

Ethnic Cleansing: The Roma in France

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Avant les grands désastres les hommes n'auront rien dit... – René Tavernier

At what point does France's ethnic cleansing of the Roma show the intention of genocide ?

The treatment of an increasingly dehumanized group, the razed communities, the families placed on the street, the bureaucrats' excuses, gather into the crime of ethnic cleansing which continues to be quietly noted by the French press.

July was a bad month. The Mayor of Chavannes threatened suicide if a Roma caravan returned to his town's stadium where it had rested a week without paying for permits. The Mayor of the town of Cholet, a Minister of Parliament Gilles Bourdouleix, is currently under investigation for allegedly suggesting "maybe Hitler did not kill enough gypsies."

Evictions of Roma people at Vaulx-en-Velin (near Lyon) were protested by the European Roma Rights Centre last year due to repeated police forced evictions with no alternative lodgings, and the attacks by unknown assailants. Ejected from their garage of habitation so it could be converted to rent-controlled housing, on August 6th, 2012, 150 Roma previously of the St. Fons encampment and half of them children, left Vaulx-en-Velin for temporary encampment at Villeurbanne. On August 15th 2013, half Vaulx-en-Velin 's Roma encampment burnt down, putting 150 people on the street with nowhere to go. Then on August 23rd, the remaining 223 grownups and 167 children were evicted and the camp razed. These criminal yet officially 'legal' acts are not confined to right wing mayors: the Mayor of Vaulx-en-Velin is Communist-Party.

On August 27th, 150 Roma (initially there were about 300), 60 of them children, were evicted from the encampment in Bobigny, leaving all but 3 of the families without shelter. On August 28th, 24 Roma families were evicted from their apartment house in Toulouse and placed in mobile homes. August 29th, 50 Roma were removed from 'occupying' a house in Saint-Martin-d'Hères near Grenoble.

Noted as "camp removals," what is meant is the complete destruction of a living environment, homes, addresses for the children's entry into schools. 50 Roma (12 families) were displaced from a camp on the outskirts of Evry after it was surrounded by police, at 6:30 AM, September 17, 2013. The largest Roma camp in the city of Lille was finally dismantled entirely on September 18th, forcing remaining residents to run away. Once home to 750 people, the land is slated for use as a commercial centre, "le Lillenum."

Mayors of towns neighbouring Lille complain at the number of Roma seeking refuge. In Lezennes on September 14th, a hundred people demonstrated against the placing of a Roma encampment, chanting "Les roms, on n'en veut pas !"

In nearby Croix, Mayor Régis Cauche of the right wing UMP (Sarkhozy's Union for a Political Movement) party proves unable to cope with the numbers of Roma displaced by the destruction of their home camp and seeking refuge. Aware that many have nothing to eat, the mayor blames Roma for disappearances of chickens and geese etc. from local enterprises. Unmoved by the etymology of their commune's name, citizens are outraged that Roms are stealing food to stay alive. This, Mayor Cauche says, leads to a "drama." He has asked for the closure of Croix's Roma encampment. He predicts "un dérapage comme le bijoutier de Nice si rien n'est fait rapidement... Si un Croisien commet l'irréparable, je le soutiendrai " – which is to say, there will be an 'accident', as in Nice (recently a Nice jeweler shot in the back and killed an escaping thief), if something isn't done quickly...and if a citizen of Croix does this, the mayor will support him.

Though Mayor Cauche pulled the teeth of his statement, publicly, the UMP makes inroads on President Hollande's Socialists by mixing populism with insults and threats. The extreme right wing National Front under the le Pens, is more forthright in its attempt to win votes, and anti-racist SOS Racism has taken politicians Jean-Marie le Pen, and Christian Estrosi to court for inciting race hatred.

By its silence the French government is allowing its racist policies to be effected extra-judicially. On the night of July 27th 15 men armed with iron bars and baseball bats attacked a Roma camp at Seine-Saint-Denis in what is described as a "punitive expedition", breaking a woman's skull. The attackers who have not been arrested despite video surveillance, were identified as Africans and North Africans (an equally vulnerable immigrant group). Roma were sleeping in their cars since the 150 person camp was 'dismantled' by police on July 23rd. Other camps, home to hundreds of families in St. Denis have been burnt out or cleared in the past several months.

