

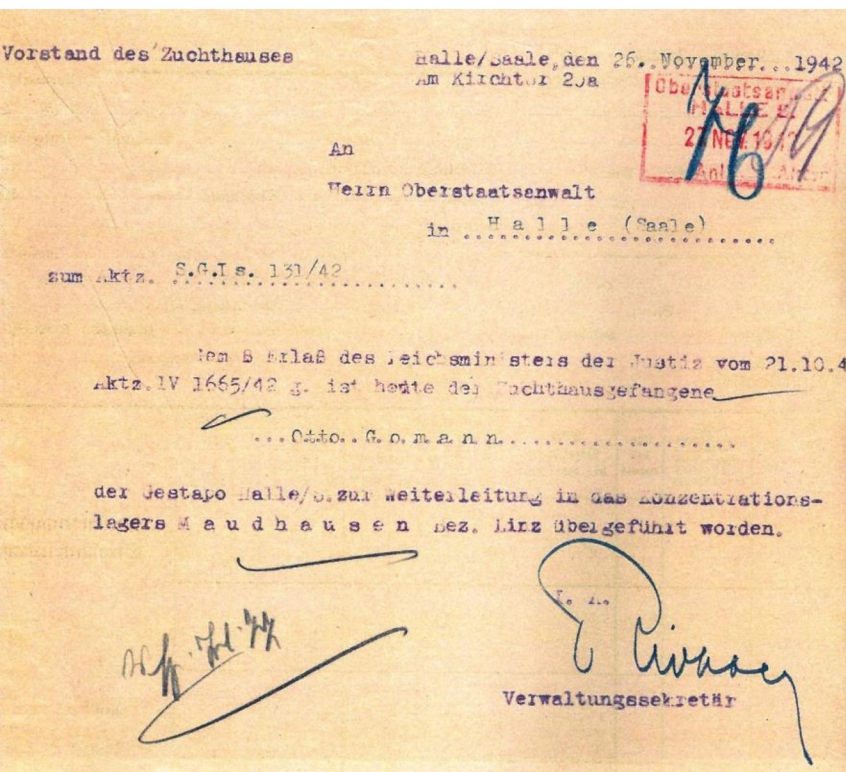
Otto Gomann – A Sinto from Halle and a Victim of National Socialism

Part I

Otto Gomann was born on February 18, 1911, in Wanne (West Phalia). He later lived in Halle (Saale), most recently at Langestraße 9. He worked as a cargo driver and transported goods and merchandise using a horse-drawn cart. This profession was particularly common during Gomann's lifetime, especially in the transportation and trade sectors. Otto was the son of Agnes Gomann and Franz Lutz, who ran his own trucking business in Halle.



A Sinti and Roma family's trailer in Halle (Saale), photograph, ca. 1936-1943



Document regarding the transfer of Otto Gomann to the Mauthausen concentration camp, 1942

Together with his brother Fritz Gomann, he was part of a family that earned its living in the trucking business. Otto Gomann was the father of five children. The surviving records show that the authorities registered him as stateless. At the same time, they contain numerous details about his origins and his family. They thus provide insights into the life of a Sinto from Halle, whose life was violently cut short by Nazi persecution. On January 11, January 1943, Otto Gomann was murdered in Gusen, a subcamp of the Mauthausen concentration camp, most likely in a gas chamber.



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Part II

On March 1, 1942, Otto Gomann was accused of selling a suit to a Ukrainian forced-laborer at an inflated price. A few days later, the authorities filed a complaint against him for price gouging. Following his arrest, he was remanded in custody. Despite the support of his father and a lawyer, the public prosecutor's office filed charges before the Special Court on June 13, 1942. On June 26, 1942, Otto Gomann was sentenced to imprisonment:

"The defendant is [...] sentenced to one year and six months in prison and a fine of 500 RM, or, alternatively, an additional 25 days in prison."

