

The registration of Gypsies in National Socialism: Responsibility in a German region

ULRICH F. OPFERMANN

Using data from three German towns (Berleburg, Siegen, and Morsbach) we investigate one aspect of Gypsy persecution in the National-Socialist period, namely, registration. Generally labelled as ‘Gypsies’, the inhabitants of the regions were of different ‘travelling’ descent and had assimilated to a large extent. We describe the role played by the central agencies of persecution, especially the Racial Hygiene Research Unit in Berlin. It will be shown that on local levels institutions and persons collaborated extensively and that they had considerable freedom to act within the framework of national policy.

1. Introduction

In the present article I will examine how the registration of ‘Gypsies’ took place during the National Socialist persecution. I concentrate on the region situated at the intersection of the lines connecting Dortmund-Frankfurt and Köln-Kassel, which is today on the joint borders of the federal states (*Bundesländer*) Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hessen, and Rheinland-Pfalz. It is a rural area with extended forests. It has an old industrial centre—Siegerland—bordered by Wittgenstein, Rhineland, Upper Hesse, Westerwald, and Southern Westphalia.

By the end of the seventeenth century, close relations had developed in this area between some Sinti families, territorial sovereigns, and the majority

Ulrich F. Opfermann is an independent researcher specialising in regional history. Correspondence address: Hofgutstrasse 16, 57072 Siegen, Germany.

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population. In the eighteenth century some families became sedentary. They settled down in the *Wittgensteiner Zigeunerkolonien* ('Wittgenstein Gypsy colonies'), which are regarded as the oldest existing in Central Europe, as is well attested in the literature.¹ From the first half of the nineteenth century, when the conditions of settlement improved in Prussia, the second large group of regional itinerant people among the 'Manisch' families of Sinti settled down. 'Jenisch' people established new settlements or moved into existing ones.

'Manische' denotes Sinti in the usage of 'travelling' groups. In a somewhat different sense this term is still used in Wittgenstein for the inhabitants of the Berleburg *Zigeunerkolonien*, although they are not Sinti. 'Manisch' also refers to what remains of the dialect, whose lexicon derives mainly from Romani. These two senses of 'Manisch' are used by both the minority's offspring and the existing majority; the latter also use *Schwarz* ('blacks'). Both terms refer to the defining role of the Sinti within the colony's population. 'Jenische',² by contrast, refers to a group which also has independent ethnicity—although less clearly defined than Sinti—namely, itinerant small traders and mending workmen, whose ancestors at some time were separated from the indigenous majority population. The Jenische developed their own identity: they have been isolated for several generations; they had a different life-style from the majority population (*Zigeunerart*, that is, 'Gypsy-like'); and they were also isolated from the Sinti and Roma, who were their economic competitors.

In the following I use 'Manisch' to denote the offspring of the historical group of the Wittgenstein Sinti; 'Jenisch' relates to the historical group of indigenous itinerant traders and workmen; 'Manisch–Jenisch' relates to the situation prevailing since the first decades of the twentieth century: shared descent.³

Although the shift to sedentary life did little to break down the barrier separating the regional Sinti minority and the Jenisch 'white Gypsies' from the majority population, the minorities opened to each other. The tradi-

1. The families were not forced to sedentariness by the sovereigns: it was their own initiative and they were readily tolerated (Opfermann 1997: 69 ff.).

2. They also called themselves *Koochemer*.

3. For the principal differentiation, not only of speech, see Lerch (1986: 12) and Matras (1998: 197 ff.). For an example from regional neighbourhood, see the description of the folklorist Neuschäfer (1988) from Gießen: short and not always correct, but distinguishing between Manisch and Jenisch people in central Hesse.

tional separation gave way in areas of joint settlement; neighbourly relations developed and the two groups intermarried.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, more rapidly than in the first decades after the turn of the century, the two minorities grew together more and more. Apart from some relics, they lost the characteristics of their ethnicity and took over the language, way of life, and cultural forms of mainstream society, regarding themselves—in a contradictory way—as its members. Here and there a few Jenisch families of basket makers lived in the region, but there were no Sinti.⁴ Nevertheless, the term ‘Gypsy’ did not lose popularity and is still used today.

I will concentrate on three municipalities where travelling people settled down:

- the small town of Berleburg, with a settlement in the outskirts which the majority population called *Zigeunerberg* (‘Gypsy Hill’) and a few other *Kolonien* in the surrounding area. With the end of the small Principality of Wittgenstein-Berleburg as an independent state in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the former capital had become the headquarters of the Prussian district Wittgenstein;
- the industrial town of Siegen, as the regional centre with a minority mostly of Jenisch descent which was spread over the town and surrounding area;
- the rural municipality of Morsbach, consisting of some villages in the Rhenish Oberberg district with the *Zigeunerkolonie* Stockshöhe near Morsbach, the seat of the authorities. Stockshöhe was inhabited mainly by people of Jenisch origin. Some other families lived in other localities.

The three towns are within a radius of about thirty miles. The residential places of the minorities were interlinked by family ties. The districts of Wittgenstein, Siegen, and Oberberg were Nazi strongholds. At an early stage the Nazis succeeded in creating a popular party in this Protestant-Reformed majority environment, with followers in all social groups. By contrast, the *Zentrum* (‘Centre’), the party of the political Catholics, dominated in the few Catholic enclaves—Morsbach was one of them.

Special emphasis will be placed on Berleburg as the Hill was regarded as the largest settlement of ‘sedentary Gypsies’ in the Reich.

4. There had never been regional Roma (as they emigrated from South-east to Central Europe in the nineteenth century).

We look at the activities in the three towns, the wider institutions, individuals and their cooperative relationships. Section 2 deals with the initiatives by town: Berleburg in Section 2.1, Siegen in Section 2.2, and Morsbach in Section 2.3. As the locals involved made their actions exemplary, and as they succeeded in exporting these, I also investigate how their attitude was received nationally. Section 3 addresses the interaction with central agencies of persecution. Above all these were the Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Research Unit (*Rassenhygienische und Bevölkerungsbiologische Forschungsstelle*, RHF) in the Reich Department of Health, and the Reich Office of the Detective Forces (*Reichskriminalpolizeiamt*, RKPA). These two agencies, as a 'science and policing complex', formed the main instrument for the persecution of the Gypsies (Zimmermann 1996). The RHF was founded in 1936 in order to identify and classify all 'Gypsies', 'part-Gypsies' and other groups of 'born antisocials' in the Reich, thus providing the basis for their elimination. The RKPA was established in 1937 as the central headquarters of all police forces. An essential element of its task—to combat crime preventively—was the registration of Gypsies. In 1938 the Reich Office to Combat the Gypsy Plague (*Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens*) was attached to it. Apart from these two central agencies, Sections for Gypsy Questions (*Dienststellen für Zigeunerfragen*) were established in the Regional Headquarters of Offices of the Detective Forces (*Kriminalpolizeileitstellen*). The RHF and the RKPA worked closely together, but they relied heavily on the support of locals.

