

**RE-THINKING ROMA RESISTANCE  
THROUGHOUT HISTORY:  
RECOUNTING STORIES  
OF STRENGTH AND BRAVERY**



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## **Chapter 6**

# **“How I became a partisan”. Filmmaking as a resistance strategy against oblivion**

by Vera Lacková

### **Introduction**

Since I was a child, I have loved my grandmother’s mysterious stories. As well as fairy-tales and Roma stories, my grandmother would often tell me about my great-grandfather, Ján Lacko. A Roma partisan, he lived through a lot both during and after the Second World War. His story influenced the course of my family’s life and also profoundly impacted mine. Today, however, many Second World War stories are gradually being lost, and even more have been forgotten entirely.

I became one of a very few female Roma filmmakers and decided to explore the significance of the partisan struggle in which my great-grandfather and other Roma partisans participated. In my documentary film, *How I Became a Partisan*, which will premier in 2021, I travel back into the past to wipe away the layers of oblivion from the history of Roma participation in the resistance movement during the Second World War. The film presents my great-grandfather’s story alongside the Roma resistance movement in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. During that time, Roma resistance fighters identified themselves as Slovak or Czech, or as inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, and fought for their country. This piece of history completely challenges two deeply-rooted stereotypes about the Roma: 1) that Roma people don’t consider the country they live in as their home and 2) that they were merely victims of fascist oppression. Inspired by these stories, I decided to become a modern “partisan” and save the history of Roma resistance from oblivion by making my film and

shining a spotlight on it in wider society.

This essay reflects the process that went into making my movie, including my personal research. Inspired by the story of my great-grandfather, it is largely based on oral history. This essay is divided into various sections. First, I focus on the story of my great-grandfather. Starting with the fragmentary memories shared with me by my grandmother, I went to the archives to find out more about my great-grandfather's life during the Second World War.

Second, I describe the historical situation of Roma in Slovakia, because it is necessary to understand the time when my great-grandfather lived. During this research stage, I discovered he was not the only Roma to participate in the resistance. This finding brought me to undertake research in the Czech Republic, which I also briefly describe in the essay. I contrast the national historical accounts of the two countries against oral history accounts of actual survivors, including descendants of Roma resistance fighters to demonstrate how these events are remembered within Roma communities.

As I was conducting my research, questions arose: How is it possible that society is not aware of any Roma heroes? Why are Roma presented only as victims of the Second World War? There are still gaps in our knowledge. Later, I describe the reasons for, and examples of Roma Holocaust denial, and the suppression of Roma memory. I found out that neither Slovakia nor the Czech Republic conducted in-depth research on Roma resistance. Therefore, there are no books dedicated to the topic. There are, however, exceptions, and I focus on them later in this essay (in the sub-chapter focusing on existing literature in Slovakia and the Czech Republic).

The vast majority of Roma who participated in the resistance have passed away, except for Ján Bučko, whom I managed to get in touch with during the research for my film. This was an additional barrier to my research. Various relatives of World War survivors provided me with partial information, which I verified in the archives later. In some Roma families, the war was not discussed, which was the case of my great-grandfather. War memories were so dreary that Roma tried to block them out. They did not share them with their family members for various reasons – but I speculate that they tried to protect their children from the horrors they endured or maybe out of fear that the war might return. I am convinced that researching Roma resistance is crucial for understanding history, not only that of the Roma's but of the wider society.

## **Approach to research**

My research started with the story of my great-grandfather. My grandmother, who first told me about my great-grandfather, shared a few of her memories with me, and I promised to find out more. I started with field research in archives in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. I also used secondary sources and data such as, for example, death certificates, books, newspaper articles, registries and registry books. Little by little, I found more stories of Roma partisans and visited the families and relatives of Roma partisans, among which were living witnesses. I decided to record these oral histories and verified memories again in the archives.

