Fatal Coincidence: On the Root Causes of the Roma Holocaust

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Abstract

This article puts forward a broad interpretive scheme to understand the deep causes of the Nazi persecution of Roma. It is argued that a reference to the interplay of modernity and colonialism is required to understand how Roma were constructed as different, how this difference became racialized, and how projects to eliminate this difference were drawn up. The author presents Roma as the main actors in the two most important European historical processes: modernization and colonization. Various modern strategies targeting Roma are described, together with the impact of the colonial experience that allowed Roma to be seen as the "savage within", threatening the identity of German society. Finally, the similarities between colonial violence and persecution of Roma are brought into focus.

Keywords

- Antigypsyism
- Colonialism
- Holocaust
- Modernity
- Racism
- Roma

The Holocaust: Between Modernity and Colonialism

The arrival of the first Romani[1] groups in Western Europe coincided with the beginning of the modernization process and European colonial expansion. This coincidence had fatal consequences for Roma because, as newcomers, they were the main target of modern policies of control and submission, while a colonial mentality contributed to their racialization as essentially different and inferior. The intention of this article is to suggest a general interpretive scheme, in which the persecution of Roma can be understood through the interplay of two factors crucial for the history of Europe: the modernization process and colonialism. Neither of these two factors can separately provide a sufficient heuristic device but, taken together, they may contribute to an interpretation of the fate of the Roma that avoids monogenetic reasoning simplifications. This view was inspired by the "biopolitical approach" in the theory of the Holocaust, taken by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, or Zygmunt Bauman, according to which the Holocaust is the consequence of the logic of European modernity and its rational-bureaucratic attempt to control and homogenize populations. At the same time, the framing of the Holocaust in transnational history and in comparative genocide studies brought into focus possible links between the history of the Holocaust and the history of European colonialism (Stone 2006, 217). As a result, as Dan Stone (2010, 465–466) observes, "many historians have found the vocabulary of colonialism and imperialism fruitful for thinking about Nazi rule in Europe".

The link between colonial domination and the atrocities of the Holocaust was emphasized by anticolonial writers such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, and inspired Raphael Lemkin's concept of genocide coined in 1944, but the work in which it was elaborated most comprehensively was Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* published in 1951 (Hawkes 2011). It was Arendt's concept of the "boomerang effect", describing the application of European colonial policies and practices to European societies, which made her the "'godmother' of the colonial paradigm in Holocaust and genocide studies" (Kühne 2013, 341).

Both approaches, taken separately, have garnered meaningful criticism. The "modernity thesis" can explain the general background and course of the Holocaust, but not all its episodes, or the excess of murderous madness involved in it (Stone 2003, 252–257). The "boomerang effect" is useful in highlighting certain similarities regarding the Nazi idea of racial superiority and eastward expansion in Europe, but nevertheless remains an underdeveloped hypothesis (Gordon 2015, 274; Stone 2010, 466). However, if we take the "modernity thesis" and "boomerang effect" together, then we may see that each covers the shortcomings of the other.

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1 Following the recommendation of the Council of Europe (2012), I use the term "Roma" as an umbrella term that refers to groups which call themselves "Roma" and to groups which may prefer to use different self-appellations but have similar origins and/or socio-ethnic identity. I also use this term for the ancestors of today's Roma, regardless of what they called themselves and were called by majority. Sometimes, however, when reconstructing the approach of the majority, I may use the term "Gypsies" (in quotes) as part of the majority's discourse on Roma.

The modernity thesis helps us understand that the boomerang did not fly very far and that colonialism is actually an integral element of European modernity, so that the colonial impact is not an otherworldly visitor but the flip side of modernity. The boomerang effect helps us understand that the Holocaust was not only a matter of technology and rational bureaucracy without ethics, but also had roots in the darkest corners of human nature, ancient hatreds, and fantasies (Stone 2003, 253; Stone 2006, 224–230). Colonial domination opened the doors to the secret, and normally repressed, pleasure of inflicting violence – without being punished. The abrupt termination of the German colonial adventure after the First World War meant an undelivered promise to be a master,[2] a "stolen pleasure", and doubts whether the Germans are masters, are of the "right blood" (Theweleit 1989, 404). To be of the right blood, in this case, meant the right (and pleasure) to spill the blood of those whose blood was not right. But the Germans returned from the colonies dissatisfied: bloody colonial fantasies were not implemented, neither in the massacre of the Herero nor in the Boxer Rebellion, so the colonial murderous fantasy was again repressed, waiting to be unleashed when the time was right. A sense of stolen pleasure was felt in Germany, resulting in profiling "thieves of enjoyment" (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008): Jews, communists, and "Gypsies", who dared to exist and benefit despite, allegedly, not observing the rules of modernity.