2. Local initiative

2.1 *Berleburg*

The families in the *Kolonien* differed from the average Berleburg population in that they were poorer, had more children, and fewer qualifications. Nevertheless, it was a complex social group differentiated by income, qualification, housing conditions, working situation, etc. A few had itinerant professions such as basket making and scissor sharpening, many were workers and supplementary farm hands, others farmers and there was even a prosperous scrap dealer. When in 1926 the Central Office to Combat the Gypsy Plague in Munich, which registered all Sinti and Roma in the Reich, wanted to know about the situation, the *Landrat*, as head of the Wittgenstein district, told them: 'About 85 per cent own small houses. The male inhabitants are mostly day labourers and work as farm hands or forest workers . . ., another

section makes a living in industry. Only a small part is peddling. Roaming about . . . does not occur. They comply with compulsory education laws.⁵ No personal data of the Berleburg minority became part of the Munich files. Naturally, the advertisement trying to promote Berleburg as a health resort recommended the original colony as a 'sight'.

Most inhabitants of the *Kolonien* had both Manisch and Jenisch ancestors, but some were of full Jenisch descent. According to contemporary ethnic-racial thinking, the latter were to be rated as being *deutschblütig* ('of German blood'), like the small minority of long-established *Städter* ('town inhabitants'), who also lived on the Gypsy Hill. Because they bore the stigma of a 'travelling' ancestry or of a relationship to people of 'travelling' ancestry, the majority population regarded them as an integral component of the minority. They were indiscriminately subsumed under the category 'Gypsy'. Actually only one family on the Hill more or less considered itself Sinti. In this exceptional case, a marriage relation to itinerant Sinti had led to the expulsion from the original Berleburg family.

In spite of all objective alignment and subjective willingness for conformity, the minority and the Berleburg majority did not mix. While in reality the families had been overcome by the pressure of assimilation and firmly dissociated themselves from their original groups, they were still discriminated in school, church, and local associations. For the majority population they continued to be feared or admired exotics.

At the beginning of the 1930s about 280 of the 3,300 inhabitants of Berleburg were regarded as Gypsies. When the Nazis came into power the efforts to integrate stopped abruptly.

Exclusion began immediately after the establishment of the new political conditions, initially only on local and regional levels. A great variety of measures was taken against the minority (Opfermann 1997, 1999), with the mayor, Dr Theodor Günther, as an active forefighter. Being a young outsider at the beginning of his career (he was born in 1902), he had to distinguish himself before the native town dwellers. The Gypsy issue suited him well and he used it. By excluding the minority from the system of public funds and services he wanted to get free resources for the majority population.

Günther pursued two general plans for removing the 'Gypsies' out of town. In this he was supported by the *Landrat*, which stated as one of its foremost duties 'to get rid of the Berleburg 'Gypsy colony' in the course of

5. Hauptstaatsarchiv München, MJnn 72577, report Landrat Kreis Wittgenstein, 5 January 1926.

years.⁶ Günther's first plan, as early as 1934, was to intern the minority in a camp in a wasteland area in northern Germany.⁷ This was not an original idea: a college of mayors in the neighbouring district of Olpe had suggested a similar idea to the *Landrat* in 1926.⁸ Secondly, since 1934 he tried to use the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* ('Law for Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Defects'; hereafter 'Sterilization Law') of 14 July 1933 to sterilize as many members of the minority as possible. It enabled the compulsory sterilization of 'hereditary ill'. A wide variety of phenomena were regarded as 'hereditary defects'—for example, hereditary deafness and blindness, severe physical deformities, schizophrenia, severe alcoholism, and epilepsy. The regular medical diagnosis of the lawyer Günther was 'hereditary feeble-mindedness'. Generally he was of the opinion that 90 per cent of the school children in the *Kolonien* were cases for sterilization (Günther 1937a: 268). His numerous attempts at sterilization failed, mainly because of the attitude of the district government (*Bezirksregierung*) as supervisory authority; but there was also still the sense of justice known from the Weimar Republic.

In addition, since 1933 there were numerous measures of deprivation, such as exclusion from unemployment benefits, from winter relief (*Winterhilfswerk*) and support by the National Socialist People's Welfare (*Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*); they were refused marriage loans and family benefits, and they were not allowed to marry. Finally, a temporary curfew and a ban on moving into the *Kolonien* were imposed. In some cases the local and the district authorities were again opposed by the district government.

'Gypsies' were refused public aid and suffered other administrative measures just because they were regarded as Gypsies. Initially it was enough that someone lived in a marked district to be considered as a Gypsy. Later the

6. Staatsarchiv Münster (hereafter StAMs), Kreis Wittgenstein, Landratsamt, 800, Landrat to Regierung Arnsberg, 21 October 1935.

7. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 36, ex-mayor Günther to Staatsanwaltschaft, 27 April 1948.

8. Kreisarchiv Olpe, A 2486, mayor of Drolshagen to Landrat, 26 February 1928: 'Man spricht und schreibt so viel über Oedland und seine Urbarmachung in deutschen Landen. Lege man staatlicherseits in diesen Gegenden Baracken an, sammele die Kinder der Straße und schicke sie in Sammeltransporten dahin und zwingen sie unter steter Bewachung zur Arbeit, wie man es im Kriege mit den Gefangenen machte.' ('So much is written and said about wasteland and its cultivation in Germany. In these areas barracks should be built for state security, children should be collected from the streets and be transported there and be forced to labour under strict supervision, as we do with prisoners of war.')

main criterion—if not the only one—was the ancestral line. In interpreting the Sterilization Law, the local State Office of Health, producing the kinship group panels (*Sippentafeln*) and a kinship group card file (*Sippenkartei*), the first collection of genealogical data was created.⁹ When required they were handed over to other administrative institutions. If other authorities demanded registry documents they received information on supposed Gypsy ancestors and godparents, with no questions asked.¹⁰

The Nuremberg Race Laws (*Blutschutzgesetz* and *Reichsbürgergesetz*) of 1935 made marriages and sexual intercourse between Jews and ‘German blooded’ punishable and excluded Jews from the newly introduced ‘Reich nationality’, which was placed above citizenship, and which alone granted full political rights. The laws also prescribed who was to be classified as a ‘full-blooded Jew’, as a *Mischling* (‘half breed’ or ‘part Jew’) ‘first degree’ or as a *Mischling* ‘second degree’. The category ‘part Jew’ covered all people with one or two Jewish grandparents. Although the Nuremberg Laws did not mention ‘Gypsies’ explicitly, they then defined them as ‘regularly of alien blood’¹¹ as early as 1936. Thus, including them into the Nuremberg Laws, in 1935 the Wittgenstein *Landrat* tried to persuade the president of the district authority (*Bezirksregierung*) to apply the laws to the Berleburg minority.¹²

In 1935, Günther formulated similar thoughts in a memorandum and later reworked it into two well-noticed articles published in 1937 in specialist journals (1937a, 1937b). In late 1936 he presented a report based on his memorandum, which played an important role at a conference of the *Bezirksregierung* about the Berleburg ‘Gypsy question.’¹³ At that conference he succeeded in contacting a ‘decisive authority’ in Berlin, presumed to be the RHF or the RKPA, via the leader of the Race Policy Office in the Southern Westphalia NSDAP district (*Gau Westfalen-Süd*).¹⁴

When giving reasons for his demand for exclusion, Günther referred

9. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 36, Wesentliches Ergebnis der Ermittlungen, 13 March 1948.

