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8 Technocrats and their Tools of Genocide: The Scientific-Police Complex and the Genocide of Sinti and Roma under the Nazi Regime, 1938–1943

Introduction

Genocides are, according to the definition of Raphael Lemkin, who is considered the founding father of this term, state crimes characterized by the intent to kill or destroy all or a part of members of a national, racial, or religious group with premeditation and deliberation.¹ Lemkin himself was a fierce supporter of recognizing the genocide against Sinti and Roma and enforced the inclusion thereof in the Nuremberg Trials.²

This contribution conceptualizes the term “genocide” as a state crime implemented in a division of labor. This definition of genocide applies not only to the state crimes Nazi Germany committed against the Jewish population in Germany as well as in occupied Europe but also to the Nazi persecution of Sinti and Roma.³ Some scholars refer to this mass crime as the “Porrajmos,” a term in the Romani language meaning “the Devouring.”⁴ Today, the broad consensus among scholars is that the persecution of Sinti and Roma under the Nazis culminated in a genocide. However, reaching this point has been challenging, as the power of former perpetrators and the ongoing overall societal discrimination of this minority remained very strong in postwar Germany. Only a few of the Nazi perpetrators who were responsible for persecuting Sinti and Roma were judicially prosecuted and convicted in East and West Germany for this specific complex of crimes after the war. Whereas the perpetrators were often amnestied and reintegrated into postwar German societies, the survivors

1 Raphael Lemkin, “Genocide,” *The American Scholar* 15, no. 2 (1946): 227–230.

2 Letter by Raphael Lemkin to the Gypsy Lore Society in Liverpool from 2 August 1949, Liverpool University Library, Archives and Special Collections, GLS XV.34, 1949.

3 Wolfgang Wippermann, *Auserwählte Opfer? Shoah und Porrajmos im Vergleich: Eine Kontroverse* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013), 141–146.

4 The term “Holocaust” could be applied to both genocides, though the denotation of this term is subject to ongoing discussions among scholars and activists. See Donald Niewyk and Francis Nicossia, *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 45–52.

faced long continuities of antigypsyist⁵ discrimination, which was also reflected in their problems with being recognized as victims of Nazi racial persecution and obtaining compensation.⁶

Only in 1982 was the genocide of Sinti and Roma officially acknowledged by the postwar German government when Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt declared: “The Nazi dictatorship inflicted a grave injustice on the Sinti and Roma. They were persecuted for reasons of race. These crimes constituted an act of genocide.”⁷ This public declaration only came after Sinti and Roma had organized a civil rights movement and demanded this acknowledgment.⁸ Nevertheless, the genocide of Sinti and Roma under the Nazi regime remained a topic of little public and critical research interest until the 1990s. Michael Zimmermann’s 1996 study *Racial Utopia and Genocide* was a ground-breaking systematic study of the Nazi persecution of Sinti and Roma in Germany and occupied Europe.⁹ Even today, this work serves as a basic point of reference. In the mid-1990s, a public debate erupted between Yehuda Bauer, director of the Research Center of Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, and Romani Rose, head of the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma as well as of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma.¹⁰ Bauer argued that the Nazis perpetrated a genocide on

5 A working definition by the Alliance against Antigypsyism can be found online: Alliance against Antigypsyism, “Antigypsyism: A Reference Paper,” accessed July 15, 2022, <http://antigypsyism.eu/reference-paper/>.

6 Karola Fings, “Schuldabwehr durch Schuldumkehr: Die Stigmatisierung der Sinti und Roma nach 1945,” in *Sinti und Roma: Eine deutsche Minderheit zwischen Diskriminierung und Emanzipation*, ed. Oliver von Mengersen (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2015), 145–164; Deutscher Bundestag, *Bericht der Unabhängigen Kommission Antiziganismus Perspektivwechsel – Nachholende Gerechtigkeit – Partizipation*, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/heimat-integration/bericht-unabhaengige-kommission-Antiziganismus.html>.

7 Cited in Initiative European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma, accessed December 24, 2022, <https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/recognition/the-recognition-of-the-nazi-genocide-of-the-sinti-and-roma/>.

8 Daniela Gress, “Protest und Erinnerung: Der Hungerstreik in Dachau 1980 und die Entstehung der Bürgerrechtsbewegung deutscher Sinti und Roma,” in *Sinti und Roma: Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord in historischer und gesellschaftspolitischer Perspektive (Dachauer Symposien zur Zeitgeschichte)*, eds. Karola Fings and Sybille Steinbacher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), 190–219.

9 Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: die nationalsozialistische «Lösung der Zigeunerfrage»* (Hamburg: Christians, 1996).

10 Yehuda Bauer, “‘Es galt nicht der gleiche Befehl für beide’: Eine Entgegnung auf Romani Roses Thesen zum Genozid an den europäischen Juden, Sinti und Roma,” in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 11 (1998): 1380–1386; Romani Rose, “Für beide galt damals der gleiche

Sinti and Roma but that this was distinct from the Holocaust in its motivation to annihilate. He thus maintained the singularity thesis of the Shoah.

This contribution focuses on the role played by two key institutions decisively involved in the shaping of persecution policies toward Sinti and Roma that led to their dislocation and destruction: the criminal police and the Racial Hygiene Research Center (*Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle*, RHF). The aim of this chapter is to define the links and relationships between these two structures by focusing on the tools, ideas, and methods they used to implement the genocide against Sinti and Roma on a continental scale. Racial censuses, registration procedures, data gathering, selection process – all these operations were only possible through the active participation of these two institutions. Zimmerman described this genocidal process as a “scientific-police complex.”¹¹ By highlighting the career of police officers and racial scientists involved in the treatment of families labeled as “Gypsies,” this study unveils the perpetrators’ networks and the labor division that made the genocide possible and achievable. An emphasis will be put on the main agents from the Reich-wide institutions in Berlin.¹²

Sources from the “scientific-police complex” are scarce as perpetrators from the highest criminal police office burned almost all their files in the last weeks of the war when the Allied troops were approaching the Berlin and Brandenburg metropolitan area.¹³ Only a few collections of the personal files of the local criminal police stations can be found in archives today, as most of them were destroyed after the war or after the 1960s when investigations against the perpetrators were closed.¹⁴ Researchers consider this type of source to be a “key document for the genocide of Sinti and Roma.”¹⁵ Criminal police personal files are a “mirror image of

Befehl’: Eine Entgegnung auf Yehuda Bauers Thesen zum Genozid an den europäischen Juden, Sinti und Roma,” in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 4 (1998): 467–472.

11 Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie*.

12 For more literature on the European level, see Ilse About and Anna Abakunova, *The Genocide and Persecution of Roma and Sinti: Bibliography and Historiographical Review* (Berlin: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016).

13 Interrogation of Erich Otto Bahrke, former criminal police officer of the “prevention” department of the RKPA, in the course of the RSHA-trial investigations, February 2, 1966, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), B 057, Nr. 449, fol. 21. This entire department was evacuated to Drögen in August 1943 and had previously been in Fürstenberg.

14 Karola Fings and Frank Sparing, *Rassismus – Lager – Völkermord: Die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerverfolgung in Köln* (Cologne: Emons, 2005), 19; 392.

