INTRODUCTION TO THE TESTIMONY OF

Krystyna Gil

By Aleksandra Szcecepan, University of Potsdam

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Introduction

Krystyna Gil was born Krystyna Ciuroń in the small village of Szczurowa, 60km east of Kraków, on 5 November 1938. Her family belonged to the local sedentary Roma from the Bergitka (highlander or Carpathian) Roma subgroup. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, Szczurowa was part of the Nazi-occupied General Government (*Generalgouvernement*), that part of pre-war Poland administered by German officials, headed by Hans Frank and with headquarters in Kraków. Almost the whole community of Szczurowa Roma – 93 people, who had lived in the village together with Poles and Jews for a century – were murdered at the local cemetery in a single execution in the early morning of 3 July 1943.[1] There were only a few survivors of the massacre, and Krystyna Gil was one of them.

Krystyna Gil gave her testimony for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies on 13 May 1995 in Kraków, at the age of 57. She was interviewed by Michał Sobelman, a second-generation Polish Jew, historian, and diplomat who in 1969 had emigrated to Israel. Gil's account is the only Romani testimony among 32 interviews recorded in Polish and on-site, and the only Polish-language testimony among the 48 Romani accounts in the Fortunoff collection. It is also the first testimony of many that Gil would go on to give to various institutions and on many occasions over the following years. She would become one of the most prominent witnesses of the Romani Holocaust in Poland.

Gil's testimony is a unique historical document: a survivor's account of an instance of Nazi genocidal persecution targeting sedentary Roma, evidence of an execution meticulously planned, carried

[1] Romani families appear in the Szczurowa parish register for the first time in the 1820s. Adam Bartosz, *Małopolski szlak martyrologii Romów* (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe w Tarnowie, 2015), 18.

out with the help of the Polish "blue" police and engaging the ethnically Polish local population. But her testimony constitutes a fascinating document also for a different reason: it is a record of an intimate and intense encounter between the survivor and her interviewer, two people from entirely distinct backgrounds, a conversation sometimes tense and permeated with mutual misunderstandings, but for that even more powerful and resonant. In this over-an-hour-long recording, Krystyna Gil in a sense becomes a witness of the Romani Holocaust: she reclaims the history of the "forgotten"[2] genocide, shows the institutional and economic preconditions of its remembrance and testifies to women's agency during and after the war. Her testimony is a great illustration of how video testimonies provide crucial historical sources not only because of their factual content but also as documents on how knowledge of the Holocaust is produced and disseminated.[3]

Rural Holocaust

At the center of Krystyna Gil's account stands her survival: as a 5-year-old girl, she escaped with her grandmother from the massacre of the entire Szczurowa Romani community. She describes these events as follows. On 5 July 1943, at 3 a.m., the Romani settlement in the village was surrounded by the Polish

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[2] In Gabrielle Tyrnauer's poignant summary: "In the vast body of Holocaust literature, the story of the Gypsy extermination has become an almost forgotten footnote to the history of Nazi genocide. Under Hitler's rule, approximately half a million European Gypsies were systematically slaughtered. Yet there was no Gypsy witness at the Nuremberg trials and no one was accused of the crime. Neither the scholars who provided the data, nor the officials who formulated the 'final solution to the Gypsy problem,' nor the bureaucrats and military men who executed it were ever called to account. The Gypsies became the forgotten victims of the Holocaust." Gabrielle Tyrnauer, "'Mastering the Past': Germans and Gypsies," in Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (eds.), *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 367. See also: Grattan Puxon, "The Forgotten Victims," *Patterns of Prejudice* 11, no. 2 (1977): 23-28. Sławomir Kapralski suggests understanding the 'forgetting' of the Romani Holocaust in the comparative perspective of postcolonial critique, and uses terms such as *silencing* and *erasure* of the past of the colonized in the history written by the colonizers. Sławomir Kapralski, *Naród z popiołów: Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2012), 196; Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

[3] Many scholars emphasize that, in the case of the Romani Holocaust, oral testimonies are of utmost importance since they supplement the lack of official documentation of the crimes. See Michelle Kelso, "Romani Women and the Holocaust: Testimonies of Sexual Violence in Romanian-Controlled Transnistria," in JoAnn Di Georgio-Lutz and Donna Gosbee (eds.), *Women and Genocide: Gendered Experience of Violence, Survival, and Resistance* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2016), 37-71; Volha Bartash, "Let the Victims Speak: Memories of Belarusian Roma as Sources for Genocide Studies," in Alexander Friedman and Rainer Hudemann (eds.), *Diskriminiert – vernichtet – vergessen. Behinderte in der Sowjetunion, unter nationalsozialistischer Besatzung und im Ostblock 1917-1991* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), 499-507; Anton Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," in Anton Weiss-Wendt (ed.), *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 1-26.

"blue" police and German gendarmerie, and the first transport of victims, consisting of male members of the community, were forced on carriages (provided by local peasants) that took them to the local cemetery, where they were shot and their bodies thrown into a mass grave. Then, the carts came back for the remaining women and children. Krystyna was already on a carriage with her mother, sister, brother, and three aunts, all from the Ciuroń family, when her grandmother approached the carriage and was stopped by a German gendarme who told her not to get on. Krystyna's mother took her and handed her to the grandmother saying: "Mum, take her with you. If you are left behind, you shall at least have her."[4] Although her grandmother preferred to take Krystyna's brother, he did not want to leave the cart and finally it was Krystyna who stayed. The carriages left for the cemetery but soon returned for the remaining group and Krystyna and her grandmother got on. At the market square 300 meters from the cemetery, the carriage was stopped by a Polish woman, the owner of a local tavern, who invited the gendarmes in for some food and drinks.[5] When the Germans left, the head of the Polish "blue" police approached the carriage and said: "Run if you can." Krystyna and her grandmother hurriedly returned home, where they discovered the body of Krystyna's grandfather, Michał Ciuroń, who had been shot in his bed. As it turned out, all their belongings were gone, stolen by Polish neighbors. "How much time could have passed? Nearly one hour. There was nothing to take along... People had stolen everything because they knew that Gypsies would not be coming back, that they would all be killed," Krystyna Gil recalls. They fled the village immediately and spent the rest of the war hiding in various places in central Poland.

Krystyna Gil does not mention it, but the Szczurowa massacre was led by a German gendarme from the detachment in Dąbrowa Tarnowska: Engelbert Guzdek, who became notorious in the area for his cruelty towards civilians.[6] He headed a special unit consisting of German gendarmes and Polish "blue" policemen that specialized in "catching bandits, Jews, and other individuals"[7] (so-called *Jagdkommando*),

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[4] Testimony of Krystyna G., Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, HVT-3178. ź Segment 2 (Tape 1), 00:11:21. All cited time stamps refer to this testimony.

[5] According to the eyewitness Józef Gofron, it was his sister Maria Piotrowska who stopped the Germans to ask for her Romani employee Petronela Ruwińska. Ruwińska was married to a Polish man and lived outside the Romani settlement. Interview with Józef Gofron.

[6] He was called "Bloody Phantom" or "the Butcher". He was executed soon after the Szczurowa massacre, in August 1943 by the Polish underground. Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 96-100, 264, 265; Adam Kazimierz Musiał, *Krwawe Upiory, Dzieje powiatu Dąbrowa Tarnowska w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej* (Tarnów: Karat, 1993).

