

## From destruction to extermination: Genocidal escalation in Germany's war against the Herero, 1904\*

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### *Abstract*

*In this treatment of the war between the Ovaherero and the German Empire during 1904 the hitherto accepted notion of a genocidal strategy, planned and executed by the Germans right from the beginning of the war until its bitter end is refuted as teleological. New positions in genocide studies and the insertion of hitherto ignored and new material challenge this by now conventional wisdom. The war and its gradually escalating violence are argued to be the result of the total failure of German strategy. A 'genocidal war of pacification', rather than a genocide ensued.*

Colonial wars were most often characterised by utmost brutality. However, in the wars fought by the German Empire against Ovaherero, Nama and Oorlam between 1904 and 1908 in the then Protectorate German South West Africa, the violence against the indigenous population took on a new quality, one that is still felt in the post-colonial situation in Namibia some 100 years later. Ovaherero, Nama and Oorlam, once ruling wide stretches of territory, were decimated and weakened in these campaigns to a degree, that they only play minority roles in present-day Namibian society. For this reason it is not astounding, that Raphael Lemkin, the creator of the term genocide, qualified the wars in question in GSWA as genocide. This assessment has been shared since then among academics.<sup>1</sup> Although – or maybe because – this issue was never really contested, the debates around this specific history do not really reflect the advances in the social science theory of violence and genocide. Several historical

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<sup>1</sup> What follows is based on a somewhat qualified genocide definition. Typically, genocide includes the destruction of culture and society of the victims, as defined by the perpetrators. In this context, genocide includes the physical annihilation of the victims. It does not matter, however, whether this intention is carried through successfully, what matters is the intention to commit genocide on the side of the doers, the perpetrators. I agree with Helen Fein, *Genocide. A Sociological Perspective* (London, Sage, 1993: 19), that an intention here is not only aimed directly at the purposes, but also at the foreseeable consequences of the doer's actions.

inconsistencies, repeatedly pointed out by apologists of German colonialism, can be connected to this.

Most treatments of the issue ignore the processual nature of the violence perpetrated. They infer that the results of the violence in question were intended by its perpetrators, supposing the events to have been steps of a succession of events, clearly planned and executed accordingly. Such paradigms have been refuted recently by e.g. Sémelin, Shaw, and Mann.<sup>2</sup> They aptly demonstrated that this teleological line of explanation cannot really do justice to such cases of extreme violence. New positions in genocide studies take aboard that violence inherently unfolds own and unanticipated dynamics, developing into something totally unintended earlier.<sup>3</sup> Of primary concern therefore is the question as to how a genocidal situation develops. Insisting on the actual unfolding of genocidal violence will also address the question as to why the events happened.<sup>4</sup> Mainstream Namibian Studies, however, avoids to ask how this genocidal violence developed, yet stresses to ask the why question, presuming alleged original intentions of the political and military leadership of the time. This contribution considers the improbability of such interpretations of the developments in question in South West Africa. I will concentrate on the German campaign against the Ovaherero, more specifically on the phase of this war between August and December 1904, i.e. that chapter of the confrontation considered undisputed as genocidal among experts.<sup>5</sup> This is, contrary to what is generally held as a firm belief, not a phase of long since conceived planning and smoothly implemented strategies, but one characterised by constant change, in the wake of which developed a successive dissolution of violence.

Considering recent debates in violence theory, the aim is to show that the war of the German Empire against the Ovaherero acquired a genocidal quality only gradually. The original intentions of those responsible for the unfolding war in GSWA, both in Berlin and the Supreme Command in Windhoek, were not of a genocidal nature. Much rather, we are dealing with an escalation of violence during the war, directly conditional upon

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Sémelin, *Säubern und Vernichten. Die Politik der Massaker und Völkermorde*, Hamburg, Hamburger Ed, 2007; Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?*, Cambridge, Polity, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Harald Welzer, *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden*, 2. ed., Frankfurt, Fischer, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jacques Sémelin, "Elemente einer Grammatik des Massakers", *Mittelweg* 36, 15, 2006: 18-40 (28).

<sup>5</sup> Recently, Jonas Kreienbaum has suggested that the POW camps, established since January 1905 in GSWA, were *not* intended to be genocidal. They were not meant to have been camps of annihilation, but rather Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow's counter project to General Lothar von Trotha's genocidal warfare, as formulated and implemented indiscriminately against civilians since the latter's extermination order of 2 October 1904. The decision to establish these camps marked the departure from the genocidal strategy and aimed at convincing Ovaherero to return to the protectorate. Despite the exorbitant fatality rate in these camps, they were not intended to annihilate, but to penalise, to pacify, to force Ovaherero into the labour economy of the colony. Whether this proposition will hold, remains to be seen. It is not part of the argument of this paper. Cf. Jonas Kreienbaum, "'Vernichtungslager' in Deutsch-Südwestafrika? Zur Funktion der Konzentrationslager im Herero- und Namakrieg (1904-1908)", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 58 (12), 2010: 1014-1026.

unforeseeable and unplanned disruption, unexpected turns and twists. Genocide as a solution was merely considered to be a 'plan C', and only so, once all other strategies had failed.

My considerations are structured as follows: Firstly, Horst Drechsler's classical variant of 1966 of the genocide hypothesis – one that is still influential and potent, despite its inherent weaknesses – will be critiqued theoretically and thorough. The teleological approach inherent in his treatment of the genocide is really debateable; and many, more recent treatments of the issue have not really rendered problematic this inherent weakness of his approach either. Secondly, Henrik Lundtofte's advanced version of the genocide hypothesis of 2003 is treated; Lundtofte recognises the inherent weakness in Drechsler's approach and tries to solve these, but does not really succeed. In a third section I aim at a solution.

### Drechsler's hypothesis, its potency and other positions

Drechsler is the first expert on South West Africa to have classified the wars of 1904 to 1908 as genocide or *Völkermord*. Doubtless, the influence of his "*Let Us Die Fighting*": *The Struggle of the Herero and Nama Against German Imperialism (1884-1915)* has been overwhelming over the last almost fifty years, as his hypothesis has been universally accepted without any mentionable objection against its contents.<sup>6</sup> It is rather astonishing how little his work has been critically elaborated upon, particularly in present-day debates of the issue. Critique levelled at him from colonial revisionists such as Hinrich Schneider-Waterberg and Claus Nordbruch solely aim to disavow Drechsler ideologically as a Marxist historian from the former German Democratic Republic. Yet, his work has never been critiqued *sui generis* by theorists of genocide; surely this would have rendered his hypothetical assumptions problematic.<sup>7</sup>

Drechsler's study is the single most important treatise on the history of German colonialism in south-western Africa. It portrays the wars of 1904 to 1908 as the culmination of this history. The conciseness and the coherence of his argument serve both as advantage and disadvantage of the book. His highly articulate and quite lucid rendition imparts his account with a decidedly determinist character. This, however, does not do justice to the heterogeneity of colonial – imperial interaction. He writes, suggestively, that "German Imperialism" had just been waiting for a "pretext for

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<sup>6</sup> Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft. Der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus (1884-1915)*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1966: 15, 183. English translation: "*Let Us Die Fighting*": *The Struggle of the Herero and Nama Against German Imperialism (1884-1915)*, London, Zed Press, 1980.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hinrich R. Schneider-Waterberg, *Der Wahrheit eine Gasse. Anmerkungen zum Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904*, 2. ed. Swakopmund, Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftliche Entwicklung, 2006; Claus Nordbruch, *Völkermord an den Herero in Deutsch-Südwestafrika? Widerlegung einer Lüge*, Tübingen, Grabert, 2004.

conquering the territory military [sic!] and transforming the 'Protectorate' into a colony".<sup>8</sup>

Yet, Drechsler does not inform his reader who or what exactly is meant by this rather sweeping phrase "der deutsche Imperialismus", nor can he plausibly explain his claim that the German Empire had been waiting for 20 years for a reason for military subjugation of the protectorate in order to turn it onto a colony. Yet, he himself has painstakingly demonstrated that the German Empire did only just what was barely necessary to retain its claim to power in GSWA. *Landeshauptmann* Curt von François, perceived as a sabre-rattler was recalled after just a short while in the colony.<sup>9</sup> Germany's policy was to do everything *to not get involved* in costly conquest campaigns.

This kind of pronouncement characterises Drechsler's work and is typical for the pervasive teleological tenor of it, perceiving the unfolding history of GSWA to be following a sinister plot, schemed long beforehand by German Imperialism. Drechsler's interpretation of the Battle of Ohamakari near Waterberg of mid-August 1904 is, for the same reason, quite problematic as well.

This is what happened, as evidenced by a close reading of all available sources. According to the military directives for the ensuing battle (*Direktiven für den Angriff auf die Hereros*) of 4 August, the German command had decided on a concentric strategy, aiming to encircle the Ovaherero for a decisive battle.<sup>10</sup> This quite ambitious and bold intention, however, failed as the German military never succeeded to implement this; a mere 1500 rifles, spread over a distance of 90 kilometres were not enough to have a lasting effect and the majority of the Ovaherero were able to escape from the German encirclement into the Omaheke to the east, where thousands then lost their lives as they were pursued.

