

## From Windhuk to Auschwitz – old wine in new bottles? Review article

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### Abstract

Taking up an older debate a number of authors have over the last decade explored a possible link between the colonial violence in Namibia, in particular during the Herero-Nama War (1904–08), and the Holocaust. The argument that continuities extend “from Windhuk to Auschwitz” refers to structural and ideological similarities and even personal linkages over the forty years in question. Critics of such claims of historical continuity emphasise that pointing to similarities cannot replace in-depth source-based analysis that could describe how methods, structures, ideas, and personnel were transferred from German South West Africa to Nazi Germany. This review article provides an analysis of two books which undertook to spell out the alleged route “from Windhuk to Auschwitz” and embeds them within a wider debate on the singularity of the Holocaust that goes beyond academic circles.

The books under review are *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*, by Jürgen Zimmerer (Münster, Lit, 2011) and *The Kaiser's Holocaust. Germany's forgotten Genocide*, by David Olusoga and Caspar Erichsen (London, Faber & Faber, 2010).

### Introduction

More than forty years ago, the West German doyen of Namibian history, Helmut Bley, concluded his book *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur* with a sense of resignation: “It is difficult to decide where in the development of SWA the typical ceases and the particular begins.”<sup>1</sup> That something quite “particular” pertained to this colony was clear

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<sup>1</sup> Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894-1914*, Hamburg, Leibnitz, 1968: 312: “Es fällt schwer, zu entscheiden, wo in der Entwicklung, die SWA genommen hat, das Typische aufhört und das Besondere anfängt.” These concluding remarks are missing in the English edition of the book, *South-West Africa under German Rule 1894-1914*, London, Heinemann, 1971. See also: Russell A. Berman, “German Colonialism. Another Sonderweg”, *European Studies Journal*, 16, 1999: 25-36; Birthe Kundrus, “German Colonialism: Some Reflections on Reassessments, Specificities, and Constellations”, in: Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salawa, (ed.), *German Colonialism. Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, New York 2011: 29-47; George Steinmetz, “Von der ‘Eingeborenenpolitik’ zur Vernichtungsstrategie: Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1904”, *Peripherie Zeitschrift für Politik und Ökonomie der Dritten Welt*, 96, 2005: 195-227.

to Bley, a colonial *Sonderweg* perhaps? However, he was not sure what exactly this might be. Do we know now more than 40 years later? This question has been discussed more heatedly of late as the centenaries of the German-Herero-Nama Wars of 1904–1908 came around. From a historiographic point of view however, the *Sonderweg* paradigm to explain the ‘German catastrophe’ of 1933 to 1945 has lost its significance.<sup>2</sup> Still, whether the *Sonderweg* paradigm has any relevance for African colonial history is open to debate, particularly as the argument has shifted to the exterminatory character of National Socialism and whether German colonial history can be seen as a precursor to what happened in the Third Reich. The debate is no longer about African history. The epistemological interest now centres on the influence of three decades of formal German colonialism on metropolitan German society. The colonial experience must have had an impact on social developments at home.<sup>3</sup> Was National Socialism also informed by the colonial experience? With regard to the German-Herero war Russell Berman in 1999 considered this question to be “presumably central to a study of German colonialism”<sup>4</sup>. As early as 1993 Tilman Dederling wrote in the past tense that “[T]he history of the mass killings of Herero by German soldiers in 1904 has often been discussed in the light of Germany’s recent Nazi past.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, questions about a connection between colonialism, Nazi ideology and Nazi rule in Europe were repeatedly asked in Germany and beyond, often with reference to Hannah Arendt’s deliberations in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).<sup>6</sup> One possible

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g.: Patrick Bahners, “Warum wir nicht in der Provinz bleiben”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 October, 2010: 27, talking about the *Historikertag* 2010: “the *Sonderweg* has not been mentioned” (“der *Sonderweg* sei nicht erwähnt worden”). On the origins of this debate during the Second World War see Robert Vansittart, *Black Record. Germans Past and Present*, London, Hamilton, 1941; Carl Herz, *The Straight Line. From Soldier King to Soldier Dictator*, London, Hutchinson, 1942. The question whether this German *Sonderweg* existed was posed by Heinrich A. Winkler in his seminal *Deutsche Geschichte*, but not without adding critically that normalcy needed to be determined before the exception (the *Sonderweg*) could be deliberated upon. And indeed, the *Sonderweg* paradigm has only tentatively rendered results for a better understanding of German history. Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, Vol. I, München, Beck, 2000: 1: “Gab es ihn oder gab es ihn nicht, den umstrittenen ‘deutschen Sonderweg’? Lange Zeit wurde diese Frage vom gebildeten Deutschland bejaht: zunächst, bis zum Zusammenbruch von 1945, im Sinne des Anspruchs auf eine besondere deutsche Sendung, danach im Sinne der Kritik an der politischen Abweichung Deutschlands vom Westen. Heute überwiegen in der Wissenschaft die verneinenden Antworten.” See also: Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History. Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Eine lebhafte Kampfsituation. Ein Gespräch mit Cornelius Torp und Manfred Hettling*, München, Beck, 2006: 160-165.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Eckert and 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 (379), referring to A.L. Stoler et al.

<sup>4</sup> Berman, “German Colonialism”: 27.

<sup>5</sup> Tilman Dederling, “The German-Herero War of 1904: Revisionism of Genocide or Imaginary Historiography?”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1993: 80-88 (80).

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harcourt, 1951; Richard H. King and Dan Stone, (eds.), *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History. Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, New York, Berghahn, 2007. Cf. Jens-Uwe Güttel on Hannah Arendt’s perspectives on the connections between

reply was to point to the 'similarities' between what happened in the German colonies and during the Third Reich.<sup>7</sup> A 1975 publication by Peter Schmitt-Egner *Kolonialismus und Faschismus* was subtitled *A study of historical and conceptual genesis of fascist consciousness with reference to Germany*.<sup>8</sup> Concrete continuities between colonial domination and National Socialism were alleged in several other studies. The development of German anthropology during the Third Reich was directly tied to Eugen Fischer's work on the Rehoboth Baster of 1913. This line of continuity seemed particularly plausible since Fischer was director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut for Anthropology until 1942.<sup>9</sup> The East German historian on Africa, Helmuth Stoecker saw colonial precursors to the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws (the *Nürnberger Gesetze*).<sup>10</sup> Henning Melber followed a similar line of argument on "colonial traditions" and "practical and ideological connections" between German colonialism and National Socialism.<sup>11</sup> Later he and Reinhard Köbler, citing Hannah Arendt, even argued that German settler colonialism had been of formative influence on national socialist dictatorship. This argument is based on the way in which the 1904–1908 war against Ovaherero and Nama unfolded. It is characterised as genocidal by some authors and

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nineteenth-century European imperialism and Nazism. The *Origins of Totalitarianism* "indicate that liberal nationalism and imperialism did not in fact construct the historical foundation for Nazism and Stalinism." Rather, Arendt separates these two. Güttel concludes: "even though liberal imperialism and its legacies reach far into the twentieth century (certainly beyond the year 1945), they should not be confused with Nazi expansionism. The main trajectories of German imperialism did not point toward a future Nazi 'Eastern Europe'" (Jens-Uwe Güttel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012: 228; 232).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Martha Mamozai, *Herrenmenschen. Frauen im deutschen Kolonialismus*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1982: 256.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Schmitt-Egner, *Kolonialismus und Faschismus. Eine Studie zur historischen und begrifflichen Genesis faschistischer Bewußtseinsformen am deutschen Beispiel*, Gießen, Achenbach, 1975; see also: idem, "Wertgesetz und Rassismus. Zur begrifflichen Genesis kolonialer und faschistischer Bewußtseinsformen", *Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Marxschen Theorie*, 8/9, 1976: 350-405 (384).

<sup>9</sup> Benno Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft: Die Aussonderung von Juden, Zigeunern und Geisteskranken 1933–1945*, Berlin, Volk u. Gesundheit, 1989 [engl. edition: *Murderous science: elimination by scientific selection of Jews, Gypsies, and others in Germany, 1933–1945*, Plainview, NY, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 1998].

<sup>10</sup> Helmuth Stoecker, *Drang nach Afrika. Die deutsche koloniale Expansionspolitik und Herrschaft in Afrika von den Anfängen bis zum Verlust der Kolonien*, Berlin, Akademie, 1991: 184.

<sup>11</sup> Henning Melber, "Wir, die Deutschen, müssen uns unserer Geschichte stellen. Einleitende Bemerkungen", in: idem, (ed.), *In Treue fest, Südwest! Eine ideologiekritische Dokumentation von der Eroberung Namibias über die deutsche Fremdherrschaft bis zur Kolonialapologie der Gegenwart*, Bonn, edition südliches Afrika, 1984: vi-xi (vii): "[dass] sich die kolonialen Traditionen wahrlich kaum von der Bewältigung der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft abtrennen [ließen]". See also: idem, "Kontinuitäten totaler Herrschaft. Völkermord und Apartheid in 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika'. Zur kolonialen Herrschaftspraxis im Deutschen Kaiserreich", *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 1, 1992: 91-116: Contemplating the "ersten Formen einer [...] Zivilisierung durch Massenvernichtung" in GSWA and claiming "herrschaftspraktische und -ideologische Zusammenhänge" between German colonialism and National-Socialism.

perceived to be part of the pre-history of the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> Other authors concur with this view.<sup>13</sup> Helmut Walser Smith considered plausible a direct connection between colonial violence and the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> Jan Bart Gewald wrote that the “Nazi holocaust [has] changed forever the import and meaning of the Herero genocide.”<sup>15</sup> Gesine Krüger, however, was more cautious in her formulation that Auschwitz constituted a “sub-theme” in the historiography of German colonialism.<sup>16</sup> Ovaherero claims for reparations in US courts also referred to this ‘comparison’, having been inspired by the successful court proceedings against Germany by ex-forced labourers. In the proceedings the events of 1904 in GSWA were said to be “[f]oreshadowing with chilling precision the irredeemable horror of the European Holocaust only decades later”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Reinhart Köbler and Henning Melber, “Völkermord und Gedenken. Der Genozid an den Herero und Nama in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904-1908”, in: Irmtrud Wojak and Susanne Meinel, (eds.), *Völkermord und Kriegsverbrechen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2004: 37-75 (58f.): “ursächlichen Zusammenhang zwischen dem damaligen Siedlerkolonialismus und der NS-Diktatur. [...] Der koloniale Rassismus und die darauf aufbauende Vernichtungsphilosophie nahmen vorweg, was in den industriell betriebenen Vernichtungslagern Jahrzehnte später perfektioniert wurde.” Almost identical wording in Melber, “Kontinuitäten”: 91; Reinhart Köbler, “From Genocide to Holocaust? Structural parallels and discursive continuities”, *Africa Spectrum*, 40, 2005: 309-317: “Der [deutsche] Kolonialgedanke [...] steht als konstitutives Merkmal in einer Kontinuität auf dem Weg zu totaler Herrschaft.”

<sup>13</sup> Susanne Meinel and Irmtraud Wojak, “Einführung”, in: eadem, (eds.), *Völkermord und Kriegsverbrechen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2004: 7-18 (15): “[Es spräche] einiges dafür, dass die vom NS-Regime während des Zweiten Weltkriegs verübten Völkermorde durch einen längeren Prozess der kumulativen Entgrenzung kriegerischer Gewalt an der kolonialen Peripherie mit vorbereitet worden sind.” See also: Marcia Klotz, “Global Visions. From the Colonial to the Nationalist World”, *European Studies Journal*, 16, 1999: 37-68.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Continuities*: 197f.

<sup>15</sup> Jan-Bart Gewald, “Herero genocide in the twentieth century. Politics and memory”, in: Jon Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn, and Klaas van Walraven, (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance. Revolt and Violence in African History*, Leiden, Brill, 2003: 279-304 (304); see also: idem, “Colonization, genocide and resurgence. The Herero of Namibia 1890-1933”, in: Michael Bollig and Jan-Bart Gewald, (eds.), *People, Cattle, and Land: Transformations of a Pastoral Society in Southwestern Africa*, Köln, Köppe, 2000: 187-226; idem, “Imperial Germany and the Herero of southern Africa. Genocide and the quest of recompense”, in: Adam Jones, (ed.), *Genocide, War Crimes and the West. History and Complicity*, London, Zed Books, 2004: 59-77.

<sup>16</sup> Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewußtsein. Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia 1904 bis 1907*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999: 14: “das ‘Sub-Thema’, das in allen Texten zum Genozid an den Herero mitgeschrieben wird, ... [sei] die Auseinandersetzung mit Auschwitz.”; cf. also Brigitte Lau, “Uncertain Certainties. The Herero-German War of 1904”, in: idem, *History and Historiography*, Windhoek, MSORP, 1995: 39-52 (42f.)

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in: Gesine Krüger, “Vergessene Kriege: Warum gingen deutsche Kolonialkriege nicht in das Historische Gedächtnis der Deutschen ein?”, in: Dieter Langewiesche and Nikolaus Buschmann, (eds.), *Der Krieg in den Gründungsmythen europäischer Nationen und der USA*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2003: 120-137 (135); see also: Allan D. Cooper, “Reparations for the Herero Genocide: Defining the limits of international litigation”, *African Affairs*, 106, 2006: 113-126 (120); Steffen Eicker, *Der Deutsch-Herero-Krieg und das Völkerrecht. Die völkerrechtliche Haftung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland für das Vorgehen des Deutschen Reiches gegen die Herero in Deutsch-Südwestafrika im Jahre 1904 und ihre Durchsetzung vor einem nationalen Gericht*, Frankfurt/M., Lang, 2009; Dominik J. Schaller, “‘Every Herero will be shot’. Genocide,

Accordingly the answer to Helmut Bley's rather tentative question as to the specificity of the development of German colonialism and the Herero War as "[a] case of genocide that actually stands out in the annals of European colonialism"<sup>18</sup> is that colonialism in GSWA was the precursor to the mass violence of national-socialism. A direct line, connection, even nexus between Africa and Auschwitz was the new paradigm.<sup>19</sup>

Jürgen Zimmerer, whose PhD dissertation *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner* was highly acclaimed, has been writing extensively on the topic since 2001; he agrees with most of the above-named authors. He views the war against Nama and Ovaherero as paradigmatic for the national socialist exterminatory policies in the Third Reich.<sup>20</sup> The book reviewed here *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? (From Windhuk to Auschwitz?)* had been announced a long time prior to publication.<sup>21</sup> In view of his earlier writing and in the light of the title of this (second) book, one expected a *Habilitationsschrift* that would trace in detail the development of and players in genocidal thought and action from 1904 to 1945. With his many articles in which he linked the German-Herero War to the Holocaust, Zimmerer had become the best known German exponent of a 'postcolonial interpretation of the Holocaust'. His position was met with criticism from some colleagues and inspired further debate. Furthermore, historians who were not directly involved in the debate repeatedly insisted that an empirically based examination of the alleged connection was really needed.<sup>22</sup>

## Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz?

