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MEMORY STUDIES

Article

Memory Studies
2020, Vol. 13(1) 107–123
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DOI: 10.1177/1750698017741929
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"Call the witness": Romani Holocaust related art in Austria and Marika Schmiedt's will to memory

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Abstract
Both academic and popular culture discourses are inhabited by statements that "pathologize" the ways Roma remember the Holocaust and other traumatic events. Against these claims, this article's main aim is to explore contemporary artistic production from Austria which fosters "Roma will to memory" within an assemblage of political practices and discourses. To this end, I will explore Marika Schmiedt's body of artistic memory work from 1999 to 2015, relying on a critical visual approach. The impetus for this exploration is Slawomir Kapralski's assertion that the actual cases of active remembering and commemoration among Roma and Sinti would render the traditional approach to Roma as "people without memory and history" inaccurate. As this case study shows, there is no such a thing as "Roma indifference to recollection," but rather, the testimony about the traumatic past is silenced or obstructed by the lack of the infrastructure, the bureaucracy of the archives, and the strategic forgetting politics.

Keywords
artistic memory, commemoration, politics of memory, Roma Holocaust, will to memory

Introduction

With a joint letter published online by *The Daily Beast* on 13 September 2014, several social scientists, artists, and Roma rights activists called attention to "The Holocaust Forgotten Roma Victims."[1] The authors of this letter called for recognition of the genocide of the Roma during the Second War World (1939–1945) and their inclusion in the official history of the Holocaust. The letter calls for an explicit focus to acknowledge the Romani victims of the Holocaust and to discard the descriptions of Romani victims as being part of an isolated genocide:

> generations of school children have learnt to call the results of the Nazi's attempts at race-based extermination by the name, "Holocaust," and to infer that the Roma were not part of the same horrible

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> policy enactments, is not only historically inaccurate, but also implies that there was a different experience for Roma. (Raeesi et al., 2014)

A recent film production presented at the Palais de l'Europe (on 22 October 2015), within the framework of the 29th Council of Europe Congress Session, displayed rare archival footage and significant testimonies of the Roma victims of the Nazis. The film is advertised as "the first documentary film which pursues the recognition of the Roma' to put an end to their status as forgotten victims of the Nazis" (Amicale Council of Europe, 2015).

While the traumatic memory of the Jews who suffered persecutions during the Nazi regime has been many times materialized in monuments, memorials, art works, museums, and other officially sanctioned forms of commemoration both in the United States and in Europe, the disarticulated memory of the Roma Holocaust is much less pervasive within the active European (common) memory culture. Actually, there is a very big gap within European cultural memory of Romani persecution during the Nazi era. This veil of oblivion has persisted since the end of the Second War World when

> the Roma were decapitated people searching for someone to help explain to them what had just happened. Instead they were greeted with a wall of silence and blank stares from the authorities. No reparations, no apologies, no film or plays about their plight … (Clayton, 2002: 110)

Yet, although the officially sanctioned cultures of the various European countries are many times reluctant in enacting Romani's memory of the Holocaust, this does not mean that these traumatic memories (and post-memories[2]) do not struggle to overcome Europe's collective amnesia and its deleterious consequences. Roma right to memory has to be understood against a background of constant suppressing of Roma history and memory, social injustice, and pandemic Romaphobia. This article aims to survey the artistic-political struggles for Roma right to memory, focusing mostly (though not exclusively) on the artistic memory work of the Austrian Roma contemporary artist Marika Schmiedt (born in 1966 in Traun/Upper Austria). Without pretending to be exhaustive (which is almost impossible as the field of Roma artistic memory is still evolving), this article attempts to illuminate the artistic memory of the Romani Holocaust as displayed in the works of the most prominent Austrian artists of Roma origins. This detailed case study aims to contribute to what I call "Roma will to memory" and to argue against those academic/popular culture positions which support the view that Romani people live in an "eternal present." In her artistic-political practice, Marika Schmiedt relentlessly deals with the memory of Roma cultural, social, and political exclusion, and a large body of her work is dedicated to the memory of the Roma and Sinti victims who perished under National Socialist Germany and their allies. Since 1999, Schmiedt's artistic-political work has dealt with documentation and research conducted in collaboration with survivors of the persecution of Roma and Sinti from the end of the Second World War to the present day. What I find particularly important in Schmiedt's work is the constant affirmation of Roma strength and political activism which overcome the well-established visual representations of Romani as perpetual passive voices. Schmiedt's artistic memory work is not always displayed in museums, art galleries, or other officially sanctioned institutions of memory preservation, but rather performed as "confrontations" in counter-public spheres and on online platforms. The artistic memories of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust as displayed in Marika Schmiedt's work are invaluable documents of Roma persecution and extrajudicial killings which cover both the Nazi period and the post-Nazi treatment of Roma and Sinti throughout Europe and beyond. As Kapralski argues, the Holocaust generates the linearity of Roma history, dividing it into periods "before the Holocaust" and "after the Holocaust," and "gives this history meaning as a continuous unfolding

of the persecution pattern" (Hancock interpreted in Kapralski, 2007: 119). At the same time, Schmiedt's memory work does not only address the persecution of Roma and Sinti in her country (Austria) but also illuminate multidimensional histories and memories of exclusion, displacement, forced migration, dispossession, and hatred.

