

# COLONIALISM, GERMAN EXPERIENCE AND THE REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY

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**Abstract:** *The German colonialist experience is relatively a less studied area. First of all, it occupies relatively a short span of time. Second, the general emphasis on the Third Reich eclipses other periods. In the aftermath of the abrupt ending of German colonial rule, the British even argued that the German Empire was inexperienced when it came to ruling indigenous populations and foreign lands.<sup>1</sup> However, as Steinmetz shows German Empire was experienced in “colonial statecraft.”<sup>2</sup>*

*Thus, this paper focuses on German colonialism, its roots, course of action and pertinent repercussions. In order to do so, it initially investigates the nature of colonialism in general and then raises questions on the origins and the development of the German colonial legacy in particular. In an interdisciplinary fashion that encompasses colonialism, German history, the Holocaust, and genocidal studies and through a hybrid form of methodology that introduces modifications to the Meinig’s chronological framework<sup>3</sup>, I posit that genocidal tools had been available to the German Imperial Army long before the Holocaust. Consequently, when national prestige and global hegemony were perceived to be threatened, certain segments of the German society approved extreme brutality, and perhaps genocide.*

*After presenting various theoretical interpretations, the study adopts a case-study approach through German South West Africa. Consequently,*

\* The views expressed in this study solely represent the author’s own opinions and assessments.

1 George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa and Southwest Africa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. xvii.

2 Ibid.

3 D.W. Meinig, *Atlantic America, 1492-1800 Vol. I of The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

*the essay will be unfolding a problem presented by recent scholarly works: debate on German colonialism and its link to Holocaust.*

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Genocide, Holocaust, The German Empire (II. Reich), Namibia, Kingdom of Italy

## SÖMÜRGEÇİLİK, ALMANYA'NIN DENEYİMLERİ VE TARİHE YANSIMALARI

**Öz:** *Almanların sömürgeci deneyimi diğerlerine kıyasla az çalışılmış bir alandır. (Bunun nedeni) Her şeyden önce bu konu kısa bir zaman zarfını kapsar. İkincisi, Nazi Almanya'sına verilen genel önemin diğer dönemlerin önüne geçmiş olmasıdır. Alman sömürgeci yönetiminin ani bitişinin sebebi İngilizlerce, Alman İmparatorluğu'nun yerel halkı ve yabancı toprakları yönetmedeki tecrübesizliği olarak öne sürülmüştür. Ancak, Steinmetz bize Alman İmparatorluğu'nun 'sömürgeci devlet yönetimi' konusunda tecrübeli olduklarını gösterir.*

*Nitekim bu yazı Alman sömürgeciliğine, onun kökenlerine, hareket şekline ve doğurduğu etkilere odaklanmaktadır. Bunu yapabilmek için, önce genel olarak sömürgeciliğin doğası araştırılmakta, sonrasında Alman sömürgeci mirasının kökeni ve gelişimi hakkında sorular sorulmaktadır. Sömürgeciliği, Alman tarihini, Holokost ve soykırım çalışmalarını kapsayan, Meinig'in kronolojik çerçevesine eklemeler yapan karma bir yöntem kullanan disiplinlerarası bir üslupla, Holokost'tan çok daha önce soykırım araçlarının Alman İmparatorluk Ordusu'nun kullanımına açık olduğunu önermekteyim. Buna bağlı olarak, ulusal itibar ve küresel hâkimiyetin tehdit altında olduğu algılandığında, Alman toplumunun belirli kesimleri, olağanüstü vahşeti ve belki de soykırımı onaylamıştır.*

*Çeşitli teorik tefsirleri sunduktan sonra çalışma, Alman Güneybatı Afrika'sı üzerinden, vaka incelemesi yaklaşımını benimser. Bunun sonucunda, makale günümüzde akademik çalışmalara konu olan Alman sömürgeciliği ve bunun Holokost ile bağlantısı tartışmasına katkıda bulunacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sömürgecilik, Soykırım, Holokost, Alman İmparatorluğu (II. Reich), Namibya, İtalya Krallığı

## 1. Introduction:

It is not clear whether British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey was persuaded by Emperor Wilhelm II's remarks that "Germany desired no further territory. Her own Colonies were ample for her needs. And besides, that there were large German places of business flourishing in British colonies."<sup>4</sup> However, the transcribed dialogue, as a micro-historical case, presents the contemporary historian a vivid example of the German colonialist legacy and its rhetoric. The Emperor's remarks acknowledge, first of all, that by 1907, Germany had emerged as a colonialist empire in the age of British and French colonial empires. Osterhammel even points that "before 1914, the Germans also built up an 'informal empire' in China, Latin America, and the Ottoman Empire."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the future of German political interests in the Middle East would have been perceived consequential for the British Empire. Second of all, by acknowledging disinterest in acquiring new territories, Wilhelm II could have been sustaining the delicate diplomacy Chancellor Bismarck had embarked.<sup>6</sup> Finally, while Wilhelm's words aimed at placating the British, Germany might indeed have been refraining from the complexities of the colonial war which took its toll over the four-year long armed conflict (1904-1908) in South West-Africa. Despite these assertions, German colonialist history still deserves further inquiry. Such an undertaking would not only provide a better understanding of colonialism but also of German history.

