



▲ Dika Jeanne Josef at Oslo harbour in July 1955. Her daughter and four grandchildren had just been forcibly sent out of the country by boat. The daily Arbeiderbladet from collections of The Norwegian Labour Movement Archives and Library

Norwegian Roma and the authorities, 1915–1956: Exclusion, persecution and extermination

Jan Alexander Svoboda Brustad is an historian and archivist in The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-SENTERET) in Oslo, Norway.

E-mail: j.a.s.brustad@hlsenteret.no

ABSTRACT:

From the beginning of the 20th century, the Norwegian state gradually formulated a specific ‘Gypsy’ policy based on the registration, exclusion and expulsion of the Roma minority. The exclusionary approach towards the Roma was closely connected to the state-sponsored forced assimilation program directed against the Travellers/Romani. The exclusionary Norwegian ‘Gypsy’ policy indirectly contributed to the extinction of Norwegian Roma during World War II. This article opens with a presentation of Norwegian policy towards Roma between 1915 and 1934. It continues with a discussion of how this policy was implemented in practice and of the indirect consequences it had for this group in the years prior to and during World War II. The article concludes with a discussion of developments immediately after the war that gradually led to the repeal of the so-called ‘Gypsy clause’ (sigøynerparagrafen) in 1956.

Keywords: Norwegian Roma, Anti-Gypsy measures, Minority policies, Norway

ABSTRAKT:

Od počátku 20. století norský stát postupně formuloval zvláštní opatření zaměřená na „cikány“ založená na registraci, vyloučení a vypovídání romské menšiny. Přístup postavený na vyloučení Romů byl úzce spjatý se státem sponzorovaným programem nucené asimilace namířeným vůči Romům a kočovně žijícím osobám. Vylučující opatření namířená vůči „cikánům“ v Norsku nepřímo přispěla k tragédii norských Romů během druhé světové války. Článek začíná přehledem norských opatření cílených na Romy mezi lety 1915–1934. Dále pokračuje diskuzí způsobů jejich implementace a nepřímých následků, které z nich pro tuto skupinu vyplývaly v období před druhou světovou válkou. Článek zakončuje téma vývoje v bezprostředně poválečné době, jenž postupně vedl ke zrušení tzv. Cikánské klauzule (sigøynerparagrafen) v roce 1956.

Klíčová slova: norští Romové, „proticikánská“ opatření, menšinová politika, Norsko

On 15 January 1944, Nazi authorities deported 62 Norwegian Roma in the so-called Gypsy transport from the Dossin barracks in Mechelen. Two days later, 351 Roma of different nationalities arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau and were interned in the Zigeunerlager (Gypsy Camp). Altogether, at least 66 Norwegian Roma were deported from Belgium to Auschwitz-

-Birkenau by various transports during the war. Only four survived. Three of the largest Norwegian Roma families were almost totally wiped out by the Nazi extermination policy.

Why were Norwegian Roma in Belgium when Nazi authorities ordered the arrest and deportation of Belgian Roma in 1943? Nine years earlier, in January 1934,

¹ This article is based largely on the research conducted and the findings made while writing the report (Rosvoll, Lien, Brustad 2015) and the book (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017)

at least 35 of the deported Norwegian Roma had been denied entry to Norway, despite the fact that more than 60 per cent of them had been born there and held Norwegian citizenship. What arguments were used to justify the Norwegian authorities’ radical approach towards this minority? How did Norway’s ‘Gypsy policy’ develop over time, and how was it implemented in practice? In what way did the Belgian and, subsequently, Nazi authorities treat the group of Norwegian Roma between 1934 and 1945? Last, but not least, how did the Norwegian state react when a handful of Roma returned after the war?¹

Roma, Romani and Norwegian minority policy in the early 20th century

The first Roma came to Norway in the second half of the 19th century as a part of the second diaspora, the emigration of Roma from areas in modern-day Hungary and Romania in around 1850 (Minken 2009:19). By the end of the 19th century, Norway was one of the countries in Europe that practised a more liberal immigration regime. The abolition of the obligation to carry a passport in 1860 essentially entitled Roma and other itinerant groups to free entry into the country (Niemi, Myhre, Kjeldstadli 2003: 198–203). Up until the end of the 1880s, Norwegian citizenship could be claimed by taking up residence in the country. Many of the first Roma to arrive in Norway became Norwegian citizens under these circumstances. In 1888, Norway’s first citizenship law introduced the practice of *jus sanguinis*, the principle of acquisition of citizenship by

descent (Johansen 2005: 32). This meant that, in the early 1900s, the children of the first generation of Norwegian Roma were also entitled to Norwegian citizenship.

By the time the group we know today as Roma immigrated to Norway in the 1800s, groups of Romani had already been living in the country for many centuries. The first Romani arrived in Scandinavia in the 15th and 16th centuries as part of the earliest wave of immigration to Europe (Minken 2009: 18–19). Today this minority group is officially known as Travellers/Romani (*ta-terne/romanifolket*) and, like the Roma, is recognised as a separate national minority in Norway. These two groups are probably related historically, and display similar features in their language, lifestyle and cultural heritage. The differences between them can in many ways be likened to those between the Sinti and Roma in Germany.

Despite the cultural affinities between Roma and Travellers/Romani, the Norwegian authorities adopted radically different approaches towards these two groups in the early 1900s. Official Norwegian policy towards minorities during this period was characterised by ‘Norwegianisation’, or forced assimilation. Like the Sami, Norway’s indigenous population, Travellers were to be assimilated into the wider society by eliminating their distinctive ethnic, linguistic and cultural features (Plesner, Brandal, Døving 2017: 17). The policy of forced assimilation was closely connected to the creation of a modern Norwegian national state and to modern societal expectations to live a sedentary lifestyle (Plesner, Brandal,

Døving 2017: 15). The Norwegian state’s assimilation of Travellers was essentially implemented by a religious organisation known as the Norwegian Vagrants’ Mission (Omstreifermisjonen), hereafter referred to as ‘the Mission’. The assimilation measures implemented with respect to Travellers included forced settlement, placement of children in children’s homes, and instances of forced sterilisation (Haave 2017: 99–102).

