

## Book reviews

**The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies.** *Guenter Lewy.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 306 pp. ISBN 0-19-512556-8.

Reviewed by Donald Kenrick

Books in English covering the genocide of the Roma and Sinti in Europe during the Nazi period are few and far between (Fings 1997, Kenrick 1999, Kenrick and Puxon 1972, 1995). There is nothing to compare with Zimmermann's 574-page work in German (1996) or with the vast literature on the fate of the Jews. So, in the normal course of events, one would welcome Guenter Lewy's volume which sets out to provide an academic introduction to the topic for the English-speaking reader.

Lewy restricts himself to Germany and countries occupied by the Germans, though with some significant omissions. So, he does not attempt to deal with the murder of Gypsies in Croatia or Transdnistria by Germany's fascist allies. That said, he has consulted an impressive amount of documentation, much of it available for the first time. It comprises material from some 30 archives including the individual records (*Zigeunerpersonalakten*) in three towns, of which only those in Potsdam have been previously researched—by Reimar Gilsenbach (1993) before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The reader will find previously unpublished material in the account of the attempt to set up a Gypsy camp in Frankfurt am Main in 1929, stories of returners from the 1940 deportations to western Poland and details of the Sinti *Sprecher* whom Himmler charged with making lists of pure Gypsies to be saved.

In his introduction Lewy already stands out from the majority of previous writers on the subject of the genocide in discussing to what extent Gypsies are responsible for the prejudice against them. He cites their lying, having more than one name, stealing, tricking persons while fortune telling and creating rubbish. He does however accept that they do not steal children or commit burglary—the latter because 'they have a superstitious fear of closed doors.' (p.14). There is no reference given for this last assertion. The

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*Romani Studies* 5, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2001), 67–70. ISSN 1528–0478

Nazis could, therefore, build upon this justified popular dislike of Gypsies in evolving their policies.

I have no quarrel with the story that Lewy has woven from these archives. But when he turns to an analysis of the material, he becomes more controversial. The author's position is clearly aligned with that of Yehuda Bauer (1990) and some other writers. For Lewy, too, the genocide of the Jews is unique. He will not accept that the Nazi policy towards the Gypsies was also one of genocide, albeit evolving in a different way. This argument is partly based on statistics, partly on his failure to find any interest on the part of Hitler in the fate of the Gypsies.

He accepts at face value the statement of Ohlendorf—a leader of the *Einsatzgruppen*, responsible for thousands of deaths—who claimed at his trial that the Gypsies were included in those to be destroyed in the occupied Soviet Union because of their tendency to spy. Lewy considers the racial element in the killings to be 'unimportant' (p. 128).

We look in vain for any reference to the massive shootings of Gypsies outside the camps in Poland, carried out on the spot by a range of German military units wherever they came across their victims. There was no excuse of spying here. Zimmermann lists many of these as did *Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, based on Polish sources, in particular Ficowski (1965). Even if Lewy cannot read Polish, and has not come across the papers delivered at the Conference on War Crimes in Warsaw in 1983, there is no reason for him to omit these murders, which counteract his general thesis.

Another gap in Lewy's coverage is the fate of the Gypsies in Hungary and North Italy after the Germans took power in those countries towards the end of the Second World War. Immediately, Hungarian Gypsies were marched to the northern frontier in large numbers and no trace of their fate remains. The same happened to those Italian Gypsies unfortunate enough to find themselves in the zone occupied by the Germans. Men, women and children were held in the camp at Gries from which transports began to concentration camps in Poland. There was no logical reason why the Germans should have wanted to clear Hungary or Italy of Gypsies at that stage in the war. The deportations had one aim—to murder as many Gypsies as possible before the coming defeat—in the same way as, until the last moment, the German army were deporting Jews from Greece as the Allied armies advanced.