10. So attested for 1936 with an application for family benefit: StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 32, testimony, 8 February 1949.

11. See Stuckart/Globke 1936: 56.

12. StAMs, Kreis Wittgenstein, Landratsamt 800, Landrat to Regierung Arnsberg, 23 November 1935.

13. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 31, testimony Günther and his ‘Statistik über das Zigeunerwesen in Berleburg. Stand der Aufstellung: 6.9.1935’.

14. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 31, Wesentliches Ergebnis der Ermittlungen, 13 March 1948.

emphatically to hereditary biology and a race policy view. He distinguished between 'Gypsies' and 'newcomers of German blood . . . in almost every case of *Ostisch* [Alpine] race character'—the latter meaning Jenisch people. In his concrete statements, however, he did not assign to this group a separate role. He added them indiscriminately to a group which he collectively called 'Gypsies'. He divided the subgroup of 'Gypsies' in the narrow sense into 'full-blood Gypsies' and 'Gypsy *Mischlinge* first degree' and 'second degree'. The detailed classification followed the guidelines of the Nuremberg Laws. Instead of denomination, as with the Jews, Günther used family names as proof of descent. Starting out with four family names defined to be those of Gypsy families he determined the 'blood share' arithmetically, tracing names three generations back.

Lavishly distinguishing the several subgroups, he faked scientific methodology and system, but in the end this did not have any consequence. As an illustration of 'alien blood' he assigned a collective appearance and a collective character and behaviour to the group which he located genetically. This was an abstruse fiction. It had nothing to do with the people living on the Hill, but it was suitable for rationalizing their exclusion.

He denied that the Berleburg 'Gypsies' varied physically, even when some had red or blond hair and blue eyes. Rather, he embraced the popular conviction that 'Gypsies' could be made out by physical characteristics that distinguished them from the majority population. For example, he asserted that they would differ—'like a 100 years before'—by 'limb structure, shape of head, facial expression, yellow skin colour, black hair, black-velvet goggle eyes', in which 'the oriental steppe blood sparkles', and the 'often shrilling tone of their voice'.

Though for the moment he admitted that the Berleburg group was sedentary, he then said this was a deception. Actually, the 'full-blood Gypsies' practised a 'periodical, circular nomadism'. Whether they vanished 'into the far distance by caravan in spring, when the hot Gypsy blood begins to burn' or, as an alternative, 'aimlessly' cycled afield 'far away' during the week or were 'roaming about randomly' in the region. The same with the 'part-Gypsies': 'most of them' followed 'their daily restless urge to travel' like 'full-blood Gypsies', though they customarily returned home in the evening. As additional characteristics of a genetically predisposed personality and resistance against any external influence, Günther listed a collection of defaming attributes: antisocial behaviour, crafty mendacity, slyness, greed, hypocrisy, denunciation, notorious work-shyness, refusal of any law and

morals, etc. Finally, as if this were not enough, he insisted 'irresistible interest' in trashy entertainment, such as 'circus performances, acrobatics and sensational movies with horse-hunting, prairies, lassos and gun shots'.

He denied the decisive criterion of the acculturation of the minority, namely, the loss of the original Romani language or the characteristic in-group Jenisch vocabulary, by declaring that the people of the *Kolonien* spoke German 'only poorly'. Assertions on the increase in population, delinquency, and employment could allegedly verify the 'enormous power of reproduction', the inaccessibility for norms and the inability to stay in a job.

Günther then demanded, in a three-step plan, 'delimitation', 'registration' and 'ending'. By 'delimitation' he meant exclusion from the majority population by individual marking and inclusion in local data files. 'Registration' meant extending 'delimitation' to those 'Gypsies living out of the local scope'. 'All Gypsies and part-Gypsies who live in the territory of the *Deutsches Reich* and are national subjects' should be marked according to their ancestry and subjected to general race policy regulations. The marking should become part of the information 'in the electoral registers, registers of the local police authorities, official certificates of moving in and moving away, passports, licences for itinerant trades, service record lists, labour service documents, family documents (*Familienbücher*) and other identity papers' as well as in the files of the registry offices (Günther 1937b: 196). When all members of the minority are determined and marked, 'ending' could start by concentration and 'encapsulation' in isolated quarters. As a result of ghettoization the 'German blood' part would 'bastardize' and a population of only 'half-breeds' would grow, considerably damaged through compulsory inbreeding. Now it would be possible to apply the Sterilization Law extensively without any scruples.

Günther's conception and his intentions approached those of Dr Robert Ritter (Zimmermann 1996: 136), initiator and chief of the RHF, who had started the systematic registration throughout the Reich in late summer of 1936. In Günther's as well as in Ritter's view, sedentary life and employment did not reduce the alleged inferiority and harmfulness. They both regarded 'part-Gypsies' as a greater risk than 'full-blood Gypsies' and Jenische as dangerous for the hereditary health of the imaginary 'German national body'. Like Ritter, Günther was not interested in individuals or family groups: one should judge the minority 'as a totality' and abolish it 'systematically' 'as a whole' by intervening with in biological reproduction (Günther 1937a, Zimmermann 1996: 131 ff.).

Günther's articles were based on the contribution of his civil servants (such as the registry office, local police force, the land registry, the office of economic affairs) and on cooperation with external institutions such as the Public Health Office (a state-run institution), the district court, the headmaster of the Catholic school, an insurance company, employers, the district organization of itinerant trade, several priests's offices, and individuals. In the course of the Berleburg attempt to cross the moral and legal borders accepted by then, and to make the local minority an exemplary case for future treatment of Gypsies, in the 1930s a local network evolved out of conceptional needs and practical activities. Its numerous members could not have been unaware of Günther's intentions, which he propagated openly. Behind the backs of the people affected (that is, the 'Gypsies'), a data file was created which was to determine their fate for years.

As mentioned, Günther published his articles in specialized and recognized journals, and throughout the Reich he received the attention of professional journals which were important for his purposes. Among those were the *Ziel und Weg* ('Aim and Way'), organ of the Nazi Physicians' League, and the *Reichsverwaltungsblatt* ('Journal of the Reich Authorities'), compulsory reading for lawyers and other officials. From there his opinions were passed on to other journals for physicians, teachers, pedagogues, and welfare workers (*Der Öffentliche Gesundheitsdienst, Die deutsche Sonderschule, Wohlfahrts-Woche, Deutsches Ärzteblatt*).¹⁵ Readers were persuaded to abandon the current interpretation of the Sterilization Law and the Nuremberg Race Laws. They should radicalize their views and accept new, *völkisch*¹⁶ Nazi ethics by going beyond individual cases and generalizing over 'Gypsies' and 'part-Gypsies'.

