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‘Ja, es musste sein!’ German settler perceptions of violence during the Herero and Nama War (1904–1907)

Asher Lubotzky*

Abstract

German settlers colonizing South West Africa developed specific attitudes towards violence as a result of experiencing the Herero and Nama War (1904–1907). Through analyzing settler discourse at that time period, this article suggests that the war significantly contributed to the development of a distinct settler identity that was gradually growing apart from the German metropole. Settlers increasingly sought transnational examples of racial regimes for South West Africa, noting that their local conflict was part of a global racial struggle. Policies pursued in other, non-German settler societies became more attractive in light of the destructive German military policy and the disparities between settlers and metropole during the war. The war's goal, in the settler view, was to establish a stable oppressive and coercive structure which supported the permanent exploitation of Africans for economic, social and political gain. Therefore, they rejected both the eliminatory violence and the 'humanitarian' policies promoted by non-settler actors. To this end, settlers demanded the privilege of using domestic and labor-related violence independently, but also condemned violent behavior of European new-comers.

Introduction

German South West Africa (GSWA) at the turn of the twentieth century was seen as the German colonial territory most suitable for German immigration and the establishment of a settler colony. While some in Germany anticipated vast immigration, in 1904 the number of Europeans in the colony did not exceed 5,000 of which perhaps half may be considered German settlers (i.e., people of German ethnic descent who intended to stay permanently in the colony). Though few in numbers, German settlers played a significant role in the political and social dynamic of the colony.¹ Despite this role, and the

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¹ Some prominent scholarship on German settlers in South West Africa include: Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1914*, Hamburg, Leibniz, 1968; Daniel J. Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia*, Athens, Ohio University

burgeoning scholarly interest in settler colonialism as a research theme, German settlers are still a relatively under-researched group. The revolts of the Herero and the Nama and the German genocidal response (1904–1907) significantly influenced the settlers and shaped their conception of themselves and their environment. This article explores settler perceptions of violence towards Africans in the light of these events, and thus highlights the settlers' particular roles within German colonialism as well as their growing affinity with other, non-German settler societies.

One may discern two types of violent and coercive acts committed by the Germans against the African population throughout the Herero and Nama War. Between June 1904 and the end of 1905, state orchestrated military warfare led by General von Trotha was implemented with the goal of exterminating an entire indigenous rebelling population. In addition to the military violence perpetrated during this period, white citizens within the domestic and civil realms of German South West African society committed individual acts of violence against the native African population to exploit them economically. Violent acts by settlers, although not confined to war times, increased in severity during the genocide, taking advantage of the new weakened and largely defeated status of the Herero and Nama societies. Perhaps the most significant example, although definitely not the only one, was the violence committed during the massive incarceration of Herero and Nama in labor and concentration camps since 1905.² The settlers of GSWA had varying attitudes towards the two types of violence (state military vs. civilian domestic), due to the specific complexities and interests of their society, as this article will further demonstrate and elaborate.

Global and regional context and the Germans of GSWA

Scholars like Andrew Zimmerman and Sebastian Conrad have emphasized in recent years global and transnational aspects of the German Empire.³ This article seeks to contribute to this growing scholarship by identifying settler views on transnational issues and their own global orientation. The settler world-view on racial violence was significantly influenced by the way they perceived the use of interracial violence globally at the time. The reports that appeared in the colonial press during the war period portrayed a

Press, 2002; Robbie Aitken, *Exclusion and Inclusion: Gradations of Whiteness and Socio-Economic Engineering in German Southwest Africa, 1884–1914*, Oxford, Lang, 2007.

² 'Canonical' scholarship on the Herero and Nama genocide include: Horst Drechsler, *Der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus (1884–1915)*, Berlin, Akademie -Verlag, 1966; Jon Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, London, University of California Press, 1981; Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890–1923*, Oxford, Currey, 1999; Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005; Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*, Berlin, Lit, 2011.

³ Key publications in this regard include: Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2010; Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel, (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004.

picture of broad-based and worldwide interracial conflict. In their view, the war against the Herero and Nama was merely one of many symptoms of this global conflict. The settlers believed that the increasing racial tension, which appeared in fierce and dramatic 'race wars' or 'race conflicts' throughout the world, was a major influence on the global balance of power between Europe and the rest of the world. For example, the rise of the Japanese Empire as a result of its victory in the Russo-Japanese War, received wide coverage in the settler press, which emphasized the racial aspects of the war. The Japanese success was described in the German settler press as a "strike against the rule of the white race" around the world.⁴ Racial anxiety was also expressed by the settlers at the "resurgence of the Xenophobic movement" in China, and the local uprisings by Africans in Natal.⁵ Other global interracial conflicts were also influential and caused further anxiety: in the American South — particularly the Atlanta race riots at the end of 1906 which expanded to other states in the South, in Latin America — revolts of 'Natives' versus 'whites' in Cuba and in Mexico, and in Algeria.⁶ At the same time, the settlers in GSWA looked aghast at what they perceived as the significant strengthening of the Ethiopian Movement. Some members of this movement, which had strong religious features, called for a broad African uprising against the European regimes on the continent. The Ethiopian Movement was perceived by the German settlers as proof of a global threat to the rule of the white race,⁷ which would likely gain momentum in the wake of the Russo-Japanese war.⁸ The German settlers blamed the British for strengthening the Ethiopian Movement in GSWA and suspected them of assisting the Herero and Nama. The German settler press claimed that the British were to be blamed due to their advocacy of education for the natives. The education promoted by the British encouraged rebellion by spreading ideas of "racial equality."⁹

Hence, the atmosphere of general racial tension led the GSWA settlers to identify their local conflict as part of a global struggle. As such, it prompted them to learn and to imitate methods of control and suppression of the 'racial enemy' by observing other colonial regimes. The settlers believed that failing to defeat the Africans would bring about a weakening of the white race globally. Therefore, they felt that it was vital to unite the white race against such a threat.¹⁰ Texts written by settlers in GSWA demonstrate that both the American South and South Africa served as points of reference for the German settlers. For example, one idea adopted from the United States and South Africa was the perception that it was necessary to keep members of the other race under strict

⁴ *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* (DSWAZ), 28.06.1906, p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Windhuker Nachrichten* (WN), 01.11.1906, p. 2; WN, 11.10.1906, p. 3; WN, 08.11.1906, p. 6. Two years before the racial clashes in Atlanta, DSWAZ reported that racial tension in the US was increasing, and "was expected to develop into a war of the races". See: DSWAZ, 18.05.1904, p. 2.

⁷ DSWAZ, 04.04.1906, p. 6.

⁸ WN, 15.03.05, pp. 1f.

⁹ WN, 24.01.1907, pp. 5-6; DSWAZ, 04.04.1906, p. 6.

¹⁰ DSWAZ, 30.08.1905, p. 1.

control and supervision, which also included violence for the purpose of deterrence and education.¹¹ These ideas regarding population control, confinement, and labor-related violence had been circulating across the colonial world since at least the end of the 19th century.¹² But due to the results of the Herero and Nama War there were now new ‘opportunities’ to implement extensive measures of exploitation, and therefore this quest for other ideas was made more relevant and potentially practical than ever. The Boer Republics particularly were the main point of reference in this context, but German settlers also discussed methods of forced labor practiced in Portuguese Angola.¹³ In addition, German settlers compared the natives of their colony to the Native Americans (‘Indians’) of North America. This comparison is another example of how the GSWA settlers identified their situation with other settler societies and other racial conflicts around the world. Settler Ludwig Conradt compared the brutality of the Herero over the course of the war with that of the American “Indians” on the battlefield.¹⁴ The *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* (DSWAZ) recommended that the battle against the African rebels be fought along the lines of the American militia system that was used against the American “Indians.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the colonization process in South Africa persuaded German settlers that the Africans would not face extinction on the scale of the North American or Australian models. Rather the opposite was true: Africans were expected to multiply. Thus, the fate of Africans was not elimination or extinction but ‘merely’ that of servitude to and subjugation by the white race.¹⁶ The fact that the European population would constitute a minority vis-à-vis the African majority directly corresponded to the settler’s elitist vision of establishing a minority-ruled colony. According to their vision, this kind of colonial regime would have total control and political power over the vast native population. The indigenous majority would have to undergo a process of proletarianization and an expropriation of rights, in order to be exploited for the economic, social, and political needs of the ruling class. In choosing between two different models of settler colonies – one North American or Australian and the other South African – the German settlers in South West Africa picked the second, namely, the native majority is a fact which actually bears positive implications for the settler community.