15 Karola Fings and Frank Sparing, “Vertuscht, verleugnet, versteckt. Akten zur NS-Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma,” in *Besatzung und Bündnis. Deutsche Herrschaftsstrategie in Ost- und Südost-europa: Beiträge zur nationalsozialistischen Gesundheits- und Sozialpolitik* 12, ed. Christoph Dieckmann (Berlin: Verlag der Buchläden, 1995), 181–201.

police activity” and illustrate the adaptation of the criminal police to specific requirements and regulations regarding the treatment of Sinti and Roma over an extended period of time.¹⁶ The criminal police also created special registers such as a photograph register (“*Lichtbildkartei*”) or fingerprint collections for “Gypsies.” Most of these collections have not survived, but some have been transmitted to archives.¹⁷ Genealogies and other racial-anthropological material from medical professionals are now kept in the Federal Archives in Berlin (reference number R 165). They comprise thousands of working materials and racial research conducted by the RHF, divided into four main sections (registration, photography, anthropometry, and genealogy). In fact, the latter material was transferred back to the Federal Archives in 1981 by Sinti and Roma survivors and civil rights activists after they raided the Tübingen University archives, where Sophie Erhardt, a former racial anthropologist of the RHF, was teaching after the war and used the racist material that the Federal Archives had lent to her.

This contribution puts the genocide of Sinti and Roma in the realm of fresh perpetrator research, in which structural, institutional, and societal contextualization are considered when focusing on the perpetrators and their role in crimes against the persecuted. Frank Bajohr argued that perpetrators never acted in an isolated way but were always embedded in networks of perpetrator collectives that worked based on a division of labor.¹⁸ The term “technocrats” is used to refer to these perpetrator networks within the state apparatus, which exercised political violence through technical means. The choice of this term allows us to insist on the technical and bureaucratic expertise of police officers and racial scientists in the

16 Ernst-Heinrich Ahls, *Polizeiliche Kriminalakten (KpS)* (Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt, 1988), 23.

17 The largest collection of 810 personal files, without almost any gaps, can be found in the Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland Department, in Duisburg. The second largest collection of 587 files from the Magdeburg criminal police office can be found at the Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt in Magdeburg. The Landesarchiv Berlin holds 174 criminal police files on persecuted Sinti and Roma, constituting only a small proportion of the original collection. The latter are accessible online through the Arolsen Archives. During the investigations against perpetrators of the “scientific-police complex” in the 1960s, personal files from other criminal police departments were still available, such as Bochum, Flensburg, Hamburg, Hannover, Karlsruhe, Kassel, Kiel, Lübeck, and Munich. See Fings and Sparing, *Rassismus – Lager – Völkermord*, 392. Verena Meier, “Kriminalpolizei und Völkermord: Die nationalsozialistische Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma in Magdeburg und die Aufarbeitung dessen unter den Alliierten sowie in der DDR” (thesis in progress at the Center for Research on Antigypsyism at the University of Heidelberg). Patricia Pientka analyzed the Berlin files on her study on the communal detention camp at Berlin-Marzahn: see Patricia Pientka, *Das Zwangslager für Sinti und Roma in Berlin-Marzahn. Alltag, Verfolgung und Deportation* (Berlin: Metropol, 2013).

18 Frank Bajohr, “Neuere Täterforschung,” in *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, accessed July 15, 2022, http://docupedia.de/zg/bajohr_neuere_taeaterforschung_v1_de_2013.

use of technological tools of identification and the handling of large racial population files in the implementation of persecution measures. It should be noted, however, that their genocidal violence was not reduced to paperwork alone. Many of these male and female perpetrators put the persecuted in situations where they violently enforced their powers, for instance, in their compulsory interrogations or in implementing deportation measures. These perpetrators relied on tools and ideas that dated back to the time before 1933. According to Lemkin, genocides are characterized by “a distinct criminal intent” and “a distinct technique of commission.”¹⁹ This chapter thus raises the question of when a radical threshold was reached and when state authorities used older tools and ideas for genocidal practice and violence against persecuted Sinti and Roma.

The Criminal Police: Institutionalized Antigypsyism, the Roots of the Persecution, and its Culmination in a Genocide

Institutional Structures, Ideologies, and Logics of Actions

Antigypsyism had a long tradition within the criminal police, which had already been responsible for persecuting people designated as “Gypsies” long before the National Socialist (NS) regime. Leo Lucassen demonstrated very convincingly in his socio-historical studies and his discourse analysis of search notices by the police that the term “*Zigeuner*” (“Gypsy”) was a regulatory term used by state and non-state actors such as the police, municipal offices, welfare or employment offices, or churches. This term served to regulate people marked as “Other” by state regulators as early as the 18th century when the police in the modern sense did not even exist.²⁰ At the end of the 19th century, “criminal biology” and “criminal anthropology” became increasingly important ideas in the field of criminology. Criminality was also regarded as being rooted in “racial” or biological condi-

¹⁹ Raphael Lemkin, The Significance of the Concept of Genocide in the Trial of War Criminals, undated, Columbia University Library, RLC 5–20.

²⁰ Leo Lucassen, “Harmful Tramps’ Police Professionalization and Gypsies in Germany, 1700–1945,” *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 1, no. 1 (1997): 29–50; Leo Lucassen, *Zigeuner: Die Geschichte eines polizeilichen Ordnungsbegriffs in Deutschland 1700–1945* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 1996).

tions.²¹ Furthermore, around the same time, specific structures within the police were established in Germany to focus on this group of alleged criminals. In 1899, an “Information Service for the Security Police with Regard to Gypsies” (*Nachrichtendienst für die Sicherheitspolizei in Bezug auf Zigeuner*) was established at the Munich police directorate, and a “Gypsy Person Index” – a voluminous census register compiling the data collected on the “Gypsy” population, including civil status, reports, and family ties – was set up under the service’s head, Alfred Dillmann, and published in 1905.²² According to Dillmann, the “Gypsies” were not an ethnic group but a sociological category covering all people who move with their families, without distinction of ethnicity or nationality.²³ A turn to a more racialized conceptualization of the term within the police apparatus appeared during the Weimar Republic.²⁴

The genesis of institutional structures for the surveillance of Sinti and Roma can be traced back to the evolution of the identification service (*Erkennungsdienst*) and the technology of dactyloscopy within the criminal police apparatus.²⁵ These served as the basis for determining the general identity of a person, but from their origin, they were used as tools for surveillance of Sinti and Roma in particular. After a conference of criminal police representatives from different states of the German Empire in 1911, the Munich police department took over the role of the supraregional “Gypsy Information Service.”²⁶ During the Weimar Republic, these main features of the criminal police structure were further developed in the course of the modernization of the police. Regarding the treatment of “Gypsies,” it was highlighted that the work was structurally based on two main pillars: a reporting service for “Gypsies” and “Travellers” (*Landfahrer*), which

21 Peter Widman, “The Campaign against the Restless: Criminal Biology and the Stigmatization of the Gypsies, 1890–1960,” in *The Roma: A Minority in Europe: Historical, Political and Social Perspectives*, eds. Roni Stauber and Raphael Vago (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 19–29.

22 Alfred Dillmann, *Zigeuner-Buch, herausgegeben zum amtlichen Gebrauch im Auftrag des Staatsministeriums des Innern vom Sicherheitsbüro der königlichen Polizeidirektion München* (Munich: Dr. Wild’sche Buchdruckerei, 1905).

23 Lucassen, “Harmful Tramps,” 40.

24 Juliane Tatarinov, *Kriminalisierung des Ambulanten Gewerbes: Zigeuner- Und Wandergewerbepolitik Im Späten Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2014).

25 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, 96–107.