The strongest argument Lewy puts forward to back his eventual conclusion that the Gypsies were not subject to genocide is that large numbers

of Roma and Sinti were not deported from Germany. He considers that the figure could be as high as 15,000 (p. 181). His mathematics are doubtful. Lewy takes the police figure of 28,627 Gypsies in Germany and Austria in 1942. The source can be found in Zimmermann (1996: 435, n. 608). He then deducts from this 13,080 Gypsies from Germany and Austria arriving in Auschwitz-Birkenau. This gives the figure of 15,547. He then assumes that every German or Austrian Gypsy recorded in November 1942 and not deported to Auschwitz was in liberty at that time and survived until the end of the war in 1945.

We do have detailed figures for much of Austria. Of 8,000 Gypsies living in the Burgenland in 1938 only 870 survived and only 234 of these had not been imprisoned in a camp. In the occupied Czech lands (Bohemia and Moravia) again only 10 per cent survived. It would be surprising if, when 90 per cent of Gypsies were to die in Burgenland, Bohemia and Moravia that the figure for those in Greater Germany (including all of Austria) is only 50 per cent. Lewy himself accepts that the figure may be less than 15,000—five thousand in fact. He bases this on his analysis of Himmler's doomed plan to save a number of Gypsies as a kind of living museum. Yet up to 2,500 of those remaining were sterilised in an ongoing programme (p. 193).

In his conclusion (Chapter 14) Lewy looks at whether the mass killings in Auschwitz and the Soviet Union represent genocide and the much-debated difference between the fate of the Jews and that of the Gypsies. He says genocide must be the intent to destroy a group and argues that the Nazis did not intend to destroy the Gypsies. The mass gassings at Chelmno and Auschwitz were—he says—to stop the spread of typhus (itself the result of the poor conditions imposed by the German guards) and to make room for Hungarian Jews, respectively. We seek in vain in the index for the extermination centres of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. As Lewy does not mention the killings there, he does not have to explain them away. But these were centres to which Gypsies were taken from ghettos and roadside camps and killed on arrival. None of Lewy's excuses can be put forward here. Belzec appears only in this volume only during its early life as a work camp.

He accepts that the sterilisation programme was in fact an act of genocide (as if every adult is sterilised there will be no more births and the race will die out) but it was carried out—he asserts—not to wipe out the group but to stop Gypsies having children by Germans and producing more mixed race children.

Lewy concludes by reiterating the viewpoint of Wiesel—only in the case

of the Jews did the Nazis seek to annihilate physically every man, woman and child. But a study of his own text—even with the omissions I have pointed out—will lead most readers to the opposite conclusion; only the defeat of Germany saved the Roma and Sinti from genocide.

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**Gypsies in Madrid. Sex, Gender and the Performance of Identity.** *Paloma Gay y Blasco*. Oxford: Berg, 1999. 198 pp. ISBN 1-85973-253-4 (cloth), 1-85973-256-5 (paper)

Reviewed by Anne Sutherland

Paloma Gay y Blasco presents a concise, clear, and compelling description of the Gitanos of Jarana (an area of Madrid). The book contains many elements and themes familiar to students of Gypsy communities, in particular

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*Romani Studies* 5, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2001), 70–72. ISSN 1528–0478

the Gitanos of Spain, and is based on thorough, reliable research. Thus, her ethnographic description, in itself, is a valuable contribution to the literature on Gypsies, but an even more important and innovative contribution is her discussion of how this particular group constructs its identity in a way that appears to be different from other Gypsy groups. This is not the first time I have encountered this seeming paradox when confronted with a group of Gypsies—either in person or through the literature about them. It seems to be an essential element of each Gypsy group that while they are perfectly recognizable in a myriad of ways as like other Gypsies, they also present new challenges to ethnographic analysis, ones that may defy cherished generalizations about Gypsies. This paradox is what makes knowing Gypsies so intellectually satisfying; they never fail to challenge preconceptions of themselves.

