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From Expulsion, Child removal, administrative Detention and Forced Sterilization to partial Recognition

History and actual Situation of Yenish, Sinti and Roma in
Switzerland

Presentation at the

7th International Roma Women Conference

in the Hanasaari Cultural Center, Espoo/Helsinki, Finland,
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26th March

Timeline I

Middle Ages	First sources on presence and language of Swiss Travellers
1418	First arrival of Roma on Swiss Territory
1471	Swiss Government bans Nomads („Pagans“, „Zegyner“)
Til 1798	Death penalty against the presence of Nomads on Swiss Territory
1815 – 1848	Debates : Deportation of the Nomads to French Algeria or Citizenship for the so-called „Heimatlose“ (Homeless, sans papers). First removals of Children out of their Traveller Families to be placed in orphanages and homes

Timeline II

- 1848 Liberal Revolution in Switzerland: Swiss Federal Republic
- 1851 – 1888 Swiss Citizenship for the Yenish; Legal Presence of Roma and Sinti on Swiss Territory
- 1888 – 1972 Ban against Roma and Sinti, no right to members of these peoples to live in Switzerland. Only Hidden Presence of Roma and Sinti in Switzerland
- 1905 First Publication of the anti-yenish, racist theories invented by swiss psychiatrist Dr. Josef Jörger classifiing the Yenish als „hereditary inferior“, later on adopted by Nazi-Scientist Dr. Robert Ritter, and extended to Sinti and Roma
- 1906 Swiss law interdicting the transportation of „ZIGEUNER“ on Swiss railways

Timeline III

- 1911–1972 Registration and incarceration before expulsion all „ZIGEUNER“ captured on Swiss Territory
- 1916–1972 Removal of some Sinti Children of their expelled families, growing in homes, psychiatric institutions, work houses and jails (administrative detention, without trial)
- 1926–1972 Systematic Removal of about 1200 Yenish Children by the Foundation „Pro Juventute“, catholic network „Seraphisches Liebeswerk“ and regional authorities in the german and italian speaking regions of Switzerland, with the openly declared aim to destroy the Yenish community. Placing of the removed Yenish Children in Non-Yenish Families, homes, psychiatric institutions, work houses and jails (by administrative detention, without trial)
- Interdictions of marriages between Travellers, forced sterilizations and forced abortions
- 1934 Castration of Sinto Josef Anton Reinhardt in Berne

TIMELINE IV

- 1971 -1973 Protests against Roma ban and discriminatory controls at the Swiss borders and against the of Yenish children from their families and community
- 1972 End of the Roma ban in Switzerland. Presence of a growing Roma community in Switzerland, but mostly hiding their culture and language.
- 1973 End of the systematic removal of Yenish Children from their families and group. Persistence of the separation from their families for most of the removed Children in the Eighties and Nineties
- 1988 Non-compensatoric, symbolic payments (between 2'000.- and 20'000.- CHF) to the Yenish victims of child removing, detention and forced sterilization

Timeline V

- 1993 Swiss citizenship for members of 3 Sinti families „tolerated“ on Swiss Territory as an exception
- 1997 Switzerland's ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Yenish recognized as Swiss Minority Language
- 1998 Switzerland's ratification of the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Swiss Travellers are recognized as a protected national minority
- 2016 Official recognition of Yenish and Sinti (all members of the groups, travelling and sedentary)
- 2018 Swiss Government denies request of Swiss Roma organizations for the recognition of Roma as a National Minority and of Romanes as a Swiss Minority Language



The Co-Founder of the Foundation Pro Juventute, and President of this organization from 1912-1959, hi-ranking swiss officer **Ulrich Wille junior** (1877-1959), was a friend and sponsor of Mussolini and Hitler.

In the house of Ulrich Wille in Zürich, Hitler held a speech in 1923. Hitler got there 30'000.- Swiss Francs. He used this money for his Putsch in Munich 1923, his first attempt to get the leadership of Germany.

Some of the removed yenish Children had to do forced labour in the „Erziehungsanstalt Sonnenberg“, Kriens, near Lucerne.

1944, Photographer Paul Senn





Dr. Alfred Siegfried had a sentence for 3 month of jail in 1924 because he was abusing sexually one of his pupils. But 1926, Pro Juventute hired him als the Chief of the „Hilfswerk Kinder der Landstrasse“!

Dr. Siegfried with Yenish victims, 1953

Photographer Hans Staub



Swiss Yenish family, 1930

*„Who is wanting to fight
vagrancy successfully, has to
blast the Travellers
community, he has, as hard
as this is to speak out, to
destroy the families unity. “*

(Alfred Siegfried, 1943)



Other organizations were active in the same way, for instance the „Seraphische Liebeswerke“ of the catholic church. All 5 children of this Yenish woman were removed into institutions or into non-yenish families.

photographer: Hans Staub, 1953

„Seraphische Liebeswerke“



The Seraphische Liebeswerke were founded by the german capuchin priest **Cyprian Fröhlich**.

In Switzerland, they were active in several regions and run their own homes and residential schools. They took away many children from young unmarried mothers, among them a high number of Jewish women, to place them into institutions or to get them adopted by „good catholic families“.



Yenish victims of Pro Juventute, removed from their parents and put into non-Yenish families or grown in homes and even in jails, entered a Media conference of Pro Juventute and cried out their protests and claims, led by Yenish author Mariella Mehr and Robert Huber, president of Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse, the 1975 founded main organization of Yenish and Sinti in Switzerland.

1986, Mai 5th

In the years 1971 / 1972 swiss journal „**Beobachter**“ published several articles written by **Hans Caprez**, criticizing sharply the campaign against the **Yenish Community** lead by Pro Juventute. This was essential to stop this genocidal practice with the aim to destroy the **Yenish People of Switzerland**.

Swiss
Journalist
Hans
Caprez, in
October
2012, with
yenish
victims of Pro
Juventute
and younger
Yenish



Further informations:

<http://www.thata.ch>

<https://www.radgenossenschaft.ch/>

<https://www.stiftung-fahrende.ch/de/gesternheute-8.html>