26 Fabian Frese and Joachim Schröder, “Die ‘Dienststelle für Zigeunerfragen’ der Münchener Kriminalpolizei,” in *Die Münchener Polizei und der Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Polizeipräsidium München and Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt München (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2013), 103–111.

meant a supraregional exchange of information, and an identification service with a broad usage of dactyloscopy.²⁷ This tendency can also be observed on a broader European scale in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1923, the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC) was founded, and between 1927 and 1936, they discussed the creation of an “International Central Service for the Suppression of the Gypsy Nuisance,” which was supposed to be a Central Service that would “collect and record all data concerning gipsies, or persons nomadising after the manner of gipsies.”²⁸ Within the ICPC, the German criminal police also pushed forward their experience in surveillance. In 1935, at the annual ICPC meeting in Vienna, Dr. Bader, a representative of the Baden Ministry of the Interior, expressed his satisfaction with the results of these police reforms and stated that the centralization of data on “Gypsies” throughout the region had made it possible to compile 5,000 to 6,000 individual files since the introduction of a special identity card in the Baden region in 1922.²⁹

Thus, the technological evolution of the identification service as well as a super-regional reporting service and the bureaucratic cooperation of the different criminal police offices of the various states in the period of the Weimar Republic was closely linked to the surveillance of people designated “Gypsies” or “Travellers.”

Before the NS regime got into power, the surveillance of Sinti and Roma by the criminal police was strong but still highly dependent on regional measures. In 1936, the criminal police was centralized by the Nazi authorities, and local legislations were eliminated in favor of the establishment of the *Reichskriminalpolizei*amt (RKPA, Reich Criminal Police Office) in Berlin that, from then on, issued the central directives that were implemented at the local level. The *Kriminalpolizeileitsstellen* (KPLSt) were founded as intermediate institutions to organize and mediate police work between the central superordinate RKPA and the regional subordinate *Kriminalpolizeistellen* (KPSt).

27 Polizeidirektion München, Begleitschreiben zum Entwurf zu einer neuen Vereinbarung der deutschen Länder über die Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage, May 7, 1926, USHMM, RG-14050M, Aussenstelle Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten records, ZB 6272, fol. 11v.

28 ICPC 140/5/36, concerning the establishment of the “International Central Service for the Suppression of the Gypsy Nuisance” as a part of the “International Bureau on the seat of the Federal Police Directorate in Vienna,” March 18, 1936, The National Archives UK (thereafter TNA), Mepo 3/2047.

29 “The Repression of the Gypsy Calamity. Report on the results of a gypsy check carried out in 1934” by Dr. Bader, ministerial advisor in Karlsruhe, to the International Criminal Police Commission, p. 2, no. 9, 11th ordinary session, 1935, *Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels (AGR)*, F1700 738.

The decree of Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police, of 16 May 1938 ordered the establishment of the Reich Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Menace (*Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens*) by incorporating the “Gypsy Police Office” at the police directorate in Munich into the Reich Criminal Police Office with effect from 1 October 1938.³⁰ This order supplemented the circular on the reorganization and centralization of the state criminal police of 20 September 1936. After its incorporation within the RKPA, the Reich Central Office became a centralized data collection institution for the persecution of Sinti and Roma.³¹ With the transfer, 17,951 criminal police personal files were handed over from Munich to the Reich Central Office.³² In addition, there was also an exchange at the personnel level. For example, “Gypsy” police experts and identification practitioners such as *Kriminalinspektor* Josef Eichberger, *Kriminalkommissar* Wilhelm Supp, and *Kriminalinspektor* Josef Schegg moved from Munich to Berlin and made a significant contribution to the transfer of knowledge.³³ Compared to the Munich “Gypsy Police Office,” the tasks and goals of the Reich Central Office were determined much more by racial-biological paradigms.

A paradigmatic shift in the persecution of Sinti and Roma was initiated with a circular issued by the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police on 8 December 1938. The goal was “solving the Gypsy question by the essence of race.”³⁴ For these purposes, cooperation with the Racial Hygiene Research Center and the identification and “racial-biological” assessment of all persons who fell under the stigmatizing designation were ordered. In the preliminary remarks to the circular, it is noted that most of the persons in question were already known to the Reich Central Office in December 1938.³⁵

30 Runderlass des Rf.-SS u. Ch.d Dt. Pol., May 16, 1938, in *Kriminalpolizei – Sammlungen für die kriminalpolizeiliche Organisation und Tätigkeit geltenden Bestimmungen und Anordnungen: Zum praktischen Handgebrauch für alle Kriminal-, Gendarmerie- und Gemeinde-Polizeivollzugsbeamte, Staatsanwälte usw.* (Berlin: Kameradschaft Verlagsgesellschaft Gersbach & Co., 1937), Abschnitt VIII “Zigeunerunwesen”, A.3, sheet 9.

31 Verena Meier, “The ‘Prevention Department’ within the Criminal Police: An Example of Learning Administrations and the Core of Organizing Transports of Sinti and Roma to Concentration Camps,” in *Deportations in the Nazi Era: Sources and Research*, eds. Henning Borggräfe and Akim Jah (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 181–204.

32 Reichskriminalpolizeiamt, *Jahrbuch des Reichskriminalpolizeiamtes für das Jahr 1938* (Berlin: RKPA, 1939), 27.

33 LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 449, fol. 187–188; Fese/Schröder, “Dienststelle.”

34 Runderlass des Rf.-SS u. Ch.d Dt. Pol. vom 8.12.1938, German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), henceforth BArch), R 58/9560; Reichskriminalpolizeiamt, *Jahrbuch 1938*, 27. Translation by the authors.

35 Ibid.

The structural reorganization also manifested on the local levels. Between December 1938 and the summer of 1939, the 14 intermediate *Kriminalpolizeileitstellen* established “Departments for Gypsy Questions” (*Dienststelle für Zigeunerfragen*) in the “prevention” departments, and on the level of the *Kriminalpolizeistellen*, specific case officers were assigned to this subject.³⁶ This facilitated the exchange in a centrally orientated structure of the criminal police. Zimmermann highlighted that this reorganization, within a few months, paved the way for a highly effective “combat of the Gypsy nuisance,” as a clear hierarchy of orders as well as distribution of responsibilities had been established and conflicts of interest within the police apparatus dissolved.³⁷ From then on, the bureaucratic architecture of the criminal police was efficiently adjusted to track and persecute Sinti and Roma from a hierarchical labor division perspective.

Many of these criminal police officers had been experts in the field of identifying and sharing personal information of people wanted within their state or across borders.³⁸ *Kriminalinspektor* Josef Eichberger³⁹ and *Kriminalkommissar* Wilhelm Supp⁴⁰ both worked for the identification or reporting service before being transferred to the Reich Central Office. After the war, these perpetrators characterized their work in the Reich Central Office as continuous tasks from their previous field, thereby downgrading their responsibility for racial persecution.⁴¹

Policing and Incarceration

During the period of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic, a central aim of the police apparatus was to restrict the movement of Sinti and Roma, as they stigmatized them as “criminals” who were crossing different state borders and

³⁶ Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie*, 109; Meier, “The ‘Prevention Department’”, 186–189.

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Interrogation of Karl Lorenz (*Kriminalpolizeistelle* Kassel), January 27, 1966, and Peter Kenten (*Kriminalpolizeistelle* Kassel), March 4, 1966, LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 449, fol. 65–67, 108.

³⁹ Eichberger had worked for the criminal police in Munich since 1930 and also for the *Erkennungsdienst*. In 1937, he was transferred to the *Zigeuner-Polizeistelle München*. Staatsarchiv München, SpK Karton 344 Eichberger, Josef: Schreiben Eichbergers an die Spruchkammer IV München, July 22, 1948.

