

## Polemics and other arguments – a German debate reviewed

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### *Abstract*

*The German colonial past has been seemingly a non-issue among German historians for decades. In recent years however more and more research on this aspect of the German Kaiserreich has been published. For some scholars the subject of (causal) connections between 'Windhoek and Auschwitz' seems to lie at the heart of the question of German colonialism. This article aims at depicting the arguments presented by the exponents of this school of thought. In the way they focus on the possible links of Germany's colonial past and National Socialism, it is argued in this review article, they neither show the ability to handle adequately the issue of the Holocaust nor do they extend our knowledge of Namibian history as other scholars have been able to.*

The German colonial past? – seemingly a non-issue among German historians until a few years ago. An overview of the historiography of German colonialism would once have delivered only a short list of rather dated, yet mostly well researched and well written books on the subject.<sup>1</sup> However, with some suddenness and quite apodictically, Winfried Speitkamp argues that Germany's colonial history has not yet come to an end – a conclusion that makes sense in the light of an ever growing literature on this and related topics.<sup>2</sup> A review of this recent German literature aims at presenting to an English-language readership the latest results with regard to certain developments of this history. It also discusses the reasons for an at times highly acrimonious and emotional debate and treatment of some topics.

A question to pose at the outset of this treatise: Is colonial history suddenly *de rigueur*? It certainly is, yet for some it is not yet 'in' enough. The art historian Joachim Zeller complains, for instance, that with regard to the German collective memory – whatever that may be – there is only a very slow realisation that Germany actually has to be considered a post-colonial society, one in which its colonial past has not yet been dealt

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<sup>1</sup> Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, Berlin/GDR, Akademie, 1966; Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Hamburg, Leibnitz, 1969; Karin Hausen, *Deutsche Kolonialherrschaft in Afrika. Wirtschaftsinteressen und Kolonialverwaltung in Kamerun vor 1914*, Zürich, Atlantis, 1970; Trutz von Trotha, *Koloniale Herrschaft. Zur soziologischen Theorie der Staatsentstehung*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Winfried Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2005: 9.

with adequately.<sup>3</sup> The centennial commemorations of the colonial wars in German South West Africa (2004) and German East Africa (2005) and the attendant debates about reparations, *Wiedergutmachung*, and reconciliation can only be partly held responsible for this new direction. I would argue that the gradual re-orientation of German historians towards world history, international history, and the attendant paradigms of comparability, of transnationalism, of entangled and global history lies at the bottom of this (re-)new(ed) interest in the German colonial past.<sup>4</sup> Further, recent work in colonial history has departed from the known trajectory and therefore provides a deeper understanding of the social history of the colonial state. New questions regarding the reverberations of this on German (metropolitan) history in a European context can thus be posed and the proposed continuity 'from Bismarck to Hitler' can be examined anew and with, rather than from, this 'colonial perspective'.

These most recent propositions have resulted in a veritable discussion among the experts. Yet, this debate dates at least as far back as Hannah Arendt's argument that imperialism is one of the prerequisites of totalitarianism, without which National Socialism would not have been possible.<sup>5</sup> And even though "mentioning, [. . .] British colonial methods and Himmler's plans for occupied Russia in the same breath rarely happens", this kind of comparative approach between different colonialisms, as advocated by Guiseppe Finaldi, is entirely missing from colonial history.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, current German debates revolve around continuity and parallels in German history only, paradigms that can at best be described as dated. Reinhart Kößler and Henning Melber, taking up Hannah Arendt, actually construct a direct connection between settler colonialism and Nazi dictatorship.<sup>7</sup> Even personal continuities between German

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<sup>3</sup> Joachim Zeller, "Review of Helma Lutz/Kathrin Gawarecki, (eds.), *Kolonialismus und Erinnerungskultur*, New York/Munich, Waxman, 2005", *afrika süd* 35/2/2006: 38 "Erst langsam setzt sich hierzulande die Erkenntnis durch, dass Deutschland eine postkoloniale Gesellschaft ist, die die 'Leerstelle koloniale Vergangenheit' noch aufzuarbeiten hat."

<sup>4</sup> Sebastian Conrad/Jürgen Osterhammel, (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004; cf. also critically Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Transnationale Geschichte – der neue Königsweg historischer Forschung?", in: Sebastian Conrad, (ed.), *Transnationale Geschichte. Festschrift für Jürgen Kocka*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*, 2nd edition, München, Piper, 1991: 209-470 (cf. her chapter on Imperialism; cf. eg. "Der Unterschied zwischen dem, was in der schemenhaften, bald irrealen tropischen Welt der Kolonien, und dem, was in Europa vor sich ging, war nur, daß es in Europa einige Jahrzehnte brauchte, die ethischen Standards der Gesellschaft zu zerstören, während hier alles mit der Geschwindigkeit eines Kurzschlusses ablief." p. 415); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harcourt, 1951.

<sup>6</sup> Guiseppe Finaldi, "European Empire and the Making of the Modern World. Recent Books and Old Arguments", *Contemporary European History* 14, 2005: 245-258, (247).

<sup>7</sup> Reinhart Kößler/Henning Melber, "Völkermord und Gedenken. Der Genozid an den Herero und Nama in DSWA", in: Fritz Bauer Institut, (ed.), *Völkermord und Kriegsverbrechen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2004: 37-76 (58-59), where he posits a "ursächlichen Zusammenhang zwischen dem damaligen Siedlerkolonialismus und der NS-Diktatur." (p. 58) "Der koloniale Rassismus und die darauf aufbauende Vernichtungsphilosophie nahmen vorweg, was in den industriell

colonialism and National Socialism are stressed. A striking example of this construction/argumentative pattern reads as follows: "As a warrior and colonial administrator, Heinrich Göring left a potent legacy upon which his son Hermann would build." And Franz Ritter von Epp, who took part in the German-Herero War, "acted as a direct human conduit through which German South West African ideas and methods flowed into the highest echelons of the Third Reich."<sup>8</sup> Finally, even the brown uniform shirts of the SA are said to have been inspired by the uniforms of the Imperial *Schutztruppe*, the protection troops.<sup>9</sup> German colonialism, paradigmatically seen as a predecessor of National Socialism, is thus credited with the mental, even practical, preparation of the Holocaust. Headings, such as "From Africa to Auschwitz", underscore this paradigm uncritically:

The German terms *Lebensraum* and *Konzentrationslager*, both widely known because of their use by the Nazis, were not coined by the Hitler regime. They were minted years earlier in reference to German South West Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Andreas Eckert and Albert Wirz have warned against this straightforward supposition of a direct continuity from colonialism to National Socialism.<sup>11</sup> Even Henning Melber does not subscribe directly to such questionable (linguistic-)historical arguments, as he poses his argument by way of a question "From colonial genocide to the Holocaust?" He continues, however, arguing that

[a]s evidence shows, we can observe continuities in accounts and novels read by mass readership, in military practice as well as in the activities of specific persons, and in military doctrines and routines that link strategic ideas of decisive battles to the concept of final solution and extinction of the enemy, which came to full effect under the Nazi regime.<sup>12</sup>

Reinhart Kößler argues in the same vein, stressing the structural parallels between German colonialism and National Socialism.<sup>13</sup>

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betriebenen Vernichtungslagern Jahrzehnte später perfektioniert wurde." (p. 59). Cf. also Henning Melber, "Kontinuitäten totaler Herrschaft. Völkermord und Apartheid in 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika'. Zur kolonialen Herrschaftspraxis im Deutschen Kaiserreich", *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 1, 1992: 91-114.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe", *European History Quarterly*, 35, 2005: 429-464, (451).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: 452

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.: 429.

