Journal of Namibian Studies, 5 (2009): 123-133

Review: Jürgen Zimmerer & Joachim Zeller, (eds.), *Genocide in German South-West Africa. The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and its Aftermath*, translated and introduced by E. J. Neather, Monmouth, Press, 2008.

In 1904 the clash between the Herero and the German colonial power began in German South-West Africa, today's Namibia. Since then there have been controversial interpretations of not only the occasion and the reasons behind the war, but also it's character, ranging from a "normal colonial war" to "genocide".

Numerous publications and contributions that dealt intensively with this subject appeared surrounding the 100th anniversary in 2004.1 Besides the attention of the academic world the subject had meanwhile gained significant weight in current political affairs. By then it was a matter of the wideranging implications of a recognition or apology (and financial compensation of the Herero) from the German Federal Government for the colonial history of the German Empire. That the debates and controversies have not since abated is shown by the attempts of particular circles to eliminate all memory - in a politically correct fashion - from German cities. Garden gnome burlesques, such as the renaming of barracks and streets, bear eloquent witness to this.2

ISSN: 1863-5954

Five years after the appearance of the German edition of Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) und seine Folgen (Berlin 2003), probably the most influential and most-referenced anthology, it is now available as an English translation, complemented by an introduction by E. J. Neather. Influential not least because both editors, Joachim Zeller and Jürgen Zimmerer, have come to the fore as exceedingly active opinion leaders in the public debates about the German colonial past (especially in Namibia) in the German and Namibian national dailies.3

³ Compare among others Jürgen Zimmerer, "Menschen mit Blechmarken", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 6 April 2002; id., "Wir müssen jetzt krassen Terrorismus üben. Von der Unterdrückung zur Ausrottung. Der Krieg gegen die Herero und Nama in Deutsch-Südwestafrika als Erbe der deutschen Kolonialzeit und die Klage auf Entschädigung", Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2 November 2002; id., "Igel nach Windhoek tragen", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 8 September 2003; id., "Opfer einer beispiellosen Propagandaschlacht. Dokument mit wechselvoller Geschichte. Das 'Blaubuch' über deutsche Kolonialverbrechen in Namibia ist neu herausgegeben worden", Frankfurter Rundschau, 18 November 2003; id., "Keine Geiseln der Geschichte", Die Tageszeitung, 10 January 2004; id., "Das lange nicht beendete Jahrhundert der Völkermorde. Die historische Genozidforschung versucht, typische Züge des Ungeheuerlichen zu bestimmen: Zum Stand ihrer Debatten", Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 20 January 2004; id., "Das falsche Signal", Die Tageszeitung, 4 June 2005; id., "Warum nicht mal 'nen Neger?", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 23 November 2005; Joachim Zeller, "Weltreich für Würdige. Neu aufgelegt: Das Blaubuch des deutschen Kolonialismus", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 28 July 2003; id., "Herrschaftsutopie in SWA", Allgemeine Zeitung,

¹ See Bibliography (1).

² Compare among others *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 December 2007: "Schwierige Versöhnung"; *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 6 February 2008: "Neuer Anlauf zur Umbenennung der Leutweinstraße"

and *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 8 February 2008: "Stadt schließt Umbenennung der Leutweinstraße nicht aus".

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Reviews of the German first edition were characterized by extensive benevolence to effusive praise.⁴ Nevertheless, critical opinions were also articulated, saying the book was "ruthless in its portrayal of the war crimes, sympathetic in its description of the inhuman conditions in the German concentration camps [...], but penetrating in its unification of Holocaust and genocide."⁵

Even if the claim is made in the introduction that all contributions for the new anthology were updated to reflect the