Regarding the terminology used in this paper, two comments should be noted. Firstly, when I cite any source, I always stick to the original author's terminology, even if they use the term "Gypsy". Otherwise, in this essay, I always use the term "Roma". Secondly, I use the term Roma Holocaust when referring to the Roma's fate during the Second World War.

## **The story of Ján Lacko, my great-grandfather**

The story of my great-grandfather resembles the stories of many Roma at the turn of the 20th century. My great-grandfather was born on June 18, 1901, in Dolný Turček in the Turčianske Teplice District, where our family had lived side by side with the majority for centuries. Dolný Turček was a German village, and Germans and Roma had good relationships at that time. In fact, my great-grandfather's godfather was German. With the beginning of the Second World War, however, relations between local German's and local Roma people began to change.

The Slovakian State started to use the term "Gypsy", and the Ministry of Defence began to inquire into the racial origin of its soldiers. Accordingly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs on June 18, 1940, issued a decree stating that to be considered "Gypsy", both a person's parents should be "Gypsy", live nomadically and be unemployed (Nečas 2006, 41). It was up to the authorities to subjectively decide who was "Gypsy". As a result, many Slovaks were mislabeled as "Gypsies" and sent to labour camps. Meanwhile, many Roma were regarded Slovak and had to join the army, which they often left and volunteered instead to join the Slovak National Uprising – the armed insurrection forces organ-



ised by the Slovak Resistance.

My great-grandfather made his living by selling fabrics from door-to-door, and he was a musician. He played the violin, cello and bass. Local regulations banned Roma from entering the city. This ghettoisation ruined Roma economically, socially and ethically. Roma had to travel around the country to work in their traditional crafts and professions (Hubschmanová 2006, 103). Yet, the authorities regarded such Roma as “vagrants and idlers”. It is for this reason that my great-grandfather was imprisoned several times. The first time, on September 12, 1942, the Dolný Kubín District Council assigned him to the labour camps in Dubnice nad Váhom (letter from the captain of the labour camp in Dubnica over Váh to the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ praesidium, 1943). My great-grandfather escaped from the camp a few months later on January 11, 1943 (letter from the gendarme of the labour camp in Dubnica over Váhom to the gendarme station in Horná Štubňa, 1943). He was arrested again on March 9, 1943 (letter from the gendarme station in Horná Štubňa to the central criminal office in Bratislava, 1943). He was released on June 4, 1943 (release letter from captain of the labour camp in Dubnica over Váh to the Ministry of Internal Affairs praesidium, 1943).

Shortly after that, my great-grandfather joined the partisan movement. According to the stories my grandmother told me, and the documents I discovered in archives, he was a member of the Kremnica Unit of Gejza Lacko, First Partisan Brigade of M. R. Štefánik, under the command of P. A. Veličko and the Jegorov Group, Second Partisan Brigade of M. R. Štefánik, led by Major Žingor. Both partisan units contributed to the defence and stabilisation of rebel territory (Ján Lacko’s application for a certificate according to law 255/1946, 194). For his part in the resistance movement, my great-grandfather was imprisoned in the autumn of 1944 and taken to Ilava, and later to the detention (concentration) camp at Dubnica over Váhom.

In the meantime, the Nazi army torched my great-grandfather’s house. When his family members returned from the Banská Bystrica region to Turček, the Gestapo detained them for interrogation on suspicion of harbouring partisans. The next day, on November 3, 1940, the Gestapo took them to the mountain of Puš (in the village of Turček) and shot them in cold blood – Valéria, two months old, Rozália, two years old, Gabriela, 14, Margita, 17, Rozália, 36, and Mária, 69 (Police report, 1945). In spring 1945, my great-grandfather returned from the concentration camp and learned about the tragedy that had befallen his family. He found his mother, wife, and four children lying inert in

the forest, covered with leaves and pine needles. To bury them, he took them to the cemetery himself.

The story of my great-grandfather is not unique - there are many more stories like his. Roma resisted, and fought for our countries' freedom, risking their lives, as well as that of their relatives. To better understand the Roma predicament during the Second World War, in the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the historical context in Slovakia during the Second World War.