Given the title of the book and the fact that it had been announced long before it was finally published in 2011, this reviewer's expectations were high. While the title had not been changed, a question mark had been added – why was this? The book's cover

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concentration camps, and slave labor in German South-West Africa", in: René Lemarchand, (ed.), *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011: 51-69 (53).

<sup>18</sup> Reinhart Kößler, "Genocide in Namibia, the Holocaust and the Issue of Colonialism", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 2012: 233-238 (237).

<sup>19</sup> Melber, "Kontinuitäten": 91: "Darin mag die deutsche Besonderheit zu sehen sein, indem das 'unsichtbare Erfahrungspotential des deutschen Imperialismus [...] nicht hoch genug eingeschätzt werden' kann", citing Karl Heinz Roth, "Zwangsarbeit und Kolonialismus – Das Beispiel Deutschland", in: Bruni Höfer, Heinz Dietrich, and Klaus Meyer, (eds.), *Das Fünfhundertjährige Reich. Emanzipation und lateinamerikanische Identität 1492–1992*, Frankfurt/M. 1992: 249-265. See also: 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.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*, Münster, Lit, 2001; idem, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*, Münster, Lit, 2011: 9, 274; henceforth Z: page.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, "Der Holocaust als kolonialer Genozid? Europäische Kolonialgewalt und nationalsozialistischer Vernichtungskrieg", *Geschichte & Gesellschaft*, 33, 2007: 439-466, marked on p. 443 the book "Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz" to be "forthcoming".

<sup>22</sup> Eckert and Wirz, "Deutschland und der Kolonialismus": 383 demanded "[e]ine empirisch abgestützte Untersuchung dieser Zusammenhänge" between German colonialism and National Socialism.

shows a photograph of Nazi officers looking at the model of a village that was on display in Berlin in 1941 in an exhibition on planning and building in the East. This evokes questions: were the men in the photograph connected to the wars of 1904–08? Had they or their instructors previously been colonial military officers? These are questions one expects Zimmerer to answer. However, Zimmerer's table of contents reveals that the book is in fact a compilation of twelve articles, which were published (in some cases more than once) between 2001 and 2009.<sup>23</sup> Still, Zimmerer could have unearthed new facts. He could have responded to the call for more empirically based research to prove or disprove the theory of the road "from Windhuk to Auschwitz". He could have engaged with counter arguments and sought to rebut them. Sadly, he does not present any new insights at all; and he rejects all dissenting points of view as "defamatory" (*"persönlich diffamierend"*) (Z: 9).

A look at his combative foreword is revealing. He takes broad swipes at all who object to his paradigm, "from Windhuk to Auschwitz", accusing everybody who does not share his views of defamation of character. He also claims for himself a leading role within the wider fields of colonial and German historiography. In his discussion of the relationship between colonialism and Holocaust, he sees himself alongside of the likes of Hannah Arendt, Raphael Lemkin, Aimé Césaire, even W.E.B. DuBois. Elsewhere in the book he sees himself next to such luminous contemporaries as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Zygmunt Bauman (Z: 32, 256). His opponents he aligns summarily with the philosopher Georg F.W. Hegel (1770–1831), who was prominent among those who scorned Africa and famously denied that Africa had any history (Z: 35). One is perplexed by this kind of name dropping. Zimmerer takes the heated nature of the debate as a sign that his work has touched "a raw nerve" (*"einen wunden Punkt"*); the purely academic questions raised, he claims, have been obscured by the problem of German national identity.

To connect colonial history to the history of the Third Reich, he argues, makes it impossible to single out the latter as exceptional and hence to decouple it from the general course of German history. This decoupling, he maintains, had helped many to come to terms with the history of Germany. It is Zimmerer's insistence that the 12 years of national socialist history are inseparable from the general course of German history and are particularly closely linked to Germany's colonial experience that arouses the emotional responses to his work.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A critical evaluation of Zimmerer's position of 2007 was published as Jakob Zollmann, "Polemics and other arguments – a German debate reviewed", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 1, 2007: 109-130.

<sup>24</sup> "Wenn die Verbrechen des Dritten Reiches in Traditionen standen und Vorläufer hatten, die über den Antisemitismus und die unmittelbare Vorgeschichte der Nazi-Herrschaft in der Weimarer Republik hinausgingen, dann konnte man die 12 Jahre de[r] Nazi-Herrschaft nicht mehr länger gleichsam aus der deutschen Geschichte herauspräparieren. Die strikte Scheidung der Geschichte des Dritten Reiches vom Rest der deutschen Geschichte hatte aber vielen geholfen, sich mit der deutschen Geschichte zu arrangieren. Dies in Frage gestellt zu haben, erklärt zumindest die Emotionen, die meine Argumente weckten" (Z: 10).

This argument is questionable, however. Who actually wants to separate the Nazi era from German history, single it out as exceptional? For decades already, modern German historiography has made significant efforts to unravel and understand the roots of National Socialism.<sup>25</sup> Helmut Bley, the eminent historian of German colonialism, pointed to the roots of the national socialist era in the German colonial experience 30 years ago.<sup>26</sup>

Zimmerer, however, implies (wrongly) that it was *he* who first proposed this and pioneered a new historiographic paradigm in German history. It is *he* that put a stop to the practice of isolating the 12 years of National Socialism from the rest of German history. With *his* fact-based arguments *he* makes it impossible for those 12 years to be treated separately any longer, to which his opponents react with defamatory attacks, as if *he* had touched the raw nerve of their German national identity. But this is a delusion also found in his essays (cf. Z: 41).

His appraisal of his own doctoral dissertation, in which he claims to have established as fact ("*nachgewiesen*") German colonial policies of subjugation and expropriation (Z: 9), is also unsettling, as he creates the impression that he was the first person to have substantiated this. He simply overlooks a long line of specialists on African matters who have researched and written on the topic before him: Horst Drechsler, Helmut Bley, Peter H. Katjavivi, Jan Bart Gewalt, Tilman Dederling or Gesine Krüger are just a few names that come to mind here.<sup>27</sup> In the wider context of historiography many names could be mentioned, prominent amongst which would be Christopher Bayly.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. e.g. Thomas Nipperdey's question about the connection between Wilhelminian society, its alleged "Untertanengeist", and National Socialism (Thomas Nipperdey, "War die Wilhelminische Gesellschaft eine Untertanen-Gesellschaft?", in: idem, *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, München, Beck, 1986 [1985]: 172-185).

<sup>26</sup> "Die deutsche Kolonialgeschichte ist deshalb auch unerledigt, weil sie die Erinnerung daran wecken kann, daß [...] in dieser Gesellschaft gewalttätige Traditionen vorhanden sind, die sich nicht auf den 'Dämon' Hitler reduzieren lassen, sondern die in sozusagen 'normalen' Zeiten [...] sich vollzogen" (Helmut Bley, "Unerledigte deutsche Kolonialgeschichte", in: Entwicklungspolitische Korrespondenz, (ed.), *Deutscher Kolonialismus. Materialien zur Hundertjahrfeier 1984*, Hamburg, Gesellschaft für Entwicklungspolitische Bildungsarbeit, 1983, quoted in Melber, "Wir": viii; Melber, "Kontinuitäten": 110).

<sup>27</sup> Zimmerer's claim seems particularly unsettling given the fact that only two years before two authors dealt with the issue of "Herero Genocide" explicitly on a historiographic basis: Gesine Krüger and Tilman Dederling. The latter pointed out: "Since Horst Drechsler and Helmut Bley published their studies of German colonialism in Namibia in the 1960s, scholars have continued to ask whether or not the mass killings of the Herero amounted to genocide. [...] Were, then, the mass killings in South West Africa a crude prequel to Nazi industrial extermination? If one searches for similarities, instead of a neat line of historical continuity, the German-Herero war more closely resembles the actions of German soldiery on its eastern front during the Second World War, rather than the specificity of Nazi death camps." (Tilman Dederling, "'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 (War and Genocide I)*, New York, Berghahn, 1999: 205-222 [216 f.].)

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Malden, MA, Blackwell, 2004, concluding his book with a chapter on the "annihilation of native people" from Siberia to the Amazon.

In fact, and this is what is so disappointing, Zimmerer has nothing new to say. It is probably for this reason that he seeks to justify this edited collection of previously published articles. This he does with self-praise and by admonishing those who disagree with him. He argues that while his detractors base their arguments on one short article of his in which he described the Herero war as genocide, the great body of his work has been widely published in academic journals and in compilations on German, African and, more generally, world history. He goes on to argue that his work has not really been fully appreciated and that he therefore feels that it is necessary to make available his more important articles in one volume. That is laudable, yet not really credible, since two of the articles previously appeared in the reputable *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* while the others were all published where they would be accessible to a broad readership and not in some obscure samizdat pamphlets. The subtext here is that German historians are guilty of parochialism; of simply not taking notice of what is published in the field. He does so openly in the article "Nationalsozialismus post-colonial" (Z: 13f.). This reviewer, however, thinks that the reasons for the republication of the articles should be sought elsewhere.

That something is incongruent in Zimmerer's argument is immediately obvious to the reader. He draws a sharp contrast between the emotional German (negative) reaction and the highly positive international response to his "postcolonial interpretation of the Holocaust" (*"postkoloniale Interpretation des Holocaust"*) (Z: 9). Yet his own quotations and his success in Germany attest to the contrary. When he complains on the one hand of being a victim of German sensibilities on the issue of national identity, while claiming on the other that the attempt to vilify him met broad resistance from inside and outside the discipline (Z. 33)<sup>29</sup> it is hard to know what to believe.

Zimmerer has been quite successful in Germany with his approach and his insistence on "postcolonial interpretation of the Holocaust"; his work has been made accessible to a wide audience in a range of German newspapers.<sup>30</sup> This is no small feat. Aside from this, in 2011 he was appointed to the chair of the African History at the University of Hamburg's History Department. This is remarkable since he had not published a second book, nor had he to endure the rigour of the *Habilitation*, a formal and public examination of a second book, on a different topic and era from that of the PhD. dissertation. Even though this requirement has been handled less strictly in recent years, a quick look at the *curricula vitae* of all other professors of African history in Germany indicates that the overwhelming majority of them have written at least two monographs before their appointment. Zimmerer, on the other hand, has published

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<sup>29</sup> He refers "for example" (*etwa*) to Christoph Marx, Henning Melber und Reinhart Kößler.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Zimmerer's reference to publications in the German Newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Z: 14 FN 2); "Das lange, das nicht beendete Jahrhundert der Völkermorde. Die historische Genozidforschung versucht, typische Züge des Ungeheuerlichen zu bestimmen: Zum Stand ihrer Debatten", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (20 January, 2004); "Rassenkrieg gegen die Herero. Südwafrika 1904 bis 1908: Der erste deutsche Völkermord", *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (10 January, 2004); "Keine Geiseln der Geschichte. Deutsche Kolonialherrschaft ist bloß eine Episode, denken viele. Das Dritte Reich zeigt: Dauer sagt nichts über Intensität", *Die tageszeitung* (10 January, 2004).



almost exclusively articles on the genocide in GSWA and its connection to twentieth century German history.<sup>31</sup> The point is that he was appointed to his professorship because of his standing as a prominent historian and interpreter of the colonial genocide and its relation to the Holocaust. Thus he cannot claim that he has been sidelined in Germany.

## Defamations, continuities and the singularity of the Holocaust

Zimmerer has three aims in this collection of articles. Firstly, the Herero War is to be understood to constitute the first genocide committed by Germans; secondly he wishes to demonstrate the colonial character of Hitler's exterminatory war in Eastern Europe (1941–45) and thirdly he wants to make evident the manifold connections and structural similarities between National Socialism and German colonialism.

However, in the first article "Plädoyer zur Globalisierung der deutschen Gewaltgeschichte" ("Plea for a globalisation of the German history of violence", published in 2009) which should be read as an opening statement, there are few signs of these aims. One is reminded of Sebastian Conrad's title "Plädoyer für eine transnationale Perspektive auf die deutsche Geschichte" (2002).<sup>32</sup> However, whereas Conrad focused on new perspectives and constructively developed patterns for more multifaceted research on German history Zimmerer's argumentation is structurally defensive; and his defence takes the form of accusations against those who disagree with him. The article can be read as a response, if not revenge. He speaks of "intentionally distorted depiction of [his] arguments" (Z: 15) which does not "shy away from personal defamation nor colonial apology" (Z: 31). On the one hand, he assumes that this is due to "professional compulsion" (*Zwänge derunft*), on the other hand he ventures an explanation that seems to touch upon the great question of world history: "the superiority of the Western world". "Especially in a time that propagates anew – after 9/11 and the subsequent war against terror – a Western mission to civilize, critique of colonialism is no longer en vogue [...] this context of world politics helps to explain why any connection between colonialism and National Socialism is rejected so vehemently" (Z: 33).<sup>33</sup> In such sentences one recognizes what Dieter Langewiesche meant when he

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<sup>31</sup> See <[http://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/personal/schriftenverzeichnis\\_jz.pdf](http://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/personal/schriftenverzeichnis_jz.pdf)> [accessed 12 November, 2013]; see Wehler, *Kampfsituation*: 145.

<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Conrad, "Doppelte Marginalisierung. Plädoyer für eine transnationale Perspektive auf die deutsche Geschichte", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28, 2002: 145-169; idem, "Double Marginalization. A Plea for a Transnational Perspective on German History", in: Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, New York, Berghahn, 2009: 52-76.

<sup>33</sup> "Gerade zu einer Zeit, in der nach 9/11 und dem damit verbundenen Krieg gegen den Terror eine westliche Sendungsmission neu propagiert wird, ist Kritik am Kolonialismus nicht länger en vogue. [...] Dieser weltpolitische Kontext hilft die Vehemenz verstehen, mit der jeder Zusammenhang zwischen Kolonialismus und Nationalsozialismus zurückgewiesen wird" (Z: 33).

pointed out that the “controversial discussion” about a possible path “from Windhuk to Auschwitz” was “not always conducted in a matter of fact way.”<sup>34</sup>

In this review pertinent topics are analysed rather than the individual chapters, because these overlap to quite a degree as Zimmerer himself admits. (Z: 11). Mildly put, this is an understatement as he copied and pasted whole sections of text, including the footnotes, from one article into another; cf. e.g. 252=258; 56=272f; 174=198; 263=333; 250=269; sometimes there are even repetitions within the same article, cf. e.g. 32, 37; 270, 274. Proper editing would have weeded this out and certainly made the publication a much better book.