Namibia, 23 September 2003; id., "Der totale Feldzug", *Die Tageszeitung*, 10 January 2004. ⁴ Thomas Morlang, *Die Zeit*, Literaturbeilage November 2003; Steffen Richter, Tagesspiegel, 1 December 2003; Ursula Trüper, "Unabhängigkeit allein reicht nicht", Die Tageszeitung, 28 February 2004; Kerstin Knipp, "Mit Strömen von Blut", Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 21 January 2004; Leonhard Harding, "Der Völkermord an den Herero", Damals, 1 (2004); Michael F. Scholz, Das Historisch-Politische Buch, 2005 (53): 78; Peter Schaefer, H-Soz-u-Kult, 20.04.2004 [http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen (2004-2-046]; Inga-Dorothee Rost, sehepunkte, 2005 (5), 15 June 2005 [http://www. sehepunkte.historicum.net/2005/06/4195.html]. ⁵Michael Salewski: "Fehlendes Unrechtsbewußtsein". Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 31 December 2003. Moderate criticism also came from Bernd Leopold: "[...] whereby barely one of the authors explicitly expounds other interpretations or rejects them with arguments. Even the scientific opponents are only partially mentioned, often rather exclusively discussing - mostly plausible their own view. As such it is a book that is only partially suitable for a first approach of the subject, even if the spectrum of handled topics is pleasingly broad" (Bernd Leopold, Jahrbuch für Europäische Überseegeschichte, 2005 (5): 286-288 [288]). See also Sonja Abun-Nasr, Archiv für Sozialgeschichte online 28 May 2004, [http://library.fes.de/fulltext/afs/htmrez/80563.ht m]. Considerably sharper in his criticism is Claus Nordbruch. "Selbst Fischer scheut". Nation & Europa, 2004, (54),1: 77-78.

current stand of research, this is only valid for Erichsen's essay. For all the others one can say that, apart from cosmetic corrections, they are translations from the German first edition of 2003. This is so much more regrettable, because the scientific appreciations of the last few years have drummed up vehement critics of the genocide thesis, and these arguments are quite valid indeed.⁶

To be welcomed is the succinct introduction from Neather, who presents a brief overview of European colonial history and underlines therewith the percentage of "Germans" from the very beginning - "[...] as the best astronomers, the best cosmographers and the best cartographers in the world [...] So German expertise formed a significant part of the voyages of discovery" (XVII). Doing so he draws a line from the motives for Bismarck's colonial policy to the Treaty of Versailles, which for the German Empire meant the loss of its overseas possessions. Onward he draws through the colonial revisionism of the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich and the memory of the colonial legacy in the present. Looking towards the other colonial powers, for instance Belgium, (Belgian Congo), Great Britain ("Mau Mau" in Kenya), he comments correctly, " [...] Germany was not alone in its brutality" (XXVIII). Different to older studies of European colonialism, which were characterized by their need "[...] to see only the destructive effects of colonialism [...]", the current works are

⁶See Bibliography (2) "Critical Voices".

attempting, "[...] to achieve a more balanced view" (XXVIII).

The volume is divided into four parts: "Namibia on the path to colonization" (Krüger, Zimmerer), "The Colonial War 1904-1908" (Zimmerer, Erichsen, Brehl, van der Heyden), "Misery, resistance and a new beginning; the African perspective" (Gewald, Schaller, Krüger, Henrichsen), "Remembering and forgetting" (Gewald, Kößler, Zeller, Förster, Melber, Eckert).

In "The Golden Age of the pastoralists. Namibia in the 19th century" Gesine Krüger paints a picture of the social, economic and political situation of the indigenous population and emphasizes, that contrary to the European images of "nations or tribes" as "linguistic and cultural units, which can be clearly distinguished from each other". Much more one should speak of "unrestrictedness and openness of the political and cultural systems (p. 7-8) in the precolonial period. The mission played a considerable role from the 1840s onwards, particularly the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (Rhine Missionary Society) - the missionary stations developed into cultural, economic and political centers. The schools were used by the Herero upper class for the education of their children.

In this context it is important to mention that "the declaration of war against the German Colonial Power in 1904 and 1905 was not made by 'prehistoric tribes' but by groups which had lived for several generations in an increasingly militarized society, maintained economic and diplomatic exchanges with the Cape Colony and pursued their own strategies of ensuring the continuity of power, including the use of 'modern' methods such as writing and weapons" (p.14).