## **Slovakia: 1939 - 1945**

After the collapse of Czechoslovakia on March 14, 1939, an independent, clerical fascist Slovakian state came into existence. Slovakia fell under the decision-making bodies in Berlin. Jozef Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest and politician, became the chief, and later president of the newly established state. He was also the Hlinka guards' chief, a semi-military organisation of the Slovak People Party between 1938 and 1945. Slovakia became an ally to Nazi Germany - it entered the war against Poland and the Soviet Union and declared war against the United States of America and Great Britain. After the war, Jozef Tiso left Slovakia but was captured and returned to Czechoslovakia. There the national judiciary sentenced him to death, and he was executed in April 1947.

Alongside Jews, Roma were listed as non-Aryans preventing racial purity according to the September 15, 1935, Nuremberg Laws (Lužica 2002, 51). This served as a pretext for murdering Jews and Roma. Slovakia adopted these racial laws from Nazi Germany as if they were their own. Any ambiguities concerning who the term "Gypsy" referred to were clarified by the official explanation of Regulation No. 127 published on June 18, 1940, which stated the following: "According to paragraph 9 under law No.130/1940 of the Slovak legal code, a gypsy should be understood as those members of the gypsy race with both gypsy parents, who live a nomadic way of life or are settled, but avoid work" (Lužica 2005, 9). According to the Defense Act from January 18, 1940, "Gypsies" and Jews were excluded from the military. Had they already joined the army, they were to be released from duty without any credentials. Jewish and Roma recruits (or released recruits) did not perform their duties in military facilities but in special work units (Nečas 2006, 43). These units were located in Očová, Most over Ostrov and Trnava. Their existence did not last

long, and they were cancelled by 1941. However, other work camps were established in 1942. The biggest ones were situated in Dubnica over Váh (1942–1944) and work units in eastern Slovakia, for example, Hanušovice over Topľa (1942–1943; Kumanová 2013).

The Slovak National Uprising (SNU) emerged in response to German occupation and in protest against the Slovak fascist state, which was a German satellite. The SNU started on August 29, 1944, and, as a result, Slovakia was regarded a victor. However, by the end of October 1944, the uprising was quashed by the German army, leading to considerable repression of the domestic population.

The active participation of large numbers of Roma in the uprising is not common knowledge, despite their contribution to the armed struggle. Various historians did not consider the partisans' ethnicity and listed them all as Slovak. However, there were concrete reasons for the active participation of Roma in the partisan movement. To deal with the so-called "Roma question", the Ministry of Interior issued two regulations, one on April 20, 1941, and another on July 23, 1943. The first regulation cancelled all travel documents and their owners were required to return to their domicile address. This regulation had direct consequences for those Roma living nomadically, as well as those settled. Roma who lived close to any roads were required to move and build their homes separately from other citizens, in specially designated locations (Nečas 1994, 169). The authorities designed settlements in remote places and Roma were displaced to rural, forested areas. As an indirect result of these new regulations, the participation of Roma in the uprising struggles increased. Roma were acquainted with local forests, were knowledgeable about the various paths and crops, and thus served as a link between the partisans and the locals. They provided partisans with local news, information concerning location and movement of enemy troops, food and supplies.

Displacing Roma from towns and villages had a paradoxical effect. Partisan attacks in unknown forested terrains worried the Germans, so they did not concern themselves with Roma in rural settlements located near the woods (Hubschmanová 2005, 56). In the fall of 1944, the Slovak National Uprising was suppressed. Reprisals targeting locals started immediately after that, resulting in one of the cruellest periods ever. People were murdered, deported to concentration camps, and settlements were burned down. The reprisals were especially hard for Roma because even a hint of suspicion had drastic consequences.

