GYPSIES IN GERMANY—GERMAN GYPSIES?
IDENTITY AND POLITICS
OF SINTI AND ROMA IN GERMANY
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In this essay we introduce the population referred to as ‘German Gypsies.’ We then proceed to examine forms of organization and modern representation of identity, focusing especially on the dichotomy between two distinct self-images: the first, of a minority based in German territory and culture yet distinct from mainstream German society; the second, of a group that belongs to a transnational ethnic minority dispersed both within and outside of the German context. We will try to assess the impact of historical events and group-specific traditions on the development of a political discourse(s) among Gypsies in Germany today, and on the shaping of the political agendas pursued by their respective associations.

‘GYPSIES’:
A CONFUSION OF TERMS

In employing the term ‘Gypsy,’ we are referring to an ethnic group—however ambiguous this might seem in light of the fact that this group is multi-layered and diverse in its historical origins, language, traditions and self-identification. We draw a distinction between ‘Gypsies’ as a common term associated with a lifestyle or socio-economic organizational form, irrespective of origin, language or traditions, and ‘Gypsies’ as a popular, though usually external name for a population which shares a language (albeit split into several dialect groups), traditions and beliefs, and ultimately originating in India. We will call the first ‘Gypsy I,’ and the second ‘Gypsy II,’ in order to emphasize the fact that a single term is often used to denote two distinct types of population.1

Gypsy II is objectively recognizable primarily through language, namely, a population that speaks Romani (or romanes). The dialects of Romani
originate in an Indian language; the divisions among them, which are relatively recent, can be traced back to differentiation in speech forms as a result of dispersion throughout Europe, from the southern Balkans (formerly Byzantium), from about the 14th century onwards. In some communities, the Romani language has been lost as a result of partial assimilation and language shift, quite often coinciding with intermarriage and integration into, or absorption of, local indigenous peripatetic populations (as in the case of Britain and Scandinavia). Thus, in effect, Gypsy II (descendants who speak Romani; ultimately of Indian origin) can overlap with Gypsy I (descendants of indigenous travelers). This has caused some confusion both in popular perception and in academic discussions, where we encounter reluctance to acknowledge that overlap is a local phenomenon and not a global one. Some recent authors have carried this line of argument even further, claiming there is no basis for the assumption of Indian origin or the Romani language or the Romani-speaking population, and that the motivation behind two and a half centuries of linguistic scholarship devoted to the Indian origins of Romani is pure romanticism, or even racism.

As elsewhere, both types (Gypsy I and II) may be found in the German context. The first population group includes peripatetic musicians, peddlers, toolmakers, and operators of mobile entertainment units such as carousels. They are usually based in a particular region and travel for their livelihood, but not at random. Many of these groups are currently in decline due to changing patterns of occupation, social mobility, and lax group identity. One of the populations that stands out among the Gypsy I in Germany are the Jenische, who developed a distinct identity in the 18th century and who absorbed, locally at least, Romani-speaking groups, as well as indigenous travelers and in all likelihood, also members of immigrant minority and traveler groups. The Jenische are regionally dispersed but tend to concentrate in their own villages, as a result of settlement privileges granted to them in specific locations from the 18th century onwards.

The focus in this essay is not on populations that constitute Gypsy I—the diverse peripatetic populations—first, because we are unaware of any political or nationalist movement among these groups in Germany (though associations of Yenish are active in Switzerland); and second, unlike Gypsy II, these populations are unable to claim in any straightforward way a shared ethnicity or culture, manifested by a common language, beliefs, traditions, sense of historical fate (Schicksalsgemeinschaft) or historical territorial origin (however recent awareness of the latter may be among Gypsy II—see below). Our interest is in the link between such claims that are characteristic of Gypsy II, and the construction of ethnic-national identity and participation in a political process. We direct our attention therefore to the population of Romani speakers, known generally as Rom but locally also under group-specific self-appellations. It is to this population (Gypsy II) that we will apply the label ‘Gypsy,’ alternating with the various self-designations employed by the subgroups.