Almost at the same time, two medical dissertations, both written at Professor Karl Wilhelm Jötten's Institute for Hygiene at Münster University, dealt with the families from the Hill from a race and social-hygiene point of view

15. See Andrees (1939); NN (1939). As early as 1934 a race and social-hygiene expert had drawn attention to Berleburg in an hereditary hygiene instruction book, which was published in a large number of copies. He used the inhabitants of the Hill as examples for 'constancy of heritage with Gypsies' and required internment, preventive detention, sterilization, and castration (Friehe 1934: 65f.). As an expert representative of the NSDAP Reich Central Office he had been in Berleburg in July 1933 to give several race-policy talks. Presumably he occupied himself with the 'Gypsy colony' and met Günther. See the series of articles in the Wittgensteiner National-Zeitung, July 1933.

16. Attributes to the 'blood community' of the German people, a widespread German understanding of 'national'.

(Engelbarth 1935, Krämer 1937). Engelbarth evaluated regional school dental hygiene, assuming a correlation between 'race and frequency of caries', examining the teeth of 'nineteen full-blooded Gypsies', namely school children. The school teacher had stated the purity of blood: he was 'informed about the race history of the Gypsies'. The Berleburg dentist, Robert Krämer, carried out a 'race study' on the inhabitants of the Hill in 1936. Denying any kind of social determination and any chance of intervention, he categorically supported the race biology doctrine. Passages amounting to about eighteen pages of text had been copied from Günther. Krämer's emphasis was, on the one hand, the really obsessive belittling of his objects of observation, which made the paper a written invective, and on the other hand, the extent to which he attempted to substantiate his claims. He did not confine himself to collecting genealogical and social data, but included the outward appearance recorded in photographs and the results of anthropological measurements. Again the 'blood share' had been calculated according to the regulations of the Nuremberg Laws and the categories 'Gypsy', 'part-Gypsy first degree', 'part-Gypsy second degree' and 'German-blooded' had been set up. 'Pure Gypsies' and 'pure German-blooded' accounted for half of the group, a quarter each. As with Günther, the considerable number of subjects labelled as non-Gypsies did not influence Krämer's statements and conclusions at all. They too were part of the group collectively labelled as 'Gypsies'.

In addition, Krämer denied that the allegedly typical Gypsy way of life could not be stated in the Berleburg *Kolonien*. He emphasized, even in stronger terms than Günther had before him, the danger of 'bastards'. 'Mixing blood' with the 'scum of the German host nation'—by which he meant the Jenisch people ('German-blooded')—had caused a 'negative selection'. Thus the 'parasitic constancy of inherited Gypsiness', already present, had aggravated. Krämer examined the colour of skin, eyes, and hair of school children and confirmed the obvious fact denied by Günther that a uniform appearance did not exist. However, the children showed 'an almost uniform picture of laziness, and mendacity in their character and mental predispositions'. He judged the election successes of the Communist Party (KPD) at the time of the Weimar Republic on the Hill as an expression of collective political-genetic deficiencies of character: *Untermensch* ('subhuman creature') instinct had made the inhabitants adhere to an Asiatic *Weltanschauung*, rather than to that of the German 'host nation'.

Like Günther, Krämer demanded the extension of the Nuremberg Laws to Gypsies, but only 'as a first step'. As things would develop he thought

‘a final solution’ was necessary, which he did not explain in any detail. Krämer was supported by informants in the municipal and the public-health authorities, and by the local police station, the district court and the archives of the Prince of Wittgenstein-Berleburg. The Catholic school which was attended by the children of the almost exclusively Catholic minority committed its pupils to participate in the study but their parents refused to do so.

Race- and social-hygiene experts held Krämer’s enterprise in high esteem. It was published in the renowned specialist journal *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* (‘Archives for Race and Social Biology’). A specific infamy of both Günther and Krämer had been to publicize the family names of the subjects of their experiments. Not only did they expose them to ridicule, they also offered to look for the ancestors of the name bearers. That was taken up willingly.¹⁷

2.2 Siegen

In 1935 an employee in the Office of Welfare in Siegen published an overview of several ‘tribes’ of Wittgenstein and Siegerland ‘asocials’ that formed a ‘kinship group’ (*Sippe*) not worth preserving.¹⁸ The place of publication was the *Völkischer Wille*, a popular demographic journal. While the author preferred to remain anonymous, he named the stigmatized families. The main thrust of the article was the widely approved idea of increased utility, which Günther and Krämer had emphasized too, namely, to save expenditures caused by families deemed genetically ‘inferior’ in favour of the majority population. Municipal and district welfare payments were quoted in concrete amounts, summed up and confronted with ‘68 smallholdings’ which could have been used for ‘sound’ German worker families instead.

The article originated in the Office of Welfare (Langenbach 1935). It listed the contemporary descendants of a Jenisch basket maker in the nineteenth century as a *Schlag* (extended group connected by ancestry and marriage)

17. This is how RHF assistant Hesse understood the assignment (Hesse 1939: 405). See Gemeindearchiv Morsbach (hereafter GAMb), 1676, reference to one of Günther’s articles in Bürgermeister Morsbach to Landrat and Kripoleitstelle Köln, 6 December 1939.

18. Eine ‘Familie Kallikak’ in Deutschland. 1935. *Völkischer Wille*. Kampfblatt für Bevölkerungspolitik und Familie (46). The title quotes a ‘study on heredity of feeble-mindedness’ of the American teacher and supporter of eugenical sterilizations, Henry Herbert Goddard. In 1914 it was published in Germany for the first time and reprinted in a popular race policy series in 1934.

of 'asocials'. The anonymous author intended 'to show that men of this *Schlag* also live in our town. These are family X and the families related by blood and marriage'.

As on wanted lists, he assigned numerous social, physical, and mental deviations and deficiencies. Sumptuously pictured sexual wildness was a main focus of the tract, obviously a specific point of interest to the author. As in Krämer's article, 'un-German' sympathies for the Communist Party were interpreted as politico-genetic characteristics. In some cases 'Gypsies' were mentioned as partners in marriage. The classification resulted from 'Gypsy' family names and was combined with an absurd appearance: 'typically Mongolian'. Not being up-to-date with the current discussion about the race assessment of 'asocials' and 'Gypsies', the author did not use the category 'part-Gypsy'. In his conclusions he did not give details, but discarded 'mildness and forbearance' as being 'misplaced'. Above all, the article was meant as a practical contribution to solve budget problems. It did not explicitly formulate race or social-hygiene issues. Nevertheless, the author signalled his fundamental position by using key notions with their respective (*Untermensch, Unterrassiger, volksschädlich*, 'inferior, hereditary characteristics of personality', etc.).