Anna Reading (2012) posits that international protocols disclose four types of "discursive percepts" referring to the legal right to memory: "the right to autochthonic memory, the right to world cultural memory, the right to national memory, and the rights of victims within states of exception to have the crimes of the state publicly recognized through various media forms" (p. 136). Reading (2012) concludes her study "The European Roma: an unsettled right to memory," claiming that although the right to memory is not overtly stipulated in any international convention, this right is implicitly protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (p. 137). In the case of the Roma and Sinti, Reading claims that the right to memory is illuminated through the latter type of discursive percept (the victim memory). She supports this view by arguing that after decades of silence and avoidance, there is "some growing recognition of the memory of the *Porajmos*" in the European context.[3] Yet, as this article argues, although this recognition is enforced through European policies directed to eliminate Romaphobia, racism, and discrimination, in practice, individual states offered little (or no) support to aid the materialization of the cultural and social memory of Roma exclusion from the "common European memory." At the same time, it has to be mentioned that "Roma right to memory" ought not to be regarded only through a "victim memory" discourse type, as Reading suggests. As Bosnian artist Selma Selman points out,

> I have faced discrimination. This is why I don't want to represent myself as a Roma artist … One very important thing in my art is that I don't want to just show that we (Roma) are discriminated against; I want to fight against discrimination. The quality of my art is rooted in the culture of the Roma people, but it is enhanced by the experience of being Bosnian. (Central European University, 2015)

What this confession reveals is that the artistic memory and what this memory triggers is also enhanced by the experience of being Bosnian (the right to national memory). Another confession made by a Sinti survivor of the Holocaust, Rita Prigmore, reveals, "We Gypsies do not have a country of our own and we do not strive for it. We want to be fully fledged citizens in the countries we live in and have been living for generations" (Zafeiri, 2014). Unlike in other cases, where the concepts of national identity and memory are criticized for inculcating "master narratives," a nuanced national identity and memory discourse is still important in resisting discrimination and antigypsyism because non-identity prejudices about Roma are based on stereotypes that define "Gypsies" as "in-between identities"/"no-identities," "homeless," "nomads," "instable," "neither here nor there." In this way, "the alleged Gypsy is denied a stable and fixed nationality and belonging, one of the most important characteristics in the identity formation of the 'we-group'" (End, 2013: 21).[4]

Memory of the Roma Holocaust in current Austrian history

Austria—like Italy, Romania, Hungary, and others—also has a narrative of "occupation" according to which its complicity with Nazi Germany is non-existent, and this "historiography" triggers a greater interest in establishing Austrian state as "the first victim of Hitler's barbarism, and as a country that has been occupied by the Nazi" (Thurner, 2013: 17). Consequently, the Austrian state shows little interest in paying reparations to the Nazi's victims (namely, to persecuted minority groups) because the narrative of the "whole nation" (how the whole nation suffered from Nazi persecution and occupation) is the prevalent one. In this "grand narrative" about the "victims of the

war," Romani (as well as Jewish) victims and their memory of this traumatic event are often overlooked. As Thurner (2013) points out, the Austrian federal government used to invite Romani leaders to the Parliament from time to time, in an attempt to prove that

> integration has been successful and Austria does not have a 'Roma problem'.[5] This is also why the contact with the media works so well. Journalists know their contact persons within the Roma community, and it is easy for them to get an interview or a statement on current social events. (pp. 14–15)

However, there are many aspects of Roma history and reality which remain hidden or silenced. The Roma Holocaust is one of these aspects and its study remains a marginal issue in Austrian historical research. However, as Thurner (2013) argues, although this study was postponed in official institutions of historical research for various reasons (the supposed lack of sources, lack of interest), circles outside of the academy (artists, independent researchers, journalists, activists) focused on this topic and attempted to gather evidence to fill a gap in the memory of the Second War World. One of these valuable efforts of a history from below is Selma Steinmetz's 1966 monograph "Österreichs Zigeuner im NS-Staat" (Austrian Gypsies under the Nazi Regime) in which the researcher (herself a resistance fighter and a victim of the Nazi regime) conducted interviews with the survivors of the concentration camps. As Thurner (2013) points out, Steinmetz

> was not only interested in putting this history in writing, she also sought to include Roma and Sinti as one of the communities that survived the concentration camps and assist them in applying for restitution as victims of the Nazi regime. (p. 16)

Yet, only after 1988 (the year known in Austria as "the commemorative year") were Roma officially recognized as victims of the Nazi regime. The artist Marika Schmiedt is part of the small Roma civil society born after 1988 in Austria and her work as a contemporary artist and cultural activist can be understood as part and parcel of an active and critical Roma movement. Roma Holocaust related art is another form of memorialization of the traumatic past. The artistic practices of remembering developed by Schmiedt chronicle the persecutions of Roma and Sinti from the perspective of the descendant witness as Schmiedt performs a post-memory work which, nevertheless, encapsulates an inherited collective, trans-generational trauma. Her artistic post-memory and its role in transitional justice processes in Austria and beyond reveals what Nicole L. Immler (2012) calls "a narrative of anger" (pp. 270–281). The importance of the narrative and performance of anger in reconciliation processes ought not to be underestimated. As Immler (2012) argues, "while this performance of discontent initially boycotts the (reconciliation) dialogue, it also serves to create relationships, not only within families, but also with the outside, between accuser and accused" (p. 278).[6] At the same time, art has the power to disclose political emotions (anger included) and to display them as authentic archives of feelings.

"Call the witness"

Not a single Roma was called to bear witness to the Nazi crimes at the Nuremberg trials. The Württemberg Ministry of the Interior released a statement in 1951 to the judges hearing restitution crimes that "the Gypsies were persecuted under the National Socialist regime not for any racial reason, but because their criminal and antisocial record" (Hancock, 2004: 383). For a long time, this position remained unchallenged and nobody complained as "everyone despises Gypsies, so why exercise restraint? Who will avenge them? Who will complain? Who will bear witness?" (Montandon quoted in Hancock, 2004: 384). The "bearing witness" aspect of an unfinished

