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Roma Deportations to Transnistria during World War Two

Between Centralised Decision-Making and Local Initiatives

Abstract

This article deals with the complicated issue of the Roma deportations to Transnistria by the Romanian authorities during World War Two. There are two major questions that this article aims to answer. First, it seeks to explain how a sovereign state like Romania, which was not occupied by Germany, deported approximately 25,000 Roma. Second, it focuses on understanding and explaining the great differences in the treatment suffered by various categories of Roma or by Roma from different regions, cities, and localities. After briefly presenting the main flaws of previous explanations given so far (such as the excessive interest in elites and Antonescu, or the focus on anti-Gypsy nationalism), the analysis focuses on the local contexts. The main conclusion of the article is that these deportations were neither the result of German pressure nor of contemporary trends such as the influence of eugenics on the Romanian government, but rather the consequence of the Roma's long-term exclusion by local actors. The criminalisation of Roma by the Romanian police was aggravated by recent developments such as the disappearance of traditional Roma crafts and services, increased pauperism, and the accelerated sedentarisation of formerly nomadic Roma. These developments frustrated the local authorities, which then had a considerable influence on Antonescu's decision to deport the Roma to Transnistria. Once Antonescu gave the deportation order, this was interpreted and implemented by local authorities according to their own views and interests.

I. Introduction

Between 1942 and 1944, the Romanian authorities deported approximately 25,000 Roma to Transnistria, a territory in the occupied Soviet Union that was administered by Romania between 1941 and 1944. These Roma were deported from hundreds of villages and towns, and from case to case they experienced dramatically different treatment. In some localities, almost all the Roma were deported; in others, none were. This article aims to answer two major questions: how did it happen that a sovereign state like Romania, which was not occupied by Germany, took action against the Roma, culminating in their deportation to Transnistria, and how are the great differences in the treatment that Roma suffered during the war to be understood?

While the second question has not yet received due historiographical attention (unlike in Germany or Austria, where there are monographs on local or regional cases, in Romania such local approaches are still in their infancy¹), several answers

1 Tatiana Sirbu, "Gospodar ou deporté: la catégorisation comme instrument de la déportation des Tsiganes en Transnistrie," *Etudes Tsiganes* 56–57, no. 1–2 (2016): 90–103; Grégoire Cousin and Petre Petcut, "Deporting the Gypsy Peasantry: Shattered Fates of the Ursari of Segarcea and Sadova," *Etudes Tsiganes* 56–57, no. 1–2 (2016): 104–23; Petre Matei, "Deportările romilor din Pitești in Transnistria (1942)," *Holocaust: Studii și*

have already been offered to the first question. These can be summarised into four general approaches, according to which the deportation of Roma could be explained by: German influence or pressure (a narrative encouraged by the Romanian authorities in the 1970s to obtain German compensation);² Antonescu as the main (or only) person responsible for the deportation of Roma; a Romanian nationalism that was allegedly and similarly anti-Roma as it was anti-Semitic; and the supposedly great influence of the Romanian eugenicists on state decision-making, especially during the war. To simplify, the Roma deportations are approached either from a teleological perspective promoted mainly by (Roma) activists (always emphasising persecution and discrimination, with a focus on slavery and the Holocaust), or from a narrow perspective focusing on the Antonescu regime, emphasising only the elites (Antonescu, eugenicists, and the central authorities) and only for a short period of time (1940–1944, and more often 1942–1944). This second perspective has focused on an Antonescu who has been described as having been influenced to varying degrees by the German model (through Romanian eugenicists educated in Germany or through population exchange plans), and it risks having the effect of externalising guilt (either attributed to Germans or only to an individual whose policies against Roma are declared to be extremely new and to have nothing to do with old local realities).

In my view, these theories are oversimplifying and misleading, and they are influenced more generally by the limits of the concept of “genocide”³ and, more specifically, by an explanatory model created in the last three to four decades to explain the situation of the Sinti and Roma primarily in Nazi Germany and the occupied territories. This model has been favoured for several reasons. First, the interwar German racial legislation targeted, and affected, also the Roma population. Moreover, the collaboration between the *Rassenhygieniker* (racial hygienists) and the German authorities in this respect was well documented. Second, the Germans occupied a vast territory during World War Two, creating the premises for a relatively homogeneous persecution of the Roma that culminated in internments, deportations, and mass executions. Third, as German legislation offered better chances for obtaining compensation to those who had suffered from racially motivated persecution, the Roma claimants needed to argue accordingly and to be recognised as such. Fourth, in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, a transnational Roma movement – the International Romani Union – emerged and became increasingly interested in invoking the Holocaust, not only for compensation claims, but also for identity purposes, raising awareness, and redressing hostility towards Roma. In order to do so, it is more tempting and effective to refer to established symbols, such as German racial policies, Robert Ritter, *Einsatzgruppen*, and 2 August 1944 (when the *Zigeunerlager* at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated).

While being adequate to explain the situation of most Roma victims (at German hands) during the war, this model lacks nuance, oversimplifies, and risks creating

cercetări 9, no. 1(10) (2017): 30–55; Cătălina Tesăr and Petre Matei, “Work and Mobility among Roma from Southeast Romania from the 1920s to 1980 through a Historical-Anthropological Lens: The Case of Ursari (Bear-Tamers)/Pieptănari (Comb-Makers),” *La ricerca folklorica* 74 (2019): 29–42.

2 Petre Matei, “Roma in 1980s Communist Romania and Their Discourse on the Holocaust; between Compensations and Identity,” in *The Legacies of the Roma Genocide in Europe since 1945*, eds. Celia Donert and Eve Rosenhaft (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 214–241.

3 The simplifying focus on a state and its leadership gives the result that “genocide studies tend to focus on ethnic or racial issues instead of multi-causality, on the state instead of society, on long-term ‘intent’, planning and centralisation instead of a process and autonomous groups, on one victim group instead of many. Structural mechanisms of the genocide model work toward simplification and against contextualisation.” Christian Gerlach, “Extremely Violent Societies: An Alternative to the Concept of Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 466.

confusion when applied to a country like Romania. Complex but interesting local contexts, which require a deeper approach over a longer period of time, are usually ignored. In the following, I try to briefly present the main flaws of this simplistic discourse that is focused on anti-Gypsy nationalism, allegedly influential eugenics, and population exchanges. I then discuss local developments and actors which are generally neglected, but which, in my view, played a much more important role in articulating hostility towards Roma both before and during the deportations.

1.1. Romanian Nationalism and the Roma

There was no Gypsy obsession in interwar Romania or even during the war, hence one cannot talk about the war measures against Roma as being inspired by an agenda promoted by nationalist parties. Interwar nationalism was more hostile towards the stronger minorities that were economically, culturally, and socially better organised and perceived as revisionist. The Roma did not fit into this paradigm: as only the eighth largest ethnic group, many of its members were assimilated, and they had no state of their own so they could not become revisionist. The traditional parties, even the far-right nationalist parties, although anti-Semitic, were disinterested in the Roma and even exhibited some goodwill towards the interwar Roma movement. For example, on the occasion of the organisation of the first Roma congress on 8 October 1933, G.A. Lăzurică, an important Romani interwar leader, appealed to the support of students from the fascist Legionary Movement. As a sign of gratitude, this congress declared Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Legionary Movement, and Ilie Rădulescu, the editor-in-chief of the nationalist newspaper *Porunca Vremii*, as honorary members of the General Union of Roma in Romania.⁴

An even better example is provided by the 1937 electoral collaboration between the anti-Semitic National Christian Party led by Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza, who in December 1937 formed the government that introduced the first anti-Semitic laws, and G.A. Lăzurică and Calinic I. Popp Șerboianu, the initiators of the interwar Roma movement. The collaboration between the Roma and a far-right party is more surprising now than it was then. It proves that there were huge differences at the time between how the Romanian nationalists perceived Jews (as, for example, “the absolute enemy”, “invaders”, “plunderers”, “competitors”, “an impediment to the socio-economic primacy of the Romanians”, “capitalists”, or “communists”) and Roma, who were smaller in number, did not form urban majorities or regional enclaves, were not irredentists, but were a rural population, largely illiterate, and Romanian-speaking. For example, on 19 August 1937, *Țara Noastră*, the official newspaper of the National Christian Party, took a clear stand in favour of the Roma and the electoral agreement that the Roma had reached with this party. The newspaper’s response considered criticism of the Roma to be deeply unjust, since the Roma were good Romanians, “brought up together” with the Romanian people, unlike the Jews who were threatened with elimination:

[t]he campaign against the Roma no longer has limits. [...] The Jews laugh with their rotten mouths. What are these political goiters laughing at? For the simple reason that the Roma decided to do Romanian politics and joined the National Christian Party. The Roma did not commit any other sin. [...] By coming and joining the National Christian Party they did the

4 Direcția Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale [Central National Archives of Romania], fonds Direcția Generală a Poliției [Directorate General of Police], file no. 34/1922, 46; “Mizerii și indiscreției,” *Cuvântul*, 19 October 1933, 2; N. G. Nicolaescu, “Pe marginea unui ... Congres,” *Timpul*, 21 October 1933, 1–2.

most natural action, as they feel connected to the life and fate of our people. In the National Christian Party, the Roma feel sheltered by the Romanian nation, with which they are brought up together by what we call a common destiny.⁵

Although there was an anti-Semitic radicalisation on the part of these Roma leaders, which became visible in the Roma press,⁶ the arrangement with the National Christian Party is rather interesting because it captures a particular evolution of the Romanian nationalists and the way in which they related to minorities which the nationalists considered dangerous, among which the Roma were not yet counted.⁷

1.2. Eugenics and the Roma

Regarding the theory of eugenics, some researchers build their argument in the following way: in both Germany and Romania there were eugenicists who demanded the sterilisation and deportation of Roma;⁸ so, as both Romania and Germany were allies during World War Two and deported Roma, it appears that the Romanian measures must have been inspired by eugenicists. This formula is seductively simple: eugenics (a theory strong enough to influence interwar nationalist parties and/or state leadership during the war) plus anti-Gypsyism equals genocide. However, the Romanian eugenicists' interest for Roma was relatively low. Their judgements regarding the Roma were hostile but superficial. There was no specific research on the Roma that was financed and conducted and which is quantifiable in the form of a consistent series of articles or books, nor were there Romanian eugenicists who specialised in Roma. The few, disparate attacks against Roma did not represent a coherent programme. There was no visible and direct cooperation between the authorities and eugenicists. In fact, unlike Nazi Germany, the Romanian eugenicists could not even determine the legislation on sterilisation, which could not be practiced in Romania as it continued to be a criminal offense. Similarly, during World War Two, there was no racial legislation against Roma: sexual relations or marriages between Roma and Romanians, for example, were not forbidden. The impact of eugenics on the state's measures against Roma was minor, limited rather to legitimising post-factum measures that had already been taken.⁹ Neither central nor local authorities invoked racial arguments to motivate deportations. If we compare the categories of "dangerous Gypsies" – as constructed by eugenicists (especially with regards to the sedentary, partly assimilated Roma who were disposed to marrying Romanians)

5 Gheorghe Dragoș, "Atacurile iudeo-tărăniștilor: Campanie împotriva romilor," *Țara Noastră*, 19 August 1937, 1.

6 For example, on 20 October 1937, the frontpage of *Timpul*, the official newspaper of the Roma in Romania, included a large swastika, as well as electoral exhortations such as: "the Roma are assimilated into the Romanian element, they are Christians, dynastic, patriots, enemies of communism and religious sects. FAITH-COUNTRY-KING-ROMANIA FOR THE ROMANIANS. The Roma only demand full equality of rights as citizens. Long live the Great 'National Christian' party that fights for the salvation of the Romanian people and a higher level of human dignity for our Roma." "Izbândă!," *Timpul: oficiosul romilor din România*, 20 October 1937, 1.

7 For more details on this collaboration, see Petre Matei, "The Roma Minority and Romanian Fascism: The 1937 Alliance between the Roma and the National Christian Party," *Holocaust: Studii și cercetări* 13, no. 1 (14) (2021): 259–290.

8 Benjamin Thorne, "Assimilation, Invisibility, and the Eugenic Turn in the 'Gypsy Question' in Romanian Society, 1938–1942," *Romani Studies* 5 21, no. 2 (February 2011): 181–187; Vladimir Solonari, "Ethnic Cleansing or 'Crime Prevention'? Deportation of Romanian Roma," in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration*, ed. Anton Weiss-Wendt (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 99–104.

9 Viorel Achim, *Țigani în istoria României* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1998), 133–137; Viorel Achim, "Gypsy Research and Gypsy Policy in Romania, 1920–1950," in *Zwischen Erziehung und Vernichtung: Zigeunerpolitik und Zigeunerforschung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 170–172.

with those who were actually deported to Transnistria, we notice that the actual deportations did not respond to the eugenicists' specific concerns. The nomadic Roma (mostly endogamous and, as such, not endangering the "Romanian blood") were actually the first to be deported.¹⁰

1.3. Ion Antonescu and the Plans for Population Exchanges and Ethnic Homogenisation

Just like the theories mentioned before, neither the research directions focusing on Antonescu nor the plans for population exchanges suffice to explain the Roma deportations. According to the project sent by Sabin Manuilă, head of the Central Statistical Institute, to Ion Antonescu, on 15 October 1941, the homogenisation of Romania could have occurred by bringing in ethnic Romanians from other states while transferring minorities to the countries that claimed them. As there were two ethnic groups – the Jews and the Roma – that did not have a state of their own, the solution for them would have been a unilateral transfer across the border, that is, deportation to Transnistria.¹¹

Obviously, ethnic homogenisation was then popular among Romanian politicians, and there were government plans that led in that direction, but this alone cannot explain why only 25,000 Roma were deported. The share of deportees in the Roma population as a whole is difficult to establish precisely, given the tendency of underrepresentation among Roma. If we accept the data of the official census from 1930, based on self-identification, only 262,000 Roma would have lived in Romania and, of these, after the territorial losses suffered by Romania in 1940, there would have been about 208,000 left. The percentage of those deported would therefore represent about 10 to 12 per cent of the total number of Roma. However, the authorities' identification of Roma for the purposes of the deportations was not based on self-identification during official censuses, and in reality the number of Roma who could be heteroidentified as Roma in unofficial contexts was much higher. For example, according to the 1930 census, there were only 422 Roma in the city of Pitești, but in September 1942 the local police deported 1,006 Roma out of the approximately 2,000 Roma identified as such. Similarly, there were localities that had an absolute majority of Roma at the end of the nineteenth century, but where none or only few declared themselves as such in the 1930 census. Likewise, there were some sociological studies in the late 1930s, in areas such as Țara Făgărașului, where the number of self-declared Roma in the 1930 census was much lower compared to the numbers heteroidentified a few years later: the number of heteroidentified Roma turned out to be at least double. If such findings were extrapolated to the whole country, the real number of Roma was also estimated to be at least double, that is, around 400,000 to 500,000 people.¹² At the time, the General Union of Roma in Romania, the most important Roma organisation, claimed to have almost 800,000 members.¹³ Compared to the probably higher real number of Roma, the deported Roma represented about 4 to 5 per cent of the total Roma population.¹⁴

10 Petre Matei, "The Romanian Police and Its Role in the Roma Deportations," *Holocaust: Studii și cercetări* 10, no. 1(11) (2018): 12–13.

11 Viorel Achim, "The Romanian Population Exchange Project Elaborated by Sabin Manuilă in October 1941," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 27 (2001): 593–617.

12 Ion Chelcea, *Țigani din România: Monografie etnografică* (Bucharest: Ed. Institutului Central de Statistică, 1944), 75–88.

13 George Potra, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România* (Bucharest: Fundația "Regele Carol I", 1939), 121–126.

14 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 13–14.

As a tentative conclusion, it is difficult to understand the specificities of deporting Roma from Romania using borrowed narratives, focused on the anti-Gypsyism of Romanian nationalism, the alleged influence of eugenics, unilateral population exchanges, or the exceptional role of dictator Ion Antonescu.