GYPSY GROUPS IN GERMANY

The largest sub-group of German Gypsies in the latter sense consists of the population that now refers to itself as ‘Sinti.’ They are descendants of a Romani-speaking immigrant population that began leaving the Balkans around the end of the 14th century. First attestations of Gypsies in Germany date from the early 15th century. As a sub-division of the European Romani population, the Sinti are fairly closely related, both culturally and linguistically, to the Romani populations of Britain and Scandinavia (Finland), who migrated to these locations via Germany. All these groups are relatively closed and isolated, with rather strict codes regulating family, and limiting contacts with non-Gypsies (gadje). They also have a shared tendency to conceal their identity from non-Gypsies, and to prevent outsiders from learning about their customs and language. Like the Romani populations of Scandinavia, Britain, and the Iberian Peninsula, up to the late 18th century the Sinti referred to themselves as ‘Kale’ (lit. ‘blacks’). The term ‘Sinti’ or ‘Sinte’ (see below) may be found in 18th and 19th century linguistic documentation alongside ‘Kale,’ and appears to have been borrowed from the secret vocabulary of the Yenish travelers, perhaps because of its usefulness in concealing ethnic identity. Only toward the late 19th century does the self-appellation ‘Sinti’ replace ‘Kale’ entirely in Germany.

While the core of the Sinti population lives in Germany, a few sub-branches settled in surrounding areas. Some Sinti populations migrated to former German territories in Pomerania and Silesia, and others joined ethnic German settlement areas in Bohemia, Russia, Vojvodina and South Tirol. Some of the latter immigrated to Germany after World War II and tried to claim German citizenship based upon ethnic German identity. The authorities’ refusal to grant their demands figured prominently in the formation of modern political movement of German Gypsies, as we shall see below. There are also Sinti populations in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Manouche population in France, too, is a branch of the Sintis,
preserving another self-appellation that was commonly found among German Gypsies until the 18th century (cf. manisch, still used by the Yenish in some areas to refer to Gypsies). Most of these groups are conscious of their German connections, and the fact that their cultural and linguistic identity was formed in German-speaking territory. This is demonstrated principally by the attempts of Sinti survivors of World War II in Eastern Europe to ‘return’ to Germany and settle there. Many Sinti groups in Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium maintain close ties with Sinti families in Germany. The French Manouche and the South Tyrol Sinti are aware of German vocabulary in their dialects of Romani.

Besides the Sinti in Germany, there is also a population of Lovara, whose dialect belongs to the Northern Vlax branch of Romani dialects spoken in Transylvania. They immigrated to Germany during the late 19th century. Their migration westward during this period can be seen in connection with the gradual abolition of Romani serfdom and slavery in the Romanian principalities between 1850 and 1863. Since then they have integrated Lovara families that immigrated to Germany from Austria during the 20th century. The Lovara regard themselves as German Rom (rather than Sinti). Although they maintain some links to the Sinti, including family ties in some cities, they view themselves as distinct and are very conscious of a separate identity.

Finally, there are Roma who immigrated to Germany from the late 1950s onwards. They include Lovara from Poland who arrived in the 1950s, groups such as Arli, Xoraxane, and Dzhambazi, who settled as labor migrants from former Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s, and Polska Roma who came as asylum seekers from Poland during the 1970s and early 1980s, as well as groups originating in former Yugoslavia and Poland who applied for asylum in the 1980s as the only legal way to gain temporary legal status in the country, and despite overall rejection of their claims were allowed to remain in Germany as a result of special local arrangements. Some Roma belonging to these various groups have acquired German citizenship, and individuals have established Romani associations in their towns and taken up community-related professions such as teaching or social work. But unlike the Sinti and Lovara, the more recent immigrants, who speak Romani and define themselves as Roma, do not regard themselves as German Gypsies; nor do the Sinti view them as part of their community, though attitudes toward them among the German Lovara (German Roma) vary.