transitional justice process is still an issue of intense academic and political debate. The debate is ongoing and it is not yet clear how to remember and commemorate the Roma and Sinti who perished under the Nazi regime. This difficulty is typically explained by invoking the view that it is not yet settled as to how to refer to the wide variety of Roma persecutions. At the same time, there is a widely accepted view that Roma lack a commemorative culture. Many studies emphasize that Roma's memory culture is "peculiar" particularly because, unlike other communities, Romani people live in an "eternal present" in which there is no cult for the past and no interest for historical recording. By the same token, certain academic discourses posit that there is a lack of will to remember in Roma communities and this lack is explained by peculiar aspects of traditional Romani culture. As Alaina Lemon (2000) argues, in earlier ethnographic studies, Roma are presented as people without history and as individuals "indifferent to recollection" (p. 3). This common articulation of Roma as disinterested in memory work is present both in public and academic discourse. Some social scientists argue that Romani people are not actually interested in history and in preserving the memory of their culture because they do not have a written tradition. Other social scientists (e.g. Stewart, 2004) developed an "implicit memory approach" (Roma do not remember the past directly but as embedded in the social relations with the majority population) pointing out that Roma—in relation to the Holocaust—are actually not "indifferent to recollection" but they "remember without commemoration" (Stewart, 2004). Still other researchers complain that they could not find any survivor of the Roma genocide who wants to share their memories: "I searched in vain for personal accounts, for memories from gypsy survivors …" (Sonneman, 2002: 25) These assertions are not confined to academic circles but circulate freely in media and popular culture. For instance, Isabel Fonseca (1995) claims in her best-seller novel, *Burry Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey*, that "the Roma have made an art of forgetting their traumatic experiences," including that of the Holocaust (p. 243).

According to Lemon (2000), Romani Holocaust memory is less present in the public sphere also because of "the alleged gypsies' taboos on remembering the dead" (p. 3). However, as Reading convincingly argues, these interpretations are not necessarily accurate. The fact that we encounter fewer testimonies from the Roma survivors of the Nazi regime does not necessarily mean that Romani people are culturally "indifferent to recollection," rather this scarcity of memory work is explained by the fact that many Roma survivors of the Second War World have been living in countries that forbid commemorations, memorials, and other forms of memorialization of the Roma Holocaust on the grounds that "the entire nation" suffered under the Nazi regime. Moreover, as Reading (2012) suggests, it is entirely possible to establish a recorded history of Roma persecution under the Nazi regime and to gather oral testimonies with the "right approach" (p. 131). But what would this "right approach" be? To what extent can the memory work at the grassroots level foster an active culture of remembrance, and how can art supplement this active remembrance? In his critique of Stewart's study "Remembering without commemoration: the mnemonics and politics of Holocaust. Memories among European Roma,"[7] Kapralski (2009, 2013) posits that Stewart relies on the construction of his argument of "Roma's implicit memory" on an essentialist, fixed concept of Roma identity, disregarding the variety of Romani life, cultures, and the liminal border line between Roma and non-Roma cultural production, particularly when traumatic memory is involved. Kapralski (2009) is keen to reject the monolithic picture of the Roma cultural universe. It is true that cultural explanations can illuminate social phenomena and differences in a groups' behavior—because these explanations speak to the collective level—but this does not mean that we should rely on an unsophisticated concept of "culture" (Keating, 2008) At the same time, Kapralski (2009) is also right to refuse treating the Roma as a passive and static group, as a group with an ascribed identity whose features are universal and unchanging, because individuals belong to "more than one cultural milieu" and cultures have "contested boundaries"[8] (Keating, 2008).

Following Kapralski's (2009) claim that the actual cases of active remembrance and commemoration among Roma would render the traditional approach to Roma as "people without memory and history" inaccurate, this article argues that art can "call the witness" of the Roma Holocaust. At the same time, art can also create the landmarks for the "unknown" history of Roma without relying on the politics of monuments but on "living memories" as opposed to the official "memories in bronze or marble." Marika Schmiedt's artistic-political work is a very relevant example in this respect because it relies on "living testimony" and "oral micro-histories" which are embedded in a participatory artistic practice. Her art of memory is grounded in meticulous historical and political research in archives and informed by questions addressed by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998): "What is the juridical structure that allowed such events to take place?" (p. 166). At the same time, her artistic production is not only concerned with bringing to the forefront the voices and testimonies of the victims, but it also attempts to disclose the long-term effects of internment in concentration camps in the lives of second and third generations. The impetus for this artistic research is her personal trauma as a granddaughter of Amalia Horvath. The artist's grandmother was murdered at the concentration camp of Ravensbrück. In her search for memory and justice, the artist faces the persecution and murder of her relatives during the National Socialist regime. As she declares in her film documentary *An Undesirable Society* (2001), almost all of her family has been persecuted:

> My great-grandfather was murdered in the Buchenwald; Josef, my grand-mother's brother, was murdered in Buchenwald in 1940, at the age of 35; Josefa my grandmother's sister was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944, at the age of 37; Ulrich, Josefa's son, was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944, at the age of 14. I was unable to find any information about the fate of her other two children, Theresa and Johann.

Schmiedt engages in a convoluted process of tracing their disappearance, attempting to find records in various archives and questioning the official politics of amnesia. Her 2001 artistic documentary, *An Undesirable Society*, documents this search for memory and justice involving the audience in her research. The citizens are confronted with Austria's Nazi past and "challenged to share the weight of the destructions so many Austrians have been involved in, if 'only' by silence and passivity."[9] The right to memory is also a struggle for the right to know the truth by illuminating the complicity in human rights violations. In the lack of typical transitional justice mechanisms (trials, truth commissions, and so on), artistic practice becomes an *aide-mémoire* and a judicial eye. What *An Undesirable Society* reveals is the perpetuation of the negative stereotypes about Roma and politics of oblivion. The documentary commences with footage of crowds (most probably at the metro station) accompanied by a sensual Viennese waltz. This is the first scene in a film-document situated between poetics and politics of justice. Juxtaposing the serenity of this introductory scene with interviews in the streets, Schmiedt discloses the current racism and discrimination against Roma in her country (and in Europe). Her interlocutors are asked in an initial phase what they know about the Roma ethnic group, and their answers range from "nothing at all" to statements such as "put away everything, the Gypsies are coming … that is what I remember." The next question addressed by the artist was "What do you know about the assassination of 500,000 Gypsies?" The answers also range from "nothing. never heard of that" and "nobody told us that. In school they teach us different things. They told us about the Jews, not the Gypsies" to "In school we talked about minorities in Austria. The Gypsies were just mentioned. When we talked about the NS era, they were not mentioned." The artist then documents her painstaking pilgrimage from one institution to another in an attempt to trace her relative's disappearance. The bureaucratic nightmare on the right to memory is displayed in detail. Several times the artist is told that she came "at a very inopportune moment" (min. 28.56) and "the files from 1938 or 1939 were scaled … or maybe they

