

Expellees Tell Tales: Can Racism Explain Vampire Stories in Postwar Germany?
Monica Black, Furman University

A proposal for the conference “Beyond the Racial State”
Indiana University, Bloomington
October 22-25, 2009

In 1949, a man named Leopold Rohrbacher published an article in a newsletter for ethnic-German expellees under the arresting title “Murderers Who Guzzle the Blood of Their Victims.” In it, Rohrbacher described a form of mental derangement among those whom he referred to as “Tito partisans”—fighters who had opposed the German army in Yugoslavia and then helped to expel ethnic Germans from their homes there in the wake of Nazi defeat in WWII. Since the expulsion, Rohrbacher reported, these individuals would suddenly fall into demonic and convulsive states during which they cried out for “Schwabenblut.” For expellees, these symptoms were evidence of what they called “partisan sickness”; for Rohrbacher, they were “nothing more than the Mark of Cain for the horrific and bloody deeds” of Yugoslav partisans. After 1945, folklorists diligently collected tales expellees told about their experiences—like legends of “partisan sickness.” Like other genres of expulsion story, tales about partisan sickness appear to have been as much related to the trauma of expulsion as they were an attempt on the part of expellees to feel a belated (if only proximate) form of revenge over those whom they held responsible for pushing them out of their homelands. Though legends of partisan sickness divided the world into an “us” (German expellees) and a “them” (Yugoslav partisans), and ascribed bestial characteristics to the latter, it is not clear that the adoption of racial ideology under Nazism by ethnic Germans in eastern Europe can fully explain a mental world capable of conjuring images of “extermination troops (Ausrottungstrupps)”—as Rohrbacher called the partisans—who not only killed their German enemies but drank their blood. This point becomes all the more intriguing when we consider expellees’ reports indicating that the partisans themselves claimed to have learned to drink blood from “the fascists.”

What do these modern-day vampire legends represent? What were they trying to explain after 1945? Can they simply be reduced to expressions of popular racial thinking? This paper will take a historical-ethnographic approach to answering these questions, by attempting to embed stories of partisan sickness in a popular-cultural continuum that predates Nazism but which is at the same time sensitive to the context of war, violence, and genocide, the experience of expulsion for the German populations of Eastern Europe, and the longer-term tendency to accuse wartime enemies of ritualized forms of atrocity.

Normal

Normal

Default Paragraph Font

Default Paragraph Font

Table Normal

Table Normal

No List

No List

Envelope Return

Envelope Return

Envelope Address

Envelope Address
Unknown !
Times New Roman
Times New Roman
Symbol
Symbol
Bell MT
Bell MT
Hoefler Text
Hoefler Text
Beyond the Racial State
Beyond the Racial State
Monica Black
Monica Black
Furman User
Furman User
Beyond the Racial State
Monica Black
Normal
Furman User
Microsoft Word 11.3.5
Furman University
Beyond the Racial State
Root Entry
1Table
1Table
WordDocument
WordDocument
SummaryInformation
SummaryInformation
DocumentSummaryInformation
DocumentSummaryInformation
CompObj
CompObj
Microsoft Word Document
Word.Document.8