Bringing theoretical concepts about imagined communities, the construction of identity and the important role of practice and performance in problematizing the creation and reproduction of culture and identity, Gay y Blasco has produced a tightly organized, high quality work on a group of Gitanos who until now defied such analysis. They live in a housing estate built in 1989 specifically for Gitanos who are ‘marginalized,’ but, like other Gypsies, the Gitanos of Jarana socialize mainly in named mostly endogamous patri-groups (patrilineally related men with their wives and children). Men talk with their patri relatives, women socialize with their kin and other wives and children play with their cousins. As with other Gypsies, hierarchy is constructed almost solely on the basis of age and gender, and virginity is associated with purity and decency, something they insist the Payo lack. Also familiar is that they are generally despised by the payos (non-Gitanos or Spaniards) around them with the all too usual prejudices, and they in turn consider themselves to be superior in morality to the payos.

Gay y Blasco, however, takes pains to underline the unique aspects of this group. Although this Gitano group sees itself as separated from payos (the us/them dichotomy), they also present themselves as fragmented into groups that are sometimes at war with each other. Her analysis of the importance of this fragmentation in the construction of group identity and personhood is very useful. Her discussion of personhood includes considerable material on how the Gitano management of sexual desire becomes the key element in the construction of an imagined community. Identity is gendered—men and women are different kinds of people with different

positions in life—and their differences are the very basis of their world view. The individual Gitano has control over her person, behavior and body, and a responsibility to the community for the morality of the bodies and persons of other Gitanos (relatives). Gay y Blasco specifically links Gitano personhood (which is based on the management of sexual desire) with the construction of a shared identity. Particularly fascinating is Gay y Blasco's description of the *honra* (honor, thought to be the Bartholin's gland) inside a woman which is ritually pierced at marriage. She also looks at the Gitano theory of conception (the man plants the seed and women provide the vessel, or seven different vessels) and its implications for ideas of *raza*. In this particular case, their ideas of conception mean that it is men who pass on the *raza*, that is, it is people linked by patrilineal ties who share a common name and duties. Although a *raza* is descended from a common ancestor in principle, in practice the Gitanos do not dwell on the past or put much effort into figuring out their ancestors—rather, they focus on the formation of *raza* identity in the present. Their duty is to form active political units in which an individual can call on the others of his or her *raza* for help and support especially in conflict situations, the feuds which they call *quimeras* or *ruinas* in which the murder of a Gitano by another Gitano calls for retaliation towards any member of the killer's family. These feuds, which appear to be more ready to escalate into murder than feuds among American Roma, for example, are part of the fragmentation of Gitano identity. At the same time the feuds also reinforce Gitano laws and make it possible for them to see themselves as a people different from the non-Gypsies.

Gitano Identity as a group is carried by the person—the person's way of being, acting in an honorable and righteous manner and putting their knowledge of how to be a Gitano into practice. Being born a Gitano is not sufficient; one has to reinforce this identity continually through one's social relationships and through performance and practice in which Gitano behavior is manifested. The Gitanos of Jarana view themselves not so much as a society or culture but as an aggregate of persons who uphold the same morality and position vis-à-vis the world.

This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the variety and richness of the many groups of Gypsies present in today's world, as well as for scholars of identity construction, the role of gender in identity construction, and the connection between the identity of the person and the group. I believe it will become one of the classic ethnographies of Gypsies.

**Zwischen Toleranz und Barrieren: Das Bild der Zigeuner und Juden in slowakischen Folklore.** *Eva Krekovičová*. Studien zur Tsiganologie und Folkloristik 21. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998. 317 pp. (paper). ISBN 3-631-31688-7. (Slovak version: **Medzi toleranciou a bariérami: Obraz Rómov a židov v slovenskom folklóre.** *Eva Krekovičová*. Bratislava: Academia Electronic Press, 1999. 227 pp. ISBN 80-88880-31-9.)

Reviewed by Zuzana Jurková

The relations between the majority population and members of the minority community are of interest not just in their synchronic or present-day context. Much attention is also being devoted to the history of such relations, especially to the history of stereotype images of the 'other', 'others'. But the theme is not easy to tackle: it requires both methodological innovation and detailed knowledge of the demographic and historical context. Krekovičová's book makes a significant contribution to this field.

