

Controversies Regarding Memorials to Romani Victims of National Socialist Violence in Burgenland (Austria)

During National Socialist rule, the majority of Romani Austrians lived in the province of Burgenland. Almost 90 per cent of the approximately 8,000 Burgenland Roma and Romnija fell victim to the National Socialist genocide (Samudaripen).¹ After the war, the violence experienced by the Romani population received hardly any attention; the Romani population was, and still is, subjected to discrimination. For decades, Romani victims were not publicly commemorated in Austria. It was not until the 1980s that this situation changed when two memorials were finally erected. In 1984, on the initiative of associations for the victims of National Socialism, the federal state of Burgenland dedicated a memorial in Lackenbach to the Romani victims of National Socialist violence. It was erected in the vicinity of a former National Socialist “Gypsy detention camp”, the largest internment, forced labour, and transit camp of its kind in Austria. The camp also served as a departure point for deportations to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. Following the suggestions of the Kulturverein österreichischer Roma (Cultural Association of Austrian Roma), an annual commemoration ceremony has been held at the site since 1990.² In 1989, a memorial to all local victims of National Socialism was inaugurated in Oberwart.³ Yet it was not until the twenty-first century that new memorials were erected. In recent years, one could almost speak of a “remembrance boom” in regard to Romani victims of National Socialist violence in Austria.

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Ursula K. Mindler-Steiner, University of Graz, Department of History, Heinrichstrasse 26/II, 8010 Graz, Austria; ursula.mindler@uni-graz.at

- 1 Ursula Mindler-Steiner, Vergessen und verdrängt? Die burgenländischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945, in: Oliver Rathkolb et al. (eds.), *Burgenland schreibt Geschichte 1921–2021*, vol. 1, Eisenstadt 2021, 323–335. The Romani word “Samudaripen” means “comprehensive mass killing”. It is the Romani official term referring to the National Socialist genocide on the Romani people.
- 2 <https://www.gedenkweg.at/anhaltelager-lackenbach#was-davon-blieb> (2 June 2023).
- 3 <https://igkultur.at/praxis/aktion-denkmal-ein-ort-der-erinnerung-oberwart> (22 May 2023); Stefan Benedik, Das Denkmal für die NS-Opfer von Oberwart/Felsdör/Erba, in: Richard Hufschmied/Karin Liebhart/Dirk Rupnow/Monika Sommer (eds.), *ErinnerungsORTE weiterdenken*, Vienna (in print).

The majority of Burgenland Roma and Romnija were sedentary. During the interwar period, there were 120 so-called “Gypsy settlements” in Burgenland, often located on the outskirts of villages.⁴ There are currently 24 memorials located in various towns in the province; a few of which exclusively commemorate the Samudaripen victims, while the majority are dedicated to all victims of National Socialism, including Roma and Romnija.⁵ The history of the discussion, conception and design of these memorials varies from place to place. In many cases, the history of a specific memorial was shaped by conflict, and it took years before a monument was eventually erected. In other places, memorials were built overnight. Very often, Romani initiatives to establish a place of commemoration were not welcomed by the local communities, and sometimes the involvement of experts was required to make such projects a reality. To illustrate these complex dynamics, in this paper I briefly present four cases, focusing on the memorials in the towns of Langental, Kemetten, Unterwart, and Oberpullendorf.

The degree of involvement of the Romani community in the creation of these memorials varied from project to project, culminating in differing approaches by different stakeholders, including different Romani organizations and representatives of the local administration. This complex and charged history of memorials dedicated to the genocide of Roma and Romnija raises several questions: whom do the memorials in fact address? Who can claim ownership of them, Romani people or the general public? Who should have the power to decide what they look like, Roma and Romnija, or also Gadje, that is non-Romani people? Is it in general ethically justifiable to speak on behalf of the entire Romani community? And if so, are only Romani representatives allowed to do so or also non-Romani representatives? In this essay, I introduce some of the discussions surrounding the establishment of memorial sites in the four towns mentioned above, by briefly summarizing the history of their development based on interviews with two important and well-known Burgenland Romani spokespersons: Manuela Horvath and Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath. In my research, I am interested in the history of memorials dedicated to Romani and Jewish victims in the Austro-Hungarian border region. I pay special attention to the role of different stakeholders in this process, and to questions of

