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From “Native Policy” to Exterminationism:
German Southwest Africa, 1904, in Comparative Perspective

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I, the great General of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Herero people.

The Herero are no longer German subjects The Herero nation must . . . leave the country. If they do not leave, I will force them out with the *Groot Rohr* (cannon).

Every Herero, armed or unarmed . . . will be shot dead within the German borders. I will no longer accept women and children, but will force them back to their people or shoot at them.

These are my words to the Herero people.

The great General of the powerful German
Emperor

(Proclamation by General Lothar von Trotha to the Herero people, October 2, 1904)¹



“Alte Feste” and Equestrian statue, Windhoek (2004)



Black rain in a dry country (view from inside the Alte Feste)

¹Bundesarchiv (BArch) Berlin, Reichskolonialamt (RKA, R1001), Vol. 2089, p. 7 recto. I will use the word “Herero” when directly quoting texts that use that term and when referring to the object of (pre)colonial ethnographic discourse; the German colonizers usually referred to their subjects as “the Herero” (*die Herero*) or “the Hereros” (*die Hereros*), although the term “Damaras” was used by Europeans to refer to central Namibian Ovaherero until well into the 19th century. The name “Ovaherero” is closer to the linguistic register of the peoples in question. Its disadvantage is similar to the more common “Herero” in that it lumps together Ovambanderu with the Ovaherero groups located historically and today around Okahandja and Omaruru. The former did not (and do not) necessarily consider themselves to be part of a uniform “Herero” nation. It should also be noted that the English-language press in Namibia today uses the term “Herero,” and that it is used by Ovaherero themselves in some English-language contexts. Nonetheless, Ovaherero is the correct ethnic designation.

This paper examines the transition from colonial “native policy”² to a program of genocide in German Southwest Africa (Namibia) in 1904. I explore the reasons for the Germans’ murderous assault on the Ovaherero during the 1904 war and in the concentration camps between 1904 and 1908. Although colonial atrocities were not unusual at the time, the German attack on the Ovaherero is rightly described as the first genocide of the 20th century. Indeed, it is one a small number of *deliberate* attempts to exterminate an entire population within *modern* colonial settings.³ The fact that this was a *German* crime also points insistently back to the “Sonderweg” thesis, forcing us to ask whether German colonialism was not, after all, exceptional—exceptionally exterminationist, that is, as the British argued after WWI.⁴ Although this paper cannot answer these questions, I hope to at least pose them more sharply in light of recent

² “Native policy” in modern colonies can be defined as all interventions by the colonial state aimed at preventing or at least limiting the cultural instability or oscillation (code-switching) of the colonized. This perceived condition of unintentional “mimicry” (to apply Bhabha’s concept to the precolonial period or the dawn of modern colonialism) resulted from the prior familiarity of most newly colonized people in the late 19th century with their conquerors—a sharp contrast to the Aztecs meeting Cortes. Native policy attempted to hold the colonized to a single definition of their own culture that was located somewhere between the two extremes of incommensurable difference and genuine assimilation, both of which were incompatible with colonialism’s “rule of difference” (Chatterjee). For a more detailed defense of the claim that “native policy,” rather than, say, economic exploitation, was the defining feature of modern colonial governance, see Steinmetz (2002, 2003).

³ See Totten and Parsons, introduction to Samuel Totten, xxx. Because the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide included in the definition of genocide “Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group” and “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” many colonial regimes, modern and early-modern, might be classified as genocidal; I am concerned here mainly with the first criterion, namely, the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.”

⁴ It is advisable to work with the original version of the “Blue Book” given the large number of typographical errors in the re-edited volume. And while the latter contains many useful annotations, its editors are too credulous vis-à-vis the testimony contained in the document. Historians do not need to rely too heavily on a book with obvious legitimacy motives when enough damning evidence is available from the German archives themselves.

discussions of comparison, (post)colonial theory and history, Nazism, and the never-ending debate on the peculiarities of German history.

An Attempted Extermination

General von Trotha described the scattered survivors of the 1904 German campaign against the Ovaherero as “the last ruins of a nation that has stopped hoping for rescue or restoration.”⁵ According to the prolific Lieutenant Schwabe, who participated in the 1904 military campaign and in many earlier ones in the colony, the “terrible but well deserved destiny” of the Ovaherero people had met “caught up with it.”⁶ The official two-volume study of the wars by the historical division of the German General Staff concluded its treatment of the German-Ovaherero war with the pathetic image of “the death rattle of the dying and the furious screams of madness” that “faded away in the sublime silence of infinitude.”⁷

Such statements were of course partly wishful fantasies (*Wunschfantasien*) on the part of German officers and their military historians. The most scrupulous research has still not determined the actual number of Ovaherero deaths in the 1904 war or the postwar regime of forced labor and concentration camps,⁸ but it is unambiguously clear that the Ovaherero were neither exterminated physically nor decimated culturally, even if

⁵ Quoted in Kurd Schwabe (1907).

⁶ Schwabe, op. cit., p. 305.

⁷ Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung 1 des Grossen Generalstabs, *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn), Vol. 1, p. 214.

⁸ See *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*. .

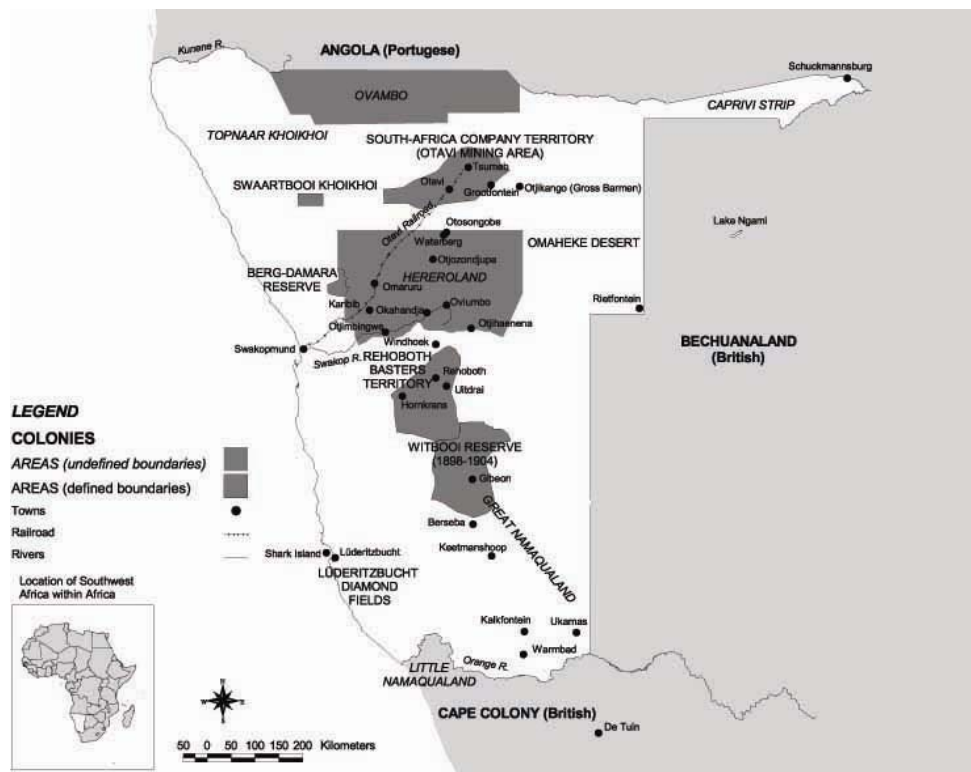
their suffering was enormous and the changes in their culture extensive.⁹ Yet the incontrovertible fact remains that General von Trotha *sought* to wipe out the Ovaherero in 1904, and that this very *intentionality* classifies official German policies between September and December 1904 (at least) as genocidal, according to standard definitions of that term. As we will see, the structured nature of the campaign to continue the extermination in the concentration camps between 1904 and 1907 provides indirect evidence for a genocidal orientation on the part of the German high command.

Of course, genocide is an inherently contested and unstable concept as well as a historical one that arose in the context of the post-Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials. But this historicity and contestedness does not distinguish the category of genocide from any other social-theoretical concept. Nor does the emphasis on intentionality pose a particular problem. Raphael Lemkin defined the “criminal intent to destroy or to cripple permanently a human group” as a central component of genocide, and the U. N. Convention on Genocide retained this category of intentionality.¹⁰ Conscious intentionality cannot serve to distinguish one set of actions from another, once we accept a more complex picture of human subjectivity that includes the unconscious. But in the case at hand, German actions were consciously and deliberately genocidal. The fact that the genocide was also driven by unconscious motives, as I will argue, does not gainsay the deliberateness of the ultimate decisions taken between August and October, 1904. Intentionality-based definitions can also be criticized for ignoring structural forms of violence. But the distinguishing feature of this colonial situation, and also many others,

⁹ On postwar Ovaherero culture and politics the most reliable sources are Krüger (1999) and Gewalt (1998b).

¹⁰ Lemkin (1947, p. 147).

was the extent to which violence was the immediate result of decisions taken in the immediate present rather than the inexorable expression of seemingly unalterable processes. This is because most of the “structural” features of colonial society and the colonial state in German Namibia were of extremely recent origin, and were constantly being reinvented.



German Southwest Africa, ca. 1904

The legal definition does not present a problem for defining the German decision to exterminate the Ovaherero as genocide, since the smoking gun of intentionality is readily identifiable. The insistence by Governor Leutwein in 1896 (during the first campaign against rebellious Ovaherero) and again by General von Trotha in 1904 that the (first) Geneva Convention was *irrelevant* to the colonial context indicates precisely the

opposite, namely, that its relevance already fell within the bounds of plausibility for both of these men.¹¹ It remains to be seen whether courts and publics find the U.N. genocide convention to be retroactively applicable to events such as the German assault on the Ovaherero which happened before the mid-20th century.