[7] Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*, 99.

especially hunting for local Jews hiding along the Vistula river.[8] According to the investigation carried out in 1969 by the Chief Commission for Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Poland (Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce), Guzdek came to Szczurowa with three other Germans: Paul Stosch, Robert Jahn and Finder, plus several Polish "blue" policemen from nearby Otfinów.[9] They were assisted by the local "blue" policemen, head Tadeusz Strycharz and Ludwiczak.[10] The pit at the cemetery was dug by local firemen.[11] Apart from Krystyna Gil and her grandmother Justyna Ciuroń, the only survivors of the massacre were Petronela Ruwińska and Ludwika Ciuroń.[12]

The case of Szczurowa draws our attention to two important issues. First, the question of the geography of the Romani Holocaust. Until recently, both historical research and Romani memory activism focused mostly on the fates of Austrian and German Roma and Sinti and the biggest ghettos and camps where European Roma were incarcerated and killed: the Łódź and Warsaw ghettos, Ravensbrück and Auschwitz. This was due to two main reasons: the German Roma and Sinti survivors were the most active in the political arena;[13] and the available archives were the German ones, which contained mostly documents related to deportations and Nazi biopolitics against Roma and Sinti, such as sterilization as well as medical experiments conducted by the infamous Research Institute for Racial Hygiene led by

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[8] On the hunts (*Judenjagd*), see Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*. In her interview for the Shoah Foundation, Maria Długowiejska, a Jewish survivor from the Szczurowa region, describes the hunts on the Vistula River region and recounts how her husband Józef Langdorf lost his father and brother in one of them. Interview with Maria Długowiejska, 16.12.1996, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (hereafter USC SF-VHA), no. 25576. The hunts on the riverbank are also described in the testimony of Stanisław Giemza for the investigation of the Chief Commission for Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Poland (Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce) in 1969. Institute for National Remembrance, Akta żandarmerii w Brzesku, DS 43/67, vol. 2.

[9] INR, DS 43/67, vol. 2.

[10] After the war, Strycharz was sentenced to 15 years in prison for killing two Jews during the war, INR, DS 43/67, vol. 2.

[11] Interview with Józef Gofron, 20.07.2002, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG-50.488*0143.

[12] INR, DS 43/67, vol. 2. Petronela Ruwińska and Ludwika Ciuroń remained in Szczurowa after the war.

[13] Thanks especially to the activity of Romani Rose and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. In 1973, they erected the first monument for Roma and Sinti victims in Auschwitz (on the site where the Roma family camp in Birkenau (BIIe) was situated). On 4 April 1980, Rose with a group of other Roma went on hunger strike at Dachau memorial site, demanding official recognition of crimes committed against Roma and Sinti by the Nazi regime, restitutions and a culture center for Sinti. The protest aroused significant interest among the German media and gave the Romani Holocaust visibility in the German public sphere for the first time. From 1991, Rose led the Documentation and Culture Centre of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg. Tyrnauer, "'Mastering the Past'," 370-371; Kapralski, *Naród z popiołów*, 267-268. See also: Sławomir Kapralski, Maria Martyniak and Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Roma in Auschwitz*, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2011).

criminal biologist Robert Ritter.[14] Thus, in the postwar years Auschwitz became the undebated symbol of the Romani Holocaust and every year on 2 August, on the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day,[15] special celebrations are held there. Yet, over the last two decades historians have charted an expanded cartography of the Romani Holocaust, showing its much less organized and much more decentralized character in Eastern and Southern Europe.[16] Polish ethnographer Jerzy Ficowski,[17] one of the first to document the persecution of the Roma during World War II, wrote as early as 1950:

> It would be erroneous to think that the destruction of the Gypsies was limited to murdering them in concentration and in extermination camps. Gypsies used to be shot in the forests during almost the whole period of German occupation […] In comparison with the mass murders of the Gypsies in Auschwitz, those were relatively minor executions, but they were so numerous that they caused the tragic deaths of thousands of Gypsies outside the camps.[18]

To give a telling example, in a radius of 20km from Szczurowa, three other villages witnessed massacres of Roma in the very same period. In July 1942, there were two big executions in the vicinity: Bielcza, where 28 people were shot on the outskirts of the village, and Borzęcin, where a group of 29 people was executed in a forest. In July 1943, in Żabno, 49 Roma were shot at the local Catholic

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[14] Gilad Margalit, *Germany and Its Gypsies: A Post-Auschwitz Ordeal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002): 32-55; Sybil Milton, "Hidden Lives: Sinti and Roma Women," in Elizabeth Baer and Myrna Goldenberg (eds.), *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 53-75.

[15] Declared by the European Parliament as European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma on 15 July 2015. The Polish Parliament established 2 August as Genocide Remembrance Day of the Roma and Sinti by a parliamentary resolution of 29 July 2011. See Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, "Holokaust Romów. Czy rzeczywiście zapomniany?" *Nigdy Więcej* 2 (2016).

[16] See especially Martin Holler, *Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord an den Roma in der besetzten Sowjetunion (1941-1944)* (Heidelberg: Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 2009); Martin Holler, "'Like Jews?' The Nazi Persecution and Extermination of Soviet Roma Under the German Military Administration: A New Interpretation, Based on Soviet Sources," *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah* 24 (2010): 137-176; Mikhail Tyaglyy, "Nazi Occupation Policies and the Mass Murder of the Roma in Ukraine," in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma*, 120-152; Tomislav Dulic, "Mass Killing in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945: A Case for Comparative Research," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 3 (2006): 255-281.

[17] For more on Ficowski, see Emilia Kledzik, *Perspektywa poety. Cyganologia Jerzego Ficowskiego* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2023).

[18] Jerzy Ficowski, "The Polish Gypsies of Today," trans. Józef Rotblat, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 3, vol. 29, no. 3-4 (1950): 92.

cemetery.[19] "In [all] regions of the occupied country the situation was the same. […] It happened everywhere; singular families, singular people who managed to escape transports or executions were hunted and killed,"[20] Ficowski comments in his pioneering *Gypsies in Poland* (Cyganie w Polsce, 1989 [1953]).[21] This phenomenon was captured poignantly in the poem *Smutna pieśń* (A Sorrowful Song) by Polish Romani poet Papusza (Bronisława Wajs), a Holocaust survivor who, during the war, hid with her camp in the forests of Volhynia:[22]

> *There was no life for Gypsies in the city*
>
> *And in the countryside they killed us, they killed us.*
>
> *What to do? Gypsy women went with their children to the woods,*
>
> *Far into the woods, so German dogs wouldn't find them.*[23]

The forest as a space of both escape and hunt is a powerful symbol in post-Holocaust Romani imagery. The symbol is very well captured in paintings by survivor Ceija Stojka (e.g. *Untitled*, 1993; *Untitled*, 1995; *Die 3 letzten Luftballons. In Auschwitz ist noch Platz*, 2008),[24] but also in the works of younger generation Romani artists, such as Valérie Leray (*Castel "de la pierre", Coudrecieux 2006 / Internment Camp for Gypsies 1940-1946*),[25] or Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's wooden *Monument to the Murdered Roma* in the forest

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[19] Jerzy Ficowski, *Cyganie w Polsce. Dzieje i obyczaje* (Warszawa: Interpress, 1989), 40; Bartosz, *Małopolski szlak martyrologii Romów*; Adam Bartosz, "Ways of Commemorating Roma Extermination Sites in Poland," in International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (ed.), *Killing Sites: Research and Remembrance* (Berlin: Metropol – IHRA, 2015), 179-184; Aleksandra Szczepan and Łukasz Posłuszny, "Bielcza i Borzęcin. Ustanawianie i uśmierzanie pamięci o romskiej Zagładzie," in Roma Sendyka et al. (eds.), *Nie-miejsca pamięci: nekrotopografie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2021), 169-245.