### **The German-Herero War as the “first German genocide” and the colonial nature of Germany’s exterminatory war in Eastern Europe (1941–45)**

Zimmerer starts his deliberations on this topic with the colonial wars against Ovaherero and Nama of 1904 to 1908. Like others before him he terms the war “the first genocide of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century”.<sup>35</sup> He characterises German colonial warfare as the “ultimate breach of taboo, one not only contemplating the complete eradication of ethnic groups, but also of implementing it”. As such it was first implemented “in the colonies” (Z: 276).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Herero genocide, he argues, was of formative influence on the exterminatory warfare of Hitler’s *Wehrmacht* in Eastern Europe (1941–45), in what he terms “the largest colonial war of conquest in history”.<sup>37</sup> Conflating the war in Eastern Europe with the Holocaust, Zimmerer then practically defines the Herero genocide as a precursor of the Holocaust, a “*Vorläufer des Holocausts*”. This, he argues, is shown not only by the bureaucratisation of the process of annihilation, but also in the psychological disposition of Germans towards the state-orchestrated mass-murder. According to Zimmerer, the colonial wars of 1904–08 resonated widely among the German public; this is demonstrated by, amongst others things, the highly successful German colonial literature on the war and the settlers. Personal experiences of colonial soldiers and settlers in GSWA, as well as other personal and institutional continuities resulted in what he calls “*Speicherung*”, retention of colonial knowledge, in addition to the general enthusiasm for the colonies among the German population which fired the collective imagination through films, fiction, and monuments. This resulted in a pool of cultural practices, a “*Reservoir kultureller Praktiken*” (Z: 42; 252; 277-287) from which the Nazis could then draw. Zimmerer however chooses to ignore the fact that the German

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<sup>34</sup> Dieter Langewiesche, “Rezension von: Susanne Kuß: Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen. Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Berlin: Links 2010”, *sehpunkte*, 11 (10), 2011, <<http://www.sehpunkte.de/2011/10/20655.html>> [accessed 9 July, 2012] “nicht immer sachlich geführt worden”.

<sup>35</sup> Dederling, “German-Herero War”: 81.

<sup>36</sup> “ultimate[n] Tabubruch, die Vernichtung ganzer Ethnien nicht nur zu denken, sondern tatsächlich danach zu handeln” (Z: 276); almost identical wording: Z: 171.

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, “Annihilation in Africa. The ‘Race War’ in German South West Africa (1904–1908) and its Significance for a Global History of Genocide”, *GHI Bulletin*, 37, 2005: 51-57 (54).

population only very reluctantly embraced colonialism.<sup>38</sup> The “tradition of a German anti-colonialism” does not figure in his work at all.<sup>39</sup>

When examining the impact of German colonialism, Zimmerer seeks to understand the Herero genocide and the Holocaust in the context of global processes. Herero genocide and Holocaust are part of the “darker side of modernity” and he sides with those who see National Socialism as a “logical conclusion of a European culture of annihilation and expropriation” (Z: 16).<sup>40</sup> By following this line of thought the “war in the East” can be liberated from its “ahistorical position” (“*Geschichtslosigkeit*”) (Z: 18). Failure to see the colonial dimension to the Nazi’s war in the East he considers eurocentric (Z: 345). This would allow one to understand why the expulsion and murder of “Jews and Slavs might *not* have been perceived as a breach of taboo”.<sup>41</sup> The expropriation and colonisation of the Ovahereros’ lands are likened to the colonisation *plans* for Eastern Europe with the concomitant resettlement and mass murder of large sections of the East European population that, he says, could be put into the context of colonial settler history, including those of the USA and Australia. Zimmerer claims to analyse the German war in the East with, as he calls it, “the instruments of colonial historiography” (“*Instrumentarium der Kolonialgeschichtsschreibung*”) (Z: 259). This may seem ‘creative’. However, the creation of such terms cannot hide the fact that nowhere in the articles under review here are these “instruments” clearly discernible. Are there any research “instruments” that distinguish *colonial* historiography from any other? It appears that the most Zimmerer has to offer are a number of quotations from Hitler, Himmler or other Nazi officials using the word ‘colonial’, ‘native’, etc. (e.g. Z: 262f.). In advancing this argument, however, Zimmerer repeats the one dimensional view that ignores the expansionist designs of other powers, in much the same way as other authors who have worked on the “colonial expansion to the East”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For a cursory overview on this issue cf. Dirk van Laak, “Deutschland in Afrika. Der Kolonialismus und seine Nachwirkungen”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 4, 2005: 3-11 (6).

<sup>39</sup> Berman, “German Colonialism”: 30; see also: Benedikt Stuchtey, *Die europäische Expansion und ihre Feinde*, München, Oldenbourg, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Josep R. Llobera, “The Dark Side of Modernity”, *Critique of Anthropology*, 8, 1988: 71-76; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2011; cf. also Birthe Kundrus, “Entscheidung für den Völkermord? Einleitende Überlegungen zu einem historiographischen Problem”, *Mittelweg* 36, 6, 2006: 4-17 (5).

<sup>41</sup> “Juden und Slawen [...] vielleicht gar nicht als Tabubruch wahrgenommen wurde” (Z: 69, 276).

<sup>42</sup> Jan C. Behrends, “Review of: Nelson, Robert L. (ed.): Germans, Poland, and colonial expansion to the East. 1850 through the present. Hampshire 2009”, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 2 February, 2011, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=13499>> [accessed 12 November, 2012].

## The relationship between and a “structural similarity” of German colonialism and National Socialism

Zimmerer is chiefly concerned with the comparison between colonialism and the holocaust.<sup>43</sup> He investigates the roots of the political ideas of race and space, seeking to explain the development of “Germany’s first colonialism” (in GSWA) into Germany’s “second colonialism” in the European east (Z: 221).<sup>44</sup> This, which he terms “archaeology of genocidal thought”, is necessary to establish the basis for comparative genocide studies. An important aspect of this archaeology is an analysis of the channels through which colonialism and the Holocaust were connected; he calls these “*Rezeptionskanäle*”, by which he means the *personal* (colonial) experiences of those who were actively involved in events in GSWA and later under National Socialism. He admits that this unique “*Rezeptionskanal*” is also most difficult to identify (Z: 278).

However, if the personal experience of individuals serving both the colonial and the national socialist state is taken to be the medium, the actual path or transmission channel from colony to European East, then it is important to decide which individuals with a personal colonial connection should be selected to prove (or disprove) Zimmerer’s claim. There are those former colonial officials that continued their careers in the national socialist regime, and there are those who identified with the democratic Weimar Republic and had little influence under National Socialism. Zimmerer focuses on members of the *Freikorps* militia as they were mainly responsible for the destabilisation of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. However, surely not all of them had colonial experience, and what about the thousands of other colonial officials and settlers who were not involved in Nazi rule over Eastern Europe? A few names suffice to show the weakness of Zimmerer’s argument: The much quoted Ritter von Epp (1868–1946) was a lieutenant during the Herero war in 1904, after 1918 he was a leader of the *Freikorps* militia, and during the 1930s he was promoted to be the NSDAP colonial expert. Benjamin Madley described him as the “direct human conduit through which German South West African ideas and methods flowed into the highest echelons of the Third Reich”.<sup>45</sup> But can one really compare Ritter von Epp with Wilhelm Solf (1862–1936), former Governor of Samoa and Imperial Secretary of the Colonial Office, who was Weimar Germany’s first Secretary of Foreign Affairs and continued to serve the democracy as Germany’s Ambassador to Japan? While von Epp was shadow Minister of Colonial Affairs

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<sup>43</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, “Holocaust und Kolonialismus. Beitrag zu einer Archäologie des genozidalen Gedankens”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 51, 2003: 1098-1119; idem, “Colonial Genocide and the Holocaust. Towards an Archeology of Genocide”, in: A. Dirk Moses, (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society. Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, New York, Berghahn, 2004: 49-76; reprinted in Henning Melber and John Y. Jones, (eds.), *Revisiting the Heart of Darkness. Explorations into Genocide and Other Forms of Mass Violence. 60 Years after the UN Convention*, Uppsala, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> “vom ersten deutschen Kolonialismus zum zweiten” (Z: 221).

<sup>45</sup> Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz”: 451.

in Nazi Germany,<sup>46</sup> Walther Rathenau, who was in charge of colonial economic policy, became Minister of Finances and later Foreign Affairs until his murder by *Freikorps* terrorists. Bernhard Dernburg, Secretary for the Colonies until 1910, was Minister of Finance and German Vice-Chancellor in 1919, under the social-democrat Philipp Scheidemann. The *Bezirksamtmann* of Windhuk, Wilhelm Külz (1875–1948), who was instrumental in shaping GSWA's municipal self-government after 1908 became Minister of the Interior in 1926 and was later among those who established the Liberal Party in the Soviet Occupied Zone in 1947.<sup>47</sup> The list of former colonial officials who worked for a democratic Germany continues; to give but one concluding example Franz Kempner (1879–1945), *Bezirksamtmann* in German East Africa, returned to Germany with General Lettow-Vorbeck in 1919 and rose to the position of State Secretary of the Chancellory in 1926. His contact with the conspirators in July 20<sup>th</sup> assassination attempt on Hitler led to his execution in March 1945. Considering these counter-examples, there is little value in demonstrating personal continuities from colonialism to National Socialism when the opposite can be demonstrated with reference to the same group of people.

As historian Mary Fulbrook has underlined: “It is by no means the case that that exposure to violence must always have ‘brutalizing’ consequences”.<sup>48</sup> Who would claim that General von Trotha's successor, Colonel Bernhard Deimling (1853–1944), who renounced war as a means of politics during the Weimar Republic, had acquired his pacifist convictions during the war against the Nama?<sup>49</sup> Others, however, are supposed to have trained in that same war what they were to implement so effectively forty years later?<sup>50</sup> The personal level, which according to Zimmerer also includes “networks” (of ex-colonial officers?) and teacher-pupil relations (which he does not further elaborate), is thus analytically inconclusive.<sup>51</sup>

While others have pointed out that “colonialism and race simply did not mean the same thing to liberals and Nazis”,<sup>52</sup> Zimmerer insists on “startling similarities between

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<sup>46</sup> Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, *Imperialismus vom Grünen Tisch. Deutsche Kolonialpolitik zwischen wirtschaftlicher Ausbeutung und ‘zivilisatorischen’ Bemühungen*, Berlin, Links, 2009: 468.

<sup>47</sup> Armin Behrendt, *Wilhelm Külz: Aus dem Leben eines Suchenden*, Berlin, Der Morgen, 1968.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives. Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011: 30.

<sup>49</sup> Kirsten Zirkel, *Vom Militaristen zum Pazifisten: General Berthold von Deimling – eine politische Biographie*, Essen, Klartext, 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. also Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*: 26, on the example of Hans Paasche, the “militant pacifist” who had been a *Schutztruppe* officer during the Maji Maji war in German East Africa: “Paasche had drawn his own lessons from his experience of violence in the German colonies which were very different from those of many others in his generation.”

<sup>51</sup> It is worth remembering the numbers involved. In 1913 there were roughly 430 officers in the *Schutztruppe*, which is roughly 1% of all German officers. Cf. Wolfgang Petter, “Das Offizierskorps der deutschen Kolonialtruppen 1889–1918”, in: Hanns Hubert Hofmann, (ed.), *Das deutsche Offizierskorps 1860–1960*, Boppard, Boldt, 1980: 163–174 (166).

<sup>52</sup> Güttel, *German Expansionism*: 17.

colonialism and National Socialism", including parallels in planning and in the justification of the extermination of 'other' life (Z: 272, 277). Both colonial and national socialist ideologies of race and space, he infers, were inherently genocidal, e.g. the physical annihilation of Ovaherero and Nama were the goals from the outset (Z: 22). As the readers of this journal know from the article by Matthias Häußler "From destruction to extermination", this "teleological" assumption is erroneous. Häußler's careful analysis of a multitude of documents from 1904 has demonstrated that an "over-intentionalist and teleologically minded approach" to the war against Ovaherero such as it is advanced by Zimmerer and others "ignore[s] the processual nature of the violence perpetrated": "The extermination of the Ovaherero was not originally envisioned by the military command, but developed gradually as an option."<sup>53</sup>

For Zimmerer, however, the colonial wars in GSWA not only served as a "provider of ideas", an "*Ideengeber*", but also as the concrete link between colonial violence and the Nazi policies of extermination (Z: 171). He goes on to argue that colonial genocides are not really different from the genocides of the Nazis. The former he categorises as less structured and bureaucratised.<sup>54</sup> "Whatever seems exceptional, if viewed from a narrow European position, turns out to be [...] a variant of earlier, colonial practices"<sup>55</sup>. He deems the national socialist crimes the most radical manifestation in the history of genocide. The main difference between the two, he maintains, lies in the different roles of the state. Colonial and Nazi genocides do not differ fundamentally in structure but merely in degree, depending on the "state's stage of historical development". (Z: 276; 171; 159; 68).

This sounds quite Hegelian. It creates an impression of historical consequentiality, as is also evidenced in the title of his 2004 article "Die Geburt des 'Ostlandes' aus dem Geist des Kolonialismus". The title implies causality between the two. In the article itself he

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<sup>53</sup> Matthias Häußler, "From destruction to extermination: Genocidal escalation in Germany's war against the Herero, 1904", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 10, 2011: 55-81 (56; 63; 76). Häußler summarizes Zimmerer, "Annihilation in Africa", 52f. as being "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" (p. 63 FN 36); cf. Matthias Häußler and Trutz von Trotha, "Brutalisierung 'von unten'. Kleiner Krieg, Entgrenzung der Gewalt und Genozid im kolonialen Deutsch-Südwestafrika", *Mittelweg* 36, 21 (3), 2012: 57-89 (85). See also: Trutz von Trotha, "Genozidaler Pazifizierungskrieg. Soziologische Anmerkungen zum Konzept des Genozids am Beispiel des Kolonialkriegs in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1904–1907", *Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung*, 4, 2003: 30-57.

<sup>54</sup> On this problem cf. Dierk Walter, "Kein Pardon. Zum Problem der Kapitulation im Imperialkrieg", *Mittelweg* 36, 21 (3), 2012: 90-111 (107 FN 93): "Rassismus ist als primäre Determinante brutaler Praktiken in Imperialkriegen oft überschätzt worden." Walter refers explicitly to Jürgen Zimmerer and the "jüngere deutsche Geschichtsschreibung, die die Gewalttätigkeit deutscher Kolonialkriegführung primär als Ausfluss rassistischer Motive und damit als direkten Vorläufer der [...] Vernichtungspolitik des Dritten Reiches verstanden hat." Referring to research on the colonial warfare in German East Africa (Bührer 2011: 269-275) Walter considers it "plausibel, dass Rassismus eine Funktion, nicht eine Vorbedingung der Frontiersituation war."