THE SEPARATENESS OF THE SINTI

The German Sinti have traditionally remained a closed and isolated group except for their contacts with Sinti in neighboring countries. Their separateness has led to attempts in Romani nationalist literature to attach a distinct origin to them. Already in 18th and 19th century scholarly discussions, the name ‘Sinti’ was associated occasionally with that of the Indian province of Sindh. There is, in fact, no connection at all. The word ‘Sinti’ has the inflection typical of a European loanword in Romani, and cannot have been part of the original Indian vocabulary of the language. The fact that it is found solely among Romani speakers in Germany and neighboring regions and only in more recent sources, suggests that it is a later borrowing into this specific dialect of Romani, and was not part of the language in pre-European time. Nonetheless, the association of the Sinti with Sindh remains part of popular folklore. Romani activist and writer Vania Kochanowski was the first to suggest that the Sinti in fact originate in a separate migration from India that of the Roma, and that they are descendants of Khatriyas (warrier caste) from the province of Sindh, who left for Mesopotamia in the 8th century due to climate changes, and later moved on to Greece together with the Roman legions, where they were joined by the ancestors of the Roma. The latter, according to Kochanowski, were Rajputs (another warrior caste) from Rajasthan, who fled after they were defeated in a battle in Afghanistan five centuries later. This theory is also accepted in somewhat modified form by Kenrick and by Hancock, both of whom suggest that the European Romani population derives from a mixture of Indian populations who merged outside of India, prior to their immigration to Europe.

Despite Hancock’s claims about the existence of linguistic findings to support this (although he has never produced them), there is no evidence, an certainly no linguistic proof, to support the theory of either a Romani multiracial pot outside of India or of a distinct origin of the Sinti. All dialects of Romani share a consistent pattern of derivation from late Middle Indo-Aryan/ear New Indo-Aryan, dating from the Early Medieval period. The absence of particular, identifiable ancestor language of Romani within India today is not surprising. This is due first to a time span of over 1000 years in which the language has changed substantially, and then to the probable peripatetic origin of the Rom within India (likewise, there is no clearly identifiable ancestor dialect of Yiddish in the German-speaking landscape of today, or of Ladino). Another reason, no doubt, is the paucity of sources and documentation of modern Indo-Aryan languages, apart from the relatively few that enjoy ti
status of standard written varieties. Rather, all differences among the dialects of Romani today are easily traceable to a series of linguistic-structural innovations that took place within the past 700–800 years from so-called Early Romani. The Sinti dialect is no exception, and although quite distinct from the Romani dialects of central Europe and the Balkans, most differences are accounted for by the influence of German, as well as by common simplification, renewal and leveling processes that occurred in situ. Moreover, although the Sinti now use this term as a self-appellation—both collectively and in regard to individuals (sinto sinti man, etc.)—the language is still referred to as Romanes (romnes), and the terms rom, romni still exist, albeit in specialized form to denote family bonds (husband, wife) rather than ethnic-national ones. (Arguably, family bonds have traditionally been more significant in the isolating Sinti culture than ethnic-national ones, hence the preservation of an old term there; but the flexibility and tendency toward vocabulary renewal in the word applies to the ethnic community as a whole.)

GERMAN GYPSIES AS A MINORITY

An investigation of German Gypsy identity today must take this history into account: on the one hand, distinctness and isolation, and on the other, awareness of bonds with Gypsy groups in neighboring countries, with other Gypsy groups that have settled in the country, and, more remotely, with Gypsy groups abroad. Thus, it is certainly somewhat problematic to apply terms such as 'diaspora' and 'transnational group' to the German Gypsies. The Zentralrat deutscher Sinti und Roma, the main organization of German Sinti and Roma, has been campaigning for years to have the Sinti officially recognized as a German ethnic minority (Deutsche Volksgruppe) within the German nation state. This struggle implies a self-definition of a non-diaspora minority. The Sinti certainly do not regard India, their ancient land of origin, as their national homeland, and nor do Roma organizations. Nevertheless, certain expressions of Romani nationalism among Roma who immigrated to Germany from Eastern Europe, and even some implicitly nationalist notions among German Sinti, reveal clear affinities to the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism.