II. Interwar Preconditions for Radicalisation

These theories and their excessive interest in elites and Antonescu obstruct the understanding of a more complex interplay between different actors who contributed to the deportation of the Roma. My working hypothesis is that these deportations were neither the result of German pressure nor of some recent developments, such as the influence of eugenics on the Romanian government, and that they cannot simply be attributed to Antonescu. On the contrary, the deportations were the consequence of the Roma's long-term exclusion by local actors. Antonescu played an important role, but he was not the only one who mattered. Along with him, there were the central authorities, such as the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie and the Directorate General of the Police, local civil authorities (mayors and prefects) and police (including legions, gendarmes, and police stations), and also the civilian population. Each protagonist came with their own sensibilities and criteria that defined what the "dangerous Gypsy" meant. The orders inspired by Antonescu were not accepted without interpretation by the subordinate institutions. There was an overlap between the agendas of various entities that, in certain contexts, would collaborate or compete, radicalising themselves in the process.

I intend to capture a broader context in order to determine if there were other causes contributing to the radicalisation of attitudes towards Roma than those generally mentioned by top-down approaches. Knowing which categories of Roma were deported during the war (like the criminalised Roma) and the institutions that defined them as a "problem", I will seek to understand whether there was a prehistory of the problem. I will therefore briefly outline the socioeconomic and demographic evolution of the Roma in Romania in the period preceding the deportations. Following that, I will address the way (nomadic) Roma were perceived by the gendarmerie in the countryside and how the (settled) Roma were perceived in cities by the urban police. It is important to bring into the discussion the bottom-up perspective of law enforcement agencies because they criminalised Roma over a long period of time, and it was the gendarmerie and police that were charged in 1942 with identifying and deporting the "dangerous Gypsies", as well as with advising on the return of these deportees from Transnistria.

My hypothesis is that the criminalisation of Roma by the Romanian police was aggravated by recent developments, such as the disappearance of traditional Roma crafts and services, increased poverty, and the accelerated sedentarisation of formerly nomadic Roma. These developments frustrated the local authorities, which then had a considerable influence on Antonescu's decision to deport the Roma to Transnistria.

2.1. The Socioeconomic Evolution of the Roma

The exact number of Roma was and remains difficult to determine. According to the 1930 census, based on self-identification, 262,501 Roma lived in Romania. However, the actual number must have been considerably higher. This can also be explained as a possible consequence of slavery (when a large number of slaves repre-

sented an asset), but also of the socioeconomic specificity of Romanian society as a whole. Even after their manumission, Roma continued to be useful to a still predominantly rural society through the trades, products, and services that they traditionally offered. Gradually, however, a significant economic change occurred. Roma trades slowly became less competitive, even in the countryside. Objects traditionally made by endogamous Roma groups – to the extent that they were even named after them, such as *căldărari* (cauldron-makers), *lingurari* (spoonmakers), *cărămidari* (brickmakers), and *pieptănari* (combmakers) – ended up being replaced by cheaper and better factory products. Roma *ursarii* (bear tamers) started to be increasingly criticised by animal protection societies, public opinion, and the authorities for animal cruelty, and work permits for them were no longer issued. Even Roma musicians in cities suffered due to the emergence of new musical genres and the spread of radios and gramophones. This gradually increasing inadequacy of traditional Roma trades had different results. The most visible one was the need for Roma to find solutions to these new issues by organising themselves in various forms of mutual aid groups, which grew to become one of the largest Roma emancipation movements in the 1930s.¹⁵ Another result was the higher levels of poverty, given the Roma's pronounced socioeconomic failure to adapt. Roma newspapers and associations' programmes contained numerous references to the disappearance of Roma occupations resulting in Roma impoverishment.¹⁶ From another perspective, this impoverishment risked turning the Roma into an increasingly acute problem for the local authorities.

Another interesting effect was the sharp reduction in the number of Roma nomads in the 1920s and 1930s. Sources from the gendarmerie estimated in 1925 that the number of nomadic Roma in the whole country was about 60,000 people.¹⁷ Not even twenty years later, the number of Roma identified as nomads had dropped significantly. On 25 May 1942, the police identified 8,905 nomads nationwide. A few months later, when the deportation was concluded, the total number was only slightly larger: 11,441. Even if we reject this number advanced by the gendarmerie as being exaggerated in order to express the magnitude of the problem that they had to deal with, various other archival and press sources converge to prove the existence of an accelerated process of sedentarisation in the 1920s and 1930s.

Sedentarisation could occur with the help of the (central) authorities which sometimes imposed it, despite the opposition of the communal authorities from mostly non-Romanian localities, especially in disputed territories such as Transylvania. Most likely, they wanted to solve not only a policing problem, but also an ethnic one, by weakening some ethnic group, for the Roma, even if they were nomads, were considered Romanophiles.¹⁸ In some cases, the local authorities agreed, without pressure from the central authorities (although with some concern for the possible damage to the image of a local community) to let the nomads settle down,¹⁹ while in other

15 Petre Matei, Viorel Achim, Ion Duminiță, Raluca Bianca Roman, and Iemima Ploscariu, "Romania," in *Roma Voices in History: A Sourcebook. Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*, eds. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 306–466; Petre Matei, Raluca Bianca Roman, and Ion Duminiță, "Romania," in *Roma Portraits in History*, eds. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 167–252.

16 Gh. Romcescu, "Dispar și lăutarii," *Țara Noastră: Ediție specială săptămânală pentru Romii din România*, July 25, 1937, 2; T. Pantazescu, "Meserii cari dispar," *Glasul Romilor*, 8 June 1938, 3.

17 Iovan Romulus, "Despre țiganii nomazi," *Revista Jandarmeriei* III, no. 10–11 (October–November 1925): 421–429.

18 Lucian Nastasă and Andrea Varga, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare: Țiganii din România (1919–1944)* (Cluj: Fundatia CRDE, 2001), 192–193.

19 Al. Marinescu, "Printre nomazi: Corturari care-și creiază un stat independent," *Neamul Țigănesc*, 8 September 1934, 4.

localities the authorities even offered plots of land to nomadic Roma.²⁰ The main Roma organisations also had in their programmes the idea of sedentarising nomadic Roma, seen as harming the image of Roma in general. In the late 1930s, *Glasul Romilor*, the newspaper of the General Union of Roma in Romania, noted this process and suggested that the authorities encourage it by facilitating settlement on the outskirts of rural and urban areas, where former nomads could practice their jobs.²¹

2.2. (Nomadic) Roma in the Countryside and the Rural Gendarmerie

Despite appearances, Roma sedentarisation was not considered by all as a solution. In some cases, it contributed to the radicalisation of attitudes towards Roma. At first sight, for the rural gendarmerie, it was not the Roma, as a whole, who were perceived as a problem, but rather the nomadic Roma in particular. In the interwar period, most articles dealing with Roma in the police press were, in fact, devoted to nomads. In the gendarmerie's view, the problem of nomadic Roma was due to the difficulty of exercising control over them and to the large number of crimes attributed to them. The criminalisation of those whose identity was difficult to establish was common among the police in general. A nomadic lifestyle was enough to make one be suspected as a potential offender.²² And yet, in their approach to nomad criminality, the police discussed social causes and even envisioned some plans to adopt (mostly social) preventive measures. The itinerant lifestyle was deemed guilty for causing social inadequacy and poverty and therefore, indirectly, crime. Some high-ranking officers even argued that this problem could be solved if, in addition to the stricter control of them, nomads were offered plots of land: "[t]he greatest interest lies in the prevention of crimes. [...] The most practical and salutary measure would be the forced land appropriation of these people [...]. For these destitute people one could find plots of land for them, enriching with them the regions that need work force."²³ Practically, according to this view, the only way to make police control effective was by sedentarising the nomads; other forms of control were seen only as a palliative.²⁴

Despite the different approaches ranging from the stricter policing of nomads to land allotment, those plans did not materialise. Unlike in Germany or Czechoslovakia, in Romania there was neither coordination of the measures against nomads in the form of a law concerning the Gypsies or nomads, nor were there working groups or commissions dealing with this issue. Consequently, practices varied further, with measures generally left to the discretion of the local authorities. For example, regardless of the suggestions for the nomads' sedentarisation, the opposite happened. On the ground, the indefinite stays of poor people who were seen as offenders – or, worse, their sedentarisation – were not easily tolerated. The lower-ranking gendarmes allowed the nomads to remain only for short periods and then removed them from their precincts, sending them to other communes, which in turn did the same. Tensions arose between the different authorities as each tried to get rid of the nomads. An example is that of the thirty-six nomadic Roma families who, in 1931, received identity papers from the Transylvanian city of Huedin. Later, in 1932, these families

20 Red[acția], "Darul orașului Ploești celor 100 de romi," *Glasul Romilor*, 1–15 November 1934, 3.

21 Tache, "Colonizarea nomazilor," *Glasul Romilor*, April 1940, 2.

22 Leo Lucassen, "Harmful Tramps: Police Professionalization and Gypsies in Germany, 1700–1945," in *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach*, eds. Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, and Annemarie Cottaar (London: MacMillan, 1998), 76–80.

