

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context.
Mikhail Bakhtin

NON-JEWISH GROUPS PERSECUTED BY THE NAZI

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Eve Rosenhaft, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom

Interview by Ana Fonseca

This interview was originally published in an extended version by Radio Heteroglossia on March 2015. The original interview has been shortened for this publication to fit our new, condensed format.

Ana Fonseca: Thanks for listening to Radio Heteroglossia. I am Ana Fonseca and our guest today is Dr. Eve Rosenhaft. [Dr. Eve Rosenhaft](#) is a historian of modern Germany and a Professor of German Historical Studies at the [University of Liverpool](#) in the United Kingdom. She is also the Acting Director of the *Eighteenth-Century Worlds Research Centre* in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Liverpool. Today, we will be discussing the article written by Dr. Rosenhaft entitled, "[Blacks and Gypsies in Nazi Germany: The Limits of the 'Racial State,'](#)" published in 2011 in the *History Workshop Journal*, which through an analysis of the experiences of Black and Gypsy peoples in the Holocaust, provides insights into the nuances encountered between official and everyday perceptions of difference, and the variety of experiences of the holocaust by the different groups that were persecuted during the Nazi regime. Dr. Rosenhaft, welcome and thank you for joining us today.

Eve Rosenhaft: Thank you for inviting me.

Ana Fonseca: First, I would like to ask you about the reasons that prompted you to write this article and what would be the main ideas that people can take from it?

Eve Rosenhaft: The article brings together two areas of research that I have been following for several years. One is the experience of German Sinti, that is to say German Gypsies, in the holocaust; and the other is the history of the black presence in

Germany. So, the people we may call Afro-Germans in the twentieth century. In the case of German Sinti, my main interest is in the holocaust. In the case of Black Germans, the question of their experience in the holocaust came in in the context of a larger study of the career of a generation of African migrants in Germany and their children. I wrote the article to bring those two together because these are two groups of which people have been aware that they victimized during the holocaust without necessarily having all the details together in particular in the case of blacks. There had been nothing substantial published using German sources. They are other victims in the sense that their experience share certain qualities with that of the Jews and with each other and at the same time there are differences, and in fact it's sort of putting the similarities and the differences together that I thought was a good reason to bring my together my thoughts in an article.

Ana Fonseca: In regards to the experience of Afro-Germans during the Nazi regime, a historical context that is provided in your article to understand the experiences of some Africans in Germany during the holocaust refers to the colonial and post-colonial experiences in Africa. How did the history of the German colonization of some parts of Africa, encouraged or put limits to the Nazi persecution of some Africans in Germany?

Eve Rosenhaft: The core of the Black population in Germany in the twentieth century was made of the families of men who have travelled from the German colonies to Germany, most of them in fact during the colonial period. Germany had colonies in Africa from 1884 until 1919 and those colonies were, East Africa which is now Tanzania, South-West Africa which is now Namibia, Cameroon and Togo; and it was mainly from Cameroon and Togo, a bit more from East Africa, very few from Namibia, men who traveled to Germany in the colonial period to be educated and trained with the idea that they would go back to the colonies, and then some other people followed them simply as migrant workers. Now once they were in Germany after 1914, after the war broke out, they couldn't leave and a relatively small group of them then became trapped, if you'd like, or settled in Germany. They married German women, they had children and these are the people who then who become the Black Germans and fall into the Nazi net, if you'd like. The impact that has on their experience in National Socialism is that their status as former colonial subjects provides a certain amount of protection for them because Germany had lost its colonies in 1919 as a result of losing the First World War, and the Nazis had some hope that they may be able to recover the colonies. While they hoped to recover the colonies in Africa, which meant ensuring that Africans had a favourable opinion of them, the Nazi authorities tended to protect people who really were

Africans from the worst effects of discrimination. We can see examples of people who had lost their jobs under racial legislation given their jobs back because they represented this link to the colonies. It was also the case that when the Nazis wanted to carry on propaganda in favour of recovering the colonies, or to remind Germans of this “great colonial tradition,” what they did was to deploy formal colonial subjects or Black people who looked African to perform in a traveling show called the “Afrika-Schau,” and again what this meant was that during the 1930s Black Germans could earn some money and could be relatively protected as long as they continued to be the colonials that the Nazis wanted them to be.

Ana Fonseca: You point out in your article how certain moments of contradiction between official and everyday racial discourses did not guarantee safety but they did create spaces for negotiation. So in the case of Afro-Germans, can we consider the perception of them as former colonial subjects that you just explained, as an example of those moments of contradiction that created spaces for negotiation within the Nazi regime?

Eve Rosenhaft: Yes, I think that’s right and it is a space of negotiation between Black people and the authorities, and also among the authority. Until the early 1940s there was still men in government in Germany who have been associated with the colonial office before 1919 and who had real sympathy for these former colonial subjects who knew them personally.

Ana Fonseca: In the case of Gypsy peoples, were there some contradictions of the regime that they were able to exploit to negotiate their experiences during the holocaust?

Eve Rosenhaft: No, I don’t think there were and I think that’s one of the differences between the situation of Gypsies and Black people and one of the tragedies, a particular tragedy of the situation of Gypsies. They were almost entirely without allies. They had no international allies unlike the Jews and even Black people. When legislation directed against publicly consorting with people of colour was suggested in 1933 it had to be set aside because of protests from Africa and Asia and Latin America. In that sense, even Black people had international protectors. The Gypsies had nobody.

Ana Fonseca: And so Dr. Rosenhaft, can we talk about holocaust of Gypsies in the way we talk about the genocide of Jewish people that occurred during the Nazi regime?

Eve Rosenhaft: This is a scenario in which there is still a lot of controversy partly because we simply don't know the numerical dimensions of the genocide against Gypsies. There is no question that it was a genocide and there is no question that even if we look at German Gypsies alone, the intentions was to prevent there being another generation of German Sinti and Roma. Himmler had this vision of separating the pure Gypsies out and when in 1943 all the mixed-race Gypsies were deported to Auschwitz on Himmler's order, his vision was to keep pure-blooded ones alive on a kind of reservation, but the intention was not to allow them to go on reproducing and increasing in numbers. So even within Germany the Nazi vision is that there should be no Gypsies in the future. Once Germany invaded Eastern Europe, in the occupied territories is becoming increasingly clear that there are quite deliberate hunting down of Gypsies in a way similar to the deliberate hunting down of Jews that we see in the first years of the War, before the exterminations camps are set up there is mass murder in the countries of it. That said, as I said, because we don't nearly enough yet, we don't know the numbers that would say yes it was the same. The intention was genocidal, mass murder is certainly happening; the differences are in the details.

Ana Fonseca: Dr. Rosenhaft, thank you for your time and for sharing with us your knowledge and points of view about these issues.

Eve Rosenhaft: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to talk to you.

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