4 Gerhard Baumgartner/Herbert Brettl, “Einfach weg!” Verschwundene Romasiedlungen im Burgenland, Vienna/Hamburg 2020.

5 Lackenbach (1984), Oberwart/Erba (1989), Kleinpetersdorf/Tiki Simeha (2006), Neudörfel (2006), Mattersburg (2007), Kleinbachselten/Tikni Boslina and Großhöflein (2008), Unterwart/Tenu Erba (2009), Goberling/Goblina (2014), Jois (2015), Holzschlag (2016), Mörbisch, Buchschachen/Buj-schocha and Jabing/Batschiba (2017), Kemetten/Kemetate and Sulzriegel (2018), Ritzing (2019), Pinkafeld/Pinkafa and Oberpullendorf/Uprutni Pulja (2020), Stegersbach/Schtega, Neusiedl am See and Pamhagen (2021) and Kemetten/Kemetate and Langental (2021). I thank Manuela Horvath and Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath for this information.

agency, in particular agency of members of the Romani community. The purpose of this essay, however, is not to present the final results of my research. Rather, drawing on the aforementioned interviews, I aim to raise questions that are intended to open up a debate and serve as starting points for further research on the memorialization of the genocide of Roma and Romnija in Austria.

Romani community organizations and stakeholders

Currently there are four organizations in Burgenland involved in Romani issues: Roma-Pastoral, Roma Service, Hango Roma (Voice of the Roma), and Roma Volkshochschule Burgenland / VHS Roma (Roma Adult Education Centre).⁶ The latter is led by a Rom and a Gadjo, the others by Romani people. Since 2016, Manuela Horvath has been the head of Roma-Pastoral at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Eisenstadt.⁷ She has also been a municipal councillor (running for the conservative Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) in Oberwart since 2017, and a city councillor since 2022. Horvath is the first Romani woman in Burgenland politics and also the only woman on the city council. She is a member of the National Advisory Council for the Romani Minority, which has been chaired by my other interviewee, Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath, since 2016. Gärtner-Horvath has also been the chair of the Roma Service for twenty years. I met both of them in May 2023 to discuss Romani memory politics in Austria and in particular in Burgenland. The interviews centred on their views on Romani memorials in Burgenland, both from their personal and professional perspectives as representatives of the Romani community.

When asked why they are committed to memorial work, Manuela Horvath explained that she thinks it is “necessary that we deal with our own history. We are now [in Austria] either the descendants of victims or of perpetrators. And we live peacefully together now, and it is our shared history.”⁸ Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath emphasized: “We have an obligation to the victims. [...] Humankind needs to know what has happened to us.”⁹ For him, it is important “to give them back their names. They have vanished.”¹⁰ These are some of the reasons why they both inter-

6 <https://hango-roma.at/> (25 May 2023); <https://www.pastoral.at/pages/pastoral/material/article/111749.html> (25 May 2023); <http://www.roma-service.at/> (25 May 2023); <https://www.vhs-roma.eu/index.php/de/> (25 May 2023).

7 <https://volksgruppen.orf.at/roma/meldungen/stories/3145729/> (25 May 2023).

8 Ursula Mindler-Steiner, interview with Manuela Horvath (born 1985), 20 May 2023, Transcription, 9.

9 Ursula Mindler-Steiner, interview with Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath, known as “Charly” (born 1962), 22 May 2023, Transcription, 5, 1.

10 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 5.

vene with the mayors of municipalities where there was a Romani population before the genocide and lobby for memorials. As Manuela Horvath stated: “Of course I hope that there will be more memorials [erected in Burgenland and Austria for the Romani victims of the genocide]. Meanwhile there is also this self-confidence or this demand from the representatives of the ethnic group – including me, of course – that we are heavily involved in memory activism and that we consider such memorials necessary.”¹¹ However, Horvath also points out that the involvement of Romani organizations takes different forms and that sometimes “we are just invited to the unveiling ceremony”¹² without participating in the decision-making process.¹³ She explains that her role on such occasions is usually limited to reading out a prayer in Romani. Horvath outlines the problem of differentiating between commemoration as a product and as a process: “In general, it is positive that there is a memorial plaque at the site. But, on the other hand, I always find it a pity that it was not possible to establish contact with the representatives of the ethnic community in order to find out: how do you see the whole thing?”¹⁴ Gärtner-Horvath also calls for better communication between stakeholders, “we should first talk more about the plans. [...] And everybody should be involved.”¹⁵

Langental: delayed implementation

Among the memorials that have been erected to date, the one in the municipality of Langental was somehow exceptional: despite a municipal council resolution in favour of a memorial, the town’s mayor refused to realize the project. The idea of erecting a memorial was first mooted as long as 30 years ago.¹⁶ Yet, the municipal council took until 2018 to pass a resolution on a monument for the Romani victims, which was also supported by Romani organizations. Nonetheless, the mayor refrained from implementing it, claiming that local Romani families had spoken out against the project.¹⁷ Much to Gärtner-Horvath’s regret their names were not disclosed to Roma Service,¹⁸ thus making it impossible for the organization to contact these families. However, a non-Romani student who wrote about Langental in

11 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 1.