The small group of Norwegian Roma who in the early 1900s numbered between 100 and 150 individuals was, on the other hand, deemed too ‘foreign’ to be assimilated. The Mission’s leader, pastor Ingvald B. Carlsen, maintained that the mere presence of ‘Gypsies’ in Norway would have a detrimental effect on the assimilation of the Travellers. Despite the obvious similarities between the groups, both the Mission and the Norwegian government defined just Travellers as Norwegian citizens with the potential to become good Norwegians. This was fundamental to their ability to be assimilated. Although they were described as ‘degenerates’ and ‘bastards’, they had been in the country since the 16th century and gradually came to be defined more as social cases or as Norwegians in difficult circumstances rather than as carriers of ‘foreign racial characteristics’ (Minken 2009: 152; Haave 2000: 78–80). Roma, or ‘Gypsies’, on the other hand, were described as foreigners with no right to Norwegian citizenship whose arrival in the country allegedly hampered the assimilation of the Travellers and would recreate a ‘Traveller problem’ that was in the process of being resolved. The Mission therefore recommended that Norwegian authorities

do their utmost to deny Norwegian Roma citizenship rights and to expel as many as possible (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll 2017: 81). This laid the foundation for the development of a separate Norwegian ‘Gypsy policy’, ostensibly warranted by the assimilation policy targeting Travellers/Romani, but based on exclusion, registration and denial of entry into the country.

Formulation of a Norwegian ‘Gypsy policy’

In the six years from 1921 to 1927, the Norwegian Government formulated a policy towards the Roma whereby they were systematically registered, stripped of their citizenship rights, and denied entry to the realm. This policy was largely driven and defined by the police and the Mission. As early as 1915, when the new Aliens Act was being drawn up, key figures in the police force criticised what they saw as the government’s insufficient handling of the Roma. They sought a clearer distinction between ‘foreign vagrants’ and ‘vagrants’ with a right to stay in the country, and more authority to expel individuals belonging to the former. The new Aliens Act contained no provisions specifically targeting Roma, but the general criminalisation of vagrant groups’ occupations provided the police with further grounds on which to turn away and expel both ‘Gypsies’ and other itinerant foreigners (Kaveh 2016: 219–220, 227). The outbreak of the First World War also affected the policy towards ‘Gypsies’, ‘vagrants’ and foreigners more generally. The fear of foreign spies, ‘invasions’ of migrants and foreign workers resulted in a much stricter state con-

² The National Archives of Norway (Riksarkivet/RA)/S-2220/0/Oc/L0039, Fra Kongsvinger politikammer.
³ RA/S-2220/0/Oc/L0039, Til Sosialdepartementet.
⁴ RA/S-2220/0/Oc/L0039, Sosialdepartementet, Omreisende sigøinerfølger.
⁵ RA/S-2220/0/Oc/L0039, «Angående adgangen til å utvise og uttransportere sigøinere».
⁶ RA/S-2220/E/Eb/L0016/0001, Angående mantall over sigøinere».

rol regime. Visas and passports were required to cross the border, and foreigners in general were perceived as threats to the nation and the established order (Brandal, Brazier 2017: 31–36).

The year 1921 marked a crucial turning point in the Norwegian state’s treatment of Roma. The police authorities, the Mission, and the Norwegian bureaucracy referred explicitly to the ‘Gypsies’ and made it clear that this group had to be treated in a special way. First, that was the year when² Carlsen, the Mission’s leader, and several police representatives called on the Ministry of Social Affairs to introduce more stringent and more assertive measures to deal with the Roma. The Chief of the Kongsvinger police station, B. Johannesen, reported that a large ‘Gypsy convoy’ had entered his district and expressed concern that they would never leave the country. According to Johannesen, ‘Gypsies’ had ‘an exceptional reproductive capacity’ and had become ‘a real nuisance’ wherever they went. Carlsen, for his part, claimed that in most cases it had to be assumed that the Romas’ identity papers had been acquired by illegal or dishonest means and that they therefore could and should be expelled from the country.³

Second, the Ministry of Social Affairs responded in concrete terms to these appeals from the police and the Mission. In its statement entitled ‘*Omreisende sigøinerfølger*’ (Itinerant Gypsy convoys), the ministry underlined how important it was ‘that an invasion of them be stopped, and that the Gypsies who are already here in the country must be expelled insofar as it is possible’.⁴ Last but not least, responsibility for Roma policy

in line with this conclusion was transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. This decision had direct and drastic consequences: it established once and for all that Roma, unlike Travellers, were not to be defined as a specific social problem that could be resolved through assimilation, but rather as a cross-border and citizenship rights problem that had to be resolved by expulsion and exclusion (Rosvoll, Lien, Brustad 2015: 172).