[20] Ficowski, *Cyganie w Polsce*, 40.

[21] In the first edition of the book (1953), Ficowski included testimonies of the survivors of these dispersed killings that he had collected himself whilst travelling with a Romani camp. In the later edition, he added exact numbers of victims from dozens of locales, which was now possible thanks to the investigations of the aforementioned Chief Commission for Investigation, which were carried out in the whole country in the 1960s and 1970s.

[22] For more on Papusza, see: Emilia Kledzik, "Bronislawa Wajs-Papusza: Between Biography and Legend," *Romani Studies* 30, no. 2 (2020): 267-272.

[23] Papusza, *Pieśni mówione* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1973), 35 (my translation). I thank Natalia Gancarz for providing me with the copy of the poem.

[24] See section *La caza 1938-1948*, in Ceija Stojka, *Esto ha pasado* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2019), 58-83.

[25] See website of the artist https://www.valerieleray.com/place-with-no-name.

near Borzęcin (2014), on which there is an inscription with a quote from the poem by Papusza cited above.[26]

Krystyna Gil explains to her interlocutor:

> A large number of people were buried at unknown sites. The only thing we know [about our family's grave] is the location because the grave is there. But many people were buried and there are no graves. […] So in the forests you kind of get the feeling that they are somewhere but there is no sign that Roma people are there.[27]

In a poignant manner, she points out to her interviewer the very specificity of the Romani Holocaust and its aftermath. Her action is even more significant because her interviewer, Michał Sobelman, speaks from a quite different position and a distant epistemological framework: he frequently misspells the name of the village and seems to be unfamiliar with the peripheral, rural character of the massacre. In the lack of common ground, he digs into his own symbolic capital: later in the interview, he asks Gil about her impressions of the movie *And the Violins Stopped Playing* (1988).[28] This Polish-American historical-drama tells the story of a Polish Roma violinist in occupied Warsaw who ends up in Auschwitz; as such, it is a narrative of "central" Holocaust geography, with two main points on the map: Warsaw and Auschwitz. Gil bears testimony to rather different experiences: the dispersed, rural Romani Holocaust that was ubiquitous in Eastern Europe, carried out mostly outside the extermination camps, in a plethora of individual locations, often in the peripheries of human settlements, on the fields and in the forests, where the Roma were pursued and murdered, often with help of non-Roma neighbors. As Gil's testimony clearly shows, in the countryside, the Romani Holocaust had a rather blurred and intimate character and was a matter of communal effort. It engaged a whole village in discrete acts of killing: giving carts, digging graves,

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[26] See http://muzeum.tarnow.pl/na-bister/en/borzecin-dolny-memorial/. On the history of the monument: Natalia Gancarz, "'I stanie się on częścią tego miejsca.' Jak pomnik staje się pomnikiem," *Studia Romologica* 9 (2016): 138-140. In April 2016, the monument in Borzęcin was destroyed by unknown perpetrators, who chopped the wooden figures into pieces and tried to remove the wooden panel from its foundation. The destruction of the monument sparked discussion on a national level and was widely covered in the media. A group of artists and intellectuals wrote an open letter to president Andrzej Duda demanding a thorough investigation and reconstruction of the monument. In the same year, thanks to the support of the Polish president, the memorial was renovated. See my interview with the artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas and Aleksandra Szczepan, "Protest z wosku. Wywiad z Małgorzatą Mirgą-Tas," *Dwutygodnik* 298 (2020), https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/9016-protest-z-wosku.html.

[27] Segment 9 (Tape 2), 00:21:17.

[28] Segment 11 (Tape 3), 00:03:22. *And the Violins Stopped Playing* (1988) is directed by Alexander Ramati.

and looting the abandoned property. Many of these acts are still uncommemorated,[29] and thorough historical and archival research on the Romani Holocaust in Poland remains in many cases a task for future.[30]

The second issue that Krystyna Gil's testimony brings to the fore, along with the expanded geographies of the Romani Holocaust, is the discussion among historians about whether the very notion of genocide should be used regarding Nazi policies against Roma. In the case of German and Austrian Roma and Sinti, the answer is more straightforward, since there is an archival trace that may serve as evidence that violence against Roma and Sinti was planned and racially motivated. On 8 December 1938, Heinrich Himmler, commander of the German police, issued a circular "Combating the Gypsy Plague" that argued that Roma and Sinti were a danger to the German race.[31] Four years later, in December 1942, Himmler ordered that Roma from the whole of Europe should be deported to the "Gypsy family camp" in Auschwitz where 21,000 Roma perished (of which over 80 percent came from Germany, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.)[32] Yet, in the case of the less organized killings, such as those in the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union, there is no consensus. Some scholars argue for a lack of genocidal intent in the German policies against Soviet Roma, demonstrating that only itinerant Roma were persecuted, thereby indicating that the motivation was "asocial" status, not ethnicity.[33] Yet, recent findings of Martin Holler and Mikhail Tyaglyy – who investigated the mass murder of Roma in the Nazi-invaded Soviet Union and used not only German sources but also reports of the records of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes Committed by German Fascists and their Collaborators on

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[29] For instance, the site of the mass grave in nearby Bielcza. See Szczepan and Posłuszny, "Bielcza i Borzęcin"; Natalia Gancarz, " Na bister. Żeby pamiętać," *Studia Romologica* 9 (2016): 283-292.

[30] However, it is important to acknowledge the work to identify, catalogue and commemorate the sites of the Romani Holocaust undertaken by Adam Bartosz and Natalia Gancarz. See Bartosz, *Małopolski szlak martyrologii Romów*; Gancarz, "Na Bister"; Natalia Gancarz, *Na bister – Nie zapomnij – Do not forget* (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe – Komitet Opieki nad Zabytkami Kultury Żydowskiej w Tarnowie, 2020). The sites of the Romani Holocaust in Poland and Europe are catalogued by Natalia Gancarz on the website "Na Bister": https://muzeum.tarnow.pl/na-bister/en/.

[31] Margalit, *Germany and Its Gypsies*, 35.

[32] Celia Donert, "Introduction," in Celia Donert and Eve Rosenhaft (eds.), *The Legacies of the Romani Genocide in Europe since 1945* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 5; Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," 5.

[33] Yehuda Bauer, *Die dunkle Seite der Geschichte: Die Shoah in historischer Sicht – Interpretationen und Re-Interpretationen* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001), 90-93; Gilad Margalit, *Germany and Its Gypsies*; Günter Lewy, The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies (Oxford, 2000). After: Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," 4; Holler, "'Like Jews?'": 138-139.

the Territory of the USSR (ChGK) – show that the Roma were murdered regardless of their social status and lifestyle, both sedentary and itinerant. The persecution was inflicted by various forces: the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) of the German Security Police, the SS, the Wehrmacht, the field gendarmerie, and the civil administration.[34] As Anton Weiss-Wendt puts it, "The Nazis variably defined the Roma in racial and social terms. This duality enabled a malicious interpretation, according to which the sum total of the Roma's purportedly inherent social traits amounted to a certain negative racial type."[35] Although much less organized, often unpredicted and varying in methods due to geographical contexts, and not grounded in racial stereotypes as prevalent as antisemitism, the treatment of the Roma aimed at their annihilation in systematic genocide. The Jewish Holocaust and the Romani Holocaust were also chronologically interconnected: Jews were murdered first, immediately after the invasion, whereas Roma were usually targeted later, simultaneously with the annihilation of the last remaining Jewish citizens.[36]

The case of Szczurowa seems to corroborate the findings of scholars researching the crimes against the Soviet Roma: Roma were victimized due to their ethnicity, not social status, and the killings of Roma were strictly related to the persecution of Jews. Before the war, the village had a population of 1,971, including 132 Jews and around 100 Roma.[37] In May 1941, the Jewish population grew to 394 people due to the influx of refugees, mostly from Kraków.[38] In July 1942, Szczurowa Jews were deported to the ghetto in Brzesko, transported by Polish peasants on their carriages by the order of German gendarmes. Some of the Jewish citizens stayed in hiding, mostly on the riverbank of the Vistula. The massacre of Roma in Szczurowa happened at the same time that hunts for the remaining Jews were taking place. Moreover, Szczurowa Roma were sedentary, tightly interwoven into the social fabric of the village. The families of Ciuroń, Siwak, Rakoczy, and Białoń lived in the Roma settlement on the outskirts of the village and worked

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[34] Tyaglyy, "Nazi Occupation Policies," 121.