¹¹ About the success of the violence related to the mission of ‘native education’ in South Africa, see: RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 53-55, in: Fritz Ferdinand Müller, *Kolonien unter der Peitsche*, Berlin, Rütten & Loening, 1962: 55f.

¹² For recent scholarship on colonial practices of confinement, displacement and concentration of labor power, see: Aidan Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism: Britain Empires of Camps*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2017.

¹³ WN, 12.07.1906, p. 5.

¹⁴ Ludwig Conradt, *Erinnerungen aus zwanzigjährigem Händler- und Farmerleben in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Göttingen, Hess, 2006: 54.

¹⁵ DSWAZ, 09.03.1907, p. 1.

¹⁶ DSWAZ, 11.05.1904, p. 2.

The war and the extermination policy as viewed by the settlers

The radical events of the war, and especially the extermination policy initiated by General von Trotha, spurred a broad-based discourse amongst the German settlers in the colony. The settlers were generally opposed to the total extermination of the Herero and the Nama and to von Trotha's policies during that period. Their main interest was the economic, political and social exploitation of the local population. Thus, the native population played an integral role in the desired social order of the colonial state and the settlers did not wish for a total disappearance, or even a dramatic decrease, of this population. Even with the adoption of a terminology of a 'war of the races,' which was promoted heavily by von Trotha, as well as the global references mentioned before, this war, according to the settlers, was not supposed to end with the wholesale destruction of the other race.

The responses in opposition to von Trotha's extermination policy can be found in texts written by settlers soon after the settler community had acknowledged his intentions to totally annihilate the Herero and Nama. At the beginning of December 1904, von Trotha publicly disclosed his goal for the war via the settler press. It was the first time he had directly called publicly through this medium for the "destruction of all rebel tribes through all military means necessary."¹⁷ In the weeks following these public announcements, settler elites expressed their firm opposition to von Trotha's ideas of total extermination. The DSWAZ which was affiliated to the merchant elements within the settler community, declared that:

The land needs [the Herero] as a worker. It is not their annihilation, but their real submission, that must be the goal of the present war.¹⁸

Moreover, the newspaper asserted that the goal of the war was not to exterminate African natives, but to save the survivors and to seal borders so that no native could leave the colony. The "weakening of the enemy," claimed the settler press, "comes at our expense;" and the survivors and the captives should be used for work.¹⁹ In a similar spirit, the *Windhuker Nachrichten* (WN), a newspaper affiliated with the German farmers of the colony, criticized the physical extermination of the Africans as a war objective, arguing that:

not annihilation had to be the guiding thought, but the preservation of what we have in the Herero: a tremendous, converted into labor-force, economic capital.²⁰

The meaning of the word 'elimination,' according to the WN, was referring to the elimination of "tribal sovereignty" and not physical elimination. Physical elimination, so

¹⁷ DSWAZ, 07.12.1904, p. 2.

¹⁸ DSWAZ, 14.12.1904, p. 2, "Ihrer bedarf das Land als Arbeiter. Nicht ihre Vernichtung, sondern ihre wirkliche Unterwerfung muss deshalb das Ziel des gegenwärtigen Krieges sein."

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ WN, 24.12.1904, p. 2, "nicht Vernichtung musste der leitende Gedanke sein, sondern Erhaltung dessen, was wir im Herero besitzen: ein ungeheures, in Arbeitskräfte umgesetztes Wirtschaftskapital."

the article argued, was an event “unprecedented in the history of southern Africa” and would be difficult to agree to.²¹ Around the time of von Trotha’s departure from the colony, at the end of 1905, the same newspaper commented that “amongst the more useful circles” of the settler population “one finds very few supporters” of the General’s extermination policies.²²

Nonetheless, the settler attitude towards the policy of extreme violence was complex and ambivalent, and the settler discourse increasingly justified the use of violence throughout the war. Even if in principle many settlers opposed total extermination, large-scale violence was at times beneficial for pursuing settler interests – especially after this violence had been committed – and therefore was sometimes reevaluated positively and justified in retrospect by the settlers.

One may discern four types of reactions and justification which were prominent in the settler discourse on the matter of violence against the Herero and the Nama over the course of the war. The first one was a ‘genocidal discourse’ which inter alia included concealing, masking, downplaying and camouflaging the violent events of the war. The second reaction was the justification of violence on the basis of the features and customs of the enemy. The third reaction was the construction of a narrative in which the settlers were the real victims, and the fourth one was the emphasis of the necessity and inevitability of the war. These reactions were intermingled at times but were clearly present in settler discourse throughout the war. They will be explained and demonstrated in the following sections.

The events of the war spurred the development of a ‘genocidal discourse’ amongst the settlers. This included using linguistic tools and specific vocabulary which concealed, masked, downplayed, marginalized and distorted the description of the violence committed against the Herero and the Nama. This type of discourse was utilized during von Trotha’s extermination campaign as well as during the period of incarceration of the Herero and Nama in concentration and labor camps. The indiscriminate murder of Herero groups in the Omaheke Desert between August and December 1904 was frequently described by the press in military terms which camouflaged the severity of the genocide. This linguistic strategy downplayed events and normalized the atrocities of the war. Such examples of the downplaying of events included the description of the indiscriminate murder of women and children, as well as unarmed men, as “shootings at those fleeing” from the “battlefield.” Massacres were described as “clashes” or “brief battles” in which women and children “participated.” These “clashes” often ended in very high numbers of casualties (sometimes hundreds of corpses), without any losses on the German side.²³ Water wells were “captured,” the area underwent a “clearing” of natives, and the Herero groups were “sent back to the desert to their people,” without

²¹ Ibid.

²² WN, 02.11.1905, p. 1.

²³ For example: DSWAZ, 12.10.1904, p. 1; DSWAZ, 09.11.1904, p. 1, DSWAZ, 23.11.1904, p. 1.

mentioning that those military operations meant certain death.²⁴ Furthermore, comparisons were made to previous small scale clashes which had been fought in the colony, in a deliberate attempt to blur the abnormality of the current war.²⁵ In a similar spirit, settler Clara Brockmann wrote that “the bloodiest wars fought in South West Africa are those which were conducted between the tribes themselves”, and not this current war.²⁶ With the passing of time and reports of mounting death tolls, settlers claimed many fatalities were the result of famine or thirst, without clearly depicting the German military actions that led to those situations. Additionally, texts implied that there was “brief opposition,” “unwillingness to fight” or “fear” amongst the Herero and Nama but did not elaborate or discuss the reasons for this.²⁷ Explicit mention of the killing of women and children or the term extermination was rarely, if ever, noted by the settlers in relation to the Herero or the Nama over the course of the war. Despite the harsh conditions which the Herero endured while fleeing in the Omaheke desert, the settler press described them as having the potential to recover and return to war, especially since they “now have nothing to lose.”²⁸ The concentration and labor camps were for the most part mentioned in positive or normative terms. They were described as “protection” which was granted to the natives.²⁹ Despite the wars and the hunger, which was mentioned very infrequently in the settler writings,³⁰ the inmates of those camps were granted much better conditions than “most of them had been used to” in their previous lives outside the camps.³¹ The camp on Haifischinsel (Shark Island), which was known for its harsh conditions, was described as a place where “everything has been arranged [...] to accommodate women and children.”³² In other places, it was banally described as a “hospital”³³ or simply as a place in which the “natives live.”³⁴ A camp in the vicinity of the village of Karibib was described almost pastorally as having the façade of a “small village” in which life was conducted in “calm and joy.”³⁵ The captives arrived at the camps in transports and were described as appearing to be in good shape.³⁶ Another

²⁴ Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 197; DSWAZ, 18.01.1905, p. 1; WN, 14.01.1905, p. 5.