The violent murders and burning of houses were carried out by German military and police units. They were assisted by the Hlinka Guard and “Heimatschutz”, consisting of German-Carpathian inhabitants in central Slovakia from the region called “Hauerland”. The reprisals aimed for total control over the designated area and the Slovak Republic’s final months were particularly hard on the Roma population. Roma were not only punished for their active participation in, and support of the uprising, but gradually became the target of openly racist hatred. Brutal murders and the burning down of Roma settlements and houses were partly motivated by retaliation and partly by arbitrary despotism. Historical evidence is not and cannot be exhaustive, but it does suggest the deep-seated evil leading directly to the Holocaust (Nečas 1944, 165). Between the end of 1944 and the start of the following year, German soldiers and emergency divisions of Hlinka’s guard murdered 747 people in Kremnička; at least 109 victims were of Roma origin. Roma were murdered in large numbers in other villages as well – Kvetnica, Tisovec, Čierny Balog, Dolný Turček, Zvolen, Nemecká, Žiar na Hronom, Brezno, Pohorelá, Lopej, Motyčky, Hriňová and others (Nation’s Memory Institute). We do not know how many Roma were shot to death and how many families were murdered because of just one family member being a partisan (or being suspected of ties with the partisans). We assume that this is not documented and will never be fully uncovered (Hubschamnová 2005, 57).

Roma men who were discharged from military service or escaped from concentration camps joined the partisan movement. Many Roma were part of the First Regiment of the Czechoslovak Military Corps. Milená Hubschamnová mentions: “In no relevant publication are we able to read anything about Roma participating in Svoboda’s army, which they joined after defecting from Tiso’s army or escaping from Russian prison camps. By relevant I mean books on the Slovak army during World War II, on Svoboda’s army, or wider historical publications on these particular times or even the fate of Roma during the Slovak state” (Hubschmanová 2005, 204).

There are many accounts which attest to the participation of Roma in the partisan movement. Witness Elena Berkyová was 15 years old during SNU, living in Dolná Bzová. Her father, grandfather and two uncles were captured and taken on November 12 or 13 to Zvolen. Later they were murdered during the mass execution in Kremnička because they were partisans. Until recently, Elena did not know where her relatives were buried, only that they have a grave at the Jewish cemetery in Zvolen. The priest could have saved them

with just a small gesture – a confirmation that they did not help the partisans. The priest denied his help, since, as Elena claims, he was a fascist. After the execution, the Germans burnt down their houses. The same priest who did not save her relatives' lives performed her wedding ceremony after the war in 1947 - the officials did not allow her to have the wedding ceremony elsewhere, in another parish.

During the shooting of my film, I met with Ružena Ďord'ová, a nephew of Roma soldier Imrich Horváth. When she was 11, her mother brought home Imrich Horváth, who was ill and living in Plzeň. Imrich Horváth was a Czechoslovak soldier of Roma origin, born in the city of Seňa in Slovakia. He was forced to join the Hungarian Army; later, in 1943 he joined Czechoslovak troops fighting against the Nazis in the Western part of the Orenburg region in Russia. He actively participated in battles over the Dukla Col as part of General Ludvik Svoboda's army. Later, he was deported to a concentration camp in Germany. When American troops were getting closer, he organised a riot together with other prisoners and escaped the camp. Ružena Ďord'ová directly witnessed Horváth's recounting of his actions during the war and was one of the few people who were in touch with him before he died. She donated his war decorations to the Museum of Roma Culture in Brno; her private possessions contain family photographs. Unfortunately, Imrich Horváth's postwar story is not currently known. He died April 28, 1977, in Plzeň.

As Roma participated in the partisan movement and the resistance, their relationship with Slovak comrades-in-arms was reconsidered and reestablished on new grounds. This was based on solidarity and patriotism stemming from antifascism, and often on communist ideology (Hubschmanová 2005, 57). The family of Branislav Oláh, Roma writer and journalist, claims local Roma joined the antifascist resistance in large numbers. According to Oláh, there is not a single family without a partisan, and each family has among them victims of the Roma Holocaust. Contrary to many Roma families, his relatives were not silent about their suffering during World War II, and they shared their war experiences with their descendants. Branislav Oláh's paternal grandfather and his brothers were partisans, members of the "Za slobodu Slovanov" group. After the uprising was quashed, his two brothers Mikuláš and Josef were captured and transported to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Only Mikuláš returned home later; Jozef did not survive his suffering in the camp.