The emergence of Romani nationalism in the late 1960s stimulated an attempt among Gypsy intellectuals to create a national history and to base the authenticity of all Gypsy groups on an imaginary heritage of the Indian homeland. Some of these attempts led to essentialist notions. Romani nationalists have faced a great challenge, since contacts among Gypsy groups dispersed throughout Europe are rather loose due to the processes discussed above, and the emergence of various Gypsy sub-cultures. These sub-cultures have absorbed local cultural elements, such as language, religion and mentality. Gypsy migrants formally adopted the dominant religions when they arrived in Europe, while maintaining certain elements of their former beliefs. In Muslim regions such as Turkey or Bosnia they embraced Islam. The earliest sources dealing with their arrival in German-speaking territory six centuries ago report that Gypsies presented themselves as Christians. However, missionaries who worked among them complained that the expression of their Christianity was fairly superficial. Most German Sinti are Catholics. They adopted certain components of Catholic folklorist ritual, including the cult of the Virgin Mary and the pilgrimage to sacred Christian locations, which were probably integrated with earlier pagan rituals. But at the same time, the Gypsies have also continued to cling to their pre-Christian beliefs and to maintain customs deriving from them. These include a system of purity and impurity, various prohibitions on eating and sexual relations, and traditions and rituals concerning birth, marriage, death and illness. Traditional Sinti society has tried hard to convince their reluctant German neighbors that they truly deserve to belong to Christian Europe. An attempt of Sinti in France to provide Christian legitimation for their presence in Europe can be observed in a traditional tale told in Romani:

All the Gypsies believed in one god. When his time came to perish on the Cross (according to missionaries, confusing Jesus with God is a quite common among Gypsies), a Sinteza was present at the site. She pitied him, and did not want his feet to be nailed. So she stole one nail, and God was crucified.

In order to grant authenticity and credibility to this tale, the Gypsy authors chose to connect themselves to Jesus' Passion by theft—a typical Gypsy trait, according to the surrounding non-Gypsy majority.

These attempts have lasted until modern times. However, under the influence of modernization in 20th century Germany, the Sinti have undergone a secularization process in which German nationalism and bourgeois respectability have replaced Christianity in terms of the legitimacy of Sinti existence on German soil. In an interview conducted in the 1980s, the Sinti Hans Brown said: "We are German: we think as Germans, we live as Germans and would like also to be accepted as Germans."
ROMANI NATIONALISM
AND ITS IMPACT ON GERMAN SINTI

The origins of Romani nationalism lie in 1930s' Romania and Yugoslavia, where Roma intellectuals were preoccupied with Romani culture and the Romani national movement and published Romani newspapers. Certain superficial expressions of Romani nationalism appeared among Sinti activists as late as the 1970s, but did not really take root among German Sinti or their organizations. Sinti lack of enthusiasm for Romani nationalism recalls the attitude that was common among German Jewry toward Jewish nationalism (Zionism) in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century. While identification with Germany among German Jewry was genuine and expressed true gratitude to German society and its institutions for enabling this minority a certain degree of integration and remarkable economic and cultural success, their reluctance to embrace their own particular identity was also an outcome of the demand of the surrounding society that these perceived foreigners prove absolute loyalty to the German nation state, and of the demonstrations of hostility toward any expressions of national feeling other than that of German nationalism by members of the German community. As most Sinti were neither fully integrated into German society nor enjoyed particular economic, social or cultural success in Germany, their reluctance was due mainly to the pressures of the surrounding society.