<sup>55</sup> "Manches, was unter dem verengten – europäischen – Blickwinkel einzigartig erscheint, erweist sich als [...] Variante früherer, im kolonialen Kontext bereits angewandter Praktiken" (Z: 288, 220).

argues with more caution. Yet, the suggested causality remains prominent, as is evident in the equally unfortunate title of the volume under review here: “Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz”. Interestingly, he now deems it necessary to insert a question mark at the end, although he does not handle the subject as one handles an open question, weighing up pros and cons. His concession that it is not possible to use German colonial experience as a monocausal explanation for Nazi crimes (Z: 69, 171) is little more than a fig leaf, repeated only as a matter-of-course, as a serious historian would never use ‘monocausality’ in his or her analysis. The same is true of his statement that it would be trivial to say that colonial genocides *cannot* be equated with the Nazi genocide. However, comparing the two, he argues, makes sense (Z: 21). Thus his insistence on the validity of his “postcolonial” approach to explain the Holocaust (this reviewer failed to find a distinction between “the war in the East” and the Holocaust in Zimmerer’s articles which is unfortunate): “the murder of the Jews [...] would probably not have been thinkable and possible if the idea that ethnicities can simply be wiped out had not already existed and had not already been put into action.”<sup>56</sup> This causal approach and inherent linear logic is surprisingly reminiscent of Dirk Moses who “links the colonial genocides of the ‘racial century’ (1850–1950) and the Holocaust to a single modernization process of accelerating violence related to nation-building that commenced in the European colonial periphery and culminated in the Holocaust.”<sup>57</sup>

The linearity of the development (which now seems to replace causality) is explained by way of vague images: there is a “path that connects Windhuk with Auschwitz” (Z: 23). Yet, this path did not begin there, nor was it “the only possible path” (ibid.). It was not a “one-way street” either (Z: 252), as there were “many paths”. However, the one that came from the colonies “was not an unimportant side street” either (Z: 70).<sup>58</sup> The relativity and vagueness of such statements is hard to outmatch. However, they say nothing about the relationship between German colonialism and National Socialism.

### **No *Sonderweg* in the German colonies and no singularity of the Holocaust**

Zimmerer avoids the question of a possible *Sonderweg* in the German colonies, laid out at the beginning of this review essay, with a remarkable argumentative strategy: Given his postcolonial and global history focus he clearly states: “there is no German special path in the ‘race war’” (Z: 346). But he goes further: For him the assumption that the discussion about his thesis would be a new edition of the debate about the German “special path” is “germanocentric” (Z: 18). Having thus disqualified the question intellectually, he continues: “The striking and polemical formula of causality (and, related to it, the *Sonderweg*) is not adequate for the connection between colonial and national

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<sup>56</sup> Zimmerer, “Colonialism and the Holocaust”: 68; Z: 171; 276f.

<sup>57</sup> A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the ‘racial century’: genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36, 2002: 7–36 (7; 33).

<sup>58</sup> “einen Weg, der Windhuk [...] mit Auschwitz verbindet” (Z: 23); “einzig mögliche Weg” (ibid); “Einbahnstraße” (Z: 262); “war kein weitab gelegener Nebenpfad” (Z: 70).

socialist crimes" (Z: 23).<sup>59</sup> Intending to underline the irrelevance of the once important question Zimmerer uses, as one critic put it, "flawy"<sup>60</sup> vocabulary, but fails to explain why reference to the debate on the *Sonderweg* is "polemic" and what the consequences of this are from the perspective of global history? On the one hand, Zimmerer does not recognize a German colonial *Sonderweg*, but on the other hand he mentions the "prominent (*"herausgehobene"*) role of German colonialism" und "in particular" (*"im besonderen"*) of the "Herero- and Nama genocide" (Z: 346). He characterizes the latter as an "outstanding event in the global history of unleashing of violence" (Z: 69). This line of argument is contradictory. However, when it is in Zimmerer's interest to apply his postcolonial perspective on the Third Reich to show what "is not singular in history" (*"eben nicht einzigartig"*, Z: 25) – genocide, conquest, exploitation, "new ordering of space based on race" – then it becomes evident, based on the title of this book, that he targets the singularity of the Holocaust. Following a 'free-hand' "postcolonial" discussion of anti-Semitism, Zimmerer at least mentions that the "selection of the groups to be annihilated" under National Socialism appears "new" (*"neuartig"*, Z: 28). Nonetheless, what additional knowledge is gained from this central postcolonial idea that 'this has all happened before'? As we have seen, he advocates a comparison between "Windhuk und Auschwitz", but, despite the title, he only touches on it. The reader is also left with the question as to Zimmerer's *tertium comparationis*? The German perpetrators are barely analysed in his articles. Violence? Since Zimmerer is probably not interested in the banal characterisation of violence as an anthropological invariable, "From Windhuk to Auschwitz?" can be summarized as arguing that the Holocaust is *not* "singular in history".<sup>61</sup> The connection with the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s that was explicitly mentioned in Henning Melber's article on "continuities of total rule" again comes to mind.<sup>62</sup> And while Zimmerer (Z: 33), Christoph Marx and others insist that nobody had thus equated and relativised the Holocaust<sup>63</sup>, against which Birte Kundrus

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<sup>59</sup> "Zusammenhang zwischen kolonialen und nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen [...] die ebenso plakative wie polemische Formel von der Kausalität (und damit verbunden dem Sonderweg) nicht angemessen" (Z: 23); cf. Joël Kotek, "Le Génocide des Herero, Symptôme d'un *Sonderweg* Allemand?", *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah*, 189, 2008: 177-197.

<sup>60</sup> "wolkig", Birthe Kundrus, "Kontinuitäten, Parallelen, Rezeptionen. Überlegungen zur 'Kolonialisierung' des Nationalsozialismus", *WerkstattGeschichte*, 43, 2006: 45-62 (49). Cf. idem, "Continuities, parallels, receptions. Reflections on the 'colonization' of National Socialism", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 4, 2008: 25-46.

<sup>61</sup> *Die Holocaust Chronik*, München, Droener, 2002: 13. [engl. edition: *The Holocaust Chronicle*, Lincolnwood, Publication International, 2000]. Cf. Rolf Zimmermann, *Philosophie nach Auschwitz. Eine Neubestimmung von Moral in Politik und Gesellschaft*, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 2005: 243f.

<sup>62</sup> Melber, "Kontinuitäten": 92.

<sup>63</sup> Zollmann, "Polemics": 115; Christoph Marx, "Entsorgen und Entseuchen. Zur Diskussionskultur in der derzeitigen Historiographie – eine Polemik", in: Henning Melber, (ed.), *Genozid und Gedenken. Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/M., Brandes & Apsel, 2005: 141-161 (153); Henning Melber, "Ein deutscher Sonderweg? Einleitende Bemerkungen zum Umgang mit dem Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika", in: idem, (ed.), *Genozid und Gedenken. Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte der*



warns,<sup>64</sup> the 'comparison' is nowadays seen as academically and politically uncontroversial.<sup>65</sup>

Zimmerer adheres to the conviction that the Holocaust is not singular which he explicates in his article "Colonial genocide?" There he argues in favour of leaving behind the "distinction between the Holocaust and other genocides" (Z: 202f.). In line with his characterization of the "war in the East" as colonial war he summarizes thus: "there were only colonial genocides" (Z: 220) – and the Holocaust was one of them. On the question why "singularity" has become an issue in the first place he offers staggering insights: On the one hand, he considers (tautologically as it is) "all cases of genocide [...] singular in important points" (Z: 200f., 146). He deems the question, on the other hand, "extra-academic" ("außerakademisch") and develops his argumentation against the "thesis of singularity" based on Dirk Moses,<sup>66</sup> that is, at times, frightening: "For historico-philosophical and biographical reasons many historians were barely able to admit to a comparative approach to the problem of genocide". Zimmerer points to the historians Yehuda Bauer und Steven T. Katz and mentions that the "trauma of the Holocaust is expressed among survivors by a sacralisation of the victims" (Z: 199).<sup>67</sup> But what is the purpose of such a vulgar-psychological reduction of the deliberations on the singularity of the Holocaust to the biographies or religious background of historians? Zimmerer does not explicitly state it, but these names are clearly Jewish; thus, is his argument that Jews are for "biographical reasons" unable to analyse genocides comparatively? Is it thus unnecessary to look into the arguments that speak for a singularity of the Holocaust, because they were advanced by Jews? And why is it "extra-academic" to concede that the Holocaust is "unprecedented because it was the planned, premeditated, political decision of a powerful state, which mobilised all its resources to annihilate the entire Jewish populace"?<sup>68</sup>

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*Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/M., Brandes & Apsel, 2005: 13-21 (14, footnote 3): "Eine 'Gleichsetzung' die, wie Christoph Marx in seiner 'fundierten Polemik' betont, gar niemand vorgenommen hatte."

<sup>64</sup> Birthe Kundrus, "Grenzen der Gleichsetzung – Kolonialverbrechen und Vernichtungspolitik", *iz3w*, 275, March 2004: 30-33 (31).

<sup>65</sup> Birthe Kundrus and Henning Strotbek, "'Genozid'. Grenzen und Möglichkeiten eines Forschungsbegriffs – ein Literaturbericht", *Neue Politische Literatur*, 51, 2006: 397-423 (408): "[Die] Theorie, wonach der Mord an den europäischen Juden unvergleichbar sei [wird] inzwischen von der Mehrheit der Forschung abgelehnt." See e.g.: A. Dirk Moses: "The fate of Blacks and Jews. A response to Jeffrey Herf", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, 2008: 269-287; see also below.

<sup>66</sup> A. Dirk Moses, "Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36, 2002: 7-36 (10-19); see e.g. p. 14: "Certainly, Bauer has made a career not only of policing the compound around the Holocaust, but also of regulating its meaning for Jewish self-understanding."

<sup>67</sup> "[D]as Trauma des Holocaust [äußere sich] bei Überlebenden in einer Sakralisierung der Opfer" (Z: 199); on this issue considerably more nuanced: Kundrus and Strotbek, "Genozid": 408. On Katz see: Zimmermann, *Philosophie*: 244-246.

<sup>68</sup> Robert S. Wistrich, *Hitler und der Holocaust*, Berlin, BTV, 2003: 28: "beispiellos, weil es sich dabei um die geplante, vorsätzliche, politische Entscheidung eines mächtigen Staates handelte, der alle seine Ressourcen mobilisierte, um das gesamte jüdische Volk zu vernichten."

Zimmerer laments that his “postcolonial perspective on the mass killings of the Third Reich [has been] repeatedly defamed with the allusion to other European states whose colonial experiences were much longer than Germany’s, but which did not commit crimes comparable to those of the Third Reich.” He dismisses this “simple argumentation” by saying that it confuses “continuity with causality”. Furthermore, the “postcolonial perspective” would not pose the question “why” but “how”. He is interested in the strategies of legitimisation and the traditions of imperial programmes of conquest (Z: 29f.). Aside from the fact that other historians applying the ‘postcolonial perspective’ do pose the ‘why-question’,<sup>69</sup> it can be concluded from the aforementioned that for Zimmerer the “how” of the legitimisations of genocides and their traditions means that the Holocaust is not singular. Consequently, there was no “special path [*Sonderweg*] in German colonialism”. The bracketing of the term genocide subsumes everything, since ‘it has all happened before’.

By ridding himself of the debate on the special path with his global history-postcolonial device (Z: 346) (without, however, being able to relinquish the “particular” or “special” of the Herero War in his argumentation) and by pointing to some further strands of tradition that *also* played a role in the politics of annihilation (Z: 23), Zimmerer succeeds in remaining vague. In order to avoid answers, he refuses to pose the central questions, but declares them to be irrelevant. However, what are the continuities of German history which generated the eliminatory anti-Semitism? How is the pre-history of the Shoah to be related and analysed? What are the vanishing points of the development leading to the Shoah? What is the relation between continuity and specificity? Are these questions “germanocentric”? Auschwitz was a specifically German establishment; reference to global settler colonialism does not help to clarify the issue.

When Zimmerer seems surprised that his dissertation on the history of GSWA was received “mainly favourably” (Z: 9) while his articles have sparked massive criticism, then the differing ways of their ‘crafting’ should be pointed out. The dissertation was drawn from the original sources; many of the articles reviewed here, however, are characterized by – as formulated by historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler – “airy evidence”.<sup>70</sup> In particular once Zimmerer leaves the familiar terrain of GSWA’s history and seeks to explain developments under National Socialism, the empirical base becomes increasingly thin.

The composition of the twelve articles is rather monotonous: There is a limited stock of quotations which are used repeatedly. Most prominent among them is the order of General von Trotha of 2 October 1904 (Z: 51; 168; 177; 274; 342), which is juxtaposed with an order of Heinrich Himmler of 1941 “to drive Jewish women into the [Pripjet]

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. Moses, “Blockages”: 35: “Why, then, did Germany produce the Holocaust?”. In general on this question e.g.: Götz Aly, *Warum die Deutschen? Warum die Juden? – Gleichheit, Neid und Rassenhass 1800–1933*, Frankfurt/M., Fischer, 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Transnationale Geschichte – der neue Königsweg historischer Forschung?”, in: Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz, (eds.), *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006: 161-174 (164): “luftige Beweisführung”.

swamps" (Z: 67; 276; 343).<sup>71</sup> The argumentation switches thus from paragraph to paragraph between examples from the colonies (overwhelmingly GSWA) and the German war of annihilation in the "East". The problem with this treatment of sources seems to be that Zimmerer nourishes a preformed idea, considering only what he thinks could corroborate it. Following this presentation of sources the author refers to "parallels" and "similarities" ("Ähnlichkeiten") (Z: 249) between the objects of his comparison; even though it is noted that the relationship between the cases is not "monocausal". Why 12 articles were necessary for such a conclusion remains a mystery. There is no argumentative progress recognizable within the set of articles which were written from 2001 to 2009. Zimmerer did not take into consideration constructive criticism of his "postcolonial" reading of National Socialism. It is also unfortunate that Zimmerer's most cited author is Zimmerer himself (e.g. Z: 22; 24; 223). This is problematic because, firstly, it tends to result in a circular 'method'; and secondly, because it can lead to the many other authors who have worked before him on the subjects mentioned being overlooked. It is incomprehensible why neither a bibliography nor an index was included; thus the impression remains of an anthology compiled with haste and little effort.

### Critique on the "postcolonial interpretation of the Holocaust"

The following chapter is intended to disprove Zimmerer's assertion of a "want of any substantive discussion" of his theses by other historians. He generally gives no details of the reactions to his "postcolonial interpretation of the Holocaust" which he sees as "defamatory". He merely refers to "numerous sweeping judgments" among which he saw only two "serious attempts to rebut" his interpretations (Z: 33). For reasons of space a cursory overview of this critique will thus be limited to four authors Birthe Kundrus, Robert Gerwarth, Stephan Malinowski, and Susanne Kuß.<sup>72</sup>

#### Limits of the concepts of 'continuity' and 'genocide'. The criticism of Birthe Kundrus

Following a series of articles by Kundrus from 2004 onwards criticizing his thesis of "continuity" Zimmerer asked: "Is it really necessary and historically justified to trivialize colonialism in order to refute any connection with the Third Reich?" He also reproached his critics for not being "historians of Africa" a fact that, in his interpretation, is at the root of their distorted and unclear perspective (Z: 35).