²⁵ Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 47, 181.

²⁶ Clara Brockmann, *Briefe eines deutschen Mädchens aus Südwest*, Berlin, Mittler und Sohn, 1912: 43.

²⁷ See for example: DSWAZ, 11.01.1905, p. 1; WN, 14.01.1905, p. 4. On the refusal of the German army to supply water to Witbooi's men who were dying of thirst, see: WN, 02.11.1905, p. 3.

²⁸ DSWAZ, 14.12.1904, p. 1.

²⁹ Brockmann, *Briefe*: 40f. The trend of justifying incarceration in camps by linking it to a necessary protection of the natives was also prevalent in the British Empire at the same time period. See: Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*: 5.

³⁰ For example: DSWAZ, 01.03.1905, p. 2.

³¹ WN, 15.05.1905, pp. 1f.

³² DSWAZ, 02.11.1904, p. 1.

³³ DSWAZ, 25.01.1905, p. 1.

³⁴ DSWAZ, 30.01.1907, p. 1.

³⁵ DSWAZ, 24.05.1905, p. 2.

³⁶ WN, 12.01.1905, p. 2.

report emphasized the generous food portions and the abundant clothing and blankets which were provided to the inmates. The report also noted that the cost to the German population was “very high under the circumstances.”³⁷ It was also claimed that the “exaggerated concern” for the needs of the Herero was “devoid of any justification.”³⁸ The settlers’ benign or positive description of the concentration camps was directly influenced by their own economic interests. It was claimed, for example, that the situation of the inmates at the camps (especially the Herero nobility – the Omuhona) was “too good” and that they were being fed and were idling about, since they were not required to work sufficiently.³⁹ The emphasis the settlers placed on the description of the Herero aristocracy is also evidence of the German social and political interest in suppressing the local traditional leadership. This leadership posed a threat to the settler’s claim on the right to absolute rule.

The settler discourse regarding the genocide, however ruthless, reflected their interest in preserving at least the Herero as a subjugated labor force, and not in their extermination. When settlers discussed the need for “a complete solution”⁴⁰ or for an “immediate solution to the question of the natives once and for all”,⁴¹ they sought yet again the *elimination of the power and political significance* of the natives “forever.”⁴² Indeed, a theoretical discourse developed over the feasibility of the extinction of races, which at times, some settlers justified. But it was only the extinction of the Nama nation that could, to a certain extent, be countenanced by the settlers. Sociologist George Steinmetz noted that Germans saw the future extinction of the Nama as an option after starting to view them as unworthy laborers due to their perceived independent nature, limited numbers, and their European influences that brought them to refuse to work or be subjugated as other African natives.⁴³ Other Europeans at that time also considered the Nama, as part of the larger Khoisan (‘Hottentots’), as a nation undergoing an “extinction process”.⁴⁴ This outlook intensified among German settlers during the Herero and Nama War, when the fantasies about a subjugated African proletariat started to be realized. Settler Conradt, for instance, wrote that only the Nama “would slowly but surely

³⁷ WN, 15.05.1905, pp. 1f.

³⁸ WN, 05.04.1906, p. 1.

³⁹ DSWAZ, 21.07.1906, p. 1: “Ich fürchte, die zu gute Behandlung ist daran schuld. Die Leute, welche sich bei den Herero-Sammelstellen einfinden, können sich dort manchmal wochenlang aufhalten, werden gefüttert, wie nie zuvor und tun wenig oder garnichts [...]”. Complaints about the good situation of the inmates in the concentration camps, see also in: DSWAZ, 28.07.1906, p. 1.

⁴⁰ “eine vollständige Auflösung”, DSWAZ, 16.02.1904, p. 1.

⁴¹ “Die Eingeborenenfrage jetzt für alle Zeiten gründlich lösen”, DSWAZ, 11.05.1904, p. 2.

⁴² DSWAZ, 05.04.1904, p. 1.

⁴³ George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007: 155-174.

⁴⁴ About the potential extinction of the Nama: Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell Univ. Press, 2003: 13. Governor Leutwein notes that the battle against the Nama is tough, because the Nama are “unworried regarding the possibility that their nation will disappear”. See: DSWAZ, 09.03.1907, p. 1.

disappear from the face of the earth.” Settler Margarete von Eckenbrecher wrote that she had “the impression that the [Nama] tribe was becoming extinct.”⁴⁵ German settlers emphasized the Nama’s low economic value and their “laziness”. They concluded that these negative characteristics would naturally lead to the Nama’s own extinction, unlike their Herero counterparts. The Nama’s inability to work and generate economic gains justified the probable extinction of this nation according to some settler opinions.⁴⁶ Settler Conradt wrote: “in an analysis that is devoid of emotions, it is hard to feel pain for them” since they have lived at the expense of what the Herero have produced.⁴⁷ The “demise” of the Nama nation was described as “one of the great successes of civilization.”⁴⁸ In contrast to beliefs about the Nama, the Herero were perceived of as a useful economic resource for the settlers. They were not considered a nation deserving of extermination, and any such harm to the Herero would only harm the settlers’ interests.

The settlers justified the violence carried out by the military during the war using the unique racial features and ethnic customs of their enemies: the Nama and Herero nations. The “otherness” used to describe Africans served as a means of denial that the enemy was human. Such racial and cultural assumptions supported the idea that the natives lacked any traits of humanity and could be treated accordingly. The settlers believed the African had different basic needs compared to the European. Of course, this negative view of Africans was rooted in a much broader colonialist and racist discourse prevalent in Europe at the time.⁴⁹ But the Herero and Nama War provided specific and extreme conditions which intensified and contextualized the dehumanization of Africans. For instance, settlers believed that the natives ascribed different meaning to life, death and violence. Various sources emphasized the inferior value Africans give to their own life, and their apathy towards the death of their people. Africans were described as fighting the war with utter “contempt towards death”, as well as suffering from “fatalism”.⁵⁰ To support this idea of contempt or apathy towards death, some settlers cited data on the rising number of suicides among Africans, and the tendency of certain tribes to abandon people who threatened tribal prosperity such as the aged and

⁴⁵ See respectively: Conradt, *Erinnerungen* : 187; Margarete von Eckenbrecher, *Was Afrika mir gab und nahm: Erlebnisse einer deutschen Ansiedlerfrau in Südwestafrika*, Berlin, Mittler & Sohn, 1907: 82.

⁴⁶ See for example Bley’s observations regarding the settlers’ satisfaction from the possible extermination of the “uncreative” Nama: Helmut Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule, 1894–1914*, London, Heinemann, 1971: 198, 207.

⁴⁷ Conradt, *Erinnerungen* : 187f.

⁴⁸ WN, 08.03.1906, p.1.

⁴⁹ For German perceptions of Africans see for example: Amadou Booker Sadi, *Das Bild des Negro-Afrikaners in der Deutschen Kolonialliteratur (1884–1945). Ein Beitrag zur literarischen Imagologie Schwarzafrikas*, Berlin, Reimer, 1985; and: Michael Schubert, *Der schwarze Fremde: Das Bild des Schwarzafrikaners in der parlamentarischen und publizistischen Kolonialdiskussion in Deutschland von den 1870er bis in die 1930er Jahre*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2003.