## Bohemia: 1939 – 1945

My film production and personal research brought me to the Czech Republic. The situation in the country was different from that of Slovakia. However, we can find cases of Roma resistance there too.

The Czechoslovak Republic fell apart as a result of the Munich Treaty, and on March 15, 1939, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia came to existence. The Protectorate was included in the Third Reich, which controlled the collaborationist government and the military.

There were two camps established in the Czech Republic, both of them designed initially as internment camps – in Lety near the city of Písek, and Hodonín near Kunštát. From August 2, 1942, when Roma were directed exclusively to these sites, they became “Gypsy camps” (Holomek 2014, 9). The decision was confirmed in December 1942 by SS Commander Heinrich Himmler’s regulation “on the deportation of Gypsies and Gypsy half-breeds” to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, where a special so-called family “Gypsy camp” (*Zigenuerlager*) was created. The majority of Roma were deported to this complex of concentration camps from spring 1943 to July 1944 (Horváthová 2002, 46).

According to historians, almost 90% of Czech Roma were killed during the Roma Holocaust (Nečas 1944). Based on the military evidence of criminal headquarters in Prague, the total number of Roma men, women and children deported to the concentration camps reached 4,870. Out of this number, only 583 Roma men and women returned to their homeland after the war. The majority of Roma residing in the former Protectorate did not survive the concentration camps (Nečas 1944, 93). However, several Roma joined the resistance in the Czech Republic. In Bohemia, Roma joined the resistance in fewer numbers than in Slovakia, usually when escaping concentration camps in Hodonín and Lety.

This was the case of Josef Serinek. Czech historian Jan Tesař published the book *Česká Cikánská rapsodie* (Tesař Jan, 2017) based on Serinek’s memories, and thus he remains one of a few known Czech Roma partisans. Serinek was captured and together with his family transported to a concentration camp in Lety near Písek. In just a short time there, he witnessed some 17 deaths by torture. Expecting a similar fate, he decided to escape. He planned to return to his family, but Czech police officers pursued him, and he had to hide in the woods. In the end, he discovered that some members of his family had died

in Lety, and others in Auschwitz Birkenau. He managed to reach the Vysočina region (Czech Republic), where, with the help of locals he established the partisan division “Čapajev”. Serinek’s grandson - Zdenek Serinek - persuaded his father to permit Jan Tesař to publish Serinek’s memoir. Since Serinek died when his grandson was just six years old, Zdeněk remembers him as a child. He grew up near the city of Svitavy, where his grandfather lived after the war. Zdeněk knew about his grandfather being a partisan since he was ten years old, even though nobody talked much about it at home. Zdeněk started to research his grandfather’s war past when he became older.

The second case is Antonín Murka, born in Újezd in Zlín region. Since 1942, he was incarcerated in the “Gypsy camp” in Hodonín. In 1943, he was ordered to dig the water holes for the camp, and together with his three friends, he managed to escape. First, he hid with the Wallachian smugglers, and later he joined the Jan Žižka partisan brigade, led by the legendary major Dajan B. Baranovič Murzin. He recalled, “We were divided into smaller groups. I was in the first one, together with Jirka and a guy from southern Yugoslavia, Teodor Simin. Then there was a group consisting of 10 Russian captives and 11 local boys... I was a leader and my nickname was, “Tonda the Gypsy”” (Murka’s written record of memories, 1923). He participated in liberating the town of Vizovice. His father, mother, siblings, and uncles and cousins, died in the concentration camps.

These two stories are very important. Thanks to their ability to resist, Roma were able to stand up against the Nazi regime side by side with majority freedom-fighters. While Roma participation in the Czech Republic resistance was limited since most Roma fell victim to the genocide, there are cases of Roma resistance fighters such as the two partisan stories described above. There are certainly more Roma partisan fighters’ stories, but the majority of them remain to be discovered.