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Eckert/Albert Wirz, "Deutschland und der Kolonialismus", in: Sebastian Conrad, (ed.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2002: 372-392, (383) with reference to the works of Hannah Arendt, Helmut Bley and Andreas Eckert.

<sup>12</sup> Henning Melber, "How to come to terms with the past. Re-visiting the German colonial genocide in Namibia", *afrika spectrum* 40, 2005: 139-146, (144-145).

<sup>13</sup> Reinhart Kößler, "From Genocide to Holocaust? Structural Parallels and discursive continuities", in: *afrika spectrum* 40, 2005: 309-317. Cf. also Reinhart Kößler/Henning Melber, "Völkermord": 37-76.

With regard to the German-Herero War, it is obvious that in this discussion the methods of colonial warfare are being considered specifically. Isabel V. Hull, known for her work on Berlin's Wilhelmine court culture, deduces the annihilatory tendencies of German colonial warfare in GSWA from Prussian military doctrine, which, she argues, did not shy away from final solutions, *Endlösungen*.<sup>14</sup> In a volume on the colonial wars in GSWA (1904-1908) and its consequences, edited by historian of German colonialism Jürgen Zimmerer, and Joachim Zeller, this theory of a direct trajectory 'from Africa to Auschwitz', a continuity between German colonialism and Nazism, is repeated.<sup>15</sup> Their point of definitional departure is the UN-Genocide Convention of 1948. The contributions to this volume, mostly drawn from already published work, range from deliberations on the 'first German genocide' under General Lothar von Trotha to the culture and social space of the *situation coloniale* in GSWA, from a pre-colonial 'Golden Age' in Herero society to the latter's attempts at social-ethnic reconstruction after the war and recent debates on reparations for the injustice suffered at German hands.

Henning Melber's edited volume *Genozid und Gedenken* could be seen as a kind of *post mortem* of the commemorative year 2004. He has pulled together writings on Namibian-German historical debates, related contemporary discussions about memory and the politics thereof Germany's *Sonderweg* (its special historical trajectory), colonialism as ideological preparation for Nazism, Herero memorial culture, and German reparations etc. New analysis and arguments are not presented; accepted ideas and thinking are reiterated. The 'Holocaust and colonialism' question is touched upon in several of the papers but contributions from Namibia have not been included. Melber, in a move to address criticism of this pertinent point, argues in the foreword that in this book the debate is centred on the European perspective only.<sup>16</sup> However he fails to present any advantage in this approach. Moreover, Christoph Marx' polemic intervention suggests that profound Namibian contributions had not been expected anyway, as inside Namibia such discussion is dominated by unqualified hobby-historian farmers and history lecturers.<sup>17</sup> This unfounded and disrespectful evaluation of Namibian colleagues was the basis upon which Africanist historian Andreas Eckert, quite uncritically, reviewed the book in the widely-read German national daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.<sup>18</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>14</sup> Isabel V. Hull, "Military Culture and the Production of Final Solutions in the Colonies. The Example of Wilhelminian Germany", in: Robert Gellately/Ben Kiernan, (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003: 141-162. Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer/Joachim, Zeller, (eds.), *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, Berlin, Links, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Henning Melber, "Vorwort", in: Henning Melber, (ed.), *Genozid und Gedenken. Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/M., Brandes & Apsel, 2005: 7-11, (10).

<sup>17</sup> Christoph Marx, "Entsorgen und Entseuchen. Zur Diskussionskultur in der derzeitigen Historiographie – eine Polemik", in: Melber, (ed.), *Genozid*: 141-161.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23/11/2005.

he intended to create the impression that Namibian historiography is dominated by conservative, even right-wing, 'assistant' historians, enviously ensuring their claim to be the only legitimate representatives and interpreters of Namibian colonial history, their *Alleinvertretungsanspruch*.

Melber's contribution to the volume entitled "Ein deutscher 'Sonderweg'?" is, predictably, on the argument of a continuity between German colonialism and Nazism. Yet, contrary to what the question mark in his title suggests, he does not offer any new and critical insight. Instead, he reiterates his earlier position that there exists a causal connection between German settler colonialism and Nazi dictatorship; and further that German colonialism has to be held responsible for the making of racist mental patterns which later could be exploited by the National Socialists.<sup>19</sup> Melber argues that colonialism acted as a switch lever, even though not necessarily in a determinist way, enabling National Socialism to take its course. For this reason, colonial studies are relevant to researching the Holocaust and more recent genocides.<sup>20</sup>

Melber's implicit and seemingly balanced exhortation for a comparative approach is particularly significant as such an approach is direly missing from the rest of the contributions in his volume, except for Zimmerer's cursory deliberations on the Australian frontier genocide.<sup>21</sup> A real comparison would have furthered our understanding of the German (colonial) *Sonderweg*, according to which the Germans either had left or never followed a colonial norm. The next step would have to be to examine the cases of Great Britain, France, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Belgium or the Ottoman Empire. The question to be answered, then, would have concerned the differences in colonial thinking, approach and method – a question not unimportant if one considers the hypothesis that German colonial method was directly linked to that employed by the National Socialists. The only aspect of this *Sonderweg* that Melber is able to mention is that the colonial genocide and the one committed 40 years later may have been committed by the same perpetrators or those of one generation later.<sup>22</sup> But what about the colonies themselves, one is inclined to ask? Why has recent research and its findings not been taken up in this reasoning, according to which German colonial

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<sup>19</sup> Kößler/Melber, "Völkermord": 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> Henning Melber, "Ein deutscher Sonderweg? Einleitende Bemerkungen zum Umgang mit dem Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika", in: Melber, (ed.), *Genozid*: 13-21, (17, 19). He argues a "weichenstellende (wenn auch keineswegs deterministische) Entwicklung" – because a "reduktionistische Kontinuitätsthese bzw. monokausale Ableitungstheorie scheint weder stichhaltig noch vertretbar".

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Rassenkrieg und Völkermord. Der Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und die Globalgeschichte des Genozids", in: Melber, (ed.), *Genozid*: 23-48.