The Ministry of Justice took its newly assigned responsibility for ‘Gypsies’ seriously: already in 1922 it issued a circular entitled ‘Concerning authority to expel and deport Gypsies’, which called for a more stringent practice for issuing passports to Norwegian Roma. The ministry also stressed that Norwegian Roma’s identity papers must be assumed to be false or unlawfully issued by police stations in Norway or by Norwegian legations and consulates abroad.⁵ The next concrete measure taken against the group was the nationwide registration of Roma enforced in 1924. The purpose of this registration was to gain an overview of the total number of Roma present in Norway and to collect information on individuals’ citizenship status, identity papers, country of origin, and reading and writing skills. In the registration order issued to the police stations and district sheriffs’ offices, the Ministry of Justice also stated in no uncertain terms that, following registration, it hoped to ‘have as many as possible transported out of the realm’.⁶

The registration work was carried out by the local police authorities. Some prominent police representatives also took the

initiative to conduct more thorough and detailed registration, inspired by German practices. The leading promulgator of this view was Reidar Sveen, Chief of Police in Kristiansund. Sveen argued in favour of establishing a Norwegian ‘Gypsy Information Bureau’ modelled on the *Zigeunerzentrale* (Central Office for Gypsy Affairs) in Munich, Germany. He also maintained that the Norwegian registration should include fingerprints and photographs, similar to the Bavarian police’s *Zigeunerbuch* (Gypsy book) from 1905.⁷ Because the Norwegian Roma minority was unlikely to number more than 150 individuals, most of Sveen’s radical proposals were not put into practice. Nonetheless, his input led to a more comprehensive registration form asking for such details as nicknames, family relationships, and distinctive features of appearance (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 67–68).

Once the registration process was completed, Norway’s policy towards the Roma was based on two key objectives: to expel as many as possible from the country, and to close its borders to them. The former came to prove easier than the latter. Police stations and Norwegian legations and consulates abroad were ordered by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not to issue new documents or renew Norwegian Roma’s passports, regardless of whether or not they were already in possession of Norwegian identity papers. In some cases, illiterate Roma were also issued identity documents for stateless persons (Rosvoll, Lien, Brustad 2015: 73). This was done to prevent Roma who were expelled from returning with new identity papers that tied them to the country. The

problem for the Ministry of Justice was that Norwegian Roma periodically travelled around the European continent, and that most Norwegian consulates and legations continued the practice of renewing their passports (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 70–72).

Meanwhile, entry denials and expulsions created diplomatic tensions with Sweden and other neighbouring countries. The Ministry of Justice therefore saw the need to specify its policy towards the Roma in the Aliens Act of 1927 (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 69). Section 3, paragraph 3 of the act stipulated that ‘Gypsies and other itinerants who cannot prove their Norwegian citizenship shall be denied entry to the realm’. The so-called ‘Gypsy clause’ was thereby introduced.

‘Gypsy policy’ in practice, and the denial of entry in 1934

The ‘Gypsy clause’ went a long way towards cementing the policy that had been pursued by the Norwegian Government towards the Roma since the turn of the year 1921–1922. All the same, the clause represented a decisive new turn: the exclusion policy towards the Roma was laid down in Norwegian law in wording that explicitly denied individuals entry into the country based exclusively on their affiliation to a specific ethnic group. Nothing like it had happened since Jews and Jesuits had been denied entry to the realm in the country’s first constitution in 1814. The slightly moderated wording of the ‘Gypsy clause’, emphasising that the ban only applied to Roma without Norwegian citizenship rights, was

⁷ RA/S-2220/0/Ob/L0003, Fra politimesteren i Kristiansund: Ang. Zigeinere.

rarely adhered to in practice by the executive branch. As we have seen, the Ministry of Justice had already determined that Norwegian Romas' identity papers were to be regarded as false or invalid, effectually branding Roma as stateless.

In theory, the 'Gypsy clause' provided the Ministry of Justice and local police authorities with the legal authority to expel Roma and then deny them re-entry. In principle, groups that travelled on the continent or in Sweden for a period of time could also be turned away if they attempted to return to Norway. Implementing the policy proved far more complicated in practice, however. First and foremost, Norway's diplomatic relationship with Sweden was put to the test when the Norwegian Ministry of Justice tried to enforce its own laws. Roma who were expelled and turned back by the Norwegian authorities were just as unwelcome in Sweden, particularly if they could produce identity papers that tied them to Norway. Sending Swedes back to Sweden was one matter; declaring Roma who were born and raised in Norway to be stateless and then claiming that they belonged in Sweden was quite another. Furthermore, Sweden had introduced its own law denying 'Gypsies' entry to the country as early as 1914. Swedish authorities therefore persistently cited passports as well as birth and baptismal certificates that were held by Norwegian Roma who had been denied entry to their country of origin as proof of their Norwegian citizenship. Consequently, the 1920s and 1930s were characterised by a constant tug-of-war between Norwegian and Swedish authorities, because Roma holding Norwegian identity papers

were denied re-entry to Norway after summary expulsions or prolonged periods of travelling (Rosvoll, Lien, Brustad 2015: 78–83).

In most cases the diplomatic negotiations ended in humiliating defeat for the Norwegian Government. As long as the Swedish judicial authorities could cite concrete documents showing a person's ties to Norway – whether they be certificates issued in Norway or passports renewed by Norwegian legations abroad – the Norwegian authorities eventually had to back down. After a prolonged expulsion case that lasted from 1929 to 1931, Norwegian media slammed the Government's ineffectuality and inability to enforce its own laws. Several leading daily newspapers described the weak enforcement of the 'Gypsy clause' as the beginning of a 'Gypsy invasion' and a blow to Norway's national dignity (Lien 2015: 96–97).

The repeated humiliating diplomatic defeats and the growing public awareness of the Norwegian Government's paralysis in dealing with expelled groups of Roma may have contributed to the Government's uncompromising stance in the final denial in 1934. In January 1934 a group of 68 Roma heading for Norway were denied entry from Germany into Denmark. The denial was issued at the request of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, which cited section 3 of the Aliens Act as its legal basis. Consequently, the Danish and Swedish authorities also denied the group entry, and they became stranded in Nazi Germany. Most of the individuals denied entry came from the Norwegian Roma families Karoli, Modeste, Modis, Josef and Zikali, and more

than half of them had been born in Norway. After some months in a German labour camp, the Nazi authorities dumped the whole group on Belgian territory, where many of them had been travelling prior to the Justice Ministry denying their Norwegian ties. After seven years of trial and error since introducing the 'Gypsy clause' in 1927, the Norwegian Government had finally achieved its objective of forcing the 'Gypsies' out of the country (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll 2017: 87–89).