Sinti and Roma in Germany also began very late to found their own organizations. Each Gypsy group formed its own. The first association of Sinti was founded by Vinzenz Rose in 1956. The name of the association was Verband und Interessengemeinschaft rassisch Verfolgter nicht-jüdischen Glaubens deutscher Staatsbürger e. V. (Association and Interests Community of Racially Persecuted German Citizens of Non-Jewish Faith). It was a rather odd name for an organization whose main mission was to represent Sinti claims, as it blurred its members' identity completely. Such a name pertained equally to 'non-Aryan Christians,' that is, people of Jewish descent (such as Christians with one Jewish parent) who were persecuted by the Nazis for racial reasons. The choice of name seems to have been deliberate. In the 1950s the self-appellation Sinti was not known in Germany. Rose was probably trying to evade the derogatory association of the term Zigeuner (Gypsy; see below), which prevailed among the German public. The association's title recalls the Jewish Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, which, similarly, is no coincidence. Both truly reflect the desperate quest of these German minorities to be recognized and accepted as Germans. The association, which represented a few prominent Sinti families, had no national character, and was engaged mainly in the matter of compensation to its members for their persecution by the Nazis, as well as bringing to trial certain Nazi perpetrators.

In Western Europe, Romani nationalism began to crystallize during the late 1960s; this was noted in Britain as well as in other European states. The Romani national revival of the late 1960s borrowed its methods from the civil rights struggle of the American Indians and from the struggle of the 1968 student movements. It climaxed in the convening of the first Romano Kongress in London in 1971. As was the case in Zionism and black nationalism, in Romani nationalism, too, assimilated persons played key roles. But, in contrast to Zionism of the late 19th and the 20th century and to certain streams in black nationalism, Romani nationalism had no territorial vision and did not seek to return all the world's Gypsies to India. Gypsy nationalists wish to stay in their present—mostly European—countries as equal citizens and to be recognized collectively as a unique cultural community. Romani nationalists have never used the term 'diaspora' but it seems that they implicitly accept the concept of Gypsies as a transnational group. Romani nationalism seeks to transform the tribal consciousness and identity of the various Romani groups such as the German Sinti into a unified Romani national consciousness and national identity. It emphasizes the Gypsies' Indian origins and the Romani language. The Romani national flag resembles the Indian flag with the Ashok Chakra (the Indian wheel of destiny) at the center. Some Romani nationalists emphasize the exodus from India and the subsequent wandering as their formative national experience and have made the song "Gelem Gelem" the Gypsy national anthem. Romani nationalism expects and requires all tribal groups to show solidarity with other Romani groups, such as the German Sinti, as members of the same Romani nation. Its influence can be traced in all Romani organizations in Europe.

During the civic struggle of the early 1980s, Sinti organizations used the Romani national flag as well as rhetoric that contained certain elements borrowed from Romani nationalism, but these expressions had a rather superficial character and disappeared over the years. Most German Sinti, like the German Jews in the pre-war period, evince reluctance about Romani nationalism because they fear it will jeopardize their desperate attempts to be integrated into the majority in the German nation state. Most German Sinti, like most pre-Holocaust German Jewry, prefer the assimilation model, with certain reservations that would enable them to preserve their unique ethnic subculture. No other local Romani organization in any European country is as
desperately engaged or as anxious as the Zentralrat deutscher Sinti und Roma, in an apologetic attempt to persuade the German public that German Sinti truly merit the right to live in Germany.

From the late 1970s Sinti activists in Germany, influenced by the International Romani Union, began to regard the German term Zigeuner, meaning Gypsy, as bearing derogatory connotations. They therefore replaced it with their own name, Sinti. Since 1973 Vinzenz Rose’s son, Roman, has presided over the re-activated organization which was then called Deutscher Sinti Verband (Association of German Sinti). In 1983 it was renamed Zentralrat deutscher Sinti und Roma, recalling the main Jewish organization in the FRG (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland). Despite its pretensions of pursuing a national struggle in the name of all Romani groups, the Zentralrat is in fact a traditional organization of a few Sinti families with no Roma on its board.