are at the Federal Archive" (min. 30.12 and min. 30.21). After visiting the Federal Archives, she found out that the files from 1938 to 1939 no longer exist but "if she really wants to see the files she should bring a written permission" (min. 32.05). Later on, the artist discovers a "memory book" dedicated to the dead people (*Remembrance Book about the People of Ravensbrück*) where she found her grandmother's name. Schmiedt's artistic-political research is instantiated as a form of unveiling and denunciation of what proved to be, in the end, institutions of permanent exclusion. Although the archives keep the files with the names of the prisoners, transport lists, prisoners' photos, death certificates, and so on, it seems that these files cannot be accessed. Thus, as the curator Suzana Milevska (2011a) points out, the artist "is making visible the existing evidence by putting the pile of these documents in front of our eyes in their frappant materiality". The very notion of "archive" is expanded in Schmiedt's work to the spaces where memories evade the official institutions of remembrance and enter everyday interactions and realities.[10] As Riano-Alcala and Baines (2011) argue, the living archive disturbs "conventional assumptions about what is documentation or witnessing in the field of transitional justice and introduces new interdisciplinary tools to the field with which to learn from and listen differently to survivors" (p. 412). This "frappant materiality" of the "living archive" is also displayed in Schmiedt's installation *What Remains…2000-2009* (2011, DVD loop 20-30), in which the artist includes copies of the documents collected during her research for the film-document *An Undesirable Society* and a video. This installation was displayed within the exhibition *Roma Protocol* inside the Austrian Parliament's Press Room in Vienna. The pile of evidence of Romani persecution is displayed through a

> few thousand single copies of transport lists, prisoner lists, obituaries, inmate-stuff cards, detention certificates, cash cards or documents related to medical experiments were offered to the audience to take home and thus to keep the memory of these otherwise blacked-out events. (Milevska, 2011a)

In this way, the memory of Roma persecution under the Nazi regime is enacted as a "memory event," meant to turn the audience from passive spectators into active participants.[11] Etkind (2010) employs the concept of "memory event" to connote various types of cultural remembering that emphasize the continuum of cultural expression as opposed to the static of the *lieux de mémoire* (p. 5). Schmiedt's participatory memory work (the distribution of these records to the audience) enhances a "living culture of remembrance," as opposed to more traditional monumental expressions. This commemorative event relies on a cultural (artistic) practice of participation and aims to occasion an active remembrance. The participants to this "memory event" do not necessarily pursue the officially sanctioned politics of remembrance and commemoration. This memory practice opens the ground for new venues in commemoration which fosters intersubjective remembering. At the same time, this artistic discourse on the Roma Holocaust triggers a multidimensional and multidirectional remembering interconnected with memories of discrimination and forced migration. Thus, as Riano-Alcala and Baines (2011) posit when they refer to various ways to document human rights violations, the archive of Roma persecution is living, "it is embedded in the day-to-day lives and surroundings of the survivor-witness and inscribed on the bodies of tellers and listeners" (p. 413).

The same will to memory guides Schmiedt's documentary, *GEDENKEN*, from 2009 (Police and Memory). In this short film, the artist conducts interviews with police officers in the Federal Police Directorate Vienna attempting to disentangle who collaborated with the Nazi regime and why. The impetus for this film is the installment of a memorial plaque (in 2000) which commemorates the Austrian police officers murdered during the Nazi era without considering the involvement of some of these officers in National Socialism's politics. The plaque is installed at the Head Office of the Federal Police in Vienna. This commemorative plaque is only one of the many sites of

memory in Vienna which serves as a reminder of the Nazi crimes and Nazi's victims in Austria. Vienna is known as a "City of Remembrance of Nazi Atrocities," and the existence of so many streets named after Austrian Jews who were murdered under National Socialism justifies this label. Yet, the post-war politics of memory controls both the practices and contents of public (official) remembrance. Schmiedt's interviews reveal the insistence of the police officers in defending the perpetrators of the Holocaust, "thereby raising the question of the unresolved complicity of the current legal system in defending and labeling the perpetrators as victims, and ignoring their active and willing participation in the Nazi regime."[12]Thus, this film-document also struggles to illuminate what Primo Levi (1989: 40) and others described as the moral and political "gray zones" of collaborators, bystanders, perpetrators, and beneficiaries of violence. The fact that this attempt to illuminate the gray zones of past and present violations of human rights is initiated by an artist—who uses an artistic-political method of investigation—proves that art can complement typical transitional justice mechanisms. *GEDENKEN* address the complex complicity of the Austrian staus quo in human rights violations by highlighting the ways and the discourses through which the "innocent" collaborators became beneficiaries of injustice. Schmiedt's art of memory and responsibility interrogates the officially sanctioned memory and its conflation of victims and perpetrators on the grounds that it is art's power to unveil the truth and to condemn historical forgetting. As the documentary reveals, the victim–perpetrator complex elicits questions and justifications which vary from individual to individual.