⁵⁰ Brockmann, *Briefe* : 37f., “Todesverachtung”, “Fatalismus”.

the ill.⁵¹ African burial customs also frowned upon and mocked, with the lack of respect or care for their dead been emphasized.⁵² Furthermore, the cruel attributes of the Herero and the Nama were highlighted. The settlers argued that the violence committed by Africans was much more extreme than the accepted norm of “civilized nations.” It was claimed that the Herero “do not have mercy on anything” and their cruelty is an attribute of their “wildness.” It was argued that cruelty had been an integral part of the Herero since the dawn of time. Brutality and ruthlessness were taught to Africans at a young age, for example settler Eckenbrecher describes a five-year-old Herero who was cruel to his victim.⁵³ The African violence could be directed both towards their enemies (European or African) but also towards members of their own people.⁵⁴ The Herero and Nama were accused of violating the corpses of their enemies, torturing and killing children and women, smashing the skulls of their enemies onto rocks, and cutting off limbs (particularly internal limbs).⁵⁵ This brutality was used as a justification for the extreme German violence which was practiced over the course of the war. In fact, it was actually the *Windhuker Nachrichten*, one of the most prominent critics of von Trotha, which declared that “in comparison to the horrors perpetrated by the colored leaders, the punishment [which they deserve] could never be harsh enough.”⁵⁶ Likewise, settler Else Sonnenberg asserted that “everyone had to be punished as befitted them” for the horrors that they perpetrated.⁵⁷ Similarly, the Herero’s “cruelty”, alongside other “animalistic” attributes that were ascribed to them, supported the settlers’ claim that warfare in the colonies had to be conducted significantly differently from warfare in Europe, and therefore it should not be subject to European laws and restrictions.⁵⁸ The basic needs of the Africans were described as substantially different from those of the Europeans, as it was thought that natives were far more capable of withstanding harsh conditions and scarcity. Settlers argued that the primary need of the Africans was work, a belief which also matched – yet again – the settlers’ economic needs.⁵⁹ The settlers believed that natives did not need the same amount of water as Europeans and were

⁵¹ Ibid.: 44f.; Eckenbrecher, *Afrika*: 80.

⁵² Eckenbrecher, *Afrika*: 154f., 176.

⁵³ Ibid.: 222.

⁵⁴ Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 181-183; DSWAZ, 03.05.04, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 46, 54, 181, 183; DSWAZ, 11.05.1904, p. 2; Bernhard Voigt, *Du Meine Heimat Deutsch-Südwest*, Berlin, Safari, 1925: 151.

⁵⁶ WN, 26.07.1906, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Else Sonnenberg, *Wie es am Waterberg zugeht: Ein Originalbericht von 1904 zur Geschichte des Herero-Aufstandes in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Wendeburg, Krebs, 2004: 82.

⁵⁸ About the “animalistic” nature of the Africans, see for example: Sonnenberg, *Waterberg*: 74; Carl Schlettwein, *Der Herero-Aufstand. Was hat ihn veranlasst und was lehrt er uns?*, Wismar, Bartholdi, 1905: p. 14. On the uniqueness of war in the colonies in the writings of the settlers, see (inter alia): Voigt, *Heimat Deutsch-Südwest*: 151; Conrad Rust, *Krieg und Frieden im Hererolande: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Kriegsjahre 1904*, Leipzig, Kittler, 1905: 490; DSAWZ, 19.10.1904, p. 1, and also Theodor Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Berlin, Mittler und Sohn, 1908: 532f.

⁵⁹ Rust, *Krieg und Frieden*: 528.

less sensitive to pain.⁶⁰ Africans were also described as being accustomed to tyranny, violence and exploitation by their leaders.⁶¹ The settler conceptions of the native Africans in GSWA facilitated the justification of the practices of exploitation and forced labor in the colony. According to settler belief, exploitation and oppression were considered to be a 'natural state' for the African native.

Settlers constructed a narrative in which they considered themselves to be the actual sufferers of the war, feeling that they were the victims of violence and extermination in the colony. The construction of such a narrative resembles the phenomenon which the scholar John Docker coined Victimology, and was widespread amongst colonial settler societies. Victimology usually occurs as a response to an emergence of an armed native opposition, which inflicts a sense of victimhood on the colonizers who may suddenly feel threatened. This sense of victimhood was used by the colonialists to justify their use of extreme violence.⁶² The shocking outbreak of the war in GSWA in January 1904 created a mental state of collective trauma amongst the settlers. This caused them to feel a tangible threat to their future existence in the colony. The German losses and casualties at the beginning of the war were seen as a concrete existential threat to the European presence in the colony. The verb *vernichten* (to exterminate), with its various conjugations, was used almost exclusively to describe the activities that the Africans carried out *against the settlers*. The year 1904 was summarized in the settler press as a year in which "a significant portion of [European] cultural labor in the colony" had now been "exterminated."⁶³ Another article described the perceived violence against the settlers at the beginning of the war as follows: "blood was spilled on the oasis of culture, innocence was strangled [...] many places in which people lived in happiness, were devastated with the ruins of destruction [...] and the women who had become captive daughters had to cope with the humiliation and shame".⁶⁴ On the second anniversary of the outbreak of the war ("Memorial Day"), the DSWAZ wrote that "the extermination of all the whites was a very real possibility."⁶⁵ Similarly, settler Helene von Falkenhausen described receiving reports about "killing of all whites" and the eradication of entire communities by the Herero during the first days of the rebellion.⁶⁶ When von Lindequist took up the position of GSWA governor at the end of 1905, one of the settler leaders, Gustav Voigt, gave a speech at the reception for the new governor wherein he expressed the sentiment that the natives were rebelling against the "culture", and were

⁶⁰ Eckenbrecher, *Afrika* : 51; Brockmann, *Briefe* : 47.

⁶¹ Schlettwein, *Herero-Aufstand* : 5f.

⁶² John Docker, *The Origins of Violence. Religion, History and Genocide*, London, Pluto, 2008: 174; For the fear of the extinction of the white race in that period, see: Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings* : 190-197.

⁶³ DSWAZ, 04.01.1905, p. 1.

⁶⁴ WN, 14.01.1905, p. 1.

⁶⁵ "eine Vernichtung aller Weißen sehr wohl möglich war", DSWAZ, 10.01.1906, p. 1. Similar thoughts are expressed in: Rust, *Krieg und Frieden* : 529.

⁶⁶ Helene von Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale. Elf Jahre in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1893–1904*, Berlin, Reimer, 1905: 225.

turning the country into “a large graveyard and a pile of ruins.”⁶⁷ Bernhardt Voigt described in his novel the apocalyptic reports received at the outbreak of the war and the feelings of dread which accompanied them. It was reported that the Herero had butchered “all the whites in Okahandja” and were showing no mercy to women and children.⁶⁸ Voigt lamented the results of the war, stating “how everything was destroyed!”⁶⁹ This narrative served as a justification for the violent retaliation against the Herero and the Nama over the course of the war, justification which was widely used in the settler discourse and in that of the colonial government.

The settlers deemed the war necessary and inevitable for creating a new order, in which European rule over the colony could be expanded. The creation of this new order thus also served as the justification for the violence executed throughout the war.⁷⁰ Settlers developed these ideas gradually and in tandem with the growing awareness of the results and ramifications of the war. The war was described as a necessary and natural event in the course of the conquest and colonization of the world by the “white race.”⁷¹ It was even argued that for the sake of the natural development of the colonial conquest, one should encourage the outbreak of a rebellion by the local population.⁷² The settler press noted during the initial stages of the war that the “rebellion opened our eyes” to something that needed to occur and was ultimately inevitable for the colonization purposes.⁷³ A settler from Swakopmund wrote that following the subjugation of the Herero, “it is possible that we might say about this rebellion that ‘yes it was bound to happen!’.”⁷⁴ Various texts argued that expropriation of lands by the Germans was only possible as result of the war.⁷⁵ The war was even compared to a “cleansing storm” which had paved the way to “the healthy development of the land.”⁷⁶ In its editorial, the DSWAZ claimed that the extreme violence that occurred during the war “against the previous owners of the land” was a “completely natural ramification which stems from the decision to colonize the land,” and there was no need to justify its

⁶⁷ WN, 30.11.1905, pp. 1f.

⁶⁸ Voigt, *Heimat Deutsch-Südwest*: 115f.