23 Nicolae Pastia, "Despre sălașurile de țigani nomazi," *Revista Jandarmeriei* (September 1925): 319–326.

24 Dumitru Birt, "Chestiunea țiganilor nomazi în Cehoslovacia," *Revista Jandarmeriei* 13, no. 11–12 (November–December): 1049.

left the city as nomads until the spring of 1934 when, following the orders of the Ministry of the Interior, the gendarmes escorted them back to Huedin, which was considered their locality of origin due to their identification documents. This strained the relations between various authorities, which made it necessary for the county prefect to intervene. In May 1934, the city government of Huedin contacted that of the prefecture of Cluj, complaining about the large number of nomads and asking for their redistribution to the rural communes of the county. The prefecture agreed, but the subordinate communes refused to accept them. In the spring of 1935, they again tried to redistribute the nomads, but without success. The communes claimed to not have enough land and that they could not be forced to accept nomads without the communes' consent.²⁵

The decrease in the number of nomads did not mean the disappearance of suspicions about Roma. On the contrary, it could have exacerbated such suspicions. If the gendarmerie precincts had been content to supervise and, after a while, send the nomads away, the gendarmes had to deal with a growing problem after sedentarisation started. It was not only the gendarmes who were disgruntled, but also everyday locals who were unwilling neighbours of the former nomads. Local tensions and conflicts arose long before the deportations. In some tense contexts, even the Roma who were already settled in a commune for a long time could be perceived as unwanted newcomers, with other residents demanding their expulsion from the locality. Such an example is the village of Mofleni, near Craiova, where about twenty to twenty-five Roma families also lived and owned properties. On 11 March 1929, a conflict took place between the Romanian and Roma villagers, with gunshots fired and wounded on both sides. When questioned, the Romanian villagers insisted on the expulsion of the Roma from the locality. Legally, this was impossible because the respective Roma already had properties in the commune.²⁶ Another example is from 1939, when several inhabitants of the village of Stolnici-Argeş complained about the sedentarisation of nomads within the commune. A plot of land had been subleased to some nomads, which annoyed the neighbouring villagers who complained to the authorities and claimed that the way of life of the nomads "is an outbreak of infection for the inhabitants of the commune".²⁷

The authorities wanted the nomads to settle down, but somewhere else, preferably as far away as possible. As a result, the tendency was – on behalf of the local authorities like the town councils and the gendarmerie – to tolerate the presence of nomads for short periods only. Paradoxically, both nomadism and sedentarisation were likely to trigger tensions. Those who continued to be nomadic were suspected of criminality under fraudulent identities, while those settling down risked being further suspected both by the local authorities and villagers.²⁸ It was a tense and potentially explosive situation, as would become more clear during World War Two, when some local authorities and communities felt encouraged to call for even tougher measures, including the relocation or deportation of Roma to Transnistria.

25 Nastasă and Varga, *Țigani din România (1919–1944)*, 195–196.

26 "Încăerare între săteni," *Universul*, 14 March 1929, 7.

27 Direcția Județeană a Arhivelor Naționale Argeş [Argeş County Department of National Archives] (DJAN), fonds Prefectura județului Argeş [Argeş County Prefecture], file no 47/1939, 8.

28 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 17–25.

2.3. (Sedentary) Roma, the City and the Urban Police

In the urban areas, the police were even more hostile towards the sedentary Roma who were increasingly criminalised. In addition to policing, there were also other pressures and interests coming from other actors. There was a normative (urban, civilising, hygienic) discourse, as locals were annoyed by the presence of Roma and complained about the shame that the Roma allegedly brought to the city, wondering what outsiders would say about the city's image being spoiled by Gypsies. Quite often, petitions were sent that criticised the Roma for squalor and laziness, and their houses were described as pest holes. This development was partly caused by the interwar expansion of cities that incorporated the peripheries where many Roma had come to live more or less segregated, especially after the abolition of slavery around the 1850s. What could be tolerated in the countryside or on the periphery started to be harshly criticised when it was perceived as being dangerously close to a city and, especially, a city centre.

The settling process on the outskirts of cities started to be perceived as an invasion and was criticised with various arguments. Among the aggravating issues was the settling of Roma along roads or railways because it made them too visible and was thus a cause of civic "shame"; this was also presented as further "evidence" of the municipal and police authorities' inability to properly handle the situation. The situation was perceived as even more alarming if such settlements were in the capital:

[c]aravans of nomads go wherever they want to and settle down especially along the busiest roads. Sometimes they gather in huts, and stretch along the roads that enter the capital. Slowly, these unclean settlements, from where the dirt cannot be expelled, become villages. But they keep the same Gypsy habits, continuing their tent life with all its repulsive and vulgar aspects.²⁹

The periphery and the Roma became increasingly visible in the context of interwar urban development. Numerous cities (and not only larger ones such as Bucharest, Iași, or other university centres) expanded, incorporating poor peripheries. It is important to emphasise that the harsh discourse on the (Gypsy) periphery was not limited to fascist politicians. On the contrary, it can be found even in left-wing newspapers or in the statements of left-wing politicians such as Dem Dobrescu (1869–1948), the mayor of Bucharest between 1929 and 1934 who was known for introducing extensive reforms and urban works. In an article with the suggestive title "Capital in Danger", Dobrescu initiated a public debate about the dangers that threatened the capital. In addition to the ammunition depots that were located too centrally, and the swampy areas around Bucharest, the Roma received special attention:

[t]he Gypsies of the capital are a great danger in Bucharest. A dirty population, living from the garbage and dirt harvest, ten [persons] living in low, dirty, wet and infected dumps; consumptives, syphilitic, full of lice and dirt; always ill-fed and all lazy. The Gypsies form the polluting population of the capital. Gypsy centers are centres of plague. [...] I was going to deal with the issue of fixing and disciplining them. A mayor of the capital who does not know the difficult problem of the Gypsies is not a good mayor.³⁰

The politicians' frustration with the periphery and the Roma was visible regardless of their political affiliations. The difference lay in how developed their solutions were. If someone like Dobrescu seems to have wanted to exercise some form of control over the Gypsies, later others, like Antonescu, acted much more radically. And

29 "Să ascundem mizeria!," *Neamul Românesc*, 22 January 1937, 2.

