ Eschewing a single term not only allows for stylistic variety but also recognizes the lexical diversity that characterizes Romani Studies. This is something Jewish Studies does not offer. Historical alternatives once employed to refer to Jews—Israelites, people of the Mosaic persuasion, Hebrews—have been deemed obsolete for good reason.

As is true of the Nazi genocide of Jews, survivors and commentators have used a variety of terms to speak of the Nazi genocide of Roma. Survivors

sometimes used concrete descriptions—such as speaking of “when we were deported to the Bug,” an expression common among Romanian Roma referring to their deportation to Transnistria, in Romanian-occupied Ukraine, near the Bug River. With time, activists and scholars sought a single term that might capture the targeting of Roma across Europe in unambiguous ways, parallel to the word “Shoah” for the Jewish Holocaust. The best-known of these names is Porrajmos, coined in the early 1990s by the Romani linguist and US-based activist Ian Hancock.⁶⁵ While the term is now commonly used by non-Romani academics, it has fallen out of favor among many Romani representatives because of its troubling connotations: the term translates not only as the “devouring” but also has sexual undertones and can be metaphorically understood to refer to sexual violence.⁶⁶ Another scholar, Marcel Courthiade, championed the alternative term Samudaripen (a Romani word for mass killing). Although many Romani activists prefer this term, it has been slow to catch on. I have decided to refer to the Romani Holocaust both because it is broadly legible and to emphasize its simultaneity with the Jewish Holocaust. No doubt, the term Holocaust has its own problems. Critics will note that its origins are in a Greek term for a sacred burnt offering, implying inappropriately that the victims of genocide might be seen as the equivalent of a divine sacrifice.⁶⁷ Other scholars emphasize that the term has a long secular use to describe a major atrocity rather than genocide specifically—a use illustrated by some of the actors in this book.⁶⁸ Irrespective of its etymology, the term remains the most widely understood, and—more importantly—its inadequacies apply equally to both of the cases discussed here.⁶⁹ Ultimately, referring to both the Romani and Jewish Holocausts allows me to underline a central point of this book: that an integrated history of the Nazi genocide and its aftermath requires an adequate treatment of both calamities as connected events.

In the immediate wake of the war, Avrom Sutzkever wrote about the Romani genocide as a crime without witnesses that required an epic and poetic response. Over the past decades, we have become weary of the “melodious heroism” that he prescribed as the remedy. We have also come to understand that there were, in fact, many witnesses as well as textual and material traces to the decimation of Europe’s Romanies. To take up his challenge today involves pausing to think about what makes it possible for us to speak of the suffering of others. This requires us to remain attuned to Sutzkever’s appeal to our

empathic and imaginative faculties but also to the politics, technologies, and economies of knowing.

Tracing the relationship between Roma and Jews from Nazi camps and killing sites to the archives that contain documentation of Nazi crimes, this book offers an alternative history of episodes that scholars have primarily analyzed through a Jewish lens. Starting with the victims' fate under Nazism, their early struggles to rebuild shattered lives, and their first attempts to document injustice and seek redress in courts, it ends with the rise of a new memorial culture, and the politicization of memory in debates over colonialism and Zionism. Rethinking these moments as formative for the history of Jews and Roma alike not only unsettles received narratives about the Holocaust but also probes the very means by which those narratives have come down to us.

I wrote this book as members of a new generation of Roma and Jews engage in an intimate dialogue about the past, minority politics and the state of Israel that would have been unthinkable in the early postwar years. This study of the unlikely trajectory from the incomprehension of the suffering of the other to shared archives, activism, and lobbying offers a new integrated history of Nazis' racialized victims. Itself a product of the burgeoning Romani-Jewish engagement that it describes, it is also an attempt to inspire a new dialogue about the opportunities and challenges of such unequal alliances.

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