



Keeping the Memory Alive: the Roma and Sinti Holocaust

FAGiC

**THE ROMA HOLOCAUST: EDUCATION AND
RECOGNITION**

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INDEX

1. PRESENTATION	3
2. WELCOMING REMARKS AND OPENING	4
3. DVD: THE UNTOLD STORY: THE ROMA AND SINTI HOLOCAUST.....	5
4. ROUNDTABLE/PRESENTATION OF THE ROUNDTABLE	5
5. DEBATE WITH AUDIENCE.....	11
6. MAIN CONCLUSIONS	15



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KEEPING THE MEMORY ALIVE: THE ROMA AND SINTI HOLOCAUST

The Roma Holocaust; education and recognition

1. Presentation

In order to raise awareness about the genocide of the Roma under National Socialism and draw attention to the continuity of prejudices about Roma before, during and after the Second World War as well as to demonstrate the link between the history of discrimination and persecution and the present situation of the Roma, FAGiC organised an international debate on December 2 at La Barceloneta Civic Centre in Barcelona focused on the screening of the DVD “The untold story: the Roma and Sinti Holocaust” followed by a debate about different opinions between the academics and the Roma community.

Regional and local politicians, decision makers, journalists, academics, university students and representatives of Roma and non Roma associations and organisations were all participating in a debate. In order to have an active debate, FAGiC formed a small group consisting of around 50/60 debate participants. Sometimes when there is a large amount of debate participants, there are not many people who speak up., Therefore, we wanted to create a close environment between the speakers and the audience. At the same time, FAGiC wanted a right audience; a mix between young and old Roma people, academics, professors, politicians and public representatives.

The debate began with welcoming remarks by Pere Garcia, Vice President of FAGiC; Ramon Terrassa, Director General of Civic and Community Action of the Catalanian Government; Josep M^a Queralt, Director of Civil Rights Barcelona City Council; and, Ferran Tarradellas, Director of the European Commission representation in Barcelona.



Europe for Citizens
Programme

It was followed by the screening of the DVD created within the project “The Untold story: the Roma and Sinti Holocaust” and subsequently the opinion of the speakers. The debate panel 1 was formed by two academics: Dr. Slawomir Kapralski and Dr. Xavier Torrens; and two young Roma female activists.

Finally, Sebastián Porras, the moderator, concluded the debate mentioning the main points discussed.

In general, events focusing on the Roma and Sinti Holocaust are very important in Spain due to a high lack of knowledge regarding Holocaust issues, particularly related to the Roma and Sinti Holocaust. This is a way to promote the knowledge of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust and link it to the present and future. We can use the Roma history as a tool to fight discrimination against Roma in Europe.

2. Welcoming remarks and opening

The welcoming panel was formed by Pere Garcia, FAGiC’s Vice President; Ramon Terrassa, Director General of Civic and Community Action of the Catalanian Government; Josep M^a Queralt, Director of Civil Rights Barcelona City Council and Ferran Tarradellas, Director of the European Commission representation in Barcelona.

In his speech, Pere Garcia focused on the importance of joining forces in order to fight discrimination and prejudices against Roma people, as well as on the importance of cooperation with other Holocaust victims.

Josep M^a Queralt focused on the work carried out by Barcelona City Council. The City Council supported also this project and contributed in the promotion of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust. The Council also promoted the participation of young Roma people in the Roma Genocide initiative of TernYpe in Krakow in August 2014. Barcelona City



Europe for Citizens
Programme

Council recognised August 2 as the Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day in Barcelona through an institutional declaration adopted by the mayor of Barcelona. He also emphasised the importance of remembering what happened during the Second World War in order to avoid similar actions and mass executions in the future.

Ramon Terrassa, talked about the social responsibility to keep the memory alive and the respect for all victims. He also mentioned the recognition of the persecution and genocide of Roma by the Parliament of Catalonia in 2007 and emphasised the importance of working all together as a diverse society.

The last speech was made by Ferran Tarradellas who remarked the work of the European Commission in this field and the importance of keeping working in this area all together. Governments, public institutions and society in general must work together in order to avoid similar situations in the future.

3. DVD: The Untold story: the Roma and Sinti Holocaust

The main outcome of the project, the DVD, was the starting point of the debate. We screened the interview of Rita Prigmore and Huub van Baar within a part devoted to survivors' testimonies and their points of view in different aspects; this was followed by interviews related to the current situation of discrimination against Roma in Europe.