⁶⁹ “Wie hat der alles zerschlagen!”, *ibid.*: 250.

⁷⁰ Medardus Brehl described the justification of the necessity of the war as ‘historical-philosophical motto’ which emphasizes the results as determinative and historically binding, while perceiving history as free of any moral perspective. See: Medardus Brehl, *Vernichtung der Herero: Diskurse der Gewalt in der deutschen Kolonialliteratur*, München, Fink, 2007: 140-160.

⁷¹ DSWAZ, 05.01.1904, p. 2; WN, 01.11.1906, p. 1.

⁷² DSWAZ, 05.04.1904, p. 1.

⁷³ DSWAZ, 02.02.1904, p. 5.

⁷⁴ DSWAZ, 24.08.1904, p. 5, “Dann werden wir vielleicht nochmal von diesem Aufstande sagen: ‘Ja, es musste sein!’”

⁷⁵ WN, 22.02.1906, p. 2. One of the characters in Bernhardt Voigt’s book stated that it was “a real sin which stemmed from a false Humanism” to prevent the diligent Germans from working on the “uncultivated” lands (Voigt, *Heimat Deutsch-Südwest*: 74).

⁷⁶ WN, 25.11.1906, p. 1.

results.⁷⁷ About a week later, in the second part of the article, the writer claimed that the “regulation” of the status of the native vis-à-vis the European, which the war enabled, is part of “what a healthy colonial policy demands.”⁷⁸ Farmer Schlettwein also made a case for the necessity of committing extreme violence against the Herero and the Nama during the war. In his opinion, the “cruel” violence of von Trotha against the two nations was necessary as part of the process to exterminate the ruling class of the Herero and the Nama, with the aim of turning them into workers. Schlettwein also argued that the “colonization and the economic future gained a lot from the extermination of the Herero,” despite the harm to their cattle.⁷⁹ As part of effort to present the war as natural and necessary, a bold racial terminology was adopted, which fell in line with the more general discourse about the global interracial struggle. Germans killed during the war were praised as being “heroes who fell to ensure the victory of the white race.”⁸⁰ Specific incidents of violence by individual Africans against individual Europeans were conceptualized by the settlers as part of a broader framework of the “war of the races.”⁸¹ Settler Rust compared the Herero rebellion to historical native rebellions which took place against the Dutch in South Africa. Rust linked the necessity of violent struggle with the “cultural” progress in the colonies by claiming that the “blood of whites” constitutes the “fertilizer for the cultural enterprise.”⁸² Later, settlers emphasized the link between the rebellions of the Herero and the Nama and the uprising of the Zulu in British Natal which erupted in 1906 (‘Bambatha Rebellion’). This comparison supported the claim that the natives were both broadly unprepared and unqualified to accept European rule.⁸³ In August 1906, the settler press stated that “we are currently in a race war, in which peace is only possible after one of the races is the unconditional victor, and the other race unconditionally surrenders.” It was clarified however that “physical extermination” was not the goal of the war. For “practical reasons,” the collaboration of the two races was required in order to develop the land. The article argued that “without the black race, the white is in no position to exploit the opportunities” of the continent. This “collaboration,” however, did not mean “equality for both races.”⁸⁴

The war was also deemed necessary for it actualized the settlers’ vision of a European ruled Africa. During the early stages of the war, the settlers discussed the future position of Africans in the colony. The goal of the settlers was to transform the natives into a

⁷⁷ DSWAZ, 02.05.1906, p. 1, “eine ganz natürliche Folgerung aus dem Entschluss, das Land zu kolonisieren”.

⁷⁸ DSWAZ, 09.05.1906, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Carl Schlettwein, *Der Farmer in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika: Eine Darstellung sämtlicher für den afrikanischen Farmer in Betracht kommenden Erwerbszweige und ein Leitfaden für Anfänger*, Wismar, Hinstorff, 1914: 49f., 56.

⁸⁰ DSWAZ, 19.04.1904, p. 1.

⁸¹ See for example: DSWAZ, 05.07.1905, p. 1.

⁸² DSWAZ, 11.05.1904, p. 2.

⁸³ DSWAZ, 13.06.1906, p. 1.

⁸⁴ DSWAZ, 01.08.1906, p. 1.

proletariat, who would be stripped of any property, independence, identity, or political power. The native Africans, according to the settlers' vision, would be subject to the economic needs of the settlers and therefore should be dispersed throughout the colony.⁸⁵ This vision was not in congruence with the idea of annihilating an entire 'rebellious' population. However, the settlers supported the forceful molding of the natives into instruments that would serve the settlers' economic needs. This interest was clearly formulated in the editorial article of the WN, at the beginning of April, 1906:

We do not want to hang the insurgent natives after they have been punished by guns and restless persecution, nor do we want to deport them, except perhaps the guilty chiefs, but we want to educate them to work, reward them for their work, and so to contribute to the prosperity of local colored workers; but in the interests of security we want to have them under coercion and keep them under coercion.⁸⁶

The war was perceived by the settlers as an event which would facilitate the realization of their ambitions and fantasies. Settlers assumed that the rebellion broke out as a result of a lack of deterrence of the natives due to the overly 'soft' policy of Governor Leutwein. They believed that Africans appreciated their rulers' unwavering power.⁸⁷ Officer Fischer, for example, who served in the northern region of the colony, noted in the postwar period, that German actions against the Herero left a marked impression on the rest of the peoples in the land; an impression that was based on the image of the Germans as powerful rulers. Furthermore, Fischer also warned and said that the "natural people" tend to "quickly forget" and so the Germans needed to preserve their tough "reputation" which they had earned during the war, by demonstrating power.⁸⁸ Therefore war was necessary in order to deter the "natives' desire to rebel" a second time.⁸⁹ Farmer Schlettwein, for example, claimed that the natives needed to know that "a people who rebel against the German empire is placing its very existence at risk" and that "only cruel treatment" by the Germans of the natives will constitute a guarantee for continued peace in the land".⁹⁰ The settlers believed that if the African truly feared

⁸⁵ About the future of the Africans after the war, see: DSWAZ, 08.03.1904, p. 1; DSWAZ, 21.09.1904, p. 2; DSWAZ, 01.11.1905, p. 1; DSWAZ, 02.05.1906, p. 1; DSWAZ, 09.05.1906, p. 1; DSWAZ, 28.07.1906, p. 1; DSWAZ, 26.01.1907, p. 2; WN, 05.10.1905, p. 1; WN, 05.04.1906, p. 1.

⁸⁶ WN, 05.04.1906, p. 1. "Wir wollen die aufständisch gewesenen Eingeborenen, nachdem ihnen die Bestrafung durch Waffe und rastlose Verfolgung zuteil geworden ist, nicht hängen, wollen sie auch nicht deportieren, ausgenommen vielleicht die schuldigen Häuptlinge, sondern wir wollen sie zur Arbeit erziehen, sie für ihre Arbeitsleistungen belohnen und dazu beitragen, dass das hiesige farbige Arbeitertum prosperiert; aber wir wollen sie im Interesse der Sicherheit in der Gewalt haben und in der Gewalt behalten."

⁸⁷ See for example: Rust, *Krieg und Frieden*: 440.

⁸⁸ Andreas E. Eckl, *Herrschaft, Macht und Einfluß: koloniale Interaktionen am Kavango (Nord-Namibia) von 1891 bis 1921*, Köln, Köppe, 2004: 57f.

⁸⁹ DSWAZ, 12.01.1904, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 50.

German authority, then the complete subjection of the Africans to colonial rule would be facilitated.⁹¹

Another explanation as to why the settlers tried to justify the war and emphasize its necessity was their need to placate public opinion in Germany and in the *Reichstag*. The settlers found it important to rationalize the war and its necessity especially in light of the heated debate in Germany about the question of guilt for the outbreak of the war, which some circles in Germany directed at the settlers. The debate about responsibility for the war had practical consequence for the settlers, since they hoped to receive compensation for the damage caused during the conflict.