Jürgen Zimmerer discusses in his essay "The model colony? Racial segregation, forced labour and total control in German South-West Africa". Before the war broke out the question of so-called 'mixed marriages' offered a breeding ground for conflicts in the colony. "The blatant breaching of racial barriers" (p. 19) and "to protect the Europeans against an influx of coloured blood) (p. 21) were the decisive arguments for proponents of a strict segregation of the races. Zimmerer depicts the diverse interactions between the Herero chiefs and Leutwein and brings to the readers attention that "One should however beware of seeing the Africans only as passive victims of colonial politics, as being manipulated and prodded by the Germans without exerting their own will" (p. 26). It is obvious that the increase in German settlers, along with the insecurity and inequality of law, stoked the conflicts with the indigenous population. However, whether one can say that the war "opened up for the German administration the possibility of an accelerated realization of its visions of dominance. [...] the war acted as a catalyst which accelerated the process by which the views held in the pre-war period were put into practice" (p. 27) should be questioned and discussed. It is evident that a post-perspective finds its way into the interpretation here.

This thesis is again exaggerated a little later: "The 'native ordinances' established a racist and interventionist state within a framework and so reached the final point towards which Theodor Leutwein's 'native policy' was always leading.⁷ This element of continuity has often been overlooked yet it is a decisive factor in understanding German colonial rule. For it demonstrates that it was not the war against the Herero and Nama that triggered the utopian visions of dominance with its concept of total control. To the contrary, these can be traced back to the very beginnings of the colony. This also disposes of the argument, advanced as some sort of apology, that the Herero and Nama share some of their guilt for their fate because of their decision to take up arms. On the contrary, the policy of total control over the indigenous population and their availability was at the heart of German colonial rule from the very first consideration of how working relationships should be regulated as early as 1894. The goal of this policy was the total re-education of the Africans in a process of social engineering" (p. 29).

Contrafactually the real question should be, how the situation in the protectorate would have developed under Leutwein without the war! It should also be asked about the actual basis of power of the German colonial administration before and after the war, the possibilities of realizing this intention, which indeed can only be described as utopian, and last but not least the therefore boundless naiveté of the German decision makers (who were suffering from advanced reality loss)! Zimmerer does in the end admit that one cannot confuse the utopia of domination with the practice, and that the colonial state, due to divergent endeavors of the indigenous population, settlers and administrators, was never in a situation to check the implementation or to even win through against resistance (p. 29-33.).

In the second part of the volume Jürgen Zimmerer deals firstly with "War, concentration camps and genocide in South-West Africa. The first German Genocide". Building on his earlier studies this is a brief summary of causes, the course of the war and the consequences thereof. Directly in the introduction the author does not spare any superlatives, in order to evoke the actual thesis right from the beginning: [...] "one of the most bloody and destructive colonial wars in history. [...] a prelude to the century of total war, to imaginable brutality of armies against each other and against the civil population. It tells of a genocide which was not only the first of the twentieth century but also the first in German history and, as such, the writing on the wall for what was yet to come" (p. 41). Besides the devastating consequences of the rinderpest, which contributed considerably to the break down of the traditional Herero societal system, impoverishment, debts, cession of land to German colonist and the insecurity of law are above all made culpable for the beginning of the conflicts. At least the author admits the Herero were not simply passive victims. With the battle of Waterberg and the flight or expulsion into the Omaheke Zimmerer sees the

⁷ The three native ordinances of 1907 – Control Ordinance, Pass Ordinance, Master and Servant Ordinance – were in no way seen by the colonial administration as purely oppressive measures, but rather as an unavoidable basis for daily life with the indigenous population (p. 28), since the lack of African workers after the war made itself particularly noticeable.

opening of the "actual genocide phase" (p. 47), as Trotha's actions were carried out with firm intent. He sees further characteristics in the treatment of prisoners on Shark Island: "murder through deliberate neglect was policy" (p. 56). In the treatment of the Herero Zimmerer believes he can see a significant step on the path towards the national socialist war of extermination, that is, an anticipation of the Holocaust: "it is this breaking of the ultimate taboo [...] which was first carried out in the colonies and then took its most radical form in the Holocaust, which links the genocides" (p. 59).