4. Roundtable / Presentation of the roundtable

The roundtable / debate was moderated by Sebastián Porrás, a Roma journalist and activist, who was in charge of leading the debate and encouraging all participants in expressing their points of view.

Porrás began by asking one question to each panellist. The first one was Dr. **Slawomir Kapralski**. Kapralski is a researcher, sociologist and social anthropologist. He is a



Europe for Citizens
Programme

professor of Sociology at the University of Krakow and a professor of Roma Holocaust on the post graduated course on Roma studies at the University of Krakow. He is a member of the Gypsy Lore Society, of the Association for the study of Ethnicity and Nationalism and of the European Association for the Holocaust Studies. He is also an author of many publications about the Roma Holocaust.

Kapralski was asked to give his opinion about what the Holocaust means to the Roma community and what was the extent of the persecution and extermination, because of a lack of consensus regarding the number of victims.

Kapralski voiced his concerns about a repetition of the crimes against Roma people in the future. In some ways, the Roma Holocaust was very different to the Jewish one. The Roma and Sinti Holocaust was implemented in a different way, depending on the country and the area occupied by the Nazis. The Roma and Sinti Holocaust was carried out at the very local level, of course with the support of the general administration and in compliance with the general ideological consciences. This resulted into a mass murdering; however the exact number of decedents remains unknown. He said that even the people interviewed in the DVD did not know how many victims died. The official number is between 250.000 to one million and a half, professors take the lowest and the highest number into account. The lowest is from the 70s from a researcher and the highest is from Ian Hancock. But we do not know and some Roma people do not care. According to Kapralski, there are two ways of understanding a history: there is a history of historians and a history of people, so called practical history. Roma people are more interested in the practical history, in collecting memories and establishing identity. For them, the families of survivors, the exact number is irrelevant. They have their memories, they have their own suffering and this is something that must be respected by historians. He said that we could list at least 10 crucial mistakes which were made by the authors of the documentary according to his professional knowledge, but he did not want to mention them because those errors



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Programme

are part of the practical history, the people's history and must be respected by everyone.

Kapralski also mentioned that he disagrees with Huub van Baar regarding education as a tool to fight against discrimination, because people who are going to seminars or are participating in any other non obligatory form of education are not Roma persecutors. These people are sensitive with Roma problems; they are going to the seminars and other events because they want to learn more, not because they hate Roma. He believes in a strong Roma movement as a way to fight discrimination and prejudices. For Kapralski, the real protection does not come from education or spreading the knowledge, the real protection comes from the political organisation of Roma.

The second person who intervened was **Noemí Fernández**. Noemí is a young Roma female activist, also a law student and responsible for the advice service in cases of discrimination against Roma in FAGiC. She was asked about her opinion on awareness of Roma Holocaust issues among Spanish Roma population and about her personal feelings after her first visit to Auschwitz-Bikernau.

In 2013 and 2014 Noemí participated in the Roma genocide remembrance initiative organised by TernYpe in Krakow. The first time the Spanish group went to Auschwitz-Bikernau, they felt fear. Several days before visiting the camp, they met Roma from different countries and shared their experience. The Spanish group learnt what happened in Auschwitz-Bikernau, as well as they gained knowledge about a current situation in different countries in Europe, especially Czech Republic and Hungary. They saw that a life of Roma people is much harder and more difficult in countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They found out that Roma are suffering a lot in many countries in Europe and they came back home thinking that those things may happen also in Spain. The rise of extreme right parties might occur in any country in Europe today and that is frightening.



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Programme

Regarding the knowledge on Roma Holocaust by Spanish people, she thinks the majority of Roma and non Roma do not know anything at all. She said that she learnt a lot when she participated for the first time in the Roma genocide initiative in 2013. She gained awareness after she began to work for FAGiC; before she did not have any knowledge. Old Spanish Roma do not know much about this matter and school and college teachers are not teaching this, even in the universities the Roma and Sinti Holocaust is not covered by the curriculum.

According to Noemí, many young Spanish Roma are now interested in knowing that part of the history, so for her it is very important to organise workshops, seminars, debates and events like this in order to promote the knowledge of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust among the Roma community, but also among the non Roma people.