It is not my purpose here to recapitulate the buildup to the German decision to try to exterminate the Ovaherero. The outbreak of the war and the various battles have been discussed in great detail by historians in recent years.¹² But until the aftermath of the battle of Hamakari (Waterberg) on August 11, 1904, at which nearly the entirety of the encircled Ovaherero people and their cattle were defeated and forced to flee, there is no evidence that the Germans intended to attempt to destroy their enemies physically rather than imprisoning, expropriating, and enslaving them. On September 13, General von Trotha gave orders to drive away by force Ovaherero women and children who came “in big numbers to ask for water,” and on Sept. 23 he rejected the suggestion by Major Ludwig von Estorff, commander of the Eastern Division (*Ostabteilung*) during the Waterberg campaign, that the Germans should accept Ovaherero offers to open negotiations.¹³ Von Trotha’s October 2, 1904 “words to the Herero people,” often

¹¹ The first Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Wounded in Time of War had been passed in 1864 and was designed to save lives during warfare and to provide for the removal and care for the wounded. I provide the sources for these references to the Geneva Convention in *The Devil’s Handwriting* (forthcoming).

¹² Gewalt, *Herero Heroes* (op. cit.) reinterprets the beginning of the war; the battles are carefully described in Walter Nuhn, *Sturm über Südwest. Der Hereroaufstand von 1904 --ein dusters Kapitel der deutschen kolonialen Vergangenheit Namibias* (Stuttgart: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1997).

¹³ Von Trotha diary, quoted in Gerhard Pool, *Samuel Maherero* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers, 1991), p. 270.

described somewhat misleadingly as a *Vernichtungsbefehl* or *Schiessbefehl* (“Order to Annihilate” or “Order to Shoot”)¹⁴ were the culmination of this hardening stance.

Nor was responsibility for this course of action limited to the self-described “Great General of the powerful German Emperor.” Graf von Schlieffen, head of the Great General Staff of the German Army and von Trotha’s superior, did not immediately reverse the October 2 decision. Given the Germans’ full awareness of the lack of water



in the Omaheke desert into which most of Ovaherero had fled after August 11, the refusal to allow them to return westward amounted to a death warrant. If this was not clear enough, von Trotha summarized his intentions in a letter of

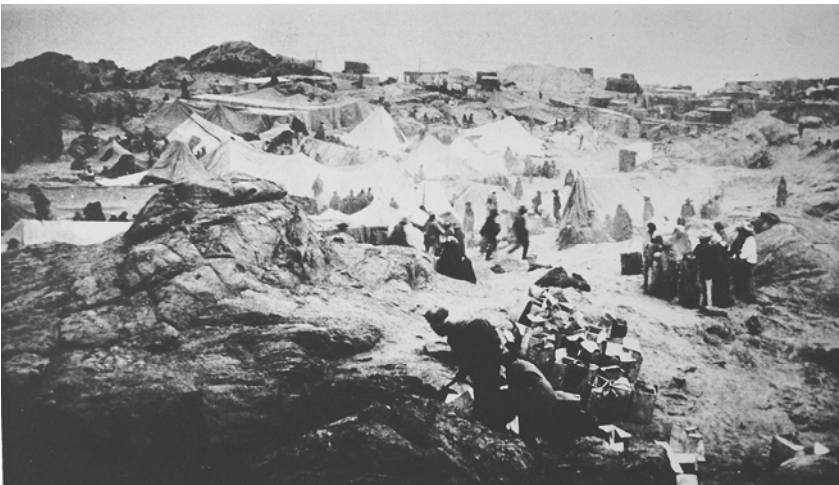
November 5 to Governor Theodor Leutwein, who was soon to return to Germany in disgrace after opposing the genocidal course of action and being relieved of his military and civil authority:

I know enough of these African tribes. They are all alike insofar as they only yield to violence. My policy was, and still is, to perform this violence with blatant terrorism and even cruelty. I finish off the rebellious tribes with *rivers of blood and rivers of money*. Only from these seeds will something new and permanent be able to grow.¹⁵

¹⁴ Von Trotha’s words of Oct. 2 1904 were a *proclamation* to the Herero and not yet a military order in the formal sense. This did not prevent von Trotha from subsequently issuing the relevant orders to the German troops, however.

¹⁵ BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2089, p. 100 verso.

Count von Schlieffen wrote to the German Chancellor, Prince Bernhard von Bülow, on Nov. 23, insisting that “one can agree with” General von Trotha’s proposal in a letter to von Schlieffen of October 4 defending the extermination strategy “that the entire nation should be annihilated or driven from the country,” since the Ovaherero had “forfeited their lives.” Given the Chancellor’s protests, however, von Schlieffen proposed as an alternative a “permanent state of forced labor, that is, *a form of slavery*” for the



Ovaherero, adding again that “the race war, once it has broken out, can only be ended by the extermination/annihilation (*Vernichtung*)

or the complete subjugation of one of the parties.”¹⁶ Only on Dec. 9, after tens of thousands of Ovaherero had perished in the waterless desert, did von Schlieffen send a telegram to von Trotha ordering him to pardon all Ovaherero except those who were “directly guilty and the leaders.”¹⁷ Countless “ordinary men” (to apply Christopher Browning’s term for the participation of a group of Hamburg policemen in the Final

¹⁶ Schlieffen to Chancellor, Nov. 23, 1904, BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2089, p. 4 recto-verso. The verb used in this discussion is “vernichten,” settling once and for all the misleading debate on whether that verb retained its purely military connotations during the German-Ovaherero war. Since Schlieffen’s letter had just described the strategy of killing the Herero by containing them in the Omaheke, the exterminationist meaning of “*vernichten/Vernichtung*” is evident.

¹⁷ Telegram Schlieffen to von Trotha, Dec. 9, 1904, BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2089, p. 48.

Solution) among the German troops and officers supported von Trotha in his radicalized course of action by helping to track and shoot Ovaherero, poison waterholes, and seal off the eastern edge of the desert.¹⁸ When the rainy season started in March 1905, First Lieutenant Schweinitz followed a broad trail through the Omaheke “that could only have originated from the ... fleeing Hereros,” finding there “ever more numerous and larger collections of remnants of corpses, hundreds of men, women, and children lying together.” The path was lined with “human skulls and skeletons.”¹⁹

This concerted effort to force the colony *beyond* native policy--which requires, at the very least, a population of “natives”--and toward an unambiguous program of killing or exiling the indigenous population, calls for an explanation. We simply cannot accept the assertion by theorists of incommensurability and trauma that certain events are too horrific, unusual, or imperfectly witnessed to permit historical explanation.²⁰ These arguments can be faulted on epistemological, political, and ethical grounds. And while Sartre claimed that colonialism always simultaneously “wills ... the death and the

¹⁸ The evidence for this ready participation is plentiful, but perhaps the best illustration is the numerous photographs and postcards depicting German soldiers standing proudly around the bodies of lynched Ovaherero. There are no photographs of Ovaherero dying in the Omaheke simply because the Germans were unable to follow them all the way in, but there are photographs of starving Ovaherero surrendering to the Germans. The most graphic of these is in the National Archives of Namibia Photo collection, photo number 482. The photo is reproduced, along with a discussion of the dangers of recreating the gaze of the perpetrator, in George Steinmetz and Julia Hell, “Legacies of Colonialism: A Photo Essay,” *Public Culture* (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Quotes from Anon., “Der Verbleib der Herero seit dem Gefecht von Waterberg,” *Militärwochenblatt* (1905), no. 96, p. 2215; see also Anon., *Meine Kriegs-Erlebnisse in Deutsch-Süd-West-Afrika* (Minden in Westfalen: W. Köhler, 1907), p. 83; and Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung 1 des Grossen Generalstabs (op. cit.), Vol. 1, p. 214.

²⁰ For a discussion of these challenges to explanation see George Steinmetz, an early and influential statement of the thesis with respect to the Holocaust is Jean-François Lyotard, see also Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999). A recent and nuanced discussion of the use of comparison in history (and science studies) is Klaus Hentschel

multiplication of its victims,” a colonialism without the colonized is clearly a contradiction in terms. It is essentially something other than colonialism.²¹



Christuskirche, Windhoek: Up the hill from the park at the end of “Fidel Castro Street” (renamed since independence) stands the “Christ Church,” consecrated in 1910. It was built to commemorate the Germans who died in the “Herero and Nama wars” between 1904 and 1908.

Theories of Colonialism, Theories of the Nazi Genocide

Obviously one needs to consider the theoretical literature on colonialism in seeking an explanation for the radicalization of German war aims in 1904. In light of the definition of the 1904 events as genocide, and also in view of the (often implicit) suggestion of links between German colonialism in Southwest Africa and Nazism, it is also important to consider theoretical discussions of the Holocaust. A comparison of these two literatures reveals first, and perhaps unsurprisingly, that much less attention has been paid to the events of 1904 than to those of 1933-1945.²²

²¹ Sartre, introduction to Albert Memmi. I defend the thesis that native policy is at the core of modern colonialism; and “Precoloniality and Colonial Subjectivity: Ethnographic Discourse and Native Policy in German Overseas Imperialism, 1780s-1914,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 15:135-228.