The article was an interim result but the author sent it to the RHF anyway. He continued his research in the next years and kept the RHF informed.¹⁹ Apart from the records of the Office of Welfare and from the Office of Juvenile Welfare, the author could use the records of the Office of Health, the local police, other local authorities, courts, as well as 'personal impressions and memories of superiors, officials in charge and former officials in charge'.

In 1938 Otto Hesse made use of the assertions of the welfare official in Siegen in an article in the organ of the Reich Department for Special Schools in the Nazi Teachers' League (1938: 510f.). Hesse was from Siegen, was headmaster of a special school for the retarded in Soest, and the regional researcher of the RHF.²⁰ He brought the portrayal of Siegen in line with the needs of the centrally pursued Gypsy policy by changing the seven racially undefined families into a single family of one hundred people, now 'Gypsies'.

19. Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BA), R 165, no. 156, Städtische Fürsorge Siegen to Amtsbürgermeister Morsbach, 3 September 1936.

20. StAMs, Regierung Arnsberg, IM 421, decree, 18 June 1941; GAMb, 1676, Hesse to Bürgermeister, 10 November 1941.

A revised edition of the Siegen paper was published in *Volk und Rasse* in 1939, the organ of the Reich Committee for People's Health Service and the German Society for Racial Hygiene. It followed Hesse's pattern of refining it (Langenbach 1939). The author—now more courageous and declaring his name—turned out to be a young municipal inspector (born in 1908). As a new assertion he wrote that the group varied from persons with a 'pretty high proportion of Gypsy blood' to some 'pure Gypsies'. The initial family was said to have had 'a considerable share of Gypsy blood'. Moreover, numerous 'part-Gypsies' had married into the family. It was a sheer invention. As a rule, in the nineteenth century the Siegerland Jenisch people were not related to Sinti families—the basket maker's family mentioned before was an example.²¹ The author evidently aimed at bringing his article in line with the current doctrine produced under the influence of the RHF (Zimmermann 1996: 131, 148ff.).

He was now more concrete about a possible solution to the problem. He dismissed the Sterilization Law and the Marriage Law (*Ehegesundheitsgesetz*, which forbade members of the minority to marry 'German blooded' people) as inefficient. Even if these laws could stop the 'asocial pest' from reproducing, the present generations would 'still remain alive, burdening the entire population for decades'. The state authorities should also 'remove from the national community the asocials alive to-day'.

Also in 1939 a regional folklorist and elementary school teacher from Siegerland, Wilhelm Ring, compiled genealogical data of families of Jenisch descent in the villages of the surrounding countryside (Ring 1940). Ring did not explicitly formulate racial biological positions and did not use the nasty and railing tone of the welfare inspector. However, he did ask for the results of 'inbreeding' and for genealogical interrelations with the Wittgenstein 'Gypsies'. Going back to opinions prevalent in the nineteenth century, he connected the ancestors of the observed families with 'rogues', 'robber bands', 'smugglers' and 'parasites' without any proof. He started out from the conviction that inheritance had been the way to accumulate their negative characteristics up to the present 'economic and moral burden'. He added to his article a copy of the denouncement and defamatory article of the Siegen welfare inspector published in 1935 in *Völkischer Wille*.

Ring identified living places, families, and individuals and studied the genealogies. He suggested that church registers, court records, and municipi-

21. This appears from the regional church registers.

pal archives should be investigated systematically. Anyhow, 'further studies in this sense' should be prompt and be collected in order 'to collect the material to work on this question'. He addressed his paper to the Siegen municipal archivist. His target group was not the general public but the small circle of racial and social-hygiene experts of the RHF. Its regional aide, Hesse, got a copy.²²

The authors of the two Siegerland compilations acted without standing in a local or regional working context, and independently from each other. The welfare inspector could draw on the authority and the resources of his office. It served as a helpful platform to organize support from other local offices and from other municipalities. Ring could see the records and archives of priests's offices and schools. Both acted on their own initiative and this did not change. There are no indications that others in the region had taken up their subject. Their investigations attracted the attention of the headquarters of the police and scientific Gypsy registration, but not that of the heads of the local and of the district authorities.

We have, then, two demographic and racial biological protagonists whose activities were appreciated by the RHF, while they were virtually ignored locally. A few members of the denounced minority were sterilized with the participation, if not on the initiative, of the Office of Welfare, but persecution by the local authorities seems to have been limited to that.

2.3 *Morsbach*

The municipality of Morsbach had about 35,000 inhabitants. About eighty of them were of Jenisch or Manisch-Jenisch descent and most of them lived in the settlement of Stockshöhe. As early as the 1920s there were only a few who kept the traditional occupations as peddlers, scissor grinders, or basket makers.²³

In the fall of 1934 the Provincial Farmers' Representation (*Landesbauernschaft*) enquired with the Morsbach authorities about 'Gypsy families'. It received a list with the particulars of three families.²⁴ The criteria for clas-

22. See the correspondence of the post-Nazi apologist of race and social hygiene, Hermann Arnold, with Hesse. Arnold used the manuscript of the Siegerland folklorist in the seventies in the context of his studies to Jenisch people. See BA, ZSg. 142/32, Mappe 3-535, Arnold to Hesse, 11 January 1965.

23. GAMB, 1629, Verzeichnis der Steuerpflichtigen 1921.

24. GAMB, 1679, correspondence Landesbauernschaft, Kreisbauernführer, Bürgermeister Morsbach, 12 October 1934, 26 October 1934.

sification were conjectures about ancestry or unsubstantiated convictions ('... the wife suspected to be a Gypsy woman . . .', 'It is beyond question that the wife is a Gypsy woman . . .') and commonly held stereotypes about appearance and behavioural and mental characteristics: '... the well-known Gypsy type: brown skin, black hair, reluctance to permanent work, urge to roam around, wearing of jewellery in the way Gypsies do, musical talents, etc.' The records do not give the motives of the enquiry of the *Landesbauernschaft*. Evidently the denunciation did not have any consequences for the affected.

There may have been more social marginality in Morsbach than in Berleburg. A few families lived in old disused railway carriages and there were more cases of welfare allowance, but nowhere can the argument be found that exclusion of the minority would bring material advantages to the local budget and to the majority population. The local and district authorities did not initiate measures of selection. As late as 1936 the municipality re-admitted former occupants of Stockshöhe as inhabitants—although reluctantly—when they returned from Solingen. They wanted to escape the squalor of the caravan site which the authorities had installed there (Rogge 1994: 65).²⁵

The activities of the Morsbach authorities seem to have been restricted to police surveillance of Stockshöhe and reporting non-local visitors of the families who were suspected of being 'Gypsies'.²⁶ In some cases applications were made for compulsory sterilization and as a result, a few inhabitants with Jenisch or Manisch-Jenisch ancestry were sterilized.²⁷ But only the applications made in the 1940s fit the race policy of the Gypsy persecution. In at least three cases in April 1943 the affected refused to consent—which was formally necessary—although the RKPA was behind the applications.