Dr. Xavier Torrens was the next to be asked. Torrens is a professor of Political Science at the University of Barcelona, a sociologist and an expert on Holocaust education. Torrens is also a director of an intercultural course and a writer of many publications regarding the Holocaust and Roma Holocaust.

The moderator asked him, if the Roma Holocaust is still an unknown part of the history in Catalonia and Spain and if education has an important role within it and what can be done by education centres (schools, colleges, universities..).

Torrens affirmed that the Roma Holocaust is the unknown part of the history in Spain and also in many other European countries. For Torrens was an honour to be a coordinator and a commissioner of the first exhibition about the Roma Holocaust in Spain which FAGiC owns. The exhibition was inaugurated in the highest institution in Catalonia, the Parliament of Catalonia. He confirmed that the Roma Holocaust is the unknown part of the history, but for the last years FAGiC has been working very hard on raising the awareness of this part of the history. There are many initiatives related to the Roma Holocaust across Europe, including Spain. As a professor and because he



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enjoys to do a pedagogy work, he shared with all participants 'the 15 ways to kill Jews and Roma' used by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

According to Torrens, poverty was among the first used tools. People often consider extermination camps as the only used tool, but poverty was also one of them. Roma people wore a brown and also a black triangle in the Nazi camps. The black one referred to anti-social people, people socially excluded, what at that time often resulted in a murder. The second way was the "progroms", attacks and lynchings against Roma and Jews, especially in June 1938, in which many Roma were arrested en masse and deported to Nazi camps. The third way were the "ghettos", which used to trap and place into custody Roma people, especially the ghetto of Lodz, where in November 1941 4.996 Roma were trapped and many of them died. The fourth way of killing was work/labour slavery. Many Roma died because of exhaustion after working many hours without any remedy. The fifth means was a shooting before creating the gas chambers. The sixth instrument of killing was violence and rape. Many Roma women were raped and forced to prostitute themselves. Their situation was much worse than many Roma men. The seventh way of killing was what we can call spiritual or emotional annihilation. People were not only killed physically, but also emotionally. This form of killing was sometimes even harder than a physical way, especially for Roma and Jewish people. The eighth means were so called "death trains". He mentioned the first deportation to Dachau in 1936 even before the war started. The ninth instrument of killing was represented by medical experiments; here it is important to mention Dr Mengele. According to Torrens, what Nazi called "medical experiment" was in reality a brutal and violent act against people. The tenth way of killing is what Torrens called "dead indifference" meaning that people living around the camps knew what was happening inside the camps. Even though they might not know all the details, but they were aware that people were murdered there. The most known way of killing were gas chambers. The crematorium ovens' rooms were mentioned as a separate way of killing, because Torrens wanted people to reflect that the crematorium ovens killed Roma and Jews spiritually. For Jewish people to be



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Programme

buried underground is an important ritual, it is like to kill them once again. The thirteenth means of killing were so called “death marches”. Once the Nazis knew the war was over they took people who were still alive from the camps and made them walking to other places. During those days many of them died in the marches. The fourteenth and fifteenth way was neither spiritual nor physical, but a moral death consisting of “Holocaust denial / rejection”. Many people from far right as well as from left right groups deny the existence of the Holocaust. According to Torrens the most serious concerns should be raised by a “trivialisation of the Holocaust”. This way of moral (not physical) killing is very alarming because any citizen can fall into the error of the banalization of the Holocaust. When people call a bad person as a Nazi or other form of genocide as the Holocaust, they minimise the Holocaust by ‘vulgarising, trivialising and banalising’. The Holocaust happened during the Second World War; people cannot minimise the Holocaust. It is important to keep this in mind because today Roma are the most discriminated minority in Europe and Jews are the third group. So, 2 of the 3 communities most discriminated in Europe are communities who suffered in the Holocaust. Therefore, Torrens emphasized the importance of not minimising the Holocaust.

The last person who spoke was **Marietta Herfort**, a young Hungarian Roma female activist and a representative of Phiren Amenca. She was responsible for delivering the seminar on remembrance and human rights. Sebastián asked her if Roma people and Roma organisations are responsible for the lack of knowledge about the Roma Holocaust. Marietta believes the responsibility of Roma is to show the past, especially to young people and motivate them to act. She thinks that raising awareness is a responsibility of Roma people, but they are not responsible for lack of education and knowledge about this issue. On the other hand Roma can use different tools such as non formal education to teach young people about Roma genocide, also organizing events like this one.