This psychological mechanism had a sociological counterpart: racialization of social cleavages, according to which the concept of race society, as elaborated in the colonies, could serve as a solution to the domestic class conflict (Kühne 2013, 341). In this way colonialism can be understood as an overseas expansion of modern European biopower which, in the colonies, took on a clearly racist form and, as such, shaped thinking about European social conflicts, with the addition of usually repressed feelings of hatred and murderous zeal. This double conditioning characterized, as Dirk Moses (2002, 33–34) observes, the period of the "racial century" (roughly 1850–1950) in which colonial genocide was linked with population politics within European states. However, this linkage was created much earlier with Roma among its first victims.

1. Fatal Coincidence: Roma and Modernity

The first groups of Roma arrived in Western Europe precisely when the processes of socio-political modernization and colonial expansion were about to commence. This coincidence had fatal consequences for Roma. On the one hand, they became targeted by the disciplinary practices of the modern state and, on the other, were perceived as "internal savages", treated like people subjected to colonial domination. Therefore, Roma became victims of the new philosophy of the state, which focused on the control and unification of populations, employing racism more and more intensively to construct external boundaries and internal bonds.

Modern technology differentiated among subjects, imposed by the requirements of the modern division of labour and means of production. These requirements drove individuals to internalize new norms of

2 This is the reason colonial experience did not lead to internal atrocities in other colonial countries which lost their colonial empires gradually, without a simultaneous wartime defeat.

behaviour, rationality, responsibility, punctuality, and so on (Boyne 1991, 57). This process was successful thanks, to a great extent, to education, disciplinary practices, and self-discipline, in which the key role was played by knowledge, and legitimized as scientific. Modern power is, according to Michel Foucault (1995), power-knowledge, rational power which eliminates the spectacular excesses of traditional power and therefore acts more efficiently, subjecting populations to permanent surveillance, regulation, normalization, and documentation.

Modern forms of subjugation require localization of the subjects: making them situated in space in such a way that allows them to be controlled. Therefore, modern power consistently and decisively tried to reduce uncontrolled mobility, defining that as nomadism and vagrancy, which, allegedly, indicated an inability to adjust to the rules of modern society. As Michel Foucault (1995, 218) observed, "one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique". The emergence of modern nation-states strengthened this process through a stricter control of state borders, a monopoly on defining citizenship, and the granting of residence rights.

A necessary component of the modernization process was a distinction between what is "normal" (i.e. not punishable) and punishable "deviation" (Mark Philp 1991, 67). As a result, modern people strove to be good citizens by looking after their health, including mental health, and conforming to social rules. They rejected illness, weakness, and transgression, seeing them as alien to them and projected them onto those whom they perceived to be alien. This double alienation, in which we assign evil features to others, as we are afraid to observe them in ourselves, and so construct the others as strangers and – particularly importantly – medicalise their constructed otherness, is the basis for scapegoating. According to René Girard (1989), this attempts to solve the problem of social cohesion in a time of crisis. Social cohesion, threatened in a period of social modernization, can be reintroduced by projecting the internal conflicts within a group onto one between that group and "strangers", who are perceived as guilty, and responsible for the situation. "Strangers" can also be held responsible for the anxieties and fears we experience given the requirements of modern social existence. Because of their alleged threat to the modernization process, the very existence of "strangers" legitimizes coercive measures employed by modern authorities.

Those cast as the scapegoat are usually seen as not fully belonging to the community. They cannot, however, be entirely different, because then they could not act as the frame of reference for the majority: the group to which members of the majority compare themselves. Therefore, they form a liminal, ambivalent category of people who partly belong to the community yet are partly excluded. Such categories often emerge, or become particularly visible, in periods of social transformation, described by Girard as the "crisis of degree", the collapse of the existing order of social differences, which typically enables people to have stable relations with each other and thus strengthens their identities (Ben Amara 2004, 7). In a Europe undergoing the process of modernization, Roma constituted precisely such a category, or rather they were constructed as such in the process of alienation, as a reaction to the existential anxieties triggered by modernity.

This tendency was of course exploited by modern institutions of power, which channeled social discontent by focusing hatred and aggression onto concrete social categories, including Roma (McGarry 2017). This mechanism was used particularly in periods of social crisis and radical change. It was the basis of the anti-

Romani policies in Nazi Germany and now, at a time of crisis for neoliberal capitalism, Roma are cast as scapegoats to conceal structural inequalities and social injustice (Themelis 2016).

The main target of this scapegoating strategy was, however, not Roma but the majority population. This can be clearly seen during the modernization of the Austro-Hungarian empire in the eighteenth century, when members of the non-Romani majority started to identify Roma with all that they feared: exclusion, poverty, homelessness, hunger, and lack of existential security (Héra 2017). The policy of the forcible assimilation of Roma, initiated by Maria Theresa, was in fact part of the new philosophy of the state striving for total political regulation of social affairs, a side effect of which was to intimidate the majority.