Stranded on the continent

Most of the Roma who were turned back were already known to the Belgian security police when they arrived in Belgium in March 1934. Norwegian Roma families had frequently passed through France and Belgium for several decades. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the local immigration police regularly imposed heavy restrictions on the group, limiting their freedom of movement to such an extent that they left the country. This was also one of the main reasons why the group of Norwegian Roma had tried to return to Norway in January 1934 (Rosvoll, Lien, Brustad 2015: 53–55). When the same group ended up back in Belgium a few months later, the head of the Belgian security police wrote that they had been given temporary residence permits 'on humanitarian grounds.' He stressed, however, that the objective was to force the Roma families out of the country through negotiations with the Norwegian authorities.⁸

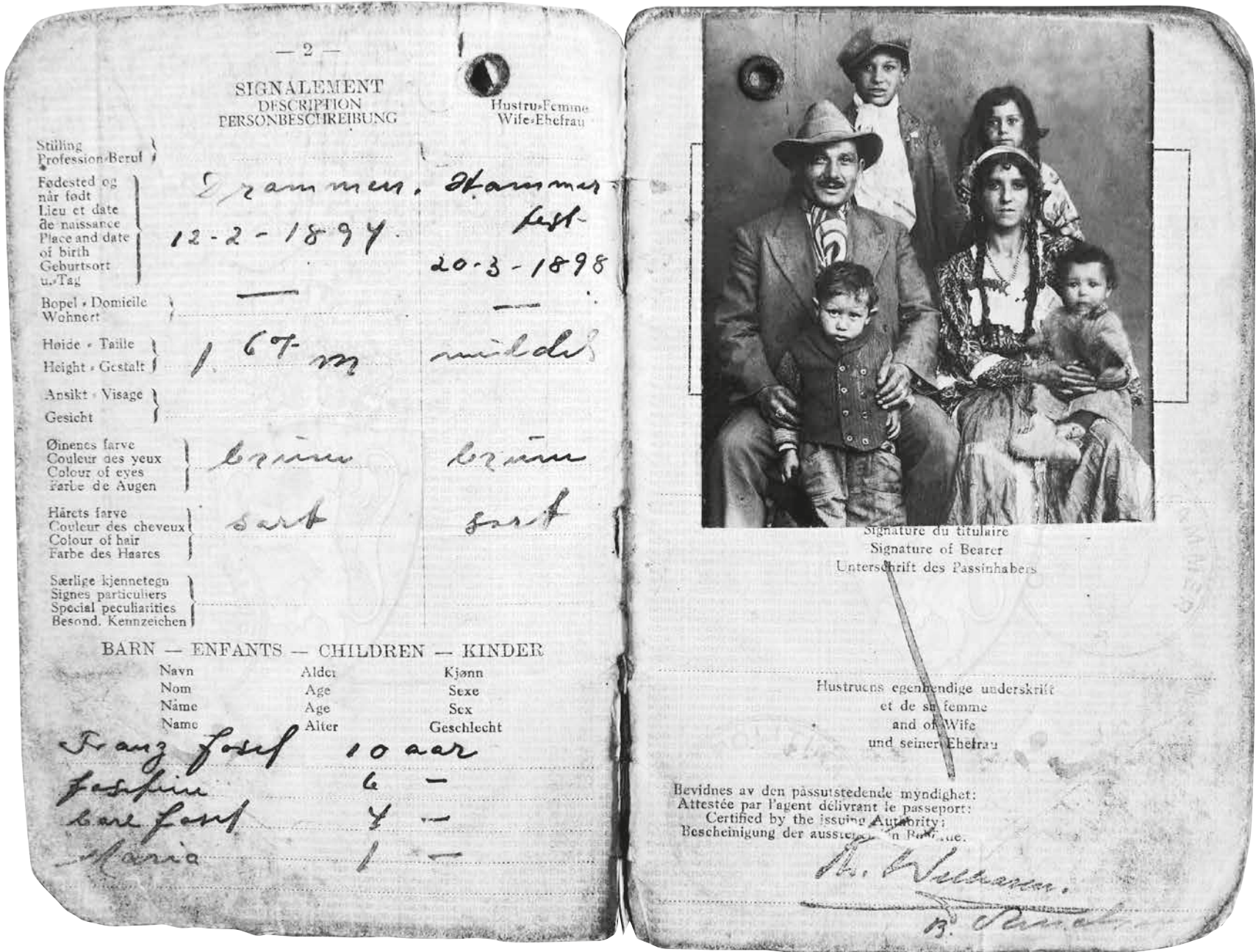
The negotiations between the Belgian and Norwegian foreign affairs ministries seemed to take much the same tone as

the diplomatic disputes between Norway and Sweden in the preceding years. The Belgian legation in Copenhagen, which led the negotiations on Belgium's behalf, based its case on the security police's lists of Roma holding Norwegian identity papers (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 82). The fact that the members of this group were Norwegian citizens seemed to them to be beyond all doubt. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, argued that the 'Gypsies' under discussion 'were no more residents of Norway than of any of the other European countries they have wandered through as part of their itinerant lifestyle'.⁹ The crucial difference from the previous negotiations was that this time the Norwegian Government did not give way. Finally, the Belgian security police and diplomatic service abandoned all attempts to return the Norwegian Roma via diplomatic channels (About 2014: 524).