12 Ibid.

13 <https://burgenland.orf.at/v2/news/stories/2822660/> (25 May 2023).

14 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 2.

15 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 4.

16 https://www.meinbezirk.at/oberpullendorf/c-lokales/einweihung-der-erinnerungsstaette-fuer-die-opfer-der-ns-diktatur_a5288149 (31 May 2023).

17 <https://www.progress-online.at/artikel/mein-vergessener-nachbar> (23 May 2023).

18 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 8.

a student union's newspaper obtained the phone number of one of the family members concerned and summed up the conversation: "He [the family member] wants peace. He is not interested in a monument."¹⁹ As there was no way of verifying this statement, it remains unclear whether the Romani families were simply not interested in a memorial or whether they had indeed spoken out against it. The situation changed when a new, younger mayor took office. In 2022, a memorial for all victims of National Socialism, most of them Roma and Romnija, was inaugurated in Langental.²⁰ In our conversation, Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath said he had noticed that younger politicians were more open to "coming to terms with the past."²¹ This is also true of other sites and monuments related to National Socialism. In Oberschützen, for example, it was only under the new (younger) mayor that it was possible to carry out a public project on the local National Socialist monument, which had been the subject of controversy for decades.²² This new 'openness' to memorializing the genocide is perhaps also related to the fact that most local National Socialist perpetrators or bystanders – contemporary witnesses in general – are no longer alive, and there is less resistance to projects dealing with the National Socialist past.

Kemetten: decades of controversy

One of the most controversial discussions about a memorial took place in the village of Kemetten in southern Burgenland. However, both Horvath and Gärtner-Horvath are convinced that Kemetten could today serve as a paradigm, exactly because of the way the memorial was finally realized after years of heated disputes. In 1999, a book was published on the Romani victims of Kemetten by Dieter Mühl.²³ Following this, Hans Anthofer, a non-Romani activist, promoted the idea of erecting a monument dedicated to the local Romani victims, supported by Romani activists Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath, then head of the Verein Roma,²⁴ and Rudolf Sarközi, chairman of the Kulturverein österreichischer Roma.²⁵ The municipality council declined the proposal in 2000 and again in 2003, claiming the local population was not in favour

19 <https://www.progress-online.at/artikel/mein-vergessener-nachbar> (23 May 2023).

20 https://www.meinbezirk.at/oberpullendorf/c-lokales/einweihung-der-erinnerungsstaette-fuer-die-opfer-der-ns-diktatur_a5288149 (25 May 2023).

21 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 8.

22 https://hdgoe.at/anschluss_monument (30 May 2023).

23 Dieter Mühl, *Die Roma von Kemetten*. Oberwart 1999.

24 This Roma association no longer exists.

25 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 7; <http://www.roma-service.at/dromablog/?p=8656> (20 May 2023).

of such a memorial.²⁶ This decision received a lot of (also negative) media attention and was strongly criticized, in particular by Austrian scholars and activists involved in memory politics. In 2006, the municipality council finally approved the proposal and commissioned a sculpture, but it was never put in place.²⁷ The mayor blocked its erection, justifying his decision with the need to be considerate of the upcoming state elections²⁸ and the “older generation”.²⁹ Ignoring a democratically made decision, he took advantage of his political power to stop the project.