⁴⁰ Supp had been a case officer in the *Kriminalnachrichtendienst (Meldedienst)* and in the tracing department at the *Kriminalpolizeileitstelle Nürnberg-Fürth* from 1935 to 1941. The *Zigeunerdienstsstelle* was a subordinate institution. He transferred to the RKPA in February 1941 and became its manager. See Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (henceforth BayHStA), LKA, Nr. 219 (Personalakte Supp LKA Bayern).

⁴¹ Interrogation of Wilhelm Supp in October 1963, LAB, B Rep. 057-01, Nr. 2692 (Wilhelm Supp), fol. 2713–2714.

thus had to be tracked and controlled by the police. In the early 1930s, many cities had already established communal detention camps for Sinti and Roma in order to facilitate police control. Under the centralized police apparatus of the NS regime, another step toward radicalization was to restrict movement and verify identities. With an urgent note, the so-called “*Festsetzungserlass*,” the Reich Main Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA), in which the RKPA was incorporated as Office V, ordered on 17 October 1939 the registration of Sinti and Roma between 25 and 27 October 1939.⁴² This registration required the same data the information service had gathered since the late 1920s but would be enriched by “racial-biological” registration. This measure aimed at a complete registration of all Sinti and Roma by the criminal police within the German Reich in preparation for deportations to Poland.⁴³ Furthermore, Sinti and Roma were forced in these days of central registration to acknowledge and sign that they would not leave their current place of residence. Thus, their freedom of movement was removed, and racial identity cards were implemented. Their identity was to be checked, and they were given a special “Gypsy identity card,”⁴⁴ which became a racial marker to classify Sinti and Roma according to different racial criteria: “full-blooded Gypsies,” “Gypsies of mixed blood,” and “persons wandering about in the manner of Gypsies.”⁴⁵

Another important factor in the persecution of Sinti and Roma was the mandate given to the criminal police to transfer the persecuted to concentration camps.⁴⁶ Similar to the Gestapo’s “protective custody” (*Schutzhaft*), it was detention for an indefinite period of time without prior judicial proceedings, without judgment, and without legal protection for the person to be detained.⁴⁷ The “Basic De-

42 Urgent instruction by the RSHA – Diary No. RKPA. 149/1939-g-of 17.10.1939 concerning Gypsy registration, State Archives Sachsen-Anhalt (Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt) (henceforth LASA), C 30 Osterburg A, No. 161, fol. 29–30.

43 Karola Fings, “Gutachten zum Schnellbrief des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes – Tgb. Nr. RKPA. 149/1939 -g- – vom 17.10.1939 betr. ‘Zigeunererfassung’ (‘Festsetzungserlass’),” accessed July 15, 2022, https://sintiroma.org/images/sinti-roma/zr_2020_karola_fings_gutachten_festsetzungserlass.pdf.

44 An example can be viewed in the digital collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-Nr.: LD 2006/36, accessed October 30, 2022, <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/bestand/objekt/lg001872>.

45 Fings, “Gutachten,” 4.

46 Patrick Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft ohne Verbrecher: Konzeptionen und Praxis der Kriminalpolizei in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Christians, 1996).

47 Karl-Leo Terhorst, *Polizeiliche Überwachung und polizeiliche Vorbeugungshaft im Dritten Reich: Ein Beitrag zur Rechtsgeschichte vorbeugender Verbrechensbekämpfung* (Heidelberg: C. F. Müller Juristischer Verlag, 1985), 4–7.

cree on Preventive Crime Control by the Police” issued by the Reich Ministry of the Interior on 14 December 1937 established a uniform Reich-wide regulation for “police preventive detention” as well as “police planned surveillance” and extended it to “asocials.”⁴⁸ With this decree, the criminal police were given the legal basis for more “freedom of action” and thus increasingly took over the functions of the judiciary.⁴⁹ This turn to a particular conceptualization of “prevention” can be traced back to Erich Liebermann von Sonnenberg of the Berlin criminal police. During the Weimar Republic, he developed the concepts of “professional” and “habitual criminals.” As deputy director of the Berlin criminal police, he initiated the “police preventive detention” on a local level as early as November 1933. At the initiative of the *Kriminaldirektor* Paul Werner, former director of the LKA in Baden and deputy director of the RKPA, this model of “police preventive detention” became Reich-wide legislation with the aforementioned decree on 14 December 1937.⁵⁰

Enforcing “Racial-Biological” Paradigms

Following this decree, special “prevention” departments were established at all levels of the criminal police between 1938 and 1940.⁵¹ Thus, the criminal police under the NS regime could be described as a “learning administration” that was structurally reorganized according to the implementation of persecution measures.⁵² In the structural organization of the RKPA, this was manifested in the “prevention” department to which the Reich Central Office was attached. The office directors of the latter were staff members from Bavaria, such as *Kriminalkommissar* Wilhelm Supp⁵³ and *Kriminalinspektor* Josef Eichberger,⁵⁴ whereas some of the directors of the overall “prevention” department could be linked to Liebermann von Sonnenberg in Berlin. For instance, *Kriminalrat* Dr. jur. Richard Zaucke⁵⁵ was trained under Liebermann von Sonnenberg at the Berlin criminal police. Others, such as the director of the “prevention” department, *Kriminaldirektor* Heinrich Böhlhoff,⁵⁶

48 Wolfgang Ayaß, *“Asoziale” im Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995).

49 Terhorst, *Polizeiliche Überwachung*, 4–7, 56–59.

50 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, 258–259.

51 Interrogation of Kurt Wedeking, January 13, 1966, LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 449, fol. 119a–119k.

52 Meier, “‘Prevention Department’.”

53 BayHStA. Landeskriminalamt (LKA), Nr. 219 (Personalakte Supp LKA Bayern).

54 Staatsarchiv München (henceforth StA Munich), SpK Karton 344 Eichberger, Josef.

55 BArch, R 9361-III, Nr. 231879; BArch R 9361-III/ 565086; LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 3379 (Dr. Richard Zaucke).

56 BArch, R 601/1814; LAB, B Rep. 067-01. Nr. 660 (Heinrich Böhlhoff).

and his deputies, *Kriminalrat* Dr. jur. Hans Maly⁵⁷ and *Kriminalrat* Johannes Otto,⁵⁸ seem to have generated expertise for these positions by having been in leading positions at local criminal police stations or working for the police administration in the Ministry of the Interior.

In the order of May 1938, the field of the *Reichszentrale*'s activity was defined as follows: "Registering all Gypsies residing in the German Reich and making all applicable provisions in the field of combating Gypsies. In particular, it shall evaluate the experience gained in combating the gypsy plague and the knowledge gained through racial-biological research."⁵⁹ After 1938, "racial paradigms" dominated the work of the criminal police, so, besides using dactyloscopy and traditional tools of the criminal police to identify and register accused criminals, racial categorizations of the persecuted were highly relevant. For this purpose, the criminal police cooperated with a newly created racial institution, the Racial Hygiene Research Center, headed by Dr. Robert Ritter.

The Racial Hygiene Research Center and the Building of a Racial Database

Creation of the Research Center and its Roots in Racial Sciences

The creation of the Racial Hygiene Research Center (*Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle*, RHF) within the Reich Health Office (*Reichsgesundheitsamt*, RGA) in the spring of 1936 constituted a decisive structural caesura in the genocidal process targeting Sinti and Roma.⁶⁰ Until the outbreak of the Second World War, the RHF not

57 State Archives Nordrhein-Westfalen (Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen) (henceforth LA NRW), Abteilung Rheinland, NW 1.049, Nr. 72.383, Entnazifizierungsakte Hans Maly; BArch, R 9361-III/2178; BArch, R 9361-III/541944; LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 2005 (Dr. Hans Maly).