## **Gaps in our knowledge**

Roma resistance is an underrepresented topic and stands in the shadows of the Roma Holocaust, the existence of which is still denied by both politicians and others. In this section, I describe examples of Roma Holocaust denial, and the reasons why Roma participation in the antifascist resistance is not known about nowadays.

Not long ago, there was a pig farm on the site of a concentration camp in the village of Lety where Roma genocide took place. Fortunately, after persistent and long-term pressure from various activists, the government bought out the private farm two years ago. As a representative organisation, the Museum of Roma Culture in Brno, after 75 long 75, will build a dignified memorial. However, some politicians and residents in Lety still deny the concentration camp's existence and insist on labelling it as a work camp, designed to teach "the asocial" to work. Last year, archaeological research at the site of the former concentration camp in Lety confirmed its existence. Both the original camp was found, which had been covered by the farm, as were prisoners' graves. Last year, new evidence was found that affirmed that it was not a work camp, as politicians had suggested. The excavations uncovered one grave with a female prisoner's remains, under 40 years of age, and a grave of a newborn, whose skeletal remains were almost untraceable since the pit was quite shallow. They found seven other graves. According to documents, there should be 120 prisoners buried in total, including 70 or more children; with the graveyard extending over an area of 400 square meters (Berkyová, Bikár, Ryšavý, Tokárová2019).

Even with these facts in mind, we still tend to forget Roma resistance fighters. The mainstream narrative labelled resistance fighters automatically as Slovak as if there were no Roma in the resistance. This is not about treating Roma as martyrs, but joining the resistance and fighting for their home country strongly subverts persisting stereotypes which treat Roma as unable to stand up for society.

One of the reasons for the lack of remembrance of the Roma Holocaust and Roma Resistance is the Roma's silence regarding these harrowing times. It was very difficult for them to prove the crimes they suffered or document their participation in the resistance. They blocked out their memories in the subconscious defence of their cultural identity. Erasing the era when basic principles of their identity were subverted was one way they protected their identity (Kapralski 2006,162). Some authors explain the lack of interest in Holocaust memory and remembrance among Roma as a result of their "art of forgetting". Such a position is dangerous since it shifts the responsibility from authorities and those in power onto the victims. Moreover, it supports (romantic) stereotypes portraying Roma as a people without memory and therefore without a memorable past. The hegemonic narrative of war omits Roma suffering (as well as that of others). However, it seems their experience would be displaced

anyway if we consider the nature of official Slovak commemorative acts. If their suffering was mentioned, it was only in reference to their antisocial way of life, thus reproducing Nazi racist theory again (Fotta 2006, 7-8). Discrimination and repressions against Roma during World War II were kept secret or belittled. For example, memorials and commemorative plaques dedicated to the victims of the war contained victims' names. However, those unable to identify Roma surnames never knew that those people died due to their different ethnical background (Mann 2013, 37).

Together with Roma partisans' descendants, I visited those memorials containing names of their ancestors killed during the SNU, but their ethnicity is not stated anywhere. This information is absent from the lists of resistance fighters as well, which were created by historians. Roma were not even included in the list of the SNU Museum, containing those 32 nations and ethnicities who joined the uprising. This was the case up to 2016 when the civic association, In minorita, took charge. In cooperation with the SNU Museum, they installed a commemorative plaque dedicated to Roma.

During annual commemorations of the Slovak National Uprising, an official state holiday, nobody mentions Roma participation in the uprising. The Roma were included in the celebration for the first time only last year, due to the opening of the "Roma in the resistance" exhibition<sup>1</sup>, which I organised. This event was included in the official commemorative program in Banská Bystrica on August 29, 2019, as part of celebrating 75 years since the SNU. The president of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, attended the opening, as well as the ombudsman Prof. JUDr. Mária Patakyová, PhD. and the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education Milan Krajniak. Other politicians did not attend the opening.