But was it merely a side effect? Herbert Heuss has suggested that the anti-Romani policy of modern political institutions was not an end in itself but a pretext to educate all of society about post-Enlightenment values, such as productivity or respect for social order. "This law-and-order policy", writes Heuss (2000, 58), "which regularly sought to subdue and secure the 'Gypsies', was not directed primarily at the Roma, but at the members of the majority, for whom the 'Gypsies' were a demonstration of what they could expect if they refused to submit to the constraints of modern society." Roma were thus, for Heuss, "surrogate victims" of the modernization process.

Surrogate victimization is particularly visible when political authorities carry out a big project aimed at creating a perfect society. According to Arjun Appadurai (2006), attempts to implement a utopian project assume that the smallest deviation from the proposed ideal is, in fact, a failure. Therefore, the existence of even a numerically insignificant minority, which resists ideological regulations, challenges the system of power, and reveals the inefficiency of the project.

The phenomenon of surrogate victims is grounded in the ambivalent perception of Roma, who, on the one hand, are seen as largely similar to the majority (otherwise their fate would not serve as a warning) and, on the other hand, as radically different, part of a defensive mechanism which fortifies the existential security of the majority. In the process of surrogate victimization, the starting point – the similarity of Roma and non-Roma – must therefore be refuted by a statement to the effect that although Roma are similar to us, they cannot, by their very nature, become us. Such negation, just like the logic of modern antisemitism, was largely possible due to the racist discourse of nineteenth-century social sciences. As a consequence, the growing importance of the racist discourse corresponded with the abandonment of assimilation projects. According to the logic of racist discourse, if the culture and social life of Roma are determined by their biological constitution, if they are radically and essentially different, then they will not be changed by assimilation or acculturation. Roma people will continue to be Roma, regardless of the social conditions and cultural environment of their lives. Therefore, according to the racists, protecting societies from Roma necessarily meant their removal: from social isolation to marginalization and expulsion, to the destruction of Romani culture and their eventual physical annihilation.

Therefore, modern strategies of constructing and then processing Roma as other can be interpreted, with the help of terminology used by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955), as anthropophagic and anthropoemic. The anthropophagic strategy consists of enforced inclusion ("devouring") and dissolution of difference through procedures of forced assimilation, like those Roma subject to the policies of the Habsburg

monarchy in the eighteenth century. The anthropoemic strategy consists of removing ("vomiting") the difference and their carriers from society, which might mean marginalization or social exclusion, but also isolation and incarceration. It could be argued that the modern sequence of strategies targeting Roma proceeded from anthropophagic attempts to devour and digest them, thus making "them" – "us", to anthropoemic expulsion to beyond the borders of society, and then to a specific synthesis of both, into physical annihilation through sterilization and mass murder during the Nazi period.

A very early specific anthropoemic expulsion of Roma was in colonized areas used by colonizing states as a dumping ground for unwanted groups. Portugal pioneered this process in the first half of the sixteenth century by sending its Roma to African colonies. This deportation did, in a way, confirm the liminal, ambiguous status Roma had in premodern society: Africa was the destination for Roma born in Portugal, who therefore could not be legally removed from the country. This also means that not only did Roma have liminal status but also that the colonies formed such a liminal zone to which problematic categories of people belonged. In the seventeenth century Portuguese African colonies became a destination for Romani women, while men were, as a rule, forced to serve on the galleys. This gender segregation can be viewed as an early biopolitical strategy, in which colonialism played a role. The first deportations to Brazil took place in the second half of the sixteenth century, and a century later a relatively large population of Roma existed there. Yet, in 1754 the Governor of Angola, Álvares da Cunha, asked in a letter "to be sent many gypsies with their women, because they stand the climate better and they don't misbehave" (Bastos 2020, 11).

France deported its Roma, albeit not on a mass scale, to Martinique and Louisiana until the latter was sold in 1803. After the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), there was a wave of migration from German lands and the Netherlands to Pennsylvania that included Roma (Hancock 1987, 86–87). In England Roma were being deported to Northern America as early as the sixteenth century. Interestingly, there were two legal frameworks which served to persecute Roma. "Gypsies were … subjects", David Cressy (2016, 50) observes, "to two sets of laws, one that treated them as vagrants to be punished, the other as aliens to be removed. The state conceived of Gypsies as 'outlandish' immigrants with no business being in the King's dominions." In this specific legal situation, we may discern the liminal character of Roma in the fact that they could not be unambiguously defined but also in the synthesis of anthropophagic and anthropoemic strategies of modernity.

As we can see, deportation to the colonies was common practice for colonial powers, with the exception of Spain, where destinations were limited to northern Africa, as the American colonies were seen as insufficiently secure to admit people perceived as insecure and unreliable (Fraser 1992, Chapter 6). The situation in the colonies also had an indirect impact on countries which were not colonial powers: "By the 17th century", Sam Beck (1989, 57) observes, "African slavery in the Americas had already been and could have served as further ideological support for maintaining slavery in Romania."