The author analyzed material from archives and published sources—a corpus of more than 85,000 songs from the entire territory of Slovakia (and from Slovaks in Hungary and Yugoslavia), mainly collected during the last two centuries. Some 380 songs from this corpus concern the two most visible and distinct ethnic groups living in Slovakia: the Roma and the Jews. Through an analysis of the folk song texts (complemented by material of other genres) the author reconstructs the image of the Rom(a) and the Jew(s) among the Slovak majority population.

The book consists of six chapters. The first two ('Ethnozentrismus und Bilder anderer Ethnien in der slowakischen Folklore: Historische und Genre-Zusammenhänge', [Ethnocentricity and images of other ethnic groups in Slovak folklore: historical and genre-related contexts, pp. 21–8, and 'Roma und Juden in der Slowakei', [Roma and Jews in Slovakia] pp. 29–36) lead to the main text 'Das Bild des Rom in der slowakischen Folklore' [The image of the Rom in Slovak folklore], pp. 37–69) and the supplementary chapter 'Reflexion des Judentums in der slowakischen Folklore' [Judaism and its reflection in Slovak folklore], pp. 71–93). The substantial part of the work is a selection of 163 song texts with commentaries about the Roma, organized according to the motifs (attributes) of the image (pp. 99–259).

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*Romani Studies* 5, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2001), 73–74. ISSN 1528–0478

Which are the images that Krekovičová—based on the analysis of the material—is able to identify? The Jewish theme in Slovak folklore appears much less frequently than the Romani theme. This differs from the neighbouring countries Poland and Hungary, where Jews are very often depicted in folklore. The image of the Jew is also very loosely defined: there is only a small number of characteristic attributes, the most important ‘distinctive’ feature being religion, though it is found to contain primarily negative stereotypes.

The Roma appear in Slovak folklore not only as the most typical representatives of the ‘others’ (often with negative connotations), speaking a funny language, living in a particular way (as blacksmiths or musicians among the rural population), having ‘deviant’ moral or ethical norms and mentality and practicing a special religion.

The boundaries between minority and majority are reflected most strongly in the area of endogamy. According to the title of the book, the relations between majority and minority should be balanced. But this is not true: the material shows prevailing obstructions, even rejections, especially in relations between the sexes. However: the image of the Jews is negative and schematic (that is, the knowledge of the Jews was weak), but the image of the Roma is rather detailed and realistic (narrow cooperation), except for the texts influenced by the romantic literature.

Eva Krekovičová did a good deal of the work exploring Slovak folk songs. If we would like to see a complete picture, it would be of most interest to know the way of reflection in other genres, too.

**Gaining ground: Law reforms for Gypsies and Travellers.** *Rachel Morris and Luke Clements*, eds. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1999. 150 pp. £17 (paper). ISBN 0-900458-98-4.

Reviewed by Lawrence S. Mayer

*Gaining ground: Law reforms for Gypsies and Travellers* is crucial for under-

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standing the current British Romani Rights movement. No scholar of this movement can ignore this collection of short articles. It lays an action plan for the legal arm of the movement

The book reports on the Second Conference on Traveller Law Reform held on a single day in February 1999 at Friends House, Euston, London, England. The ideas presented are primarily connected by 'the recognition that Travelling people not only experience a scandalous level of prejudice and discrimination in all areas of their lives, but that this treatment appears to be deemed acceptable by all levels, even the highest levels, of British Society' (page x of the Preface).

Part 1 of the book outlines the legal themes that were considered in a series of working groups that were charged in 1997 at the first Conference. That conference was attended by over 90 organizations working with Gypsies and Travellers (I prefer the term Rom but to be consistent with the book will use the term Gypsy, noting that some Rom find the term offensive). The Traveller Law Research Unit of the Cardiff Law School of the University of Wales sponsored both the first and second Conferences, the working groups, and this book.