However, this verdict did not mark the end of his ordeal. On November 26, 1942, Otto Gomann was transferred from prison to the Gestapo. A few weeks later, the Nazis deported him to the Gusen concentration camp, where he was murdered, presumably in a gas chamber, on January 11, 1943. His case illustrates how an ordinary criminal proceeding under Nazism could lead to political persecution and ultimately to the murder of a member of the Sinti minority.



Prisoners in front of the penitentiary, now known as the correctional facility in Halle (Saale), photograph, ca. 1936-1945



An Attempt at a Critical History of the Term “Gypsy”

Part I

The history of the term “Gypsy” is closely linked to external labeling, stereotypes, and exclusion. The term was never a self-designation of the minority, but was coined from the outside and used primarily by the majority society. Its linguistic roots likely lie in the Middle Greek word *atsínganos* from the 9th century and were later applied to the Sinti and Roma who immigrated to Europe.

The term has been attested in German-speaking regions since the early 15th century and was associated with the image of the “stranger” from the very beginning. In the 16th century, the false interpretation spread that “Gypsy” meant “wandering crook,” thereby linking criminality and vagrancy to the minority. As early as 1498, the Imperial Diet of Freiburg declared people designated by this term to be “outlaws” and thus legitimized their persecution.



Excerpt from a Swiss chronicle on the “Arrival of the Gypsies” featuring a woodcut by Johannes Stumpf, 1548



An Attempt at a Critical History of the Term “Gypsy”

Part II

During the Age of Enlightenment, the term “Gypsy” evolved from a description of nomadic lifestyles to a racist category. Heinrich Grellmann (1783) grouped Sinti and Roma together as a single “people” and perpetuated existing prejudices in a pseudo-scientific treatise. Immanuel Kant also contributed to this stigmatization. He denied the minority the ability to adapt to European society. This served to “scientifically” legitimize societal prejudices.

Under National Socialism, the term “Gypsy” became the official category for a racist policy of persecution and extermination. The “Racial Hygiene Research Center” registered Sinti and Roma according to racial-biological criteria, thereby paving the way for their deportation. The term served to justify surveillance, “preventive detention,” and deportation. The Nazi genocide against the European Sinti and Roma claimed the lives of up to 500,000 people.



Official Gazette of the Reich and Prussian
Ministry of the Interior on “Combating
the Gypsy Scourge,” Circular, 1938

An Attempt at a Critical History of the Term “~~Gypsy~~”

Part III

Today, most organizations representing this minority, including the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, reject the term “~~Gypsy~~” as a discriminatory label imposed by others. It is closely associated with centuries of marginalization, persecution, and the Nazi genocide. Instead, the self-designations “Sinti” and “Roma” are used.

The term has been criticized because it lumps very different people together under a single label and perpetuates stereotypes such as criminality, a “wanderlust,” or a lack of settledness. As a result, people are not perceived as individuals but are reduced to the supposed characteristics of a group.



At the same time, the term remains in everyday life to this day, for example in historical food names, idioms, or older literary works. Its use is therefore the subject of controversy: While some view it as a traditional term, many affected individuals and experts point out that its history is inextricably linked to discrimination. Studies also show that anti-Gypsy prejudices and discrimination against Sinti and Roma persist to this day. Education and a culture of remembrance should help to break down these prejudices.

A restaurant sign on Rügen featuring the names “~~Zigeunerschmitzel~~” (“~~Gypsy~~-schmitzel”) and “~~Negerkuss~~” (“~~Negro~~’s kiss”), photograph, 2024



Language as a Means of Exclusion: An Analysis of the Case Files on the Gomann Case

Part I

“Complaint Regarding a Violation of Price Regulations”

A complaint filed against Gomann for “violation of price regulations.” At the top of the complaint is a large red “Z,” next to it a stamp reading “Gypsy.” Below the heading, basic information is listed: last name, first name, place of residence, etc. Next to “stateless” is listed under nationality, followed in parentheses – and repeated twice, underlined in bold red – by the “Z” word once more. Looking at the complaint, it is striking that the focus is not on the alleged offense, but on the labeling of the accused as a “Gypsy.”