However, this hardly applies to Kundrus given her research interests and her publications. Her book *Moderne Imperialisten* (2003) examines colonial policies (and

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<sup>71</sup> On the limited relevance of this argument see: Gerwarth and Malinowski, "Holocaust": 451, 463.

<sup>72</sup> For a research overview see also: Thomas Kühne, "Colonialism and the Holocaust: continuities, causations, and complexities", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 15, 2013: 339-362; Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, "The Pre-History of the Holocaust? The *Sonderweg* and *Historikerstreik* Debates and the Abject Colonial Past", *Central European History*, 41, 2008: 477-503.

fantasies) in GSWA. Interestingly, her research is based on exactly the same archival sources in Berlin and Windhoek<sup>73</sup> as Zimmerer's dissertation (to which he constantly refers to in his articles) where he also puts an emphasis on German colonial policies (as opposed to African [re]actions). So, what makes him a "historian of Africa" and why is Kundrus not? After all Zimmerer writes about National Socialism from a "postcolonial perspective" without ever having researched the period 1933–45 in Germany and Europe, while Kundrus is a renowned historian on this issue.<sup>74</sup>

Kundrus explicitly recognizes the "potential of an analysis informed by colonial history for a better understanding of the NS-despotism". She bemoans, however, the "flawed discourse on 'connections', 'parallels', traditions', 'similarities', 'commonalities'" which raises more questions than it answers. Traditions of violence are "very difficult" to determine. "What are the mechanisms of the transmission of experiences of violence" from 1904 to 1945? And what exactly is meant with the term "continuity" (Z: 327, 329) which is so central to the "postcolonial interpretation of the Holocaust"?<sup>75</sup>

Instead of asking in which historical contexts precisely concrete transfers took place, the term 'colonial' is used as a mere label and not as an instrument of analysis. The same is true for the claims about 'continuity', a term arbitrarily used but never precisely defined. Thus the function and "relevance of colonial references under National Socialism" remain unclear. According to Kundrus one might concede 'continuities' in the field of national socialist colonial planning for Africa<sup>76</sup> or in the "utilization of the reservoir of colonial experience and institutions" with regard to the economic exploitation of Eastern Europe. However, here too it is important to recognize: "no continuity without change". Colonial concepts were "quoted, but estranged from their original context."<sup>77</sup>

When Zimmerer spoke of a "consensus attained among historians of Africa that the war of the German Empire against the Herero constituted a genocide" (Z: 35), Kundrus had

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<sup>73</sup> Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten. Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien*, Köln, Böhlau, 2003: 298-301.

<sup>74</sup> Birthe Kundrus and Beate Meyer, (eds.), *Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland. Pläne. Praxis. Reaktionen 1938–1945*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2004; Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen. Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Hamburg, Christians, 1995; idem, "Der Holocaust. Die 'Volksgemeinschaft' als Verbrechensgemeinschaft?", in: Hans-Ulrich Thamer and Simone Erpel, (eds.), *Hitler und die Deutschen. Volksgemeinschaft und Verbrechen*, Dresden, Sandstein, 2010: 130-136; idem, "Regime der Differenz. Volkstumspolitische Inklusionen und Exklusionen im Warthegau und im Generalgouvernement 1939–1944", in: Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, (eds.), *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt/M., Fischer, 2009: 105-123.

<sup>75</sup> Kundrus, "Kontinuitäten", 62, 49f.: "Potential, das ein kolonialgeschichtlicher Interpretationsrahmen als Analyseinstrument für die NS-Gewaltherrschaft aufweist", "wolkige Rede von 'Verbindungen', 'Parallelen', 'Traditionen', 'Ähnlichkeiten', 'Gemeinsamkeiten'", "sehr schwer", "Was sind die Mechanismen der Weitergabe von Gewalterfahrungen".

<sup>76</sup> See on this issue: Karsten Linne, *Deutschland jenseits des Äquators – Die NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika*, Berlin, Links, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Kundrus, "Kontinuitäten": 61f.: "Nutzbarmachung eines kolonialen Erfahrungs- und Institutionenreservoirs", "keine Kontinuität ohne Wandel", "zitiert, ihrem ursprünglichen Kontext aber entfremdet".

already expressed her terminological unease with the term ‘genocide’ — without ‘trivializing’ the violence inflicted on the Herero.<sup>78</sup> She pointed out that among scholars opinions vary greatly on what constitutes genocide. With its focus on the *intention* of the perpetrator(s), the UN ‘Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide’ (9 December 1948; on which Zimmerer and others base their interpretations; Z: 145; 204) is considered by her a “hindrance” for further research.<sup>79</sup> A definition that focuses on the intention cannot cover situational genocides. This might be useful for questions relating to criminal prosecution; historians studying the causes of state-orchestrated mass violence, however, pose different questions, especially where structural comparisons are concerned. Kundrus thus asks whether the infamous “annihilation order” of General von Trotha can be taken as evidence of a particular “intention”. According to her the order is also proof that “the assumption is too simple that words could create the most brutal realities”. It seems necessary to ask whether the perpetrators themselves believe in “what they say”. Rather than focusing on intentions and ideologies, Kundrus, like many other authors, calls for the precise historical analysis of the course of “violence on the spot”. “Why do we find genocides happening in one place and what prevents such butchery elsewhere?”<sup>80</sup> Considering the great importance that Zimmerer attaches to the Herero War, Kundrus also asks what made this war in “GSWA so different from other colonial war?” Was it “indeed singular”?<sup>81</sup> Thus, there are either “many ways from Omdurman, Addis Abeba, Luzon or none to the national socialist orgies of violence”.<sup>82</sup> Most of all Kundrus pleads — based on the historical differences — for a continued understanding of the Holocaust as a

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<sup>78</sup> Kundrus, “Entscheidung”: 10, noting that “die deutsche Seite im Herero-Krieg weitgehend ungehemmt gegen ihre Opfer vorging”.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.: 4, 6. Taking the example of the Herero War, Häußler and Trotha similarly noted that the focus on the intention to perpetrate a genocide as argued by Zimmerer (Z: 53; 146; 178f.), Sarkin and others, can “no longer be maintained” (Matthias Häußler and Trutz von Trotha, “Brutalisierung ‘von unten’. Kleiner Krieg, Entgrenzung der Gewalt und Genozid im kolonialen Deutsch-Südwestafrika”, *Mittelweg* 36, 21 (3), 2012: 57-89 [57]). For an ‘intentional’ perspective see: A. Dirk Moses, “Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History”, in: idem, (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, Oxford, Berghahn, 2005: 3-48 (28-30).

<sup>80</sup> Kundrus, “Entscheidung”: 7, 17, 11. Isabel Hull recognizes Prussian military culture as the main reason for the excessive violence in GSWA. The concrete military context of the ‘failure’ of German troops during the battle of Waterberg — and not a particular racist intention of annihilation — had set in motion the cycle of violence. See also: Isabel V. Hull: *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: 5-90; idem, “The Measure of Atrocity. The German War against the Herero”, *GHI Bulletin*, 37, 2005: 39-44; idem: “The military campaign in German Southwest Africa, 1904 — 1907 and the genocide of the Herero and Nama”, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 4, 2008: 7-24.

<sup>81</sup> Kundrus, “Grenzen”: 31; see also: Boris Barth, *Genozid. Völkermord im 20. Jahrhundert. Geschichte, Theorien, Kontroversen*, München, Beck, 2006: 128-136; Jonas Kreienbaum, “Koloniale Gewaltexzesse — Kolonialkriege um 1900”, in: Alain Chatriot and Dieter Gosewinkel, (eds.), *Koloniale Politik und Praktiken Deutschlands und Frankreichs 1880–1962*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2010: 155-172.

<sup>82</sup> Kundrus, “Kontinuitäten”: 49: “viele Wege von Omdurman, Addis Abeba, Luzon oder gar keiner zu den nationalsozialistischen Gewaltexzessen”.

“singular crime”.<sup>83</sup> For her the connection from Herero to Holocaust is not directly evident. She deems it unwise to “upgrade” ( *“aufzuwerten”* ) colonial history by declaring it the precursor of National Socialism, thus reducing it to a role of harbinger.<sup>84</sup> She points out that it would be necessary to explain how the experience of colonial violence influenced the First World War before the Second World War could be analyzed in this respect. The last point proves particularly challenging with respect to personal continuities given the relatively young age of the Nazi elite. Furthermore, there are “major differences” in the course of action leading to mass violence: “The real comportment of Jews was irrelevant during the development of the Shoah. This was different in GSWA in 1904; there genocide was a result of the ongoing combat operations.”<sup>85</sup>

The attempt to construct out of this justified criticism of the terms ‘continuity’ and ‘genocide’ the accusation that Kundrus holds an apologetic opinion of colonialism seems misplaced after reading her texts. On the contrary, she speaks of the responsibility of the North for the crimes of colonialism and more specifically desires a “discourse of memory” ( *“Erinnerungsdiskurse”* ) about the crimes of German colonialism.<sup>86</sup>

### **‘Breaking the taboo’, the ‘ambivalence’ of forced modernisation, and military imprint. The criticism of Robert Gerwarth, Stephan Malinowski, and Susanne KuB**

The historians Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski who have been involved in the debate on the thesis of the “Holocaust as colonial genocide” since 2007 are renowned scholars of the history of (mass) violence and National Socialism. Malinowski has also written extensively on ‘wars of modernization’, among them the war in Algeria 1954–62.<sup>87</sup> Here too, the reproach that they are not “historians of Africa” is not tenable.

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<sup>83</sup> Kundrus, “Grenzen”: 32: “auch weiterhin als singuläres Verbrechen zu begreifen”.

<sup>84</sup> Birthe Kundrus, “Von den Herero zum Holocaust? Einige Bemerkungen zur aktuellen Debatte”, *Mittelweg* 36, 14 (4), 2005: 82-92 (82f.). Cf. also: idem, “From the Herero to the Holocaust?, The Current Debate”, *Afrika Spectrum*, 40 (2), 2005: 299-308.

<sup>85</sup> Kundrus, “Herero”: 87f.: “Das reale Verhalten der Juden spielte für die Entwicklung der Shoah keine Rolle. Dies war in DSWA 1904 anders gewesen, dort war der Genozid Folge der aktuellen Kampfhandlungen.”; cf. Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*: 30; 32f., who points out that the “intention [of military leaders or colonial administrators] had been the suppression of the uprising, not the eradication of a people.” She concludes, “to link developments in the suppression of colonial rebellion in Germany’s African colonies in the 1900s with Hitler’s policies and practices in Eastern Europe after 1939 is highly problematic. [...] For the time being, everything remained open; and policies were continually contested.”

<sup>86</sup> Kundrus, “Grenzen”: 33.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *Hitler’s Hangman: The Life of Heydrich*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2011; Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, (eds.), *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; Robert Gerwarth and Donald Bloxham, (eds.), *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; Stephan Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer. Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat*, Frankfurt/M., Fischer, 2004; Robert Gerwarth and Corinna Unger, (eds.), *Modernizing Missions: Approaches to ‘Developing’ the Non-Western World after 1945*, München, Beck, 2010; Robert Gerwarth,

Similarly to Kundrus, Gerwarth and Malinowski point to a number of structural shortcomings in the 'continuity thesis'. It seems incomprehensible to them that the study of colonial violence "needs to be legitimized and 'upgraded' [...] through Holocaust analogies".<sup>88</sup> Even though Zimmerer states somewhere in most of his articles that for the "crimes of National Socialism there is no monocausal track back to the theory and practice of European colonialism" (Z: 219),<sup>89</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski have a different impression from titles such as "The Birth of the 'Ostland' out of the Spirit of Colonialism" or "From Windhuk to Auschwitz":

the 'causal nexus' [is] implicitly and explicitly the argumentative core, suggesting that with the 'African' roots of the Holocaust a central element for the explanation of the annihilation of the European Jewry has been ignored by international research.<sup>90</sup>

For Zimmerer, the Herero War is the "point of origin, not a way-station" on a path that started in Africa and ended in Auschwitz.<sup>91</sup> While Zimmerer analyses the Herero War as the "ultimate breaking of a taboo" (Z: 276), Gerwarth and Malinowski argue that this war needs to be seen in the context of European colonial violence. In 1904 the annihilation of groups of people previously classified as 'inferior' was already a common practice among colonial powers as the examples of Algeria, the Philippines, or Cuba show. Such forms of violence had become part of a trans-national European 'colonial archive' that could be referred to again and again.<sup>92</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski point out that Zimmerer contradicts his own arguments when he analyses the connections between European colonialism and National Socialism *generally* ("Globalisation of the German history of violence") while at the same time focusing on *one* German colonial war, thus recalling the German *Sonderweg* thesis. For if the war in GSWA (1904–08) against Herero and Nama loses its paradigmatic character, in view of the European

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"Modernisierungskriege. Militärische Gewalt und koloniale Modernisierung im Algerienkrieg (1945–1962)", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 48, 2008: 213–248.

<sup>88</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski, "Holocaust": 442: "durch Holocaust-Analogien [...] legitimiert und 'aufgewertet' werden".

<sup>89</sup> "Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus [ließen] sich nicht monokausal auf die Theorie und Praxis des europäischen Kolonialismus zurückführen" (Z: 219).

<sup>90</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski, "Holocaust": 442: "der 'kausale Nexus' [ist] implizit und explizit das argumentative Kernstück, das suggeriert, mit den 'afrikanischen' Wurzeln des Holocaust sei ein zentrales Element zur Erklärung des Völkermordes an den europäischen Juden von der internationalen Forschung übersehen worden"; see also: Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, "Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz", *Central European History*, 42, 2009: 279–300; Stephan Malinowski and Robert Gerwarth, "L'antichambre de l'Holocauste? À propos du débat sur les violences coloniales et la guerre d'extermination nazie", *Vingtième Siècle*, 99, 2008: 143–159.

<sup>91</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski, "Holocaust": 442: "als Ausgangspunkt, nicht als Zwischenstation".

