

Roma, Sinti und Jenische. Schweizerische Zigeunerpolitik zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Beitrag zur Forschung

Roma, Sinti, and Jenisch. Swiss Policy Regarding Gypsies in the Nazi Period. Research Contribution
(Publications of the ICE, volume 23)

Thomas Huonker, Regula Ludi

ISBN 3-0340-0623-3

Summary

Research has for a long time neglected the Roma, Sinti, and Jenisch as a group of victims of the Nazi policies of persecution and extermination. Only in the past years have the circumstances of their persecution during the Third Reich been investigated in detail. There still are very few publications available with respect to the position of Switzerland during this period. The contribution of the ICE has shed light upon different aspects of this gap in research. In particular, the question is pursued as to whether Roma, Sinti, or Jenisch were successful in escaping to Switzerland, and if so, under what circumstances.

In chapter 1, the terms are explained, the status of research described, and the specific problems of methodology as well as those relating to the sources of the subject under investigation are discussed. The ideological and structural background of Swiss and international positions of rejection with respect to itinerant peoples are presented in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the radicalization in Germany is illustrated beginning with the «gypsy policy» of the Weimar Republic to the deportation and genocide which took place under the Nazis. Chapter 4 analyzes the conduct of Switzerland with respect to itinerant peoples on the basis of several case stories of escape, while chapter 5 shows the relations of Switzerland to Roma, Sinti, and Jenisch up to the present.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Switzerland was one of the first states unilaterally limiting by legislation the freedom to travel for «gypsies», thus creating discriminating regulations with special legal force. The closing of borders decreed in 1906, including a prohibition to transport gypsies by rail or steamboat, was maintained by the Swiss authorities even after the beginning of the Second World War.

The consequence of the expulsion of foreign or stateless Roma and Sinti practiced in the period between the wars by most European countries was that itinerant families were permanently pushed around between individual states. The radicalization of the expulsion policy in the 1930s frequently led to serious incidents at borders and disputes between states with a diplomatic aftermath, as it was a routine procedure before the beginning of the war for police authorities of various states to illegally expel «unwanted» foreigners over the border to a neighboring country. On the other hand, an attempt was made to force Jenisch with Swiss citizenship to become sedentary.

Thus the mobility of itinerant people in Switzerland – and by similar measures in the whole of Europe as well – had been massively restricted already before persecution by Nazi authorities began in 1933. On the basis of pseudo-scientific findings, the internationally cooperating police authorities set up a defense system leading to restrictive regulations for entering a country. These rejection measures were intensified everywhere after the seizure of power by the Nazis, thereby denying those being persecuted any option of escape.

Systematic searching for traces of Roma, Sinti, and Jenisch in Swiss files on refugees quickly pushes methodology to its limits, and hence no quantitative results have emerged. It may be assumed, however, that sedentary Roma and Sinti with common last names were able to escape to Switzerland without being recognized as «undesirable gypsies». Between

1939 and 1944, four cases of rejection can be found which involved at least 16 persons. The rejection of Anton Reinhardt in September 1944 proves that openly threatened Sinti were rejected even at a time when the restrictive regulations of asylum policy had been alleviated. Reinhardt was arrested by the German authorities and shot in an attempted escape (chapter 4.3.1).

The Swiss authorities did not intervene even if itinerant people of Swiss nationality were threatened with deportation and possibly death. Several cases are evidenced in which the authorities refused to recognize the citizenship of these individuals, or failed to take the steps possible with the Nazi authorities in order to rescue those who were in peril.

Additional information:

www.uek.ch

Book orders:

Chronos Verlag

Eisengasse 9, CH-8008 Zürich

Fax: 0041 / (0)1 / 265 43 44

e-mail: info@chronos-verlag.ch

www.chronos-verlag.ch