30 Dem Dobrescu, "Capitala amenințată," *Orașul*, 22 April 1934, 1.

this frustration could only increase as the urban works announced by Dobrescu continued under the following mayors of the capital. For example, in Bucharest in the 1930s, areas such as Floreasca and Herăstrău were sanitised and became parks, promenades, and relaxation areas. Initially swampy, peripheral areas, they had a significant population of Roma who were relocated from zones that had (to) become emblematic of the capital.³¹

From the perspective of the modernising centre, the periphery had to be sanitised and tamed. Although the centre was actually advancing towards the periphery, the discourse supported the opposite. An alarm was sounded to alert about what was presented as the outskirts advancing into the “good” areas of the city that risked being invaded. Vigilance and emergency measures were required, otherwise the emblematic centre would be compromised. Excerpts from an article published in 1939 capture the perceptions and proposals which resemble those under the Antonescu government only three years later:

[b]eggars roam the streets of the capital [...]. Next to Cișmigiu, there are some. Others are on the boulevard. In La Șosea³² they are installed every hundred metres. Not to mention other centres in Bucharest, which thus get a deplorable appearance? We urge the authorities to put an end to the shameful spectacle of ragged, filthy and professional beggars. It is no longer acceptable for the vagabond to laze without limits. All the Gypsy chaff must be prevented from entering the city in indecent and barbaric attire. I have seen that sometimes the trucks of the Prefecture [police] gather beggars and vagrants and take them to work camps. There they have to be paid for the work, and they must be given clothes from what they earn. Only then could they be allowed to circulate in the capital.³³

Similar arguments were made for other cities. In general, the authors lamented the fact that cities, instead of leaving a positive impression were, on the contrary, a shame, both in the centre, which was compromised by the presence of people seen as not belonging to the place (such as Gypsies, beggars and vagrants), as well as on the periphery. A common topos in newspapers and petitions was that of the “civilised foreigners” and of the opinion that they might have about “us” Romanians. The impression could only be lamentable, which was a reason to try to fix this state of affairs. This is reflected by another example from Iași:

[p]alaces and bell towers shine in the distance, but if your eyes follow the railway, your indignation merges with sadness. Long lines of shameful little hovels, a chaos of buildings, where you feel the gurgling of disease and the most repulsive squalor, lie at the entrance to a great cultural city from where so many illustrious men have risen to bring their immortal contribution. I fully felt the horror of this sight when I was in Iași accompanying two foreign professors, my guests, eager to see the city they had heard so much about. Nobody thought of defending Iași against the Gypsy huts and hence it became quite normal to build some troglodyte neighborhoods.³⁴

Much to his frustration, the city consisted not only of cultural emblems which he could easily relate to and be proud of, but also of the poor and far too visible peri-

31 “Asanarea lacului Floreasca,” *Neamul Românesc*, 9 May 1937, 2.

32 This name refers to Kiseleff Boulevard, a major road in Bucharest that runs northward from Calea Victoriei and Piața Victoriei, with landmarks ranging from museums and parks to embassies and the Romanian Arch of Triumph.

33 “Cerșetorii,” *Neamul Românesc*, 14 February 1939, 4.

34 A.G. Stino, “N. Iorga și Iașul,” *Neamul Românesc*, 14 July 1937, 1.

phery. As was the case most of the time, the suburb was quickly attacked as being “Gypsy”.

Against this background, the radicalisation of the urban police occurred. Unlike the gendarmes who saw the problem as being provoked by nomads, the urban police were comparatively less concerned about nomads (who rarely appeared in the city as their services and crafts were in less demand there). The police first of all criminalised the sedentary Roma. These differences could be explained by the different approaches on how to best solve their own “Gypsy problem”. To simplify, the gendarmerie suggested that policing would become more efficient with sedentarisation, and that the problem of the nomads’ criminality in rural areas would thus decrease. In practice, however, numerous gendarmerie precincts where the nomads settled down were dissatisfied with this. The same radicalisation was actually occurring, on an even larger scale, in cities where most Roma had been sedentary already for a long time.

As a result, the urban police recommended harsher solutions, such as tightening control over the settled Roma, above all in Bucharest. They also suggested evicting certain Roma from the city who were then supposed to be sent either to their villages of origin or to a certain region of the country. I present *in extenso* the ideas of an article published in 1927 and authored by Willy Georgescu, a former inspector in the central bureaus of the *Siguranța*, who played an important role in setting up this intelligence service. Many of his ideas resemble closely the way in which Antonescu would, fifteen years later, think about solving the Roma problem. The article proves that such radical ideas were not limited to the eugenic discourse but could also occur among the police. According to Georgescu, because of the authorities’ idleness, Bucharest would get overwhelmed by Gypsies. More specifically, he presented a set of proposals in several steps. First of all, the Prefecture of the Capital Police had to order police precincts to draw up detailed tables on the situation of the Roma. These lists were to include details such as the name, place of birth, and commune of origin of an individual, if the allegations could be documented, and if the person had served in the army and paid taxes, had a criminal record, or had suffered any punishment. Likewise, other information of interest included the time and reasons for a person leaving their village of origin and preferring to move to Bucharest, their occupation, and what kind of reputation they enjoyed in their neighbourhood. Second, after all these tables would be sent by the police precincts to the Prefecture of Bucharest, where they would be centralised, the Prefecture would check very carefully whether the statements in the tables were correct or not. Third, Roma would be selected. Some would be allowed to live further in Bucharest, but others would have to be evicted. Moreover, the author did not exclude the possibility of having Roma settled in a certain part of the country where they would be forced to work:

[a]fter obtaining this result, the true control of the Gypsies would be made by selecting those who are allowed and entitled to live here and those to be forcibly dispatched, each to his place of origin. This selection would remove from Bucharest everybody that is unnecessary and dangerous for the public order and the safety of people. [...] it would also be possible for the government to determine a certain region in the country where the Gypsies would have their domicile forever, in order to force them to work honestly.³⁵

According to that plan, the capital would be cleansed of Roma.

35 Willy Georgescu, “Plaga țiganilor în Capitală,” *Paza*, no. 7 (1927): 7–9.

Despite differences between the gendarmerie and the police, in the end both institutions wanted the same thing: to get rid of their own Gypsies by sending them away somewhere. During the interwar period, neither the proposals of the urban police nor of the rural gendarmerie were put into practice, although they are illustrative of the gendarmerie's and police's growing frustration. However, these proposals are very similar to what actually happened during the Antonescu regime.³⁶

III. The Persecution of Roma during World War Two

In what follows, after briefly presenting the way Antonescu imagined the “Gypsy-problem”, I will discuss how different authorities interpreted the orders coming from the centre and became radicalised.

3.1. Antonescu's “Gypsy-problem”

Ion Antonescu served as a resonance box. He absorbed, from different milieus, several types of arguments against Roma: 1) the alleged criminality and difficulty in exercising control over Roma (the police discourse); 2) the oriental, lamentable image offered both by nomads and sedentary Roma, especially in the cities where the Gypsy slums served as a counter-example of what a proper Romanian city should look like (a discourse promoted especially by mayors, the press, and the various locals who sent hostile petitions asking for measures against Roma); 3) the feeling of shame, provoked by Roma, in front of foreigners (pre-existent, it was aggravated during World War Two by the presence of German soldiers on Romanian territory).

For Antonescu, Roma were different from Jews. If the latter were seen as a strong and influential enemy, depriving the Romanians of their elite position, as traitors, requiring the application of a comprehensive anti-Semitic legislation and their immediate elimination (and in large numbers, primarily from disputed regions such as Bessarabia and Bukovina),³⁷ Roma seemed to be a relatively minor issue. It was not a question of fear, as Roma were not perceived as a threat, but rather of embarrassment: they were too visible, especially in emblematic areas, and they risked compromising the image of Romanians both in their own eyes and in the view of foreigners. Their location was an aggravating circumstance. Antonescu was particularly interested in the urban Roma. The clean and modern city risked being contaminated and compromised by slums, dirt, orientalism, and Roma.³⁸ A few other statements Antonescu made offer an insight into his belief that the city, squalor, and Roma were inter-related with a lack of civilisation.³⁹ Antonescu repeatedly expressed his intention to cleanse the cities of Roma and he even prioritised some of the cities that should undergo this.

On 7 February 1941, a few days after the Legionary's rebellion, Antonescu addressed the issue of urban peripheries and, implicitly, that of the Roma. Bucharest was used as an example, but Antonescu spoke generally about cities and slums. He regarded the problem as more complex, including not only the issue of criminality, but

³⁶ Matei, “The Romanian Police,” 24–27.

³⁷ However, Antonescu tended to distinguish between the Jews from disputed regions such as Transnistria, Bessarabia, and Bukovina, which suffered greater casualties during the Holocaust, and those from the Old Kingdom. See Armin Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 69.

³⁸ Thorne, “Assimilation, Invisibility, and the Eugenic Turn,” 189–197.