<sup>22</sup> Melber, (ed.), *Genozid*: 15: "dass ein Aspekt des 'Sonderwegs' darin bestehen mag, dass der koloniale Genozid und der Holocaust 40 Jahre danach durch z.T. noch dieselbe und die unmittelbar darauf folgende Generation von Tätern begangen wurde."

method was barely different from that of other colonial powers?<sup>23</sup> Differently phrased, the argument can be made that the period of high imperialism was characterised by commonalities rather than differences among the European colonial powers.<sup>24</sup> The German Empire, as the late-comer, made sure it learnt from its 'elders'. This is evidenced in the rich content of the Federal Archives in Berlin-Lichterfelde; substantial amounts of files record communications with the other colonial powers and their colonies on questions of policy, approach and shared experiences. As Guiseppe Finaldi has recently argued, "the study of colonialism is by nature comparative or cross-national".<sup>25</sup> This seems not to have been realised by all Namibianists. Andreas Eckert has argued in this direction. Pointing to a certain preference for Namibia in these debates, he emphasises the importance of positioning its colonial history within the historical context of the other German colonies as well as that of colonialism in Africa in general.<sup>26</sup> Yet his advice is not heeded and Jan Bart Gewalt, for instance, argues, vaguely and without reference, the "extreme nature of German colonial repression in Namibia".<sup>27</sup> The latter reiterates a position already taken by Horst Drechsler, who had argued in the 1960s the particularly aggressive nature of German imperialism, again, without adequate evidence.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the picture emerging is one of a history researched only deficiently and superficially, one in which a comparative approach would assist to verify such judgment. Even a profound comparison with the Maji-Maji-War of 1905 in German East Africa – an event that in its results and repercussions would have a much better claim to being called genocidal – has not yet been undertaken. It would, indeed, be interesting to see what the differences were between these two German colonial wars of annihilation, fought almost at the same time, and what these differences would mean. Eckert expresses amazement that this war, fought at the same time with the same kind of (German) genocidal determination, yet resulting in many more fatalities, does not resonate among German researchers.<sup>29</sup>

A second point to be made is the partiality for the Herero and Nama cause, a point openly acknowledged by some of the authors. Reinhart Kößler goes as far as seeing this to be inevitable, even necessary, for this kind of historiography; Henning Melber claims

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<sup>23</sup> Dirk van Laak, "'Ist je ein Reich, das es nicht gab, so gut verwaltet worden?' Der imaginäre Ausbau der imperialen Infrastruktur in Deutschland nach 1918", in: Birthe Kundrus, (ed.), *Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2003: 71-90, (74).

<sup>24</sup> Dirk van Laak, "Kolonien als 'Laboratorien der Moderne'?", in: Sebastian Conrad/Jürgen Osterhammel, (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871 – 1914*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004: 257-279, (257).

<sup>25</sup> Finaldi, "Empire": 245-258, (245).

<sup>26</sup> Andreas Eckert, "Namibia – ein deutscher Sonderweg in Afrika? Anmerkungen zu einer internationalen Diskussion", in: Zimmerer/Zeller, (eds.), *Völkermord*: 226-236, (226).

<sup>27</sup> Jan Bart Gewalt, "Review of Tony Emmett, Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966, 1999", *Journal of African History*, 42, 2001: 157.

<sup>28</sup> Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*: 9.

<sup>29</sup> Eckert, "Namibia", in Zimmerer/Zeller, (eds.), *Völkermord*: 226-236, (236).

empathy and moral engagement on the side of the authors of his edited volume.<sup>30</sup> And maybe one cannot but be morally enraged and therefore emotionally and discursively engaged when, for instance, 90% of the prisoners-of-war on Shark Island died. Sympathy and compassion for the victims and heroes of anti-colonial resistance – forces such as those who during the Battle of Ohamakari were able to resist the German troops effectively – is one thing. Why things happened as they did, however, requires a sober explanation. The approach and question to be posed, impartially, should concern the *situation coloniale* which makes such wars possible. Zimmerer concedes that the reason for von Trotha's genocidal willingness and readiness is still unanswered and that it needs to be adequately explained. In this vein he argues that earlier colonial wars need also to be considered.<sup>31</sup> This is certainly a way forward, advancing new understanding. Yet, questioning the reason for such developments cannot be allowed to result only in the discovery of ever more new continuities – the campaign in China 1900, Leutwein's war against Hendrik Witbooi and his people in 1894, the as yet uncounted punitive expeditions in other newly acquired protectorates, even the so-called Anglo-Boer War. Comparative research and the assumption of links between different events and of personal continuities will not endlessly deliver new insight nor plausible explanations about 'causal connections'. It is much more likely that one will eventually get lost in some unknown Nowhere.

Other reasons exist for the partisanship of the authors under review, among which the request for reparations is the most important, a demand that most support. Accordingly, Melber argues that if one is serious about the recognition of historical guilt, then practical steps should follow.<sup>32</sup> The insistence on reparations to be paid by Germany to Herero and other groups of victims of the colonial wars also borrows from the debate about comparability and *Gleichsetzung*, which equates colonial warfare and the Holocaust. The comparability and singularity of the Holocaust were hotly debated in Germany during the 1980s in the so-called German *Historiker-Streit*. What the Holocaust Chronicle takes as its point of departure: "Er [the Holocaust] ist einzig in der Geschichte" might be considered one result of this debate.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the impression remains that the two historical phenomena – colonial genocide and Holocaust – are seen by some to be comparable and causally related. Christoph Marx, however, in his polemical treatment of this issue, goes to great lengths to flatly deny that any writer has

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<sup>30</sup> Reinhart Köbler, "Im Schatten des Genozids", in: Melber, (ed.), *Genozid*: 77; *ibid.*, Melber, *Vorwort*: 10.

<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Der Krieg gegen die Herero und Nama in DSWA (1904-1907)", in: Rüdiger Overmans, (ed.), *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Köln, Böhlau, 1999: 277-294, (294): "Woher die Bereitschaft zum Völkermord bei von Trotha und anderen stammt, ist eine offene Frage, die noch der Klärung harret. Zu ihrer Beantwortung müssten auch eventuelle Kontinuitäten zu früheren Kolonialkriegen untersucht werden."

<sup>32</sup> Melber, "Sonderweg": 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Die Holocaust Chronik*, München, Droener, 2002: 13. [engl.: *The Holocaust Chronicle*, Lincolnwood, Publication International, 2000].

taken this line.<sup>34</sup> Really? For one might pose the question why Birthe Kundrus deemed it necessary to warn against this *Gleichsetzung*. For this she was rapped on the knuckles by Marx.<sup>35</sup> A reviewer of the Zimmerer/Zeller volume also took exception to the insistent interlacing of colonial genocide and Holocaust.<sup>36</sup> Namibians have been far less cautious. In 2001 former Namibian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo Ben-Gurirab, called his German counterpart, Joschka Fischer, a racist because German exculpations of guilt had only been addressed to 'whites'.<sup>37</sup> German refusals to pay reparations, on the grounds that the Holocaust/Shoah was particularly singular and cannot be compared with instances of colonial genocide, are thought to be racist by Herero Paramount Chief Riruako because compensation was only given to "Jews", that is "Whites".<sup>38</sup> These rather questionable allegations have been taken up on the German side quite vindictively. Accordingly, it is argued, the German government has created two categories of genocide, one entitled to reparations, whilst another committed in the colony has no such entitlement. Whether this can be seriously alleged is not to be discussed here. Yet, the result of this argument is the collapse, on the most basic materialist level, of a distinction between Holocaust and colonial genocide.<sup>39</sup> Despite Marx' denial this argumentative pattern is quite common.