[35] Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," 1.

[36] Holler, "'Like Jews?'": 175.

[37] According to the census carried out on 30 September 1921. See *Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej opracowany na podstawie wyników pierwszego powszechnego spisu ludności z dn. 30 września 1921 r. i innych źródeł urzędowych*, vol. 12 *Województwo Krakowskie. Śląsk Cieszyński* (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1925). In March 1943, according to the German census, Szczurowa had 1866 residents. See *Amtliches Gemeinde- und Dorfverzeichnis für das Generalgouvernement auf Grund der Summarischen Bevölkerungsbestandsaufnahme am 1. März 1943* (Krakau: Burgverlag Krakau G.m.b.H., 1943). I thank Łukasz Krzyżanowski for help with finding this data.

[38] Joint Distribution Commitee Archive, Sprawozdanie z czynności komitetu za marzec 1941, 12.03.1941, no. 2657971.

as musicians and blacksmiths. The grandfather of Krystyna Gil, Michał Ciuroń, was a successful violinist who spent some years playing in the US. Her maternal grandmother, Justyna Ciuroń, was an ethnic Pole, as was her father, which illustrates at a deeper level how the Roma community was a permanent component of the village social structure.[39] Finally, as researchers argue, the fates of the Roma depended greatly on local context: on their inclusion in local communities and on the decisions of the local authorities.[40] The case of the Szczurowa massacre opens questions about the attitudes of ethnically Polish neighbors, especially the ones from the Polish "blue" police or firemen.

The integration of the Roma community into the social fabric of Szczurowa is also a reason why the exact number and names of victims are known. Yet, this is a rare instance in the case of the Romani Holocaust. At some point during the interview, Michał Sobelman asks Krystyna Gil: "Do you know roughly how many Roma people, how many Gypsies, died during the Second World War here in Poland? Has any research been done?" The witness explains:

> I don't know if the exact number has been established by anyone. I don't know. I doubt it. Because Gypsies did not register their fixed addresses. They just stayed at a given place, they were there but it's not known how many there were and how many died. If we had been dealing with sedentary [Roma], we would have known how many there were. The way things are, we don't. The same goes for the Auschwitz camp. It is not certain how many persons died there. Has the number given been reliably established? Is it lower or higher compared to others? Is it the right number? There were incoming transports that were not recorded anywhere. They were not. Bodies were taken directly to the crematorium and it is not known how many were cremated. The same here. So we shall not get to the bottom of this. Our history shall probably not get to the bottom of this.[41]

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[39] Mixed marriages were not rare among sedentary Roma. See Volha Bartash, "The Romani Family before and during the Holocaust: How Much Do We Know? An Ethnographic-Historical Study in the Belarusian-Lithuanian Border Region," in Eliyana R. Adler and Katerina Capková (eds.), *Jewish and Romani Families in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 17-41.

[40] Bartash, "Let the Victims Speak," 501; Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," 2.

[41] Segment 9 (Tape 2), 00:21:08, 00:21:17.

And indeed, the exact number of Roma victims of Nazi persecution is debated. Usually, historians estimate between 96,000 and 500,000 victims, with many historians agreeing on 200,000.[42] In the case of Poland, Ficowski estimated that 8,000 out of 20,000 Roma were murdered.[43]

The Romani Holocaust has taken place on the sidelines

As the already quoted exchanges between Krystyna Gil and Michał Sobelman acutely show, the interviewee and interviewer differ from each other in various respects, such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Sobelman is an educated man, a career diplomat and a descendant of Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors, who left Poland for Israel due to the antisemitic campaign of 1968.[44] Among 13 interviews he recorded for the Fortunoff Archive, Krystyna Gil is his only Roma interlocutor, and his conceptual framework, embedded as it is in Jewish history and collective memory, and his ignorance regarding the history of the Roma, cause him sometimes to flounder in his preconceptions and stereotypes. He does not distinguish between Romani sub-groups and never asks the witness whether she speaks Romany, nor does he know about Romani traditions and customs. Even though Gil comes from a non-nomadic Romani settlement that had lived with Polish and Jewish neighbors for decades, the interviewer inquires whether she misses the "Gypsy caravan life" and asks about her views on the palaces of rich Roma coming from the Polska Roma subgroup (different and distant from Bergitka Roma, the group to which Krystyna Gil belongs) in Zgierz near Łódź.[45] These questions may be seen as an effect of projected othering and exoticizing, as well as Sobelman's occasional "ontological deafness."[46]

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[42] Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," 1.

[43] Ficowski, *Cyganie w Polsce*, 44; Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage"* (Hamburg: Christians, 1996), 283.

[44] Due to the antisemitic campaign launched by the Communist authorities and the eruption of antisemitic sentiments in Polish society (known as "March 1968"), 13,000 Polish Jews left Poland in the years 1968-1969, mostly to Israel, North America and Sweden. See Feliks Tych, "The 'March '68' Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development and Consequences," in Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), *Jewish Presence in Absence: The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944-2010*, trans. Grzegorz Dąbkowski and Jessica Taylor-Kucia (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2014), 451-472; Dariusz Stola, "Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967-1968," *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 25 (2006): 175-201.

[45] Segment 7 (Tape 2), 00:08:58, 00:09:04, 00:09:40.

[46] Nicole Immler and Éva Kovács, "Zum politischen Anspruch der Oral History. Über das epistemische Schweigen und die ontologische Taubheit der Mehrheitsgesellschaft," *FQS Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 23, no. 2 (2022).

Yet, these discrepancies do not necessarily need to be treated as a disadvantage. As Noah Shenker wrote, those "messier, more unplanned moments that emerge throughout the testimony process […] represent unexpected and essential traces of meaning."[47] For it is "the very untidiness of the testimony", in Hannah Pollin-Galay words, that "can produce insight."[48] The role of interviewers is rarely scrutinized in the analyses of Holocaust testimony, yet attentiveness to the clashes between the interviewer's and interviewee's positionalities – in this case related to gender, class, and ethnicity – allows us to better understand the experiences to which the witness gives testimony.

At the beginning of their conversation, Sobelman asks Gil if he should call her Gypsy or Roma. When she gives him a hesitant answer that "maybe Roma somehow sounds gentler," he inquires: "When somebody calls you 'Gypsy' in the street, do you take offense?" Gil, confounded, clarifies:

> It's slightly diminishing but you cannot take offense. If somebody calls me a 'Gypsy' and I actually am one, I tend to turn a deaf ear. It seldom happens in my close environment: I have been living among Poles for so many years. I've been living in this apartment block since 1956. No one has yet called me 'Roma' or 'Gypsy' there.