In his contribution "'Ombepera i koza --The cold is killing me'. A history of the concentration camp in Swakopmund (1904-1908)", Joachim Zeller describes the blocking off of the Omaheke as an "act of genocide" (p. 65), the dying of the Hereros on a massive scale in the camp was linked above all to the "appalling conditions of hygiene" (p. 70) and the forced labor. In saying so he emphasizes that "concentration camps [...] were by no means 'normal' internment camps as many colonial apologists try to claim" (p. 76). At least "for the early phase it can be assumed from the start that the mass deaths of prisoners were intended by the colonial administration" (p. 78), without the influence of the missionaries the results would have been more dramatic.

Erichsen discusses the catastrophic conditions for most of the female prisoners in his contribution "Forced Labour in the concentration camp on Shark Island". The Boer War and an "increased need for labour in the southern town" (p. 76) served as a

"facility". model for this kind of Characteristic were the lack of protection against the raw climatic conditions, the increasing sexual attacks and the fact, that Nama women were increasingly "used as concubines" (p. 88-89) in connection with the "calculated hope that the prisoners would die out and thereby reduce the cost of a potential, future deportation", and as such the "ideal solution to the Nama problem" (p. 91). Not until Estorffs initiatives did the situation change decisively and the death rate was reduced considerably. Nevertheless the Nama - in comparison to the Herero - were never released from captivity (p. 95-97).

Brehl demonstrates in his essav "The drama was played on the dark side of the sandvelt". The destruction of Herero and Nama in German (popular) literature", that for contemporaries the war represented "a regular subject of discussion" (p. 100) and the "annihilation of the Herero and Nama is neither contested nor trivialised" (p. 101). Until 1945 Frenssens novel Peter Moor was "the viable account of the 'Herero War'" (p. 108). The years 1904-1915 represent the chronological epicenter of this topic. Works, which dealt critically with the events appeared only after 1945 (p. 110).

Van der Hyden illuminates the internal political effects of the conflict within the German Empire in his essay "The 'Hottentot election' of 1907", above all the way SPD and Center Party voted against the war, although here it was primarily about the controversial question of the war loans. After the government lost a vote the Reichstag was dissolved and the so-called 'Hottentot election' of 1907 followed. With that the Reichstag majority of SPD and Center Party, who were fundamentally skeptical when it came to colonial adventures, was broken. During the reform era under Dernburg the steadfast anti-colonial position of the SPD also tended towards its end. This defeat of the SPD in 1907 may well have played a not inconsiderable role in their decision to support the war loans.

With a focus on the African perspective Gewald begins his "Colonisation, genocide and resurgence. The Herero of Namibia 1890-1923". His aim is "to refute any idea that the colonial war should be viewed as the end of Herero history" (p. 123). He emphasizes the disagreement between the Herero long before the War and the fact that Samuel Maherero "had German guns to thank for his position of power" (p. 125), with other words that he did not find universal recognition within his own ranks. As the main stimulus for the war Gewald mentions not the lack of land. but rather "a war between the Herero and the Germans became a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 130) and a "result of the settlers' persecution mania and the incompetence and panic of a German Officer" (p. 133). In spite of everything the Herero survived as an "independent ethnic group with their own identity" (p. 133). The founding of a "specifically Herero identity" (p. 139) can be fastened to the occasion of Samuel Maherero's funeral in 1923.