Domestic and civil violence as an ‘instrument of control’ by the settlers

Settlers believed they had a deep familiarity with the African population, and for this reason they also believed they possessed the correct solutions for ‘handling’ them. General von Trotha’s military violence, which was intended to exterminate the Herero and the Nama, was actually considered to be harmful to the settler interests. However, civil and domestic violence was perceived by the settlers as a legitimate instrument of control and within the natural context of colonial relations with natives.⁹² Violence between the European ‘master’ and the African servant or worker was deemed an effective and necessary means of achieving what the settlers perceived as one of the primary colonial objectives – ‘educating’ the native to work. While domestic and civil violence was believed to be an effective tool for ‘educating’ the natives, other methods of ‘civilized’ education were considered irrelevant for them. In fact, the educational justification was a common way of masking the true European interest in establishing total authority over the natives, and in instilling racial differences into the structure of colonial society.

The correct way of ‘handling’ the Africans, in the settlers’ view, was by adopting an attitude that was “tough but just”.⁹³ This attitude was linked to the prevalent notions about child and youth education in fin de siècle Europe.⁹⁴ This ‘toughness’ towards the Africans was viewed as a right or even a duty of the settler. The natives were viewed as

⁹¹ DSWAZ, 23.02.1904, p. 3.

⁹² An analysis of 96 cases, in which the courts in GSWA sentenced Africans to corporal punishment between 1896 and 1899, shows that 63.5% of the cases were related to the enforcement of social and economic control: discipline at work, insulting ‘whites’, disturbing the public peace and sedition. The rest of the sentences were given for property offences or physical harm. The original data may be found in: RKA Nr 5077, which appears in Müller, *Kolonien*: 88-97.

⁹³ “Streng aber gerecht”. This expression is found in many texts written by the settlers. For example: DSWAZ, 24.10.1906, p. 2; WN, 15.09.1905, p. 8-10; Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 257f.

⁹⁴ For a background on the right to physically punish children for disciplinary purposes in Prussia, see: Harry Schwirck, “Law’s violence and the boundary between corporal discipline and physical abuse in German South West Africa”, *Akron Law Review*, 36, 2002: 81-132 (83-96).

those who were dependent on the Germans for employment and other things — a dependence similar to that of a child on his father. Just like the father, the white master also had the basic right of exercising 'punishment' through physical violence against those under his authority. The settlers saw this 'right' as part of a complex colonial and racial relationship between the ruler and the ruled. They also used the 'right to violence' as a tool to establish an economic system of forced labor, which gained momentum towards the end of the war and thereafter.⁹⁵ The direct violence used by the settlers was specifically meant to instill discipline and obedience in the native, two crucial traits that Africans lacked, according to the settlers. The WN made a remarkable comparison when it likened the colonized natives to low ranking soldiers in the army, and the settlers to senior ranking officers. The article opined that both the natives and the soldiers were required to undergo a process of tough discipline. This pseudo-militaristic relationship between Africans and Europeans meant that natives were expected to obey any German settler as if the latter was a commanding officer and the African a mere soldier. Similar to the authority attached to military rank, a native had to obey any white, and not only his or her direct employer, just like a soldier has to obey any officer even if he does not directly serve below that officer.⁹⁶

The settlers demanded the right to carry out physical punishment, particularly lashes or incarceration, whenever they felt it was necessary and without having to obtain permission from colonial authorities or any other third party. They also required a system of forced labor and the freedom to use more indirect types of violence, such as separating family members, transferring workers forcefully, placing tight restriction on mobility, and withholding wages.⁹⁷ The settlers also demanded the expropriation of other social rights in the employment context, such as providing food and sick leave for their workers and placing restrictions on work hours.⁹⁸

Settlers found various arguments to justify this right and the need to use violence directly against the native workers. Again, one of the main justifications was its educational value. This 'educational' justification was based on the belief that Africans lacked work ethics. The settlers saw the natives as lazy and dishonest. Thus, violence was viewed as an educational duty, since 'normative' German pedagogy was perceived as unsuitable for the African native.⁹⁹ Educational violence could facilitate the 'improvement' of the African character over time, through implanting feelings of "respect and

⁹⁵ More about the importance of the right to commit violence as part of the economic system in GSWA, see also: Müller, *Kolonien*: 33-35.

⁹⁶ WN, 03.01.1907, p. 1.

⁹⁷ WN, 01.03.1905, p. 6. WN, 11.01.1906, p. 2. DSWAZ, 14.06.1905, 5; WN, 01.06.1905, p. 5.

⁹⁸ Demands in this spirit were also raised at the Economic Union Convention in Grootfontein, see: DSWAZ, 28.06.1905, p. 2; WN, 11.01.1906, p. 2.

⁹⁹ DWSAZ, 26.07.1905, p. 2. For more about the educational necessity of violent punishment, see: Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 258f.

duty" that Africans presumably lacked.¹⁰⁰ Educational violence was also portrayed as an economic necessity which helped to ensure economic efficiency and gains.¹⁰¹

This justification of violence for educational purposes can be clearly seen in the statements of farmer Gottlieb Bleibtreu. In August 1906, he claimed that Africans were idle at every opportunity and made up false excuses about being hungry or sick. Bleibtreu stated that "there is no other way of educating them to work," except for forcing them to do so by all means necessary.¹⁰² The Berg Damara nation was mentioned by settlers as an example of people who acquired their laudable work ethic through subjugation (by the Herero) over a long period of time. This example was used as a further justification for the use of violence and coercion.¹⁰³ South Africa was also mentioned as a positive example for a place in which the violence of employers towards their native employees brought about economic prosperity.¹⁰⁴ The settlers also argued that the Africans were used to harsh and violent treatment from their leaders and therefore would understand and appreciate similar treatment by their German rulers.¹⁰⁵ Even more so, settlers believed that compassion, moderation, concession and softness were considered to be contemptible, weak and cowardly traits in the eyes of the African native.¹⁰⁶ Settler Brockmann, for example, wrote that among the Herero the "right of the strongest prevails".¹⁰⁷ These arguments were based on the belief that Africans held substantially different values to those of Europeans. According to the settlers, ideas such as liberty or dignity could not be conceived by the African and therefore the native could not be significantly harmed when deprived of such concepts.¹⁰⁸

Another aspect that justified direct violence was the perceived physiological and emotional differences between the two races. Most prominent of which was the African's assumed insensitivity to pain. It was claimed that the 'black skin' could withstand twenty-five lashes which did not cause him significant pain, but only "superficial bruises."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰ "Ehre und Pflicht". RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 29-31, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 148f.

¹⁰¹ For example, a letter from the settlers in Windhuk to the German Foreign Office in July 1900, details the need to preserve the punishment of lashes: RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 53-55. See also: Rust, *Krieg und Frieden*: 460f.

¹⁰² "dass es einen anderen Weg zur Erziehung zur Arbeit hier nicht gibt". WN, 23.08.1906, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Voigt, *Heimat Deutsch-Südwest*: 50; Brockmann, *Briefe*: 39; Eckenbrecher, *Afrika*: 83.

¹⁰⁴ RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 53-55, appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 55f.; DSWAZ, 06.09.05, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Examples of the cruel punishment by the Herero as described in the writings of the settlers: Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 175; Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale*: 171; Schlettwein, *Herero-Aufstand*: 11; Lydia Höpker, *Um Scholle und Leben. Schicksale einer deutschen Farmerin in Südwest-Afrika*, Minden, Köhler, 1927: 60.

¹⁰⁶ WN, 03.01.1907, p. 1; Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale*: 197; Schlettwein, *Der Herero-Aufstand*: 11, 18.

¹⁰⁷ "das Recht des Stärkeren". Brockmann, *Briefe*: 45.

¹⁰⁸ For example: RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 53-55, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 55f.

¹⁰⁹ RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 207-208, from August 1904; and: RKA, Nr 5379, Bl. 161-16, from December 1907. in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 98, 107f.