Drechsler, in his rendition of this battle stated that this course of events had been planned deliberately, imputing that the strategy of the Germans had been, right from the beginning, to drive the Ovaherero into the dry Omaheke, to die there of hunger and thirst. Drechsler claimed that the outcome of the battle was a "well-thought-out plan".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Drechsler, *Fighting*: 138.

<sup>9</sup> Von François' aggressive power politics failed when he started a war with the Witbooi, and which he was unable to terminate. He was therefore replaced by Theodor Leutwein, whose colonial approach was more formal and peaceful, and therefore more commensurable with the rather insignificant metropolitan interest in all things colonial. Some of the more experienced colonial administrators, the 'alte Afrikaner', Leutwein had overstretched this policy, leading to a near collapse of the colony, driving it into the rebellious insurrections of 1904. Cf. Ludwig von Estorff, *Wanderungen und Kämpfe in Südwestafrika, Ostafrika und Südafrika 1894-1910*, 2. ed., Windhoek, Privatdruck, 1979: 114, yet his restrained and cost-effective policy was appreciated in Berlin, among the government, in society and the *Reichstag*.

<sup>10</sup> The German text reads "2. Ich [der Oberkommandierende, Lothar v. Trotha, MH] werde den Feind [...] gleichzeitig mit allen Abteilungen angreifen, um ihn zu vernichten", cf. Großer Generalstab, *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika. Der Feldzug gegen die Hereros*, Berlin, Mittler, 1906: 157.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Drechsler, *Fighting*: 155. In the original German text Drechsler claims the battle's outcome was "verbrecherisch geplant", i.e. criminally planned (Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*: 183). Gustav Frenssen's fictional account *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest* is often used to prove and illustrate the genocide

This line of argument, however, is problematic, both historiographically as well as regards the underlying conceptualisation of genocide. Not only was Drechsler the *first* expert of South West African history to advocate the genocide hypothesis, he also did so in the most potent version, the teleological version. Any writing on the subject since then has not departed from this paradigm; a genocide-theoretical intervention is overdue.

The official report on the German-Herero-Nama war indicates – somehow cautiously though – that the confrontation at Waterberg had not been as successful as envisaged. It attributes this to the arbitrariness and even failure of certain officers.<sup>12</sup> This is exposed in the diaries and letters of German participants in the campaign.<sup>13</sup> All of them objected to von Trotha's message of August 1904, reporting a military triumph at Waterberg to headquarters in Berlin. Their views were more nuanced and they saw the outcome at Waterberg actually not as victorious at all.

First Lieutenant Stuhlmann openly reported on a military fiasco, as the first pursuit of the Ovaherero during the night of 13 August collapsed due to the total exhaustion of both horses and troops.<sup>14</sup> Almost dead of thirst, the troops were almost immobile on their return.<sup>15</sup> "All felt totally beaten, in fact they were beaten" was the fatalistic evaluation of the situation by Schenk von Stauffenberg.<sup>16</sup> And von Hardenberg quipped ironically: "Another such victory and we are lost."<sup>17</sup> Lothar von Trotha himself recorded in his diary total consternation at the situation on the ground.<sup>18</sup>

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hypothesis, as it renders the military operations at Waterberg in August 1904 as successful; cf. Wolfgang Benz, "Kolonialpolitik als Genozid. Der 'Herero-Aufstand' in Deutsch-Südwestafrika", in: Wolfgang Benz, (ed.), *Ausgrenzung, Vertreibung, Völkermord. Genozid im 20. Jahrhundert*, 2. ed., München, dtv, 2007: 27-53; for a critique cf. Andreas E. Eckl, "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. Generalstab, *Kämpfe* is the official version of the war, and therefore inherently biased, cf. Eckl, *Land*: 18 for this aspect. In particular Generalstab, *Kämpfe*: 218 is often cited to demonstrate the genocidal intentions of von Trotha: the cordoning off of the Omaheke ("Abspernung") finalising the annihilation (das "Werk der Vernichtung", "vollendet"). Most works on this aspect apply these and similar passages rather uncritically and at face value, to demonstrate genocidal intention on the side of the German military, cf. e.g. Tilman Dederich in his justified critique of Brigitte Lau "Uncertain Certainties" (1989) in "The German-Herero War of 1904: Revisionism of Genocide or Imaginary Historiography?", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19 (1), Special Issue: Namibia: Africa's Youngest Nation, 1993: 80-88 (83f.)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Generalstab, *Kämpfe*: 178ff.; also cf. Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 2005: 39-41.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Werner Freiherr Schenk von Stauffenberg, *Von München nach Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, ed. by Gertrud Marchand-Volz, 2. ed., Göttingen, Hess, 1998: 144; Eckl, *Land*: 181; Victor Franke, *Diary*, BArch, NI. 30/3a, entry 12 August 1904, 362.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Stuhlmann, *Tagebuch meiner Kriegserlebnisse in Süd-West-Afrika 1904 und 1905 als Oberleutnant der Schutztruppe*, NAN, Private Accessions, A. 0109, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rudolf von Hardenberg, *Diary*, NAN, Private Accessions, A.151, No. 2, I, Entries 13 and 14 August 1904, 47.

<sup>16</sup> The German text reads: "Alle fühlten sich vollkommen geschlagen und waren es auch" (Schenk von Stauffenberg, *München*: 144).

<sup>17</sup> "The German text reads: "Noch so ein Sieg u. wir sind verloren", Hardenberg, *Diary*, NAN, Private

The outcome of the battle and the military situation at large were considered a complete fiasco by the German military by mid-August 1904. Von Trotha had planned to end the war with a large-scale decisive battle. One of his adjutants, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, reflected later, that the situation had actually allowed such a decisive battle against the masses of the Ovaherero south of Waterberg, and that there had been the rare opportunity to end the war without it turning into a guerrilla war.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the opponent, seen by some German officers as victorious, had managed to flee from the operating range of the German military.<sup>20</sup> Even in early September the situation was not as evident as one is inclined to believe. Officer von Hardenberg, who had participated in the pursuit of the Ovaherero into the Omaheke, diarised on 2 September that there could be no talk of a deserved punishment of the Ovaherero and that they were still alive and what they prize most prized cattle were still in their possession, aside from only a few they lost.<sup>21</sup>

The outcome and accomplishment of the battle as strategised actually never really happened. This demonstrates quite clearly, that Drechsler's interpretation of the events constitutes a simplification if not straight forward falsification of what happened on the ground. This can be further demonstrated. Drechsler rendered the developments as wholly monologic, i.e. as being determined entirely by 'German imperialism'. Even as he tried to provide the Ovaherero, Nama and Oorlam with an own voice as victims of this inhuman war, he obliterated them almost totally as actors of their own history – quasi a second extermination one might argue. He treated them as objects, merely tossed about by the events of a war one-sidedly dictated by the Germans. Despite his rather innovative approach to this history, Drechsler perpetuated colonial attitudes towards the colonised at the same time as he ignored the enormous difficulties faced by the colonial power. And even though the war had been relatively even during the first months, he depicted the conflict as characterised by an asymmetry of active perpetrators and passive victims. This is probably a deliberate strategy, employed to show the savage persecution and criminal actions of the Germans even more contrastingly.

The consequence of this is that the Ovaherero as serious opponents of the Germans, as indeed active participants in this war, are eradicated and rendered invisible. Undeniably, the Ovaherero fled, removing themselves successfully from a decisive battle, during

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Accessions, A.151, No. 2, I, Entry 21 August 1904, 49.

<sup>18</sup> "Ich denke, ich falle auf den Rücken. [...] Das ist mir über den Spaß. [...] Nun können oder müssen wir von vorne anfangen, resp. *es ist vorbei*." (Archive of the von Trotha Family, Lothar von Trotha Nachlass, No. 122/17, entry 13 August 1904; emphasis MH).

<sup>19</sup> The German text reads: "die im Kleinkrieg seltene Aussicht, ihnen [i.e. the Ovaherero] mit einer Operation im großen beizukommen", cf. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, *Mein Leben*, Biberach, Koehlers Verlagsgesellschaft, 1957: 77.

<sup>20</sup> Schenk von Stauffenberg, *München*: 144.