Hillebrecht devotes himself to the often rather neglected subject "The Nama and the war in the South". At the beginning Witbooi sympathized with the Germans and even raised troops for them, only with the end of 1905, after the Battle of Waterberg, did "they become convinced that war was inevitable" (p. 149). In contrast to the events which had come before, a querilla war followed lasting several years, which demanded an equally heavy toll. Although Witbooi's death in 1905 meant that the important figure of integration was missing, others were to enter his footsteps - among others Jacob Marengo and Simon Kooper, who were to continue the resistance against German rule. In the end Kooper secretly received a pension from the Germans, in order to bring the endless conflict to an end. Significantly the expropriated land was not returned to the Nama after 1915. All the same: in 1995 a great grandchild of Witbooi became Vice Prime Minister of Namibia.

In "At the margins of war. The Ovambo Kingdom of Ondonga" Schaller describes the fate of a further ethnic group, which escaped the events mostly unscathed. In 1906 the Ovambo country was declared an officially prohibited zone. The German colonial administration wished to avoid a further center of conflict. Until the end of German rule the region remained to a great degree autonomous.

Krüger takes up the ambivalent role or rather the perception of women in her contribution "Beasts and victims — Women in the Colonial War". Central in this context is that the conflict was no "normal war" for the Germans. Due to the specific situation on the ground the civilian population and the indigenous warriors were not always clearly distinguishable from one another. On the one hand Herero women were seen as "beasts", but on the other hand as "unfortunate victims of war" (p. 174). The role of propaganda must not be underestimated here, while (whether supposed or real) deaths and cases of rape of German women by Herero played a considerable role (p. 175). In this context Krüger speaks of "colonial fantasies of fear about the virility and savagery of African men" (p. 177) on the German side. So far, the role of the Herero women in the war is barely known. In the contemporary journalism one often finds the image of the unleashed beast, thirsting for revenge, who was in no respect less cruel than the men. Whether this presentation simply served the rationalization of German actions (p. 178), can scarcely be answered conclusively. To ban the statements of German war participants regarding this matter completely to the realm of legend or war propaganda seems in this light to be too simple. Nevertheless, out of female "savage beasts" were later made "suffering creatures of the camp" (p. 182). Reports of rape, sexual diseases and the increase in "mixed race children" (p. 183) in the camps are taken quite seriously in the research. Krüger underlines that "images of 'savage black women' do not genuinely arise from the situation of the colonial war" (p. 185), but that these images were of heavy weight in the post war period for the creation of a "racial order" (p. 187). Before the war numerous German farmers and missionaries equally had lived with indigenous women or were married to them. After the war a strict "racial separation" (p. 187) followed.

Mixed marriages were explicitly forbidden.

Henrichsen depicts the individual fate of a Herero woman who marries a German shortly after the breakout of war in his contribution "Wartime wedding. The experiences of Kaera Ida Getzen-Lainhos". At that point in time both had extremely eventful pasts behind them, the relationship was also not of long duration. Henrichsen correctly points out "one should treat these dividing lines with some skepticism" (p. 202). It is an example like this which "invites us to question many of the firmly embedded interpretations of war" (p. 202).

In the final section of the volume "Remembering and forgetting", Gewald devotes himself to "The funeral of Samuel Maharero and the reorganisation of the Herero". Based on the model of the German colonial forces the Herero established a "social support system (p. 208) from 1915 onwards. This formed the starting point for the "process of reconstruction of Herero society" (p. 209). The funeral of Samuel Maherero in 1923 represented the most important social and political event since the war, "the beginning of a new era of the Herero nation" (p. 214).

Kößler shows in "'A luta continua': Strategic orientation and the politics of remembrance as exemplified in the Witbooi 'Heroes Day' in Gibeon", that "victory over colonial powers and racist political systems is generally not synonymous with re-establishing conditions as they previously existed" (p. 229).