The German colonialist experience is relatively a less studied area. First of all, it occupies relatively a short span of time. Second, the general emphasis on the Third Reich eclipses other periods. In the aftermath of the abrupt ending of German colonial rule, the British even argued that the German Empire was inexperienced when it came to ruling indigenous populations and foreign lands.<sup>7</sup> However, as Steinmetz shows German Empire was experienced in "colonial statecraft."<sup>8</sup>

4 In an attempt to convince the British Foreign Secretary of the German intentions in the Middle East, Emperor Wilhelm II made it explicit on November 12th, 1907, that "Germany desired further no further territory. Her own Colonies were ample for her needs. And besides, that there were large German places of business flourishing in British colonies." Document 25, November 13, 2007, Foreign Office reprinted in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, General Editors Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt Part I From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the First World War, Series B The Near and Middle East 1856-1914 ed. David Gillard Volume 18: *Arabia, the Gulf and Bagdad Railway, 1907-1914*, (University Publications of America, Inc. 1985), pp. 18-20.

5 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997), p. 19.

6 Russell A. Berman, "Book Review: Colonial Fantasies," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (Aug 2000), pp. 110-114.

7 George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa and Southwest Africa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. xvii.

8 Ibid.

Thus, this paper focuses on German colonialism, its roots, course of action and pertinent repercussions. In order to do so, it initially investigates the nature of colonialism in general and then raises questions on the origins and the development of the German colonial legacy in particular. In an interdisciplinary fashion that encompasses colonialism, German history, the Holocaust, and genocidal studies and through a hybrid form of methodology that introduces modifications to the Meinig's chronological framework<sup>9</sup>, I posit that genocidal tools had been available to the German Imperial Army long before the Holocaust. Consequently, when national prestige and global hegemony were perceived to be threatened, certain segments of the German society approved extreme brutality, and perhaps genocide.

After presenting various theoretical interpretations, the study adopts a case-study approach through German South West Africa. This specific case-study is particularly relevant since it had become one of most notorious examples of colonization and armed conflict. Consequently, the essay will be unfolding a problem presented by recent scholarly works: debate on German colonialism and its link to Holocaust. While doing so, a comparative approach is also utilized. Finally, in an epilogue, current relations between Germany and former South West Africa, Namibia, will be clarified. In terms of tribal names and German words, I adhere to the original punctuation of the quotations. Otherwise, generally accepted wording has been used.

## 2. Conceptualization of Colonialism:

*The Economist*, in an anachronistic fashion, lately interpreted Chinese overseas overtures as colonialist intentions.<sup>10</sup> According to the report, the contemporary Chinese, fueled by their "thirst for resources"<sup>11</sup> had become "the new colonialists."<sup>12</sup> If however, *The Economist* misinterpreted this notion and had categorical flaws, what then would be the definition of colonialism?

Osterhammel offers a comprehensive definition of colonialism. According to him,

9 D.W. Meinig, *Atlantic America, 1492-1800 Vol. I of The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

10 "A Ravenous Dragon: A special report on China's quest for resources, March 15th, 2008," *The Economist* March 15th-21st 2008.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

*Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule.*<sup>13</sup>

There are certainly other interpretations of colonialism as well as of imperialism and empire. In early interpretations of the term, Heinrich Friedjung had asserted that “imperialism signified both a nationalist ideology devoted to extending the domination of a particular nation state, and also a policy determined by ceaseless rivalry among the powers composing the international system of states.”<sup>14</sup> According to Said, on the other hand, “imperialism means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’ which is almost a consequence of imperialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory.”<sup>15</sup> Zantop further asserts that “imperialism thus encompasses both thought and action, [whereas] colonialism only the latter the actual taking possession and settling of the land.”<sup>16</sup> Osterhammel, on the other hand, juxtaposes that “imperialism is the concept that comprises all forcings and activities contributing to the construction and the maintenance of transcolonial empires...Imperialism thus implies not only colonial politics, but international politics for which colonies are not just ends themselves, but also pawns in global power games.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas the colonial politics is left to the hands of localized officials, imperialism is the domain of the metropolis.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Zantop concludes that, “as the experience of Germany shows, colonialist desires could be instrumentalized for imperialist purposes, since they had taken hold of the imagination long before any state-sponsored expansion was even considered.”<sup>19</sup>

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13 Osterhammel, p. 15.

14 Heinrich Friedjung, *Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus 1884-1914*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1919-1922), pp. 4-5, quoted in Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism* trans. P.S. Falla, New York: Random House, 1980.