²² Aside from the difference in the scale of atrocities and their levels of bureaucratization, the gap between the two discussions—the absence of any real “Historikerstreit” among German colonial historians, aside



Graves, Okahandja, Namibia

A first set of theoretical suggestions from Marxist and marxisant perspectives can be quickly set aside in this case. Broadly economic forces obviously shaped German colonial policy in multifarious ways, but they were hardly as dominant as earlier perspectives on colonialism suggested. Even the Germans' *acquisition* of most of their colonies obeyed a non-economic and even an anti-economic logic.²³ Although the "founder" of the colony, Adolf Lüderitz, had signed treaties with indigenous leaders in 1883 and 1884 that he hoped would bring him money, he was bankrupt by 1885, and his shares were bought up by the German Colonial Society for South West Africa (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft für Südwestafrika*) under pressure from Bismarck but with no realistic expectations of profits. Indeed, the German state took over the responsibility for keeping order in the colony at a moment when the chances for profitability were at their nadir. Nor can von Trotha's behavior be explained economically, even by the most "structuralist" versions of Marxism. Even the most omniscient planner or *Gesamtkapitalist* could not have guaranteed or foreseen in 1904 that the colony would be

from the desultory discussion of Brigitte Lau's somewhat notorious "Uncertain Histories" essay (1995)--reflects the fact that the German historical profession has not yet been "decolonized." On the differing degrees of bureaucratization of the two genocides see Zimmerer (2004). Two recent and valuable contributions to the comparative and theoretical analysis of genocide are Moshman (2001) and Strauss (2001).

²³ Similarly, in the three-power negotiations over Samoa, Great Britain offered Germany the Volta River Delta in West Africa and the neighboring Polynesian island of Tonga, whose harbor was considered superior to those in the Samoan islands of 'Upolu and Savai'i, but these economically and militarily more useful alternatives were rejected even by the business-oriented Colonial Council (*Kolonialrat*) in Berlin and by the German Navy, which should have preferred the better harbor. A more important consideration, apparently, was that the German public and the Kaiser himself were extremely fond of Samoa, while the Navy had "sentimental" attachments to 'Upolu due to the German marines killed there during the fighting of December 1888. As for Qingdao, naval motives dominated discussions of its usefulness prior to German occupation in 1897, and economic goals soon became all powerful after it was realized that the port was militarily indefensible, but geopolitical goals prevailed after 1904, specifically the desire to cultivate China as an ally by softening Germany's imperial pressure on Shandong province.

able to find a labor force to replace the Ovaherero. Indeed, the colony's white employers



faced labor shortages until the end of the German period. And while the expropriation of land and cattle that resulted from the war laid the groundwork for the enlargement of the European-owned agricultural sector (mainly cattle ranching), these farms required indigenous labor to prosper. There was no guarantee that ranching would ever become a profitable branch of the colonial economy. Enslaved prisoners built the Otavi railway to the Tsumeb copper mines (completed in 1906) and worked in the mines there and at Gibeon. The mining company also benefited from the fact that Ovaherero were unable to protest violations of their land by rail lines. But the emergence of the profitable postwar regime of forced labor had not been not anticipated by von Trotha and the other planners of the war in 1904. The first suggestion to exploit the captured Ovaherero as forced laborers came from a private diamond mining firm, the Gibeon-Schurf- und Handelsgesellschaft (Gibeon Prospecting and Trading Society) in August 1904. The directors of this society asked the government for 50-100 men to use as mine workers.²⁴

²⁴ National Archives of Namibia (NAN), ZBU, D.IV.L.3, vol. 1, p. 1. The Gibeon-Schurf- und Handelsgesellschaft was created in 1903 with the goal of mining for diamonds. It was liquidated in 1910 because no diamonds were found in the Gibeon district (Drechsler 1996, p. 9).

However objectionable such forced labor, it differed from the genocidal intentions of von Trotha and his superiors in the army. Indeed, von Trotha's efforts between October and December to exterminate the Ovaherero or to drive them out of the colony pointed away from economically rational policies. Von Trotha's slaughter of all cattle captured from rebellious Namibians in 1904-1905 was also, according to historian Helmut Bley, "a disastrous set-back to efforts to re-establish a stock-raising industry" in the colony (1996, p. 168). All of von Trotha's public statements and secret communications with other officials in the colony and Berlin suggest that he was supremely unconcerned, as a German nobleman and an officer, with questions of the colony's economic viability. Indeed, von Trotha's reference to "*rivers of blood and rivers of money*" is as remarkable for the profligacy of the second image as for the barbarism of the first. Clearly the General was as little concerned with balancing the budget as with accusations of brutality.

According to a more class-analytic account, *settler colonies* are particularly brutal ones, perhaps because of the zero-sum character of the struggle for land.²⁵ But even if the majority of the settlers in German Southwest Africa supported von Trotha's murderous program—something that has not yet been established by historical

²⁵ For an exposition of this argument see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Kolonialismus. Geschichte--Formen--Folgen* (München: C.H. Beck, 1995), p. 48; for an interpretation of settler societies' peculiar violence, see Helmut Bley, "Gewaltverhältnisse in Siedlergesellschaften des südlichen Afrika," in *Siedler-Identität. Neun Fallstudien von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Christof Dipper and Rudolf Hiestand (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 141-165. Of course, German Samoa disproves this thesis: at the moment of colonial annexation there were more settlers in Samoa than at a comparable moment in Southwest Africa, but the German colonial government in Samoa systematically worked against settler and "beachcomber" interests; see Steinmetz (2004b).

research²⁶—there is little evidence that official policymaking was driven by settler interests, either in Namibia in 1904 or in any of the other German colonies.²⁷ Most importantly in the present context, von Trotha arrived in the colony at Swakopmund, a center of German settlers, on June 11, but he did not tarry there, and he spent a total of just two days in Windhuk, where German settler opinion was concentrated. He headed to the battlefield on July 9,²⁸ and returned to Windhuk only *after* issuing his Annihilation Proclamation (although he spend some time in Okahandja, where settlers had been killed in the first days of the fighting in January 1904).²⁹ It is therefore unlikely that von Trotha was immersed in Southwest African settler opinion and guided by it in the weeks leading to his fateful set of decisions,

Nor can von Trotha's actions be reduced to a case of *Tropenkoller* (colonial madness), even if his strategizing failed to correspond to a rationality of colonial *raison d'etat*. It is not satisfying to cast von Trotha as an eerie precursor of Nazism, as in Thomas Pynchon's *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow* (although Pynchon was of course not in the

²⁶ Bley (op. cit.), pp. 166-168) refers to the disapproving comments of Paul Rohrbach, but he was the official in charge of settlement issues and not a civilian settler himself. Moreover, Rohrbach's remarks were published in the form of a diary in 1909, although they may have been written in 1904. Strong public opinion against the genocide and positive views of the Herero emerged among colonial Germans only after 1904, as I have shown elsewhere. Still, this does not prove that settlers in October 1904 supported von Trotha's actions.

²⁷ There were more Europeans (including Germans) present in Samoan at the moment of colonial annexation than in Southwest Africa, meaning that the former it started out as more of a settler colony than the latter. Furthermore, the German colonial government systematically rejected settler demands in Samoa.

²⁸ See *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* June 29, 1904 (no. 26), p. 1 and July 6, 1904 (no. 27), p. 1; and Pool (1991), who tracks von Trotha's movements using his personal papers. None of the photographs of von Trotha in the vast collection of the Namibian National Archives in Windhoek or in any of the other collections I have examined shows him in the company of settlers in 1904, although his wife and sons are sometimes depicted.

²⁹ Von Trotha probably interacted with settlers in German East Africa during the 1890s, when he was posted there. Since there is no biography of von Trotha and his papers are inaccessible, it is difficult to reconstruct his activities during this period. None the historians of German East Africa have dealt with von Trotha in the 1890s.

business of historiography).³⁰ And while it is clear that certain practices that were pioneered in the colonial context reemerged in the Nazi empire, including in the *Generalgouvernement* in occupied Poland³¹—something I will return to in the conclusion to this paper--this future cannot retroactively explain the events of 1904 without violating basic principles of historical causality.

Great power politics played a considerable role in the timing and character of Germany's acquisition of overseas colonies, and they also directly shaped native policies within at least one of the German colonies, Qingdao/Jiaozhou in the Chinese Shandong peninsula. But dynamics within the global core did *not* have a direct influence on the German slaughter of the Ovaherero and Witboois in 1904-1907, except negatively. Indeed, the silence of the foreign governments and the news media about the passive slaughter in the desert was deafening. As Bley notes, there was even “much resentment felt that the attention of wide circles in Germany and world opinion itself were directed” elsewhere at the time, namely toward the Russo-Japanese war, rather than focusing on the campaign in Namibia.³² It has sometimes been suggested that a contributing factor to the

³⁰ Pynchon's *V* includes an entire chapter focused obliquely on the massacre of the Herero (“Mondaugen's Story,” Ch. 9), in which a sadistic Lieutenant Weissmann (“white man”) in the Union Mandate colony of Southwest Africa in 1922 appears to connect the Ovaherero massacre to Hitler. Weissmann tortures Africans and pronounces the name Hitler as if it were “the name of an avant-garde play” (Ibid. 1963, p. 224). The Weissmann figure reappears as Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose settings include the Nazi “Oven State” and its postwar aftermath, the “Zone.” The Ovaherero appear here as the “Schwarzkommando,” part of the Nazi war machine. They worship a rocket program and are dressed in “pieces here and there of old Wehrmacht and SS uniforms.” The topos of the Schwarzkommando reinforces Pynchon's suggestion of a linkage between Nazism and “the scrupulous butcher named von Trotha,” who is responsible for the Ovaherero dedication to “tribal suicide” and for their deculturation (“*eanda* and *oruzo* have lost their force out here”; *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp. 367-369, 420). For analyses of von Trotha and Ovaherero in Pynchon's fiction see David Seed, “Pynchon's Herero,” *Pynchon Notes* 10 (1982), pp.37-44 and Douglas Ivison, “Outhouses of the European Soul: Imperialism in Thomas Pynchon,” *Pynchon Notes* 40-41 (1997), pp. 134-143..

³¹ See Roth (2003).

³² Bley (op. cit.), p. 160.

escalation of brutality in 1904 was the threat to German geopolitical prestige from an African rebellion. But I have found no evidence in the archives that anyone inside the German government actually understood events in this way.