In his contribution "Symbolic politics. Notes on the German colonial culture of remembrance", Zeller characterizes

memorials: "The message claiming everlasting future life for monuments could be translated as a statement about the superiority and supremacy of the white colonial masters [...]" (p. 233). After 1945 the extermination of the Herero and Nama was virtually forgotten in the two German states (p. 238). He criticizes a "small milieu of traditional military groups [Traditionsverband], which still today cling to an uninterrupted culture of remembrance which offers apologia for colonialism" (p. 238). In light of this general and undifferentiated criticism one must, at this point, offer supplement and say that especially the Traditionsverband at no point suffered from the often attested German "colonial amnesia". On the contrary, a look at the decade long publications should suffice, even if some points and positions did not always enjoy a general consensus or approval. Zeller appreciates on the other hand the numerous occurrences of the pulling down of monuments since 1984 and the use of the word "genocide" (p. 239). At the same time he attests of the South-West Germans in today's Namibia an uncritical, euphemistic historiography (p. 243). He even speaks of a politics of remembrance taboo between suppression, denial and relativization (p. 244). That the situations of desk-affected writers in comparison to German-Namibians on the ground are two completely different ones seems not to deserve mention. The instrumentalization of the earlier resistance against the German colonial rule - "a line of tradition traced back" (p. 245) - by the current political leadership, is another problem altogether. Moreover, although Riruako has for some time been claiming compensation in line with compensation paid for victims of national socialism, in 1984 – before Namibia's independence – he sounded considerably more conciliatory.⁸ Zeller laments furthermore the lack of corresponding memorials about the atrocities of imperialism in European metropoles. The events of 1904-1908 represent a national trauma for Namibia now as then (p. 248).

In her short contribution Förster sketches the significance of "The German cemetery at the Waterberg", above all as a place of German, later on common remembrance, while the Herero celebrate the 'Ohamakari Day' since the independence of Namibia.

Melber gives a short overview of the diplomatic irritations with a focus on the post 1990 period in his essay "We never spoke about reparations'. German-Namibian relationships: suppression or reconciliation?".

As a conclusion Eckert gives a review on several central positions of international debate until 2003/05 in "Namibia – A German 'Sonderweg' in Africa? Remarks on the international discussion". Whereby deviating or controversial voices find no mention, rather he sees "the colonial war and genocide in German South-West Africa highlight the need for comparative research into genocide to be even more systemati-

⁸ Interview with Riruako in: *Die Deutschen von Südwest. Erinnerung und Hoffnung in Namibia* (The Germans from South-West. Remembrance and Hope in Namibia). A Film by Guido Knopp and P.C. Schmidt, first broadcast 1.04.1984 (ZDF).

cally linked with research into colonialism" (p. 283).

So what remains? As much as there are a few promising beginnings (Krüger: "Women in the Colonial War", Henrichsen "Wartime Wedding"), the anthology mostly reflects the state of the Marxist historiography of the 1960s and its epigons. If the values of Marxist historians from the 1960s[!] are adopted without criticism and are to represent the current climax of advanced or rather modern historical research approaches, then a contemporary who does not pay homage to questionable advances likes to hark back to methodological approaches from 1830 - and that with greater scientific justification - for this primary occupation with the sources and corresponding source criticism refers to the historian's very own task - beyond all trends of zeitgeist and political currents or better said ideologies. As such, these methods remain to a certain degree timeless. A desideratum remains, a deep, critical valuation of contemporary sources, without devaluing them generally with a comment of deficient objectivity. Hardly any exposure has ever been given to the German colonial administration's and above all the Schutztruppe's real possibilities for action and operation, which were light years away from being able to use an only halfway intact logistical infrastructure, completely leaving aside the hygienic and medical conditions. Only with this background does a revaluation or reappraisal make sense.

Without repeated references to the unavoidable Horst Drechsler this topic does not seem to be dealt with scientifically appropriately or 'politically correctly' – this really is to be regretted. Regrettable mainly because recent critical studies were in no way taken into account in this translation/reprint⁹ and a political debate conforming to the zeitgeist is encouraged, which at least for the heirs of the affected on both sides will scarcely be of any advantage.¹⁰

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