³⁹ Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1998), 290–291, 484–485.

also those of public order and urban development. Therefore, Antonescu claimed that the urban peripheries should concern not only the police but also the city council. Although he placed great weight on the Roma, he did not see them as being alone in ruining the peripheries. Antonescu accused the Roma of “invading” the cities after the abolition of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, and especially after 1918, but he also criticised the “lazy” peasants who moved from villages to settle in cities. Insufficiently controlled, the riffraff lived a dubious life without working, populating slums and waiting for the first opportunity to rob and vandalise. The solutions proposed by Antonescu consisted of stricter control of both Roma and peasants. However, in the case of the Roma, Antonescu went a step further and wanted them out of the city. The vacated places, Antonescu continued, had to be sanitised and room made for schools and other useful constructions to be built. Antonescu wanted to set up some Gypsy villages close to the Danube or in Bărăgan, where he planned to concentrate several thousand Roma families. The working Roma would not be evicted but, according to Antonescu, they were anyway just a minority. Most Roma were problematic and had to be removed, but, interestingly enough, not because they had a criminal record, but simply because “one does not know what they do to make a living”.⁴⁰ A few months later, on 4 April 1941, during a new meeting of the Council of Ministers, Antonescu again brought up the idea of removing the Roma from Bucharest and other cities:

[a]nother serious scourge are the Gypsies. [...] One must act against them. We have to see where they came from and when to send them back. [...] Today I was again concerned about the problem of Gypsy villages. First, let us make some huts in Ialomița (County). [...] My tendency is to take the Gypsies out of all the cities, to make Gypsy villages.⁴¹

These ideas were not put into practice, but they show a certain similarity between how Antonescu and others (be they mayors, journalists, or police officers) before him imagined a Gypsy problem and the solutions for it. The emphasis was not on exterminating the Roma, but rather on removing them from important locations, on making them invisible. The Antonescu regime’s concern with the negative image of the cities that was allegedly created by the Roma is obvious also from the efforts to blur the presence of the Roma who escaped the deportations. On 22 September 1942, a few days after the deportation of 13,000 sedentary Roma, the Ministry of the Interior ordered the councils of the cities with many Roma inhabitants to take measures to concentrate them in certain areas called “neighbourhoods”. These would be isolated and made invisible, with the planting of poplars around them being planned.⁴² The short life of Antonescu’s regime did not allow this plan to materialise, but the plan is nevertheless illustrative for the attitude towards the presence of the Roma in the cities. However, there are cases documented in the archives when other local authorities – such as in Mizil – decided to remove the Roma from the central areas in order to relocate them to less visible areas. The local authorities justified their actions as follows:

it is necessary both because [their workshops] are a permanent source of infection, right in the centre of the city, but also because everyone who passes through the city of Mizil is left with the impression of a Gypsy city, not Romanian.⁴³

40 Dumitru-Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 2, 181.

41 Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri: Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1999), 94–95.

42 DJAN Argeș, fonds Primăria orașului Pitești [Pitești City Hall], file no. 22/1942, 68.

43 Viorel Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 145–146.

Even for Antonescu, the category of “problem Gypsies” was fluid and difficult to grasp. In 1941, he seemed preoccupied exclusively with the urban (sedentary) Roma, whom he wanted out of the cities and relocated to some villages set up in the Bărăgan area (largely similar to Willy Georgescu’s project from 1927). The idea was not put into practice. Later, after obtaining Transnistria, which he had already used in 1941 as a destination for the deportation of Jews, Antonescu abandoned the idea of Gypsy villages on the territory of Romania proper and instead opted for deporting them to Transnistria. In May 1942, on the order of Antonescu, the Ministry of the Interior drafted deportation plans. On 17 May 1942, it ordered subordinated authorities (the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, the Directorate General of the Police, and the Prefecture of the Capital Police) to organise a special census of the “problem Gypsies”. The criteria were vague as this category included both nomadic Roma and also those sedentary Roma “who, although non-nomadic, are convicted, recidivists, or have no clear means of livelihood or precise occupation on which to live honestly through work, and thus represent a burden and a danger to public order. All of them will be registered with their families, that is, husband, wife, and underage or over 18-year old children if they live under the same roof.”⁴⁴ It was not only convicts who were targeted, but also those who were suspected of becoming a problem. The criminal criterion was just a pretext, since those who were incriminated, and thus considered to be deportable, would have been all the Roma who were not considered to be economically useful.

3.2. Deporting Roma: Radicalised Authorities and the Negotiation of Criteria

Once Antonescu gave the deportation order, this was interpreted and implemented by local authorities according to their own views and interests. There is an interesting overlap between the criteria used by Antonescu for labelling the undesirable Roma: ethnic, criminal, socioeconomic, and urban. In the next period, these projections intertwined and influenced each other. Matters became even more complicated when other actors emerged with their own grids of interpretation of the so-called “problem Gypsies”.

On 25 May 1942, the police in urban areas and the gendarmerie in the countryside carried out a special census of the “problem Gypsies”. The vague criteria inspired by Antonescu were interpreted differently by numerous central and local authorities. In Romania, there had been neither police professionalisation with regard to the Roma, nor laws, working groups, or Gypsy databases. Consequently, when charged to identify these people, the Romanian police had no precise data about who was a Roma or who belonged to the “problem Gypsies” category. The imprecise wording of the order of 17 May 1942 meant basically that mostly lower-ranking officers of the police and the gendarmerie were called upon to establish not only who was a criminal (based on police records), but also who was prone to becoming one (based on unclear criteria, such as a suspect lifestyle). What did it mean to have a “precise occupation on which to live honestly through work”? How could they judge economic utility, how clearly defined were the occupations of the Roma, and how satisfactory did their social conditions need to be to ensure that they would live honestly? In fact, the unclear criteria left it tacitly to the discretion of the local authorities to decide by themselves whom they considered undesirable.

⁴⁴ Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 5–6.

Shortly after the census, the results were centralised: there were 8,905 nomadic Roma and 31,438 settled Roma.⁴⁵ On 1 June 1942, the nomads started to be deported. Their deportation occurred from precinct to precinct, with nomads being gradually pushed eastward in a relatively short period. By the autumn of 1942, 11,441 nomads had been deported, although the census had recorded only 8,905 of them. The increased number can be explained by the gendarmerie's practice of including in the convoys also those subsequently identified as nomads. Already on the occasion of the nomads' deportation, the lack of expertise on the Roma became evident. There were numerous errors and abuses. In some cases, the gendarmes could not distinguish nomads from sedentary Roma who, in the summer of 1942, had the misfortune of passing through a commune where they were unknown to the local gendarmes.

As to the deportation of settled Roma, there was no plan that was strictly followed from the very beginning. For example, during the deportation of the nomads, the authorities did not yet know how to deal with the sedentary "problem Gypsies". Initially they planned to deport all of them to Transnistria, without any distinction.⁴⁶ Things changed on 22 July 1942, when the Ministry of the Interior ordered the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie and the Directorate General of the Police to urgently sort the nominal tables according to the criterion of military utility, distinguishing between mobilised and mobilisable Roma on the one hand and not mobilised and non-mobilisable ones on the other. On 25 July, the commanders of the gendarmerie and the police retransmitted the order to all police units in the country, informing them that "the evacuation of the Gypsies of category II [...], that is to say non-nomads, is about to begin with those convicted of crimes and all sorts of crimes, recidivists, pickpockets, tramps, as well as all those for whom you have indications that they live by theft".⁴⁷ Realising that they could get rid of the "problem Gypsies" from their own regions, many local police officers acted radically. Instead of taking into account the order that they should only go through the lists from the census of 25 May 1942 and select for deportation merely a part of those listed, twenty-eight gendarmerie legions (that is, from twenty-eight counties) came up with new lists that by far exceeded the initial numbers proposed for deportation. Thus, the Dolj Gendarmerie Legion submitted lists with an additional 1,516 Roma, while the corresponding figure in Vâlcea was 534 and in Muscel it was 414. These increases were also influenced by the fact that the gendarmerie did not have to take into account real criminality proven by verifiable criminal records, but could freely decide which Roma to deport based merely on simple clues and suspicions. Surprised by these numbers, on 4 August 1942 the Ministry of the Interior asked for explanations.⁴⁸ In doing so, it moderated what risked becoming a series of radical and out-of-control local initiatives. In the end, only seven gendarmerie legions maintained their new lists.