The typical Sinti choice to include the adjective ‘German’ in the title of their organizations has not been observed among the Roma in Germany. When, in 1960, Walter Strauss and Wilhelm Weiss, two German Roma from Frankfurt, founded the first Roma organization in the Federal Republic, they had no qualms about calling it Zentral Komitee der Zigeuner (Central Committee of the Gypsies).\(^{17}\) This trend could also be traced in the organizations of the second generation after World War II. When Rudko Kawczynski, a Rom—who was born in Poland to a Roma family of non-Polish origin and as a child immigrated to Germany—founded an organization for both groups in Hamburg in 1980, he named it Rom und Cinti Union (Romani and Sinti Union).

In sharp contrast to the German Sinti, many Roma, especially activists such as Kawczynski—who was one of the first generation among Polish immigrant families to grow up in Germany and had relatives and networks all over Europe—do not regard themselves as Germans and are not eager to be considered so despite their wish, for practical reasons, to obtain German citizenship. In an interview to the communist newspaper Neues Deutschland in 1993, Kawczynski was asked about the German citizenship he had recently acquired. He replied: “Naturally I am not a German. When I go along the street, no one sees that I have a German passport in my pocket.”\(^{18}\) Rather like the first postwar generation of immigrants in Germany of east European Jewish origin, these activists regard themselves as members of a nation (Jewish people or Roma) and not as members of a German minority group (German Jews or Gadschkene Sinti, meaning German Sinti in the Sinti dialect). The present generation at least would never refer to itself as Gadschkene Roma.

These developments have surely encouraged the emergence of a Romani national consciousness and identity. However, the different self-apppellations and the specific naming of the Roma and Sinti organizations express a dissimilar collective consciousness in these two Gypsy groups. The Roma have a national consciousness while the Sinti have a tribal consciousness. Between 1979 and 1985 Sinti and Roma organizations cooperated in pursuing a public campaign for civil rights and recognition in the FRG. However, the Sinti did not embark with other groups on a public campaign to promote a political concept aimed at revising the citizenship law of 1913 (which was indeed amended in 1999). Instead they chose a strategy based on the ethnic-cultural concept of German self-understanding. They have tried to persuade the German public that they, the Sinti, constitute an integral part of the German culture and German nation.

The Zentralrat demanded that the federal government recognize “German Sinti and Roma as a German ethnic group [deutsche Volksgruppe] with its own 600-year German history, language and cultural identity.” Rose argued that “Romani is a language which has been spoken in Germany for 600 years and therefore it forms a part of the German culture.”\(^{19}\) This particularistic demand has no appeal to the Roma of east European origin living today in Germany, many of whom immigrated to the Federal Republic only in the last few decades. These people neither possess German citizenship nor belong to the circle of German culture. The Roma organization, Rom und Cinti Union, by contrast, demanded that the European authorities recognize all Gypsy groups as a non-territorial European people, a definition which corresponds to the transnational concept of diaspora.\(^{20}\)

A central objective of the Sinti organization is to present the Sinti to the German public as German patriots and bearers of the German culture. In some of his public statements, Zentralrat chairman Romani Rose depicted the Sinti as guardians of the German cultural heritage and emphasized their contribution to German culture:

Sinti are among the foremost people to ensure that old cultural possessions (Kulturgut) would remain preserved. They went to the villages and bought or secured their antique things, things that other people would just have tossed into the garbage... Some German citizens who today possess a Baroque chest of drawers do not know that they owe it to the Sinti.\(^{21}\)

The Zentralrat has also tried to impress the German public with their patriotism, even inserting photos of Sinti soldiers in Wehrmacht uniform in
some of their publications, and participating in the Holocaust exhibition at the Documentation Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg.