<sup>21</sup> "Von einer Bestrafung, wie sie geplant und wie sie [die Ovaherero, MH] sie verdient hätten, nämlich, sie zu töten, kann keine Rede sei. Sie sind noch am Leben und das was ihnen am teuersten ist, ihr Vieh, haben sie noch, abgesehen von einer geringen Anzahl, die ihnen abgetrieben ist." (NAN, Private Accessions, A.151, No. 2, II, entry 2 September 1904, 6).

which they would have, undoubtedly, suffered substantially. Of course one has to concede, that they fled to back off from the danger posed by the German troops. Yet, even if this retreat was not entirely of their own choice, it still represents an active response rather than passive suffering. That the majority were able to escape, was seen as a success. This is evidenced by oral history.<sup>22</sup>

What one has to keep in mind though, is that even genocides are not unilateral in nature. Their course is as determined by the bearing of the victims. Shaw has urged to move away from a one-sided consideration of the perpetrators and their intentions, and to train the attention much more on the social dimension of genocides. Both, the relations among the doers, as well as the dynamics between victims and perpetrators need to be included in the quest to understand genocides.<sup>23</sup> The interaction between the two – the perpetrator and the victim – needs to be the real focus. Drechsler has not included this dimension in his seminal book at all.<sup>24</sup>

Reconstructions of genocidal events that focus on the intentions of the perpetrators only are therefore necessarily one-sided and wrong. Interactions unfold dynamics that go beyond that which both sides intended and expected. This is even more the case in a war situation, which is actually characterised arbitrarily by reduced foreseeability, even non-predictability.<sup>25</sup> War is determined by the actions of many players, and sudden change and unexpected turns do in turn result in new constellations, surely not expected earlier. Violence as such is characterised by a tendency to go off track course.<sup>26</sup> As everybody gets used to this, this normalisation then changes the horizons, escalating the threshold levels of acceptability hitherto unprecedented.<sup>27</sup>

Drechsler's teleological interpretation and his overdrawn 'intentionalism' are in the light of this quite problematical then. This has to do with the 'fulfilment conditions' for genocide, as laid down in the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of the United Nations of 1948*. Of course, this definition holds true, as

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Annemarie Heywood, Brigitte Lau, and Rajmund Ohly, *Warriors Leaders Sages and Outcasts in the Namibian Past. Narratives Collected from Herero Sources for the Michael Scott Oral Record Project*, Windhoek, MSORP, 1992: 143; Andreas Kukuri and Ernst Dammann, *Herero-Texte*. Erzählt von Andreas Kukuri, transl. and ed. by Ernst Dammann, Berlin, Reimer, 1983: 125; Stefanie Michels, *Schwarze deutsche Kolonialsoldaten. Mehrdeutige Repräsentationsräume und früher Kosmopolitismus in Afrika*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2009: 112.

<sup>23</sup> Shaw, *Genocide*: 81f.

<sup>24</sup> An exception to this is the work of Tilman Dederig, "A certain rigorous treatment of all parts of the nation'. The annihilation of the Herero in German South West Africa 1904", in: Mark Levene and Penny Roberts, (eds.), *The Massacre in History*, New York, Berghahn, 1999: 205-222. He has actually depicted a very balanced account of this two-sided escalation.

<sup>25</sup> Trutz von Trotha, "Formen des Krieges. Zur Typologie kriegerischer Aktionsmacht", in: S. Neckel and M. Schwab-Trapp, (eds.), *Ordnungen der Gewalt. Beiträge zu einer politischen Soziologie der Gewalt und des Krieges*, Opladen, Velbrück, 1999: 71-95.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Trutz von Trotha, "Zur Soziologie der Gewalt", in: idem, (ed.), *Soziologie der Gewalt*, Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997: 9-56 (25).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Welzer, *Täter*, 15f.

according to the text of the convention, the genocidal intention of the perpetrator is decisive as a criterion. It is from this point that Drechsler launched his treatment of the issue. He reconstructed the developments therefore, according to Shaw, in an *absolute*, that is highly determinist way.<sup>28</sup> His reconstruction in fact fulfils, rather over-fulfils, this criterion of the *UN-Anti-Genocide Convention* and the events in GSWA can doubtless be termed a genocide therefore.

Drechsler's rendition of the events is – from scratch – permeated and determined with the original intentions of “German imperialism”: the war against Ovaherero is perceived as the goal, the *telos* of 20 years of colonial rule; and the course of the war is reconstructed as a smooth implementation of the planned strategy, smoother than even the most arrogant military technocrat in Berlin would ever have dreamt. German military planning provided for everything: the strategy, its implementation, even the eventual flight of the Ovaherero. Admittedly, this is not a problem confined to Drechsler's treatment; it is a problem encountered in genocide research at large.<sup>29</sup>

Michael Mann has convincingly argued that most forms of extreme violence were never intended to be mass murder initially by its perpetrators. “Genocide is not usually the first choice of leaders, but the outcome of a process of escalation”, Scott Straus states accordingly.<sup>30</sup> Genocidal solutions usually come into play only as a ‘plan B’ or even ‘plan C’, developing only during the course of events unfolding.<sup>31</sup> Jacques Sémelin has demonstrated aptly, that even the Holocaust was never anticipated to be the genocide it turned out to be, but that unforeseen and unplanned turns transformed what was intended into the final result.<sup>32</sup> This does not mean, however, that questions about the perpetrator's intentions are oblivious; it simply means that genocides are determined in their development by unforeseeable events and occurrences. They often even surprise the doers, rendering their original intentions obsolete.<sup>33</sup> The genesis of mass murder is far more complex than teleological paradigms can explain. If this is true for the Holocaust, which happened in a highly developed governmental and administrative environment, then how much more must this be true for a situation in which such structures yet had to be installed.

Although Drechsler's reconstruction of the events does not do justice to the actual complexity of this violence, most work on this history follows his argument. The hypothesis, that the battle of Ohamakari had been “criminally planned” is still painstakingly applied. Dominik J. Schaller, for instance, merely reiterated Drechsler when he wrote that the flight of the Ovaherero was nothing but a desired, probably even planned

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Shaw, *Genocide*: 84.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; Mark Levene, *The Meaning of Genocide*, London, Tauris, 2005: 35f.

<sup>30</sup> Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide. Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2005: 12.

<sup>31</sup> Mann, *Side*: 18f.

<sup>32</sup> Sémelin, “Elemente”: 26-28.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Levene, *Meaning*: 35.



result of the Battle of Ohamakari – if he was serious about this, then why did he still use the term flight, as then it could not have been that; that much linguistic precision could be expected, or not?<sup>34</sup> Most recently, David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen have gone over this postulate.<sup>35</sup> Aside from this, Drechsler's position is also still powerful as regards his over-intentionalist and teleologically-minded approach. Few, if any of the more recent treatments have taken issue with this aspect.<sup>36</sup>

Some treatments of this history deviate in certain aspects from Drechsler's reading, even though they also start with the assumption that the German side had harboured genocidal intentions at Waterberg right from the beginning. These connect such intentions more with the person of von Trotha, and some do indeed take exception at the terms 'annihilation and / or extermination'.<sup>37</sup> Probably these authors would agree with the view that the Germans failed at Waterberg and that the flight of the Ovaherero was not what was preferred by the military. Yet, they assume that the failed campaign had been intended to be exterminatory. What it boils down to then is this: had von Trotha actually intended the extermination of the Ovaherero at the Battle of Ohamakari? If this is the case, why then had he pushed for the establishment of camps for thousands of prisoners before the battle – for up to 8000 in fact. This was the official estimated number of the Ovaherero warriors, as suggested by Isabel V. Hull.<sup>38</sup> If one could prove that the camp capacity actually had been calculated to meet the anticipated necessity of housing the maximum number of Ovaherero warriors as estimated by the Germans at Waterberg, this would indicate a different approach in the beginning, one that could be termed limited warfare. In any case, what transpires is that obviously larger numbers of prisoners of war were expected. This indicates a rather conventional approach in this phase of the war, rather than one aiming at extermination. More

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dominik J. Schaller "Kolonialkrieg, Völkermord und Zwangsarbeit in 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika'", in: idem, (ed.), *Enteignet – Vertrieben – Ermordet. Beiträge zur Genozidforschung*, Zürich, Chronos, 2004: 147-232 (217, note 156).

<sup>35</sup> David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust. Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, London, Faber & Faber, 2010: 145.

<sup>36</sup> Quite powerful is Jürgen Zimmerer, "Annihilation in Africa: The 'race-war' in German Southwest Africa (1904-1908) and its significance for a global history of genocide", *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 37, 2005: 51-57 (52f.). He is adamant that local and situative factors as well as possible setbacks played no role in the escalation of violence at all, but that von Trotha had aimed right from the beginning at annihilating all Ovaherero.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Benz, "Kolonialpolitik": 37f.; Wolfgang U. Eckart, "Medizin und kolonialer Krieg. Die Niederschlagung des Herero-Nama-Erhebung im Schutzgebiet Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1904-1907", in: Peter von Heine and Ulrich van der Heyden, (eds.), *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Peter Sebald*, Pfaffenweiler, Centaurus, 1995: 220-235; Eckart, Wolfgang U., "Medizin und kolonialer Rassenkrieg: Die Niederschlagung des Herero-Nama-Aufstandes im Schutzgebiet Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1904-1907)", in: Wolfgang Wette and Gerd Ueberschär, (eds.), *Kriegsverbrechen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001: 59-71.

<sup>38</sup> Isabel V. Hull, "Military culture and the production of 'final solutions' in the colonies. The example of Wilhelminian Germany", in: Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003: 141-162 (148).

advanced reconstructions of the war do, indeed, argue that there were *no exterminatory intentions at this point in time*.<sup>39</sup> It was only after the Germans failed at the Battle of Ohamakari that the war turned genocidal.