Nor can the course of events be explained by the shifting of responsibility for the war effort to the General Staff from the colonial Governor, Theodor Leutwein, who was also conventionally the commander of the colony's troops (the *Schutztruppe*). The Germans prepared for the battle of Hamakari (Waterberg) on August 11 by setting up POW camps, which suggests that von Trotha did not yet at that time have plans to annihilate the Ovaherero in the second, non-military, sense of that term (*Vernichtung*).³³ The General's aims reached their most radical point only after August 11.³⁴

This complicated course of events leading up to the genocidal course is suggestive of the somewhat confusingly named "intentionalist" interpretation of the Nazi Holocaust (which was contrasted in that earlier debate with the so-called "structuralist" interpretation).³⁵ That discussion, however misleadingly cast (with its rigid dichotomy

³³ See Lundtofte (2003). Before August 1904, Ovaherero had been taken prisoner and forced to work, but they were not yet being shot on sight or driven out of the colony. The *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* (published in Swakopmund) reported on Herero POWs, e.g. in "Aus Swakopmund," *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* June 22, 1904, no. 25, p. 2.

³⁴ I have not found any evidence that von Trotha was singled out among the German commanders in the joint expedition against the Chinese "Boxers" (*Yihetuan*) as especially brutal. As Commander of the First Infantry Brigade of the German East Asian Expeditionary Corps, however, he was certainly involved in the notorious punitive missions. See Anon. (1902), pp. 230ff. on von Trotha in China; and von Waldersee (1923, Vol. 3, pp. 42, 39) on atrocities committed by Allied soldiers while he was their Supreme Commander.

³⁵ See Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (1985), for an overview of that discussion and a recent article by the same author revisiting that debate ("Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39(2): 239-254. For an overview of the discussion of Goldhagen see Geoff Eley, ed., *The "Goldhagen effect": History, Memory, Nazism--Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). An excellent summary of recent

between structure and agency), did tap into a crucial important issue in social-historical epistemology: the distinction between, on the one hand, a view of historical events as resulting from unpredictable and changing conjunctures of underlying structures intersecting with individual or group strategies in ever unique “parallelograms of force,” and on the other hand a view of the causes of those events that is fatalistically reductionist or philosophically positivist.³⁶ Transposed to the current discussion, the only serious contender for something like an “intentionalist” explanation (that is, a monocausal and reductionist one) for German actions in 1904 would trace them to the strikingly univocal or monoaccental formation of precolonial ethnographic³⁷ representations of the Ovaherero. This could be called, continuing the analogy to the Holocaust discussion, a “colonial Goldhagen” thesis: the genocidal German attack on the Ovaherero in 1904 would be attributed to long-standing and widely held racist, and ultimately exterminationist, visions of the Ovaherero among the Germans, and would therefore be cast as inevitable. Such an explanation could also be assimilated to a broader array of arguments in the human sciences emphasizing the discursive determination of practice; in social theory this claim is associated most forcefully with

German debates is Ulrich Herbert, ed., *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

³⁶ The fact that the intentionalist position emphasized intentions and ideologies does not release it from the charge of philosophical positivism, which relates more to the search for general laws or “constant conjunctions of events.” On the contrast between a philosophically positivist account of events and a conjunctural one, see Bhaskar (1986); Collier (1994); Sewell (1996); Steinmetz (1998), and the contributions to Steinmetz (2005).

³⁷ I should note that I use the adjective “ethnographic” in the most encompassing sense to include all discourse that claims to describe the character, culture, subjectivity, psyche, or essence of a human collectivity or ethnic group (as that group is delimited within the discourse). All racial discourse is ethnographic, according to this definition, but not all ethnographic discourse uses the tropes of race.

Foucault, and in colonial studies with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which emphasized the determining effect of the Orientalist "library of *idées reçues*" on European colonialism.

There is certainly a strong affinity between the dehumanizing discourse of most 19th century European and German observers of the Namibian Ovaherero³⁸ and von Trotha's egregious language of "finish[ing] off the rebellious tribes with *rivers of blood and rivers of money*." This archive of racial/ethnographic representations does help to explain the exceptional turn of events in 1904. But such representations were determinative only insofar as they were taken up by contending actors in the colonial state field ("field" understood here in Bourdieu's sense)³⁹ and deployed strategically against other European actors. Disembodied images of the Ovaherero, no matter how hateful, were not sufficient to motivate practice. We only need to recall that Theodor Leutwein opposed von Trotha's course and had himself not attempted to massacre all of the rebellious Ovaherero in 1896, even though he himself had clearly been exposed to the dominant strand of dehumanizing discourse by that point, after two years in the colony. Leutwein's mild treatment of the rebellious Witboois in 1894 suggests the same, although here there was also a more affectionate, if paternalistic archive of ethnographic imagery upon which Leutwein and official colonial policy could draw.⁴⁰ Leutwein's resistance against von Trotha's policies in 1904, however feeble, also suggests that more mediations

³⁸ I reconstruct this discursive legacy in my forthcoming book. Even the first missionary to the Namibian Herero, Hugo Hahn, discussed them in his diaries and his reports to the Barmen mission headquarters in proto-Social-Darwinist terms as destined for extinction. His depiction of their culture and character suggests that he would not have regretted their demise. The specific trope of Herero cruelty is discussed below.

³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu,

⁴⁰ Namely, the discourse that represented the Khoikhoi as "noble savages" akin to James Fenimore Cooper's "Last of the Mohicans, a discourse initiated by the traveler François Le Vaillant in the 18th century.

are needed in the Saidian or “colonial discourse theory” approach.

The Colonial State as a Field of Power: the Distinction of Ethnographic Acuity

We need to integrate discourse analysis with a sociology of the colonizers and the colonial field--or rather, we need to integrate these two optics. The mediations between ethnographic discourse and political practice are usually left unspecified in writing inspired by Said and Foucault. Specifically, there is a lack of attention to the *multivocality* of ethnographic discourse. According to Said, there were diverse “idioms” at the surface of Orientalism but a convergent “layer of doctrine about the Orient” underlying them, “all of them converging upon ... essential aspects of the Orient.”⁴¹ But a comparison between precolonial European representations of the Ovaherero and the Khoikhoi (including specifically the Witbooi people), not to mention the Ovaherero and the Chinese, suggests a significant difference between more univocal and more multivocal discursive formations. Said’s succinct but unsatisfactory formula, “from traveler's tales, colonies were created,” also suggests a lack of attention to the complex ways in which Orientalist discourses are turned into policy. This is perhaps acceptable in Said’s case, since *Orientalism* was primarily a work of cultural studies, and since it could be read together with his *Question of Palestine*, published the following year (1979). But other adherents of “colonial discourse theory” have been less careful.

What we need is a theory of the ways in which the internal social dynamics of the colonial state mediated the effects on policy of even the more univocal ethnographic representations. Regarding the colonial state as a field reveals that it was far from

⁴¹ Said (1978), p., 203.

internally homogeneous, and that different European groups and German officials competed with one another as they would in any other field for specific stakes. Within the modern colonial state field these stakes can be defined as the quest for mutual recognition of ones *ethnographic acuity*⁴² by all of the other actors in the field. Colonial officials gravitated towards strands of ethnographic discourse that promised to foreground their own holdings of cultural capital and thus to further their social aspirations; corresponding to these ethnographic postures were a set of native policies. This does not mean that dominant actors in the colonial field of power actually had a superior grasp of the culture of the colonized, any more than Bourdieu claimed (e.g. in *Distinction*) that what counted as good taste in a given field was genuinely superior in some objective sense. But ethnographic discourses were still wielded as weapons of distinction, nonetheless.

The Bourdieuan approach itself needs to be historically specified, however.⁴³ The three-way metropolitan intra-elite class struggle in metropolitan Germany that was described by historians of the German *Sonderweg* was transposed into the colonial realm. The colonies featured an exaggerated version of Imperial Germany's central struggle between the educated middle-class *Bildungsbürgertum*, the capitalist class, and the nobility. The Junkers and aristocrats may have been declining in influence within domestic society and politics, as Blackbourn and Eley argued, but they still played a leading role in the Foreign Service and the army, which dominated colonial affairs

⁴² Elsewhere I have defined and discussed ethnographic acuity as a form of cultural or symbolic capital specific to the modern colonial state; see “The Devil's Handwriting” and “Precoloniality”, op. cit.

⁴³ Another shortcoming is Bourdieu's allergic avoidance of psychoanalytic theory, despite his implicit reliance on concepts like Lacan's “symbolic” and “imaginary.”

(especially before 1907). Each colonist gravitated toward a vision of the colonized that underscored his socially constructed strengths, finding elective affinities with tropes and narratives from the ethnographic archive perceived as being best suited to this task. University-educated middle-class officials tended to emphasize interpretations of the colonized that relied on hermeneutic and linguistic skills and that were distant from what they defined as the less dignified and refined motives of money and military domination. Many of the officials who insisted on this “hermeneutic” approach to their subjects had been trained as philologists, Orientalists, Sanskritists, translators, or lawyers before arriving in the colonies. Some missionaries took a similar approach even though they were not supposed to be interested in pre-Christian cultures except as the targets of their transformative campaigns.⁴⁴ Aristocrats and army officers tended to describe the colonized using military or crudely racist categories. Their preferred native policies emphasized the arts of coercive command—the traditional specialization of the German nobility—but they still framed this in terms of a superior grasp of the natives. As General Lothar von Trotha wrote, “my *exact knowledge* of so many central African tribes, Bantu and other, has always demonstrated to me with absolute necessity that the

⁴⁴ Todorov (1984) argued that even missionaries like Las Casas who treated the native Americans as equals were intrinsically poor ethnographers because they saw all humans as potential Christians and were uninterested in the pre-Christian culture. This judgement not to apply to all missionaries. Some of the Herero missionaries were indeed poor ethnographers, though not necessarily because they sympathized with the Herero. But other were alert and intelligent, like Heinrich Viehe, Philipp Diehl, and Jakob Irle, and they provided invaluable ethnographic information on Herero culture, although these bits often have to be disentangled from stereotypical formulae. Missionary Viehe observed that most Europeans were too impatient to find out about Herero customs and assumed that their practices were simply random (*Willkur*). But in fact, Viehe wrote, Herero customs were “regulated in the smallest details, and when you ask several Hereros they will give you the same details in almost the same words” (1879, p. 372). This passage is interesting not just for its factual content but also because it shows that missionaries were also involved in claims for ethnographic acuity. And as Gewalt notes, missionaries were interested in extant “pagan” culture partly because of their difficulties in converting the Herero and in determining “what it was that would have to be transformed before a Herero convert could become an acceptable Christian in their eyes” Other sympathetic missionaries like Richard Wilhelm in Qingdao immersed themselves in local culture for quite different reasons.

