

*A Hole in the Head*. Directed by Robert Kirchhoff. Produced by Hitchhiker Cinema (Slovakia), Czech Television, Slovak Television and atelier.doc (Slovakia). 2016, 90 minutes. Slovak, Czech, German, Polish, French, Serbian, Croatian, Sinti with English subtitles. Contact: Michaela Cajkova, Taskovski Films (London), [festivals@taskovskifilms.com](mailto:festivals@taskovskifilms.com). Webpage: <http://www.aholeintheheadfilm.com>. Shown at the ASN 2017 World Convention.

*A Hole in the Head*, directed by a Slovak independent documentarist Robert Kirchhoff, addresses an issue of Roma Holocaust, focusing not just on the remembrance of the genocide of European Roma during World War II by Germany's Nazi government and its allies, but also on a present context of the memories: a contemporary status of the Roma, who constitute Europe's largest and most marginalized ethnic group.

Filmed in seven countries (Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia), the documentary brings together dozens of testimonies from Holocaust survivors, a small subset of informants that the film director Kirchhoff met while conducting research for the project. Kirchhoff defines his cinematographic approach as a "documentary essay" in contrast to a classic historic documentary – indeed, it is a partially staged and scripted documentary, without voiceover narration or title screens, without any use of an archival footage, photos, or illustrations. The 90-minute-long film is a bricolage of testimonies, songs, and conversations with survivors, family members of victims, activists, experts, and scholars in different European countries. The narratives are juxtaposed with background music and visuals of landscapes and cityscapes, memorial sites, community spaces, and home interiors.

The film addresses the most disturbing aspect of the current discourse on Roma Holocaust, that testifying and remembering survivors may be distrusted or even ridiculed. In a scene shot in Germany, students attend a lesson offered as a part of an awareness raising program "School without Racism" (*Schule ohne Rassismus*), and listen to a testimony of a Holocaust survivor of Sinti origin, Rita Prigmore, who was subjected to a Nazi "twin experiment" as a baby: a doctor attempted to change the color of her eye by using chemical injections. As Ms. Prigmore explains to teenagers how much she suffers from dramatic health consequences of these "medical" experiments, comes a tongue-in-cheek question from a blond boy: „*What's it like to live with a hole in your head?*” –Ms. Prigmore's audience bursts out laughing when she soberly replies: „*It's not a hole. It's a scar, darling.*”

Today, in the mid-2010s, most of the "available" survivors experienced the Holocaust as children. In a scene in the Czech Republic, Arnošt Vintř, who was born in a Roma family and lives now in an assisted living home, reveals a Swastika-shaped scar on his scalp, claiming that it was "stamped" onto his head in the Auschwitz concentration camp when he was only three-year-old, by dr. Mengele himself. In the next scene, shot somewhere else, a descendant of a Roma Holocaust survivor reflects on this story by questioning Mr. Vintř's credibility: "*That's nonsense. My memory begins at age five and I have a really good memory. [...] You don't remember anything when you're three.*"

The memories and testimonies of the remaining survivors have a special role and an utmost importance in the case of the Roma Holocaust, given that the genocide of the Roma was largely undocumented by the Nazis and their allies during World War II, and remained under-researched ever since due to a lack of resources and/or political circumstances. In a scene in Croatia, a social scientist Daniel Vojak and Roma NGO leader Dragoljub Acković are talking about the Jasenovac concentration camp, established and operated by the Nazi-like Ustaša regime, and about estimations of the number of Roma victims killed there and buried in mass graves: "– *They were not worthy enough to be counted. [...] – How many there were, no one knows. – Certainly not a million but certainly not a few hundred. Many more than that.*" In

another scene Jan Hauer, a Roma activist, notes during a walk across the venue of the Lety u Písku concentration camp, which was designated for Roma during Czechoslovakia's German occupation: *"How many died there? Many. The exact figure is unknown because no one unearthed the mass graves."* The film brings attention to a vicious circle: a lack of consolidated knowledge about the Roma victims of Holocaust may result in a reinforced distrust towards survivors' accounts, while without having a homeland (a nation-state) or a back-up from the international community, resources for a thorough research sufficient to cover high costs of exhumation projects may not be available. There is a hopeful voice in the film, though. According to Markus Pape, a German-born journalist and human rights activist who lives in Prague: *"The time will come just like in Srebrenica, Bosnia, or in other places of genocide. The [Czech] government will exhume the mass graves [in Lety u Písku] and we will see how many people are here."*

The film pays attention to a peculiar context of the Roma Holocaust remembrance: a continued persecution of the Roma throughout Europe that is still present these days. The film features Raymond Gurême, who was born in a Traveler family in France, and who survived imprisonment in different camps during World War II. The 89-year-old man claims that in September 2014 he was assaulted in his caravan by a French police officer with a baton. As Mr. Gurême concludes: *"The French gendarmerie treated us very badly during the war. I think it's almost the same today."*