A few days later, a visit by Antonescu in Bucharest hastened the deportation of Roma. More precisely, according to a notice from the Ministry of the Interior from 19 August, Antonescu was dissatisfied with the appearance of the capital and with the presence of the Roma:

- 1) dirty squares; 2) dirty streets and courtyards; broken or fallen fences; 3) houses with roofs left like this since the earthquake of 1940; 4) many Gyp-

45 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 33-34.

46 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 45-52.

47 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 75.

48 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 92-93.

sies and Gypsy women, some doing nothing, others selling flowers and boiled corn, women with brushes on their shoulders, beggars, dirty and barefoot children shoeblacks [...] Marshall Ion Antonescu ordered that, as soon as possible, the following measures be taken: [...] All nomadic Gypsies, those who cannot justify their existence, and those with convictions will be gathered by the Gendarmerie units and sent by 1 November current year to Transnistria.⁴⁹

The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was prepared and, on the very next day, on 20 August 1942, it replied by sending to the Ministry of the Interior a plan for the deportation of 12,497 sedentary Roma, and it asked for the necessary deportation trains. However, local authorities did not respect the criterion of military utility and more Roma were deported than planned – 13,176 persons. There were cases when not only families with members on the frontline but also Roma soldiers on leave were rounded up, put on trains, and deported to Transnistria.

Between September and December 1942, numerous Roma complained of being abusively deported. In the first stage, between September and October 1942, the central police authorities denied any responsibility for abusively deporting the Roma. They kept saying this even after military units addressed the Ministry of the Interior, indicating their dissatisfaction with the fact that families of Roma soldiers had been deported. In this period, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie could still count on support from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. On 29 September 1942, almost immediately after the arrival in Transnistria of 13,176 Roma deportees, a meeting of the Council of Ministers took place. There, Gh. Alexianu, the governor of Transnistria, took the opportunity to state that among those already deported there were also mobilised Roma, orphans, and war invalids, suggesting that they should be repatriated. C.Z. Vasiliu, the gendarmerie commander, took this personally: he justified the deportations by criminalising the Roma (claiming that all deportees allegedly had criminal records) and asked rhetorically: “[a]re you sending me back the thieves?” This is illustrative of the extent to which the Roma were criminalised, both by the local and national authorities, and how the formal criteria for this were actually negotiated by different actors. Although it should have saved them, the criterion of military utility (as with the mobilised soldiers) mattered little to the suspicious authorities that shared the view of Roma as offenders. All this was aggravated by the reaction of Mihai Antonescu, the vice-president of the government, who waived any responsibility for the fate of the abusively deported Roma: “[t]hose [whom] you evacuated, God be with them! – we will not bring them back. When there are rare cases ...”⁵⁰ Antonescu’s intervention demonstrates that the Council of Ministers tolerated the violation of its own criteria for defining undesirable Roma. He did not demand the observance of the initial orders and the return of the soldiers’ families, and admitted only to the repatriation of a very small number of Roma, namely the war invalids. Even in this case, there were local authorities, such as the Gendarmerie Ialomița, that flatly refused all repatriation requests, including those coming from the war invalids. As long as there was not enough pressure exerted from above, that is, from Antonescu and the government, the police could defend themselves and ignore the subject.⁵¹ On 9 October 1942, in a report to the Ministry of the Interior on the deportation of Roma, the General Inspectorate of the Gendar-

49 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 106–107.

50 Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 8 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2004), 228–229.

51 Matei, “The Romanian Police,” 43–44.

merie continued to deny the evidence, claiming that among the 13,176 deported sedentary Roma there were no mobilised or mobilisable Roma or their families.⁵²

Things changed slowly starting in mid-October 1942. It was no longer just about Alexianu's remarks of 29 September 1942 or some disparate complaints, but a flood of petitions were now addressed to authorities at all levels and coming from different senders. These senders included Roma deportees, family members who had escaped deportations, different firms, citizens, lawyers, and military units in which Roma soldiers served. They all described the injustice done to Roma soldiers fighting on the front while their families were deported, and with all of this being in violation of the formal criteria decided by the government itself. These were arguments that one could reason with. On 23 October 1942, the Ministry of the Interior informed the gendarmerie and the police that, based on the numerous complaints from the Roma soldiers, certain cases were verified which proved that families of mobilised and mobilisable Roma had been deported contrary to the orders. Therefore, the police and the gendarmerie were urged to promptly check the lists of the Roma deportees in order to identify the mobilised and mobilisable Roma.⁵³

Even if the government was, reluctantly, forced to get involved and take action to correct the most flagrant abuses of its orders, this does not necessarily mean that these were corrected. Contradictory and lacking consistence, the orders from above could prove to be hardly effective in the face of local authorities which were unwilling to reconsider their initial decisions by accepting the repatriation of a large number of Roma deportees. In response, on 25 October 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie presented a first report in which it minimised the magnitude of these abuses. The conclusion of this report is not surprising because this institution, as the coordinator nationwide of the deportation of Roma, was responsible for any failures. Hence, the abuses were presented merely as accidents, and the Roma were accused of contributing to this situation because they lacked identity papers and allegedly volunteered to leave for Transnistria.⁵⁴ Obviously, there were no rigorous controls during the deportations or later, when these controls were required. So far, no information has emerged of any cases of disciplinary action being taken against those responsible for the abusive deportations.

On 28 October 1942, like the governor of Transnistria a month earlier, but with greater success, another senior Transnistrian official drew attention to the abusive deportations. He was Col. Vasile Gorsky, the prefect of Ochakov, the most southeastern county in Transnistria, to which sedentary Roma had been deported. Gorsky sent a telegram directly to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers headed by Ion Antonescu, in which he bluntly mentioned the abuses during the deportations and asked for a commission on the ground to check on these:

[a]mong the nearly 14,000 Gypsies evacuated to this county, there are quite many who did not meet the evacuation provisions, as they are not nomadic and do not have criminal records. Among them, there are war invalids and widows, soldiers serving in the current war, decorated with the Military Virtue, women and children with husbands and parents on the frontline, parents with children and sons-in-law on the frontline, property owners, trained craftsmen, merchants with a good financial situation in their cities [...] Because of the [local] poor crop, we can ensure the feeding of the Gyp-

52 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 269.

53 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 303.

54 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 312.

sies only for a short period [...] Due to the cold and to the absence of heating possibilities, 10–20 Gypsies die every day. [...] Please send a commission for the immediate sorting of Gypsies.”⁵⁵

After being informed of this, Ion Antonescu issued the following resolution: “all abuses to be repaired. General Popescu⁵⁶ must take the matters into his hands and report. It is the evil work of the gendarmerie that did not execute my orders properly.”⁵⁷

Antonescu was not concerned that most Roma had been deported without being found guilty of any crime. After all, he had ordered the very vague criteria that allowed the local authorities to deport a large number of Roma. He was, however, sensitive to the fact that families of Roma who were fit for service had been deported. Even so, despite appearances, Antonescu’s interest in redressing these abuses was superficial, and his pressure on subordinate authorities was not constant. As before, the provisions of the now “moderate” center could be applied with a certain freedom of interpretation by a vast police apparatus (which was now more radical than the centre). The control system was slow and deeply subjective, and interested in not accepting the return of the already deported Roma. Practically, the same authorities responsible for abusively deporting the Roma were asked to check on themselves.