The working groups met in 1998 to promote reforms of the laws affecting Gypsies and Travellers in Great Britain. The attendees at the working groups, far too numerous to name, are the authors of Part 1. Suffice it to say that the list of Participants, given in an appendix, reads like a Who's Who of the British Gypsy and Traveller Legal Reform Movement.

Part 2 gives voice to the people who attended the working groups whether or not their ideas are represented in Part 1. Again the list of participants is long, about 25 in number, but includes such notables as Sarah Cemlyn, Colin Clark, and Donald Kenrick.

The book focuses on the legal barriers and burdens placed on Gypsy and Travellers by the current legal system in Britain and makes proposals to remove the barriers and lower the burdens.

The contributions are focused on specific areas of the law: education, accommodation, criminal justice, planning, and health and social services. The analysis and recommendations made in both parts are very specific to the existing laws and legal systems of Great Britain, particularly England and Wales. They are germane, but not critical, for appreciating the book. It may take hours and a British legal dictionary to decipher them, particularly if the reader is not familiar with terms like a 'Private Members Bill' or 'Circular 1/94' or abbreviations such as DETR or OFSTED. But the book,

like a conversation with a good lawyer, can be appreciated without taking a course in current British politics and nomenclature.

For a Romani scholar specializing in other than the legal problems in Britain, the value of the book is the delineation of the burdens and barriers. The majesty of the movement and the theme that 'The right to respect is very much at the heart of the law reform agenda' are loud and clear. Equally important is an appreciation for the historical context in which the movement emerged and the strategic and tactical brilliance it took to generate the Conferences, the working groups and this volume.

As the Romany rights movement has gained in strength and momentum, as the Rom have become more self-aware of the meaning of being Rom, a political and legal struggle has been waged by Rom and Gadjo in Britain for the basic rights of Gypsies and Travellers. This struggle is for the most basic rights: housing, health care, free movement, equal protection under the law, and the right to be free of persecution from fellow citizens. *Gaining Ground* is critical for understanding the strategy used and progress made.

Over the past ten years the complexity of the law relating to Gypsies and Travellers in England and Wales has grown greatly both in terms of the extra tools given to Local Authorities and police to evict unlawful encampments, and in terms of planning law which makes it difficult for Gypsies to buy land and construct their own caravan sites. Legal aid has, however, facilitated a growing number of lawyers who have gained expertise in presenting Gypsy cases. Two decades of relative stability and prosperity in the 1970s and 1980s have produced more wealth in the Gypsy and Traveller communities, money to invest in land and pay for planning appeals. This wealth has attracted the kind of lawyer who likes to fight for the oppressed but needs to earn a living.

After the Criminal Justice Act of 1994, it became evident that Gypsies had little to gain from the Conservative government, who appeared to be making Anti-Gypsyism an explicit part of their election appeal. But this pandering to racism may have contributed to the defeat in the elections of 1997.

The traditional Gypsy lobbyists redoubled their efforts to influence the Labour Party when it came to power. The trouble is that the old stalwarts who were the shadow Ministers at that time, were seen, by leadership, as 'Old Labour' and not brought into government. Instead, young lawyers like Mike O'Brien were brought in, the widely-publicized 'yuppie face' of 'New Labour'. Instead of adopting the policies that had been developed by Labour

members in opposition, they seem to take the advice of the same civil servants as the previous governments, without appearing to realize there might be a viable alternative.

Young lawyers who had been working for Gypsies and Travellers, and who seemed to understand the mind-set of the New Labour lawyer-ministers, decided to set up their own lobbying effort. The chief intellectuals of this movement were Luke Clements, a West Country solicitor, and some eager beavers at a Birmingham law firm. They raised funds to set up a Traveller Law Research project at the Cardiff University Law School and to hire the redoubtable Rachel Morris, first to run an advice line, and second to do the work of coordinating drafts for proposed legal reforms.