Sobelman explains: "I'm just asking because you know sometimes even the word 'Jew' makes for an unpleasant association in Polish also, mainly to the person uttering the word 'Jew' and not to the Jew himself."[49] Sobelman refers to his own experience: as a descendant of Jewish survivors who lived through the Polish antisemitic campaign of 1968, he knows well how the word "Jew" may be used as a slur. In his short autobiographical essay, he wrote: "On a football pitch, when you didn't pass the ball or missed a goal, after softer insults, like 'loser,' 'moron,' or 'clown,' came inevitably 'Jew.' Very early, when I was 8-10 years old, I understood that in Poland there is nothing worse than to be a Jew."[50] Thus, he makes a false analogy and assumes that the word "Gypsy" is a neutral term and is considered offensive – just as

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[47] Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 2.

[48] Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 8.

[49] Segment 1 (Tape 1), 00:00:38, 00:00:44, 00:01:30, 00:01:33, 00:02:40.

[50] Michał Sobelman, "Wyjazd. Marzec 1968 – refleksje świadka," in Alicja Bartuś (ed.), *Europa wobec wyzwań XXI wieku. Deportacje, wysiedlenia i przymusowe migracje jako nieodłączny element konfliktów zbrojnych i wojen współczesnego świata* (Oświęcim: Urząd Miasta Oświęcim, 2014), 72. See also the interview with Michał Sobelman, "Babcia była antysemitką. Mówiła, że mój ojciec jest gburem, złym człowiekiem i Mośkiem," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 09.10.2017, https://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,22476131,michal-sobelman-babcia-byla-antysemitka-mowila-ze-moj.html.

the word "Jew" is used as a slur, only by those who hold anti-Roma prejudice. He proceeds to call her "Gypsy" throughout the whole interview. Yet, unlike the word "Jew", "Gypsy" is not a neutral name: it has been used to describe Roma by a majority group and often has pejorative connotations, whereas "Roma" is a word of self-identification ("Rom" means in Romany a man and "Romni" a woman).[51] This is what Gil, in a polite manner, tries to explain to her interviewer: "Gypsy" is "slightly diminishing" and "Roma somehow sounds gentler." At the same time, she assures Sobelman that "no one yet" called her "Roma" or "Gypsy" in the neighborhood where she lives, suggesting that her ethnicity has not been called out on her as a slur, similarly to Sobelman's experience. It is important to keep in mind that at the time when the interview was recorded the change of language regarding Roma was still under way and use of the word "Gypsy" was widespread and considered by many Roma as neutral and acceptable.

Sobelman uses comparisons with the Jewish experience throughout the entire interview, which usually provide ground for short circuits of sudden understanding and solidarity with his interviewee. When Gil describes how after escaping the massacre in Szczurowa she and her grandmother spent the rest of the war in the Kieleckie region, hiding in several villages, it prompts discussion of the experience of hiding and passing as Poles, or "whites" in Gil's term (she uses here a common expression used by Roma to denote non-Romani people, in Romany called *gadje*), during the occupation. The witness describes how she "didn't look like a Gypsy" and the interviewer immediately relates it to the Jewish experience of *passing* (as a non-Jew) during the Holocaust. He asks: "You didn't have a look?" and uses an elliptic phrase "to have a look" which stands for "to have a Jewish look," meaning "to look like a Jew." It was commonly used during the Holocaust and after the war, by both survivors and non-Jewish witnesses, together with "to have a good look," meaning "to look like a non-Jew." He also ponders whether she could have been

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[51] The word "Gypsy" and its equivalents in other languages, like "Cygan" in Polish or "Zigeuner" in German, has in many languages derogative connotations, e.g. in Polish *cyganić* means "to cheat." The word "Cygan" (as also "Zigeuner") has an unclear etymology; it might come from the Greek *Atsínganoi*, a deformed version of *Athínganoi*, the name of a heretic sect; "Gypsy" derives from "Egypt" and is a remnant of a legend born in the Middle Ages of an origin in ancient Egypt. "Roma" as a word of self-identification has been used more frequently since the emergence of a Romani civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s and first World Romani Congresses (London, 1971; Geneva, 1978, where the International Romani Union was founded). In its broader meaning, it entails therefore a political self-determination and is used as a collective term for the whole minority. In a narrow sense, it denotes Romani subgroups from Eastern and Southern Europe. This is why there are some communities who do not recognize it, such as German Sinti, who suggest instead using the phrase "Sinti and Roma." See: Kapralski, *Naród z popiołów*, 78-84; "Erläuterungen zum Begriff 'Zigeuner,'" Central Council of Sinti and Roma, https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/sinti-und-roma-zigeuner/; Milton, "Hidden Lives," 54; Margalit, *Germany and Its Gypsies*, 3-4.

mistaken for a Jew.[52] The Jewish Holocaust is a constant frame of reference also for the witness: Gil emphasizes that "both Jews and Gypsies lived through almost the same ordeal during the war."[53] At some point Sobelman asks his interlocutor directly: "Are you interested in Jews' martyrdom during the Second World War?"[54] Yet, the seemingly analogous positions of Roma and Jews may be also a source of differentiation. The witness talks about her need to be close to the murdered and her coming back to Szczurowa after the war, despite the destruction of its Romani social fabric. When the interviewer rebuts: "While people sort of ran away, Jews, for instance, were leaving Poland to stay away from the country where their families had been killed," she comments: "It was like a magnet that attracted people."[55]

As Ari Joskowicz has aptly showed, the memory of the Romani Holocaust exists in a strong, yet "profoundly asymmetrical" relationship to the Jewish Holocaust, and "even today, Romani history cannot be written without taking account of Jewish archival and memory politics."[56] Most testimonies of Romani Holocaust survivors are available thanks to Jewish archival institutions, such as the Fortunoff Archive, Shoah Foundation or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The institutional setting of Gil's testimony, namely the context of the interview, its mere singularity among other Polish-language testimonies, and the persona of the interviewer, are obvious instances of this situation. The history of the Jewish Holocaust and remembrance has created basic templates through which the Romani Holocaust is interpreted and commemorated.

This situation is also decisive for the term I am using in this text: the Romani Holocaust. Although there have been efforts among scholars and activists to find a proper name for the Roma genocide, one that would have the power and uniqueness of the term "Shoah" used for the annihilation of the Jews during World War II, no commonly accepted term has been found. Ian Hancock, a British Romani linguist,

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[52] Segment 9 (Tape 1), 00:22:51, 00:23:21, 00:23:48. For more on *passing* during the Holocaust, see Małgorzata Melchior, *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni "na aryjskich papierach": analiza doświadczenia biograficznego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004); Małgorzata Melchior, "Moral Attitudes and Conflicts of the Holocaust Survivors who Passed as Non-Jews," *Studia Judaica* 1 (2002):139-152; Małgorzata Melchior, "Les 'Juifs aryens': stratégies de survie et problèmes d'identité," in Jean-Charles Szurek and Annette Wieviorka (eds.), *Juifs et Polonais 1939-2008* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2009), 369-388.

[53] Segment 1 (Tape 1), 00:03:01.

[54] Segment 11 (Tape 3), 00:06:14.

[55] Segment 6 (Tape 2), 00:01:34, 00:01:44.