The Sinti highlight their respectability and 'Germanness,' and in parallel represent their Gypsyhood as an aspect of their identity that belongs to the private domain alone. This claim of similarity to their fellow Germans calls to mind the interpretation in liberal German-Jewish circles of 'Jewishness' and 'Germanness,' and reflects the demands of the German citizenship law of those who wish to be naturalized in Germany. Despite their declaration of pursuing a national struggle in the name of all Romani groups, during the public civil rights campaign between 1979 and 1985 the Zentralrat and most of the Sinti gave a cool reception to the East European Roma refugees who sought asylum in Germany. The Zentralrat refrained from showing solidarity and support for Roma refugees in the early 1980s, when the latter requested the help of Sinti organizations in their legal struggle for the right to stay in Germany and escape deportation to their countries of origin. The Zentralrat claimed that growing numbers of foreign Roma who "abused their guest status in our country" might harm the image of German Sinti and Roma and thus wreck many of the organization's achievements. Nevertheless, when the Zentralrat refers to Nazi persecution, a contradictory note emerges, implying that Sinti and Roma share a common history and similar destiny throughout Europe. It always mentions not just the 15,000 German Sinti victims but the 500,000 Sinti and Roma victims of Nazism, although this might be more for practical considerations than an expression of Romani nationalism. Nevertheless, it denotes certain notions of solidarity that transcend the boundaries of the German nation state, and is more typical of a transnational group, although most Sinti reject the notion of a diaspora or a transnational group implied by Romani nationalism.

CONCLUSION

The German Sinti are caught between two facets of their identity, the first being their group-specific loyalty. This excludes the Roma, although it acknowledges, somewhat reluctantly perhaps, that the Roma share certain traits with the Sinti. Faced with a hostile world of outsiders (gadje), the Sinti trust the Roma to understand them and sympathize with them, but this negative aspect of identity, the sharing of a fate or destiny, appears to be the strongest, perhaps the only binding link between the two. The other side of the Sinti identity is their Germanness, which their leaders and representatives seek to emphasize to the gadje world. And it is here, in seeking to align themselves with rather than distance themselves from German society that the German Sinti regard the Roma as an interfering factor, rather than a support or object of identification. Since the presence of the Roma, with their pan-Romani and international orientation, is a constant reminder to the Sinti of their distinctness, they fear that in the eyes of the gadje, association with the Roma will strengthen the view that they, the Sinti, are also not an integral part of German society.

NOTES

4. E.g., Wim Willems, In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution (London, 1997).
7. Ian Hancock, "The Emergence of Romani as a Koiné outside of India," in Thomas Acton (ed.), Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies (University of Herfordshire Press, 2000), pp. 1–13; Ian Hancock, We Are the Romani People (University of Herfordshire Press, 2002); Donald Kenrick, Gypsies from India to the Mediterranean (Toulouse, 1993).
THE POLITICS OF MEMORY
JEWS AND ROMA COMMEMORATE THEIR PERSECUTION
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INTRODUCTION

In The Ethnic Origins of Nations the British historian and sociologist Anthony Smith, a leading theoretician of nationalism, defines ethnic community as “a named human population possessing a myth of common descent, common historical memories, elements of shared culture, an association with particular territory and sense of solidarity.” Although Smith accepts the claim espoused by ‘modernist’ theoreticians of nationalism, such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, that nationalism is a modern way of thinking, he argues that nationalist consciousness cannot be explained merely as a consequence of modernity but is based on primordial and perennial ethnic ties and sentiments—a pre-existent cultural unit that preceded nationalism. Ethnic heritage, he claims, is an essential background to the modern process of nation building.3

Theoreticians who underline the durability of ethnic communities, such as Smith and John Armstrong, emphasize the permanent cultural attributes of ethnic identity, namely: memories, values, myths and symbols, recorded and immortalized in art, language and laws. These are the “cement that has maintained group identity over a long period of time.”4

The ethno-symbolic hypothesis creates a synthesis between the opposing theories of the perennialists and the modernists, explaining the linkage between ethnicism and the formation of modern nation-states.5 Its significance, however, pertains to the identity of ethnic minorities, whose initial concern has been protecting their cultural identity.6

In the case of modern Jewish history, as demonstrated by Gideon Shimoni, Smith’s theory elucidates the emergence of ‘cultural nationalism,’ which preceded the appearance of Zionism. Shimoni claims that, “the genesis of Jewish nationalism is traceable to their ethnically self-affirming sentiments... [It] rose to the defense of Jewish cultural distinctiveness.”7