Joachim Zeller complained – juxtaposing – that, alongside the highest representatives of government, thousands attended the inauguration of the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, while few attended the unveiling of a memorial to commemorate the Congo Conference of 1884, and without any government representation.<sup>40</sup> Reinhart Kößler formulates this juxtaposition similarly, though far more cautiously. His argument is that the 'foundational myth' of present-day Germany is constitutively about the Holocaust memory, whereas the Namibian colonial genocide and other atrocities have been excluded from "national

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<sup>34</sup> Marx, "Entsorgen": 141-161 (153); *ibid.*: Melber, "Sonderweg": 14, footnote 3: "Eine 'Gleichsetzung' die, wie Christoph. Marx in seiner 'fundierten Polemik' betont, gar niemand vorgenommen hatte."

<sup>35</sup> Birthe Kundrus, "Grenzen der Gleichsetzung. Kolonialverbrechen und Vernichtungspolitik", *Blätter des IZfW*, Nr. 275, 2004: 30-33.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Salewski, "Review of Zimmerer/Zeller, (eds.), *Völkermord*", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31/12/2003: 9, objects to a "penetrante Ineinssetzung von Holocaust und Genozid".

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Jürgen Zimmerer, "Keine Geiseln der Geschichte", *taz, die Tageszeitung*, 10/1/2004: 5.

<sup>38</sup> Janntje Böhlke-Itzen, *Kolonialschuld und Entschädigung. Der deutsche Völkermord an den Herero 1904-1907*, Frankfurt/M., Brandes & Apsel, 2004: 91.

<sup>39</sup> "Völkermord bleibt Völkermord – und verlangt Entschädigung. Issa-Erklärung zur Frage der Entschädigung für die Opfer des deutschen Völkermords in Namibia", *afrika süd*, 35/3/2006: 34-35. The title of this article reads in translation as follows: Genocide remains genocide – and requires reparations. ISSA-declaration on the question of reparations for the victims of German genocide in Namibia. In this declaration the argument is made (on the background of reparations paid to Israel) that the Federal German Government's refusal to honour requests for reparations to be paid to Herero, Damara, Nama and San amounts to the creation of 'two categories of genocide', one with legitimate reparations and one without. Hence, genocide committed against black people, the authors of the above-cited declaration conclude, is considered less grave.

<sup>40</sup> Zeller, "Review of Lutz/Gawarecki": 38, cf. footnote 3.

memorialisation”.<sup>41</sup> Does he wish the latter to have the same impact on the German ‘foundational myth’? All these arguments could very well be read as an attempt to a *Gleichsetzung* of Holocaust and colonial genocide.

Henning Melber explicitly paraphrases that the singularity of the Holocaust has been generally accepted, yet argues at the same time that German colonial policy aimed at completely annihilating the adversary.<sup>42</sup> In arguing this, he suggests a similarity as he applies terminology used by the Nazis with regard to the Jews who were almost completely exterminated in Europe. Whether the African inhabitants of GSWA were to be annihilated in the same way has not yet been seriously alleged by anybody. The contents of the so-called Native Proclamations of 1907, for instance, suggest the opposite.

Janntje Böhlke-Itzen points to the fact that Herero do base their request for reparations on a negation of this singularity of the “Jewish” Holocaust. Another/other Holocaust/s, non-Jewish at that, have thus been discursively constructed! She deems it necessary to point to the fact that (only?) Jewish authors consider this negation to be anti-Semitic – leaving it to the reader to understand why national or religious affiliation of authors strengthen or weaken their argument. In her view, this claim of anti-Semitism amounts to an instrumentalisation, even utilisation, of the singularity of the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup> During a conference in Berlin (January 2005) on “Genocides: Forms, Causes and Consequences. The Namibian War (1904-1908) in historical perspective”, which aimed at understanding this Namibian development as part of a more general history of genocide, the accepted view of the singularity of the Holocaust was pushed aside as unacademic, its exponents were termed intellectually narrow minded.<sup>44</sup> Christoph Marx assumes that the “insistence on the singularity of the Holocaust” results from the refusal to think through certain continuities in German history. However, he always emphasises that there is only an alleged *Gleichsetzung* of Holocaust and colonial genocide.<sup>45</sup>

This usage of the terms genocide and Holocaust has obviously become rather inflationary. Henryk M. Broder has recently, quite pointedly, described a new phenomenon: “Holocaust envy”, calling it a “macabre competition”. “The Holocaust belongs to us all”, he quips, particularly as the term’s usage, seemingly and

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<sup>41</sup> Köbler, “Schatten”: 53

<sup>42</sup> Melber, “Sonderweg”: 20. He claims a policy of attempted “Ausrottung des ‘Gegenüber’ mit Stumpf und Stil”.

<sup>43</sup> Böhlke-Itzen, *Kolonialschuld*: 91.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. the paper by Henry R. Huttenbach; cf. Dominik Schaller, *Tagungsbericht: Genocides: Forms, Causes and Consequences. The Namibian War (1904-08) in historical perspective, (Berlin, 13.-15.1. 2005)*, [www.hist.net/ag-genocid/tagungsbericht.htm](http://www.hist.net/ag-genocid/tagungsbericht.htm) accessed August 25, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Marx, “Entsorgen”: 141-161, (154).

automatically, ensures the media's attention and implied calls for reparation payments. A newspaper headline of years ago already read "The Herero Holocaust?"<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, Jürgen Zimmerer warns against, even rejects, an equation of the Holocaust with colonial genocide, clarifying that it would be wrong to describe Nazi atrocities as mere copies of colonial events. While he refuses the notion of a monocausal connection between colonialism and Nazism, he still argues colonialism to have been a forerunner, an *Ideengeber*, of the Holocaust. He posits that colonial rule was similar to National Socialist rule, and following from that he concludes that colonial genocide and the Holocaust are also similar in nature. German colonial experience is seen by Zimmerer to have acted as a cultural (re)-source (*kulturelles Reservoir*) from which the National Socialists would have drawn their ideas.<sup>47</sup> These rather ominously formulated ideas of Zimmerer are repeated in his piece titled *Die Geburt des 'Ostlands' aus dem Geist des Kolonialismus*.<sup>48</sup> And they do not become clearer here, as the ominous title – "Birth of the 'Ostland' conceived by the spirit of colonialism", demonstrates. His title gives the impression of answering a question which has been posed by those who want to emphasise the continuities, not to say causalities, Zimmerer had just denied in his article. A 'birth' has only one reason – it is monocausal by its very nature. By choosing this title, Zimmerer has described a situation of a "because/therefore ..." In his understanding the spirit of colonialism is the reason for the 'Ostland' – and all that has happened there, including the extermination of the Jews. No colonialism, no ideas of Germanised Eastern Europe, no Holocaust? Zimmerer's arguments do not convince, they confuse – not only the reader, but also the issues. Does he want to make an argument backing causal connections between German colonialism in Africa and German colonial designs in the European East? Did he not just reject such notions? One has the suspicion that he tries to avoid a decision either for or against a monocausal connection between colonialism and Nazism. What remains is the impression that he cannot handle the questions adequately, as he does not manage to handle, with enough intellectual precision, the difficult issues he wants to answer. Melber has the same problem, obviously. On the one hand he denies that German colonialism and National Socialism are deterministically connected, yet on the other hand he argues a causal connection between German settler colonialism and Nazi dictatorship.<sup>49</sup> Now, what does he mean?