[56] Ari Joskowicz, "Separate Suffering, Shared Archives: Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution," *History and Memory* 28, no. 1 (2016): 112.

proposed "Porrajmos";[57] however, in many Romani dialects this word has a strong connotation of sexual violence and is not universally accepted.[58] Marcel Courthiade suggested "Samudaripen," which means total killing or murder, similar to the Yiddish *khurbn*, yet the word has not gained universal recognition and political efficiency.[59] Yet, using the term "Romani Holocaust" faces its own challenges and committed adversaries. The strongest opposition comes from those intellectuals and scholars (such as Michael Berenbaum, one of the creators of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, or Yehuda Bauer and Stephen Katz, Holocaust historians) who plead for the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust. In this optics, Nazi atrocities against Roma may be considered genocide, yet not *the* Holocaust, which term is reserved for the unprecedented and singular character of the Jewish tragedy, due to its scale, links to historical antisemitism and intent of the Nazi regime for the complete annihilation of the Jewish people.[60] Discussion of the uniqueness of the (Jewish) Holocaust has been ongoing since the 1970s (and in recent instances focuses on the relation between the Holocaust and colonialism[61]), and many of its participants have shown that not only historical particularity is here at stake but that "memory and memorializing are also expressions of power," as Gabrielle Tyrnauer has rightly observed,[62] and that the present visibility and political agency of the groups affected by the past atrocities are crucial for the recognition of their history. Therefore, as Joskowicz argues, the use of the term "Romani Holocaust" may be viewed as a political choice: it draws on Holocaust recognition and its complex entanglements but also, due to its

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[57] Ian Hancock, "The Porrajmos (Romani Holocaust)," *Nationalities Papers* 19, no. 3 (1991): 373-394.

[58] Weiss-Wendt, "Introduction," 23-24.

[59] Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "Holokaust, Porrajmos, Samudaripen... Tworzenie nowej mitologii narodowej," *Studia Romologica* 3 (2010): 75-94. In English: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235700074_Holocaust_Porrajmos_Samudaripen_Creation_of_New_National_Mythology.

[60] Michael Berenbaum, "The Uniqueness and Universality of the Holocaust," in Michael Berenbaum (ed.), *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 20-36; Steven T. Katz, "Quantity and Interpretation: Issues in the Comparative Historical Analysis of the Holocaust," *Holocaust Genocide Studies* 4, no. 2 (1989): 127-148; Yehuda Bauer, "Whose Holocaust?" *Midstream* 26, no. 9 (November 1980). See the polemic by Ian Hancock, "Uniqueness, Gypsies and Jews," in Yehuda Bauer et al. (eds.), *Remembering for the Future: Working Papers and Addenda*, vol. 2 *The Impact of the Holocaust on the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989). See also Margareta Matache et al., *The Roma Holocaust/Roma Genocide in Southeastern Europe* (Boston, The François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, 2022); Dan Stone, "The Historiography of Genocide: Beyond 'Uniqueness' and Ethnic Competition," *Rethinking History* 8, no. 1 (2004): 127-142.

[61] See the synopsis of the recent debates in Michael Rothberg, "Lived Multidirectionality: 'Historikerstreit 2.0' and the Politics of Holocaust Memory," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 6 (2022): 1316-1329.

[62] Gabrielle Tyrnauer, "Recording the Testimonies of Sinti Holocaust Survivors," in Wolfgang Mieder and David Scrase (eds.), *Reflections on the Holocaust: Festschrift for Raul Hilberg on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Burlington: Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont, 2001), 232.

problematic etymology, prompts constant attention towards the categories that we use to describe historical events and their later evaluation.[63]

These problems find their apt representation in Krystyna Gil's testimony. It is not only the similarity of the war experiences of Jews and Roma that is constantly evoked during the interview, but also the question of the collective memory of both genocides after the war. At the end of the recording, Sobelman inquires:

> You know that Jews were the primary victim of Hitler's bestiality […]. Jews honor the memory of all murdered Jews and there are museums, research is being conducted and there are institutions tasked with doing that. In that context, don't Gypsies who were also victims, even though few people are aware of it, along with Jews, feel upset? Don't you personally feel upset that the fate of Gypsies has been forgotten both by history and by people?

Gil responds with a poetic phrase: "The extermination of Gypsies took place on the sidelines."[64] In this short statement, the witness summarizes both the decentralized character of the mass murder of the Roma and the dynamics of power relations in the remembrance of the Romani Holocaust: the consequences of the genocide are still abiding, yet remain on the margins of official politics and collective memory. Understanding the relationship between Roma and Jews in the aftermath of genocide and finding the reasons for institutional and discursive exclusion of the former group must be based on an analysis of the economy of knowledge production. Gil's testimony offers a point of discussion on that matter. She recalls her planned trip to Washington as a part of the Roma delegation, together with Roman Kwiatkowski, Józef Kamiński and Andrzej Mirga, to the Days of Remembrance ceremony held at the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C., on 28 April 1995.[65] She canceled her visit due to financial reasons.[66]

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[63] Ari Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 20.

[64] Segment 9 (Tape 2), 00:23:42, 00:24:16.

[65] The Days of Remembrance are the annual event established by the United States Holocaust Memorial Council (planning body of the USHMM) commemorating the Holocaust in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol. Roman Kwiatkowski and Andrzej Mirga are Polish Romani activists, the co-founders of the Association of Roma in Poland. Józef Kamiński (Malińciu) was a Romani Holocaust survivor and activist, one of the founders of the Tarnów Gypsy Social and Cultural Association (1963).

[66] Segment 9 (Tape 2), 00:20:28.

This event is another example of the "economic context for memory work,"[67] which is so crucial in the case of Romani struggles for the recognition of the history of their persecution, especially in the context of the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.[68]

The relation between money and remembrance is a recurrent topic in Krystyna Gil's testimony. After the war, she tried to reclaim her family land in Szczurowa, to no avail. She also mentions problems with obtaining war compensation among the Roma:

> This is very unfair because, for instance, compensation is offered to the persons who were in camps. Those in camps died but there are those who are alive and continue to live with their memories, with all that. […] Let's take the orphans. What have they experienced in their lives? Poverty and squalor. They haven't received anything in return. What did the state give them? Nothing. Nothing. They shall certainly not live long enough to obtain compensation because there are simply no persons among us who would promote the interests of those Gypsies. […] Nobody reckons with a Gypsy.[69]

As the testimony of Krystyna Gil shows, the persecution of Roma did not stop after the war: due to discrimination and racism, Roma are still considered not fully valuable members of society, and this translates into a problem in obtaining compensation for their war experiences.[70]

In Szczurowa, on 8 May 1965, a monument commemorating the murdered Roma was erected in the cemetery, as a part of the national effort to memorialize victims of World War II. The inscription reads: "Mass grave of 93 inhabitants of Szczurowa, murdered by Hitlerites on 3 July 1942 [sic]. Hail to their memory."[71] The fact that the ethnicity of the victims is not mentioned is emblematic of the Communist

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[67] Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash*, 174.

[68] Ari Joskowicz describes in detail the efforts (to a large extent unsuccessful) of Romani activists to include the history of the Romani Holocaust in the USHMM permanent exhibition. The very fact that a Roma delegation from Poland was invited to the Days of Remembrance in 1995 is a product of this struggle: in the 1980s, no Romani survivors were included in the guest list and this prompted Romani activists to protest and appear at the ceremony uninvited. See Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash*, 170-179.

[69] Segment 10 (Tape 2), 00:26:49.

[70] On the postwar compensations see Julia von dem Knesebeck, *The Roma Struggle for Compensation in Post-War Germany* (Hatfield, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011); Michelle Kelso, "Holocaust-Era Compensation and the Case of the Roma," *Studia Hebraica*, no. 8 (2008): 298-334.