Their strategy seemed to be a simple one: draft viable legislative amendments which could go through Parliament as Private Member's bills, and could be sold to the government as helping rather than hindering, but which would nonetheless attract wide support from Gypsy organizations.

They have followed this strategy with patience and tenacity. First they have immense good will from Gypsies and Travellers because of the legal help they have given, often *pro bono*. Second, they have consulted with most of the Gypsy organizations unceasingly, making sure the consultations were chaired by respected Gypsy figures like Charles Smith, Peter Mercer, Sylvia Dunn, and Eli Frankham. They have not cut political corners: they have done their homework, and they have gone out of their way to try to void the charges that they are paternalistically doing what they think best for the Gypsies and Travellers. At the same time they believe they present a very clear idea of how far it may be possible politically to get the Blair government to act, and that they have a duty—the kind of duty a lawyer owes to a client—to advise Gypsies and Travellers so they make real progress rather than political gestures which they believe will fail.

Before the Conference on which this book reports they held a series of themed working groups all over the country. The Conference was meant to bring together the results of all the working groups for endorsement by all the people who came—so in that sense the most important part of the text is the attendance list. Essentially all those people have given a broad mandate for the kind of strategies for change laid out in the book.

Now lawyers, co-coordinated by Rachel Morris, are engaged in reducing the text to specific well-drafted amendments to planned government legislation which may be politically viable. Their biggest ally in government may be a new minister just appointed with a left-leaning record, Chris Mullin,

who does have a reputation for doing his homework. They are holding fresh sets of meetings to keep all the Gypsy and Traveller leaders and well-wishers on board. This has been a phenomenal effort, and has led to the creation of the broadest base coalition for Gypsy and Traveller politics that we have seen for a generation.

One can see what efforts they put into keeping everybody on board by looking at the participation of Professor Thomas Acton, the only Professor of Romani Studies in Great Britain. He said something mildly skeptical about government education policy and ethnic minorities. The organizers quickly asked if they could put it in as part of the debate—which they did.

This is eerily reminiscent of the 1960s. Then, as now, Britain had a new Labour Government coming in after a long running Conservative government had run out of steam, and then as now there was a relatively united Gypsy and Traveller movement, and a mobilization of the liberal conscience (National Council for Civil Liberties, Minority Rights Group, Save the Children, etc.) to get the 1968 Caravan Sites Act through as a Private Members bill given support by the government.

Note that the organizers coaxed Lord Avebury to chair the conference. As Eric Lubbock, MP, he was the Liberal MP who guided the 1968 Caravan Sites Act through parliament. His foreword sets the tone nicely.

Perhaps this group can create a popular movement to get the government to act. Whether they will learn the lessons of 1968, and whether the broad coalition will outlast the success that it may reap in the next two to three years or whether it will lapse into factionalism as it did in the 1970s, remains to be seen.

Reservations about the book are few. Little in the book covers Scotland or Northern Ireland, which have different legal systems than England and Wales. I would have rather the book left out Scotland than give it the terse coverage it did. Perhaps another volume will focus on these other countries.

Some readings in the book come across as quite paternalistic, a perspective that is both understandable and irritating. Some of the contributions seem to ignore the issue of confounding or bias. They consider problems of poor Gypsies to be the result of their Gypsiness rather than their poverty. They fail to recognize that all their data are epidemiologically biased towards the poor and those who attend special outreach programs.

The analysis of health issues focuses more on access to health than it does on health status. Presenting the implications of lack of access for the health of Gypsies would have been helpful. Mental health issues receive

no coverage yet my experience has been that mental health conditions are often not treated effectively for Gypsies and Travellers. The issue of Gypsies who are settled and not poor but still suffer many of the problems of their traveling cousins is not covered.

The book is a political document—not a textbook for beginners. It will be a primary source for historians of the future—who will contextualise it. It must be read with a critical intelligence. But creating so broad a political consensus, and documenting it so carefully, is an immense achievement.