The mechanisms of scapegoating (the social engine of the anthropoemic strategy) and surrogate victimization (which sets in motion anti-Romani anthropophagy) are closely related. The creation of scapegoats is basically a bottom-up process, although it can easily be manipulated or even initiated by the authorities. The mechanism of surrogate victimization, in turn, is usually instigated by the institutions of

power, but the social majority participates eagerly in this top-down process. Both assumed the ambivalence of Roma, subsequently resolved by assigning to them irremovable features: a fixed cultural essence or implicit biological nature. In the remaining part of this article, it will be argued that this characteristically modern negative attitude to ambivalence (Bauman 1991) evolved, in the case of Roma, into genocide because of genocidal racism first developed in the colonies and then transplanted to Europe and applied to the excluded categories, now seen as the "internal savages" of European society.

The concept of race does not necessarily have to be connected to alleged biological features of large social categories, which inevitably and invariably determine the behaviour of their members. In contemporary parlance, the term "race" evolved from its biological meaning to a "social-political construct" and eventually to "cultural difference" underlying "racism without race" (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). The perception of culturally different groups as races is possible thanks to the essentialization of cultural difference: treating it as an objectively given and unchangeable essence, which necessarily and totally determines the actions of members of a cultural group and is manifested in them.

According to Ivan Hannaford (1996, 17), race as a concept, which describes particular cultural features, is not new and has always been a part of racism, understood as a conviction that "there were immutable major divisions of humankind, each with biologically transmitted characteristics." The perception of reality in racial categories was, according to Hannaford, in opposition to the Greek political idea of seeing people "not in terms of where they came from and what they looked like but in terms of membership of a public arena" (*Ibid.* 12). Politics was therefore the opposition of nature and meant the liberation of human beings from the determinism of *physis*, subjecting them to *nomos*: the law that people make and can change (*Ibid.* 21).

Politics, understood as the acceptance of collective conventions as binding in a given time, also meant an entrance to history. Race, in turn, is forever, does not change, and is therefore an ahistorical category. If the concept of race is used to denote a category of people, then that means that its members are not perceived as people of history. Race is eternal and immutable, something that does not unfold over time. The concept of race, as applied to groups such as Roma, implied their exclusion from history and inscription in the order of nature, and therefore they are perceived as unable to change, evolve, and progress.

2. From Colonialism to Racism at Home: Redemptive Antigypsyism?

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries the increasing importance of understanding the world through racial categories was conditioned not only by the medicalization of politics, the development of scientific racism, and practical exercises in eugenics, but also, perhaps predominantly, by colonial experience. This process can be seen, in terms of Hannah Arendt's concept, as a movement from race-thinking to racism. Race-thinking is a very general tendency to perceive the world in terms of the fixed essences of a predominantly biological nature, which determine the lives of whole categories of people. Supported by the success of the theory of evolution and translated into

the cultural configuration known as "Darwinism", it offered a language used in various class conflicts and nation-building processes; it contributed to thinking in tribal terms but did not necessarily mean segregation or exclusion.

Racism does draw on race-thinking, but there is no hard and fast logic leading from one to the other. According to Arendt, it is imperialism and colonial domination that produce racism, while using race-thinking as a resource. "It is highly probable", writes Arendt (1973, 183–184), "that the thinking in terms of race would have disappeared in due time together with other irresponsible opinions of the nineteenth century, if the 'scramble for Africa' and the new era of imperialism had not exposed Western humanity to new and shocking experiences. Imperialism would have necessitated the invention of racism as the only possible 'explanation' and excuse for its deeds, even if no race-thinking had ever existed in the civilized world. Since, however, race-thinking did exist, it proved to be a powerful help to racism."

More recently this argument has been advanced, for example, by Isabel V. Hull and Brian Vick who follow Arendt and claim that it was colonialism that developed racist discourse in terms of which European states started to see first the colonized peoples, and then the problems of their excluded minorities at home. The marginalization of these minorities was thus legitimized in the colonial categories of the "white man's civilizing mission". Colonies became a resource of images and practices of a racist character which, subsequently, were employed at home towards the societies of the colonizing states. The first part of this statement is evidenced by Brian Vick (2011), that even in the 1870s German travellers, describing the social organization of African peoples, were using the same concepts used in Europe: "states", "kingdoms", "nations". This linguistic convention changes at the end of the nineteenth century when the dominant description category becomes "tribe". This change occurred largely in the colonies: Analysis of memoirs of soldiers in the German colonial army reveals that their language only acquired an openly racist character during their service in the colonies (Hull 2005).

The influence of colonialism on the perception of Roma is clearly visible. In 1861, Emil Reinbeck was comparing Roma "with Indians and other 'peoples' who attempted to 'fight against civilization' but were 'sooner or later to lose this fight'. They belonged to 'uncivilized, savage races', being a 'passage or an intermediate stadium between animals and human beings'" (Wippermann 1997, 113). Half a century later, in 1911, Hermann Aichele, a high-ranking official in the German police, in a book entitled *Die Zigeunerfrage mit besonderer Berücksichtung Württembergs* [The Gypsy question with particular reference to Württemberg], presented the thesis that "the Gypsies have no history". This "automatically placed them on the same cultural level as the other 'non-historical' *Naturmenschen* of the extra-European colonial world" (Fitzpatrick 2015, 179).