A point repeatedly argued, is that Lothar von Trotha was a far more aggressive racist than any of the so-called 'alte Afrikaner' ever were, a point readily conceded.<sup>40</sup> Yet, this does not mean that when von Trotha took over from Leutwein in June 1904, he automatically implemented a re-orientation in strategy. Von Trotha's social-Darwinist leanings, and his ideas of a 'Rassenkampf' seemingly suggest a genocidal inclination in his approach and hence strategic differences with regard to his predecessor Leutwein. Indeed, when von Trotha took over, the degree of violence in the war against Ovaherero, Nama and Oorlam intensified.

Von Trotha had been chosen in Berlin to replace Leutwein as the commander of the Protection Troops and to terminate the war. Indeed, rumours that Leutwein actually intended to enter into negotiations with the Ovaherero led to his demission.<sup>41</sup> Peace, bilaterally negotiated and as called for by Leutwein and later also von Estorff, was ruled out. Count von Schlieffen, chief of staff in Berlin, confirmed this view in a letter to Chancellor von Bülow on 23 November 1904, arguing that to conclude peace with insurgent rebels could only happen in the form of unconditional submission.<sup>42</sup> To achieve this, tactical successes would not be sufficient and an ordinary victory as defined by Count von Schlieffen would not be enough.<sup>43</sup> A real effort had to be made to subjugate the enemy completely, to render the Ovaherero unable to collectively resist, because the aim was to eliminate the adversary as an independent political entity.<sup>44</sup> This elimination does, indeed, exceed the original tactic insofar as it does not only aim at rendering the enemy defenceless, but intends to also destroy it as a political entity. This, however, cannot be called genocidal, even though it contains a certain escalatory

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<sup>39</sup> Henrik Lundtofte, "I believe that the nation as such must be annihilated..." The radicalization of the German suppression of the Herero rising in 1904", in: Steven L. B. Jensen, (ed.), *Genocide. Cases, Comparisons and Contemporary Debates*, Copenhagen, Danish Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 2003: 15-53 (32f.); George Steinmetz, "Von der 'Eingeborenenpolitik' zur Vernichtungsstrategie. Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904", *Peripherie. Zeitschrift für Politik und Ökonomie in der Dritten Welt*, 96, 2005: 195-227 (197).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting. Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007: 201f. Whether von Trotha's social-Darwinist jargon was the basis for his more aggressive and exterminatory tactics and strategy remains an open question.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. BArch, R1001/2112, p. 189.

<sup>42</sup> BArch, R1001/2089, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Jehuda L. Wallach, *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht. Die Lehren von Clausewitz und Schlieffen und ihre Wirkungen in zwei Weltkriegen*, München, dtv, 1970: 83.

<sup>44</sup> At a meeting of the Advisory Board [Beirat] on 6 September 1904 in Windhoek, even Leutwein asserted the inevitability of destroying tribal structures, arguing indirectly for the establishment of locations; cf. *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung*, 21.9.1904, p. 2.

potential.<sup>45</sup> If such strategic aims are “absolute”, if the political survival of the opponent is seen to be illegitimate, further, if the adversary’s defeat – on account of his alleged inferiority – is thought of as only a question of time, then important inhibitions for violence vanish. It is for this reason that colonial wars were so often characterised by such transgressions of accepted rules of warfare.<sup>46</sup>

The elimination of the Ovaherero was important for von Trotha’s approach to colonial policy. His conflict with Leutwein was about the latter’s different take; he understood colonial rule to be guardianship, based on (bilateral) treaties, implying, at least partially, a recognition of indigenous populations as independent partners, allowing them to retain some control as well as the right to possess weapons. For von Trotha this *situation coloniale* (Balandier) was inescapably conflictual and essentially a *Rassenkampf* – a war between races.

Von Trotha dismissed Leutwein’s position, because it aimed at a peaceful balance between the antagonists and underestimated the inherent conflict, rejecting his position as a mere *Schaukelspiel* – the German term for kids playing on a seesaw: colonies must be conquered, there is no question about that.<sup>47</sup> The race war has to be fought decisively, once and for all, until the opponent is on the ground, ideally before the actual colonising task is started.<sup>48</sup> The hypothesis was that only once the situation had been cleared once and for all – *nur wenn einmal “reiner Tisch” gemacht worden war* – would it be possible to establish stable and secure colonies.<sup>49</sup>

The war as fought by von Trotha according to orders from Berlin was aimed at more than just the mere destruction of the enemy in a military perception, yet that the objective was *total*/annihilation, as argued by Krüger, Schaller and Zimmerer, cannot be claimed.<sup>50</sup> Even the hypothesis that von Trotha’s take-over of the operations implied a

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<sup>45</sup> This hinges on the genocide definition applied. Raphael Lemkin would have termed the destruction of Ovaherero political structures, their society and culture genocide; other authors qualify this as ethnocide, as it does not aim at physical extermination. Cf. e.g. Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Die Konkurrenz der Opfer. Genozid, Identität und Anerkennung*, Lüneburg, zu Klampen, 2001: 182-184. Even before the war started, Leutwein had commented that in the case of a failure of his policy (*Friedenspolitik*), a more consistent colonial policy (konsistente Kolonialpolitik) would require the killing of all prisoners fit to bear arms. Even as he himself would prefer to not have to order this, he would not blame anybody for doing it. Cf. Schaller, “Kolonialkrieg”: 210, note 88.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Henk L. Wesseling, “Colonial wars: an introduction”, in: Jaap A. Moor, (ed.), *Imperialism and War. Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa*, Leiden, Brill, 1989: 1-11 (3). Italy e.g., still applied chemical warfare in the 1920s and 1930s in Libya and Abyssinia, even though it was a signatory to the Geneva Protocol, banning such warfare. Cf. Giulia Brogini-Künzi, *Italien und der Abessinienkrieg 1935/36. Kolonialkrieg oder totaler Krieg?*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2006: 149.

<sup>47</sup> “Erobert müssen die Kolonialländer werden, davon ist nichts abzuidividieren”, Diary Lothar v. Trotha, entry 1 July 1904.

<sup>48</sup> Lothar von Trotha, “Politik und Kriegführung”, *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*, February 3, 1909: 1-2 (1).

<sup>49</sup> “Der Aufstand”, *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung*, February 2, 1904, supplement 2.

<sup>50</sup> Wolfgang Benz for instance makes the point that as from the arrival of von Trotha in GSWA onwards, the war turned genocidal: “Mit der Ankunft des Generalleutnants Lothar von Trotha [...] trat im Juni 1904 der Krieg nicht nur in eine neue Phase ein. Er hatte von nun an den Charakter des Vernichtungskrieges, des

radicalisation of the aims and warfare itself cannot be upheld easily either.<sup>51</sup> Von Trotha himself introduced procedures for executions, whereas Leutwein had allowed random violence vis-à-vis the enemy – obviously a measure to reign in uncontrolled violence on the side of the settlers and troops.<sup>52</sup> Further to this, he indeed followed through with Leutwein's strategy of a decisive defeat of the enemy at Waterberg – unchanged.<sup>53</sup> The only real difference between von Trotha and Leutwein was more of a tactical nature. The latter was of the opinion, that von Trotha's concentric approach would not be practical in GSWA. Others shared this skepticism, notably Viktor Franke.<sup>54</sup> As a representative of the military establishment, von Trotha did what the high command in Berlin, in control of operations since February 1904, expected. A quick and decisive victory was thought to be possible only through a well-planned and executed concentric tactical approach; this was probably the only possible tactic, given the prevailing Prussian military culture and inherent sense of superiority.<sup>55</sup>

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Genozids." Cf. Benz, "Kolonialpolitik": 37; cf. also Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewußtsein. Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia 1904 bis 1907*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999: 50; Schaller, "Kolonialkrieg": 167; Jürgen Zimmerer, "Rassenkrieg und Völkermord. Der Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und die Globalgeschichte des Genozids", in: Henning Melber, (ed.), *Genozid und Gedenken. Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Frankfurt, Brandes & Apel, 2005: 23-48 (28).

<sup>51</sup> Schaller speaks of the "Radikalisierung der deutschen Kriegsführung und Kriegsziele", cf. "Kolonialkrieg": 167.

<sup>52</sup> Von Trotha's proclamation of 11 June 1904 "Bestimmungen für das Militär-Gerichtsverfahren etc. während des Kriegszustandes in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika" (NAN BKE 220) corresponded with the "Kriegsbrauch im Landkriege" (Großer Generalstab, Berlin, Mittler, 1902) which stipulated that only officers were allowed to court-martial and shoot, and only such people as were carrying arms, as they could be considered having hostile intentions. Suspects were to be handed over to military courts and regular soldiers were not allowed to engage in this any longer, contrary to established practice. Surely this did not follow from any philanthropic motivation on the part of von Trotha, but for the military authorities to regain the monopoly on legitimate force.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*: 50. Leutwein was also of the opinion that being "merely victorious" in colonial wars in Africa (*bloßes Siegen*), an ordinary victory, as defined by von Schlieffen (*ordinärer Sieg*), was of no consequence. Only the destruction of the enemy would make sense. Cf. Theodor Leutwein, *Die Kämpfe der Kaiserlichen Schutztruppe in Deutsch-Südwestafrika in den Jahren 1894-1896, sowie die sich hieraus für uns ergebenden Folgen*, Berlin, Mittler, 1899: 5; cf. also Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*: 91. Elsewhere Leutwein was of the opinion that one should aim, without doubt, at the killing of all prisoners fit to bear arms. Cf. Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Hamburg, Leibniz-Verlag, 1968: 102: "zweifelloso die Tötung sämtlicher waffenfähiger Gefangener". Obviously there were 'regularities' of colonial warfare, not dependent on individuals.