Fingerabdruck genommen*)
Fingerabdrucknahme nicht erforderlich*)
Person ist -- nicht festgestellt*)
Datum: 18. 3. 42
Name: [Redacted]
Amtsbezeichnung: Priv. Oberoff.
Dienststelle: 4 K.
Halle (Saale), am 18. 3. 1942
Zigeuner

Excerpt from the “Interrogation Transcript,” 1942

“Interrogation Transcript”

The first page of the interrogation transcript contains the personal information of Otto Gomann. At the top of the document, the “Z” word was added, underlined in bold, and without any reference to any of the categories. Presumably, the intention was to burden him with prejudice even before gaining insight into the full circumstances of the incident.

Der Polizeipräsident
Preisbehörde
Halle (Saale), den 4. März 1942
Anzeige wegen Verstoß gegen Preisvorschriften.
I. Zur Person:
Familienname des Beschuldigten: G o m a n n ,
Geburtsname bei Frauen: /
Vorname (Rufname unterstreichen): Otto
Lehste Wohnung (Ort, Straße, Nummer): Halle/Saale, Langestraße Nr. 9.
Stand (Beruf, Gewerbe): Geschirrführer
Tag, Monat und Jahr der Geburt: 18.2.1911
Ort der Geburt: Wanne/Westfalen
Verwaltungsbezirk (Kreis usw.): Stadt: Wanne-Einkel
Staatsangehörigkeit: Staatenlos (Zigeuner)
Zugehörigkeit zur NSDAP. seit: nein
Zugehörigkeit zu ihren Gliederungen: nein

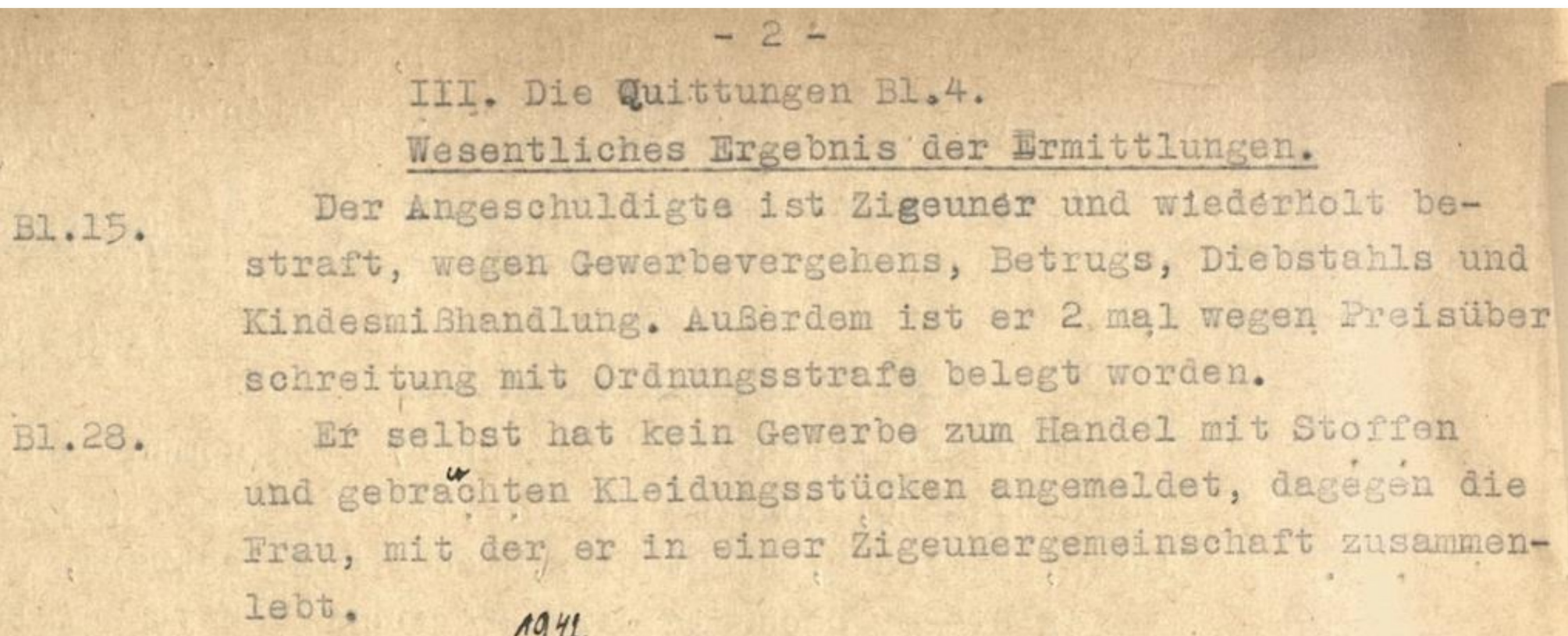
Excerpt from the “Notice of Violation of Price Regulations,” 1942