In 2016, the Burgenland-based association RE.F.U.G.I.U.S. (Rechnitz Refugee and Memorial Initiative)³⁰ and the VHS Roma put up large posters on billboards in the village, advertising a newly created website for the virtual commemoration of the Kemetten victims.³¹ This campaign was received as quite controversial, as it once again drew (negative) public attention to the village. Part of the local non-Romani population took a defensive stand and felt personally offended by the campaign. Others feared negative effects for the local Romani community: although the posters had not been put up by its members, but by two associations, some were afraid that the campaign would be attributed to the Romani people and be seen as “grandstanding” and “nest-fouling”. In 2017, a new (younger) mayor was appointed in Kemetten. In 2018, a sculpture named *Geschichtskreis* (history circle) was installed in front of the municipal office. It informs about the most important historical events of the village and also mentions the local Romani history. But it does not serve as a memorial for the victims of the genocide.³² Moreover, no Romani representatives were invited to the inauguration. Again, Roma organizations demanded a monument for the Romani victims, which was opposed by the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ). Despite this, the mayor of Kemetten decided to go forward with the project, involving different stakeholders (Romani organizations, political parties) in the process. In 2021, a public survey was conducted in order to assess the level of local support for the memorial.³³ It turned out that the Kemetten people were in fact in favour

26 Lisa Rettl, *Erinnerungskultur im Burgenland*, in: DÖW Jahrbuch (2006), 79.

27 <http://www.roma-service.at/dromablog/?p=8656> (20 May 2023).

28 Ibid.

29 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 7.

30 RE.F.U.G.I.U.S. is very active in Burgenland memory and culture politics and some of its members are also working for VHS Roma such as Gadje Horst Horvath and Andreas Lehner, who are at the executive committees of both associations; <https://www.refugius.at> (31 May 2023).

31 <https://kurier.at/chronik/burgenland/roma-denkmal-seit-jahren-in-der-warteschleife/223.491.030> (18 May 2023); <https://www.gedenkweg.at/gedenkort-kemetten/gedenkort-kemetten> (18 May 2023).

32 Roman Urbaner, *Der blinde Fleck*, in: dROMa 56 (2019), 10–12.

33 <https://www.bvz.at/oberwart/buergerbefragung-roma-gedenkstaette-in-kemten-buerger-werden-befragt-kemetten-wolfgang-koller-buergerbefragung-roma-gedenkstaette-print-285372395> (22 May 2023).

of the monument.³⁴ Finally, in 2022, a memorial for all victims of National Socialism was inaugurated at the local cemetery.³⁵ Gärtner-Horvath believes that the fact that it took so long to build the memorial actually made it more sustainable because people had to deal with the history of their place over a longer period of time.³⁶ In doing so, he made clear that the process of erecting a memorial is often understood as more controversial, or even excruciating, than the memorial itself.

Placement of and inscriptions on memorials

The location of the Kemetten memorial plaque – the cemetery – also reflects the question of whom the commemoration actually addresses. Is the cemetery an appropriate place for a memorial to the victims of National Socialist violence? Who visits cemeteries? A cemetery (religious or public) is a place of remembrance of the dead. It is neither the place where the genocide took place nor a visible ‘public space’ in a narrow sense. Should, therefore, a memorial be better placed in a central location, where it is generally visible and accessible, not only to ‘insiders’? While a cemetery tends to be frequented only by members of the local population, a location in the centre of a village or town additionally appeals to visitors from the outside. At the same time, the question of the ‘type’ of commemoration remains central. Do the descendants of victims need a (retreat) place that allows for personal mourning, or should the commemoration be inscribed in the collective memory of the general public? Should it rather serve as a general reminder of the past and the victims? The inscription on the memorial is also of importance: in view of the fact that knowledge about the National Socialist period is decreasing, the question arises as to whether the phrase “victims of National Socialism” is sufficient to evoke the association that a memorial addresses a genocide. It needs to be considered whether more information is needed today if we want people to understand what actually happened to the victims.

This has been recognized and implemented in Lackenbach, for example. In Burgenland, the Lackenbach monument mentioned at the beginning of this contribution is the only memorial erected on the site of actual atrocities, in the vicinity of the former “gypsy detention camp”. Its inscription explicitly only refers to Romani victims, and clearly states that these people died there “under torture and deprivation and were deported to extermination camps”. However, the memorial does not

34 https://www.meinbezirk.at/oberwart/c-lokales/gedenkstein-fuer-ns-opfer-am-friedhof-im-gemeinderat-beschlossen_a4987876 (25 May 2023).

35 <https://burgenland.orf.at/stories/3150411/> (17 May 2023).

36 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 11.

explain in detail the history of the camp and the genocide. Thus, in 2021 the municipality of Lackenbach installed an information board next to the memorial to provide visitors with more information about the camp and the suffering and fate of its inmates.³⁷ Unlike the Kemeten memorial, the Lackenbach memorial is clearly visible in the village.