[71] The wrong year date was corrected in 1993. Adam Bartosz, *Małopolski szlak martyrologii Romów*, 20-22; "Szczurowa. Memory and Commemoration," in Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Esteban C. Acuña and Piotr Trojański

memory politics of the 1960s. The experiences of minorities were neutralized, as exemplified by the famous 1964 monument designed by Witold Cęckiewicz at the site of the former Plaszow camp in Kraków, which commemorates "the martyrs murdered by the perpetrators of Nazi genocide in 1943-1945," without mentioning that most were Jews.[72] Krystyna Gil returned to Szczurowa in July every year, and her iterative private practice inspired a more public commemoration. In 1993, on the 50th anniversary of the killing, next to the monument from 1965, a cross was erected by the locals with another plaque, stating that this is the place of death of the "Gypsies-Roma" and that the cross is a "prayer homage" for them from "the residents of Szczurowa." This commemoration shows well how this site of the Romani Holocaust gradually became recognized as a part of the Szczurowa local heritage. Since 1997, a grassroots commemorative initiative, led by Polish ethnographer Adam Bartosz and Rom from the nearby city of Tarnów, Adam Andrasz, the Roma Caravan Memorial started visiting Szczurowa in late July (just before the celebrations of the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day), along with three other sites of the Romani Holocaust in the region: in Borzęcin, Bielcza and Żabno.[73] After initial frictions and disputes, Krystyna Gil joined the commemoration, and until her death spoke every year at the cemetery about the 1943 massacre.[74] In 2014, together with Lee-Elizabeth Hölscher-Langner and Laurids Hölscher, Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Kraków, she founded another memorial, listing the names of all the victims.[75] Krystyna Gil's perseverance in commemoration of the murder of her family and the Romani community of Szczurowa made a unique case of Romani Holocaust memorialization.

Builders of Nowa Huta

(eds.), *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide: Scholarship, Commemoration and the Role of Youth* (Kraków, Libron: 2015), 187-194.

[72] Robert Traba, "Symbole pamięci: II wojna światowa w świadomości zbiorowej Polaków. Szkic do tematu," *Przegląd Zachodni* 1 (2000): 52-67.

[73] Adam Bartosz is a leading figure in memorialization of the Romani Holocaust in Poland. In 1979, he curated the exhibition *Gypsies in Polish Culture* in the Regional Museum in Tarnów, which, the first initiative of this kind, addressed as the Romani Holocaust. Started in 1997, the Roma Caravan Memorial is a form of performative memorialization in which Roma and non-Roma participants travel together in late July to four villages in the Tarnów region that witnessed mass killings of Roma. Natalia Gancarz, "Kolekcja romska zwana Amaro Muzeum," *Muzealnictwo* 58 (2017): 268-276; Bartosz, "Ways of Commemorating Roma Extermination Sites in Poland"; *Tabor Pamięci Romów / Roma Caravan Memorial* (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe w Tarnowie, 2003).

[74] Szczepan and Posłuszny, "Bielcza i Borzęcin," 221-222.

[75] See the details of all the monuments here: https://muzeum.tarnow.pl/na-bister/en/szczurowa-memorial/.

Although occasionally pessimistic, the narrative of Krystyna Gil is characterized by persistent agency. This is also visible when she describes her postwar fate: a couple of years after the liberation, she and her grandmother came back to Szczurowa, where Krystyna finished primary school and started vocational school. Then, in 1954, she moved to Nowa Huta, the industrial district of Kraków, where she actively participated in building the new socialist city. Nowa Huta (The New Steelworks) was planned by the Communist government as one of the "socialist cities" built in the Soviet bloc: it was designed as an enormous steelworks with housing estate for its workers and their families, originally planned for 100,000 people.[76] The construction started in 1949 and transformed the rural environs of Kraków into a socialist utopia: it brought to Kraków, traditionally a city of the conservative bourgeoisie, thousands of rural migrants who began a new life in modern conditions.[77] But it is impossible to draw the history of Nowa Huta in black and white, as a morbid center of Stalinization. For its new inhabitants, Nowa Huta became, especially in its early days, a space of freedom, social emancipation, and living on one's own terms. This was also the case for Roma. Communist authorities recruited Roma to settle in Nowa Huta in a campaign aiming at their "productivization" and forced settlement (a prelude to the later prohibition of the itinerant lifestyle, introduced in 1964). Yet as it turned out, those Roma who arrived to build a new socialist city were not nomads, those whom the Communist authorities wanted to tie down to one place, but originated mostly from the sedentary communities of Bergitka, Roma living in villages in the mountainous Polish-Czechoslovak borderlands (Podhale and Spiš). Destitute after the war, they voluntarily relocated near to Kraków to escape poverty.[78]

In her interview, Krystyna Gil tells Sobelman: "I came here to Nowa Huta because the construction of Huta was beginning and there were many Gypsies, lots of them. […] I came here […] to see how Gypsies lived. I was always very attracted to that Gypsy cheerful way of life. I was sort of isolated from that life."

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[76] Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 3. The beginnings of Nowa Huta were captured in the movie *Man of Marble* (1977, directed by Andrzej Wajda).

[77] Forced industrialization was intended as a punishment for a city that had voted against Communist recommendations in the 1946 national referendum and was considered a seat of both cosmopolitanism and a "bastion of reaction." Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 14.

[78] In 1950, the first 160 Roma arrived in Nowa Huta; in 1956, its Romani population exceeded 270 people. Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 110. See also Monika Szewczyk, *O Romach w Nowej Hucie słów kilka* (Kraków: Sawore, 2019); Monika Golonka-Czajkowska, *Nowe miasto nowych ludzi. Mitologie nowohuckie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), 189-230.

"Where did they work? Did they build Nowa Huta?" the interviewer asks. "Yes, from scratch,"[79] Gil answers. She recounts how she met her husband, Augustyn Gil (Rom from Jurgów in Spiš), and describes his work as a foreman and the distinction that his uncle Walenty Gil received from Polish Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz. Nowa Huta is in Gil's account the Romani Brave New World: a reality of open possibilities, a life without exclusion and the limitations of one's own community, and a space of ethnic, gender, and class equality.[80] Elements of this atmosphere may be glimpsed in the photos of Romani women plasterers from Wiktor Pental's famous series of photographs portraying the beginnings of Nowa Huta.[81] In Pental's photographs, Roma women glance boldly at the camera; they wear plaster-stained jackets and trousers – garments far removed from Roma women's traditional attire – and hold work tools: a grinder and a scraper. Not only do these photos document the historical moment of emerging new opportunities, they also present labor as an expression of identity and a token of emancipation. "I thought I was in heaven," Gil confessed in another interview.[82] Finally, she describes to Sobelman her work as a tram driver (she was the first female tram driver in Kraków), her engagement in grassroots Romani organizations, and in her help for socially excluded Romani kids and elderly as the chairperson of the Nowa Huta division of the Association of Roma in Poland, whose office was in her apartment.[83] Gil's Holocaust

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[79] Segment 6 (Tape 2), 00:06:58, Segment 7 (Tape 2), 00:08:05, 00:07:08, 00:07:11.

[80] In her insightful analysis of the early days of Nowa Huta, Katherine Lebow presents the situation of Nowa Huta's Romani population as similar to that of the district's women. Both groups were offered instantaneous emancipation by the Stalinist authorities; nevertheless, their eventual status in society was determined by pre-existing gender and racial stereotypes. Despite gaining the opportunity to work as labourers, women found it difficult to raise their professional qualifications or to access more specialist and thus better paid jobs; at the same time, their social status was still determined by chauvinistic cultural and sexual attitudes – their most essential duty was motherhood and house chores were their exclusive responsibility, with no regard for the concept of the division of labour. Nowa Huta Roma, in turn, were constantly under surveillance; they often encountered difficulties in obtaining better jobs (for instance, many Roma worked in low-income jobs in the municipal sanitation department). Propagandistic rhetoric stressed the civilisational gap that Roma needed to overcome to perform their leap of assimilation. Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 97-123.