Even one of Europe's greatest minds, Edmund Husserl – who was himself targeted by the Nazis because of his philosophy – asked the following question in a lecture given in 1935 in Vienna:

> We may ask, 'How is the spiritual image of Europe to be characterized?' This does not mean Europe geographically, as it appears on maps … In the spiritual sense, it is clear that, to Europe belong the English dominions, the United States, etc., but not, however, the Eskimos or Indians of the country fairs, or the Gypsies, who are constantly wandering about Europe.

> Clearly the title Europe designates the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity – with all its aims, interests, cares, and troubles, with its plans, its establishments, its institutions (Husserl 1965, 155).

In this way Roma were symbolically expelled, by the philosopher, to beyond the borders of Europe, being not quite up to Europe's "spiritual life and [a] creative activity". Traces of colonial mentality are visible here, in identifying European spirituality with the area under control of the Europeans, while Roma were included in the ranks of non-European "natives" relegated to country fairs or nomadic itineraries.

Alfred Dillmann, a leading German "expert" and the police officer in charge of the "Gypsy question", was the author of the infamous *Zigeunerbuch* (Gypsy book), published in 1905. This served as a manual for the persecution of Roma; he also believed that "Gypsies" in the course of their history lost any specific features which distinguished them from other groups (Fitzpatrick 2015, 178). This perception, which did not stop Dillmann from designing persecutory schemes specifically targeting Roma, soon started to change in Germany, partly because of a transfer of the "civilizational mission" practiced in the colonies on certain groups in the home countries of the colonizers. In Germany these were the unemployed and various groups described as vagabonds or work-shy. They started to be described in language that differed little from the rhetoric of the overseas "civilizational mission" – as strangers and savages (Conrad 2012, 150).

Terms such as vagabonds or work-shy were commonly applied to Roma by the German authorities; they were perceived as strangers, not part of the Aryan/Nordic race and national community. This found practical expression in the implementation decrees for the Nuremberg Laws. In this way the features that characterized the social situation of Roma were linked to those defined in racist discourse and viewed as genetically transmitted peculiarities of a "Gypsy nature". Any attempts to subvert these perceptions, resist persecution, or protect one's agency were treated as an indication of innate barbarity and a threat to the politically instituted homogenization of German society (Feierstein 2012).

The processes that occurred in Germany, leading to the genocide of Roma, expanded later, radicalizing the hidden philosophy of the modern state with an idea of standardization, homogenization, and exclusion, of those who refused to be subject to the "civilizational mission" aimed at the modernization of European societies. This mission was subsequently developed in the colonies where it had been supported by racist discourse. Radicalized in connection with colonial experience, it was again applied in Europe, to deal with marginalized groups who were treated as "internal savages" or "savages within".

The concept of the "savage within" is used in European social anthropological historical analyses and – more generally – the European approach to "otherness" (Kuklick 1991). It also forms part of Klaus Theweleit's analysis of the psychological structures of Nazi men. It is the weak, "chaotic interior", the "primitive man" inside the healthy mind that results from "racial miscegenation", with inferior primordial psychological layers corresponding to the "primitive mentality" of contemporary "savages" and causes psychical disintegration that weakens a man and deprives him of his "body armor" (Theweleit 1989, 75–76). This psychological metaphor can be translated into sociological language and applied to a German society influenced by a colonial mentality. In this language, Roma (among other marginalized

groups) were cast in the role of the "savage within", an inferior group of strangers that nevertheless exists within our society and therefore problematizes the status of the majority. Such groups must be colonized, otherwise the majority's role as "colonizer", that is, as a racially and culturally superior group, will be undermined. The persecution of minorities can therefore be understood, from the perspective of the majority, as an act of self-defense and protection of the racially perfect state. That is why violence against subversive minorities is, from the point of view of the majority, redemptive: a defense of racial perfection.

This psycho-social fear of "miscegenation" evolved in Germany in close connection with colonial experience. In 1913, Eugen Fischer published a book, *Die Rohoboter Bastards und das Bastardisierunsproblem beim Menschen* [The Rehoboth[3]bastards and the problem of human bastardization], in which the mixing of races was strongly criticized. This book was based on information from South-West Africa (present-day Namibia) and, according to Henry Friedlander (1995, 11–12), it influenced the content of the Nuremberg Laws which, amongst other things, banned marriage between Romani and non-Romani Germans.

The German debate about mixed marriages in the colonies should be placed in a broader context of uncertainty in regard to the line separating Germans from natives, and to fears associated with the emergence of a possibly disloyal "creole" category, disrupting the neat race division. But the problem was associated not only with practical issues in the exercise colonial rule but also an existential issue: fear of German identity dissolved via contamination by alien genetic features. This fear stemmed from the Lamarckian idea "that acquired characteristics could be passed on and become hereditary. According to this theory, 'going native' would, eventually, mean the end of the German people" (Conrad 2012, 119).