Negro never bows to treaties but only to raw violence.”⁴⁵ Settlers and investors generally wanted to turn the colonized into interchangeable versions of *Homo Economicus* and were attuned to categories like *idleness* and *usefulness*, against which they evaluated local individuals. They were relatively *uninterested* in extant indigenous culture.⁴⁶ Of course there were also many exceptions, Germans holding sociologically anomalous ethnographic views. The aristocratic writer and traveler Count Hermann von Keyserling enthused about Asia and China in ways that were more typical of middle-class intellectuals at the time.⁴⁷ On the opposite side was the liberal middle-class sociologist Max Weber, who followed Sinophobic sentiment, typically associated with other social classes in this period, in arguing that Confucianism was oriented toward “adjustment to the world” rather than “rational transformation of the world” such that modern capitalism could not emerge in China.⁴⁸ Many colonizers were located in *contradictory* class positions (to use Erik Olin Wright’s felicitous phrase)⁴⁹, and some were more interested

⁴⁵ Von Trotha to Schlieffen, Oct. 4, 1904, in BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2089, p. 5 verso (my emphasis). One of the specific signs of status that different groups of colonial Germans struggled to attain was designation as an “old African” (*alter Afrikaner*). This referred to Europeans—not indigenous Africans—with long years of experience in Africa.

⁴⁶ See for example the report on the “Education of Samoans to Industriousness” by Herr A. Kraus, a member of the opposition to Governor Solf, in BArch Berlin, R 1001, Vol. 3065, pp. 174ff.

⁴⁷ Hermann Graf von Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher* (London: J. Cape Ltd., 1925); Ute Gahlings, *Sinn und Ursprung. Untersuchungen zum philosophischen Weg Hermann Graf Keyserlings* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1992).

⁴⁸ Weber drew heavily on the work of the Dutch Sinologist De Groot who taught at Berlin University starting in 1912 and considered the Chinese to be only “semi-civilized” and prone to religious “fanaticism” (De Groot 1892, p. X). De Groot was quite anomalous in his views in comparison with most of Sinological teaching staff in Berlin at the Seminar for Oriental Studies. Sinophobia had of course been widespread among intellectuals in Hegel’s time, underscoring the fact these social class associations, however pervasive, are historically contingent. I discuss the reasons for German middle-class Sinophobia in the 18th and early 19th centuries in *Precoloniality*.

⁴⁹ Erik Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1979).

in *changing* their class status than in capitalizing on their current one. For the most part, however, there were strong and pervasive associations between social class and ethnographic postures, even if these patterns were limited to a specific place and period.

The class backgrounds and aspirations of Theodor Leutwein and his opponents in the colonial administration help explain the nature of the intra-elite conflict that arose there, and thus indirectly explain the assault on the Ovaherero. Leutwein, born in 1849,

was the son of a

had enjoyed a classical

the university. He

studies and entered the

fight in the German

At the time of his

Landeshauptman,

lecturer in military

academy at (Bad)

François brothers

in 1894, by contrast,



Lutheran minister and

education and attended

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military but did not

wars of unification.

appointment as

Leutwein was a

tactics at the military

Hersfeld.⁵⁰ The von

whom he marginalized

taking over the

Governorship from one of them (Curt von François), were scions of the nobility. Their ancestor August von François had received the title “deutsche Reichsadel” in 1774; their father was a hero of the Franco-Prussian war.⁵¹ This class antagonism overcoded the tension that was already present in the relationship between the new *Landeshauptmann*

⁵⁰Bley (1971); Esterhuyse (1968), p. 202.

⁵¹Bruno von François had fallen at Spichern in 1870 as Commander of the 27th Brigade.

and those whose power he was usurping. Ten years later, a similar constellation found Leutwein confronting General von Trotha, a member of an ancient aristocratic family. Von Trotha was also a veteran of the crushing defeat of the French at the Battle of Sedan and of military engagements in German East Africa, and he was one of many participants in the German-Ovaherero war who had taken part in the Allied campaign against the Chinese Boxers shortly before the 1904 war in Namibia, commanding the First Infantry Brigade of the German East Asian Expeditionary Corps.⁵² The polarization between von Trotha and Leutwein expressed in a highly exaggerated form the class hostility that a historian would see as arising almost “naturally”⁵³ in Wilhelmine Germany between a military aristocrat and a pastor’s son who flaunted his classical education. The tension between the two men was heightened by the manner in which von Trotha entered the colonial arena to displace the Governor at a moment of crisis—repeating the scenario from a decade earlier, but with the of social class reversed. Leutwein attempted to salvage his personal authority through a frantic correspondence with Berlin in which he attacked von Trotha and the officers allied with him. He insisted, for example, that the situation with the Ovaherero had to be analyzed from a “colonial” rather than a “military” standpoint and that von Trotha had “the standpoint of a brave Lieutenant, not a colonizer.”⁵⁴ When von Trotha transferred the military command for the campaign against the Nama (Khoikhoi) rebellion from Leutwein to a younger officer, Berthold von

⁵²Pool (1991), p. 243; von Salzmann (1905), 187.

⁵³ Pool (1991: 243-244).

⁵⁴ BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2089, p. 98 verso, Leutwein to Colonial Department, Nov. 12, 1904.

Deimling, in October 1904, Leutwein attacked von Deimling as having a nervous temperament that was “particularly inappropriate in Africa”—here claiming the capital of the “old African.”⁵⁵

Precolonial discourse and social competition in the colonial state field were not ontologically separate processes but were inextricably entwined with one another. This can be seen clearly in the conflicts between Leutwein and his adversaries, all of whom drew from the same register of preexisting ethnographic tropes. Similarly, in German Samoa, the same cultural class dynamics pitted Governor Wilhelm Solf, a trained Sanskritist and former colonial judge and a champion of a program that could be summarized as “salvage colonialism”⁵⁶ against a group of settlers and naval officers who supported a harsher course against the indigenous population. Solf flaunted his hermeneutic skills and taste for the exotic and disparaged “the little man in the colonies” for having “too little education to find [his] way in the complicated mental processes of a Samoan brain,” and for falling back on stock phrases like “bloody Kanaka, this damned nigger!”⁵⁷ Solf attacked as “stupid and vain” a naval officer he saw as undermining his

⁵⁵ BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2089, p. 43 verso, Leutwein to Trotha, Oct. 5, 1904.

⁵⁶ I am alluding to so-called “salvage anthropology,” which was aimed at collecting customs and artifacts from cultures that were on the brink of disappearing; see Steinmetz (2004) for further discussion of the idea of salvage colonialism.

⁵⁷ “Bloody” and “Nigger” are in English in the text. BArch Koblenz, Solf papers, Vol. 27, pp. 76, 86, 66. “The Little man in the colonies” is the title of a lengthy section in Solf’s 1906 “Program for the Development of the Colony” (“Entwicklung des Schutzgebiets. Programm”) in *Ibid.*, pp. pp. 64 ff.

own native policies.⁵⁸ A similar struggle pitted the overwhelmingly Sinophile members of the translating branch of the German Foreign Service in China against the typically Sinophobic and aristocratic members of the diplomatic corps. Thus Otto Franke, a career translator in China who translated during the Chinese-German negotiations concerning the 99-year



Joseph Freinademetz



Karl Gützlaff in clothing of Fujian sailor, lithograph by Cécilie Brand

“leasing” of Jiaozhou (Qingdao) and went on to become a leading Sinologist in Germany, believed (correctly) that the German Envoy Baron von Heyking and his novelist wife viewed any interest in Chinese culture among Europeans as the sign of a “subaltern mentality.”⁵⁹ Intellectual proto-Sinologists like Otto Franke and Richard Wilhelm (a missionary and quasi-official in colonial Qingdao), and China enthusiasts like Hermann Graf von Keyserling also

promoted a less aggressive approach to China and the Chinese. Like von Trotha, their programs pointed away from colonialism altogether, but unlike von Trotha they envisioned a peaceful civilizational exchange between equals rather than the annihilation

⁵⁸ BArch Koblenz, Solf papers, Vol. 20, Solf to Dr. Siegfried Genthe, Feb. 22, 1900, p. 134.

⁵⁹ Franke (1954), p. 98). Similarly, a German diplomat in Beijing from 1906 to 1908, Artur von Kemnitz, described the “professional” consular service personnel, who tended to come from more elite class backgrounds, as “more effective,” and deplored the shift in the center of gravity of Qingdao’s German governance toward career translators, members of *Dolmetscherlaufbahn*. Von Kemnitz to Foreign Office, March 12, 1917, and von Kemnitz’ minute (Aktennotiz) from March 2, 1917, both in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (German Foreign Office Archives), R 2167, Deutschland 135, Nr. 15, no pagination.

of the Other.⁶⁰ What is also crucial here is that none of these men were inventing their ethnographic positions from whole cloth but were drawing on material from well-established frameworks—Solf on the century-old discourse of Polynesian noble savagery, Franke and Wilhelm on an even older tradition going back to Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits who went over to convert the Chinese and were culturally converted themselves, at least in part.