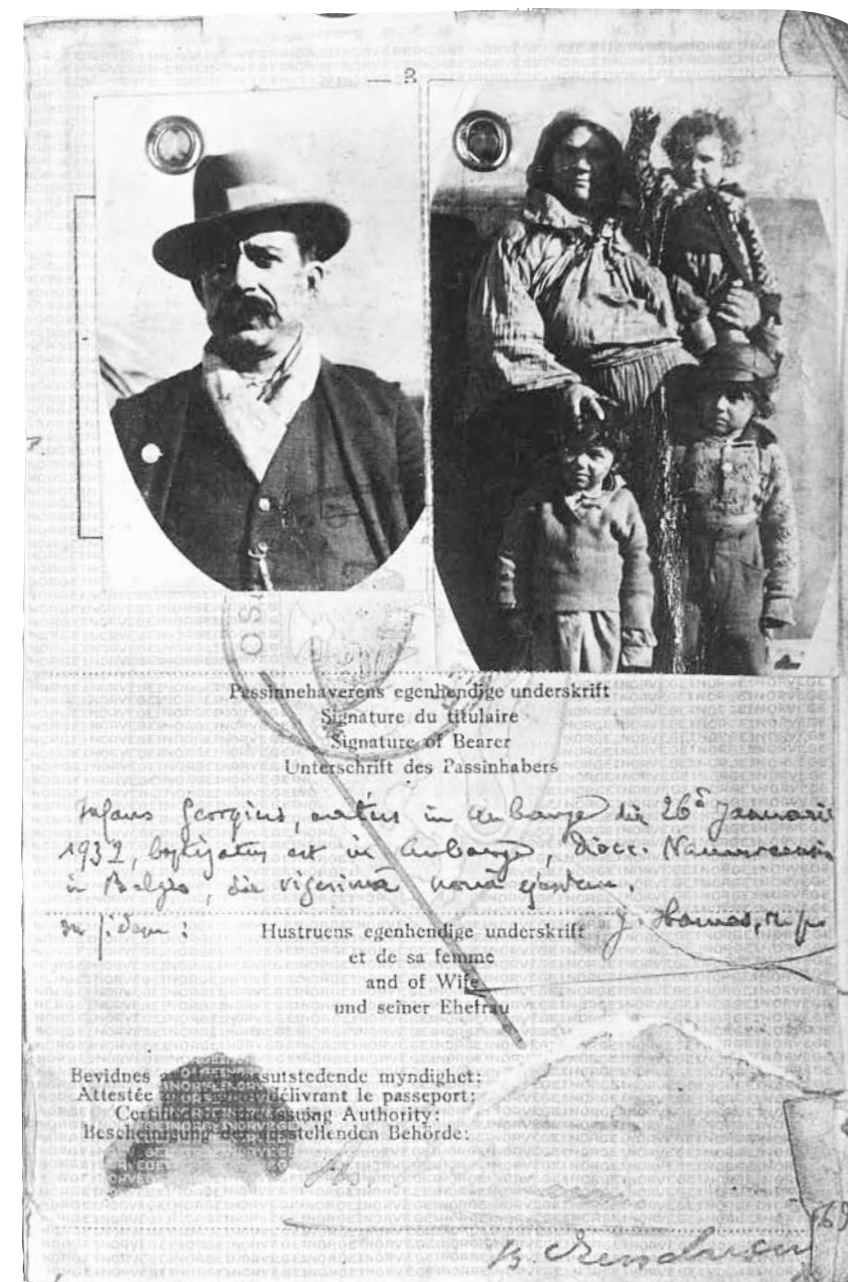
The fate of the rejected Norwegian Roma families during the second half of the 1930s gives us a bleak insight into how European national states treated stateless individuals in general and stateless Roma in particular. When negotiations with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stalled, the Belgian security police reverted to their original strategy for having the group removed from the country: they prohibited begging, heavily restricted their freedom of movement, made random arrests among them, and summarily expelled smaller groups. Norwegian Roma frequently tried to leave Belgium voluntarily, but attempts to cross the border into the Netherlands or head south into

⁸ National Archives of Belgium (Archives générales du Royaume/AGR), PdE, A32.301 bis Kristian Josef Modeste.

⁹ RA/S-2259/Du/L6927/0004, Norge-div land. Ang. utstedelse av pass til si-gøynere og spm. om innreisestillatelse til Norge.



► The passport of Czardas Josef, with his wife Dika Jeanne and their children Karl, Frans, Josefine and Maria Jeanne. The passport was issued in Oslo in 1930. From National Archives of Belgium



►► *Josef Karoli's Norwegian passport, issued in 1931. The part of the passport where the holder's nationality was recorded had deliberately been removed – probably by Norwegian authorities. From National Archives of Belgium*

Attestations n° 1.638.748 délivrées à Bruxelles le 13 mars 1934 par Monsieur l'Administrateur de la Sureté Publique attestant que les intéressés sont autorisés à séjourner en Belgique jusqu'au 9 avril 1934. Les attestations devront être renvoyés le 10 avril 1934 par l'intermédiaire de la gendarmerie à Monsieur l'Administrateur de la Sureté Publique. Il est formellement interdit aux titulaires de ces attestations, ainsi qu'aux membres de leur famille de circuler en roquette, de se livrer à la mendicité ou de se joindre à d'autres groupes de nomades. Ils sont tenus de se fixer dans une localité belge et au siège d'une brigade de gendarmerie. Dès qu'ils auront trouvé une habitation ils devront se présenter à la gendarmerie qui signalera aussitôt leur présence à la Sureté Publique.

Bulletin de mariage délivré à Oslo le 15 juin 1926 par le Curé de la Paroisse;
Extraits d'acte de naissance des enfants.