These, by and large, biological and psychological fears can be translated into an anthropological conception of the "other" which is more threatening if it has a place within the threatened community and is not radically different from its members. In this way Saul Friedländer (1999, 211–213) explained modern antisemitism, which, in his opinion, focused not on the difference between Jews and non-Jews, but on Jews' adaptability and obliteration of any boundaries. The problem of what is most threatening to the racist majority – a radically different group, or one which is not clearly different and therefore easily integrated – re-emerged in Nazi Germany in connection with Roma. A group of Nazi officials and race scientists believed that "pure blood Gypsies" were more dangerous because they represented, in a concentrated form, inferior racial characteristics, while another group claimed that "mixed blood Gypsies" were more dangerous because they integrated with German society and spread their racial inferiority through mixed marriages (Trumpener 1992).

Legal regulations followed. In 1905, a year after the Herero war, a decree was issued in German South-West Africa "forbidding marriage between German men and African women (the reverse never occurred) and even annulling any such marriages already in existence" (Conrad 2012, 118). To prevent sexual relations

3 Rehoboth, today a city in Namibia, was historically the name given by missionaries to a site inhabited by the Nama people. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, emigrants from the Cape Colony, of mixed Nama and European ancestry, moved there. After 1884, when South-West Africa became a German colony, this group, called *Basters* (bastards in Afrikaans), helped German colonial units quell Nama resistance to colonial rule.

between colonizers and colonized, Germany developed a programme of "women's colonial schools" which prepared German women for life in the colonies, where they were expected "to prevent the male-dominated German colonial society from going native" (*Ibid.* 120).

As one can see, the measures that applied to the colonized people of Africa were similar to those targeting Jews and Roma in Germany and can be understood in a similar way. Saul Friedländer, in his attempt to understand the roots of anti-Jewish hatred, coined the term "redemptive antisemitism"

> which was born from a fear of racial degeneration and a religious belief in redemption. The main cause of degeneration was the penetration of Jews into the German body politic, German society, and the German bloodstream. Germanhood and the Aryan world were on the path to perdition if the struggle against the Jews was not joined; this was to be a struggle to the death. Redemption would come as liberation from the Jews – by their expulsion or possibly their annihilation (Friedländer 1997, 85).

It seems plausible to argue that the sources of hatred directed at Roma were similar and we may speak of redemptive antigypsyism (Szombati 2018). Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why such a small and harmless group caused such great concern and engaged so many people and institutions working full time to produce a "solution to the Gypsy question". But, if we perceive Roma as the "savage within" whose very presence, even if minimal, constitutes an existential threat to German identity and the "Aryan race", which could be destroyed if contaminated by close encounters with inferior "Gypsies", then we can understand anti-Roma measures as part of a redemptive crusade to protect the existence of Germans even if they were never really threatened by Roma.

3. Internal Colonialism and Genocide

In general, the concept of internal colonialism depicts the synthesis of modern power and colonial domination, which turned out to have fatal consequences for Roma. Internal colonialism can be understood as an element of the political and economic integration of European states that affected the situation of smaller national, ethnic, or territorial groups, which did not develop their own statehood and functioned within the structures of power of stronger political organisms. This process took place simultaneously with the overseas expansion of European states and was a result of the attempt at political and economic control of populations and resources.

Although the concept of internal colonialism has been applied mostly to territorial groups, it could also be used to describe strategies targeting groups with no territory of their own. Territoriality is a tool of political manipulation: it can be politically instigated when a group is, for example, forcibly settled in a given place or, even, when a political decision makes no place accessible to a group. Groups which do not have an opportunity to shape and control space are therefore an easy target for colonizing practices of a discriminatory nature, through which the dominant majority holds them back, legitimized by discourses it controls (Hechter 1999). An excellent illustration of internal colonialism is the politics of modern states towards Roma, often based on regulating Roma access to given spaces and placing them on marginal and

dangerous sites that nobody is interested in. Along with their spatial marginalization, the modern state perpetuates the stereotype of Roma as nomads, in this way justifying their exclusion (McGarry 2017).

Both processes could be observed in the colonies, including in German South-West Africa. Living areas for local populations were limited to reserves, located in sites of no agricultural or industrial value, while the military strategy of German colonial military units, during the Herero-German war of 1904, included pushing the defeated Herero to the Kalahari Desert where climate, hunger, and lack of water concluded the genocide. This process of "territorialization of race" also included increased control over the mobility of colonized peoples, treated "as a danger to the project of civilization" and "linked to amorality" (Hoffmann 2010, 166). After the Herero war the colonial administration introduced identity cards to control the movement of people outside the "tribal areas" designated for them (Conrad 2012, 110). These practices corresponded to the control of Roma mobility in Europe, which included the introduction of identity cards and bracketing of itinerant life with criminality.