25. GAMB, 2907, correspondence Gemeindeverwaltung Morsbach, Bezirksfürsorgeverband und Stadtverwaltung Solingen, March and April 1936.

26. GAMB, 1676, report of Ortspolizei, 14 July 1936.

27. So at least in 1934, 1938, 1939, 1942 and—following the Auschwitz-Erlaß which intended the exempted to be sterilized—in 1943. See GAMB 3123, correspondence Bürgermeisteramt Morsbach, Gesundheitsamt des Oberbergischen Kreises, Universitäts-Frauenklinik Bonn, Erbgesundheitsgericht Bonn, November 1934 till May 1935, January 1938 till April 1939, GAMB 3281, Bürgermeisteramt Morsbach, Gesundheitsamt des Oberbergischen Kreises, Landrat/Bezirksfürsorgeverband, March–June 1942, Gemeindeverwaltung to NN, 3.1.1947, GAMB 1676, RKPA, Kripoleitstelle Köln, Ortsbehörde Morsbach, February till April 1943.

It referred to Himmler's Auschwitz decree and a refusal could provoke deportation.

3. Transition of initiative to the central institutions

3.1 *Berleburg*

In August 1936 the RHF took up its activities. An early, if not its first, thoroughly studied field of exploration²⁸ was the district of Wittgenstein, especially the municipality of Berleburg. Its *Kolonien* housed those 'sedentary part-Gypsies' who were regarded as prime examples for examination; they were expected to be a good source of local information.

The investigations in Berleburg, Siegen, and Morsbach in the previous years were only of limited value to the RHF, for it had its own conception and imposed its own standards. RHF scientist Dr Adolf Würth dismissed Günther's and Krämer's publications as nonsense: 'These articles do not say anything about Gypsies' (1938: 98). His boss, Robert Ritter, considered them a 'disaster' because of their disturbing influence on the Paris International Congress for Demographic Sciences in 1937.²⁹ Würth's and Ritter's disapproval may have been inspired by the competition between the leaders of the RHF and the leader of the Section for the Preservation of Descent and Race in the Reich Committee of National Health (*Abteilung für Erb- und Rassenpflege im Reichsausschuß für Volksgesundheitsdienst*), Carl-Heinz Rodenberg (Zimmermann 1996 153f.). The latter, who had also turned to the Gypsy question, had been appreciative of the Berleburger articles (Rodenberg 1937).

For Krämer and Günther, the Berleburg minority, like all 'Gypsies', was an integral part of a separate group of aliens. Ritter applied the common term 'Gypsy' to a group of the population almost completely ethnically mixed: the intersection of two groups of 'born asocials', namely Sinti and Roma on the one hand, and the 'scum of the German people', mostly of Jenisch origin, on the other. In his view these 'half-breeds' constituted a 'motley riffraff'—hard to define, a 'formless lumpen-proletariat', the Berleburg group appeared to be a typical example (Ritter 1938: 77, 1939: 15).

28. According to the numbering of the RHF race reports on the Berleburg group: BA, R 165, No. 212, 'Aufstellung über die im Stadtbezirk wohnhaften Zigeunermischlinge', 1 March 1939, references to race reports no. 3 and no. 138.

29. BA, ZSg., 142/28, correspondence Würth, Ritter, July 1937.

In contrast with Günther and Krämer, the RHF refused to apply the Nuremberg definition of *Mischlinge* to the minority. By stretching the definition the RHF got a larger group (Zimmermann 1996: 148f.). The category of ‘part-Gypsy’—the criterion of social conformity, which was open to manipulation, were not considered—covered all people with at least two ‘quarter-Gypsies’ up to two ‘full-blooded’ and two ‘half-blooded’ Gypsies in their ancestry. Thus, more than 90 per cent of all those registered were declared *Mischlinge*, the category considered to be the main risk (Zimmermann 1996: 151).

Not later than in March 1937 Günther and Ritter first met in Berleburg.³⁰ In May and in June a ‘flying squad’ visited Wittgenstein. Its members were Ritter’s close assistants Adolf Würth and Eva Justin; the visit lasted about four weeks. Their activities went beyond what had been done earlier: ‘Anthropological examinations of the half-breeds . . ., examinations of schoolchildren and check of the school reports’. Genealogical studies in the Registry Office, in the Protestant and in the Catholic priest’s offices in Berleburg and the Office of Health. Several discussions with the mayor or his deputy, with the head of the district, with the *Kreisleiter* [the leader of the NSDAP district organization] and the headmasters of the two elementary schools . . . evaluations of records [in the princely private archives of Wittgenstein Castle]. In Laasphe [near Wittgenstein Castle] checking the Protestant church-registers.³¹ Members of the minority who refused examination and recording were brought before Würth and Justin by the police.

A photograph, probably made during the RHF visit, showing a ‘pedlar colony’ in Hemschlar near Berleburg³², and the inclusion in the RHF register of kinship groups of the Jenisch family that lived there, once more show that the interest and the practices of the Berlin race scientists went beyond ‘Gypsies’ and ‘part-Gypsies’ and also covered the Jenisch minority.

As a result of their investigations the RHF stated that the ‘Gypsies’ presented by Günther and Krämer were mere manipulations. Meanwhile, in the ‘Gypsy colony’, only people were to be found ‘who do not have any contacts with tribes of pure race, who do not understand the Gypsy language and to whom the customs and the laws of their Gypsy ancestors are alien’

30. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 31, Wesentliches Ergebnis der Ermittlungen, 13 March 1948.

31. BA Berlin, ZSg., 142/28, work report, 18 May to 12 June 1937.

32. BA Koblenz, B 107, 94/32/29 a.

(Ritter 1938: 77). According to their racist premises they did not interpret these facts as an expression of a social process, but as the hardening of a hereditary biological phenomenon: the genesis of 'kinship groups of half-breeds', closed to the outside world, open only to their asserted genetic neighbours, the *Jenisch* people.

The RHF classification produced the desired results. There were only two categories, 'part-Gypsies' and 'non-Gypsies'. The latter were also singled out on suspicion of having travelling forefathers and judged to be an asocial plague.³³ When the blood-share calculation resulted in 'full-blooded Gypsy', this was changed to 'considered as a part-Gypsy'. In one exceptional case a woman of an itinerant Sinti family had married a man from the Hill. Although there were no genealogical data she was put into the category 'part-Gypsy'.