10. Nature des papiers, leur état, autorités qui les ont délivrés, lieu et date de leur délivrance.

11. Est-il réfugié politique ?

12. Conduite et moyens d'existence. Antécédents en Belgique et à l'étranger.

13. Est-il intentionné de résider en Belgique pendant plus de 6 mois ?

14. Observations

Liege, le 16 mars 1934.
Le Commissaire en Chef de Police,

Photographie récente

L'intéressé qui est illettré déclare n'avoir encouru aucune condamnation.

l'agent de police,

Empreinte roulée de l'index droit.

du mari de l'épouse

A Monsieur l'Administrateur de la Sureté publique,
Rue Ducale, 61
Bruxelles

► Karl Josef and his wife Marie Koi, on a document issued by the Belgian security police in 1934. From National Archives of Belgium

9097	Belg. Z. Renard	Michel	1	10	84	Hande Belgian	
9099	" Renard	Leon		187		Amey Sep. Hage	
9100	" Tancou	Edmond		147			
9101	Stratz Karoli	Josef	21	3	90	Oslo	
9102	Belg. Z. Karoli	Paula	6	3	19	Mechen (Belgien)	Ant. 23. 2
9103	" Karoli	Marcelle	0	8	29	St. Germain	
9104	" Karoli	Georges	20	1	32	Ombange	
9105	" Karoli	Andre	3	3	30	Steenkuffer	
9106	" Gorgem	Georges		1934		Gent	
9107	" Gorgem	Martin	29	5	37	Turnes	✓
9108	" Gorgem	Nanoche		1938		Gent	✓
9109	" Gorgem	Josef	3	Mon. ult		Trickich	
9110	" Gorgem	Georges	10	3	34	Gent	
9111	Frang. Z. Colimbis	Theodore	21	1	53	Bapaume	
9112	Belg. Maître	Josef	24	1	24	Wavren	
9113	Belg. Maître	Jules	29	9	33	Rommert (Belgien)	✓
9114	Frang. Colimbis	Alfred	20	12	41	Tournmont	✓
9115	Span. Tancou	Palise	15	3	70	Barcelona	✓
9116	M. Tancou	Hennon	20	5	24	Pilsburg Tr. 15. 4. 44	✓
9117	Belg. Tailor	Emil		1935		Kochwe (Belgien)	✓
9118	" Peterboot	Josef		1941		Hille	
9119	" Peterboot	Jules	10	10	28	Brege nobel Tr. 22	✓
9120	" Ischorgemo	Renri		117		Tongre (Belgien)	✓
9121	" Peterboot	Nikolas	20	4	43	Willard (Belgien)	✓
9122	Frang. Lagrene	Stomiloe	7	5	80	Libonen	✓
9123	" Lagrene	Michel	22	7	14	Charakari Tr. 15. 4. 44	✓
9124	" Lagrene	Jules	15	4	20	Hille Tr. 15. 4. 44	✓
9125	" Tancou	Charles	17	3	14	Remine	
9126	" Tancou	Pierre		17		Paul in Nord	
9127	" Tancou	Georg		67		Londraez	✓
9128	" Lagrene	Alexander	21	7	99	Post la Pile	✓
9129	" Lagrene	Frang	15	4	28	Tramstort	

◀ Excerpt from the prisoner record or main ledger of the Zigeunerlager in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Several Norwegian Roma are recorded on this page, among others Milos Karoli, registered as number Z-9103. From State Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau

¹⁰ Norsk politiblad, nr. 8, 1938.

France usually ended with border guards or local police sending them back to Belgium as soon as possible (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 86–87).

After Norway denied them entry in January 1934, the Norwegian Roma families had dealings with border and police authorities in six different countries: Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. They were not welcome anywhere and were essentially stranded in Belgium. In 1938, the year before World War II broke out, a representative for the Norwegian police declared that Norway was ‘fortunately’ done with ‘the Gypsies’: ‘They are used to wandering from country to country, and the thought that they might be denied re-entry never entered their heads. So, they wandered out, but when they wanted to wander back in again, they found the door closed’.¹⁰

Deportation and extermination

The Norwegian Government’s endeavours to make the Roma stateless, and their subsequent existence on the European continent as a group with no defined national identity, are reflected in the prisoner register for the *Zigeunerlager* in Auschwitz-Birkenau. For a long time, there were uncertainties about how many Norwegian Roma were deported to Auschwitz during the war and who they were. The main reason for this was that only 20 or so Roma were registered as Norw. Zig. – Norwegian Gypsies – on arrival at the *Zigeunerlager*. We now know that at least 66 Norwegian Roma were deported and registered in the largest of the Nazi extermination camps. The details of

nationality and place of birth recorded in the prisoner register reflect how this group crossed national borders, sometimes voluntarily, but often as a result of restrictive policies. The birthplaces recorded for Norwegian Roma ranged from Antwerp and Brussels in Belgium to Stockholm in Sweden and Oslo, Trondheim and Harstad in Norway. Many of them were children who had been born in Belgium or France in the period after their parents were denied entry in 1934 and up to the time of their deportation. Their nationalities were recorded as Norwegian, Belgian, French or stateless (Parcer 1993: 1268–1274).

On 15 January 1944, sixty-two of the 66 deported Norwegian Roma were sent to Auschwitz in the so-called Gypsy transport from the Dossin barracks in Mechelen. Two days later, on 17 January, 351 ‘Gypsies’, which accounted for almost all the Roma living in Belgium during the war, arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 130). The order to deport the ‘Gypsies’ from Belgium and the Netherlands was issued by the Nazi occupation regime on 29 March 1943 (Zimmermann 1996: 310). For reasons that are unclear, the order was not carried out until the autumn of 1943, but some Roma were already imprisoned when the mass arrests began in November that year. Three men from the Norwegian branch of the Modis family were among them. Brothers Thorvald and Henri Modis and Henri’s 16-year-old son Heinrich were among the first Roma in Belgium to be arrested and deported. In November 1943 they also became the first Norwegian Roma to be deported to Auschwitz. They were registered as ‘Bel-

gian Gypsies’ and were assigned prisoner numbers Z-8888, Z-8891 and Z-8892 (Parcer 1993: 1254).