An Attempt at a Critical History of the Term “~~Gypsy~~” “

Part III

“Special Court Action”

The document lists the allegations against Otto Gomann. As early as the first line, it states: “The Horse-drawn Carriage Driver (‘Gypsy’) Otto Gomann from Halle [...].” Although this label has no apparent relevance to the alleged offense, it serves to categorize Gomann along racial lines. On the second page, the pejorative label is once again linked to his prior convictions. This creates the impression that there is a connection between his attributed group membership and criminal behavior. Anti-Roma prejudices are thus reinforced. The phrasing “[...] the woman with whom he lives in a Gypsy community [...]” extends the disparagement to his social environment. His living situation thereby appears to deviate from mainstream society and is associated with contemporary stereotypes of supposed primitiveness, uncivilized behavior, and criminality.



Excerpt from “Special Court Action,” 1942



Language as a Means of Exclusion: An Analysis of the Case Files on the Gomann Case

Part III

“Gomann Criminal Case, Summary”

The document repeatedly uses the discriminatory term in its arguments. This characterization is not relevant to the assessment of the specific charge. Nevertheless, it states, for example: “[...] this punishment of the defendant (a ~~Gypsy~~) for knowingly and unscrupulously exceeding the price limit out of gross self-interest [...].” Gomann’s racist label is here directly linked to the alleged offense. On page 6, the racist argument becomes even more evident. There, it is claimed that Gomann, “[...] precisely as a ~~Gypsy~~, [should have been] particularly careful to live strictly in accordance with German laws.” This imposes upon him, based on his attributed identity, a special duty to obey the law. Subsequently, a sentence exceeding the statutory minimum is demanded: “It was therefore necessary to impose a prison sentence on the defendant that had to exceed the minimum sentence [...].” The sequence of arguments suggests that the racist attribution influenced the sentencing. Furthermore, the severe sentence was intended to have a deterrent effect. Later on, the derogatory term reappears in a handwritten addition. In this addition, the reference to an alleged “criminal spirit” reinforces another anti-Roma stereotype. Criminality thus does not appear as individual behavior, but is racially attributed to an entire minority.

Excerpt from “The Gomann Criminal Case: Summary,” 1942

die Preise für Anzüge nicht kannte. Zu Ungunsten des Angeklagten mußte ferner berücksichtigt werden, daß er im Unterwerfungsverfahren kurz vorher bereits mit einer Ordnungstrafe wegen Verstoßes gegen die Preisvorschriften belegt worden war. Dies hat sich der Angeklagte nicht zur Lehre dienen lassen, obwohl er gerade als Zigeuner besonders darauf bedacht sein mußte, streng nach den deutschen Gesetzen zu leben. Irgendwelche besonderen Umstände, die zu Gunsten des Angeklagten sprechen könnten, sind nicht ersichtlich. Es war deshalb gegen den Angeklagten auf eine Zuchthausstrafe