"Field Marshall Count Waldersee at his desk in the Beijing Winter Palace," from *Deutschland in China* (1902)



Lothar von Trotha as a student

The specific configuration of the inherited formation of ethnographic discourse played a central constraining role for Leutwein. Forced out of power and put on the defensive, his only hope (for his career, and by extension, for the Ovaherero) was to argue the intrinsic merits of the Ovaherero. But he was unable to do so convincingly given the poverty of existing German ethnographic representations, the absence of a positive strand in the given repertoire. With respect to the Witboois after 1894, by contrast, Leutwein had successfully culled affectionate, if paternalistic, images from the multivocal ethnographic archive, which included a strand of discourse that described

⁶⁰ On Richard Wilhelm see the essays in Hirsch (2003).

Khoikhoi as “noble savages.” Hendrik Witbooi was thus compared to the romanticized Native Americans after 1894. Karl Dove, the “organic intellectual” of the “noble savagery” approach to colonizing the Witboois during the 1894-1904 period, referred to François Le Vaillant as an authority. Dove described Hendrik Witbooi as “actually having the traits that Cooper’s imagination attributed to the redskins,” and as controlling his “knightly” soldiers with a “manly iron discipline.”⁶¹ But it was impossible for Leutwein to come up with a rhetorically powerful defense of the Ovaherero, no matter



how much his contest with von Trotha called for it. Flailing about for an alternative framing, Leutwein fell back on unconvincing historical analogies, comparing the Ovaherero uprising to the Sicilian Vespers revolt against

their Angevin rulers in 1282.⁶² While this served to display Leutwein's cultural refinement as against von Trotha's crassness ("rivers of blood"), the simile could hardly be compelling, since most Europeans at the time refused to acknowledge any bonds of kinship with the Ovaherero.⁶³ Absent a successful representational struggle by the

⁶¹ Dove (1896a), pp. 54, 159, and 235.

⁶²BArch Berlin, RKA, Vol. 2115, Leutwein to Colonial Department, May 17, 1904, p. 66 recto.

⁶³ In contrast to Polynesians, for example, who were troped as early versions of Europeans. But Paul Rohrbach (1909, p. 160) called the Herero uprising a “war of liberation against us” and compared their

Ovaherero themselves it would probably have been impossible for Leutwein to single-handedly counter the accumulated weight of the relentlessly condemnatory racial imagery. The best he could come up with, as he became entangled in disagreements with “those imprudent voices that would like to see the Herero completely destroyed,” is that

aside from the fact that a people with 60-70,000 souls is not so easy to annihilate, I would consider such a move a grave mistake from an economic point of view. We still need the Herero as breeders of small livestock and especially as workers. We only have to kill them politically. If possible they should no longer be allowed to have a tribal government and should be confined to reservations that are just big enough to meet their needs.⁶⁴

This was hardly a ringing endorsement of the Ovaherero. And this appeal to the Ovaherero’s functional usefulness was an argument to which the military and the metropolitan government were impervious (temporarily, at least). Only the appeals by the Rhenish Missionary Society in Germany and by the Chancellor, von Bülow, invoking Christian humanitarian values, were able to sway von Schlieffen, but they came too late. Precolonial discourse constrained colonial practice *negatively* in this case by virtue of its own monoaccentuality.⁶⁵

The interweaving of precolonial ethnographic material and competition for field-specific cultural capital explains a great deal of the variation in German colonial policy, not only in Southwest Africa but also in Samoa, Qingdao, and other colonies. But of course there are other influences, as in any overdetermined open system. One that is

“savage” practices in warfare to those of the ancient Cherusci, who were “our ancestors, after all,” and whose leader, Arminius, was called “unquestionably the liberator of Germany” (*liberator haud dubie Germaniae*) by Tacitus.

⁶⁴BArch Berlin RKA, Vol. 2113, Leutwein to Colonial Department, Feb. 23, 1904, p. 89 verso.

⁶⁵ Ethnographic discourse also guided native policy into specific paths before and after the war, but that topic that will have to be ignored here; see most recently Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner: staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*, 2nd edition (Münster: Lit., 2001).

often referred to in the literature on colonialism is resistance. It is important to keep in mind that resistance was not punished as brutally in some other colonies as in Southwest Africa during this period. The Samoan resistance movement in 1908-09, the *Mau a Pule*, was at least as threatening to settlers and the colonial government as any putative Ovaherero sable-rattling before 1904, but the Governor of Samoa responded by de-escalating the conflict and sending only a handful of “ringleaders” into a comparatively gentle exile in German Micronesia, from whence they were convinced that they would be returning within two years. Indeed, Jan-Bart Gewald’s reconstruction of the onset of hostilities in January 1904 forces us ask whether we are really analyzing Ovaherero *resistance* at all rather than a Ovaherero military response to a (military) assault.

Moreover, resistance generally could prevent a given regime of native policy from being pursued but could not design or initiate a new policy. German colonizers selected their paradigms of native governance from within an existing palette of alternatives. The options of the colonized were also restricted: they could cooperate fully, attempt to revise policies at their point of implementation, or refuse all collaboration. But the colonized were not the authors of their own native policies, and it would be even more absurd to argue this in the case of the German-Namibian war. This would amount to blaming the Ovaherero for their own fate.⁶⁶ Resistance shaped the details of native policy, but the

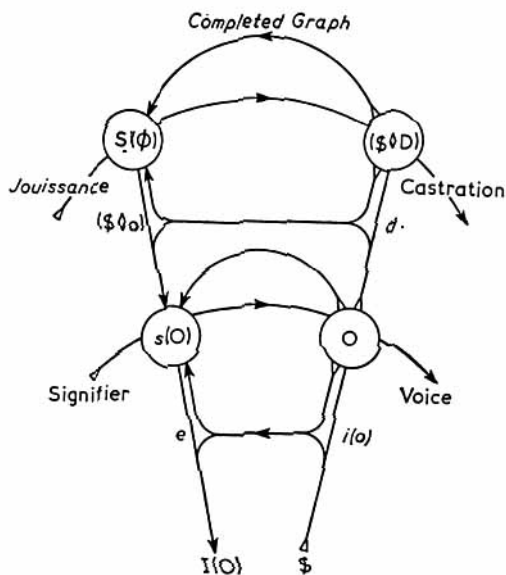
⁶⁶ A further consideration is the relative autonomy of colonial Governors from central oversight and the degree of support they received from the colonial department and other offices in the metropolitan state. In many instances colonial Governors were strongly backed by the metropolitan government in their daily activities. After all, these governors were appointed by Berlin, and this generally reflected a certain level of support in the Colonial Department (or in the case of Qingdao, within the Navy administration and the German Consulate in Beijing) for their anticipated policies. Thus the Foreign Office and even the Emperor consistently supported Governor Wilhelm Solf in his struggles against the Samoan settlers. By contrast, as soon as the Navy and the Foreign Office withdrew support for Governor Truppel in Qingdao, his vision of the Chinese was no longer able to withstand the pressure from his less Sinophobic adversaries. Even though German colonial governors were typically kept on a very long leash, their autonomy could be severely curtailed. When this happened, we might decide to focus our attention in explaining local colonial

Ovaherero were no more the architects of their own genocide than the Jews were of the Holocaust. The events between October and December of 1904 represent the nadir of anticolonial resistance in Central Namibia, although scattered Ovaherero continued to fight or to evade capture while remaining in the colony.

From Racist Ethnography to a Colonial Theater of Cruelty: Processes of Cross-Identification

More important in explaining von Trotha's seemingly delirious cruelty in 1904 is a properly psychic level of analysis. This relates to the colonizers' tendency to use the colonized for their own *imaginary* cross-identifications. Colonizing practice, like all forms of social practice, has a dualistic character, in which *conscious* motives are

doubled by the pursuit of *ideal ego images*-- to use the Lacanian-Freudian formulation-- and the acting out of unconscious fantasy scenarios. Indeed, this level is not actually separate from the sociological processes of distinction discussed by Bourdieu. Only by attending to the psychic level can we make sense of the *desire*--specifically, the desire for recognition, linked to processes of

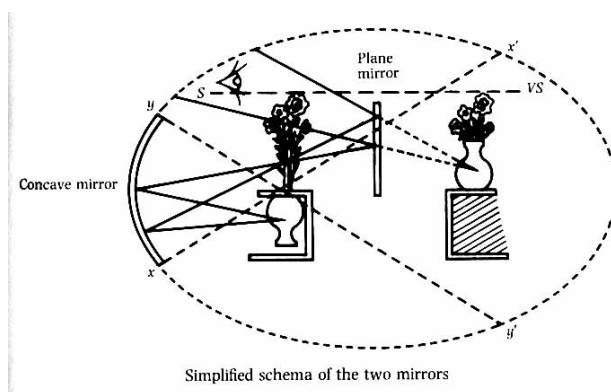


policy on the relevant offices in Berlin. Theodor Leutwein's situation in 1904 represents the most extreme limitation of autonomy. But von Trotha was remarkably autonomous from the General Staff just as Leutwein had been from the Colonial Department until 1904.

It is also important that the Berlin offices involved in appointing governors could not anticipate all of the new situations that would arise in the colony, including the constellation of social classes within the colonial field of power, but these situational factors could influence native policy, as we have seen. This means that an account of colonial policymaking cannot simply concentrate on decision-making in Berlin.

identification with an ego ideal (*Ichideal*)--that drives cultural competition in Bourdieu. And only by attending to the psychic level can we understand the seemingly mysterious integration of the *habitus*, its constitution as a unifying fundament for practice, which is linked to processes of imaginary identification with an ideal ego (*Idealich*). Although Bourdieu tried to differentiate his theory from a utilitarian approach, he was not entirely successful. He frequently deploys the adjective “unconscious,” but his approach is ultimately a sociological reductionism that ignores the ontological distinction between the social and psychic levels of human practice.