When the ‘Gypsy transport’ reached Auschwitz two months later, 22 new members of the Modis’ family were registered in the *Zigeunerlager*. Most of the deported Norwegian Roma were members of the Karoli, Josef and Modis families, while the rest belonged to the families of Zikali and Tschoreanon. A few were also Norwegian Roma who had married into French and Belgian families. The last Norwegian Roma to be deported was Stevo Karoli. He was arrested by the Nazi authorities in France in the spring of 1944 and arrived at Auschwitz in a transport on 21 May (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 197–198).

Our knowledge about the Norwegian Roma’s lives and deaths in the *Zigeunerlager* is limited. What little information we do have is found primarily in the camp’s prisoner register and in the archive of the *Hygiene-Institut der Waffen-SS*, the Waffen-SS institute of eugenics research in the concentration camps and occupied territories. The names of 17 Norwegian Roma interned in the *Zigeunerlager* appear in documents held in this archive. For instance, at least 10 Norwegian Roma women appear on a list which most likely documents attempts to forcibly sterilise 84 women from the ‘Gypsy’ transport three days after their arrival from Mechelen.¹¹ What we know for sure is that a total of 62 of the 66 deported Roma lost their lives while in captivity during the war as a result of starvation, contagious disease, random violence, medical experiments or the gas chambers. We also know that seven

Norwegian Roma – three women and four men – were transported from Auschwitz to other concentration camps between May and August 1944, just before the liquidation of the *Zigeunerlager*. Several of them were returned to Auschwitz, however, and only four survived the war (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 149–152). One of the survivors was Milos Karoli, who shared his war-time memoirs in the 1970s and provided the only written eyewitness testimony to the extermination of Norwegian Roma during World War II (Skogaas, Lilleholt 1978).

A further 13 Norwegian Roma were imprisoned in France during the war. Most of them were members of the Josef family who had managed to cross the border into France when Nazi Germany invaded Belgium on 10 May 1940. They were subsequently arrested and interned in Nazi concentration camps such as Mulsanne and Montreuil-Bellay. With the exception of Charles Josef, the members of this group survived their years in captivity (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 107–121, 199). This branch of the Josef family was the first group of Norwegian Roma to return to Norway. The ‘Gypsy clause’ was still in force, however, and the Josef family’s presence would therefore prompt a heated public, political and legal debate over the continued validity of the clause and the Romas’ right to reside in the country.

Repeal of the ‘Gypsy clause’

The Josef family repeatedly applied for permission to enter Norway in 1953 and 1954, but just as before the war, the government turned them down, citing

¹¹ State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Archives, Hyg.-bakt- Unters.-Stelle der Waffen SS, dok. 685/26c. and Heddebaut (2013: 85).

¹² RA/S-4242/D/L0045, Notat: Avvisning av sigøynere på Fornebu.
¹³ RA/S-4242/D/L0045, Representant Seips grunngitte spørsmål til Justisministeren: Hvilken instruks har Politiet for håndheving av fremmedlovens § 3.

the ‘Gypsy clause’ as legal authority. The family finally gave up seeking permission and crossed the border illegally after travelling through Sweden with fake French passports (Skogaas, Lilleholt 1978: 96–100). Under these circumstances, they became the first Roma to return to Norway in the summer of 1954. Since they had crossed the border illegally, they did not attract the attention of the Norwegian authorities straight away. This changed in June 1955, when a group of French Roma on their way to visit the Josef family was denied entry and turned back at Oslo’s main airport. Once again, the Norwegian Government had to deal with the presence of Roma inside Norway’s borders (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 168–170). Shortly after the French group of Roma was turned back, the Ministry of Justice and the police began targeting members of the Josef family. Initially they were closely monitored by the police, and after one month several members of the family were simply deported out of the country on a ship to Antwerp. In other words, the Josef family was branded as foreigners with no right of residence and, like the French Roma, could be expelled with legal authority under the Norwegian Aliens Act. The Minister of Justice, Jens Christian Hauge, made clear his thoughts about a member of the Josef family in an internal memo: ‘Also a Gypsy [...] Must be denied residence’.¹² The approach towards Roma adopted by the Ministry of Justice and the police seemed to be exactly the same as in the 1920s and 1930s. The opinion of the Norwegian press, on the other hand, had altered dramati-

cally. Whereas in the 1930s the press had attacked the Norwegian Government for not enforcing its exclusionary ‘Gypsy policy’ firmly enough, by the 1950s it was doing the exact opposite. In the aftermath of World War II and the Nazi racial and extermination policies, prominent newspapers such as *Dagbladet*, *Verdens Gang* and *Arbeiderbladet* championed the Romas’ cause, calling for humanism and human rights rather than rigid laws targeting legally vulnerable groups (Lien 2015: 99–100). To some extent the arguments were based on a matter of principle, in defence of the rights of the individual against the state. However, the media also put the spotlight on the indisputable fact that post-war Norway still enforced a blatantly racist clause. Moreover, the Norwegian Roma gained an important ally in the form of the lawyer Jens Christian Mellbye, who brought a case against the Ministry of Justice on behalf of the Josef family and succeeded in getting the expulsion decision withdrawn in July 1955. The expelled members of the family were subsequently brought back to Norway at the Government’s expense – a victory of decisive symbolic value (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 175–176). The Roma gained another crucial ally in Helge Seip, a member of the Norwegian Parliament for the Liberal Party and editor of the daily newspaper *Dagbladet*. In June 1955 Seip directly challenged Justice Minister Hauge on the issue of the ‘Gypsy clause’ and its enforcement by the police.¹³ In doing so, Seip became a driving force behind moves to prove and shed light on the authorities’ exclusionary practice against Roma as a specific ethnic group. The