58 LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 2290 (Johannes Otto), fol. 543; 565.

59 Runderlass des Rf.-SS u. Ch.d Dt. Pol. vom 16.5.1938. Translation by the authors.

60 On the RHF, see Eve Rosenhaft, "Wissenschaft als Herrschaftsakt: Die Forschungspraxis der Ritterschen Forschungsstelle und das Wissen über 'Zigeuner'," in *Zwischen Erziehung und Vernichtung: Zigeunerpolitik und Zigeunerforschung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 329–353; Karola Fings, "Die 'gutachtlichen Äußerungen' der Rassenhygienischen Forschungsstelle und ihr Einfluss auf die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerpolitik," in *Zwischen Erziehung und Vernichtung: Zigeunerpolitik und Zigeunerforschung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 425–459.

only focused on Sinti and Roma populations but also targeted other groups like Baltic Germans, mixed-marriages of German, Polish, and Galician Jews and non-Jews, and Jenish “asocials and criminals” to find out their “hereditary value . . . and their influence on the German population [*Volkskörper*].” Ritter highlighted that other institutions like the police or racial researchers had given up on the task of fully understanding the family relations of Sinti and Roma in the German Reich as the situation had been so complex.⁶¹

By aggregating genealogical, photographic, anthropometric, and biological data in their Berlin-Dahlem offices, RHF researchers implemented new tools and methods inherited from racial science to classify, order, and network the information collected on Sinti and Roma living in Germany. The endeavors of the RHF to create such a centralized racial database were deeply connected to the development of eugenics, genetics, and heredity sciences in the political and medical discourses of the Weimar Republic. In the wake of Otmar von Verschuer’s, Alfred Lenz’s, and Eugen Fischer’s theses, German racial hygiene researchers supported a hereditary conception of criminal behaviors and specifically targeted Sinti and Roma. Founded in 1927, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics (*Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie, menschliche Erblehre und Eugenik*, KWI) was dedicated to the promotion of research on racial hygiene and reflected the strong diffusion of the hygienist and racial conception of human populations within German academia since the 1920s.⁶² Studying the career trajectories of researchers who worked at the KWI provides information about the profound interrelationship between their political beliefs and their scientific hypotheses, as is the case for the biologist Karin Magnussen.⁶³ Close ideological and scientific connections existed between this institute and the RHF as many doctoral students working at the KWI were later recruited by the RHF, such as Eva Justin and Adolf Würth.⁶⁴

After studying medicine, biology, and anthropology at the University of Freiburg and then in Berlin, Würth became Fischer’s assistant at the KWI in 1931 and started his doctoral research on fingerprints and hand anatomy. In 1937, he be-

61 Robert Ritter, Arbeitsbericht, BArch R 187/399.

62 Benoit Massin, “Apprendre à classer et à sélectionner. L’enseignement de l’eugénisme, de l’hygiène raciale et de la raciologie dans les universités allemandes (1930–1945),” *Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah* 183 (2005): 265–388.

63 Vojin Saša Vukadinović, ““ . . . in Erinnerung an die schöne Zeit in Dahlem” Karin Magnussen, reichsdeutsche Rassenforscherin und bundesdeutsche Biologielehrerin,” in *Rassismus, Von der frühen Bundesrepublik bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Vojin Saša Vukadinović (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 67–122.

64 Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, 1927–1945: Crossing Boundaries* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 360.

came an assistant at the RHF and carried out racial investigations on the Sinti and Roma living in southern Germany, around Karlsruhe, with the active cooperation of the Baden state criminal police.⁶⁵ He worked under the supervision of the newly appointed head of the RHF, Robert Ritter.⁶⁶ From 1930 on, Ritter worked at the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Tübingen and studied the inheritability of criminality among children with eugenic theories. In 1925, his colleague and mentor, Robert Gaupp, published a study advocating the sterilization of “mentally and morally diseased and inferior people.”⁶⁷ Therefore, although the RHF was created under the Nazi regime, the careers of its researchers and the mentalities, networks, tools, and methods they mobilized to identify Sinti and Roma were decisively rooted in the rise of German anthropological racial science during the Weimar Republic.

Additionally, the RHF could rely on previous research in the manner of “Gypsy-loreism,” e.g., in linguistics or social sciences. One example is the writer and hobby photographer Hans Weltzel from Dessau-Roßlau, who had close amicable relations with Sinti families of the region, learned the Romani language, created pedigrees, and photographed them.⁶⁸ Ritter requested his research material, and survivors testified Weltzel’s active complicity with the RHF when he and his wife, as well as Ritter and Justin, visited the Buchenwald concentration camp to question Sinti and Roma inmates about their family histories. Furthermore, the RHF received material from churches and religious organizations. The Naumburg Missionary Assistance Association gave their files on the “Gypsy” Protestant mission in Friedrichslohra in the 1830s to the RHF in March 1939, and Justin later used it for her doctoral thesis from 1943.⁶⁹

65 Joachim S. Hohmann, *Robert Ritter und die Erben der Kriminalbiologie: “Zigeunerforschung” im Nationalsozialismus und in Westdeutschland im Zeichen des Rassismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1991), 276.

66 Tobias Joachim Schmidt-Degenhard, *Robert Ritter (1901–1951): Zu Leben und Werk des NS-“Zigeunerforschers”* (Tübingen, Universität Tübingen, 2008).

67 Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), 317.

68 Eve Rosenhaft, “Genocide and the Ethics of Scholarship: The Photographer Hanns Weltzel,” *Website of the Wiener Holocaust Library*, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:49485182-07aa-4f48-bc14-ce27878284cb>.

69 Verena Meier, “Neither Bloody Persecution nor well Intended Civilizing Missions Changed their Nature or their Number”: A Postcolonial Approach to Protestant ‘Zigeuner’ Missionary Efforts in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Critical Romani Studies* 1 (2018): 86–126.

Racial Census and Building Databases

In a conference at the University of Tübingen in September 1937, Würth argued for the necessity to label the “Gypsy” population to enhance the application of Nuremberg racial laws against Sinti and Roma. Using rhetoric focused on the obsession with protecting German blood, he explained the methods used by the RHF to assess their racial affiliations and promoted a biological and racial approach to the “Gypsy question.”⁷⁰ Hereditary genealogy and biological anthropology were the two main disciplines Ritter and his colleagues mobilized to set up a stable racial classification of all Sinti and Roma living in Germany, for which RHF scientists systematized the use of the forced racial census.

From the spring of 1937 on, with the logistical support and local knowledge of criminal police forces, the RHF’s “mobile working groups” organized racial investigations on the ground in numerous German cities and gathering places where Sinti and Roma lived. Before that, the RHF had registered some Sinti and Roma prisoners who were already incarcerated. The aim was to collect social, biological, genealogical, blood, and anthropometric data of the censused individuals and gather the documentation in Berlin to build a centralized racial database. The members of the RHF’s mobile working groups worked closely with the local police departments, where criminal police officers had been systematically gathering personal data since the late 1920s through their identification service.