[81] Henryk Makarewicz and Wiktor Pental, *802 procent normy: Pierwsze lata Nowej Huty* (Kraków: Vis-a-vis / Etiuda, 2007).

[82] In this interview, she also mentions her work in the steelworks: she had an administrative job, then she worked in the coking plant. Interestingly, Gil learned to speak Romany also in Nowa Huta, from other Roma, since her Polish grandmother did not teach her. "Historie opowiedziane: wideo," Romowie w Nowej Hucie (Roma in Nowa Huta), http://romowie.dobrawola.eu/romowie-w-nowej-hucie/historie-opowiedziane-wideo/.

[83] The Association of Roma in Poland (Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce) was founded at the beginning of 1992 by anthropologist Andrzej Mirga (representing the Bergitka Roma subgroup) and activist Roman Kwiatkowski (representing the Polska Roma subgroup). It was registered in Bielsko-Biała, with its headquarter in Oświęcim (the Polish town where the Auschwitz camp was situated). The Association was created in the aftermath of the Mława pogrom (26-27 June 1991), a series of anti-Roma attacks in the town of Mława in north-eastern Poland, when a group of about 200 individuals attacked and devasted Roma properties in the town as retribution for a hit-and-run involving a Roma driver. The Association organizes an annual commemoration at KL Auschwitz-Birkenau on 2 August. It is

testimony thereby opens another door: it becomes a narrative of social mobility and female emancipation, and the Romani beginnings of Kraków's industrial district, today almost forgotten in the collective consciousness.

Krystyna Gil's testimony corresponds with a collection of ten interviews recorded with Romani survivors from Nowa Huta by the Shoah Foundation in the late 1990s.[84] In these testimonies, Nowa Huta Roma narrate their survival in wartime southern Poland: hiding in forests, forced labor, incarceration, and execution, along with the story of escape from poverty and discrimination to a new life in Nowa Huta. These testimonies offer a glimpse into a space of unique fusion. As it turns out, Holocaust archives store the recorded Romani history of Nowa Huta, and at the same time uncover a new chapter in the history of the district as a refuge for Roma survivors.[85]

Conclusion

I met Krystyna Gil in Szczurowa in July 2017, at the 19th International Roma Caravan Memorial. As always, she came to speak at the cemetery to commemorate the victims of the 1943 massacre. Surrounded by family and friends, she gave a short speech and concluded: "They were murdered only because they were Roma. This was their only fault that they were Roma." She was at the time a "professional" witness, the most prominent witness of the Romani Holocaust in Poland, and a symbol of the Romani struggle for recognition.[86] But in her Fortunoff interview from 1995, Krystyna Gil in a sense becomes a witness:

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oriented to human rights and identity politics. The Association's representatives were involved in the Common Commission of Government and National and Ethnic Minorities that worked on the Minority Law, which was adopted in early 2005. See Andrzej Mirga, "Setting up the Association Of Roma In Poland (Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce)," https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/setting-up-the-association-of-roma-in-poland-stowarzyszenie-romow-w-polsce/. Krystyna Gil was engaged in the Association of Roma in Poland until 2000, when she founded the Association of Roma Women in Poland.

[84] Andrzej Gabor, Maria and Stanisław Oraczko, Andrzej Mirga and Ewa Siwak, Andrzej Oraczko, Anna Gil, Augustyn Gil, Julian Gabor and Franciszek Dunka, USC SF-VHA, nos. 39659, 39656, 39657, 47010, 39660, 37644, 43331, 43315, 43334, 47301.

[85] See Aleksandra Szczepan, "Great People Who Survived the Holocaust: Nowa Huta Roma in Holocaust Archives," in Wojciech Szymański and Natalia Żak (eds.), *Travelling Images: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Exhibition Catalogue* (Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2022), 92-101.

[86] Krystyna Gil gave her testimony to the USC SF-VHA, no. 30163 (13.03.1997) and (twice) to the Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma in Heidelberg: she is a protagonist of the 1997 documentary *Szczurowa* by Alexander von Plato and Loretta Walz and 2020 video for the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0HvdPkGs7s&ab_channel=EuropeanHolocaustMemorialDayforSintiandRom

because she gives testimony for the first time publicly, but also because in a given framework she needs to constantly negotiate her testimonial agency on the intersection of her ethnicity, gender, and class: as a Roma explaining her story to a Jewish interviewer, as a woman narrating her emancipation, and as a working-class person telling of her fate to a big-city intellectual. Reading her video interview as a complex performative situation gives us insight into the dynamics of testimony as a site of knowledge production and entanglements of memory and power.

Interestingly, Krystyna Gil's Fortunoff interview has recently received a second life. Polish-Romani artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas used a still from the 1995 testimony to create the portrait of Krystyna Gil that she included in the installation *Re-Enchanting the World*, exhibited in the national pavilion of Poland at the 2022 edition of La Biennale d'Arte di Venezia. Curated by Cecilia Alemani and entitled *The Milk of Dreams*, after a book by British surrealist Leonora Carrington, the Biennale was dominated by women artists and dedicated to rewriting the history of art, in order to open the door to its female counterpart, always present, yet overlooked and kept on the sidelines. Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's 12-part large-format tapestry somehow followed this path. It told the story of Romani identity: global, local, women's, and intimate. The images of historical Romani nomadic life were juxtaposed with scenes from the contemporary everyday life of the artist's community in Czarna Góra in the Podhale region. The middle section of the installation was dedicated to Romani herstory and portrayed Roma women, both from Mirga-Tas' private circle and public figures, who in the last decades have changed Romani lives and the ways in which they are perceived by the majority culture.[87] One of the heroines was Krystyna Gil, depicted in the corner of the pavilion, which opened on April 23, 2022. She had died a year earlier, on the morning of April 1, 2021. The same frame was used by the artist to portray Gil in another work, a monumental series of portraits *Siukar Manusia* (Great, wonderful people, 2022), which depicts ten representatives of the first postwar generation of Nowa Huta's Romani residents.[88] In Mirga-Tas' collages, Gil is portrayed as a middle-aged woman, sitting in an armchair in a relaxed position, wearing a red blouse and flowery skirt. Her confident posture is unmistakable to anyone who has watched a recording of her speaking: in her tapestry portraits, Krystyna Gil is giving testimony. These images recreate her interview for the Fortunoff

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a. In 2020, Gil received the Cross of Merit (Verdienstkreuz am Bande) from German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

[87] Wojciech Szymański and Joanna Warsza (eds.), *Małgorzata Mirga-Tas: Re-enchanting the World* (Warszawa and Berlin: Zachęta Gallery, 2022).

[88] All of them were Holocaust survivors. See Szczepan, "Great People Who Survived the Holocaust."

Archive as a site of knowledge production and memorial agency. At the same time, Gil appears in them a heroine of Romani herstory: a woman witness to the Holocaust and a Romni activist: a founder and chairperson of the Association of Roma Women in Poland – the first such initiative, whose goal was to steer Roma women towards "independent thinking and taking control of their lives," as Gil wrote in *List do Romów i Romek* (A letter to Romani men and women).[89]

[89] Quoted in: Anita Adamczyk, "*Romni* wśród Romów: Kobieta w kulturze romskiej," *Przegląd Politologiczny* 16, no. 2 (2011): 42. The Association of Roma Women in Poland was founded in 2000, registered in 2004 and dissolved in 2023.