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<sup>46</sup> Henryk M. Broder, "Der Holocaust Neid", *Der Tagesspiegel*, 31/5/2006:8; Jeremy Silvester/Werner Hillebrecht/Casper Erichsen: "The Herero Holocaust? The disputed History of the 1904 Genocide", *The Namibian*, see: [http://www.deutschland-postkolonial.com/herero\\_holocaust.pdf](http://www.deutschland-postkolonial.com/herero_holocaust.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Zimmerer, "Rassenkrieg": 46-48.

<sup>48</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Die Geburt des 'Ostlandes' aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus. Ein postkolonialer Blick auf die NS-Eroberungs- und Vernichtungspolitik", *Sozialgeschichte. Zeitschrift für die historische Analyse des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, 1, 2004: 11-43. The term Ostland was used for the vast areas east of Germany in the context of Nazi colonising designs.

<sup>49</sup> Köbler/Melber, "Völkermord": 58-59; Melber, "Sonderweg": 16. Indeed sentences like the following are convoluted to a degree that defies translation into English. For instance, Melber argues that there are "zahlreiche Indizien, die als eine Besonderheit des kolonialen Genozids in DSWA diesen in substantiellen

Whether the Holocaust was singular or not, and the resultant insistence on or refusal of reparations to Herero and other victims of German colonial rule are one side of the coin – but there is also a flip side. For some of the authors in question, African and colonial history has relevance only because of European domination, exploitation, genocide even. In other words, Africa is only of historiographical interest as the object of European intervention. And arguably, this is what lies at the heart of many of the ongoing discussions. Gesine Krüger has perceptively argued that Namibian history is, sub-textually, connected to Auschwitz.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Namibian history can be effectively instrumentalised for a totally different and completely unrelated set of reasons. It is in this context that Christoph Marx' polemical intervention against Birthe Kundrus and Wolfram Hartmann has to be seen.<sup>51</sup> Both, he argues, are trying to play down and relativise German colonial rule in Namibia, with their application of post-colonial empty formulas and terminology, as mere negotiation of and bargaining over political power and domination. Notwithstanding that a thorough reading of Hartmann and Kundrus will barely deliver any such (insinuated) understanding, such negotiatory processes did indeed form part of the colonial reality in GSWA, but before rather than after the wars of 1904 to 1908. The latter are in these arguments always taken as the foundation date for the history of southwestern Africa, unreflectingly narrowing Namibian history down to these wars and their aftermath. While Hartmann has presented profound research on pre-colonial and early colonial Namibian history, Marx has not. It is perhaps for this reason that Marx, reflex-like, treats any differentiated approach to this history as minimisation, which includes, in his view, the Battle of Ohamakarari or the Native Proclamations (*Eingeborenenverordnungen*). And in this context: what would one actually call the attempts of Maharero, Kambazembi and Hendrik Witbooi in the 1880s and 1890s to come to terms with the presence of the British and Germans, the latter at no time having any real power?<sup>52</sup>

Another example of this narrowed down understanding of Namibian history is Zimmerer's argument that Germany's "first genocide" is "constitutive for the origins of

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Momenten mit der reklamierten Einzigartigkeit des Holocausts in erklärenden Zusammenhang bringen und zur Prüfung des 'deutschen Sonderwegs' herausfordern."

<sup>50</sup> Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewusstsein. Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia 1904 bis 1907*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999: 14.

<sup>51</sup> Kundrus, "Grenzen". The title of Wolfram Hartmann's commemorative conference at the University of Namibia in August 2004 "1904-2004 – Decontaminating the Namibian Past" was disliked by Marx, cf. Marx, "Entsorgen": 155-160.

<sup>52</sup> Similar phenomena and "strategies of the African participants" have been attributed to Portuguese-African encounters during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that were "not so much a confrontation of cultures as an intimate, balanced commercial collaboration." Joseph C. Miller, "Review of: M.E. Madeira Santos, 'Serventia e posse' (Angola século XIX), 1998", *Journal of African History*, 41, 2000: 503. Cf. also: Patricia Hayes, *A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, c. 1880-1935*, unpubl. PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1992.

German speaking Namibian society".<sup>53</sup> Cavalierly, he forgets to mention that Germans (and others) had already started to arrive in the 1840s, and that substantial numbers of civilians started to appear in the protectorate from the early 1880s. Instead, Marx and Zimmerer are – first and foremost – polemically interested in proving the Prussian genocidal-militarist tradition that would bring about the Third Reich and the Holocaust. African and Namibian history is of interest to Zimmerer only due to colonialism's brute force and the genocide he has now described in a multitude of papers. This attempt at positioning this narrowed and watered-down version of Namibian (and African) colonial history within the wider historiography of 20th century German history seems, in fact, to be driven by hopes of enhancing their standing and profile within that wider and accepted field of study. It might be tempting to answer the most important question of modern German history – how was the Holocaust possible? – in the light of Namibian history. Yet, such attempts are futile, if not abortive, given the sources and the literature that is available for this paradigm.

It is not without reason that other authors reject notions of similarity, continuity and parallels in the history under review here – unanimously at that. Both Horst Gründer – disliked by some contemporary German historians of Africa because of his, by today's standards of political correctness, rather dated, yet still valuable overview history of the German colonies – and Birthe Kundrus are warning constantly of this continuity paradigm.<sup>54</sup> Even Hannah Arendt's authoritative, paradigm-creating evaluation of totalitarianism – often (mis-)used as a kind of a quarry – has been challenged recently.

Hannah Arendt's use of colonialism as a stepping-stone to totalitarianism and one in which the later was precociously made apparent is not altogether convincing, certainly when analysing some recent scholarship.<sup>55</sup>

And the general application of the term genocide to describe this aspect of German colonial history has not gone without intervention. Boris Barth cautions that, despite the large amount of literature on the topic, the term "genocide suspicion" is much more appropriate. He rejects Isabel V. Hull's treatment of the issue, who has argued, once more, a direct connection between the two – German colonialism and National Socialism.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the historian Andreas Eckl provides us with a thorough treatment and critique of such notions as applied in the literature that deal with the Herero-German war. He has edited the diaries of two members of the German colonial forces – Georg Hillebrecht, an army doctor, and Franz Ritter von Epp, later notoriously known as

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<sup>53</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Review of Klaus Nordbruch, *Der Hereroaufstand*, Stegen, Vowinkel, 2002", *Militär-geschichtliche Zeitschrift*, 62, 2003, where he posits his argument of the "genozidalen Ursprüngen der deutschstämmigen Kultur Namibias."