<sup>92</sup> Moses, "Blockages": 31: "Racial extinction, then, was a common notion in Europe long before the Holocaust". On the "Racial Century, ca. 1850–1950" (<<http://sydney.edu.au/arts/history/research/projects/moses.shtml#pubs>> [accessed 22 July, 2013]) see e.g.: Eric D. Weitz, *Century of Genocide. Utopias of Race and Nation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003 (referring to the twentieth century); Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire. German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

history of violence in the colonies,<sup>93</sup> Zimmerer's thesis of the "breaking of a taboo" does not hold. Furthermore, the continuity thesis focused on German history cannot explain why those states with the longest colonial tradition are not those "who after 1918 released the greatest level of racist destruction".<sup>94</sup>

To Gerwarth and Malinowski the "axial age of the inner-European violence 1914 to 1923 with its pronounced impact on the protagonists of the National Socialist war of annihilation" seems more decisive than the war of 1904–1908. This is due in no small way to the fact that only minimal personal continuities "from Windhuk to Auschwitz" have been detected hitherto: twenty-year-old soldiers who fought in 1904 in Hereroland were almost 60 years old during the *Ostfeldzug*, their former commanding officers, such as Ritter von Epp, were between 70 and 90 years old. Talk of "institutional memory" and "biographical imprint" should not obscure the (open) question as to how such impacts can be substantiated and proven. But even if research can unearth such connections, the question remains what relevance the generation of "old Africa warriors" of between perhaps 20 and 200 soldiers had in Hitler's army of three million.<sup>95</sup>

Historians would do well to realize that colonialism defies simple formulae. It is a phenomenon of colossal diversity. This includes the limited reach of colonial rule, its greatest weakness.<sup>96</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski thus point to the fact that the colonial analytical framework of the history of National Socialism is stretched to its limits when dealing with the "ambivalence of forced modernisation and development on the one hand, and violence and annihilation on the other hand that was central to Europe's late colonialism but absent in National Socialism". Colonialism is "neither in general nor in German South West Africa equivalent to annihilation". Indeed in the German colonies there were approaches – names such as Bernhard Dernburg and Walther Rathenau come to mind – for a *mise en valeur* which sought "education towards autonomous economic activity and the development of an African outlet market [...] instead of a brute exploitation of African work force". There were, however, no equivalents for such

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. Horst Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2004: 12; idem, "Genozid oder Zwangsmodernisierung? Der moderne Kolonialismus in universalgeschichtlicher Perspektive", in: Mihran Dabag, (ed.), *Genozid und Moderne. Vol. 1: Strukturen kollektiver Gewalt im 20. Jahrhundert*, Opladen, Leske & Budrich, 1998: 135-151; see also: Russell A. Berman: "Der ewige Zweite. Deutschlands Sekundärkolonialismus", in: Birthe Kundrus, (ed.): *Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2003: 19-32 (24); Klaas van Walraven and Jon Abbink, "Rethinking resistance in African history: An introduction", in: Jon Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn, and Klaas van Walraven, (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance. Revolt and Violence in African History*, Leiden, Brill, 2003: 1-40 (25).

<sup>94</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski, "Holocaust": 465: "die nach 1918 das größte Maß an rassistischer Zerstörung [...] nach außen freisetzen."

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.: 449, 452, 458.

<sup>96</sup> Trutz von Trotha, "Was war Kolonialismus? Einige zusammenfassende Befunde zur Soziologie und Geschichte des Kolonialismus und der Kolonialherrschaft", *Saeculum*, 55, 2004: 49-95 (52, 61-63) with reference to Jürgen Osterhammel; see also: Berman, "German Colonialism": 28, 35.



policies in Nazi occupied Eastern Europe; similarly there were no equivalents for indirect colonial rule there.<sup>97</sup>

One additional contribution to the debate to be mentioned here is Susanne Kuß' monography on the *German Military in Colonial Theaters of War* (2010). Kuß, having worked repeatedly on colonial history, finally provides historians with a long overdue *comparative* study on German colonial wars in German South West Africa, East Africa and China ('Boxer Rebellion'). She takes up the debate on continuities between colonialism and National Socialism and explains the escalation of violence with reference to situational conditions, especially with specific factors relevant in the colonial space. For her conclusion that there are no connections between the warfare in German South West Africa and Eastern Europe, Kuß offers a number of reasons: neither *Reichswehr* (German army during the Weimar period) nor *Wehrmacht* (German army during the Nazi period) drew on experiences of colonial warfare for military training. There were no discourses on colonial wars. Instead, the experiences during the First World War were seen as definitive. Like Gerwarth and Malinowski, Kuß, considers the number of former colonial officers in the *Reichswehr* and *Wehrmacht* too small to have substantial influence; furthermore, they were simply too old. Kuß encourages further research into the biographies of former colonial soldiers and explicitly points to the self-declared colonial activities of 'old African' soldiers in the Baltic region after 1919. However, she underlines that these few men would hardly have had the means to have any impact on the military during the Weimar Republic.<sup>98</sup> Thirdly, National Socialism's racism and anti-Semitism, the objective of which was annihilation, differed greatly from any form of colonial racism and was not based on it ideologically.<sup>99</sup> Similar to Matthias Häubler's article on the war in 1904 already mentioned above, Kuß shows that an in-depth-analysis of a wide array of contemporary sources and a broad research perspective can provide a more meaningful explanation of the past than any teleological concept 'from ... to' will ever offer. In this sense, Matthew Fitzpatrick pointed out recently that the search for "continuities" leaves not just many questions unanswered, but any historical "links" "from Windhuk to Auschwitz" described so far may be "more definitional than

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<sup>97</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski, "Holocaust": 464, 455f., 458 "im Nationalsozialismus fehlende, im europäischen Spätkolonialismus hingegen zentrale Ambivalenz von Zwangsmodernisierung und *development* einerseits, Gewalt und Vernichtung andererseits"; "weder generell noch in Deutsch-Südwestafrika gleichbedeutend mit Vernichtung"; "statt roher Ausbeutung afrikanischer Arbeitskraft [...] eine Erziehung zu selbständigem Wirtschaften und die Entwicklung eines afrikanischen Absatzmarktes".

<sup>98</sup> Susanne Kuß, *Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen. Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, Links, 2010: 416.

<sup>99</sup> Kuß, *Deutsches Militär*: 27: "Tatsächlich aber wurden die deutschen Kolonialkriege weder in der Reichswehr noch in der Wehrmacht rezipiert. Sie waren nicht etwa nur ein Randthema, sondern überhaupt kein Thema. [...] Die Kontinuitätsthese setzt vordergründig auf Eindeutigkeit. Sie bewegt sich im grellbunt-plakativen Reich der Analogien und Vermutungen, bleibt aber den Nachweis schuldig, dass die im Zweiten Weltkrieg vom deutschen Militär angewandte extreme Gewalt sich aus dem südwestafrikanischen Krieg ursächlich herleiten ließe."

explanatory”: “these are genocides because they meet a posited definition of genocide”.<sup>100</sup>

As stressed at the outset it would be incorrect, however, to create the impression that Zimmerer’s theses had been rejected out of hand. He himself pointed to “exceedingly positive international reactions” (Z: 9). He also met with approval in Germany.<sup>101</sup>

### Putting ‘postcolonial history of the Holocaust’ to the test: *Kaiser’s Holocaust*

Years ago, the historian Eric D. Weitz warned: “[i]f we insist on the incomparability of the Holocaust, we place it outside of history”.<sup>102</sup> One wonders why? Comparisons between the Holocaust and colonial violence, for example, are neither a new phenomenon,<sup>103</sup> nor are they discussed exclusively in Germany.<sup>104</sup> More than two decades ago, Zygmunt Bauman explained: “Holocaust-style phenomena must be recognized as legitimate outcomes of [a] civilizing tendency, and its constant potential.”<sup>105</sup> In 1998 Alison Palmer saw a common element between “the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide and the German genocide in SWA” because all of them “were explicitly authorized by the state”. She explicitly aimed “to avoid arguing that each case is unique and so beyond comparison”.<sup>106</sup> Individual researchers have since not only pursued comparative approaches but, like Zimmerer in Germany, have tried to detect direct developments

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<sup>100</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Pre-History”: 502.

<sup>101</sup> “überaus positive internationale Reaktionen” (Z: 9); cf. Köbler and Melber: “Völkermord”; also Kiran Klaus Patel emphasizes that “NS-Rassen- und Vernichtungskrieg im Osten [...] nicht nur Ursprünge auf dem Reichsterritorium [hatte], sondern [...] bis nach Deutsch-Südwest und -Ostafrika zurückverfolgt werden [müsse]” (Kiran Klaus Patel, “Der Nationalsozialismus in transnationaler Perspektive”, *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 9, 2004: 1123-1134 [1125f.]).

<sup>102</sup> Weitz, *Century of Genocide*: 12.

<sup>103</sup> For references, see the introduction of this essay. One more example: Robert J. Gordon wrote in 1992 “that the supposedly anomalous genitalia of the Bushmen played a part in the construction of racial difference, revealing white sexual anxieties similar to those reflected in the images of the Jew and Gypsy in Nazi racial science” (Robert J. Gordon, “The Making of the ‘Bushman’”, *Anthropologica*, 34, 1992: 183-202 [183]).

<sup>104</sup> Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010; Jones, *Genocide*; idem, (ed.), *Gendercide and Genocide*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2004; idem, (ed.), *Genocide, War Crimes and the West. History and Complicity*, London, Zed Books, 2004; Thomas Kühne and Peter Gleichmann, (eds.), *Massenhaftes Töten. Kriege und Genozide im 20. Jahrhundert*, Essen, Klartext, 2004.

<sup>105</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989: 28; on the “postmodern influence” of Bauman see: Wehler, *Kampfsituation*: 166: “daß die Pathologie in der modernen Welt angelegt und der Holocaust ihr Paradebeispiel sei. Dann wird er universalisiert nicht als Einmalereignis, sondern als permanent drohende Gefahr – dadurch entsteht eine Art Lust an der Leugnung der deutschen Sonderbedingungen.”

<sup>106</sup> Alison Palmer, “Colonial and Modern Genocide. Explanations and Categories”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21, 1998: 89-115 (104f.).

“from Africa to Auschwitz”,<sup>107</sup> arguing: “What occurred in the colonies set the tone for the holocaust in Germany.”<sup>108</sup> Shelley Baranowski observed that “finding similarities between Imperial warfare and Nazi ethnic cleansing [...] seems irresistible” for historians; however, she made it clear that “Imperial Germany was not Nazi Germany” and, similarly to Kundrus, Gerwarth und Malinowski, she identified differences.<sup>109</sup>

Thus the second book under review here is not new in terms of arguments but rather in the extent to which it provides readers with a new dimension of the ‘postcolonial’ continuity thesis. In a way the authors David Olusoga und Casper W. Erichsen, take up the work programme outlined in Zimmerer’s articles and deliver a continuous analysis of the path “from Windhuk to Auschwitz”. The title *Kaiser’s Genocide* apparently did not suffice. The authors seek to equate directly the Ovaherero and Nama Wars of 1904 to 1908 to the Holocaust: It was thus the “Kaiser’s Holocaust” and it has been “forgotten”.

Irrespective of the fact that such tub-thumping titles might encourage sales,<sup>110</sup> these kinds of ‘comparisons’ violate the principles of good taste no matter what the politics behind them are:<sup>111</sup> On the far-right German Neo-Nazis talk of Germans as the victims of a “Bomben-Holocaust”;<sup>112</sup> while far-left critics of imperialism research the “American Holocaust”<sup>113</sup>, unified thus in their endeavour to promote various hyphenated ‘Holocausts’ to an analytical category. In this respect neither Olusoga and Erichson’s title is original,<sup>114</sup> nor are their theses, which strongly evoke Rosa Amalie Plumelle-

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<sup>107</sup> Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz”.

<sup>108</sup> Gabrielle Gagnon, “The Genocide of the Herero Set the Tone for the Holocaust”, *Aegis*, 61, 2008: 62-70 (67).

<sup>109</sup> Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*: 49f.

<sup>110</sup> Kundrus, “Herero”: 83: “‘Auschwitz’ wiegt im vergangenheitspolitischen Diskurs am schwersten.”

<sup>111</sup> On this, see already: Leon A. Jick, “The Holocaust: Its Use and Abuse within the American Public”, *Yad Vashem Studies*, XIV, 1981: 301-318.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Jan Van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002: 93; Wolfgang Benz, *Feindbild und Vorurteil: Beiträge über Ausgrenzung und Verfolgung*, München, DTV, 1996: 139.

<sup>113</sup> David Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992; Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival. A Population History Since 1492*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

<sup>114</sup> Christian Bernardac, *L'Holocauste oublié. Le massacre des Tziganes*, Paris, Editions France-Empire, 1979; Adam Hochschild, *Les Fantômes du Roi Léopold. Un Holocauste Oublié*, Paris, Tallandier, 2007; Lansiné Kaba, “The Atlantic Slave Trade Was Not a ‘Black-on-Black Holocaust’”, *African Studies Review*, 44, 2001: 1-20, taking on the claims of Henry Louis Gates.

Uribe's book *La férocité blanche*.<sup>115</sup> It should also be noted that for some historians 'genocide' and 'Holocaust' have become synonyms.<sup>116</sup>

### From Nuremberg to Windhuk

The book's introduction so poignantly summarizes the author's understanding of Namibian and German history that one is tempted to question whether one needs to read any further. Everything is centred on the thesis which is supposedly illustrated by the clumsy opening scene of Hermann Göring's suicide in Nuremberg in 1946. Even though this has nothing to do with "Kaiser's Holocaust", this reference to the Nuremberg tribunal is supposed to raise the reader's awareness of the book's basic message which is at the same time a political demand: There is a path "from Windhuk to Auschwitz" and thus the victims of German colonialism are entitled to the same moral acknowledgement and legal redress (Nuremberg) including compensation payments as the victims of National Socialism. The authors therefore fray at the conclusion of the Nuremberg trials that the Nazi crimes were "unique in history." They call this argument "the great post-war myth" since they are convinced that National Socialism was no "aberration in European history".<sup>117</sup> Rather, there was an "earlier, forgotten holocaust" that shows "a continuity in German history" (OE: 9).

It is clever of the authors to revisit Göring's own defence strategy, which involved pointing out to the Allies their own colonial crimes and their struggle for *Lebensraum*, and thereby discredit the argument that European colonial powers indulged in similar practices (cf. above) as apologetic Nazi discourse. At the same time, however, Olusoga and Erichsen acknowledge in Göring's defence an "uncomfortable truth" in the *German* case: Göring's father, Ernst Heinrich Göring (1838–1913) was the "first Governor of South West Africa" (OE: 6) and he is alleged to have taken an interest in *Lebensraum* for Germans which could be conquered with "industrial weapons" if necessary. The linguistic association with industrial annihilation is undoubtedly deliberate; however, it is not clear on which sources the authors base their argument. They do not shy away from other notable theses among which is the constant reminder that they are presenting a history of "genocidal violence, much of which [...] has been largely forgotten" or "overlooked" (OE: 8; similar 108; 274). However, those who write in 2010 about their "surpris[e]" that the "connections between Nazi empire and the colonial violence [...] have been so [...] little discussed in the decades since" (OE: 329), apparently know very little about research on German colonialism over the last decades. On the other hand and contrary to the jacket text, promising "shocking new archival evidence", this book is not an

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<sup>115</sup> Rosa Amalie Plumelle-Uribe, *La Férocité Blanche. Des non-Blancs aux non-Aryens: génocides occultés de 1492 à nos jours*, Paris, Michel, 2001 [German edition: *Weißer Barbarei. Vom Kolonialrassismus zur Rassenpolitik der Nazis*, Zürich, Rotpunktverlag, 2004]; Kundrus, "Herero": 82.

<sup>116</sup> This has even been noticed by Zimmerer who does not think the case for differentiation compelling (cf. Z: 174; 198; 202).