In another body of work, *Visible*, from 2009, the artist brings together five portraits of Austrian women survivors of the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Their testimony is clear evidence of the painful treatment they endured. At the same time, this traumatic memory is also passed down to the second and third generations. The return of the victim's voice in contemporary artistic production represents "the return of a silent witness and gives voice to the muted historical experience" (Grobbel, 2003). At the same time, this return of the victim's voice proves the erroneousness of the common assertion that Roma survived the harsh times because there is no place for trauma in their collective memory. By the same token, Jan Yoors' exotic account from *Crossing* which underlines that Roma are "content to remain forgotten and unnoticed" is also inaccurate (Yoors quoted in Tebbutt, 2006: 189). Marika Schmiedt's *Legacy* also demonstrates that the women descendants of the victims continually articulate their need to renegotiate the past as they live with their "quiet testimonials" of those "who cannot testify." These testimonies clearly indicate the will to remember and to be remembered against a background of indifference and oblivion. Schmiedt's work *Legacy* is dedicated to another Austrian-Romani visual artist, story teller, writer, and musician who survived the Holocaust—Ceija Stojka. After she survived all the horrors of internment in three concentration camps (Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Ravensbrück), she was forced to face the continuous persecution and discrimination of Roma and Sinti after the end of the Second World War. The memories of exclusion and persecution are all present in her art enacted in visual production, musical performances, and writing. Stojka's indefatigable memory work testifies her struggle for Roma right to memory in a context of constant and perpetuated infringements of the human rights of Roma, Sinti, and Travelers: "If the world does not change now … if it does not build peace-so that my great grandchildren have a chance to live in this world, then I cannot explain why I survived Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Ravensbrück" (Stojka quoted in Keen, 2015: 80). After the war, the artist returned to Austria only to find that there was no acknowledgment of the Roma persecution during the Nazi regime, and some anti-Roma policies even continued after the Second World War. Facing this excruciating oblivion of the Romani Holocaust and their continuous persecution in Austria and in Europe, Stojka began to paint in her mid-50s (starting in 1986). Her visual testimony about the Roma traumatic experience under National Socialism is also enacted in written form. In 1988, she published, *We Live in Seclusion: The Memories of a Romani*, one of the first

Roma autobiographic accounts of the Holocaust. Ceija Stojka's art is a break through the silence and refused testimonies. As the director of the Berlin art gallery, Kai Dikhas posits,

> In Germany, very often these were the very same people who had been in charge of organizing the Holocaust in the first place. They simply refused testimonies and did not want to let the victims study the archives. With her writing and artwork, Ceija Stojka broke this taboo of silence […] To my knowledge, Stojka and her brother Karl were the first to go public in Austria, where people were particularly silent about this part of history. (Pankok quoted in Bak, 2014)

Thus, Stojka's artistic testimony, as Schmiedt's "testimony-within-testimony," ought to not be only understood or primarily understood as a private working through of the individual memories and trauma. What this form of artistic work encapsulates in the first place is a will to memory and historical justice especially within a climate where strategic forgetting is prevalent. Marika Schmiedt's *Legacy* does not necessarily attempt to integrate in the visual cannon of the Holocaust because what she wants to emphasize is not only the pervasiveness of Roma suffering but also the political intervention and the struggle for the right to memory. In this film, Ceija Stojka and different generations of her descendants (exclusively women) are interviewed by Marika Schmiedt, and all of them warn us about the noxious and perpetual racism present in our present societies. Ceija Stojka recalls the most startling memories of her internment in the Nazi concentration camps and warns that these crimes against human rights can happen again. Some of her memories from the time she was only 10 years old reveal how Roma women have died in the Nazi camps: "What they did, they used a hair curler, penetrated the woman with it, and then switched on the power. The women would endure internal burn wounds and subsequently die from their injuries" (*Legacy*, minute 15.33 and 15.39). Another unsettling memory reveals how Capo guards—who were prisoners themselves—were treating the other prisoners worse than the SS guards:

> I remember when an old man slipped in a puddle. He tried to get up but kept on skidding because the puddle was slippery and greasy like lard. And as he was trying to get up, one of the capo guards reached for his head, pressed his face into the puddle and beat his head with a club. (*Legacy*, minute 17.09–17.31)

In the second part of the film, Ceija Stojka continues her testimony about Roma persecution in Austria long after the end of the Second War World:

> In 1960 people still had Nazi flags hanging from their walls but I did not say anything … I find it quite incredible that Mozart, Schiller, Cleopatra, Nero—people and events from centuries ago—are brought up in no time. But to shine light on the history of the Nazi is too much to ask for. That is a burden. (*Legacy*, minute 28.28–29.00)

The film ends up with media reports about Romani persecution throughout Europe and the rise of the neo-Nazi groups which harass and intimidate the Roma residents of various European cities and villages. In one of the last scenes, Ceija Stojka states that Marika Schmiedt can pass these memories on: "You are a witness to my story. You are a contemporary witness" (*Legacy* minute 40.50). Schmiedt, in turn, commands the audience of her film to bear witness to Roma persecution and harassment, and in this way the legacy of witnessing is passed on. Both Stojka and Schmiedt's readiness to question old stereotypes about "Roma culture and lifestyle" and "Roma as people without history and indifferent to recollection" reveals the instantiation of a will to memory and a will to memory's transmission. It is not without significance that the will to memory and living testimonies are enacted in both cases in artistic production. As Thomas Acton (2011) argues, "sociology calls the

production of visual art 'representation', but when artists call it 'bearing witness' it suddenly becomes more urgent. Bearing witness is an action that requires an active subject."[13] Marika Schmiedt's *Legacy* is both a film about testimony and a "testimony-within-testimony" involving the creative act of an author (the artist) who, according to Agamben (1999), is at the same time a co-author of the testimony because the author "signifies the witness insofar as his testimony always presupposes something—a fact, a thing or a word—that preexists his and whose reality and force must be validated or certified" (p. 149).