This control occurred in several steps. First of all, on 16 November 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was ordered to investigate the Roma deportees’ complaints. Reluctantly, it complied, and on 20 November 1942 it retransmitted the order to its subordinate Ochakov Gendarmerie Legion, but expressed doubts about the sincerity of the deportees’ allegations.⁵⁸ On 8 December 1942, the Ochakov Legion responded to its superiors, in the spirit suggested by the order of 20 November, confirming everything that the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie wanted to hear. Thus, the deportees had allegedly misled Gorsky as they had

presented to the Prefecture unreliable documents that they were war invalids, widows from the past war and women who verbally declared that their husbands served on the frontline now. [...] The harvest from Ochakov County was satisfying and the Gypsies can be provided with food in [good] conditions. [...] One cannot rely on Gypsies’ allegations unless they are verified by the Gendarmerie Legions and the Police stations of origin.⁵⁹

Probably reassured by this report, the next day, on 9 December 1942, the gendarmerie commander sent three commissions to investigate on the ground, in Ochakov, the complaints of the sedentary deportees.⁶⁰ In fact, the situation of the Roma deportees, already critical at the end of October, when reported by Gorsky, had meanwhile worsened dramatically. An independent report by a Romanian secret agent dated 5 December 1942 stated:

[t]hey [Gypsies] were under-fed. They were given 400 g[rams] of bread for those able to work and 200 g[rams] for the elderly and children. They were given a few potatoes, and very rarely salty fish, and these in very small quantities. Because of the poor food, some Gypsies – that is, the majority – lost so much weight that they turned into skeletons. Daily – especially lately – 10–15 Gypsies have died. They were full of parasites. [...] They are naked, without clothes, and the laundry and the clothing are also missing com-

55 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 321.

56 Gen. Dumitru Popescu, Minister of the Interior (January 1941–August 1944).

57 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 322.

58 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 343.

59 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 31–32.

60 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 33–35.

pletely. [...] In general, the situation of the Gypsies is terrible and almost unimaginable. Because of the squalor, many of them became shadows and almost wild. This state of affairs is due to ill-fated accommodation and food as well as due to the cold.⁶¹

Similarly, the reports of those three commissions revealed numerous abuses, including with regards to the deportation of mobilised and mobilisable Roma, of people without criminal records, or even of Romanians wrongly labelled as Gypsies. One such report stated that

some of the gendarmerie and urban police stations did not sort out the Gypsies, [...] they rounded-up and evacuated those they came across on their way because all they wanted was to have the number of Gypsies they had previously reported [...] without controlling if they were the ones to be evacuated. This is the only explanation for such a large number of those evacuated by abuse or negligence and it is necessary to take severe measures against those responsible. [...] They should be investigated and sent to prison because it is not acceptable to evacuate invalids, soldiers who were on leave, people who served in the army in this war and had awards of gratitude, Romanian children etc., and I wonder why these categories were not reported by the Ochakov Legion to the Odessa Inspectorate and why proposals were not made to immediately repatriate them.⁶²

Notwithstanding these reports, and just as before, there was no investigation leading to those responsible for the abuses. On the contrary, the nominal tables with 7,000 sedentary Roma were sent back to Romania so that the local police authorities (the same that had deported them) could verify if the Roma claims were true and respectively advise on their repatriation. Naturally, more often than not, the local police authorities refused their repatriation. Although the control mechanism was flawed, there were, however, differences as some local police authorities accepted certain repatriations requests while others refused them all together. On the whole, nationwide, there were 1,261 cases of Roma deportees who obtained favourable decisions. However, this still did not necessarily result in their repatriation. This time, it was again the central decision-making bodies that proved radical and imposed harsh measures against the Roma deportees. More precisely, after the Ministry of Health identified forty-eight cases of typhus among the Roma returning from Transnistria, Ion Antonescu intervened and decided that no Roma could return to Romania until May 1943, when the end of the epidemic was expected. On 20 January 1943, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was informed of this decision and measures were taken to ensure that Roma with repatriation permits would be stopped in Transnistria.⁶³ Antonescu's decision meant for many of these people the drastic reduction of their chances for survival.

61 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 27–28.

62 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 61–62.

63 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 91.

IV. Conclusion

The persecution of the Roma in Romania during World War Two cannot be explained only by invoking German influence and fascism. Focusing just on these factors risks obstructing a more interesting, in-depth local evolution, which is nevertheless more difficult to observe and follow in a brief analysis.

In the conditions of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, several important evolutions took place during the interwar period. These included the decrease in the economic utility of traditional Roma trades, which were until then still useful to a rather traditional economy. Then there was the increasing number of formerly itinerant Roma who started to settle down. The impoverishment of a large number of Roma also occurred, which was a fact that was frequently deplored in the press of the Roma movement. At the same time, urban development also meant the incorporation into cities of poor peripheries, including those with a significant number of Roma, so that the Roma became increasingly visible. The more recent sedentarisation of former Roma nomads had the same effect. A vicious circle was created. Traditionally, law enforcement agencies criminalised nomads in particular, but now, with their growing visibility, sedentary Roma also started to be increasingly criminalised, and not only by the law enforcement agencies, but also by mayors, the mass media, public opinion, and neighbours.

There were many localities where, prior to the rule of Ion Antonescu, there were interethnic tensions that involved the Roma, with locals making petitions or authorities devising plans for resettling the Roma. Such plans were often justified using a rhetoric that characterised Roma as dirty and uncivilised, and their homes and habits as pest holes. Sometimes these tensions exploded and became visible at the national level, when petitions vehemently demanding actions against Roma, or even against the local authorities that were accused of doing nothing, were sent to various ministers and even, during World War Two, to Antonescu. Antonescu did not create this hostile discourse against Roma, but he took it over from law enforcement agencies and municipalities and imposed it upon the entire country.

The centre of the state does not seem to have been inspired by recent, foreign, excessively theoretical, or elitist factors, but rather by old, deep, local, and pretty rudimentary causes. If there has to be a German factor contributing to Antonescu's radicalisation, this did not necessarily imply the adaptation of ideas of eugenicist inspiration. On the contrary, it was empirical. There was already a widespread sense of shame caused by the inability of urban authorities to manage the problem of the (Gypsy) periphery. The already existing shame in front of the few foreigners coming to interwar Romania became very strong after 1940, when numerous German troops were stationed or passed through Romania. Other factors include the dictatorial power used by Antonescu to "solve" what was perceived as pending problems left unsolved by the previous authorities,⁶⁴ either out of neglect or for legal reasons (such as respecting Roma properties in areas that were becoming sensitive). And there was, of course, the occupation of Transnistria, which could be used as a place to which undesirables could be deported, as had already been happening with Jews since 1941.

As for the Roma, Antonescu became radicalised along the way. In a first phase, in 1941, he did not think of deportation, but rather of exercising stricter control and removing the Roma from Bucharest only. These people were then supposed to be relocated to special villages. This was not a new idea. The local authorities were not

⁶⁴ Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt*, 43–45.

fond of the Roma presence in cities or of the former nomads' sedentarisation process. As such, plans and the practice of sending them back to their places of origin, or even creating some special places for them, existed long before the war. Later, after occupying Transnistria, the idea of creating special villages for Roma on Romanian territory was abandoned in favour of a Transnistrian alternative.

In 1942, Antonescu decided to deport some categories of Roma. Differentiation among Roma was not made by using a relatively objective criterion, such as having a criminal record, but by using a very subjective criterion, namely an unclear means of livelihood. This tendency to criminalise the Roma without proving their individual guilt continued and had serious consequences during the deportations. All of the 11,441 nomadic Roma, and more than 13,000 sedentary Roma, were deported. These Roma, although not real criminals, were seen and treated as criminals, which was a consequence of a long-term criminalisation process. With the exception of the Roma, no other Romanian citizens with criminal records were deported to Transnistria. The criminalisation of the Roma by the police was aggravated by local specificities. Once Antonescu gave the order, his vague criteria were interpreted by the local authorities according to their own interests. Some local authorities radicalised and acted very harshly, trying to take full advantage of the orders. Others, on the contrary, acted in moderation.

The treatment of the Roma was a contradictory process. In a first stage, the central authorities tended to tolerate the local authorities' non-observance of the formal criteria for identifying the "problem Gypsies". Later, although rather reluctantly, they intervened when the local initiatives became too radical and risked getting out of control. Faced with numerous grievances, complaints, and interventions, the central authorities showed a (limited) readiness to repair the most egregious abuses, particularly the deportation of the families of Roma soldiers. The control mechanism was deeply corrupt, inefficient, and dependent on the local authorities. Basically, the same local authorities which were guilty of abusive deportations were required to investigate themselves and advise on the return of the Roma deportees. As a result, the readiness to admit errors was reduced, with dramatic consequences for the deportees. Later, in January 1943, in the conditions of the outbreak of the typhus epidemic, Antonescu decided to stop all Roma repatriations without exception, which again radicalised the local authorities.

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