<sup>117</sup> David Olusoga and Caspar Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust. Germany's forgotten Genocide*, London, Faber & Faber, 2010: 4; henceforth OE: page.

original contribution to historical research, but rather summarizes very loosely the research and theses of others. The paucity of footnotes also attests to this. It is not Olusoga and Erichsen's aim to write about Namibian history only. The section covering the period from the origins of the Ovaherero War to the prison camps (chapter 12) takes up only 126 out of 361 pages. Thus, this book is in a very literal sense 'post'-colonial.

The level of commitment to the (political) objective of this book equates with the poor standard of craftsmanship that went into its writing. The failure to provide references for the most impressive quotations (M.J. Bonn, p. 330; 351) is most unfortunate. It is disappointing that among the few footnotes some evidently do not relate to the text they accompany (OE: 379; FN 9-12). The constant misspelling of German terms is rather amusing.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, many factual errors are simply grotesque, as other reviewers have previously noted.<sup>119</sup> No bibliography is provided.

### Historical teleology

Olusoga und Erichsen relate the history of Namibia as a drama which climaxes at the Battle of Waterberg in 1904 while the death of thousands of prisoners on Shark Island serves as peripety. In their account of the causes of the Herero War the authors follow historian Jan-Bart Gewald who sees Lieutenant Zürn's conduct as having triggered the conflict (OE: 127). The description of the war reads like a summary of texts by Drechsler, Bley, Gewald und Hull. It remains a fact, as historian Andreas Eckl has pointed out, that for years now no new findings on the issue have been presented.<sup>120</sup>

In stark contrast to their account of the Herero War, the portrayal of the Nama War is characterized not so much by German brutalities, but by the authors' celebration of the "tactical genius" Jacob Marengo as the "greatest exponent of guerilla warfare in the whole history of SWA" (OE: 182/3). One senses Olusoga and Erichsen's desire to communicate their enthusiasm for the "bushcraft" of the Nama to the reader. In their account it is a very manly war among equals – with a strategic advantage for the Nama.

Given that those who are familiar with the literature on Namibia will constantly have the impression that they have read this or that section elsewhere, the authors' desire to

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<sup>118</sup> E.g. on page 87 the authors speak of "Auswanderung" but mean "Auswanderer".

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Köbler, "Genocide in Namibia": 235: "their account is riddled with bizarre mistakes and assertions. Again and again, the authors display utter ignorance of basic historic and geographic facts." Just one example: When talking about the allocation of "viceroys" posts in newly conquered Eastern Europe (1941?), the authors begin their list with Fritz Sauckel, who "became the Gauliter [sic!] of Thuringia" (OE: 326). However, he had held this post since 1927 (!) and in any case Thuringia lies in the heart of Germany, the region does not even border on foreign territory.

<sup>120</sup> Andreas Eckl, "The Herero genocide of 1904. Source-critical and methodological considerations", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 3, 2008: 31-61; but see the new interpretation by Häußler, "Destruction": 55-81; see *ibid.*: 71 FN 73 on Gewald and his "cavalierly" manner to deal with sources and inconsistencies: "One is left with the impression that he did not really want to engage with [...] glaring inconsistency, as that would have not been conducive to his argument."

present their own research results is understandable. They attempt to do so by analysing a memorandum from Lieutenant Count Stillfried to the Emperor in November 1904. The officer, who had only been in GSWA for a short period, argued for the establishment of confined areas (*geschlossene Niederlassungen*) for Herero “sentenced to captivity”. While the introduction spoke of the invention of the “death camp” in Lüderitzbucht, GSWA, the authors cannot help mentioning that the British had set up camps in the “Boer War” in 1900 while the Spanish had done the same in Cuba in 1896. However, Olusoga and Erichsen consider the “concentration camps” in GSWA “entirely novel” (OE: 159) because in South Africa the camps were seen as a military necessity whereas in GSWA “the Herero were already a defeated and scattered people” (OE: 160) thus — they argue — the camps were set up for the continuation of the intended policy of extermination through forced labour. However, the question is whether Count Stillfried knew about (and believed in) the defeat — barely three months after the Battle of Waterberg?<sup>121</sup> The German colonial civil administrators are seen as even more cold-blooded than the military. Governor “Lindequist’s regime was so calamitous for the Herero and Nama that it can be considered a continuation of their extermination, by non-military means” (OE: 203). The use of language that is otherwise found in research on National Socialism is no coincidence: There was a “concentration camp system” and there was a “final solution” to the “Nama problem”: the “death camp” on Shark Island, in Lüderitz harbour (OE: 206; 220).

From page 265 onwards, when the account moves away from GSWA, the authors lose sight of the object of their study. The book becomes more and more erratic in its narrative style with the analytical content becoming less discernible. The reader is conducted along different chains of association: from the Spring Offensive of 1918 to German-*Mittelafrika* and from there to ‘German colonial ambitions’ in Russia and Germany’s road to civil war.

For Olusoga and Erichsen the former *Schutztruppenleutnant* Ritter von Epp remains central. He is depicted as *the* decisive military figure in the German Civil War. For the thesis “from Windhuk to Auschwitz” Epp has become the standard personified reference. As the old colonial officer was to become a marginal figure from the late 1930s, the authors try to prove that Epp was one of the “patrons who eased Hitler’s ascendancy” (OE: 288). Other German soldiers and scientists, this narrative continues, had begun their careers in the colonies and carried on to reach leading positions in Nazi Germany (OE: 309). Thus, the (wrong) impression is created that after 1933 former colonial officers were the driving force in Germany and that there were no more pressing issues for the Nazis than the recovery of the colonies. The authors grant those former colonial

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<sup>121</sup> One of the authors, Caspar Erichsen, is — due to his Master thesis on the camps in GSWA — one of the experts in the issue, see: Caspar W. Erichsen, *The angel of death has descended violently among them: Concentration camps and prisoners-of-war in Namibia, 1904–08*, Leiden, University of Leiden, African Studies Centre, 2005 ;cf. also Tilman Dederig, “Compounds, camps, colonialism”, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 12, 2012: 29-46.

officials who were not ardent Nazis only a few meagre sentences although there were many such people (OE: 315).

### World War II without the Shoa

Those, whose fate gave rise to the ill-chosen title, only appear in very strange constellations in this book. For example, the authors consider it necessary to report that in 1905 the new Governor von Lindequist was greeted by “the leading members of Swakopmund’s Jewish community” with a barely audible speech. What is this picture supposed to portray? “The Jews” and their hidden access to power? “The Jews” and secrecy? Since “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” at the very latest these are images which haunt history.<sup>122</sup> And it becomes even worse. Only two sentences later it is stated that Governor von Lindequist, to whom the Jews had just whispered unknown things, continued the annihilation of the Herero and Nama. He was a “bureaucratic killer” (OE: 360): a bizarre constellation that causes one to sit up and take notice. The reader wonders why the authors have chosen this highly conspicuous link. Is that a coincidence – considering the title? Why are “the Jews” singled out? Is it not an all too implicit accusation that the “Jewish community” did not rebel against the “extermination”? These sentences are deeply disturbing (OE: 190).

However, the most problematic section deals with Hitler’s worldview which seems superfluous in a book on the history of GSWA. However, this section is academically and morally unacceptable because various details are elaborated on over five (!) pages, but the centrality of Hitler’s fanatical anti-Semitism<sup>123</sup> is not mentioned at all. One could be forgiven for thinking that Olusoga and Erichsen are merely paying lip service when they state: “Of course, many Germans who accepted [...] Social Darwinism did not support imperialism, anti-Semitism or militarism” (OE: 294). Hitler was apparently not among them. But while there is no place in this book for Hitler’s anti-Semitism the authors do devote two pages to the fate of the “Rhineland bastards” (OE: 305). And an entire paragraph is dedicated to the description of Hitler’s armoured train (OE: 323) which is completely out of proportion to its relevance here. For the authors Hitler is primarily of importance because they want to emphasize both the lack of originality of his thinking and the colonial patterns of his orientation (OE: 330). Formulations such as “very similar”, “the same”, “for the second time” (OE: 310) underline this wish. There is much talk of “the revival of practices, concepts and theories that had been developed in Germany’s former African colonies.” The colonies were allegedly a historical testing ground for Nazi bureaucrats (OE: 300).

Why is it so hard for the authors to write about anti-Semitism and Jews as victims, considering that they put so much emphasis on the analysis of National Socialism and the Second World War? Among the “peoples of the East”, “Poles, Ukrainians and Baltic

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<sup>122</sup> Wolfgang Benz, “Jüdische Weltverschwörung? Vom zähen Leben eines Konstrukts”, in: idem, *Was ist Antisemitismus?*, München, Beck, 2004: 174-192.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Ralf Georg Reuth, *Hitlers Judenhass. Klischee und Wirklichkeit*, München, Piper, 2009.

people” are mentioned; but Jews appear only indirectly – for example as “main translators” for General Ludendorff, a man not previously known for his philo-Semitism (OE: 270). Again the Jews appear as informers of a dark force. Why? When the authors mention the German violence “in the East”, it is never directed specifically against Jews. They always stand in an enumeration between “Slavs” and “Gypsies”. And all of them fare as “Herero and Nama decades earlier” did (OE: 328). The book remains dangerously imprecise, leaving the reader with nebulous phrases such as “expulsion of the Jews”. At most, Olusoga and Erichsen talk of “*plans* for their complete extermination as a race” (OE: 340, own emphasis). On only one occasion do the authors, whose descriptions are otherwise so colourful, describe in some detail the violence against Jews: describing the Nazi activities of the Germans in SWA. “Rotten eggs and even stones were thrown at [Jewish] shops and some emigrated to South Africa” (OE: 317) – so, this is how they describe Jews as victims? “Rotten eggs and even stones”!

The tendency to ‘contextualize’ Nazism and its victims, not to speak of a relativisation of the Holocaust, is also indicated by a number of linguistic blunders. For example, when the authors note that the “birth of [Hitler’s] empire in Russia” “was perhaps no more preposterous than the birth of any other empire.” “Hitler’s war for *Lebensraum* was the greatest colonial war in history” (OE: 327). Again and again, the authors present their main ‘postcolonial’ issue that it ‘all happened before’. But this argument does not suffice as ‘leitmotif’ for a book of this scope. Olusoga and Erichsen seem to understand how difficult it is to present consistently the different groups of Nazi victims as one.<sup>124</sup> But they see this as a historiographical problem: Germany had brought “40 to 65 million under its control; 11 million were Jews, the rest mainly Slavs. In Nazi ideology and in modern historical memory, the Nazi’s racial contempt for the Slavs is overshadowed by their more fanatical and obsessive hatred of the Jews. Nazi anti-Semitism had Darwinian elements but was deeper, more complex and multi-layered. The Slavs’ place in the Nazis’ racial worldview was more directly shaped by colonial thinking.” (OE: 335) Is that the reason why the authors only mention “slavs” as victims thereafter? Does this mean that the “modern historical memory” is too focused on “the Jews”? The enumeration of Nazi victims – among them 2.2 million Soviet soldiers, “starved, frozen and beaten to death in vast open-air pens” – is unsettling because Jews do not or only indirectly feature in this description. It is mentioned that “small numbers [of Soviet soldiers were] gassed in the first mobile gassing van” (OE: 342). Here, the reader is left alone to recall what followed after these “first mobile vans”. But this chain of associations is all that is offered. Instead, the authors play a game of numbers, which helps to relativise the Holocaust. By 1945 the concentration camp system, they argue, had “exterminated 11 million people, enslaving another 6 million”. In literature, but also in politics and beyond, the figure “six million” is taken as the number of Jews murdered in Europe. But – again – they are not mentioned here. This amounts to an attempt the recount the German ‘campaign in the East’ without the Shoah. The authors aim at a comparison – for relativising purposes. However, the object of their comparison, the six million murdered

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Wistrich, *Hitler*: 24-28.



European Jews, is almost blanked out in Olusoga and Erichsen's narrative. In the sentences that follow they return to the Shark Island "death camp" which was based on "principles broadly the same" as the camps in the "Nazi-East" (OE: 342).

Olusoga and Erichsen are not alone in their efforts to read (German) colonialism from a "postcolonial" perspective – one which cannot be considered anything but anti-Semitic: While some write the history of the Second World War (almost) without the Shoah, others go further and try to recount a history from "Windhoek" to "Jerusalem", arguing that German colonial enthusiasts in the 1950s and 1960s embraced the "settlement" of Jerusalem.<sup>125</sup> German colonial history thus becomes a weapon which is used not only to relativise the Holocaust, but also to question the legitimacy of the state of Israel. It is not surprising that Jürgen Zimmerer is a member of the advisory board of the new journal *Settler Colonial Studies*, whose second volume positions itself as clearly as it does one-sidedly with the title *Past is Present. Settler Colonialism in Palestine*.<sup>126</sup>

Olusoga and Erichsen's "Epilogue" does not summarize the results, but seeks to map the lines of continuity to the present: from the politics of oblivion and the destruction of the "Blue Book" in the 1920s, to Oskar Hintrager's connections to the Afrikaner National Party (almost making apartheid a German invention), to the "small German communities" in present-day Namibia and their alleged veneration of Hitler. The impression that the book engages in German-bashing is hardly mitigated by the authors' statement that "the Nazi sympathising and the neo-Nazi elements within the community are no doubt small"; for nothing is said about the great majority of German Namibians. Instead, the charge is made that "[a] culture of denial has developed, that regards attempts by the Herero and the Nama to uncover and commemorate the extermination [...] as an attack on Germany and German Namibians" (OE: 351). Does citing one letter to the editor and one article from the Windhoek newspapers *Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Republikein* really allow one to draw such a conclusion?<sup>127</sup> So much has been written and argued about the war in 1904 that the allegation of a "culture of denial" is ridiculous. The authors underestimate the potential of Namibian discussion culture. In

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<sup>125</sup> Martin Braach-Maksytis, "Germany, Palestine, Israel and the (Post)Colonial Imagination", in: Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama, (eds.), *German Colonialism. Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011: 294-313; a different story of German support for Arab goals in the 1950s is related in: Kurt P. Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika. German Nationalism Since 1945*, Vol. I, Middleton, Wesleyan University Press, 1967: 229-239.

<sup>126</sup> *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2 (1), 2012, "Past is Present. Settler Colonialism in Palestine", ed. by Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, and Sobhi Samour, see, e.g. Ian Pappé, "Shtetl Colonialism: First and Last Impressions of Indigeneity by Colonised Colonisers": 39-58. This accusation of colonialism has become so common that the Israeli Premier saw himself obliged to point out: "We're not the British in India. We're not the Belgians in the Congo", quoted in: *Financial Times*, 24 May, 2011, "Netanyahu rejects Palestinian talks", <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f4c1adcc-862f-11e0-9e2c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz232fu5vzK>> [accessed 8 August, 2012].