The ugliness isn't normal. The French government is caught in a policy of destroying Roma settlements, and is covered by paper principles but in operation without providing the alternatives of resettlement available to a civilized democracy. Some Roma are taken to the border and paid to leave. Some are found temporary lodgings to placate human rights groups. Many are forced to flee into the woods or neighbouring towns, or find their way to other camps, but their families are essentially without shelter, an address so their children can go to school, the tools of sustaining life.

A groundswell initiated by the Sarkhozy government's chuffing off of immigrants, Muslims, Roma, as its buyout of the middle class progresses toward obvious conclusions. Interior Minister Manuel Valls's [observations](#) that the Roma either don't wish to integrate into French culture or are under control of criminal elements furthers the government's methodic extermination of a people. The early tripwires that warn of genocide have been crossed. In fact the Roma who are innocent of the historical crimes of war and colonialism France shares with Europe, are not allowed to survive even marginally.

While not returning to the more naked policies of death camps in the 1940's, the crimes of bureaucracy dovetail conveniently with a pan-European neo-Conservative agenda. First noted in Austria with Haider's populist movement's rise through scapegoating of Roma, clarified by Jobbik's rise in Hungary, and both official and [Operation Gladio style attacks](#) on Italy's Roma encampments under Berlusconi, France's politicians subscribed to the coining of its most vulnerable poor, to win votes in economic hard times. Historically, this mechanism is never satisfied with removal of the initial victim group. Socialist President

Hollande seems powerless to put the genie of intolerance back in the bottle.

Among the few voices of reason (in a nation inundated with nuclear power plants), Benjamin Abtan of EGAM (le Mouvement Antiraciste Européen) attributes the government's silence to its guilt. Yet there is a wider conspiracy of silence. The religious organizations are too silent. Outside of France the world press is too silent. Possibly because they provide evidence of a terrible crime against Roma peoples, French media articles concerning the ethnic cleansing of Roma are not translated into English. The State's actions against the Roma requires the complicity of silence beyond its borders.

Amid this deluge of misery one thing is absolutely clear. The French are cutting the traveling people, the Roms, les gens de passage, to pieces in a cold blooded murder of a way of life. The government insists on this soulless exercise as a genocidal ritual required by the new world order to enter a future made for profit not humanity. For the Roma, whose traditions are of greater age and constancy, a [genocide warning](#) is in effect.

Both French and European Union instruments protecting the human rights of this minority haven't functioned effectively. Whether or not Roma peoples subscribe to borders, nations, or the UN Conventions and Covenants which protect all peoples rights, the United Nations Working Group on Roma, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial discrimination (which warned France in 2010 about deporting Roma), the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Racism, the U.N. Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, the U.N. Special adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human rights (OHCHR), should focus on France. They haven't.

United Nations concern for Roma human rights was clearly [lacking in Kosovo of 1999](#), when after occupation by NATO forces, French troops refused to halt the ethnic cleansing of Roma by Albanian forces. Under UN protection surviving Roma families were confined to an area lethally contaminated with lead poisoning.

Protection of the Roma as a people in France relies on France itself, then on the European Union, and then on the United Nations. If the government of France, the EU and UN continue to fail, they should be held complicit in the crime against a people. As a group Roma peoples are innocent. The communities of dispossessed are defenceless and without political alliances. Immediate international concern is needed to assure their primary human rights. Options include pressuring state and international organizations to honour their mandates, reciprocity against French corporate interests, life-respecting direct actions within France supporting Roma, and legal actions calling the State to account for violations of the Convention on Genocide.

Partial sources:

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Previous: " First They Came for the 'Gypsies'..." J.B.Gerald, Oct. 14, 2012, nightslantern.ca - <http://www.nightslantern.ca/ftcessay.htm>.

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