joint efforts of Mellbye, Seip and, not least, the Norwegian Roma in the fight for citizenship rights contributed to the ‘Gypsy clause’ being formally removed on the introduction of the new Aliens Act in 1956. Remarkably, the Justice Ministry arguments seemed to pursue the same approach as always towards the Roma, both in connection with the expulsion cases in the Norwegian legal system and during the parliamentary debate on the ‘Gypsy clause’. To be sure, the ministry emphasised that it was ‘in principle unfortunate and contrary to Norway’s interpretation of the law to have special provisions denying entry to specific ethnic groups’.¹⁴ The ministry realised that provisions targeting specific ethnic groups were now a thing of the past, and tried to repudiate the allegations of racism levelled at it by Seip and the press. At the same time, the ministry stressed the importance of continuing to keep foreign ‘vagrants’ out of the country, be they ‘Gypsies’ or not (Brustad, Lien, Rosvoll, Vogt 2017: 179–180). In other words, the pressing issue was to word the law in such a way that it could be used to turn Roma away without referring explicitly to ‘Gypsies’. The justification for the need to still deny Roma entry was strikingly similar to the approach adopted by the Government in the 1920s, namely, consideration for the state’s and the Mission’s forced assimilation of the Travellers/Romani – the Norwegian ‘vagrants’ – carried the most weight. The Government and the Mission feared that repealing the ‘Gypsy clause’ would prompt an ‘invasion’ of ‘Gypsies’ or ‘foreign vagrants’ who in turn would destroy the efforts to

assimilate Travellers and put an end to the so-called vagrancy-problem (Haave 2006: 241–243). Although some Norwegian Roma were granted citizenship after the ‘Gypsy clause’ was removed, it can be argued that the act was just reworded rather than repealed. The term ‘Gypsies’ was replaced with ‘vagrants and so forth’, a move that allowed the practice of preventing Roma from entering the country to continue. As the Mission’s leader at the time, Pastor Bader, said in 1956: ‘Only the name ‘Gypsy’ has been removed. Let us not be romantic, and instead take a sober view. We do not want a new invasion of itinerants.’ (Haave 2006: 241–242). Conclusion From the early 1920s until the formal removal of the ‘Gypsy clause’ in 1956, the Norwegian Government’s primary objective was to force Roma out of Norway and then deny them re-entry. There were a number of reasons for this radical approach. As in most European countries, there was a fear of being landed with economic and social responsibility for a group that so fundamentally broke with the modern societal expectation to live a sedentary lifestyle. Notions of Romas’ degenerate racial attributes, disproportionately high reproductive rate and inherent criminal nature also existed in Norway’s Government bureaucracy and police force. First and foremost, however, the exclusionary policy pursued against Norwegian Roma was ostensibly warranted by the forced assimilation policy adopted towards Travellers/Romani. If the Travellers were to be successfully assimilated and vagran-

¹⁴ RA/S-4242/D/L0043, Om lov om utlendingers adgang til riket m.v., Fremmedloven. Politidepartementets 4. politikontor.

cy eliminated, the 'Gypsies' had to be stripped of their citizenship, thrown out of the country and denied re-entry. The Norwegian Government achieved this in January 1934, when the largest Norwegian Roma families were turned away. For the next 20 years Norway was, to all intents and purposes, rid of 'Gypsies'. An indirect consequence of Norway's exclusionary policy was that Norwegian Roma were stranded on the continent and sub-

sequently subjected to the Nazi extermination policy. Sixty-three of them died in Nazi concentration and extermination camps, and only a handful returned in the 1950s to fight for their rights as Norwegian citizens.



► Mechelen transit camp (SS-Sammellager Mecheln), photo probably taken by a German or Dutch member of the SS in August 1942. More than 25 000 people were deported from Mechelen during World War II, among them at least 62 Norwegian Roma. From Kazerne Dossin – Mechelen – Fonds Kummer



▲ Elisabeth Warscha Karoli with her children Marie, Polykarp, Karl, Regina and Zolo, 1922. Elisabeth Warscha was married to Josef Karoli, and belonged to one of the largest Roma families in Norway. Polykarp was the only one at the picture who survived World War II. The rest of the family were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. From National Archives of Belgium



▲ Jeanne Galut Modis, photo taken by the Belgian security police in June 1945. From National Archives of Belgium

Archival materials

Riksarkivet (RA) – The National Archives of Norway

Justisdepartementet (Files from the Department of Justice):

- Sigøynere (Documents regarding gypsies), RA/S-2220/0/Oc/L0039
- Fremmedloven (A) III (Documents regarding the Aliens Act), RA/S-2220/E/Eb/L0016/0001
- Politidepartementets 4. politikontr (Documents from the 4th Police Office of the Police Department), RA/S-4242/D/L0043 and RA/S-4242/D/L0045

Sosialdepartementet (Files from the Department of Social Affairs):

- Omstreifere (Documents regarding vagrants), RA/S-2220/0/Ob/L0003

Utenriksdepartementet (Files from the Department of Foreign Affairs):

- Norge-div land. Ang. utstedelse av pass til sigøynere og spm. om innreisestillatelse til Norge. (Documents regarding passports to gypsies and their entry to Norway), RA/S-2259/Du/L6927/0004

Archives générales du Royaume (AGR) – The National Archives of Belgium

Les dossiers individuels de la Police des Étrangers (Files on individual persons collected by the Belgian Security Police):

- Documents regarding Kristian Josef Modeste, AGR, PdE, A32.301 bis Kristian Josef Modeste.

Archiwum Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau – The Archi-

ves of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

Hyg.-bakt- Unters.-Stelle der Waffen SS (Files from the Waffen SS Hygiene Institute in Auschwitz):

- List of Roma women subjected to so-called vaginal examination, Hyg.-bakt- Unters.-Stelle der Waffen SS, dok. 685/26c

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