<sup>54</sup> Viktor Franke evaluated the military operations at Waterberg, and the idea of a quick extermination of the enclosed "Herero-Pastete" (untranslatable German colloquialism) (BArch, NI. 30/3a, entry of 12.8.1904: 362) as emblematic for the ignorance of the officers from Berlin. He thought the whole military exercise as ludicrous "Farce schlimmster Art" (BArch, NI. 30/3a, entry of 16.8.1904: 363) and quite a comedy (BArch, NI. 30/3a, entry 26.7.1904: 350).

<sup>55</sup> Some authors think of concentric battle strategy à la Sedan as early variants of total war, e.g. Reinhart Köbler and Henning Melber, "Der Genozid an den Herero und Nama in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904-1908", in: Irmstrud Wojak, (ed.), *Völkermord und Kriegsverbrechen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2004: 37-95 (45). This claim needs correction. Large decisive battles are a feature of

The decisive caesura in this war was the unexpected turn the war took when the attempt of a decisive strike against the Ovaherero enemy failed dismally at Waterberg. It had not been anticipated by the Supreme Command at all and in due course turned out to be far more important than the arrival of von Trotha and the rather slight tactical changes after he assumed duty. Originally, von Trotha acted on a purely military, tactical-operational level – that is what he had been called to effect.<sup>56</sup> It was only after his original plan failed, and warfare had started to take on a political dimension, that von Trotha's convictions came to the fore. It was then that his violent disposition started to influence the course of events.<sup>57</sup> This change in approach relied entirely on the unexpected turns and events of the war.

It should have become clear now that there was no *original* genocidal intention on the side of the Germans. The war was fought, initially, with conventional means only, but eventually developed into something different, with many unforeseen turns. A more sophisticated debate must take this aboard and should attempt to elucidate more precisely, when the conditions changed.

### Lundtofte's refined genocide hypothesis

Lundtofte took a different view from those that tie the genocidal strategy to Lothar von Trotha.<sup>58</sup> He showed that the Battle of Ohamakari had been fought still within the framework of conventional warfare, and that the destruction of the enemy was perceived within contemporary military contexts. Even the pursuit that followed the immediate battle was meant to do what could not have been effected at Waterberg, the military destruction of the enemy. It was during this phase, that the violence escalated and children and women were also killed. Von Trotha, however, changed his strategy to qualitatively new, outright genocidal tactics only after this first unsuccessful pursuit on 16 August 1904.<sup>59</sup>

Lundtofte also queried the fact that nobody is concerned about the long period between the Battle of Ohamakari and von Trotha's notorious extermination order, even though the time between mid-August and early October had been quite eventful. Substantial numbers of Ovaherero lost their lives in this period, i.e. before the fateful proclamation of von Trotha.

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pre-conceived, limited 19<sup>th</sup> century warfare, as for instance contained in the Schlieffen Strategy of 1914, and quite antithetical to the doctrine of total war. Wars of this kind were short and operatively quick and limited to the combatants themselves. Cf. Wallach, *Dogma*: 95. Attrition strategies on the other hand cost far more blood, took much longer and would often harm the population indiscriminately.

<sup>56</sup> Drechsler termed von Trotha a "Nur-Militär", somebody being just a military person and nothing but – as such he thought him to be just the right man for the situation.

<sup>57</sup> Steinmetz, *Devil's*: 201ff.

<sup>58</sup> Lundtofte, "Nation"; Benz, "Kolonialpolitik": 37; Zimmerer, "Rassenkrieg": 30; Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*: 51.

<sup>59</sup> Lundtofte, "Nation": 30-36.

Lundtofte argued that the violence escalated only gradually, first triggered in the course of the failed battle, intensified during the pursuit and finally resulting in a full-blown genocide. He demonstrated, convincingly, how a genocidal strategy developed only as a result of unanticipated and unexpected turns during the actual events of this war. There is a problem with his dating, however. August, 16<sup>th</sup> is certainly far too early a date for a change to a genocidal strategy. To the contrary, a close reading of the diaries of participants demonstrates that until the end of August plans persisted to defeat the Ovaherero by means of the original strategy of capturing these in a concentric formation – the same strategy as applied during the mid-August offensive.<sup>60</sup> There is no such strategic adjustment to be seen in the diaries of von Trotha either, neither on 16 August, nor later.

Up until 29 August there is no indication of a change of strategy in von Trotha's thinking. He, however, recapitulated a conversation with Officer Maximilian Bayer c. two weeks after mid-August about Leutwein's suggestions on how to terminate the war. According to this, von Trotha did not agree with Leutwein, who advocated an end to the hostilities by concluding agreements with the Ovaherero. His idea was to persistently pursue them, and to beat them wherever possible, or to expel them into English territory and to then erect strong border posts.<sup>61</sup>

Von Trotha emphasised his intention to pursue and beat the enemy as long as possible. Yet he was doubtful, whether he would be able to apprehend and beat the Ovaherero. If they were to reach English territory, i.e. Bechuanaland, he would have to switch strategies from offensive to defensive, which would entail the establishment of strong border posts to prevent their return to 'German' territory.

This is an entirely different strategy, not only later than hitherto argued in the literature, but also really different and not as assumed by Lundtofte. By the end of August 1904, von Trotha was still harbouring hopes of being able to beat the Ovaherero decisively and to not have to commit to a new strategy. On 6 September, von Trotha still hoped for a military solution, and on 23 September he penned down the outcome of a meeting with Ludwig von Estorff, the commander of one of the units that pursued the fleeing Ovaherero.<sup>62</sup> The latter also wanted to negotiate an end to the war with the Ovaherero

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<sup>60</sup> In the mean while Viktor Franke noted in his diary on 21 August that he was let in on yet another plan of concentric encirclement (*Einkesselungsplan*) of the Ovaherero by von Deimling (BArch, NL Viktor Franke, NL 30/3a: 369). Stuhlmann reports on 25 August of such operational plans as well (NAN, Private Accessions, A. 0109: 54). This is a clear indication that German strategy had not been altered fundamentally until end of August 1904.

<sup>61</sup> "Palaver mit Bayer über Leutweins Ansicht der Situation. Er [Leutwein] bleibt bei seiner Idee, daß man den Krieg nur beendigen könne, wenn man mit den Leuten pactiert. Über die örtlichen Wasserverhältnisse weiß er ebenso wenig wie alle alten Afrikaner. *Vorläufig bleibe ich bei meiner Idee, sie immer zu verfolgen und zu schlagen, wo ich kann* oder sie in engl. Gebiet zu drängen, und dann dort eine starke Grenzbesetzung zu lassen", (emphasis MH), von Trotha diary, no. 122/17, entry 29.8.1904.

<sup>62</sup> "[A]Iso wird es wohl doch noch einmal möglich sein, sie [the Ovaherero, MH] zu fassen", von Trotha diary, No. 122/17, entry 6.9.1904.

but von Trotha insisted on a complete military solution.<sup>63</sup> It is clear then, that at this late stage, von Trotha still thought such a military solution possible, excluding negotiations.<sup>64</sup> There is other evidence for von Trotha's continued confidence, that a clean military solution would be possible at this time, i.e. six weeks after the failed battle of Ohamakari.<sup>65</sup> A final change in strategy only happened once it had become clear that the approach taken until then had failed badly.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly it can be argued that German strategy had not changed in any way between the Battle of Ohamakari and the end of September, even the beginning of October. Up to then, von Trotha had aimed at large military operations and concentric tactics to enclose the Ovaherero and to then crush them in a classical military sense.<sup>67</sup>

Only after it had become clear that the (remaining) Ovaherero were beyond the scope of the German military, did von Trotha consider a change of strategy. This is evidenced –

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<sup>63</sup> Von Estorff wanted a negotiated end of the war; cf. his memoir *Wanderungen*: 117. Von Trotha was against this: "Großer Vortrag von Estorff über die Operation. Er will verhandeln. Nein, mein Freund, daraus wird nichts. Es wird gefochten, so lange es geht", von Trotha diary No. 122/17, entry 23.9.1904.

<sup>64</sup> Von Trotha declined negotiations with the Ovaherero because he thought of this solution as a quasi two-sided peace, which he considered unacceptable; cf. von Trotha diary, entry 23 September 1904. In the same entry, he charges that von Estorff's intention to negotiate a settlement was driven by the latter's quest for the office of governor. He continues "Es wird alles totgeschossen! – Basta!" – words that clearly show von Trotha's growing genocidal inclinations and how the mere military destruction of the enemy came to be infused with thoughts of complete liquidation.