A list of 'the persons living in the Gypsy colony of Berleburg and its environs' with the notes *ZM* (*Zigeunermischung*, 'part-Gypsy') and *NZ* (*Nichtzigeuner*, 'non-Gypsy') became obligatory in September 1938 for the selection decisions of the local and regional authorities. In 1941 the categories *ZM* (+) and *ZM* (-) were added. They were used to indicate a 'predominantly Gypsy blood share' or a 'predominantly German blood share'.³⁴ Changes of occupancy in the *Kolonien* were regularly reported to the RHF by the local authorities, so revised versions of the residential list went back to Berleburg several times.

Günther now stood corrected. On the agenda was now a 'solution' to the Berleburg problem as envisaged by the RHF. In the Reich its classification system was introduced after March 1939, when the guidelines for implementation of Himmler's decree 'Combating the Gypsy Plague' of 8 December 1938 (*Grunderlaß*) were issued. The *Grunderlaß* recommended 'the final solution to the Gypsy question based on its essentially racial nature'.

In 1939, following Himmler's decree, the local police—on the instructions of the Office of the Detective Forces (*Kriminalpolizeistelle Dortmund, Kripo*)—started registration by taking fingerprints and photographs. The

33. BA Berlin, R 165, No. 212, 'Nachweisung über die Abstammung der über 14 Jahre alten, in der Zigeunerkolonie und Umgebung wohnhaften Personen ('Proof about the descent of persons of fourteen years old and older in the Gypsy colony and its surroundings'), Stand: 1. September 1938', with handwritten notes; Stadtarchiv Berleburg (hereafter StABb), 151, hec-tographic version.

34. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 32, Urteil, 4 March 1949.

Berleburg 'part-Gypsies' and 'non-Gypsies' received special photo-identity cards in different colours, according to category.³⁵ It was the preliminary step towards the *Festsetzungserlaß* which was issued on 17 October 1939 by the Reich Security Central Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA).³⁶ It prohibited all members of the minority from changing their registered domicile and was meant to prepare for a 'final transportation'. When in May 1940 about 2,500 'Gypsies' and 'part-Gypsies' from Northwest, West, and Southwest Germany were deported to the *Generalgouvernement*, the Berleburg group was not affected. However, active soldiers in the *Wehrmacht* were dismissed (May/June 1941)³⁷ and all schoolchildren were removed from their schools (October 1942),³⁸ although after protests the latter decision was later partly reversed.

On 16 December 1942 Himmler issued his decree for the incarceration in a concentration camp of 'part-Gypsies, Rom-Gypsies and non-German-blooded members of Gypsy families of Balkan origin'. The RSHA guidelines of 29 January 1943 named the extermination camp Auschwitz as the destination.

In Berleburg the selection of those to be deported was based on a RHF list which had been updated in 1942. The need to update the list mainly resulted from new births. The last decision was made in a local conference on the eve of the deportation. Representatives of the Dortmund *Kripo*, the local police, the local and district authorities, the Office of Health, the Office of Welfare, the Employment Exchange, the NSDAP and its Race Policy Office took part. One hundred and thirty four people were selected, about half of them children, and transported to Auschwitz in cattle wagons on 9 March 1943. Nine survived.

At the same time, all movable and immovable property was confiscated. Part of the properties were passed on to the majority population, partly it was surrendered to the regional tax office for exploitation. All deportees were subject to the special regulations of the RSHA guidelines, which stipulated that they should not be deported as their relatives and acquaintances

35. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 31, testimony, 1 February 1948.

36. Central institution commanding Security Service (*SD*) of SS and Security Police, the latter consisting of Secret Policy of State (*Gestapo*) and 'Detective Forces' (*Kripo*).

37. Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München, MA 423, Bl. 485.244–485.261, notes and correspondence Parteikanzlei, Gauleitung Westfalen-Süd, Reichspropagandaministerium, February till June 1941.

38. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 32, u.a. Urteil, 4 March 1949.

in Hagen and in the Sauerland region had been.³⁹ The local authorities knew, and in the small town it was an open secret, that the destination of the transport was not some vague labour camp or settlement area somewhere in the East, but the concentration camp Auschwitz, known as a place of no return—if not of extermination (Opfermann 1997: 202, Opfermann 1999: 82).

For those who escaped deportation, persecution did not end. Almost all forms of deprivation remained in force: they suffered sterilization⁴⁰ as did many 'non-Gypsies'.⁴¹ At least ten members of the Hemschlar basket-maker group were sterilized.⁴² Part of the Berleburg majority population would have preferred all inhabitants of the *Kolonien* to have been deported, without exception. Overt remarks of citizens and of officials of the local authorities expressed the hope of a second deportation and the expectation to profit from the distribution of the estates one more time (Opfermann 1999: 82).

3.2 *Siegen, Morsbach*

Although there were no RHF activities in Siegen there was communication between some local authorities and the headquarters in Berlin.⁴³ A police official deployed in Siegen in the 1940s declared after the war that 'all Gypsies in Siegen' had been summoned in 1944. So it can be assumed that there was a list. They had been forced to consent to sterilization. However, supported by the mayor and another high local official they successfully refused, according to the spokesman (Heyer 1988: 36 f.). In Siegen there were only two cases of deportation, both on requests from Berleburg.

In Morsbach registration by fingerprinting and photographing on the instructions of RKPA, and performed by the local police, followed the *Grunderlaß*. The Section for Gypsy Questions in the Office of the Detective Forces (Regional Headquarters) in Cologne, where the data were accumulated, was responsible.

39. StAMs, Staatsanwaltschaft Siegen, no. 31, Ermittlungen gegen Hermann Fischer u.a., testimonies, 16 January and 2 February 1948.

40. After the deportation the exempted had to consent to their sterilization which some of them refused.

41. StABb, 151, Erklärungen gegenüber der Stadtverwaltung, May 1949.

42. StABb, 151, Verzeichnis über die im Stadt- und Amtsbezirk gegen ihren Willen sterilisierten Personen, July 1946.

43. Private collection of author, correspondence RHF, Stadtschulamt, Pestalozzi-Schule about a youth detained in the juvenile concentration camp Moringen, February 1943.

The Morsbach authorities listed 29 'Gypsies, part-Gypsies', adding short individual descriptions of behaviour.⁴⁴ Only one of them was negative. There was no systematic differentiation between the two groups. The genealogical studies had been only superficial, to the extent that there had been any at all. Inclusion in the list was made 'on the basis of personal knowledge of land and people', because 'records which could have been used to judge the Gypsy quality' apparently did not exist.⁴⁵ Though the *Grunderlaß* made it obligatory to name 'persons roaming around in the manner of Gypsies', although there were some itinerant small traders and mending workmen of Jenisch descent, nobody was classified 'non-Gypsy'. Those listed were ordered not to leave the municipal area and were threatened with deportation in case of an offence. All signed the demanded declarations, but at the same time refused to declare whether they were 'Gypsy' nor 'part-Gypsy'. Some complained self-assuredly to the *Kripo* in Cologne and to the RHF and in some cases the categorization was reversed.⁴⁶