Interestingly, when I asked Emmerich Gärtner-Horvath and Manuela Horvath about their perspectives on these two memorials, their responses differed. Gärtner-Horvath argued that a monument in the cemetery was more significant for him personally: “Because this is the site where I give back to the victims, so to speak, the place [grave] which they do not have.³⁸ [...] This is where you can put your candles.”³⁹ Manuela Horvath, in turn, said: “Who will see this memorial plaque in the cemetery? [...] I would prefer to put up memorial plaques for the victims of National Socialism in central, visible, public, and well-frequented places in the villages. [...] This way, you sensitize people to the topic. After all, it is kind of hidden in the cemetery.”⁴⁰ This illustrates that even within the Romani community there are different approaches to the question of where memorials should be erected – in the centre of the village, which inevitably reminds the public of the atrocities of the past on a daily basis, or in a remote cemetery, where they facilitate a more personal remembrance of the dead.

Unterwart: putting up a memorial “overnight”

While Horvath and Gärtner-Horvath believe that Kemeten ultimately turned out to be a success story, both see the case of the town of Unterwart in southern Burgenland as a failed mission. In 2009, the municipality placed a memorial at the cemetery “overnight”.⁴¹ The inscription reads: “In memory of all the citizens of this municipality – in particular the Roma and Sinti – who were victims of totalitarian regimes. Unterwart.” Gärtner-Horvath deplores that “it was not unveiled, not inaugurated, nothing. They simply put it next to the graves of the Roma. And that was it. They [the municipality] simply did not want to deal with the issue.”⁴² Though many people were disappointed by this course of action, Manuela Horvath decided not to give

37 <https://www.burgenland.at/news-detail/gedenken-an-roma-und-sinti-opfer-in-lackenbach/> (27 May 2023); Ursula Mindler-Steiner, phone call with the municipal office of Lackenbach, 1 June 2023.

38 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 8.

39 Ibid., 13.

40 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 4.

41 Ursula Mindler-Steiner, phone call with Manuela Horvath, 5 June 2023.

42 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 2.

in and keep the memory of Unterwart Roma alive. In 2017, for instance, she organized a “little walking tour” for the Romani community. They walked from Oberwart to nearby Unterwart to the memorial, where they read the biography of a survivor, prayed, and lit candles. “This was nothing big, but it was really just for us,”⁴³ Horvath emphasized. The tour was not meant to be a public event that would attract media attention, but a personal commemoration for people from the Romani community.

Oberpullendorf: “catchy” photo and no local reference

The memorial in Oberpullendorf⁴⁴ is seen even more critically by the two Romani representatives. In 2020, it was inaugurated at the initiative of the VHS Roma and the local community, and is dedicated to all victims of National Socialism.⁴⁵ The memorial consists of a panel depicting a small girl, presumably Romani, from the Lodz ghetto, and a short inscription that is identical to the text of the Kemeten memorial, except for a few words: the name of the town is different, and in Kemeten there is no mention of “religious” resistance (“In memory of the women, men, and children from Oberpullendorf, who became victims of National Socialism from 1938 to 1945. They were Romnija and Roma, Jews, people who resisted for political or religious reasons, and people who were denied life due to illness and disability and who fell victim to National Socialist medicine.”) In Kemeten, the memorial shows the text and a QR code. Yet it is striking that the panel in Oberpullendorf also displays the VHS Roma logo. In general, memorials or commemorative plaques do not display any sponsors or logos. Here, its presence makes the panel look more like an information board than a commemorative plaque.

Andreas Lehner, (Gadjo) chairman of the VHS Roma and designer of the memorial, calls it a “hybrid” memorial: on the one hand, it is intended to be a commemorative plaque but, on the other hand, it is also an information board.⁴⁶ For Gärtner-Horvath it is incomprehensible why an unknown girl has been chosen as the subject of the memorial rather than a Romani local. He would have preferred the picture of a local Romani victim known to everyone.⁴⁷ Lehner points out that the memorial

43 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 5.

44 <https://www.gedenkweg.at/oberpullendorf/zur-erinnerung-an-die-oberpullendorfer-romnija-und-roma> (22 May 2023).

45 <https://www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/burgenland/termine/gondolipe-gedenken-in-oberpullendorf> (21 May 2023); <https://www.bvz.at/oberpullendorf/oberpullendorf-roma-maedchen-erinnert-an-opfer-des-ns-regimes-oberpullendorf-gedenkstaette-ns-opfer-kriegsdenkmal-225319069> (21 May 2023); <https://volksgruppen.orf.at/roma/meldungen/stories/3067678/> (21 May 2023).