<sup>65</sup> "Es wird erkundet und dann führe ich am 1. X. den letzten Schlag nach Osten gegen Samuel. Dann ist er am Ende", von Trotha diary, No. 122/17, Entry 28 September 1904. Other sources, accessible to Lundtofte, show that action was expected somewhere in the Omaheke area towards the end of September 1904, where the adversary would be finally beaten. Max Belwe, *Gegen die Herero 1904/1905. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen von Max Belwe*, Berlin, Mittler, 1906: 115 reported on a religious service end of September 1904 in which chaplain Max Schmidt referred to an expected final battle. And Stuhlmann expected a desperately fought battle against thousands of Ovaherero, one that might as well be lost by the Germans. Cf. Stuhlmann, *Tagebuch*, NAN, Private Accessions, A.109, 62; 64.

<sup>66</sup> "Die großen Operationen sind, soweit es sich um etwaige konzentrische Schläge handelt, beendet. Eine Weiterführung derselben ist mit Rücksicht auf Wasser und Verpflegung unmöglich. Es wäre vielleicht zu machen gewesen, wenn uns die Karte östlich der Linie Otjosondjou – Epata – Epukiro nicht völlig im Stich gelassen hätte", Addendum to diary von Trotha, No. 315, "Zusammengestellt von Frau Lucy von Trotha, Bonn am Rhein 1930, Mit Anhängen": 54. In his communication to the general staff in Berlin, dated 1.10.1904 he wrote that contrary to all assumptions until then, there was no lack in pasture; even recently dug water holes existed, but that large military operations were impossible, NAN ZBU D.IV.L.2: Herero-Aufstand 1904. Feldzug; Politisches, p. 82f.

<sup>67</sup> Von Trotha's hope to destroy the enemy militarily was as illusory as the idea that fewer than 1500 armed German soldiers could encircle and beat at Waterberg an adversary far more numerous and mobile. Indeed, quite a number of participants in the campaign were convinced that this would not be possible. As the Ovaherero enemy had been scattered it was no longer possible to get at them in one large operation. Lettow-Vorbeck argued this, saying that the Germans were no longer able to overwhelm them "mit einer Operation im großen", Lettow-Vorbeck, *Leben*: 77. And Malzahn related that the pursuit of the enemy was just a wild chase – a "wilde Verfolgung", cf. Malzahn, *Erinnerungen aus Afrika*, NAN, Private Accessions, A.510, 26). Stuhlmann feared in September 1904 that the deplorably bad condition of the troops and the impending rainy season would not allow them to get at the Ovaherero, NAN, Private Accessions, A.109, p. 79).

ironically – by exactly that phrase which is always applied to prove the genocidal intentions of von Trotha. A closer reading of this incriminated sentence reveals something different and definitely not what Köbler and Melber see to be von Trotha's 'plan A' nor Lundtofte's 'plan B' solution.<sup>68</sup>

I believe that the nation as such [the Ovaherero] must be destroyed, and as this has not been possible tactically, must be expelled from the territory through operative means and further detail treatment.<sup>69</sup>

These words of von Trotha, "that the nation as such must be destroyed", have become famous as they, seemingly, express his genocidal disposition. This is possibly the case, as von Trotha's phrase mirrors the text of the UN-Anti-Genocide Convention's definition in quite an uncanny way.<sup>70</sup>

Yet, this impression is deceptive, and the words show, how cautiously one has to tread when dealing with von Trotha's martial language.<sup>71</sup> Von Trotha formulated an alternative of two strategies: either the "nation as such" is destroyed or "expelled from the territory". The German he uses is not too elegant and von Trotha struggled to complete the sentence correctly. He started the sentence as if he wanted to point out his conviction that the "nation as such" (whatever he may mean by this!) should be destroyed, no matter what the consequences. Apparently, this was his firm belief and he was convinced that this would have been the only acceptable outcome of the campaign. This indicates that he considered the second option as unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that von Trotha was well aware of the fact that he could avert the second option. The opportunity to destroy the "nation as such" was ultimately wasted. His formulation "as this has not been possible" – the past tense is crucial – implies that the opportunity to destroy the Ovaherero had been irrevocably lost; it is not a conditional but a temporal clause here. His only way out of this situation was to resort to a new strategy, the expulsion of the Ovaherero from 'German' territory. For von Trotha, this new strategy explicitly is no strategy aiming at 'Vernichtung' anymore.

And even though von Trotha's diction is not at all crucial for a qualification of his further warfare and the question whether it was genocidal or not, it is important to note, that for him – at least at this stage of the campaign – the ambiguous term 'Vernichtung' still meant the militarily connoted conventional 'destruction', not 'extermination' or 'annihilation'. The original intentions, von Trotha's 'plan A', were of strictly tactical

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<sup>68</sup> Köbler and Melber, "Völkermord": 44ff.; Lundtofte, "Nation", 33f.

<sup>69</sup> "Ich glaube, daß die Nation als solche vernichtet werden muß, oder, wenn dies durch taktische Schläge nicht möglich war, operativ und durch die weitere Detail-Behandlung aus dem Lande gewiesen wird", von Trotha to von Schlieffen, 4 October 1904, BArch, R1001/2089, 5.

<sup>70</sup> According to the UN Anti-Genocide-Convention of 1948 "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such."

<sup>71</sup> The depiction of genocides cannot be restricted to a quest for jurally utilisable passages to prove genocidal intentions. How insidious the simple and uncritical application of such material can be, is demonstrated by the case of von Trotha. Yet, the same passages are recycled in the literature again and again, cliché-like applied to demonstrate with a few brush strokes genocidal intentions in particular and the genocide hypothesis in general.



nature and cannot be considered genocidal therefore. Moreover, he pointed out that 'Vernichtung' denotes a strategy that had proven futile, that had failed and therefore was a matter of the past. A new phase with a different strategy was now to follow. Of real relevance for the argument here is that von Trotha's change in strategy happened much later than assumed by Lundtofte. Whether this new strategy was actually genocidal will be discussed hereunder.

## The proclamation and the transition to 'plan B' – eviction

Von Trotha's new strategy was laid down in his proclamation of 2 October 1904.<sup>72</sup> To cut to the core: the proclamation was a reaction to his failure to secure a decisive victory, and not the climax of any pre-programmed intentions as teleologically surmised in most treatments of this history. Most often the events of mid-August at Waterberg are connected seamlessly with the proclamation of October 1904, implying that nothing of importance took place in the time between these two dates.<sup>73</sup> Further to this it is

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<sup>72</sup> The Proclamation addressing the Ovaherero goes: "I, the great general of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Herero people. Hereros are no longer German subjects. They have murdered, stolen, cut off the ears and noses and other body parts from wounded soldiers, and now out of cowardice refuse to fight. I say to the people: anyone delivering a captain to one of my stations as a prisoner will receive one thousand marks; whoever brings in Samuel Maherero will receive five thousand marks. The Herero people must leave this land. If they do not, I will force them to do so by using the great gun [artillery]. Within the German borders every male Herero, armed or unarmed, will be shot to death. I will no longer receive women nor children but will drive them back to their people or have them shot at. These are my words to the Herero people." He further gave the following orders: "This proclamation is to be read to the troops at roll-call, with the addition that the unit that catches a captain will also receive the appropriate reward, and that the shooting at women and children is to be understood as shooting above their heads, so as to force them to run [away]. I assume absolutely that this proclamation will result in taking no more male prisoners, but will not degenerate into atrocities against women and children. The latter will run away if one shoots at them a couple of times. The troops will remain conscious of the good reputation of the German soldier." (Hull, *Destruction*: 56). The German original text can be found in BA Berlin-Lichterfelde, R1001/2089, p. 23: "Ich, der große General der deutschen Soldaten, sende diesen Brief an das Volk der Herero. Die Hereros sind nicht mehr deutsche Untertanen. Sie haben gemordet und gestohlen, haben verwundeten Soldaten Ohren und Nasen und andere Körperteile abgeschnitten, und wollen jetzt aus Feigheit nicht mehr kämpfen. Ich sage dem Volk: Jeder der einen der Kapitäne an eine meiner Stationen als Gefangenen abliefern, erhält 1000 Mark, wer Samuel Maharero bringt, erhält 5000 Mark. Das Volk der Herero muß jedoch das Land verlassen. Wenn das Volk dies nicht tut, so werde ich es mit dem Groot Rohr dazu zwingen. Innerhalb der Deutschen Grenze wird jeder Herero mit und ohne Gewehr, mit oder ohne Vieh erschossen, ich nehme keine Weiber und Kinder mehr auf, treibe sie zu ihrem Volke zurück oder lasse auf sie schießen. Dies sind meine Worte an das Volk der Hereros. Der große General des mächtigen deutschen Kaisers. [...] Dieser Erlaß ist bei den Appells der Truppen mitzuteilen mit dem Hinzufügen, daß auch der Truppe, die einen der Kapitänen fängt, die entsprechende Belohnung zuteil wird und das Schießen auf Weiber und Kinder so zu verstehen ist, daß über sie hinweggeschossen wird, um sie zum Laufen zu zwingen. Ich nehme mit Bestimmtheit an, daß dieser Erlaß dazu führen wird, keine männlichen Gefangenen mehr zu machen, aber nicht zu Grausamkeiten gegen Weiber und Kinder ausartet. Diese werden schon fortlaufen, wenn zweimal über sie hinweggeschossen wird. Die Truppe wird sich des guten Rufes des Deutschen Soldaten bewußt bleiben. Der Kommandeur gez. v. Trotha, Generalleutnant."