Independently of the registration by the Cologne *Kripo*, the RHF representative, Hesse, wanted information about the inhabitants of Stockshöhe. He included those of Jenisch descent. He passed the information from the local authorities and from a regional folklorist on to the RHF.⁴⁷ On the basis of this information and that of the *Kripo*, the Berlin race researchers classified all those registered as 'part-Gypsies', with one exception.⁴⁸

The consequences of registration were limited for the affected. They were not allowed to change residence, which they regarded as 'internment'. But at the same time some worked in factories far outside the municipal area so that they could not return home every day and had a second domicile. The *Kripo* headquarters in Cologne were informed that there were no sanctions.⁴⁹ The Cologne *Kripo* district had to contribute 1,000 persons to the deportation into the *Generalgouvernement* in 1940, which followed registration and arrest. From Morsbach no one was included. Three active soldiers

44. GAMb, 1676, 'Aufstellung', 27 October 1939, 'Nachtrag', 26 January 1940.

45. GAMb, 1676, Ortspolizei Morsbach/Kripoleitstelle Köln, 26 January 1940.

46. GAMb, 1676, see for instance NN to Polizeipräsident Köln, 19 November 1939.

47. GAMb, no reference, Meurer to Hesse, 30 May 1941; GAMb, 1676, Hesse to Bürgermeister, 10 November 1941.

48. GAMb, 1676, List of RHF, 6 December 1941, copies of individual race reports.

49. GAMb, 1676, correspondence Kripoleitstelle Köln, Ortspolizeibehörde Morsbach, November and December 1942.

were dismissed at the instigation of the *Kripo*. There were no dismissals from schools.

When in February 1943 the mayor was demanded to present a list of the minority, which would have been the basis of a deportation list, he refused this as unnecessary. 'All Z. [*Zigeuner*] or ZM [*Zigeunermischlinge*] who live here and are liable for compulsory work' were 'working in factories important to the war effort', he said.⁵⁰ These 'Gypsies' and their families were exempted from the Auschwitz decree. By contrast to relatives who lived in Marburg and Solingen, no one from the Morsbach group was deported (Rogge 1994; Romang-Engbring 1998). The move of some families from Solingen to Stockshöhe in the 1930s probably saved their lives.

Within the regional scope of activities Morsbach is not the most far-reaching case of sparing people from persecution. Relatives in two Sauerland municipalities had not been registered and had not been ordered to stay in their residential areas, nor had there been dismissals from active service until the late fall of 1944. The local authorities took the view that they were neither 'part-Gypsies' nor 'Gypsies'. The Morsbach authorities denounced them to the RHF. The RHF informed the RKPA, which ordered the *Kripo* Dortmund to 'ensure that the necessary steps are taken.'⁵¹

4. Conclusion

Even before the beginning of centrally organized registration, the three municipalities examined had been recording persons of Manisch-Jenisch and of Jenisch descent. But there were great differences.

In Morsbach the impetus came from outside—there were no local initiatives. In Siegen a single activist in the welfare authority made every effort, achieved considerable response nationally, but had hardly any internal support. He did not succeed in winning over the municipal institutions or even their leadership, to support his activities and aims; all he achieved was some denouncing information. Only when in the late 1930s the RHF and the RKPA organized persecution on a national scale, and when Gypsy policy radicalized increasingly, did this development have some effects on the two municipalities.

50. GAMB, 1676, Bürgermeister Morsbach to Kripoleitstelle Köln, 22.2.1943. At this place of the record the exemption regulations of the Auschwitz decree have been filed.

51. GAMB, 1676, correspondence Gemeindedirektor Morsbach, RHF, RKPA, October and November 1944.

Things were quite different in Berleburg. As early as the spring of 1933 and well before the general development reached that point the local authorities tried to use the new power structure to get rid of the minority. Detailed plans were drawn up resulting in activities to register, exclude, and deprive.

In contrast to Siegen, in Berleburg the driving force was mainly the head of the municipality. His descriptions and conceptions received much outside attention. The local situation could thus become a generally known prime case of a policy of racial and social hygiene. It was an example to be followed and was aimed at the eradication of the minority everywhere. While in March 1943 the local authorities in Morsbach averted a deportation, in Berleburg they exceeded even the limits set by Himmler's Auschwitz decree.

Comparing the three local examples it can be seen that within and beyond the framework of the Gypsy policy intended by the Reich, local authorities had some room to manoeuvre. It ranged from passiveness about the aims and practical measures of the national policy on the one hand, to local initiatives in conception and practice, which endeavoured to go on ahead of the general development, pushing it forward whenever possible. The local case shows how the willingness to support the intentions and activities of RHF and RKPA could decide the intensity of persecution and its results. The registration of the minority by the RHF turns out to have been a necessary but insufficient condition for the deportation as well as other forms of persecution.

The practice of persecution was not the final result of a chain of orders running from above to below. It cannot be reduced to a hierarchical structure rigidly organized by leadership principle, with the lower level willingly or unwillingly only executing the orders of the higher one. It was more about interactive circumstances, with the lower regions often taking the initiative.

The organizers of registration had to rely on the assistance of local experts. Looking back in 1941, Ritter named as his helpers 'genealogical researchers, local historians, regional folklorists, archivists, mayors, teachers, and medical officers' (Ritter 1941: 40). He listed only part of the social groups from which the contributions came and some of them devoted themselves to the subject long before the RHF gave a signal.

Popular prejudices, common race and hereditary biological convictions, attitudes typical within state bureaucracies such as zeal, obedience, and unemotional administrative routine, planning of individual careers, the

expectation of material benefits, a local social hygienic and social policy programme, the regulations of the Reich Gypsy policy—all this brought the participants together and created a dense network of action between state and social institutions and individual protagonists, a sphere of habituation and training. It would be unfounded to assume that they did not realize what it was ultimately all about. Even if more devastating ways to eliminate the minority than sterilization were not publicly discussed, such considerations circulated in the lower ranks of the local authorities no later than at the end of the 1930s. This is confirmed by the welfare inspector in Siegen, who wanted to eliminate the living generations of the ‘pest’ in such a way that they would not ‘still be alive and burdening the entire population for decades’, as in the case of sterilization. Registration and exclusion were discussed publicly, explained and justified especially as a way to improve the situation for the majority population.

The regional so-called Gypsies had not been in touch with the groups from whom they had descended for a long time—they were in the process of integrating into mainstream society. But their dissociation from Sinti and Roma did not impress their pursuers, as they were to discover in Auschwitz. Their destiny shows that the social and cultural facts did not affect the assignment of racial categorizations. This assignment to categories ignored them, orientated to pure fantasy, in fact on all levels of registration and independent of whether it was based on popular sentiment or on a methodology claiming to be scientific.

There were differences in the construction of identity labels, involving the extent of reliance on both prejudices and facts. In some places people of Jenisch descent were included, in others, they were not. However, these differences seem less important in view of the common denominator: a denial of the fact that the minority was heading toward full integration and assimilation into mainstream society, with the intention of eliminating the minority altogether.

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