Europe for Citizens
Programme

She also thinks that there are many profiles of organisations; some are fighting for human rights, other for women rights and some are just focusing on education for young Roma. She believes that, Roma organisations should promote the awareness on the Roma Holocaust whatever their profile is and also create a space for social movement.

5. Debate with audience

The floor was opened to participants who were asked “do we have to be afraid of another Holocaust? “, because in some European countries the situation becomes more similar to the era of the 30s/40s.

The first answering person was Marietta who said that in Hungary and many other European countries, the current situation is very similar to the situation in the pre-war years. Fighting racism is raising awareness, so it is very important to work with young people and make them participate in initiatives as the one in Krakow so they can understand what happened and prevent similar situations. We really try to connect the past with the present and the future. Anti-Gypsyism is happening everywhere, not only in Eastern Europe. In Hungary around 6 Roma have been murdered in the last year and similar things are happening in Romania, Slovakia and Czech Republic. She is also sure that Roma in many Western European countries are facing a lot of problems. Roma cannot allow the legitimization of these actions.

Maria Carrasco (Roma woman) believes that the Holocaust against Roma has not ended yet, she thinks that it is still on. There was a Holocaust during the Balkan war and it has not been recognised yet. She said that Jewish people have a strong economical power that Roma do not have, what makes them much stronger. It is important to continue fighting against racism using education as a tool. Therefore, we must promote education among Roma children in order to make them stronger.



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Programme

Torrens replied to Maria, firstly telling her that she cannot call genocide or Holocaust something that legally is not classified as genocide or Holocaust. If people would use the term Holocaust for any kind of extermination or genocide, they would minimise its meaning, what he found terrible. Secondly, he told her that all genocides are exterminations, but not all exterminations are genocides. There is a specific legal differentiation, what does not mean that one group suffer less than the other. He also believes that separating the memory of the Roma community from the Jewish one is not a good strategy. It is very important to cooperate in achieving the same goal.

Manuel Heredia, a senior Adviser on Roma matters for the Government of Catalonia encouraged Roma to be strong and keep fighting against the prejudices and stereotypes.

Kapralski believed that the Holocaust will not repeat due to the existence of a strong Roma movement. Roma are also collaborating with non-Roma organisation, experts, etc. in order to make this part of the history a public matter. For Roma it is important to make a link between the past and the present; Roma are not interested in history for its own. He thinks that the strong Roma movement and the alliance with non-Roma people prevent another Holocaust to happen.

Maria Dantes from Unite against Racism and Fascism said that people from the street, normal people and even people who studied consider the Jewish community as the exclusive victim of the Holocaust, while they do not think about Roma, gay people, republicans and other victims. Recently, the other Holocaust victims have raised awareness about their suffering during the Holocaust. She believes that this should be taught in schools, colleges and universities.

Maria Rubia from Roma organisation Nakeramos agreed with Kapralski about the strong Roma movement, especially among young Roma. Nakeramos is a Spanish member of TernYpe. In the last 2 years the movement for the Roma genocide has been



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Programme

very strong and helped in recognising the 2nd of August as the International Day of the Roma Genocide. She also believed that it is Roma's responsibility to learn about their past and to be active in the present in order to have a better future. She also recognized how hard it is to be a Roma and to work in a racist environment.

Marietta also agreed with Maria Rubia that there are many examples of a racist working environment. She believes that it is very important to share experience and learn from them. Even if there are different Roma groups, Roma have many things in common and that is the reason why the cooperation is so important.

José Antonio (young Roma activist and political science graduate) who is from La Mina (Roma neighbourhood), made a reflection about the current situation and linked it to the moderator's question. He thinks that the economical crisis, a lack of trust in the democratic institutions and a lack of leadership from traditional political parties encourage a rise of new ideologies, especially from the far right, as it happened in the 30s. For governments it is easier to blame a disadvantaged / weak population from causing problems to allow the rise of racism. He thinks that the European institutions should stop far right groups and racism around Europe. European institutions have power to impose austerity but they do not do anything to stop racism.