<sup>73</sup> Jan Bart Gewald's rendition of the events are an example of how cavalierly some historians go about, "Imperial Germany and the Herero of Southern Africa: genocide and the quest of recompense", in: Adam

assumed that the German strategy had been continuously applied until October 1904. Joël Koteck's reading of the proclamation is a point in case: he actually argues that the proclamation was a logical completion of the preceding phase of the war.<sup>74</sup>

Jon Bridgman's and Leslie Worley's treatment of the issue renders a good impression of how von Trotha's Proclamation is generally integrated into the course of the violence unfolding in 1904. According to the two, von Trotha sealed off the western border of the Omaheke to prevent the Ovaherero from returning to the Protectorate.<sup>75</sup> Their assumption is based on a passage from the official report of the war-historical department of the general staff in Berlin, which argues that all contacts with the enemy after the Battle of Ohamakari "demonstrated [that] strength of will, unity of command, and the last remnants of resistance have been lost".<sup>76</sup> Also, imprisoned Ovaherero had indicated that a general desire to succumb persisted among the enemy at large. By directly connecting von Trotha's proclamation to this passage the authors allude it be the climax of the brutality of his warfare. A total defeat of the enemy, without any will to continue the war any longer, is surmised. It is further suggested that this was known by the Germans at this time, as they had been informed by imprisoned Ovaherero; also that the Germans knew by this time that most of them had already perished or would be perishing in the desert from thirst. On this background, constructed by the authors, von Trotha is staged, decreeing the proclamation, so to speak aiming at killing off what little remained of the Ovaherero. The authors term the proclamation "his infamous 'Schrecklichkeit' (Atrocity or Extermination) order".<sup>77</sup> Similarly collapsed renditions of the events and the proclamation characterise most of the research literature on this history.

I would like to offer two observations. Firstly, the proclamation is not the climax of a planned and systematically executed event. Nor is it the culmination of an original strategy, but a reaction to the failure of a tactic, mirroring von Trotha's resentment at the Ovaherero's alleged 'cowardice'. Secondly, Bridgman and Worley overestimate German power to control the fleeing or hiding Ovaherero. The latter had, seemingly, eluded the German military, which was in no position to evaluate their condition, a fact the authors simply chose to ignore. Von Trotha's communication to von Schlieffen of 4 October 1904, however, demonstrates that he expected that the Ovaherero would either

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Jones, (ed.), *Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity*, London, Zed Books, 2004: 59-77 (70-73). One is left with the impression that he did not really want to engage with this glaring inconsistency, as that would have not been conducive to his argument.

<sup>74</sup> Joël Koteck, "Le Génocide des Herero, Symptôme d'un Sonderweg Allemand?", *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, 189, 2008 : 177-197 (181).

<sup>75</sup> Jon M. Bridgman and Leslie J. Worley, "Genocide of the Hereros", in: Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny, (eds.), *Century of Genocide. Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, New York, Garland, 1997: 3-40 (17).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., quoting from: Generalstab, *Kämpfe* : 206. "Alle Zusammenstöße mit dem Feinde haben gezeigt, [...] daß den Hereros jede Willenskraft, jede Einheit der Führung und der letzte Rest von Widerstandsfähigkeit abhanden gekommen ist."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. The application of the German word *Schrecklichkeit* – only clumsily translatable as *horribleness* – does not really make any good sense here, and one wonders what the authors had in mind?

assert their presence in the Omaheke or manage to move to English territory.<sup>78</sup> The situation was frustratingly unsatisfactory for the Germans actually. Insofar as the Ovaherero were outside the range of the German military, they were in fact ultimately unbeatable. Instead, the Germans could realistically expect, in fact they feared this, an undefeated enemy, located in an area from which they could relaunch the war at any time. Von Schlieffen referred to this when he wrote to Chancellor von Bülow on 23 November 1904. He thought that the Ovaherero in Bechuanaland constituted a constant threat if the Cape Government did not react to this danger and actually even expected an ongoing war.<sup>79</sup> A situation thus that could not be handled anymore, that was unclear, one that had cost a lot of money, with high losses and no real outcome. Further, to guarantee the security of the colony, enough troops had to be stationed and maintained for prolonged periods in remote areas. As a result, the internal situation in the colony would be precarious, particularly as one could react only provisionally. It is therefore misleading to speak of an “extermination order” (“Vernichtungsbefehl”), of a “firing instruction” (“Schießbefehl”) or a “genocide order” (“Genozidbefehl”).<sup>80</sup> Such terminology ignores the indeed pragmatic framing of the document, which, firstly, was meant to convey a message to the *Ovaherero*. Secondly, though indirectly, it constituted an instruction to the troops. It could also have insinuated that the Germans still had some power over the Ovaherero, which from a German perspective though, never really existed. Von Trotha’s proclamation was formulated from a weak position, and its author warns the Ovaherero to not do what he fears most, to return to GSWA.

Notwithstanding, the proclamation has a distinctly genocidal dimension, as a part of the order requested that every male Ovaherero be killed. And while women and children were expressly exempt from this measure, a consistent application of the order would have led to genocide in the end. This genocidal dimension would, however, only evolve later and over time into full-blown genocidal practice. Initially the proclamation was designed to spread terror.<sup>81</sup> In the beginning the execution of the proclamation constituted “*unterwerfende Vernichtungspraktiken*”, aiming at subjection – to be distinguished from those applied later – “*ausrottende*” (genozidale), aiming at extermination. This distinction was first made by Sémelin.<sup>82</sup> In other words, although civilians were killed during the first phase, no systematic elimination of these was anticipated.

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<sup>78</sup> BArch, R1001/2089: 5f.

<sup>79</sup> BArch, R1001/2089: 4.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Zimmerer, “Rassenkrieg”, or Schaller, “Kolonialkrieg”.

<sup>81</sup> The argument here is directed against Isabel V. Hull’s account. She assumed that the military operations before the proclamation were openly genocidal and that the latter only officially sanctioned this practice. She further accepted that the proclamation called for immediate genocidal action. Cf. Hull, *Destruction*: 57. I have argued that the developments before the end of September cannot be termed genocidal and that the proclamation as such was meant to terrorise in the first instance; it only assumed a genocidal quality in the course of events, that is, when the Germans realised that the Ovaherero had actually not been really able to retain their hold in the Omaheke area nor that they had reached English territory and that many had died of thirst already.

<sup>82</sup> Sémelin, *Säubern*: 357f.

These deaths were accepted to impress the survivors as 'collateral' fatalities, in order to implement political authority. Sheer terror – 'Terrorismus', as German officers called it – against the Ovaherero was not applied to subject them to German political authority any longer, but to ban them as effectively as possible from GSWA.<sup>83</sup> While von Trotha argued later that he had aimed at subjecting the Ovaherero to German political authority, he knew that they were outside of his area of influence anyway and therefore his approach was rather one to stabilise the status quo and to keep them outside the range of his soldiers.<sup>84</sup>

Terror was seen to be the way to keep the surviving majority of the Ovaherero – that was what was assumed anyway – away and to make them realise that there was no return to GSWA. For a qualification of von Trotha's proclamation as either terroristic or genocidal, it is important to realise that he thought the majority of the Ovaherero to be far away from his sphere of influence and that they could only be affected with exemplary, individual acts of terror.

Initially, threat is the more important element in the proclamation. Von Trotha's 'plan B' was therefore, initially not immediately genocidal either. The proclamation's main aim was to expel, to keep the Ovaherero out and away from the German colony (notwithstanding that the further orders to the troop had a clear genocidal dimension). These measures were not perceived to be genocidal by von Trotha under the circumstances given, but aimed at spreading terror. They were not yet aimed at systematic extermination.

Von Trotha had, already during August 1904, started to think about a new strategy in case 'plan A' would fail. This new strategy aimed at expelling the Ovaherero into British territory, and then to seal off the borders. It had been devised when the general situation of the Ovaherero was decidedly more favourable, but also quite obscure to the Germans. This strategy was only implemented in October, however, i.e. after the majority had already perished during September. There were clues about this locally among the experienced troops; we know today for sure.<sup>85</sup>

Yet this does not indicate how those responsible at headquarters perceived the situation as such.<sup>86</sup> Even regular soldiers on the ground had, towards the end of September, still no clear idea what they were heading for and about the situation regarding the enemy. Generally they seem to have expected heavy, open-ended military action. One should keep in mind that the Germans were dealing with an enemy well-trained in evasive strategies, one for whom a successful escape meant victory. As nomads they were

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<sup>83</sup> Schenk von Stauffenberg, *München*: 211.

<sup>84</sup> Von Trotha, "Politik": 1.

<sup>85</sup> Hull, "Culture": 155, "in englisches Gebiet zu drängen, und dann dort eine starke Grenzbesetzung zu lassen".