46 Ursula Mindler-Steiner, phone call with Andreas Lehner (born 1961), 22 May 2023.

47 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 4.

is located in the public sphere next to the teacher training college. For him, “it was more important to address people on an emotional level, little children as victims of mass murder”.⁴⁸ Faced with criticism from Romani activists, he claims the VHS Roma “always involves the other [Romani] associations”.⁴⁹ Gärtner-Horvath strongly disagrees: “We should have been more involved. A girl was chosen whom nobody knew. [...] We were only partly involved. [...] We were not allowed to decide.”⁵⁰ Whether this is indicative of paternalistic, ignorant behaviour or simply a communication problem remains unclear. However, this case illustrates that still disagreement between Gadje and Romani activists on forms and content of commemoration exist.

“Involvement” or “decision-making power”

The quote above, which calls for greater involvement of Romani actors, reflects one of the fundamental issues of the politics of commemorating Romani victims in Burgenland. What exactly does ‘involvement’ mean in this context? Is it really about negotiations and dialogue between Roma/Romnija and Gadje on an equal footing? What is the value of a symbolic gesture such as the erection of a memorial without the inclusion of the Romani community in the process? Is it enough to invite Roma and Romnija to inaugurations of memorials and take pictures with them, but at the same time exclude them from the process that leads to the creation of the memorial? Who are the final decision-makers? And, again, who speaks on behalf of the Romani community as a whole? Who represents them?

In Burgenland, dissonances regarding questions of Romani representation are evident. The question is whether the ethnic group still needs non-Romani professionals to run Romani associations in 2023. Some Gadje, who have supported the community since the very beginning of the Romani empowerment movement, are still in leading positions within the Roma VHS. So far, much of the media coverage of the Roma VHS has only mentioned its two Gadje representatives; the fact that there were also Romani contributors has often gone unmentioned.⁵¹ Horvath has a clear opinion about this: “Together you are always stronger than alone. But the people in charge of working with the ethnic groups should be the members of the ethnic group [and not Gadje]. We have come so far that we can actively lead the work of the ethnic group. Thankfully, a lot came from outside in the 1980s. There were many people who supported the young members of the ethnic group and encouraged them. [...]

48 Phone call with Lehner.

49 Ibid.

50 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 2, 4.

51 <https://volksgruppen.orf.at/roma/meldungen/stories/3074923/> (22 May 2023).

So it is good if we continue to receive support from people who are not members of the ethnic group. But the decision-makers, the leading decision-makers who set the tone, that should be us. The Roma and Romnija.”⁵² Gärtner-Horvath reinforces this statement: “These people also have to let go. And I think it was nice at the beginning, just this support [from Gadje], because we simply had no idea. And it was also necessary. And now, it’s like the community has people who can say, okay, we can speak for ourselves, including the youth. [...] Of course, we are grateful that the support was there at the time. But I think now also the non-Roma have to learn to let go. And say, okay, we have to stop [...] being the guardians of this ethnic group. And that is very important. Because that is a point where we are restricted in becoming more self-confident.”⁵³

The future of memorial work

Both Horvath and Gärtner-Horvath plead for sensitization and “general awareness work at the local level”⁵⁴ since “memorial plaques and memorials will not do it alone”.⁵⁵ This is true for Romani and non-Romani alike. For example, Romani people who are not memory activists are rarely found at the inauguration of memorials. It is mainly politicians, activists from Roma organizations, and Gadje.⁵⁶ This raises the question of who the stakeholders of the memorials are addressing. “I believe this is a question we must begin to ask ourselves”, Horvath confirmed. “Of course it [the erection of memorials] is necessary. On the other hand, we cannot say that we need a place for commemoration if nobody from the ethnic group goes there. [...] You can’t expect us to cover the whole of Burgenland with memorial plaques [...] and then have no one stand by any of them. This won’t work.”⁵⁷ The future will bring new challenges for Romani organizations in Burgenland as well as for the Romani community itself. These challenges revolve around new forms of commemoration and the erection of monuments, but also around questions of power and agency, and how this will be allocated to, or negotiated between, Romani and non-Romani activists. The case examples described in this contribution show that, independent of academic debates, questions of empowerment and silencing are inherently at play in local attempts to memorialize political violence.

52 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 7.

53 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 3.

54 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 2; interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 1.

55 Interview Gärtner-Horvath, Transcription, 1.

56 Interview Horvath, Transcription, 5.

57 Ibid., Transcription, 5, 7.