The Second Roma Pavilion at the Venice Biennale entitled, *Call the Witness* (2011), urged Roma artists, media researchers, and academics to testify to the pandemic spread of hatred and discrimination against Roma communities. As the curatorial statement points out,

> in the core of the project lies the concept of contemporary artist as an instantaneous witness of his/her time who is not a passive viewer but rather acts as an active participant in solidarity with the events and people that provoked his/her artwork. (Art&Education, 2010)

Marika Schmiedt's *Legacy* was part of the sheer number of testimonies displayed at the second Roma Pavilion (Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art, 2011). Positioned against historical amnesia, her witnessing functions as both evidence of a will to remember and as weapon against the cultural taboos about Roma's indifference to remembering traumatic events. The second Roma pavilion at the Venice Biennale was conceived around the curatorial concept of *Call the Witness*. As Suzana Milevska (2011b; who proposed this concept for the Roma Pavilion) claims,

> the title and the main theme of the project *Call the Witness* were informed by Romaniya, the Roma law that structures community life, and Romani Kris, the judicial tradition of informal and unwritten justice codex still existing in some Romani cultures. Within this framework, testimonial "performances" allow anybody to be a witness in a proceeding if one feels that there is an urgency for his/her testimony to be heard for the sake of truth and justice.

The contemporary artists of Roma descent from all over Europe (though not exclusively) came to Venice Biennale to bear witness of Roma and Sinti continuous persecution. At the same time, they understood the urgency of disclosing those memories of oppression and extrajudicial killings which are often overlooked, overwritten, or whitewashed by cultural and political institutions. The artists' testimonies verbalize and display trauma for the ones who cannot speak and address the issue of lack of compassion and solidarity with those different and disempowered. What Marika Schmiedt aims to accomplish through her artistic memory work is a form of collective action and mobilization against historical oblivion and multifarious injustice. As Tommaso Vitale and Enrico Claps (2010) posit, these "mobilizations are never spontaneous," but rather "when referring to mobilizations we talk about moral and political entrepreneurs" (p. 234). As a moral and political "entrepreneur of memory" (Jelin, 2003; Müller, 2002), Marika Schmiedt triggers social action and political deliberation. This artistic form of political and "ethnic mobilization" (Vermeersch, 2006: 102) crosses "the boundaries of policy making, academic work and grassroots mobilization towards collective action" (Mirga-Kruszelnicka et al., 2015: 22).

Artistic memory against strategic forgetting in Kirchstetten

Some of Marika Schmiedt's relatives lived in the small Austrian town Kirchstetten, Lower Austria. In her persistent quest for the right to memory, the artist wanted to commemorate in August 2015 the Roma and Sinti who were persecuted and killed during National Socialism with a temporary

exhibition in the small Austrian city. According to Roma React (2015), around 100 Roma and Sinti were living in Kirchstetten before the Second World War, and only a few of them survived the concentration camps. Kirchstetten is not only the hometown of the Roma and Sinti victims of the Nazi era but also the hometown of the Austrian poet, essayist, and writer Joseph Weinheber (1892–1945) who lived in Kirchstetten from 1936. As Roma React (2015) reports on their website, "shortly after the 'Anschluss', when Austria became part of Nazi Germany," Joseph Weinheber became a "court artist" for the Nazis. In 1945, he committed suicide as the Red Army was advancing in Austria. Yet, his artistic reputation grew and Weinheber became one of the most respected poets in Austria. The traces of his fame still linger in the cultural memory of Kirchstetten, and several places and institutions are named after him (a museum, a kindergarten, a street, a square, and a bridge). Weinheber is remembered for the aesthetic qualities of his poems and partly forgotten with regard to the pro-Nazi Germany content of some of his works. Referring to the aesthetic qualities of Weinheber's work, Andrew Barker (2006) points out that the lyric poetry of Joseph Weinheber "provides a counter to the otherwise overwhelming provincialism of so much Austrian writing at the time" (p. 115). However, both literary critics and Roma rights activists confront Weinheber's problematic politics expressed in poetic form, especially the Nazi panegyrics from the *Bekenntnisbuch* (1938) where the Austrian poet from Kirchstetten declaimed: "Deutschland, ewig und groß/ Germany eternal and great,/Deutschland, wir grüßen dich!/ Germany, we greet thee/ Führer, heilig und stark,/ Fürher, sacred and strong,/ Führer, wir grüßen dich!/ Fürher, we greet thee! " (excerpt from Joseph Weinheber's "Hymnus auf die Heimkehr" translated by Barker, 2006: 115). Marika Schmiedt wanted to commemorate the Roma and Sinti victims of National Socialism in Kirchstetten with a temporary art installation entitled *Futschikato—Die verschwundenen Roma und Sinti aus Kirchstetten und der "Fall Weinheber"* (Futschikato—The Missing Roma and Sinti from Kirchstetten and the "The Weinheber Case") but the mayor of the city, Paul Horsak, denied permission to exhibit her temporary art exhibition on the grounds that he does not accept Kirchstetten to be in the spotlight of public and media attention as a place where Nazi crimes took place. His letter of refusal addressed to Marika Schmiedt (2015) states that this exhibition would be detrimental to Kirchstetten's image as a city of great poets and writers (Weinheber included) who are recognized as reputable artists in the whole world. He also mentioned that as the community leader of the beautiful Kirchstetten, he believes that the younger generation does not want to recall the dark past of the Nazi persecutions because the young generation is not responsible for the crimes that happened more than 70 years ago. Moreover, the mayor of Kirchstetten posits that memory work and the commemoration of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims should follow an adequate protocol. He states, "Erinnerung ja, aber es muss auch einmal Schluss sein mit Aufarbeitung und Auseinandersetzung" (Remembering yes, but there has to be a stop to processing and confronting the past).[14] What this puzzling assertion tries to suggest is that remembering and commemorating the Holocaust should not be confrontational but "adequate." In other words, according to Paul Horsak, the memory making of the crimes and persecution of Roma and Sinti should not entail a critical engagement with the past and should not force the community of Kirchstetten to face the history of those disappeared. Following this, a legitimate question is what kind of remembering would be "adequate" according to Horsak's view.