<sup>86</sup> Von Estorff had informed von Trotha in September 1904 that the Ovaherero were on the brink of annihilation, but headquarters ridiculed the evaluations of the situation by experienced old hands, the "alten Afrikaner", cf. von Estorff, *Wanderungen*: 117, and Eckl, *Land*: 294.

expected to be able to manage long and arduous migratory movements. Not only would they be able to find enough food, they also were familiar with the age-old routes through the Omaheke, taken by generations before them and their knowledge of available water and pasture – information the Germans lacked sorely.<sup>87</sup>

Von Trotha admitted, in the already-mentioned letter to von Schlieffen of 4 October 1904, that the Ovaherero might either maintain their ground in the Omaheke or flee into English territory. After a great number of quite misleading reports on German victories during the preceding months, von Trotha had to admit the final and total failure of his strategy.<sup>88</sup> If one keeps in mind the difficult relationship between von Trotha and von Schlieffen, and also how problematic such an unfavourable admission would have been for the former, then one could actually assume that his evaluation of the situation on the front must have been honest and to the point.<sup>89</sup> It is quite probable then, that when von Trotha decreed his proclamation, he was hoping that his announced threats would intimidate the Ovaherero to not return to the protectorate in future.

### The gradual transition to ‘plan C’ – extermination

The rather inconspicuous shift towards a decidedly genocidal strategy could have only happened after von Trotha’s proclamation and in a very specific way. As diarised by von Frankenberg, the strategy of “terror” meant the indiscriminate gunning down of all Ovaherero encountered.<sup>90</sup> Concretely, nothing changed over the course of the next months, yet on the strategic level a qualitative change cannot be excluded. Eventually the *circumstances* changed as von Trotha realised that the Ovaherero could not offer any resistance to the Germans any longer and that they could not any longer keep up in the Omaheke, nor that they would be able to reach English territory. Instead, many of those still surviving now succumbed to thirst, hunger and disease. The new quality of the war was, under these circumstances, not founded in a new approach, but it reflected the changed conditions under which the war was fought. The actual turnaround of von Trotha’s strategy took place only, when the forlorn situation of the Ovaherero had become clear to the Germans, when despite their desperate position, the strategy of military destruction was not altered and therefore turned genocidal.<sup>91</sup> Von Trotha knew

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<sup>87</sup> Karl-Johan Lindholm, *Wells of Experience. A Pastoral Land-Use History of Omaheke, Namibia*, Uppsala, African and Comparative Archaeology Dep. of Archaeology and Ancient History Uppsala University, 2006.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Eckl, *Land*: 181.

<sup>89</sup> Von Schlieffen was against the appointment of von Trotha. Cf. Susanne Kuß, *Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen: Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, Links, 2010: 83, note 1. Obviously Martin Chales de Beaulieu had been appointed by von Schlieffen as von Trotha’s Chief of Staff to report covertly to Berlin about the latter. De Beaulieu left the colony after a conflict with von Trotha (cf. diary von Trotha, No. 122/17, entry 22.7.1904) – reported with acrid derision, and probably under a pretext. (NL Viktor Franke [BArch, Nl. 30/3a], Entry 1. and 13.9.1904).

<sup>90</sup> “über den Haufen geschossen”, cf. Diary of von Frankenberg und Proschlitz NAN, Private Accessions, AACRLS.070, p. 117.

<sup>91</sup> That a genocidal intention can only be proven indirectly does not contradict the genocide hypothesis as

this as is evidenced in a letter of November 1904, in which he wrote that the Ovaherero now had to perish in this way, after he had not been able to do so militarily.<sup>92</sup> When this genocidal turn had exactly happened is not possible to determine, but, obviously it had by the time von Trotha wrote this letter.<sup>93</sup>

Von Trotha considered this genocidal escalation of the war, quasi a 'plan C', now as a possible and acceptable solution. When he now used the term 'Vernichtung', what he meant differed from what was intended up until September: he now meant the total annihilation of the Ovaherero. Because he had not been able to destroy the enemy in a militarily conventional sense, the intention now changed to direct physical extermination. 'Plan B' had been unsatisfactory anyway, as military security had remained precarious and the deployment of troops to the remote border areas very expensive. In this context, von Trotha was finally prepared to execute this extermination, as it would solve the conflict once and for all.

## Conclusion

The extermination of the Ovaherero was not originally envisaged by the military command, but developed gradually as an option. Only after a military solution, i.e. victory, had failed, and the consequences of the ensuing strategy, viz. their expulsion had become evident. Instead of a 'plan A', implemented as planned, one should rather think of the unfolding as a 'plan C', crystallising as the events developed, taking turns not anticipated earlier. The escalation of violence was not a linear process, but was characterised by unforeseen disruptions and discontinuities, steering the developments onto new, unpredictable trajectories.

The genocidal escalation of the campaign did not happen well planned, but resulted from the failure of all other strategic designs. From this can be elucidated also, that this escalation cannot be exclusively tied to the person of Supreme Commander von Trotha, who simply never had envisaged these developments. Yet, this war would most probably not have spiralled into a full-blown genocide, had Leutwein or von Estorff been at the helm of military operations. Probably we would be terming the Battle of Ohamakari as

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such. It only challenges the excessive intentionalism of common variants of the genocide hypothesis, which is uncalled for. I would like to refer to genocide researcher Helen Fein's work *Genocide*. Rejecting notions defined by every-day language and legal perceptions, she has developed a concept of intentional action, that is not limited to the immediately intended consequences, but includes the foreseeable effects of one's doings as well, cf. Fein, *Genocide*: 19.

<sup>92</sup> "Die Absperrung der Ostgrenze der Kolonie und die Ausübung des Terrorismus gegen jeden sich zeigenden Herero bleibt, solange ich im Lande bin, bestehen. Die Nation muß untergehen. Wenn es mir nicht gelang, sie durch die Geschütze zu vernichten, so muß es auf diese Weise geschehen", cf. R1001/2089, p. 29, von Trotha an Leutwein, quoted in Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*: 191.

<sup>93</sup> According to the report of the General Staff, the consequences of the German measures became only evident after the rainy season had started. Cf. Generalstab, *Kämpfe*: 218. The military would have only been able to reach the eastern border of the protectorate by November 1904 to affirm the 'successes' of their operations.

just another one of the many 'dirty little wars' and not as a full-blown genocide, had it happened as intended originally.

Among the few commentators, Lundtofte was actually the only one pointing out the processual character of the violence unfolding, yet his realisation of this was not far-reaching enough. The point in time, when the operations turned genocidal surely was later than he assumed. This is also true for Isabel Hull's treatment of this issue.<sup>94</sup> Von Trotha's strategy of annihilation was, until the end of September 1904, never geared towards the total destruction of the Ovaherero: neither at Waterberg in August, nor during the immediate follow-up, and certainly not during the subsequent pursuit of the fleeing into the Omaheke. Not even the notorious extermination order, unquestionably genocidal in character, was aiming at an immediate annihilation of the challenger. Headquarters were sure that they had no real control over the remaining Ovaherero, and was therefore not in any position to believe that the execution of the proclamation would really happen and eventually take on exterminatory dimensions. The order was rather directed at an enemy assumed to be too far away to be still reached by own troops; therefore the threat of utmost terror was meant to keep the survivors away from 'German' territory. The transition towards a genocidal event happened, when the strategy that aimed at expulsion underwent a qualitative change in itself. Between military annihilation (plan A) and genocidal annihilation (plan C), von Trotha had envisaged complete expulsion of all Ovaherero from the colony already in August 1904 (plan B) – after the military defeat had failed. This cost countless defenceless and unarmed individuals their lives. To my mind, the conversion to a genocidally oriented strategy on the side of the German forces happened gradually only as their military practice never changed, but the conditions under which it was exercised. While the German military had paced their actions to a mere expulsory strategy as from August 1904, this same strategy became genocidal as knowledge of the extent and magnitude of the results of this in October-November 1904 in the Omaheke became known. Only when the consequences of this strategy in the Omaheke became obviously manifest, yet this strategy was continued, can one actually term it genocide.

Recent research has demonstrated that even extreme forms of violence and genocide have to be seen as developing processually. For the case of German South West Africa I would like to further clarify this, conceptually, in order to cover its specificity. At first, this war was a *real* conflict between two rather even contenders. Over time unevenness developed, with the Germans taking control. But, even then, the Ovaherero determined the course of events, as they were able to keep the German military leadership in the dark about their real situation at least until October 1904. The genocidal outcome of the conflict grew out of the attempt to implement a strategy that might have been illusory right from the beginning and to absorb, somehow, the failure of this same strategy. Ever more radical solutions – first expulsion, then annihilation – became possible then to terminate this war. The shift to final extermination was actually indiscernibly gradual, and not planned, but rather stemming from the continuation of a strategy. The genocidal

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<sup>94</sup> Lundtofte, "Nation": 30-36; Hull, *Destruction*: 57.

consequences of this were only becoming obvious in the process. It is impossible to say when this exactly happened. I would suggest, therefore, to rather apply Trutz von Trotha's proposed, more concise term "genocidal war of pacification" for the developments in GSWA between 1904 and 1908.<sup>95</sup>

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