Exploration of psychic dynamics can illuminate aspects of colonial officials' activities that *exceed* the competition for cultural distinction. Colonial historians have sometimes called attention to the excessive, affective, ecstatic, and seemingly irrational character of much colonial policy. But as Ann Stoler has argued, colonial and metropolitan societies were *not* subject to completely different rules. In some respects colonies resembled other off-stage realms in metropolitan life. From the standpoint of



the symbolic order, the psychic identifications with the colonized may have been *illegal identifications*, to use a term coined by Julia Hell in an analysis of the non-Jewish Germans' identification with the Jewish

victims.⁶⁷ In different contexts different sorts of identification can be symbolically “illegal”—men’s identification with women, whites with blacks, and so on. But illegal

⁶⁷ Julia Hell,

does not mean nonexistent. Colonies resemble certain noncolonial sites—like the Bush administration’s White House, perhaps—in their attenuation of the defense mechanisms that normally limit the expression of wishful fantasies, and in their encouragement of a dream-like sense of omnipotence. The subjugated status of the colonized made them available for mobilization as props in colonizers’ fantastic scenarios—but again, this does not fundamentally distinguish colonies from other hierarchical settings. People in metropolitan realms also engage constantly in identifications across cultural boundaries—gender, race, class, nation, etc. What is distinctive about colonies, perhaps, is that *all* of these conditions were present, almost all of the time. This encouraged the proliferation of cross-identification with the colonized, at least when a psychically useful ethnographic framing of them was available.

Europeans did see the colonies as places in which the normal rules were less applicable, in which superego controls and barriers to the expression of unconscious fantasies were lifted. If we call this *Tropenkoller*, so be it, but we have to recognize that the formation of every human subject begins with a series of imaginary identifications, identifications located in a realm of plenitude and wholeness and functioning via sameness or metaphor (unlike symbolic identifications, which work through difference or metonymy within the social arena of language). These earliest imaginary identifications provide a template for a whole series of later ones that are similarly characterized by their striving for wholeness. Lacanian theory points out that “heroic identifications” with “great personalities from history or contemporary life characterized by independence, pride, success” are also imaginary ones. A proliferation of “illegal identifications”

across the colonizer-colonized boundary perhaps marked a quantitative difference from metropolitan life but not a qualitative one.

To return to the topic of colonial policy: One form of strategically irrational colonial activity is the European's hallucinatory self-promotion into the imagined role of indigenous ruler. In his interactions with the Samoans, the German Governor Wilhelm Solf often presented himself as a traditional chief, even though the Samoans were not fooled by this performance and some German settlers ridiculed him for it. In China many German colonizers and missionaries, including Otto Franke and Richard Wilhelm, identified with Chinese Mandarins.⁶⁸ And General von Trotha's barbarism was itself also a form of psychic cross-identification with a European image of "Herero cruelty," at least in part.

The central tropes in European representations of the Ovaherero in the later 19th century had emphasized their "Satanic hardheartedness" and "crudest cruelty," to quote from prewar missionary and military reports.⁶⁹ After the collapse of the Afrikaner Orlam polity the Rhenish missionaries began to describe the Ovaherero as almost demonically *cruel*.⁷⁰ Missionary Beiderbecke discussed the "inhumane" behavior of the Ovaherero at

⁶⁸ See my "Devil's Handwriting" (2003).

⁶⁹ Missionary Brincker spoke of the Herero's "*Hartherzigkeit*" in his article "Neu-Barmen," in *Berichte der Rheinischen Missions-Gesellschaft* (1870), No. 10, p. 304. The phrase "crudest cruelty" was used in Anonymous (1894): "Kurze Uebersicht über die fünfzigjährige Missionsarbeit im Hererolande," *Rheinische Missions-Traktate*, Nr. 58, S.7. Hugo Hahn's diary contained an entire passage subtitled "*Lack of Feelings among the Herero*," in which he noted that "an Ovaherero has almost no feelings. He has no feelings of love or hate, compassion, pity, or revenge.

⁷⁰ See missionary Heidmann's letters of February, 1880 and Sept. 14, 1880 to the mission society in Archiv- und Museumsstiftung Wuppertal, *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*, Vol. 3.538a, pp. 130 verso and 132 verso.

his station at Otyozondjupa (Waterberg).⁷¹ Hugo von François' 1895 book *Nama und Damara* emphasized the theme of Ovaherero cruelty, including their mutilation of the corpses of their enemies. Lieutenant von François even hinted at cannibalism--something none of the precolonial literature had ever suggested--informing his readers that the Ovaherero had mutilated one of Hendrik Witbooi's sons' corpses, "cutting out the inner side of his thighs, together with the testicles, probably to make a meal of it." The Ovaherero, he said, were "black devils" whose faces recalled "furiously bartering Jews."⁷² And so on. Lieutenant Kurd Schwabe, who had such positive things to say about the Witboois in his 1899 book (*Mit Schwert und Pflug in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Vier Kriegs- u. Wanderjahre*), summarized the Ovaherero as being "violent and cruel," at least "when they are in the majority."⁷³ The Witboois' great champion Karl Dove called the Ovaherero "arrogant and cruel."⁷⁴ Lieutenant von Erffa, an officer killed in the first major engagement with the Ovaherero, wrote of the horrors committed by these "black devils":

Mutilated remnants of corpses everywhere! The beasts had raped the women there after murdering the men and then slaughtered them like sheep . . . Patrols found the body parts hanging on trees like meat to be cured: excised breasts, arms, legs. And over there, the Herero women had mutilated half-grown boys with knives and then left them lying there to bleed to death!

⁷¹"Entwickelungen und Verwickelungen im Hererolande," *Berichte der RMG* (1880), No. 4, p. 103.

⁷² Von Francois ()

⁷³ Schwabe (1899), S. 156.

⁷⁴Karl Dove, *Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Ergebnisse einer wissenschaftliche Reise im südlichen Damaralande. Ergänzungsheft No. 120 zu "Petermanns Mitteilungen"* (Gotha: Justus Perthes, 1896), p. 74.

The outcome of these incidents, according to von Erffa, was that an “evil hatred” (*ein böser Haß*) welled up in the German breast against these “beasts.”⁷⁵

But are hatred and the desire for revenge enough to explain policies of lynching, removing body parts and skulls for scientific study, and trying to exterminate an entire people?⁷⁶ It is difficult to understand Trotha's economically irrational determination to kill off the entire Ovaherero nation without attending to his sadistic self-image as the “great general of the German soldiers” exercising “terrorism,” shedding “rivers of blood,” and driving women and children to their death. This self-perception suggests an identification on the General's part with a European *imago* of the cruel Ovaherero. Challenged by middle-class upstarts like Leutwein who seemed to embody the inexorable demise of noble privilege, von Trotha identified with a caricatured image of the enemy, directing his savage “Herero” wrath as much against the soft opinions of German liberals as against the autochthonous African military opponent.⁷⁷ By theorizing processes of

⁷⁵ These quotes are from letters written by Erffa between September 2, 1903 and March 26, 1904 and published after his death (Erffa 1905, p. 70, 56, 72). For a more relativistic interpretation of the Herero mutilation of their enemies' bodies, see the discussion by Rhenish missionary J. Irle (1906, p. 198), according to whom “the Herero believe that the dead also continue to live Therefore he takes revenge on the dead as on the living.”

⁷⁶ An anatomist, Dr. Sergio Sergi, investigated 14 Herero brains at the Berlin Anatomical Institute which had been procured by anthropologist Leonhard Schultze from the German military in Southwest Africa. According to Sergi, the causes of death among those he investigated included two by hanging (*impicato*), one by suicide, and several by pneumonia or typhus (Sergi 1909, 7). Other scientists studied Herero heads preserved in formaldehyde (Zeidler 1914; von Eggeling 1909); discussion and images in Krüger (1999) and Bergmann (2004, p. 250-251).

⁷⁷ This *imago* was certainly located within the realm of ideological possibilities, even if the Herero were in actuality less cruel than the Germans (they spared women, children, missionaries, and non-Germans during the fighting). By contrast, it would have been ideologically impossible for Leutwein to productively fantasized about being a Herero chief.

imaginary cross-identification we can begin to understand the otherwise inexplicable energy and psychic enjoyment associated with such perverse colonial practices.

Conclusion: How many German Exceptionalisms?

Could German Southwest African be the site of that pre-1914 German exceptionalism that has been so widely dismissed in the historical literature? In order to clarify this issue I think we need to distinguish among three different uses of the language of German exceptionalism. The first and third, as we will see, are perhaps more relevant than the second, but it is the second that has attracted the most attention recently.

The first version of exceptionalism theory has the 19th century, or more specifically, Imperial Germany (1871-1914/1918), as its object. This approach was articulated by Friedrich Engels and Max Weber before the war, by Thorstein Veblen in the United States in 1915, and by Eckart Kehr in the Weimar Republic. The focus here was on the failed revolution of 1848, on the weakness and “feudalization” of the German bourgeoisie, which had failed to embrace and defend its “natural” ideology, liberalism, and had instead emulated the aristocracy and adopted the cultural conservatism and anti-democratic politics associated with that class. The German nobility was said to have retained an overweening importance within the polity and culture even as the economy industrialized rapidly. For instance, Engels had described the Junkers as hegemonic in Imperial Germany and Bismarck as organizing “the demolition of German industry, under the pretext of protecting it.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884),” in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress, 1970, p. 329; also “Le socialisme de M. Bismarck,” in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, I/25, pp. 188-194. Weber’s 1895 inaugural address at Freiburg University is his strongest statement of the argument; As I discuss in my *Regulating the Social* (1993), Marx’s and Engels’ views of

In a second iteration, arising during the Nazi period and after 1945, the putative disjuncture between rapid economic modernization in 19th century Germany and the continuing domination of culture and the state by the Junkers was mobilized as an explanation for the rise of Nazism. Ralf Dahrendorf, Helmut Böhme, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and many other “exceptionalist” historians adopted this framework starting in the 1960s.⁷⁹ Wehler ended his book on the German Empire with an allusion to the connections between the German Empire and “German history over the past decades,” and in the English language edition of 1985 he specified that “the guiding question underlying this book has been to investigate why Hitler's National Socialist regime came to power some dozen years after the end of the monarchy; why this regime succeeded in establishing a system of unprecedented terror and barbaric mass extermination; and why it proved capable of conducting a second total war.”⁸⁰ A culturalist version of this argument was associated with Marxists like Lukács (1954), Leo Kofler (1948), and Alexander Abusch (1946) and by non-Marxist cultural historians such as Helmuth Plessner, George Mosse, and Fritz Stern.