These processes also coincided with a shift "to a more biologically determinist view of racial difference as something that could not be changed" (Vick 2011, 16) that took place in Europe around 1850. This view, partly formed in the colonies and later transferred to Europe, helped Germany legitimize not only the treatment of minorities defined as racially inferior but also the expansion to the east to compensate for the loss of colonies. Colonial imagery provided additional support to the already existing mandate to "bring civilization and progress to the Slavic peoples" (*Ibid.*). This imperial mentality was at the core of a vision of history which dominated not just Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a largely colonial vision, in which nations possessing culture and civilization become the actors of history by colonizing others. According to A. Dirk Moses (2008, 36), Hitler was thinking in precisely those categories, and the murderous policy of the Third Reich can be seen as a reaction to Germany's loss of status as a colonial state, which led to internal colonialism and the application of colonial racist divisions in domestic politics.

A colonial history was strongly embedded in German collective consciousness and was disseminated at various sites, such as geographical societies, colonial clubs, universities, and popular culture hubs, familiarizing the average citizen with the racist vocabulary used in the colonies. This commonly known and accepted concept, originating from the colonies, contributed to the development of Nazi language and was facilitated by the lived experience of colonial actors, institutional memory, and collective imagination (Zimmerer 2005, 18; Rothberg 2009, 104).

Apart from family ties (Göring's father was a colonial official), there were also personal connections between colonial administrators and the military, on the one hand, and Nazi officials, on the other. Many officers and soldiers from German colonial units in Africa later joined the *Freikorps* (paramilitary right-wing militia units) where they met people who become future leading figures in the Third Reich (such as Bormann, Frank, Heydrich, Keitel, Strasser, and others) and who, together, fought violently against leftist movements and workers' uprisings following the First World War (Olusoga and Erichsen 2010, 284–287). The link between German military involvement in the colonies and the Nazi movement was symbolized by the infamous brown shirts of the SA, the *Sturmabteilung* or Nazi storm troopers. They were, in fact, uniforms manufactured for a German colonial military unit, the *Schutztruppe* which never got to South-

West Africa because of transport problems during the First World War. The SA acquired them thanks to one of the former officers of colonial military units, and later *Freikorps* commander, who was friends with Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA (*Ibid.*, 292).

German colonial violence in Africa in many ways is linked to, or resembles, the Holocaust, including the genocide of Roma. First of all, the scale of the genocide: In German campaigns against Herero, approximately 85 per cent of this group was killed or died of hunger, lack of water, and exhaustion. Second, the Germans intended the genocide of the whole group, including women and children, although this developed in the course of military events and interactions between the main actors. As we read in the orders of General Von Trotha, the commander of German colonial military units: "[w]ithin the German boundaries every Herero, whether found armed or unarmed … will be shot. I shall not accept any more women and children. I shall drive them back to their people, otherwise I shall order shots to be fired at them" (Dugard 1973, 26). This order was known as the *Vernichtungsbefehl*, the extermination order. Third, after the extermination order was revoked, the policy of extermination by bullet and famine was replaced by confining Herero, mostly women and children – following British policy in South Africa – in enclosures known as "concentration camps", located in bigger towns and providing forced labour. This was in 1904, and twenty-five years later the first Municipal Gypsy Camps were opened in Germany; in 1933, the first Nazi concentration camp at Dachau started operations.

Concluding Remarks

The roots of Nazi persecution of Roma can be found in the xenophobia Roma have experienced since the beginning of their presence in Europe, but, most importantly, in the radical change in perception of this group, traced back to the beginning of the modernization of European societies which was linked to the emergence of antigypsyism ideology. In accordance, Roma began to be treated as people who, by their very existence, subverted the values of modern culture. Their way of life became, in the dominant culture, synonymous with otherness and backwardness, a "social problem" or "pathology" which needed to be eliminated via forced assimilation. Over time, however, Roma culture and way of life started to be perceived as biologically conditioned, and Roma were seen as a different, inferior race, which could not be changed by assimilation. This was the beginning of the process – intertwined with colonialism and the application of its practices in Europe – which led to the genocide committed against Roma. However, one should avoid thinking in terms of a simplified causal relation (Hawkes 2011). Acts of genocide, including the Holocaust, do not have one single, universal cause and often depend on contingent factors and local constellations of ideas and interests. I would, therefore, say that the interrelation of modernization process mechanisms and colonial expansion significantly increased the probability of the mass extermination of Roma, and I intend to designate this increased probability as a "root cause" of Romani genocide.