## **Existing research on Roma resistance in Slovakia and Bohemia – the importance of oral history**

The Communist regime played a significant part in suppressing Roma memory since their goal was to assimilate Roma. Roma heroes and role models had no place since they would lead to Roma emancipation. As a conse-

1 More information about this exhibition can be found here: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/foto-v-zahrade-chavivy-reik-na-75-vyrocie-snp-otvorili-vystavu-romovia-v-odboji/>

quence, Roma histories remain undocumented and untold. Shortly after the war, the methodology of oral history was not considered as a valid research tool, as I found out through my interview with Jan Tesař, the author of the book about Roma partisan Josef Serinek:

The historians did not understand me chasing down some gypsy histories, I was a laughing stock. The traditional and proper historical process was to learn how to gather archival documents and then going through the amassed paper file. I chose this partisan topic, a conspiracy, and you do not have written evidence of that. If you do, the conspiracy aspect is out, it was revealed. On top of that, successful partisan units created forged documents in order to protect themselves. As a historian, you work with these false documents. The resistance fighter was prosecuted, he tried to cover his back in the courtroom, yet he carried on with his resistance as well. As a result, as a historian you have the evidence confirming the lies of the captured resistance fighters. How they carried on with whatever they did before.

(Tesař Jan, 2017; interview)

Jan Tesař's three-volume book, *Czech Gypsy Rapsody*, is divided into three sections. The first part contains memories of Serinek and descriptions of protagonists from Serinek's oral accounts. The second part focuses on the author's comments on Serinek's narrative, and the last section contains maps, tables and diagrams. Jan Tesař recorded memories of Josef Serinek during 18 meetings that were held between March 27, 1963, and June 20, 1964 (Tesař Jan 2016, 13).

The Roma Holocaust topic in Bohemia and Slovakia was researched by the Czech historian, Ctibor Nečas, in the 1970s. As a result of his research, several crucial books on the life of Roma in Slovakia during World War II were published, including *Českoslovenští Romové v letech 1938-1945* (Nečas, 1994), *Romové na Moravě a ve Slezsku 1740-1945* (Nečas, 2005), *Našti Biteras* (Nečas, 1994), and *Holocaust českých Rómov* (Nečas, 1999). In his book, *Československí Rómovia v rokoch 1939 – 1945* (Nečas, 1994), in the chapter "Repression against Roma in 1944-1945", he mentions Roma resistance. For example, the author writes about the Roma settlement in Tisovec. According to his account, local Roma were persuaded by Nazi collaborators to destroy a bridge near a local paper factory. Roma confessed that they were in touch with partisans and agreed to go forward with the assumed action. During the night, the police took them out and made 14 men dig out trenches; they were shot to death over their graves. Some 34 women and children were taken from the village to their execution in Kremnica. The author remembers Pohorelá



settlement, which was burnt down because local Roma provided refuge for partisans.

Romani Studies scholar Milena Hubschmanová chose the oral history method in the 1990s as well. She collected and recorded Roma memories, resulting in the first volume of her book *Po Židoch cigáni. Svědectví Romů ze Slovenska 1939-1945* (Hubschmanová 2005, 750). Currently, the publishing house Triáda is preparing the second volume for publishing. Her book contains memories of Roma partisans as well. Among them is Ján Tumi, nicknamed “Koro”, who was in the army and joined the partisans after his release. “And then in 1944 the uprising broke out. And so I joined it in Valaské.” (Hubschmanová 2005, 750). Apart from Tumi, Ladislav Tancoš and Ladislav Petík also joined the partisans after serving their time in the military. Additionally, Hubschmanová presents the testimonies of various indirect participants of the resistance, for example, that of Anna Virágová, Jozef and Vilma Abrahám, Agnesa Horváthová, Irena Kroková, and Roma writer Elena Lacková, who mentions a Roma partisan group. One of the accounts, described by Hubschmanová, tells the story of a Roma Partisan Unit:

In Chmeľov (Slovakia) there was a Roma called Oračko who had four sons. Oračko went to see Kukurelli, a leader of a partisan unit, and they agreed that the Roma will establish their own independent Roma partisan unity. Their task was to put mines under the bridges. Oračko took his four sons and a few other Roma from Hanušovice and Pavlovce. Kukurelli armed them – he was an important person, and they went together with the “whites”. (Hubschmanová 2005, 832).