Settler Brockmann mentioned the “fact” that the natives who had been shot continued to run many kilometers, and that serious burns are virtually unfelt by them.¹¹⁰ In a similar spirit, settler Schlettwein claimed that the incarceration of the African should not be viewed as a punishment at all since the native receives much better conditions in his place of incarceration than he does ‘in nature.’¹¹¹ Likewise, Africans’ preference for swift punishment and their ‘natural’ need to be a subject of a master were also mentioned as a further justification for violence.¹¹² The settlers believed that Africans accepted that real political rule, as such, had to be accompanied by violence and by a tough attitude on the part of the rulers towards the ruled. In this spirit, farmer Bleibtreu claimed that “the better the [African] is treated, the more impudent he becomes.”¹¹³ Farmer Schlettwein claimed in DSWAZ that:

The uncivilized man sees, according to nature, in grace and goodness [which are shown] where he deserves punishment, a weakness; he says to himself: one is afraid of us and does not dare to do anything to us. Energetic depression, exemplary punishment, if possible, [are] the only [thing that] impresses the colored African.¹¹⁴

Moreover, the African, according to Schlettwein, was described as someone who tends to be cruel in an “animalistic way” toward anyone he believes is weak and good-hearted.¹¹⁵ The settlers ascribed political significance to these arguments. The outbreak of the rebellion of the Herero and the Nama was, in their view, proof of their claim that the “soft policy” of Governor Leutwein was responsible for the natives’ contempt and refusal to view Europeans as their rulers.¹¹⁶ The lack of violence had encouraged impudence and local insubordination. It had obscured the basis for the legitimacy of European rule over the colony and therefore implementing a tough regime of violence in the domestic and civil spheres was a political duty. The settlers claimed that the inability to carry out violence independently (without state permission or involvement) would harm their complex web of relations with the Africans and would encourage insubordination. Settler Panzlaff from Windhuk argued that imposing a duty to report to the police before punishing insubordinate Africans would foster native disrespect for the

¹¹⁰ Brockmann, *Briefe*: 47.

¹¹¹ Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 259.

¹¹² See: RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 59-60, appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 149f., and also: DSWAZ, 24.10.1906, p. 2.

¹¹³ WN, 23.08.1906, p. 2. Governor Leutwein claimed that the most disciplined “native tribe” are the Witboois (of the Nama People), since “there is no other leader in the colony who has made such broad use of the punishment of lashing like Old Witbooi”. See: RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 21-22, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 147f.

¹¹⁴ DSWAZ, 05.01.1904, p. 2. “Der unzüivilisierte Mensch erblickt, der Natur entsprechend, in Gnade und Güte, wo er Strafe verdient hat, eine Schwäche; ja er sagt sich: man hat Angst vor uns und wagt es nicht, uns etwas zu tun. Energisches Niederdrücken, exemplarisches Bestrafen, wenn Gelegenheit, nur das imponiert dem farbigen Afrikaner.”

¹¹⁵ Schlettwein, *Herero-Aufstand*: 12.

¹¹⁶ For example: Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 258.

European master.¹¹⁷ Farmer Schlettwein emphasized, as well, the importance of the master executing physical punishment himself, and not the police, since such a practice would be “healthier and produce respect.”¹¹⁸ Another justification for the exercise of violence by the settlers was based on the lack of German sovereignty over vast parts of the colony, due to the long distances and few human resources. The lack of sovereignty created large zones of lawlessness. The unreliability of a state-based solution for enforcement of rules and laws, together with the deep insecurity felt especially by farmers who lived as a secluded minority amongst the African majority reinforced the settlers’ belief in the importance of being able to take the law into their own hands.¹¹⁹ An example of this state of mind may be found in an article which appeared in the WN, which called for “every white to see it as his duty to assist the authorities in the efforts” to enforce law and order in the colony.¹²⁰

Some settlers reacted in anger when criticized for violent conduct towards Africans, especially when this criticism came from critics of colonialism in the *Reichstag* and in Germany. The settlers criticized the ‘humanism’ and ‘Negrophilia’ of their critics, who lived so far away and were cut off from the harsh reality of colonial life. ‘Humanist’ ideals were only relevant, according to the settlers, in theory or in Europe, but did not stand the test of Colonial realism.¹²¹ Implementing these ‘humanist’ ideals in the colonies would be an inhumane act. It would create disrespect towards the white population and would allow Africans to rebel against Europeans, which would lead to severe damage and an imbalance of power in the colony.¹²² The settlers believed that the humanist ideals suffered from an “incomprehensible optimism,” which could harm the “healthy and swift development” of the colony.¹²³ The settlers claimed that the humanists’ view of the African was idealist, utopian and erroneous. These alleged humanists, being disconnected from the harsh reality in Africa, imagined the African man as a “character in Robinson Crusoe.”¹²⁴ To reject the humanist criticism, farmer Schlettwein claimed that even European countries that viewed corporal punishment as inhumane and forbade it in Europe, allowed it in their colonies, recognising the starkly different reality there.¹²⁵ The settlers claimed to have a deep understanding of the Africans and believed that they

¹¹⁷ RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 59-60, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 149f.

¹¹⁸ Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 259.

¹¹⁹ For example, the claim that “here in Africa there are no laws, and each one needs to look out for himself as to how he will cope”, Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 159, 197.

¹²⁰ WN, 08.03.1906, p. 2.

¹²¹ For example, see a letter sent on behalf of the settlers from the district of Windhuk to the German Foreign Office in July 1909, see: RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 53-55, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 55f. See also: DSWAZ, 05.01.1904, p. 2.

¹²² RKA, Nr 5378, Bl. 73-78, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 150-153. It is claimed that “relinquishing the whip” is somewhat of a utopia that is reserved for the distant future.

¹²³ DSWAZ, 05.01.1904, p. 2.

¹²⁴ DSWAZ, 03.08.1904, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Schlettwein, *Farmer*: 259.

shared a close bond with the natives. This perceived closeness by the settlers justified their idea that it was best for them to independently decide how to “handle their natives.”¹²⁶ Farmer Bleibtreu even invited the “Negrophiles” who preached against forced labor and the harsh conditions of the native, to “come here to learn and practically recognize the pleasure and pain in which the farmers experience the dear children of Ham.”¹²⁷

These economic and political reasons (as well as security concerns), were the basis for the settlers’ ‘right’ to use violence as an instrument of control over the African population. Violence in the domestic and civil spheres was utilized as a means of strengthening the dichotomous colonial order. This order was meant to facilitate the economic exploitation of the natives and strengthen the settlers’ sense of domination and power. The settlers thus aspired to use violence legally and independently although this privilege would otherwise be an exclusive state prerogative. In a sense, they wanted to break what Michel Foucault termed as the modern state’s monopoly over violence.¹²⁸

Nonetheless, there was no consensus amongst the settlers regarding the scope of violence to be used against the Africans. The settler elite supported the settlers’ ‘right’ to physically punish the Africans, mainly within the employment framework. However, they sharply criticized the excessive violence committed by settlers from the fringes of the colonial society and those who had recently immigrated to the colony. The European new-comers, in the eyes of the established settler elite, lacked experience and understanding of the African reality. A number of extraordinarily cruel violent incidents during the war were widely covered and condemned in the settler press and in the texts of their leaders. It was viewed as a significant threat to the stability of European rule that would likely encourage further rebellions. Cruel and unnecessary violence could also severely harm the German settlement in GSWA, by adversely affecting the image of the colony and its settlers in the eyes of the public in Germany and among the members of the Reichstag. At the beginning of 1907, in response to accusations concerning the settler attitudes towards Africans, an editorial in the DSWAZ claimed that there were individuals in the colony who “believe that they are required or obligated to demonstrate their affiliation to the ruling race by violent conduct towards the colored.” The article called such behavior a “serious mistake” since “violence against a weaker party is always a sign of lack of culture.” A link was then made to negative violent behavior and the inferior quality of a significant portion of the newly arrived settlers. This reflected the settler elite’s fear undesirable European elements were increasingly immigrating into the colony. Thus, the article claims that:

¹²⁶ DSWAZ, 24.10.1906, p. 2.