I accept the exceptionalist historians’ definition of the main elite actors in Imperial Germany and their depiction of the triangular relationship of force among these groups. But I reject the essentialist definition of each group as having certain historical

Imperial German’s social class base were shifting and contradictory; GDR historians of that period, attempting to hew to a Marxist line, themselves reflected Marx’s own confusion on the issue.

⁷⁹ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York: Norton, 1965); Helmut Böhme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Großmacht. Studien zum Verhältnis von Wirtschaft und Staat während der Reichsgründungszeit 1848-1881* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1966); Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969) and “Industrial Growth and Early German Imperialism,” in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, ed. Bob Sutcliffe, London: Longman, 1972), pp. 71-92.

⁸⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985), p.7.

“tasks” to perform and intrinsic ideologies. Also against the Wehlerite version of this theory, it was not the colonial bourgeoisie but the *Bildungsbürgertum*—the legions of university trained specialists in foreign cultures, languages, and legal systems—that played the role as the “Träger” of less racist and less intolerant positions and policies in the colonies. This version of the *Sonderweg* thesis sometimes suggested, correctly, that the political and cultural positions of each social class were generated relationally from within a force field of elite class competition.⁸¹ But at the level of symbolic identifications, middle-class colonial German men did not typically mimic the nobility, *pace* Wehler and Co. If anything, these men mimicked the supposedly more civilized bourgeois British colonizers. This is exactly the opposite of the *Anglophobic* identifications that the *Sonderweg* historians posit for the German middle class.

A third version of the German exceptionalism thesis is more descriptive; indeed, it is often more of a rhetorical figure than a full-fledged historical argument. From Tacitus to the present, Germany has been described as deviating from a normative model or from its more modern neighbors—from Rome in Tacitus’ time, from Britain in the 19th century, and from the United States under both Presidents Bush. This trope is often used to cast aspersions on political programs or opponents. Supporters of the neutralist German peace movement in the 1980s and opponents of German reunification after 1989 were accused of pursuing a German *Sonderweg*, as were those who opposed German participation in the first Gulf war, other joint military missions, and the more recent war

⁸¹ See especially Ute Frevert, *Ehrenmänner: das Duell in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (München: C.H. Beck, 1991).

in Iraq.⁸² But comparisons among states or other actors *within* a particular world historical moment can be descriptively illuminating. If German colonial policy did differ from the practices of the other colonizers this difference certainly merits further analysis.

How are these three approaches mobilized in discussions of German Southwest Africa? Interestingly, colonial historians' attention has been drawn recently not to the first and third approaches but to the second. The continuity between 19th-century German colonialism and Nazism was alluded to by Helmut Bley in his foundational book on the colony. Bley's goal was to account for the peculiar *extremism* of German Southwest Africa. Toward the end of his book there is a section entitled "growing totalitarianism," and in the final pages he turns explicitly to Hanna Arendt's suggestion that the seeds of modern fascism can be found in colonial (South) Africa. Bley even hints that Southwest Africa may have evolved into a kind of fascism due to the colony's "lateness," an argument that echoes the exceptionalist trope of the disastrous effects of belated modernization.⁸³ All of the individual components of the exceptionalism narrative are thus present in Bley's book, but in a disaggregated and somewhat rudimentary form: deviation from western "normalcy" as a result of "lateness" leads to "extremism" and eventually to "totalitarianism." The argument follows the rhetorical form of the *enthymeme*, a truncated syllogism in which an implicit but essential premise is left unstated; considered as an ideological form, the *enthymeme* relies on the reader or audience supplying "premises never set forth in the argument" from its "stock of

⁸²For references see George Steinmetz, "German Exceptionalism and the Origins of Nazism: The Career of a Concept," in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 251-284.

⁸³Bley (1971/1996), pp. xvii, 223-225, 282.

knowledge and opinions.”⁸⁴ In Bley’s text, the unstated premise is the exceptionalism model, which his German audience would have been able to supply on their own.

Bley’s text also gestured toward a topic that is now being explored in more detail by historians: the formative influence of colonialism on Nazism.⁸⁵ Although this research is clearly making new empirical discoveries, I am not convinced that it is going to rearrange our understanding of Nazism. Certainly Nazism drew on and was shaped by a tremendous array of historical precursors. But historians have traced Nazism to the spirit of modernity at one moment and to an antimodern culture at another; to the bourgeoisie and capitalism here and to the Junker nobility there; to masculinity, science, eugenics, racism, and Hitler’s personality. And they have found solid evidence for all of these partial theories. This should caution colonial theorists about any claims to have discovered the new key.

The third *Sonderweg* approach and a revised version of the first one seem more promising. With regard to the third, recall that Bley framed his study as a contrast between German colonialism and its “deviation from the normal,” that is, from the allegedly more “normal” British and western European versions.⁸⁶ Indeed, von Trotha’s actions do in fact seem to have differed from those of most other colonizers in the

⁸⁴ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 208.

⁸⁵ In addition to the works cited in note 19, see David Bruce Furber, “Going East: Colonialism and German Life in Nazi-occupied Poland,” Ph.D. Thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2003; Idem, “Thinking Like a Colonial State: Development for Exploitation and the Emergence of the Final Solution in the Government-General,” paper presented at the 14th international conference of Europeanists, Chicago, 2004; Lenny Urena of the University of Michigan is currently conducting dissertation research on this topic as well.

⁸⁶Bley (1971/1996), p. xvii.

modern imperialist era by targeting an entire ethnic group for physical destruction.⁸⁷ The United States killed 20,000 Filipino fighters and between 250,000 and a million civilians during the Philippine-American War (1899-1913), and “numerous atrocities” were “sanctioned by the highest authorities,”⁸⁸ but no one has ever argued that the U.S. sought to exterminate *all* of their new colonial subjects. The British killed between several hundred and 1,200 of their Indian subjects at Amritsar (Jallianawala Bagh) in 1919. If we shift forward to the postwar period, the French slaughtered at least 11,000 Malagasy rebels in 1947; about 50,000 Kenyans died during the Mau-Mau war of the 1950s; and between 250,000 and 1,500,000 Algerians died in the so-called civil war of the 1950s.⁸⁹ These numbers are appalling, and in the last case they are certainly higher than the numbers of Ovaherero who could have perished in 1904. But there is no evidence that these colonial powers deliberately sought the complete extermination of their subjects. The 1904 events in Namibia were thus exceptional in their own sociohistorical and epochal context, that is, in the era of modern (if not early-modern) European colonialism.

This raises the question of whether there was something peculiar about the Germans as colonizers, or about the Germans per se, as the authors of two of the genocides of the 20th century. One way to approach this problem is to ask what, if anything, is specifically “German” about the account I have sketched here? The explanatory elements that I have emphasized here are precolonial representations of the Other, symbolic struggles for class distinction, and imaginary identification with imagos

⁸⁷ Early modern colonialism is a different story; on the Pequot War as genocide see Freeman (1995).

⁸⁸ Clymer (1983: 550); vgl. Miller (1982); Shaw & Francia (2002).

⁸⁹ William B. Cohen,

of the colonized. The latter two processes drew on precolonial ethnographic imagery. Although precolonial visions of the Ovaherero were dominated by Germans, especially German missionaries, I have found little evidence that 19th-century observers from other parts of Europe discussed Ovaherero in different terms. This may of course be due to the fact that early non-German travelers relied on the Rhenish missionaries for information and assistance, and so assimilated their views of the local people. Symbolic struggles within the colonial state field were nationally distinctive, however, and for reasons similar to those identified by the original version of the *Sonderweg* thesis. I was hardly inclined, when I embarked on this project, to seek support for a thesis I had firmly rejected in an earlier study of German social policies in the 19th century.⁹⁰ Yet in one colony after the other, I found that the colonial field was criss-crossed by cultural-political conflicts organized around the class categories that were central to the *Sonderweg* literature. But there were two key differences as well. First, colonial settlers and investors—the “bourgeoisie” in the *Sonderweg* literature--were not centrally involved in the daily formation of native policy. Instead the main axis of intra-German conflict saw men identified with the nobility opposing men self-identified as educated members of the liberal middle class. Secondly, these educated middle-class men were not being “feudalized”; instead, they usually defended their class-specific cultural capital in their symbolic struggles with the von Trothas and von Heykings of the military and Foreign Service, while sometimes seeking an imaginary ennoblement through identification with an imago of the elite members of the colonized society. These

⁹⁰ George Steinmetz,

fantasies of exaltation—or in von Trotha’s case, fantasies of degradation—could strengthen an affinity for a specific course of native policy (or genocidal policy).

The German exceptionalism thesis has been widely discredited among theoretically oriented historians for, among other things, idealizing a British or western model of 19th century development. But if German colonialism in Southwest Africa was truly more brutal and violent than modern British, French, Belgian, or U.S. colonialism, and if the reasons for this have partly to do with a colonial translation of the classic metropolitan tension between German middle classes and German aristocrats, then perhaps the *Sonderweg* thesis warrants another look.

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