

Abstract

How can we offer a comprehensive, comparative, and transnational history of the *Porrajmos* which deeply understands the cumulative nature of the persecution of the so-called ‘Gypsies’ in Germany, Austria and Switzerland between 1870 and 1945?

Until recently, the genocide of the Gypsies under the National Socialist regime was a neglected topic in Holocaust historiography often overshadowed by the systematic suffering of European Jewry. Over the last thirty years, a surge of historical literature has addressed the motivations behind the discriminatory mistreatment of the Gypsies and has called for their recognition as victims of Nazi genocide. This has raised a greater awareness of the *Porrajmos*, allowing it to become a subject that is increasingly studied and understood in its own right. Yet an overarching history of the *Porrajmos*, which closely analyses the continuities and ruptures in government policies implemented against the Gypsies before and during the Nazi era, is sorely-needed. Current scholarly works have also overlooked the transnational dimensions of the systematic persecution and genocide of Europe’s Gypsies. By critically assessing archival material, sourced from German, Austrian, and Swiss repositories, and deploying Michel Foucault’s analysis of ‘biopolitics’, this thesis offers a transnational history of the *Porrajmos* which carefully examines the development of anti-Gypsy policy in Central Europe between 1870 and 1945.

This thesis has two central points. Firstly, it asserts that there was a clear shift in Germany’s biopolitical management of Gypsies. During the *Kaiserreich* period, the authorities employed liberal biopolitical practices against Gypsies that aimed at their assimilation and gradual absorption within the dominant sedentary culture. After Adolf Hitler’s rise to power, however, this continuity ruptured. The Nazis implemented increasingly radical policies directed towards the racial destruction of Gypsies through their deportation and sterilisation. This gradually

culminated in genocide and saw, in Foucauldian terms, the transition from biopolitics to thanatopolitics.

Secondly, this study argues that a Central European framework for dealing with the 'Gypsy Question' was evident from 1931 onwards through the utilisation of the International Criminal Police Commission. Alongside their involvement in this international crime-fighting organisation, Austria, and Switzerland too pursued biopolitical courses of action against their Gypsy populations. Only Nazified Austria, however, made the leap with Germany into thanatopolitics. Switzerland, by contrast, maintained their earlier citizen/foreigner distinction and looked to sedentarisation, rather than expulsion and murder, for their Gypsy citizens. Even though the *Porrajmos* has been widely ignored by Holocaust scholars, this thesis offers new methods and knowledge for understanding and recognising the Gypsy persecution as a genocide with its own historical origins and dynamic.