Between 1937 and 1938, racial censuses conducted in several cities along the Rhine, such as Cologne, Heidelberg, Mannheim, Freiburg, and Magstadt, led to the complete racial examination of more than 1,000 Sinti.⁷¹ The case of Karlsruhe is emblematic of the establishment of the “scientific-police complex” premises and unveils the close networks between criminal police officers and RHF racial researchers. In 1936, Ritter was allowed by Paul Werner, then director of the Baden criminal police, to use the Karlsruhe police archives on the surveillance of “Gypsies” for the preparation of his habilitation thesis. At that time, Werner was highly interested in Ritter’s criminal biology research, and the two had close working and personal relationships.⁷² In 1937, when Werner was made responsible for “crime prevention fighting” policies within the newly created RKPA in Berlin, Würth, Ritter’s collaborator, moved to Karlsruhe and started to gather biological materials on local Sinti families living in the area. In April and August 1938, Würth conducted two racial surveys

70 Adolf Würth, “Bemerkungen zur Zigeunerfrage und Zigeunerforschung in Deutschland,” *Verhandlungen der Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenforschung* 9 (1938): 95–98.

71 “Hilfskarteien: Sinti aus Süddeutschland, Rheinland, Mitteldeutschland,” 1937–1940, BArch, R 165/6.

72 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, 273–274.

and summoned the Sinti families to the Karlsruhe police headquarters. These operations led to the identification of 79 individuals.⁷³ The data collected in Karlsruhe was later sent to RHF offices to complete family trees, morphological tables, and blood sample results.

Karl Moravek's career illustrates the transfer of staff and ideas as well as the way the RHF integrated previous racial inquiries into its database on Sinti and Roma. Moravek had written his Ph.D. thesis about the "racial status" of Roma in Burgenland (Austria) in 1939.⁷⁴ His thesis supervisors introduced NS racial hygiene ideologies to the University of Vienna. Afterward, he joined the RHF, transferred his data collection on Roma from Burgenland to this institution, and became the head of the mobile working group and census of Roma in Leipzig and Halle (Saale) in 1940.⁷⁵ A transcript of an examination in the latter city reveals that RHF members first asked questions about family relations and checked the respondent's answers with information they had already gathered. The transcript states that family members were interrogated individually. After that, all family members were asked to enter the room together for the anthropological examination, but the purpose was not revealed to them. At least one criminal police officer was present at all times and disciplined the examined.⁷⁶ At the conference in 1937, Würth had already highlighted that the use of family genealogy and biological anthropology was the basis for achieving a racial inventory of all Sinti and Roma living in Germany.⁷⁷

The RKPA not only relied on the data that the RHF gathered independently through such censuses but also proactively asked the RHF for "racial" examinations so that they knew whether they could apply some regulations of Himmler's decree from 8 December 1938 to Sinti and Roma. On 20 May 1939, a group of Romanian traders were arrested during a police operation in a hotel in Vienna. As the designated experts, Dr. Robert Ritter and Dr. Hans Odenwald traveled there and reported their examination results back to the Reich Central Office.⁷⁸ They categorized them as "Gypsies" and warned that they could "intermix with German blood" because of their good economic status and unclear family relationships. The Reich Central Office then ordered the *Kriminalpolizeileitstelle* in Vienna that these foreigners were to be expelled

73 RHF individual identification cards (*Messkartei*) for Karlsruhe, 1938, BArch, R 165/4 and 5.

74 Hohmann, *Robert Ritter*, 271–275.

75 Ibid.

76 Undated file note by Karl Moravek, BArch, R 165/208, 3.

77 Würth, "Bemerkungen, 96.

78 RHF to RKPA, June 8, 1939, USHMM, RG-14050M, Aussenstelle Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten records, ZB 6289. A.11, fol. 464.

from the country in accordance with Himmler's decree.⁷⁹ When Ritter remarked that there were 122 of them in Vienna and thus many more than the 14 who had been arrested, the *Kriminalpolizeistelle* Vienna also gave residency bans to the others.⁸⁰ In January 1940, the RKPA ordered all civil administrations not to issue any permits for itinerant trade for "foreign Gypsies," as several such people had had to be expelled from Austria the previous year.⁸¹ Thus, the RHF's "expert" knowledge was crucial for how the Reich Central Office defined Sinti and Roma people, applied the existing regulations to them, and ordered new ones for the public administrations. These powers of definition by the "scientific-police complex" had a fatal impact on the trajectories of those labeled "Gypsies" when deportation orders were implemented.

Technocrats and their Tools: Deportations of 1940 and 1943

In May 1940, the identification material gathered by the RHF was used by the German police authorities to organize the first collective deportation transports of Sinti and Roma from Western Germany to occupied Poland.⁸² Paul Werner was the overall logistical coordinator of the deportation, Würth was present during the police discussions in preparation for the deportation operation in May 1940,⁸³ and Josef Eichberger was present at the provisional assembly space in Hohenasperg and performed organizational tasks presumably until the deportees reached their final destinations in the *Generalgouvernement*.⁸⁴ Other members of the

79 Reich Central Office to KPLSt Vienna, June 1, 1939, USHMM, RG-14050M, Aussenstelle Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten records, Z ZB 6289. A.11, fol. 463. Ritter informed the Reich Central Office of the situation before Odenwald sent the official letter to the RKPA.

80 KPLSt Vienna to Reich Central Office, October 25, 1939, USHMM, RG-14050M, Aussenstelle Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten records, Z ZB 6289. A.11, fol. 468.

81 Note RKPA, January 1940, USHMM, RG-14050M, Aussenstelle Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten records, Z ZB 6289. A.11, fol. 461.

82 Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie*, 167–175.

83 Benno Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft: Die Aussonderung von Juden, Zigeunern und Geisteskranken, 1933–1945* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1984), 153–154.

84 Interrogation of Antonie B. in the course of investigations against Josef Eichberger, August 11, 1966 BArch Ludwigsburg, B 162/25242, 1, 8; "Bescheinigung" für Heinrich Birkenfelder, ausgestellt im Sammellager Hohenasperg (Vorderseite), Datenbank des Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrums Deutscher Sinti und Roma, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://www.sintiundroma.org/de/set/021008/?id=141&z=9>; Schreiben der Kriminalpolizeistelle Darmstadt an die Kriminalpolizeistelle Frankfurt a.M., May 27, 1949, 1.1.0.6/82335691/ITS Digital Archives, Arolsen Archives.

Reich Central Office personally present to organize the deportations were Dr. Josef Ochs⁸⁵ in Cologne and Dr. jur. Richard Zaucke in Hamburg.⁸⁶ For the first time, local police forces and racial scientific authorities collaborated on the ground to coordinate a regional deportation operation. Although these first collective deportations were implemented at a regional level, the involvement of an RHF researcher in the selection process highlights the growing influence of Ritter's institute in shaping persecution policies and policing practices toward Sinti and Roma.

By February 1941, the RHF had issued 10,000 "expert reports" (*gutachtliche Äußerungen*), and with the conquest of new territories, the RHF racial database grew and expanded.⁸⁷ Indeed, the German authorities projected their own conception of "Gypsies" onto Sinti and Roma living in these annexed spaces and started to gather genealogical data. The transfer of knowledge and practices occurred in annexed Alsace, where, in the summer of 1942, the Strasbourg criminal police organized a racial census.⁸⁸ Police officers – who were mainly former Karlsruhe policemen – used the same methods and registration forms to identify the persecuted.⁸⁹ The organization of such a racial census also took place in Prague during the summer of 1942, evidencing the collection and transfer of identification data of Sinti and Roma in Western and Eastern German-ruled territories.⁹⁰

Furthermore, a transfer of knowledge and personal was exercised from the peripheries to the center and vice versa. For a short period, lower- and medium-rank criminal police officers from the *Kriminalpolizei(leit)stellen* assisted in the Reich Central Office so that there was a constant flow of staff.⁹¹ In the case of Vienna and annexed Austria, *Kriminalrat* Zaucke was transferred from the RKPA in Berlin to the *Kriminalpolizeileitstelle* in Vienna at the beginning of 1941.⁹² He

⁸⁵ Fings and Sparing, *Rassismus*, 210.