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. Stefanie Michels, "Review of: Winfried Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2005", in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 27.10.2005 ([www.hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2005-4-057](http://www.hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2005-4-057)); Horst Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, 3rd edition, Paderborn, Schöningh, 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Finaldi, "Empire": 258; see e.g.: Melber, "Sonderweg": 17

<sup>56</sup> Boris Barth, *Genozid. Völkermord im 20. Jahrhundert*, München, Beck, 2006: 128-136.

a prominent Nazi.<sup>57</sup> In the introduction to this source edition, Eckl contextualises the diaries within the historiography of the German colonial wars in GSWA, reconsidering – critically – the research, methodology and results thereof.

Eckl tackles, head on, the evaluation of German colonial warfare in GSWA as genocidal – paradigmatic since the 1960s. He convincingly demonstrates how this position has served mainly to situate this aspect of Namibian history in contexts that have nothing to do with Namibian historiographical concerns. Historians that insist on the genocidal nature of this war often do so exclusively from a European/US perspective, a perspective predominantly defined by the paradigms and theoretical positions of German historiography (p. 14). While Zimmerer bases his argument on the definition of the United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948 and stresses that the colonial wars of 1904 contributed to making the Holocaust thinkable and possible (p. 15), Eckl emphasises the fact that the category genocide has inherent analytical value only for *German* history; for interpretations of Namibian history, particularly the 1904 wars, the term genocide with its Eurocentric orientation towards historical developments of three to four decades later is not helpful (p. 16).<sup>58</sup> In fact, and despite Marx' and Zimmerer's scandalising of Eckl's position, it is not really new.<sup>59</sup> Even Andreas Eckert has in the Zimmerer/Zeller volume argued earlier in the same line, albeit tentatively only – does he not want to commit himself to clarity in this matter? – that stringing together German colonial genocide and the annihilatory policies of the Nazis possibly results from a specific German historical perspective only.<sup>60</sup>

Eckl argues further that the discussion of this particular Namibian historiographic issue rests on a very thinly exploited source base – a fact admitted by few. The background, the origins and the course of the colonial wars of 1904 have not been researched adequately; the research and writing of this history tends to be self-referential, a fact easily verified by looking at how the evidence is footnoted in this rather small body of literature. Arguably, this writing has not surpassed the methodological mode of Horst Drechsler's classic of 1966 *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, translated as *Let us Die Fighting*. Eckl goes to great lengths to illustrate how Drechsler applied and exploited his sources – ambivalently at best (p. 31). The latter's method, demonstrably,

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<sup>57</sup> Andreas Eckl, (ed.), *"S'ist ein übles Land hier". Zur Historiographie eines umstrittenen Kolonialkrieges. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen aus dem Herero-Krieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904 von Georg Hillebrecht und Franz Ritter von Epp*, Köln, Köppe, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Eckl, however, stresses that the "analytische Wert der Kategorie Genozid, wenn überhaupt, dann für die Analyse und Interpretation der deutschen Geschichte von Bedeutung ist." However, for a perceptive understanding of Namibian history and the events of 1904ff this perspective, he argues: "Zum Verständnis der namibischen Geschichte und der Ereignisse von 1904 aber tragen der Begriff und die mit ihm verbundene eurozentrisch 'auf Späteres' verweisende Perspektive nicht bei." (p. 16) Melber argues against him that this "scheinbar interkulturell sensible Argument unter Verweis auf den ernst zu nehmenden afrikanischen Wissenschaftler" Achille Mbembe, der vor einem "verengten, pseudo-radikalen 'Afrozentrismus'" gewarnt haben soll, cf. Melber, "Sonderweg": 19.

<sup>59</sup> Marx, "Entsorgen": 158.

<sup>60</sup> Eckert, "Sonderweg": 236.

was to use a source when it suited his argument, and to discard it when it contradicted him.

This lamentable situation – a strongly biased historiography in Eckl's words – has not improved in the decades since Drechsler's work, and nothing new has been discovered.<sup>61</sup> For example, he argues, historians have without any reservation and methodological rigour applied themselves to the *Generalstabswerk* as a source – *prima facie*, and used this body of evidence – mantra-like, substituting it for the lost archives of the Imperial Protection Troop (*Kaiserliche Schutztruppen*). The *Generalstabswerk* is the official report on the 1904-1908 wars, issued by the military headquarters in Berlin.<sup>62</sup> One quick look at its foreword, however, shows the publication for what it is: a vindication of, if not an apologia of the colonial war/s as a successful military campaign in the face of a highly adversarial German public, as a publication to claim the *Dank des gesamten Vaterlandes*, gratitude of the whole nation for the troops' involvement (and heavy losses).

Another source for German colonial history in Namibia – used and evaluated by some of the authors as respectable, credible and substantial – is the *Blue Book*. It contains a record of the German mismanagement of GSWA, underpinned by the atrocities committed against the African inhabitants of the territory. It is based on a selection from the archives of the German colonial administration, a few interviews and some other published materials. The *Blue Book* was edited in 1917 by the South African military administration with the clear aim of discrediting German colonial rule.<sup>63</sup> The problem with this source, as Eckl points out, is the absence of any source-critical evaluation. The *Blue Book's* validation as a historical source has become something of an article of faith. And this in a situation, where a rigorous (re-)assessment of its value as a source is direly needed (p. 19).

Eckl then goes on to demonstrate how a much more thorough evaluation of sources, including the broadening of the source base, can contribute to a far more differentiated interpretation and better grounded evaluation of the history under review. He does so by applying himself to the three most important issues in this debate: the reasons for the war, the annihilatory politics, and the so-called 'extermination proclamation' of General von Trotha of 2 October 1904. He concludes:

- while Jan Bart Gewald argues that the outbreak of the German-Herero War could not have been the result of planned and concerted actions on the side of the Herero, there

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<sup>61</sup> Eckl, *Land*: 18: Diese bedauerliche "Tendenzösität der akademischen Geschichtsschreibung", die sich im unkritischen Umgang mit Quellentexten sowie deren Interpretation und Darstellung niederschlägt, setzte sich fort: "In zentralen Fragen gibt es seit Jahrzehnten kaum einen Erkenntniszugewinn" (ibid.: 42).

<sup>62</sup> Großer Generalstab. Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung I, (ed), *Der Feldzug gegen die Hereros*, (Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika, Bd.1) Berlin, Mittler & Sohn, 1906.