Alexandra Bahor (young Romanian Roma girl) believes that the Holocaust has not ended; she thinks there is only a break. Roma families from the cities of Romania are displaced to marginal areas, which are many times surrounded by more than 2 meters tall walls and people from the cities are not able to enter these areas. Right now there is a new kind of Holocaust in Romania. She thinks that the recognition of the Holocaust is needed because for example during the Holocaust there were many people killed and exterminated in Romania. Thousands of Roma were transported to Transnistria, including Alexandra's family members. But neither in high schools nor at universities is not this part of the history being taught. Teachers do not speak about Transnistria and



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Programme

do not teach about the Holocaust. She heard about the Holocaust just when she went abroad, what she considers not normal.

Oncle Ricard (Ricard – old Roma man) confirmed that nobody told him about the Holocaust. He gained knowledge due to self-studying when he discovered that also the Roma were victims of the Holocaust. He is an old man who lived under the Spanish dictatorship, but now young people should learn it at schools and this is not happening. That is why the recognition is also important, because without it, people may think that the Holocaust did not happen. He participated with the young Spanish Roma in the Roma genocide initiative and it was a pleasure for him.

Pere Garcia (Vice President of FAGiC) said that Roma must work together with other communities who are facing similar problems as them. The social image of Roma is unfair. A Roma person is what media and sociologists wants... the image of the Roma is vague. He does not believe that another Holocaust as the one we know from the 40s will occur, but he agrees that this period of time is terrible for Roma. Nevertheless, we should name this period with a term, but Holocaust is not the right one.

Torrens agreed with Pere Garcia, but he believes that education can change the image of Roma. He is a director of an intercultural course in Barcelona. He explained that a woman of around 45 years had a lot of prejudices against Roma, but after meeting a Roma woman during the course she changed her mind and confirmed that she had many prejudices against Roma but she did not realize them. Because of the course she had a chance to speak for a first time with a Roma woman. Therefore, he thinks that the education is a key tool for fighting discrimination and racism.

Torrens re-emphasised the necessity of distinguishing between the Holocaust and other violent or discriminatory acts. It is needed to re-formulate them and call them differently, such as Romaphobia. He thinks that Romaphobia is common in Europe, but hopes that there will not be other genocide against Roma. By using a term 'Holocaust'



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Programme

incorrectly we are trivialising its meaning. All the violence, discrimination, social rejection must be known by the non Roma society, because when a problem is not seen as a problem, people do not do anything at all. So Roma organisations must say that violence, discrimination, rejection, racism, etc... create a problem.

David Cortés (Young Roma activist and president of a young Roma organisation from La Mina) added that for him the ignorance from the governments is the worst form of racism. Governments allowed the institutional and social racism against Roma and majority society accepted it. According to him is this invisible racism the worst. In fact, the access to welfare state must be seen as a right of every person and anti-Gypsyism must be considered as a crime. He thinks it is not about education instead more about politics and interests.

Uncle Manel (Old Roma man) commented that there is a need of recognition which he reflects as an acceptance of what happened in the past. Therefore the institutional recognition is like an institutional confirmation of what happened. Another necessity is an education for everyone; Roma and non-Roma. So, there are two levels: first is based on the recognition by the governments and second level consists of providing education to all members of the society. This is the right way to start changing things.

Sebastián Porrás concluded the debate by thanking all participants. For the first time, people were very active in the field and in the end there was more time for the debate needed.

6. Main conclusions:

- For the majority of the participants, education and non-formal education is very important because of spreading the knowledge of the Holocaust, particularly Roma Holocaust



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Programme

- It is the Roma responsibility to raise awareness about Roma genocide, but it is the government responsibility to raise awareness about the education in schools and universities; in order to achieve this goal a recognition can be used as a tool.
- Holocaust is what happened in a specific period (Second World War), so people should not use the term 'Holocaust' in order to describe other forms of genocide or extermination.
- It is very important to link the past with the present and the future in order to understand the current situation of the exclusion of Roma in Europe and to fight against discrimination and racism.
- It is also very important to obtain the government's support, especially to stop far right groups and anti-Gypsyism.
- It was strongly recommended to work all together, Roma and non-Roma and creating an alliance with other minorities and victims groups.
- To distinguish between history of historians and history of people (practical history). Sometimes there are differences between them, but we should keep in mind and respect the importance of the practical history for Roma people.