⁸⁶ Hans Hesse, . . . wir sehen uns in Bremerhaven wieder . . . *Die Deportation der Sinti und Roma am 16./20. Mai aus Nordwestdeutschland* (Bremerhaven: Stadt Bremerhaven, 2021), 60 and 72.

⁸⁷ Robert Ritter, "Die Bestandsaufnahme der Zigeuner und Zigeunermischlinge in Deutschland," in *Der Öffentliche Gesundheitsdienst* 6 (1941): 477–489, 611/3/10, Wiener Library, London. Translation by the authors.

⁸⁸ Strasbourg criminal police to the Mulhouse criminal police, June 28, 1942, Archives départementales du Haut-Rhin, 3AL3 24077.

⁸⁹ *Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preußischen Ministers des Innern* 99, no. 51 (1938): 2105–2110.

⁹⁰ Michal Schuster, "The Dycha Family from the Village of Hrušky: Microhistory of the Nazi Genocide of the Roma and Sinti in the Czech Republic," *S:I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation* 8, no. 2 (2021): 72–85.

⁹¹ List of officers transferred to the Reich Central Office, June 27, 1941, USHMM, RG-14050M, Aussenstelle Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten records, ZB 6256 8AE.

⁹² Interrogation of Dr. Richard Zaucke in the investigations for the RSHA trial, August 7, 1969, LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 3379.

later described himself as the “right hand” of the director of this criminal police office, whom he had known from their time at the LKA Berlin before 1933, and his special task was to reorganize the Vienna criminal police according to the Berlin model.⁹³ On 8 October 1941, shortly after his transfer to Vienna, he accompanied his boss, *Kriminaldirektor* Kappenhengst, to the communal detention camp for Roma and Sinti in Lackenbach, where he met with the camp director. In several meetings in Vienna and Lackenbach, they discussed the preparations for the deportations to Lodz.⁹⁴

In December 1942, a new threshold in the radicalization of the persecution measures was crossed when Heinrich Himmler ordered the deportation of all remaining Sinti and Roma living within the Reich to Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁹⁵ On 15 January 1943, leading staff members of the “scientific-police complex” met in a conference in order to discuss the implementation of the deportations and, ultimately, the “solution to the Gypsy question.” Among them were *Kriminaldirektor* Heinrich Böhlhoff, *Kriminalkommissar* Wilhelm Supp, *Kriminalkommissar* Albert Wiszinsky, and *Kriminalinspektor* Josef Eichberger, as well as Robert Ritter and Eva Justin from the RHF.⁹⁶ The main agreements reached at this conference were that “mixed-race Gypsies” were to be deported, while those exempted were to be forcefully sterilized in order to achieve their extinction within a generation. Karola Fings has argued very convincingly that this conference can be regarded as a “‘Wannsee Conference’ on the Extermination of the Gypsies.” She also underlined the entanglements with the organizations and plannings of the deportation of the Jewish population in Europe by these Nazi officials, as members of the Department for Racial and Ethnic Policy within the Security Service or the Race and Settlement Main Office (*Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*) also participated in this conference. They were “strategists and practitioners . . . equipped with experience in the killing of European Jews. Mass sterilization and the displacement of millions of people were just as much a part of their sphere of action as the ‘racial’ selection of individuals for an eventual decision on, for example, their Germanization or extermination.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Florian Freund et al., *Das Ghetto in Lodz* (Vienna, 2013) 63, accessed July 14, 2022, https://zeitgeschichte.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/i_zeitgeschichte/Publikationen/Endbericht-Lodz_ro.pdf.

⁹⁵ Karola Fings, “A ‘Wannsee Conference’ on the Extermination of the Gypsies? New Research Findings Regarding 15 January 1943 and the Auschwitz Decree,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27 (2013): 174–194.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 176.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 178.

Within the German Reich and its annexed territories, the identification and racial classification of so-called “Gypsies” became major selection criteria for deportations. The role of the “scientific-police complex” is also evident on the margins of German territory. During the racial census in Strasbourg in the summer of 1942, 105 persons were identified as “Gypsies” by the Strasbourg police.⁹⁸ However, it appears that the deportation convoy organized from Strasbourg to Auschwitz-Birkenau in March 1943 only comprised 61 individuals.⁹⁹ In fact, the common characteristic of this group of deportees from Strasbourg was that they had all previously been spotted by the “police-scientific complex” in the pre-war years in Germany, but those not deported had not been racially registered in the RHF files as they had lived in France before the war.¹⁰⁰ As an example, all the names of the Rosenbach family members arrested in Alsace and deported from Strasbourg in 1943 appeared in an RHF genealogical tree dated 1942.¹⁰¹ The case of the Rosenbach family illustrates the circulation of genealogical data between the Strasbourg criminal police and the RHF offices regarding Sinti and Roma living in Alsace.

Local studies on the persecution measures and implementation of deportation orders have further demonstrated that the final selection of the deportees was in the hands and judgments of the local *Kriminalpolizei(leit)stellen*.¹⁰² The Reich Central Office was responsible for forwarding the racial reports of the RHF to the *Kriminalpolizeileitstellen*.¹⁰³ The urgent instruction from 29 January 1943 made it clear that the *Kriminalpolizeileitstellen* were in charge and that no request for incarceration had to be made at the RKPA in order to achieve a speedy implementation of the transports to Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹⁰⁴ Some groups were exempt from deportation, including “purebred Sinti and Lalleri Gypsies.” The local criminal police also had the freedom to exclude people from deportation; for example, those in so-called mixed marriages with partners classified as “German-blooded” or those engaged in compulsory work in factories considered important for the war effort.¹⁰⁵

98 Arrest cards of the Strasbourg criminal police, 1940–1944, Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin, 757D 68–107.

99 Entry register (men and women) of the so-called “Gypsy Camp” (*Zigeunerlager*) of Auschwitz-Birkenau, March 22, 1943, 1.1.2.1./530981-2 and 531497-8/ ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

100 Théophile Leroy, “‘Gypsies’ in the Police Eye: Identification, Census and Deportation of Sinti and Roma from Annexed Alsace, 1940 to 1944,” in *Deportations in the Nazi Era: Sources and Research*, eds. Henning Borggräfe and Akim Jah (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 205–226.