<sup>63</sup> Jeremy Silvester/Jan Bart Gewald, (eds.), *Words Cannot Be Found. An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book*, Leiden, Brill, 2003.

are substantial sources pointing away from spontaneous upheaval – material most probably known to Gewalt.<sup>64</sup>

- the evidence used proves German brutality unanimously. Yet some of the authors, in their biased quest to prove the war to be genocidal, obviously 'arranged', selected, even eliminated some of the evidence quite markedly. The impression, first created by Horst Drechsler, is that all Herero, whether men, women or children, were killed when apprehended by German soldiers.<sup>65</sup> Yet, a complete and thorough reading of the sources provides a far more nuanced picture, one far less characterised by such unrelenting and eliminatory vigour as is now commonly accepted. Imprisoning women instead of killing them immediately does not fit with the widely-held notion that von Trotha's extermination order only sanctioned what had been the practice anyway.

- finally, von Trotha's proclamation, addressed to the Herero, mostly taken to be ordering the latter's extermination, implies that he chose this means to order the killing of all Herero. It has been concluded that it was von Trotha's order that forced the Herero into the Omaheke Desert, where thousands perished. Yet, what has been overlooked is that the order was issued more than six weeks after the Battle of Ohamakari. This implies that most Herero were still alive and were only forced by this order to move farther away into the desert. Eckl argues that there is no convincing proof for the assumption that thousands died of thirst as a consequence of the order (p. 36). Moreover, he argues, the biased selection of source materials conceals that von Trotha did not necessarily intend this large-scale catastrophe on the edge of the Omaheke Desert to happen. That he may have seen this to be a possible result is not challenged, however (p. 38).

On the background of these elaborations, Eckl's argument for a far broader and inclusive usage of the available sources makes sense (p. 40). The diaries of soldiers who participated in the colonial wars in GSWA, edited by him, are meant to widen our perspectives on von Trotha's annihilatory policy, the monolithic *Schutztruppe*, and motives and reactions of individual 'perpetrators'. Gesine Krüger has pointed in this direction, the 'subjective' side of the war, with her masterly exploitation of soldiers' diaries. Yet she did so under substantial pressure to justify this approach.<sup>66</sup> Still, the diarised impressions of what was experienced and processed by the soldiers allow a more complete, albeit one sided, view of the war and its atrocities and destruction. The diaries edited by Andreas Eckl do not allow any minimisation and relativisation of the war and its aftermath. Dr. Hillebrecht (1874-1944), one of the diarists, records how people

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<sup>64</sup> Eckl, *Land*: 25; Jan Bart Gewalt, "Kolonisierung, Völkermord und Widerstand. Die Herero von Namibia 1890-1923", in: Zimmerer/Zeller(eds.), *Völkermord*: 105-120 (112).

<sup>65</sup> Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*: 185: "Alle Herero, gleichgültig ob Männer, Frauen oder Kinder, wurden getötet, wenn sie deutschen Soldaten in die Hände fielen." (cit. in Eckl, *Land*: 28). Evidence showing this 'annihilatory policy' as much less eliminatory – in the very same texts – is often deliberately withheld by the authors. Cf. Eckl, *Land*: 25.

<sup>66</sup> Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*: 71: "Eine Beschäftigung mit einzelnen Soldaten kann nicht das Ausmaß der Zerstörung, welches diese Armee und das heißt die Soldaten zu verantworten haben, relativieren."

and animals were dying wretchedly of thirst and sickness in the Omaheke, and how the remaining Ovaherero survived on morsels of food, as a broken tribe, on English territory. Before that the Germans had constantly tried to hunt them down, but without success because the horses they rode were weak.<sup>67</sup>

Certainly then, there is no relativising here. Nor is this another attempt to deny colonial genocide in Namibia, as is scandalisingly implied by Reinhart Köbler in a suggestive review of the diaries edited by Andreas Eckl.<sup>68</sup> Another example of this rather sharp, if not unprofessional, treatment of their opponents is Marx' polemical article in the Melber volume on genocide and memory – it creates the impression that the adversaries are reactionaries waving the German Imperial flag. Zimmerer goes on to overstep the bounds of good taste when he opines in a review of the television documentary *Deutsche Kolonien*, that its makers Horst Gründer and Gisela Graichen are merely professorial advisors subtly trying to offer an apology for German colonialism. Despite such obvious nonsense, Zimmerer is scandalised at the suggestion that there was no direct road from Windhoek to Auschwitz.<sup>69</sup> Whoever dares to respond critically is – almost, yet innuendously – declared to be a Holocaust denier. Zimmerer should relax. A quick look at Mary Fulbrook's *Historical Theory* would have already taught him something about the wide interpretative spectrum of Hitler's rise to power or the (inevitable) development from racism to genocide.<sup>70</sup> 'Facts' and (insinuated) reproaches alone will do nothing to advance the discussion.

How can Namibian historiography be liberated from these paradigmatic strictures and re-oriented away from its confining unidirectional road "from Windhoek to Auschwitz"? Or, differently asked: is it possible to resist the undertow of the genocide paradigm, and, if so, how? What were German colonial officers and settlers actually doing when they were not busy demanding, plotting or committing genocide? Marx takes exception to the fact that postmodern and postcolonial studies tend to forget that colonialism was based on violence and brutal force.<sup>71</sup> Certainly a rightly stated commonplace which leaves it to the reader to understand how colonial history suddenly becomes postcolonial, even postmodern. Yet, his query does raise questions about the different forms of such violence. A whip-cracking German soldateska was, if one accepts the large quantity of

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<sup>67</sup> Eckl, *Land*: 182: "Menschen und Vieh sind durch Seuchen und Durst in Massen im Sandfeld verreckt, der Rest [der Herero] lebt als gebrochener Stamm in der Kalahari und auf englischem Gebiet von kärglicher Nahrung." Zuvor hatten "wir sie ständig verfolgt, ohne sie mit unseren schlappen Pferden kriegen zu können" (ibid.: 108).

<sup>68</sup> Reinhart Köbler, "Wie mit Quellen Politik gemacht werden soll. Eine neue Runde in der Kampagne zur Leugnung des kolonialen Völkermordes in Namibia", *afrika süd*, 6, 2005: 33-35.

<sup>69</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "'Warum nicht mal 'nen Neger?'" Review of Gisela Graichen/ Horst Gründer, *Deutsche Kolonien. Traum und Trauma*, Berlin, Ullstein, 2005", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24/11/2005. "Subtil wird die Ehrenrettung des deutschen Kolonialismus betrieben". See also Gründer's answer "Vom Massenmord zum Völkermord", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10/11/12.2005.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, London/New York, Routledge, 2002: 8.