¹²⁷ WN, 23.08.1906, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, Random House, 1977. See also: Michael Mann, “Das Gewaltdispositiv des modernen Kolonialismus”, in: Mihran Dabag, Horst Gründer and Uwe Ketelsen, (eds.), *Kolonialismus. Kolonialdiskurs und Genozid*, München, Fink, 2004: 111-135 (111-121).

The mass of the people does not consist of people of the finest culture and highest insight. [They are] still ruled by rough instincts and [their] intelligence is not strong enough to curb those instincts.¹²⁹

The wide coverage of the trial of Paul Wiehager, a farmer who was charged with the murder of three of his African workers, added to the settler elite's concern for their reputation. The WN strongly criticized Wiehager and claimed that he was a danger to society, pointing to the possibility that this sort of violent conduct could bring about another broad rebellion. The WN asserted that Wiehager needed to be expelled from the colony, for indeed, his conduct amounted to treason. The newspaper also declared that settlers like Wiehager were "dubious elements," who tended to arrive in their masses to the "young territories" and are a "disaster" for them. These new-comers, according to the WN, were a "dreadful cancer for the colonies," and therefore the "determined elimination of them is a duty for anyone for whom the prosperous development of the colonies lies deep in his heart."¹³⁰ The DSWAZ also expressed the settlers' deep fear for their reputation and referred to the Wiehager saga as "ugly". They believed that stories like his were responsible for the wide news coverage in Germany of the cruel behavior shown towards the natives in the colony.¹³¹ In another incident, a settler referred to as "S", who had murdered an African, was condemned for arguing that von Trotha's Extermination Order (October, 1904) justified and authorized the killing of Africans.¹³² Aside from the condemnation of specific cases which came to the broader public attention, the settler elite continued to emphasize the second clause of their slogan "tough but just" which guided their behavior towards Africans. Farmer Schlettwein clarified that "just" was not justice in the sense of European law, but the "sense of justice as is implanted in anyone gifted with healthy understanding."¹³³ Many settlers emphasized the importance of good and moderate treatment of natives, and that this kind of treatment was vital for the stability of employment relations and colonial control.¹³⁴ According to the settler leaders, the violence against the natives had to be moderate and "fatherly."¹³⁵ Settlers believed that they also needed to lead by example

¹²⁹ DSWAZ, 16.03.1907, pp. 1f. "Aber die Masse des Volkes besteht nun einmal nicht aus Menschen von feinsten Kultur und höchster Einsicht. Sie wird immer noch durch grobe Instinkte beherrscht und ihre Intelligenz ist nicht stark genug, diese Instinkte zu zügeln."

¹³⁰ WN, 28.02.1907, p. 1.

¹³¹ DSWAZ, 06.03.1907, p. 1.

¹³² WN, 22.02.1906, p. 2.

¹³³ Schlettwein, *Herero-Aufstand*: 19.

¹³⁴ Conradt, *Erinnerungen*: 168f.; DSWAZ, 21.02.1906, p. 1; DSWAZ, 09.05.1906, p.1; Rust, *Krieg und Frieden*: 459-467; DSWAZ, 16.03.07, pp. 1f. Rust testified that he only used the club once against his African workers in the case of an immoral behavior.

¹³⁵ For example, the court in Windhuk ruled in 1911 that "the right to punishment" needs to include "light and fatherly" violence and it should not deviate from its function as an "educational tool". See: RKA, Nr 5553, Bl. 21-25, which appears in: Müller, *Kolonien*: 137-140. More about the required "fatherliness" see in: WN, 05.12.1906, p. 5.

and behave with dignity before the natives which would justify the “demonstration of respect which we demand of the Africans.”¹³⁶

The complex position held by the settlers regarding direct violence towards Africans attests to the tension under which it was conducted. On the one hand, the settlers had a desire to preserve their right to legitimately use violence against the natives. This right was perceived as part a personal right and duty which supported the autonomy of each settler within the parameters of the colonial social order. On the other hand, the settlers were interested in ridding themselves of the marginal European settlers who harmed the settlement’s reputation, and threatened the old settler elite hegemony. The reckless and violent behavior of these outcasts endangered the delicate balance in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized needed to come to terms with their inferior status, without being goaded into a violent uprising. Farmer Schlettwein framed this tension by describing two common “mistakes” which have been prevalent primarily amongst the settlers who have “come recently.” One mistake was treating the African too kindly, as a “young child.” The second mistake was to treat the native in “a gross, brutal and inconsiderate” way. Treating the native in an overly kind manner, led to “impudence and shamelessness” on the part of the African and the belief that “his master is a fool”, whereas cruel treatment brought about “obstinacy and restlessness.”¹³⁷ An official guidebook for potential settlers, which was published in Germany in 1907, also framed the tension of the two extremes – demonstrating weakness versus excessive toughness:

The treatment of the natives is no easy task. Some [who are] otherwise efficient settler[s] had to pay badly for not being able to deal with [their] natives. The newcomer is usually either too weak and too lenient or too hard and too hasty in the treatment of the natives.¹³⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, the German settlers in GSWA held complex views about the violence committed against Africans during the Herero and Nama war. The settlers distinguished between violence committed for physical extermination and violence for economic exploitation. The former was considered a danger to their interests, whilst the latter was justified as part of a 'natural' colonial order. The settlers drew a distinction between violence directed against any African, regardless of his identity and background, as opposed to violence against specific Africans who did not conform to the demands placed upon them by the settlers. The settlers also aspired to halt the genocidal violence committed during the war by the German army, in order to establish a stable

¹³⁶ WN, 03.01.1907, p. 1.

¹³⁷ Schlettwein, Farmer : 257f.

¹³⁸ *Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Amtlicher Ratgeber für Auswanderer*, Berlin, Reimer, 1907: 54. “Die Behandlung der Eingeborenen ist keine leichte Aufgabe. Mancher sonst tüchtige Ansiedler hat schwer büßen müssen, daß er mit seinen Eingeborenen nicht umzugehen verstand. Der Neuling ist bei Behandlung der Eingeborenen meistens entweder zu schwach und zu nachsichtig oder zu hart und zu hastig.”

oppressive and coercive structure. In a way, this process resembles Johan Galtung's differentiation between personal or direct violence, and structural violence: settlers in GSWA aspired to transform the direct violence exercised by the German army during the war, into a structural violence that serves their long-term interests.¹³⁹ This kind of coercive colonial structure was supposed to establish a permanent system of exploitation of the natives for economic, social and political gain. The stability of this structure required that the direct genocidal violence ended. Instead, and in order to maximize their privilege and power in the new order, the settlers demanded the individual right to use violence against the natives in the domestic and civil realm. Violence, in general, was also justified by the settlers through concepts that they developed during the war. The settlers created a narrative of victimhood in order to justify their actions. They also defined certain features and customs of the enemy that gave reason for their violent behavior. Moreover, they justified war in the colonial sphere, almost as a deterministic and inevitable aspect to the nature of colonialism. Some of the settlers' views on violence were different from those of their German colonialist counterparts. These differences could also be found between the views of the settlers and the German army, the German government, and vast elements in the German colonial discourse in Europe. Conversely, the Herero and Nama war reinforced the settlers' growing transnational gaze, strengthening their affinity to other settler colonies, mostly those in Southern Africa. Thus, the varying views of the German settlers on violence are another aspect which demonstrates how the settlers were a particular and unique group within the German colonial realm.

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¹³⁹ According to Galtung, these two types of violence are very closely linked to one another. Direct violence often brings about the establishment of structural violence, which is then likely to take its place. Structural violence is prone to become direct violence, mostly when those who benefit from structural violence feel threatened or challenged. See: Johan Galtung, "Violence, peace, and peace research", *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3), 1969: 167-191; idem, "Cultural violence", *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (3), 1990: 291-305.

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