In the 1990s, in cooperation with Yale University, Milan Šimečka’s Foundation recorded statements of Roma who witnessed persecution and genocide. In my opinion, these video recordings are very important since such material does not exist in Slovakia. Among the testimonies, we can find the accounts of Ján Bučko, Juraj Bučko, Ján Bartoška, Ján Škrvňan and resistance soldiers from Svoboda’s army and the Czechoslovak Army (Michal Demeter, Andrej Gombár, Ondrej Gujda). The statements were recorded by the ethnologist Rene Lužica, who published some of the materials in his books *Keď bola vojna nebol som doma* (2004) and *Zabudnutí a zatratení* (2002, together with Július Tancoš). Based on this project, Milan Šimečka’s Foundation published a book called *Rómovia a druhá svetová vojna* (2006).

From the video witness statements included in the Milan Šimečka Foundation’s collection, the only living Roma partisan who I found was Ján Bučko.

He was born in Sasová, and today he is 95 years old. He lives in a retirement home, where I visited him as a part of my research. He told me he joined the partisan brigade - Ján Žizka - when he was only 17 years old. After returning home, he found out that his parents, grandmothers, and three uncles were murdered in Kremnička and the lime kiln in Nemecká. They were murdered because he took part in the uprising. Only his two sisters stayed alive. After the war, he requested the exhumation of the mass grave in Kremnička, so that he could recover their bodies and provide them with a proper burial.

The Museum of Roma Culture (Brno, Czech Republic) dedicates a small part of the permanent exhibition to the topic of Roma resistance. Last year, the museum exhibited medals and decorations belonging to Imrich Horváth - a Roma soldier in the Czechoslovak army. Among other artefacts are partisan certificates including those of Roma fighters Vojtech Boldi, Karol Baláž and Ladislav Bukaj, a fragment of Josef Serinek's recollections which were later published in *Česká cikánská rapsodie*, and a written record of Antonín Murka recollections.

## Conclusions

Initially, my research was influenced by my great-grandfather and took me on a journey of filmmaking. Gradually, I started to become more interested in the topic of Roma resistance during the Second World War and began my research. I discovered that my great-grandfather was not the only one Roma who participated in the anti-fascist resistance. Thanks to my investigations, I know that Roma participated in partisan movements in a number of occupied and allied countries (including USSR, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Italy and France), and were part of the regular armies fighting against Germany (mainly in the Soviet Union and, towards the end of the war, also in Bulgaria and Romania), as well as in the Slovak National Uprising (Marushiakova, Popov 2017, 6). However, society is largely unaware of this fact.

Stories of Roma who participated in the resistance were shared among families, mostly orally. Today, one of the possible means of recording Roma partisans and antifascist fighters' memories is through their surviving family members and ancestors, through which their memories live on.

My archival research was very difficult - many documents have been lost, and most of them are still yet to be processed in Slovakia and the Czech Re-

public. For example, documents from the detention (later concentration) camp in Dubnica over Váhom, where I needed to find information about my great-grandfather, are still not accessible to the public; for my research, the archival staff gave me special permission. Even though this history is relatively recent – dating back 75 years - only a few historians are interested in this topic.

With the increasing trend of far-right beliefs and racist attitudes that have swept into our public discourse once again, it seems to be crucial to remind people of these forgotten heroes' names and deeds. Therefore, I hope that in the future, historians will shed more light on this missing chapter of our past, not just of Roma history for the Roma themselves – but as a chapter of broader European history of which Roma are an integral part.

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