Although he feared the presence of Kirchstetten in the spotlight of media attention, the denial of Schmiedt's temporary exhibition has gained consistent reactions both from the media and civil society. A considerable number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, and artists addressed open letters to Paul Horsak in which they condemned the silencing of the Roma right to memory and the censorship of the artist's installation.[15] In spite of the official denial to install the exhibition, on 27 September 2015, Marika Schmiedt, Martina Sinowatz, and Klaus Sinowatz organized an unauthorized exhibition in Kirchstetten as a protest action against the censorship of Schmiedt's

work and against the infringement of the Roma and Sinti victims' right to memory and commemoration. The unauthorized exhibition was announced via online social media.[16] The artistic-political installation gathered quite a few citizens of Kirchstetten who attended the artistic event under the vigilant eye of the policemen. Among the pieces displayed in this installation were excerpts from Schmiedt's research (copies of prisoner lists, obituaries, photographs) for her previous art pieces *Un Undesirable Society* (2001) and *What Remains…2000-2009* (2011). The public was invited again to face the existing evidence of these archival documents, which testify to the persecution and extrajudicial killings of Roma and Sinti under the Nazi regime. Marika Schmiedt's political and artistic practice extends and performs the archival memory of Roma and Sinti persecution by turning the spectators from passive attendants to an artistic event into witness (or post-witnesses) of a horrendous violation of human rights which is still perpetuated through a strategic politics of forgetting. As Von Lisa-Maria Seidl reports for *Nön* newspaper, the unauthorized art exhibition from 27 September 2015 has been conceived as an artistic protest against "Kirchstetten's ambivalent culture of commemoration" which cherishes Joseph Weinheber's memory but silences Roma and Sinti's victims' right to commemoration (Von Seidl, *Nön*, 30 September 2015: 40). The artistic protest was also documented photographically by Seidl and some of these photographs appeared in *Nön* newspaper. Marika Schmiedt's art installation, exhibited against all odds, bears witness to the double humiliation Roma and Sinti endured—during National Socialism and in the present—when their voices have been constantly silenced. The artist is a retrospective witness of the past deportations who turns into an active witness of present discrimination and antigypsyism. She also discloses the tight link between the current antigypsyism and the gap within the European cultural memory of Roma "forgotten Holocaust." What Marika Schmiedt's memory work reveals is an acute emphasis on the cultural memory of Roma persecution as performative act. In her approach, cultural memory is a constant process in which the Romani persecution is reiterated with every new artistic enactment. Nevertheless, the artist has a difficult road ahead of her, especially because her memory work is an active "lobbying" for Roma Holocaust remembrance against a background of institutionalized forgetfulness. Nevertheless, she paves the road to a more inclusive cultural memory. Her artistic intervention is also a form of political activism which avoids the aestheticisation of politics. This artistic protest reveals that the commemoration of Roma and Sinti is not an end in itself; rather, its meaningfulness rests in its power to unveil past violations of human rights in order to foster a common future. Compellingly, Schmiedt's memory work also encapsulates the persistent discrimination faced by Romani in our current societies. In her film documents, the testimonies of the survivors (as well as the testimonies of their descendants) are constantly intertwined with memories of post-war discrimination and persecution. Indeed, constant anti-Gypsy slogans and threats are recollected by all survivors and their descendants. Schmiedt's artistic practice highlights exactly what Alan Rosenbaum (2009) has called the "ethical reasons" for investigating the gloomy periods in human history:

> Any debate about the Holocaust uniqueness or about the relation of the Holocaust to other genocides is worthwhile just to the extent that it never loses sight of the fact that ethical reasons are the most important ones for studying these dark chapters in human history. (p. 5)

As Schmiedt's artistic production reveals, the Romani's fate in post–Second World War Europe continues as part of a "dark chapter in human history." The pervasive discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origins is recurrently remembered by Schmiedt's interlocutors. Thus, this artistic memory work addresses the ordeals of the Romani and reminds the viewer that we bear witness "not only for the dead but perhaps even more for the living" (Wiesel quoted in Roth, 2001: 74). Through her art installations, films, and living memorials, Marika Schmiedt attempts to foster political action from the grassroots. As Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero posit, in their introduction to *Grassroots*

Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death, the performances of memory at sites of historical injustice “are not only a matter of expressing grief and sorrow” for the victims but also messages “asking for action (‘This should not have happened’, ‘Somebody has to take responsibility’, ‘Change now’, ‘Justice!’)” (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero, 2011: 3). At the same time, these forms of cultural productions can function as counter-monuments[17] (Stevens et al., 2012; Young, 1992) in the sense that they encapsulate a “critical mode of commemorative practice” (Stevens et al., 2012: 951). Unlike the traditional monumental culture of remembrance (e.g. statues of local or national heroes), the counter-monument displayed by Marika Schmiedt in Kirchstetten was not necessarily designed to “adopt anti-monumental strategies” (Stevens et al., 2012: 951) as an aesthetic, post-modern device of artistic memory making. Her installation instead puts forth a critical mode of commemoration intended to oppose a specific existing monument (Joseph Weinheber’s) and the values it embodies.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the artistic memory of the Romani Holocaust in the Austrian context. Although the focus of this study remains restricted to the artistic *milieu*, it still brings to the forefront concrete instances of active commemoration of the Holocaust among Roma and Sinti. The creative and political vigor of these artistic memory works can inspire other disenfranchised groups to join the struggle against the hegemonic politics of forgetting the troubled past (by rendering visible what is obliterated by the dominant, national “culture of remembrance”). In conclusion, those academic (and other) positions which claim that Roma do not remember the Holocaust—either because these memories are not direct reflections on the past but are “embedded” in the relations between Roma and non-Roma (Stewart, 2004) or because of “the alleged gypsies’ taboos on remembering the dead” and traumatic events (mentioned by Lemon, 2000: 3)—overlook the concrete cases of active remembrance and commemoration among Roma and Sinti. As Marika Schmiedt’s body of artistic memory work demonstrates, Romani commemorative practices are very diverse and complex, overcoming many times the monolithic politics of monuments and memorials, and enhancing participatory aesthetics and contemporary art practices. Moreover, as Kapralski (2009) argues, “these artistic memory works and commemoration practices developed “in contemporary ‘postmodern condition’ … do not radically differ from the non-Romani ones, especially those influenced by traumatic historical experience” (p. 213). The “pathologization” and exotization of the way Roma and Sinti remember the traumatic events rely on narrow (essentialist) understandings of culture and identity, hasty generalizations, and politics of oblivion. As this detailed case study of persistent artistic memory practice demonstrates, there is no merit to the idea that there is a “Roma indifference to remembering,” but rather, the testimony is silenced or obstructed by the lack of the infrastructure, the bureaucracy of the archives, and the strategic politics of forgetting. Bringing to the forefront concrete cases of active memory work and commemoration among Romani would render the accounts of traditional Roma culture of remembering and forgetting the traumatic past inaccurate. Yet, oral history is not enough for gathering testimonies and witness of the extrajudicial killings of Roma and Sinti. Oral history work needs to be supplemented by artistic practice and artistic memory work in order to materialize these “living testimonies” and to turn them into cultural memory. In this way, the still unknown yet striking materiality of the Romani Holocaust will be revealed right in front of our eyes.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Between 1933 and 1945, the members of Roma and Sinti ethnic minority in Europe suffered numerous persecutions and extrajudicial killings under National Socialism. The Nazi regime and its allies regarded Roma as "racially inferior" or "racial impure." There is no consensus regarding the number of Roma and Sinti killed by the Nazis and their allies but the most commonly cited number hovers somewhere around 500,000 victims. However, the figure of 500,000 victims is more frequently mentioned by activists and politicians than by historians.
2. Postmemory refers to the transmission of (often) traumatic memory from one generation to another. See Marianne Hirsh (2008).
3. *Porajmos* ("devouring") is a Romani term introduced in the 1990s by Ian Hancock to connote the Romani Holocaust. The term is used by some activists but many Roma (including the victims and their relatives) do not use it in association with the Holocaust. Other activists reject this term on the grounds that "Porajmos" is synonymous with another Romani word (*poravipe*) which means "rape" and it is regarded as vulgar, offensive, and unacceptable. Some activists, academics, and politicians have thought to propose other terms: *Kali Traš* (Black Fear), *Samudaripen* (collective murder), *Pharrajimos* (Fragmentation), and so on.
4. However, other voices (including those of some Roma activists, artists, and intellectuals) hold a different view, opposing the attempts to "fix" Roma identities (including through national identity narrative).
5. According to recent census (2013), around 50,000 Romani live in Austria today.
6. Nicole Immler addresses the issue of reparation procedures and family memory in Austria's post Holocaust context. She argues that there is a difference between the understanding of Austria's reparation policies and the private, subjective understandings of "compensation" for suffering injustice. Thus, according to Immler's main argument, "there is a difference between what the phrase 'too little, too late' is commonly being understood to mean (a critical evaluation of the compensation efforts), and an analytical reading of this narrative, in the framework of 'family memory'." For more on this argument, see Nicole L. Immler (2012).
7. Michael Stewart (2004) argues that

   despite Gypsy "presentist" rhetoric, the past is "remembered" among Gypsy populations […] Following Maurice Bloch's call for greater integration of psychological and anthropological work, this article considers what can be gained from seeing memory as a socially distributed function, in which the role of "implicit" memories, embedded in dealings with others, is significant. (p. 561)

8. Form more on this critique of Stewart's argument, see Slawomir Kapralski (2009).
9. Marika Schmiedt's artist statement can be consulted at: https://marikaschmiedt.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/cv-marika-schmiedt1.pdf
10. This view of the archive expanded to spaces of everyday interactions (as opposed to the understanding of the archives as official and static institutions of remembrance) is detailed in Pilar Riano-Alcala and Erin Baines (2011).
11. Alexander Etkind coined the term "memory event" in 2010. See Alexander Etkind (2010).
12. Marika Schmiedt's statement available on her website: https://marikaschmiedt.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/cv-marika-schmiedt-engl.pdf
13. Thomas Acton's talk for "*Call the Witness*" (Roma Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2011) can be watched online at: http://www.callthewitness.net/Testimonies/TheNewRomaniArt
14. See the entire refusal letter of the mayor of Kirchstetten on Marika Schmiedt's blog: https://marikaschmiedt.wordpress.com/futschikato-die-verschwundenen-roma-und-sinti-aus-kirchstetten-und-der-fall-weinheber/

15. The open letters addressed to the mayor or Kirchstetten can be consulted on Marika Schmiedt's blog: https://marikaschmiedt.wordpress.com/futschikato-die-verschwundenen-roma-und-sinti-aus-kirchstetten-und-der-fall-weinheber/
16. The unauthorized exhibition and protest action was announced on Facebook by the organizers who created a special account entitled *Futschikato—Die verschwundenen Roma und Sinti aus Kirchstetten und der "Fall Weinheber"*: https://www.facebook.com/events/842652939189482/
17. Counter-monument is both a philosophy of art and a strategy of commemoration that rejects the hegemonic conventions of public memorials and monuments.

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