101 Page 7 of the Rosenbach genealogical materials, 1942, BArch, R 165/160.

102 Fings and Sparing, *Rassismus*, 295–296.

103 LAB, B 057-01, Nr. 989 (Josef Eichberger), fol. 1025.

104 Transcript of urgent instruction of the RSHA, V A 2 no. 59/43 g, January 1, 1943, IfZ, MS 410, fol. 385–391.

105 Fings and Sparing, *Rassismus*, 288.

In the case of exemptions from deportations, people were to be forcefully sterilized, as the conference participants agreed on 15 January.¹⁰⁶ The forced sterilization of those exempted from deportation has to be seen as a genocidal practice as well. The British Attorney General to the Nuremberg Trials in fact bolstered the charge of genocide in Count III of the Indictment, which listed the deliberate and systematic genocide of Jews but also Sinti, Roma, and others. Referring to the techniques, he highlighted that “various biological devices to achieve the genocide” had been applied, including “sterilization, castration, and obstructions to marriage and procreation.”¹⁰⁷ In total, less than 1% of the approximately 30,000 Sinti and Roma living in the German Reich – excluding the annexed territories – were exempted from deportation or forced sterilization.¹⁰⁸

In post-war investigations, members of the Reich Central Office downplayed their involvement in the deportations of 1943, arguing, for instance, that they had only sent racial reports made by the RHF to the subordinate criminal police departments.¹⁰⁹ The division of labor was crucial for the implementation of the deportations, and the leading criminal police officers of the RKPA were in fact the ones who paved the way for this genocidal practice by sending out deportation orders from the center to the peripheries. As early as 1961, Raul Hilberg, a pioneer of Holocaust research, argued for the relevance of the bureaucratic administration and the division of labor for genocidal violence in the Shoah and the cumulative radicalization of the destruction process.¹¹⁰ With regard to the genocide perpetrated against the Sinti and Roma under the Nazi regime, it was also the interconnection between networks of agents and institutional structures, a long history of antigypsyism, a new intent to exterminate, as well as situational dynamics of violence that were crucial for the radicalization of violence toward a genocide.¹¹¹

106 Fings, “A ‘Wannsee Conference’.”

107 Special release No. 1, Office US Chief of Counsel, Public Relations Office, July 27, 1946, Columbia University Library, RLC 4–8.

108 Fings and Sparing, *Rassismus*, 295.

109 See, for instance, the interrogation of *Kriminaldirektor* Heinrich Böhlhoff during the investigations against him: February 1, 1960, LA NRW, Abt. Rheinland, Rep. 118, Nr. 517, fol. 7.

110 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961).

111 Michael Wildt argued that these interconnections should be considered when analyzing the mass violence of the NS regime; see Wildt, *Generation*, 23.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the 20th century, criminal police had elaborated multiple attempts to create a central file register and to build a coordinated and unified network of data exchange on Sinti and Roma populations. Technological innovations, such as fingerprinting and photography, were among the new tools mobilized by criminal police departments to record, identify, and repress the presence of German Sinti and Roma. The development of these police methods contributed to the emergence of a new perception of “Gypsies,” inherited from the progress of criminal biology. With the NS regime’s seizure of power, racial biological paradigms increased in the way data was collected by police authorities.

Three schools of thought or practice were important during the centralization of the criminal police in 1936 and the formation of the “scientific-police complex” after 1938. First, the long-lasting Munich tradition of the identification and reporting service that pushed forward the creation of local and supraregional information services and dactyloscopic treatments of Sinti and Roma even before the Weimar Republic and ended up as the Reich Central Office. Second, the Berlin tradition of Erich Liebermann von Sonnenberg and the specific notion of “prevention” with transfers to concentration camps in Prussia as early as 1933. Third, Paul Werner’s “racial-biological” paradigms and his close links with Dr. Robert Ritter and his colleagues, such as Adolf Würth, and their scientific definition of the “Gypsy” dating back to 1937/38.

The emergence of the RHF as a central institution specifically dedicated to the registration of Sinti and Roma and composed of racial anthropologists constituted a turning point in the state’s treatment of this population. The building of a racial database, the organization of racial censuses, and the mobilization of genealogical tools reflected the new methods used to spot German Sinti and Roma and unveiled the hereditary conception of the “Gypsy” category that made genocidal policies toward them possible. The implementation of deportation measures illustrates how the racial materials gathered by the RHF – with the support of criminal police departments – played a decisive role in the selection process on a local level. The collection of racial data on a group whose characteristics were defined by the perpetrator’s eye led to a pre-genocidal situation in which all the tools developed over the years were mobilized to achieve the destruction of an entire group on the basis of their ascribed “race.” The decree signed by Heinrich Himmler in December 1938 stating that the “Gypsy question” had to be solved in the

light of the “essence of that race”¹¹² can thus be seen as a threshold when the tools and ideas that had existed before turned into genocidal policies and actions. The situational context of the war further constituted a setting in which mass violence radicalized in general.

Above all, it was a network of perpetrators that willingly and intentionally radicalized the persecution into genocidal violence. The “intent to kill” of this network of perpetrator collectives was manifested in the years between 1938 and 1943 when genocidal ideas were put into practice. This network was further characterized by great mobility and the transfer of knowledge, personal, and practices in order to implement the measures on a wide geographical scale. Furthermore, this network of perpetrators and their role in radicalizing persecution measures makes it clear that there were many entanglements with other state crimes, such as the Shoah or the resettlement programs of “ethnic” Germans. Future research on the history of transfers or a *histoire croisée* could thus be very insightful in this respect.

In postwar German society, the perpetrators maintained powerful positions and continued to influence the general population’s attitude toward the minority as well as the compensation procedures of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators. None of the perpetrators of the “scientific-police complex” was convicted in a trial.¹¹³ Officers from the criminal police apparatus often remained within police forces after 1945, and members of the Reich Central Office – like Wilhelm Supp and Josef Eichberger – started working for the Bavarian LKA in the postwar years, specializing in this group of people again.¹¹⁴ Paul Werner worked for the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of the Interior and supported postwar regulations against Sinti and Roma from the realm of civil administration.¹¹⁵

Even today, police work remains characterized by structurally embedded forms of antigypsyism, e.g., when specific forms of crimes are attributed to them

112 Runderlass des Reichsführer-SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerplage, December 8, 1938, Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preußischen Ministeriums des Innern, 1938, Nr. 51, 2105–2106, in *Deutsches Kriminalpolizeiblatt*, 20.3.1939, BArch, R 58/9560.

113 Ulrich F. Oppermann, *Zum Umgang der deutschen Justiz mit an der Roma-Minderheit begangenen NS-Verbrechen nach 1945: Das Sammelverfahren zum “Zigeunerkomplex” (1958–1970)*, accessed July 15, 2022, https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimat-integration/antiziganismus/opfermann-nsg-verfahren.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2.

114 Eveline Diener, *Das Bayerische Landeskriminalamt und seine “Zigeunerpolizei”: Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten der bayerischen “Zigeunerermittlung” im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaft, 2021).

115 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, 11.

or suspected criminals are labeled in ethnic terms.¹¹⁶ In 2010, a journalistic investigation revealed the existence of an ethnic file on Sinti, Roma and Travellers compiled by the French Gendarmerie since at least the 1990s.¹¹⁷ This file, entitled “Minorities of non-sedentary ethnic origin”, is kept within a “Central Office for Combating Itinerant Crime”. Furthermore, this group’s genetic data has now been gathered, and researchers claim that these people are not distinct by their “race” but by their genetic makeup, which just constitutes a semantic shift from “racial” paradigms to genetic.¹¹⁸ The majority of this research is conducted in the field of criminology and is of interest to the police apparatus. Despite Auschwitz, therefore, the stigmatization and criminalization of Sinti and Roma continue in new guises.

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¹¹⁶ Markus End, *Antiziganismus und Polizei* (Schriftenreihe des Zentralrats Deutscher Sinti und Roma, vol. 12 (Heidelberg: Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 2019).

¹¹⁷ Franck Johannès, “La gendarmerie détient un fichier Roms illégal”, 7.10.2010, *Le Monde*, accessed March 15, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2010/10/07/la-gendarmerie-detient-un-fichier-roms-illegal_1421548_3224.html.

¹¹⁸ Veronika Lipphardt, Gudrun A. Rappold, and Mihai Surdu, “Representing Vulnerable Populations in Genetic Studies: The Case of the Roma,” *Science in Context* 34 (2021), 69–100.

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