<sup>127</sup> See also: Reinhart Köbler and Henning Melber: "German-Namibian denialism: How (not) to come to terms with the past", *AfricAvenir* 2012, <<http://www.africavenir.org/de/news-archiv/newsdetails/datum/2012/03/19/>> [accessed 6 July, 2012]. However, here again, the insight that published opinion is not to be equated with public opinion is missing.

any case the impression the authors create of “the Namibia-Germans” is not very flattering: a tight-knit community that clings to its privileges and exploits others.

In their concluding remarks Olusoga and Erichson make a puzzling volte-face: without saying it openly they claim all the elements of the Holocaust for the history of GSWA. On the other hand, in the end they proclaim in a kind of severability clause that could well have been copied from Jürgen Zimmerer or others:<sup>128</sup> “There is, however, no direct ‘causal thread’ linking the Herero and Nama genocides to the crimes of the Third Reich”(OE: 361). Apart from the fact that the phrase is a platitude, this statement inadvertently underlines once again the message of the book: it is not the authors’ intention to describe a ‘development’, a *progression* from German colonialism to the absolute evil of 1941–1945. The ‘links’ between both periods serve as a vehicle of argumentation to equate the Sandveld with Auschwitz. The relativistic logic is summarized in the title *Kaiser’s Holocaust*. All in all this is a poor book with an all too evident anti-Semitic subtext.

## Conclusion: On the *Zeitgeist* of the continued distortion of the Holocaust

The margins are fascinating. A wish which haunts historiography involves granting greater meaning to the margins, be they geographical or temporal. For some time now the repercussions of events in the colonial peripheries for the metropolises have been subjects of research; or those times that previously were only considered *pre-war* times: The Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and their significance for the First World War are being examined. The Italian-Ethiopian War of 1935–36 is now considered a “test ground” for the Second World War.<sup>129</sup> As understandable as the desire to widen perspectives is, the inherent perpetuation of the separation of periphery and centre remains problematic. The point is to show the relevance of one’s own ‘peripheral’ research object to the history of the ‘centre’. The ‘earlier’ plays a role because it had an impact on a significant (more significant?) ‘later’. The narrative structure of *Kaiser’s Holocaust* and *From Windhuk to Auschwitz?* suffers as a result of this method of argumentation. The later (the Holocaust) is the more important although the earlier (Kaiser’s Windhuk) should also be analyzed. In this reading, according to the historian Winfried Speitkamp, “the history of the colonies [...] is primarily seen as part of German history and incorporated into the prehistory of the Third Reich.”<sup>130</sup> However, the history of South West Africa would also be worth analyzing even if it had not been a German colony.

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<sup>128</sup> Dederling, “German-Herero War”: 83: “This is not to claim that there was a linear continuity between the extermination of the Herero and the Holocaust forty years earlier.” Cf. also: Dederling, “Compounds”: 31, referring to R. Kössler and J. Zimmerer.

<sup>129</sup> Aram Mattioli, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt. Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung 1935–1941*, Zürich, Füssli, 2005; cf. Dederling, “Compounds”: 43.

<sup>130</sup> Winfried Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2005: 186: “die Geschichte der Kolonien [wird] [...] primär als Teil der deutschen Geschichte gesehen und in die Vorgeschichte des

We are thus bound to characterize this way of reasoning, which describes an alleged path “from Windhuk to Auschwitz”, as a step backwards in comparison to the developments in research as represented by, for example, Gesine Krüger whose exploration of the Hereros’ active survival strategies and forms of self-assertion during and after the war predates these works.<sup>131</sup> Not even the analysis and interpretation of a “German way to [South Africa’s] apartheid” as Zimmerer’s PhD supervisor Wolfgang Reinhard had described the development *in* GSWA sufficed.<sup>132</sup> When Zimmerer speaks of the “globalization of the German history of violence” (Z: 15), he is referring solely to the history of the Third Reich and its policy of extermination. The terms ‘Auschwitz’ and ‘Holocaust’ guarantee academic and media attention, they evoke associations and they are predestined to convey moral judgments on the basis of comparisons.<sup>133</sup> People *in* GSWA play only a passive role in this account. However, colonial history has been written like that before – albeit under reverse conditions. If Zimmerer characterizes his critics as state-centred Hegel adepts, it is appropriate to reply to him – freely adapted from young Hegelian Karl Marx – that he has not been capable of turning the object of his study upside down.

With Gerwarth and Malinowski one should also point to the risk of historians seeing themselves as being called “to scour world history as retrospective state-attorney for cases of ‘suspected genocide’, rather than focusing on the analysis of root causes.”<sup>134</sup> However, it can be presumed that with the relative success of the Herero lawsuits – although they have not (yet) resulted in financial reparations, but have attracted a lot of attention at national and international level – other peoples will be reminded that they were victims of German atrocities which may even include genocide.<sup>135</sup> Many years ago, Allan D. Cooper pointed out that “[a]ll other groups in Namibia also experienced some

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‘Dritten Reiches’ eingegliedert.” Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*: 24: “Nor did the escalation of genocidal violence in the African colonies of Imperial Germany, or the atrocities committed during the Great War, stand in any direct line of continuity with the brutality and genocide carried out under Nazi auspices, on a far more extensive scale, some thirty or forty years later. But these early experiences of colonial violence and European war did have a massive impact, with reverberations across the century.”

<sup>131</sup> Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*: 302.

<sup>132</sup> Wolfgang Reinhard, “Eingeborenepolitik in Südwestafrika 1842 bis 1915. Der deutsche Weg zur Apartheid”, in: Sabine Weiss, (ed.), *Historische Blickpunkte. Festschrift für Johann Rainer*, Innsbruck, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, 1988: 543-556 (543).

<sup>133</sup> See e.g. Jan-Bart Gewald, “More Than Red Rubber and Figures Alone. A Critical Appraisal of the Memory of the Congo Exhibition at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 39, 2006: 471-486 (486).

<sup>134</sup> Gerwarth and Malinowski, “Holocaust”: 464: “die Weltgeschichte als rückwärtsgewandter Staatsanwalt nach Fällen von ‘Genozidverdacht’ zu durchkämmen, statt sich auf Ursachenforschung zu konzentrieren.” Cf. also: Nipperdey, “Wilhelminische Gesellschaft”: 175: “Die Aufgabe des Historikers ist nicht mit der trivialen Forderung nach Kritik versus Apologie zu begreifen, nicht mit der Funktion des Staatsanwalts oder des Verteidigers, ja nicht einmal mit der der Jury.” Criticism of the continuity thesis thus has nothing to do with colonial apology.

<sup>135</sup> See e.g. Shiremo Shampapi, “The 1903 Kavango Uprising against the German Imperial Government. A Forgotten Historical Episode”, *New Era*, 11 October, 2011.

form of genocide as well during the colonial era.”<sup>136</sup> More Holocaust comparisons and an inflation of hyphenated ‘Holocausts’ are thus to be expected. The ‘cession’ of the term ‘Holocaust’ to other mass atrocities will, however, erode the knowledge of the singularity of the Holocaust. The particularities of Jewish victimhood will thus be called more and more into question (‘competitive victimology’).<sup>137</sup>

While it was mainly conservative historians who, during the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, argued for a ‘contextualization’ of the Holocaust, amounting to relativism in the face of Stalin’s crimes, today it is predominantly politically left-standing authors who compare, contextualize and seek to show that – given the crimes of colonialism – the Holocaust is “simply not unique in history” (*“eben nicht einzigartig in der Geschichte”*) (Z: 25). It is also probably due to his political self-positioning that Zimmerer expresses his surprise at being “pushed into the corner of unrighteous Holocaust relativisation” (Z: 15).<sup>138</sup> Undoubtedly, there have been more accentuated voices outside of academia from which can also be seen the extent to which Holocaust comparisons seem to reflect the *Zeitgeist* – here, academia would seem to follow a social trend. The term ‘Holocaust relativisation’ would probably not always be recognized as a ‘reprimand’.<sup>139</sup> A history of Holocaust comparisons has yet to be written; in conclusion three examples should suffice to illustrate this trend.

Firstly, Jacques Vergès, the lawyer of Klaus Barbie, ‘the Butcher of Lyon’, whose relativisation of the Holocaust is legendary: Maître Vergès, an avowed Maoist, anti-imperialist and Israel-hater, took up the mandate through the mediation of Holocaust denier François Genoud. In 1987 the ‘devil’s advocate’ and his ‘postcolonial team’ seized the opportunity to reproach France with its colonial past during the trial in order to relativise his client’s participation in the Holocaust. He told a German journalist: “In French concentration camps in Algeria more children died within a month, than Jewish children were deported during the German occupation of France.”<sup>140</sup> Secondly, the French critic of imperialism mentioned earlier, Rosa Amalie Plumelle-Urbe, argued in the

<sup>136</sup> Cooper, “Reparations”: 119f.; see also: Jan-Bart Gewald, “Conference report: German Colonialism in West Africa. Implications for German-West African Partnership in Development. 29.09.2011–01.10.2011, Winneba/Ghana”, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 24.11.2011, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3904>> [accessed 12 October, 2012].

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Pascal Bruckner, *La Tyrannie de la pénitence. Essai sur le masochisme occidental*, Paris, Grasset, 2008: 143, on the “hiérarchie du martyrologue”.

<sup>138</sup> “in die Ecke unredlicher Relativierung des Holocaust gerückt” (Z: 15).

<sup>139</sup> In contrast, politically left-oriented authors now dismiss the anti-Semitism charge as an “instrument of power”, see: Gerhard Hanloser, “Die Linke und der Antisemitismus. Der Antisemitismusvorwurf als Herrschaftsinstrument”, *Das Argument*, 53, 2011: 501-507, referring to Moshe Zuckermann, *Antisemit! Ein Vorwurf als Herrschaftsinstrument*, Wien, Promedia, 2010.

<sup>140</sup> Ulrich Wickert, *Frankreich. Die wunderbare Illusion*, München, Heyne, 1989: 167: “In französischen KZs in Algerien sind innerhalb eines Monats mehr Kinder gestorben, als jüdische Kinder während der deutschen Besatzung aus Frankreich deportiert wurden.” Cf. also “Interview with Notorious Lawyer Jacques Vergès: ‘There Is No Such Thing as Absolute Evil’”, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-notorious-lawyer-jacques-verges-there-is-no-such-thing-as-absolute-evil-a-591943.html>> [accessed 21 November, 2008].

tradition of Aimé Césaire that National Socialism was nothing more than Europe's extermination policy transferred from the colonies back to Europe. In contrast to Olusoga and Erichsen she begins this story in 1492. Birthe Kundrus summarized Uribe's book *Férocité Blanche* (White Barbarism) with the sentence: "The Holocaust [is] just old wine in new bottles". It is no coincidence that this book concludes with wild accusations against Israel.<sup>141</sup> Thirdly, in one of Germany's largest daily newspaper, the journalist Elisabeth Kiderlen recently ascertained a symmetry between Israelis and Iranians. Both peoples see themselves as victims (*Opfervolk*), both have had traumatizing experiences. The first with the "murderous anti-Semitism" (the word 'Holocaust' is *not* used!), the latter with the oil price. The Iranians had been degraded in their own country to second-class citizens by the British, Russians and Americans because they have been denied the right of disposal over their most important resource.<sup>142</sup>

This last example in particular shows the direction into which relativism can lead, this ongoing search for comparisons and 'parallels': Where (cynical) parallels are drawn between Nazism and imperialism, to such an extent that gas chambers are equated with the price of oil, history is being trivialized. But this cannot be the aim of historians. The philosopher Pascal Bruckner, after reading Plumelle-Uribe, has rightly warned of an all too superficial "Nazification" of history.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore Zimmerer equates the Holocaust with the Herero War much more clearly than in the articles discussed here in his criticism of Gerhard Seyfried's novel *Herero*, and this is an eloquent testimony to the intellectual banality that looms if colonial (world) history is painted 'brown'.<sup>144</sup>

By imposing the template of argumentation on history that 'it has all happened before' no new knowledge can be gained. This has been shown – on the one hand – by the criticism of Kundrus, Gerwarth, and Malinowski of the 'continuity thesis' advanced by Zimmerer, Olusoga, Erichsen and others. On the other hand, the contrast between the lack of originality of the theses of the two books discussed here and the alleged *new* historical insights that the thesis "from Windhuk to Auschwitz" is supposed to allow, has been repeatedly pointed out in the preceding chapters. But if one reads Césaire, Plumelle-Uribe and Zimmerer one after the other, it is entirely reasonable to ask of what exactly this new, this 'progress' over the past decades consisted? A few 'continuities of personnel' and Hitler's colonial quotes are insufficient to bring something new into historiography. One is reminded of historian Frederick Cooper's warning; after reading a number of unsatisfying theses about 'colonial studies' he concluded: "There is an equal danger of time-flattening, particularly in the locating of forms of 'colonial governmentality' in a vaguely defined modernity that seems to extend from Diderot to Derrida." The critique of "story-plucking, leapfrogging legacies, and

<sup>141</sup> Kundrus, "Herero": 82.

<sup>142</sup> Elisabeth Kiderlen, "Nie wieder wehrlos. Israel und Iran haben überraschend viel gemeinsam", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 April, 2012: 11. It is no coincidence that the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* has built up over the last years a deplorable record of anti-Semitic cartoons and other slurs.

<sup>143</sup> Bruckner, *Tyrannie*: 134; 143: "hitlériser l'histoire"; "nazifier".

<sup>144</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Keine Geiseln der Geschichte", *die tageszeitung*, 10 January, 2004: 5.

time-flattening” fits Zimmerer’s approach. This kind of analysis “makes the identification of structures, agency, and causality fade from view.”<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, the conclusion seems justified that the postcolonial reading of National Socialism, which promotes the thesis “from Windhuk to Auschwitz”, was launched as petrel and has landed as grebe. After about 10 years of writing we now learn from one of the most earnest advocates of this thesis that there was “no special path in German colonialism”. He declares the question posed by Bley which was quoted above regarding something “particular” in GSWA as “germanocentric”. Whereas the ‘why’ is usually considered the key question for historians, Zimmerer does not even pose it. Where once an “explanatory connection”<sup>146</sup> was asserted, there are now “many ways” and only “one, not a secondary path” led “from Windhuk to Auschwitz”. This is not just “an airy line of argument”, this is also formulated quite hesitantly; one could also say: arbitrarily. It does not ring of intellectual acuity. The analytical precision required to provide a truly “explanatory connection” for the period from 1904 to 1945 is (still) missing – if this was ever the objective. However, this should not result in the continued distortion of the Holocaust.

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<sup>145</sup> Frederick Cooper, “Decolonizing Situation. The Rise, Fall and Rise of Colonial Studies, 1951–2001”, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 20, 2002: 47-76 (64 f.); for a similar critique of Bauman and his followers see: Wehler, *Kampfsituation*: 166f.: “man [stößt] allzuoft auf Ahnungslosigkeit”.

<sup>146</sup> Melber, “Deutscher Sonderweg?”: 16: “erklärender Zusammenhang”.

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