The approach proposed here may contribute to the study of the Roma Holocaust and to the comparative analysis of the fate of Jews and Roma. The focus on the root cause of the Roma Holocaust, developed in this paper, that is the specific synthesis of modernization and colonialism, reveals the commonality of the fate of Roma and Jews in a much better way than a study of more direct causes and forms of

persecution. The latter have often been exploited by authors who claimed different treatment of Jews and Roma by the Nazis, with a clear intention to exclude Roma from the ranks of Holocaust victims (Bauer 1978; Lewy 2000). They were mostly produced within an intentionalist paradigm, which assumed that there was a murderous intention behind Nazi crimes, expressed in a decision by the highest authority to kill all members of a target group, subsequently passed down the bureaucratic chain of command and implemented without any hesitation, or change of the original idea. This "intentionalist approach" was followed by the "uniqueness debate" in which authors, such as Bauer and Lewy, assumed that the presence of such an intention uniquely characterized the Nazi genocide of Jews. Their views have been challenged (Hancock 1989; Wipperman 1997), who argued that the Nazi intention included Roma as well as the handicapped and other minority and religious groups.

In the 1980s the intentionalist paradigm of the general historiography of the Holocaust was confronted by a structuralist or functionalist one. Within the new approach, it was argued that there was no evidence of a single decision to explain the murder of the Jews and that the Holocaust "emerged out of the actions of many individuals and state agencies" (Stone 2003, 67), often incoherent and improvised according to the contingent dynamics of the conditions of war and the institutional development of the organizations involved. All these processes occurred, of course, "within the framework of a universally accepted racism and antisemitism driven by the Third Reich's leadership" (Stone 2003, 69), but this general framework was differently concretised at various times and places.

This structuralist or functionalist paradigm which, in its moderate form has dominated the field of Holocaust research, becomes gradually more visible in reflections on the Roma Holocaust. Growing numbers of authors recently admit that "[f]or the reconstruction of persecution it is not the most important thing whether Hitler perceived Sinti and Roma as sufficiently important to be mentioned in his speeches … Particular steps of persecution can be discerned not on the level of declarations and orders but only at the level of praxis" (Fings 2015, 99).

According to Michael Zimmermann (1996) and Michael Stewart (2007), to mention two names only, this praxis was a result of a complicated process, in which old anti-Gypsy measures and policies merged with Nazi regulations based on racist ideology. The process was largely inconsistent and de-centred, although based on a consensus of its perpetrators. The genocide took different forms and intensity in the Third Reich, the occupied territories, and in areas controlled by allies of Nazi Germany. This situation calls for a revision of the intentionalist, top-down approach, to genocide as a consistent implementation of a preconceived plan. The Nazi persecution of Roma cannot be fully understood as either a consistent implementation of a centrally conceived murderous intent or as a contingent side effect of relations between different sectors of the Nazi apparatus of power but rather as a multilayered phenomenon that was not governed by a single mechanism. Instead, we can speak of the specific penetration of racist stigma in situational killing escalation, or of an interplay of the centre (orders from Berlin) and the periphery (initiatives from below).

As a result of Nazi policies, whatever their nature, Roma suffered terrible human losses, many communities were wiped out, and we have good reasons to believe that their final fate would have been annihilation, had the military situation suited Nazi policy in this respect (Rosenhaft 2011). In the final instance,

despite the existing differences of fate, Roma, together with Jews, were killed because they "belonged to a biologically defined group", members of which "could not change their condition to escape death" (Friedlander 1995, XII–XIII).

The interpretive hypothesis presented in this article aims at better understanding the relationship among modernity, colonialism, and the Holocaust, including the genocide of Roma. It argued that the project of modern society developed in Europe was tested in a colonial situation, where it acquired certain irrational elements of primordial hatred, as well as an initiation of genocidal violence, and as such was transferred back to Europe. In this version of the "boomerang effect", modernity and colonialism mutually mediate their impact on the Holocaust, and the colonies served, in a way, as a laboratory for modern societies: relatively empty spaces where Europeans could experiment at will (Conrad 2012, 142–143).

Modern strategies applied to Roma could be either anthropophagic (like assimilation) or anthropoemic (like expulsion). The first of them engendered the mechanism of surrogate victimization, while the second was responsible for the mechanism of scapegoating. Both strategies acquired a clearly racist dimension, partly thanks to the colonial experience which consolidated European racism. This colonial racialization of Roma as the "savage within" had several consequences. First, it caused existential anxiety about the possibility of racial contamination of "German blood" and, therefore, the possible disappearance of German identity. So, colonial regulations prohibiting mixing of races were later employed in Germany and affected the life of many Roma. It is argued that these regulations coincided with the racist approach to Jews in German society, taking the form of "redemptive antisemitism", that is, antisemitism pretending to be German culture and society's self-defense against contamination and disappearance. It is also argued that, similarly, one can speak of "redemptive antigypsyism", to explain the disproportionate interest in Roma in Nazi Germany and the irrational allocation of huge resources to "solve the problem" of a small and harmless minority.

Finally, the article outlines the similarities between German colonial experience and the practice of the Roma Holocaust. As a result, we see the presence of colonial racism applied to Roma at home, in the form of domestic colonialism, personal continuity between colonial officials and perpetrators of the Holocaust, and the similarity between colonial violence and persecution of Roma. This article conclude that to fully understand the Roma Holocaust one must refer to the European, and particularly the German, colonial experience.

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