<sup>71</sup> Marx, "Entsorgen": 148.

statistical information available, certainly not the only colonising 'white' group in the colony. And indeed, other such groups and their relations with African communities have been researched, believe it or not, ever since Helmut Bley's ground-breaking study on the social structure of German colonialism in GSWA.<sup>72</sup> Birthe Kundrus, to be sure, has changed this discussion with her book *Moderne Imperialisten*.<sup>73</sup> And she has indicated how to evade the attraction of the above-criticised perspective, while not forgetting Marx' commonplace admonition that colonialism was based on violence. This book, despite its rather nondescript title and (misleading) subtitle treating Imperial Germany as mirrored by its colonies, is a profound study of contemporary German colonial discourse in and about German South West Africa. Kundrus examines four contemporary discursive fields – settler policy, the observation and mastery (*Bewältigung*) of the colony's nature, cultural arrangements in the new environment, and, finally, the problem of racially mixed marriages – and integrates these colonial fantasies into a cultural and mentality history of Imperial Germany. This much should be clear: Kundrus has also written a history of the colony (GSWA) – (even if only) a history of its perception, both in Germany and in GSWA. The discourses she unearths are the discourses of the *Kaiserreich*, regardless of where they were practised. And some of those she cites had never set foot in any of the colonies. As the African (colonised) majority was not given a voice in these discourses, she cannot – obviously – write on these. Her aim was to trace imperialism among the imperialists and their individual and collective identity formation (p. 17). Kundrus reconstructs contemporary colonial debates and arguments, masterfully exploiting and applying her vast knowledge of sources. As such she depicts that aspect of German history which is about GSWA – her work is, epistemologically, about the *Kaiserreich* as mirrored in its colony *Deutsch Südwestafrika*.

This elegantly written and well structured book is particularly relevant for Namibian historiography as it describes the colony in the way it was experienced by soldiers, settlers, civil servants and travellers; moreover, it also talks about German hopes, conceptualisations, disappointments and fascination with the colony.<sup>74</sup> Whoever will research and write on Namibian history in future will not be able to by-pass her work: settler and educational policy, public health, the landscape, mixed marriages, she has it all. And bearing on the particular issue of a German colonial *Sonderweg*, Kundrus elaborates enlighteningly on the positive role that British imperialism played in contemporary German discussions and debates. Kundrus manages admirably, and this

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft*; Daniel J. Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad. Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia*, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 2002; Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, *Die abhängigen Herren. Deutsche Identität in Namibia*, Münster, Lit, 1993; Klaus H. Rüdiger, *Die Namibia-Deutschen. Geschichte einer Nation im Werden*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 1993; Wolfram Hartmann, *Sexual Encounters and their Implications on an open and closing frontier: central Namibia from the 1840s to 1905*, unpubl. PhD thesis, New York, Columbia University, 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten. Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien*, Köln, Böhlau, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> The author has also edited a volume on this topic entitled *Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2003.

seems to be one of the more important results of her research, to demonstrate how German colonial policy emulated that of other colonial powers. She is unable to discern a specifically German colonial discourse, one that would prove Germany's colonial *Sonderweg*, (p. 294).<sup>75</sup>

Udo Kaulich's book on the history of the former colony aims at being a general survey (*Gesamtdarstellung*) – as is promised in the subtitle.<sup>76</sup> If one expected a book covering the colony's history in the broadest, yet most inclusive, terms, then this is an empty promise and the only point of criticism to be made – a mere question of titling. Of course, one could also complain about his (politically quite incorrect) application of dated, essentialising terminology. To be clear, however, his book is not about GSWA and Africa, it is about its colonisers. And, as such, it is indeed a *Gesamtdarstellung*, unapologetically critical of Germany's so-called achievements in its colony. His findings are that the colonisation of German South West Africa was expensive, brutal and meaningless, economically disappointing and completely unprofitable for Germany.

He has sequenced his material into eight chapters, mostly taken from German administrative archives, but also from other published sources of the time, and ordered chronologically. His presentation of colonial financial policy, economic development, and the establishment of an administrative infrastructure which required immense subsidies from the Imperial coffers, is particularly innovative. His depiction of this developing infrastructure – from the Berlin-based Colonial Office to the District Offices in the colony – is based on a thorough exploration of the widest possible range of available sources, and for this reason exceptionally valuable. With his elaborations on the legal and jurial angle of colonial history his work advances into totally new fields of historical enquiry. The quality of his work is measurable in the many new questions raised; for instance, the question of how a colonial officer dealt with the day-to-day reality of administering African and European colonial subjects.

Kaulich's elaborations on German native policy (*Eingeborenenpolitik*) does not deliver any new knowledge; yet, he does not simply regurgitate the literature, but checks and correlates footnotes and other referenced materials with his sources. Considerable space is devoted to an elaboration of the so-called *System Leutwein* – a term coined by Helmut Bley – dated to 1894-1904. In his opinion it was destined to fail, because the ever growing number of German settlers would inevitably have resulted in conflict with Herero over space and economic resources. His analysis is constructed on known terrain. Eckl's intervention would thus also be relevant to his work, particularly where he also applies the *Blue Book* uncritically as a source in its own right (p.254). Why Kaulich chose to reiterate the commonplace that German control after 1905/07 and until the end of German overlordship in the colony remained unchallenged is, given his profound

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<sup>75</sup> Kundrus, *Imperialisten*: 294: "[E]in Blick auf die mental-habituelle Unterfütterung der Kolonial-Diskurse anderer Kolonialmächte [scheint] die These einer [deutschen] Spezifik nicht zu stützen."

<sup>76</sup> Udo Kaulich, *Die Geschichte der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1884-1914). Eine Gesamtdarstellung*, Frankfurt/M., Lang, 2001.

knowledge of the sources, astounding. He concedes, though, that the deficient administrative and infrastructural conditions in the colony precluded the complete application of a highly restrictive Native policy (p. 275). Indeed, this correlates with the results of other historical research. Hermann J. Hiery, who has worked on the German possessions in the Pacific, has argued that the idea that a raised German flag automatically meant the introduction of German ways, ideas and control is to be found only in national-chauvinist writing from before 1945, or in explicitly antinational work from after 1945. Such ideas, he opines, represent European delusions of grandeur and have nothing to do with academic history.<sup>77</sup>

Kaulich is not an Africanist. This is not meant to be an argument against him. He is interested rather in the historical development and construction of German colonial administration and this forms the basis of most of his work. It would be quite a challenge to now research and write on the same 30 years of history from an African perspective, how Africans acted and reacted to and against the establishment of such colonial administration. To answer the need for a *Gesamtdarstellung* would require the inclusion of the regional specificities in the colony and how individual German colonial officers acted and reacted in given situations. Regarding certain hagiographic tendencies in the treatment of African resistance, the Paris-based Africanist historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch once quipped ironically that it is far too easy to accept “these leaders as African Vercingetorixes and to make them out to be the fearless and irreproachable heroes”.<sup>78</sup> Kaulich’s elaborations are, notwithstanding this admonition, free from any moralising, even bedevilling, evaluation of the German ‘protagonists’ of this story. Concise bibliographic and source information, to which have been added place and terminology indexes, add to the positive impression of this book, which has the qualities of a standard reference text for this history.

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<sup>77</sup> Hermann J. Hiery, “Der Einfluß der Deutschen auf Leben und Kultur der indigenen Südsee“, in: Magdalena Moeller, (ed.), *Emil Nolde. Expedition in die Südsee*, München, Hirmer, 2002: 35-42, (35).

<sup>78</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa. Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988: 67. [*Afrique Noire: Permanences et Ruptures*, Paris, 1985).

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