15 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 9, quoted in Suzanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Pre-colonial Germany, 1770-1870*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 8.

16 Suzanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Pre-colonial Germany, 1770-1870*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 8-9.

17 Osterhammel, p. 21.

18 Osterhammel, p. 22.

19 Zantop, p. 9.

### 3. Repositioning of German Colonialism in Comparative Framework:

Whereas the British, French and Spanish Empires have a long-legacy of colonialism dating back to the early modern ages, the German Empire is a late comer in such an imperial enterprise. In order to encapsulate peculiarities and commonalities of their enterprise in Africa, this paper not only points to the colonial imagination in the German psyche, which will be discussed in Section 4 but also briefly compares the German colonial legacy to similar Italian experiences in Section 6.

### 4. Conceptualization of Colonialism in Imperial Germany:

While an imperial cable, stating protection over a German overseas enterprise in South West Africa, on April 24, 1884 marks the beginning of German colonialist history,<sup>20</sup> its colonialist ventures date back to earlier centuries. The first episode is the failed colonization attempt in Venezuela during 1528-1555.<sup>21</sup> The second episode emerges out of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century German scholarship<sup>22</sup> that in a form of intellectual imagination transformed even the failed Venezuela experience into an “ultimately triumphalist fantasy,”<sup>23</sup> which facilitated the emergence of German /Prussian State as a colonialist empire.<sup>24</sup>

Pre-1884 colonialist thinking, according to Zantop, laid the foundation for German colonialism. Zantop’s theory demonstrates the following:

*As the experience of Germany shows, colonialist desires could be instrumentalized for imperialist purposes, since they had taken hold of the imagination long before any state-sponsored expansion was even considered. Imaginary colonialism anticipated actual imperialism, words, and actions. In the end, reality just caught up with the imagination.*<sup>25</sup>

In addition to creating new colonies, what the afore-mentioned intellectual ‘fantasy’ assisted was the formation of a German identity.<sup>26</sup>

20 German colonialist activity encompassed South-West Africa, Togo, Cameroon, East Africa and the Pacific. See Zantop, p. 1.

21 Zantop, p. 19.

22 For its racist contents, see Zantop, pp. 66-80 and 81-97.

23 Zantop, p. 29.

24 Ibid., pp. 1-16.

25 Ibid., p. 9.

26 Ibid., p. 7.

According to Zantop, in their struggle against other European nations, Germans created mental maps on various social categories that assisted “constructing a national identity in opposition to the perceived racial, sexual, ethnic or national characteristics of others, Europeans and non-Europeans alike.”<sup>27</sup> She further posits that “as Germans imagined their others, Europeans and non-Europeans both outside and inside Germany, they created themselves.”<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the colonies became the stage “for the creation of an imaginary national self freed from history and convention”<sup>29</sup> Zimmerer and Zellner point out Dr. Fabri and Hübbe-Scheiden’s promotion of colonial aspirations and how the latter (Hübbe-Scheiden) linked “the development of national consciousness, an independent overseas policy and national power.”<sup>30</sup>

Steinmetz, on the other hand, posits a theoretical framework that emphasizes the role of ethnographic discourses, symbolic struggles among the colonizers and the psychic identifications on the making of German colonialism.<sup>31</sup> According to this theory, the pre-colonial images of the indigenous population had a bearing on the later colonialist administration’s policy.<sup>32</sup> However, not only the power struggle between German classes but also colonialist administrators’ personal choice affected the outcome of the native policy, which is the “official intervention directed toward stabilizing a colonized group around a particular definition of its culture, character and behavior.”<sup>33</sup>

The economic dimension of the German colonial project is relevant to the discussion at hand and also an unresolved question. For Friedrichsmeyer et. al., “German conduct within the colonies depended very much on the nature of the land and specific German interests. ... Germany’s policy aims in the colonies were almost exclusively economic.”<sup>34</sup> For Zimmerer and Zeller, “from the 1830s, the German presence in West Africa grew until in some places, German firms occupied first place in the European colonial trade”<sup>35</sup> and the State

27 Ibid., p. 7.

28 Ibid., p. 7.

29 Ibid., p. 7.

30 Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, trans. Neather, Edward, *Genocide in German South-West Africa: the Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its aftermath*, Monmouth, Wales: Merlin Press, 2008, p. xxi and also Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans. P.S. Falla, (New York: Random House, 1980).

31 Steinmetz, p. 22.

32 Ibid. p. 2.

33 Ibid. p. 43.

34 Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Suzanne Zantop, ed. *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press: 1998), p. 11.

35 Zimmerer, *Zimmerer and Zeller*, p. xix.



refrained from the cost that would be associated with an imperial administration.<sup>36</sup> However, it is difficult to view German colonial project as a profitable enterprise in all cases as a uniform model. Within this context, Smith argues that the German colonial empire is a reflection of “nineteenth-century European imperial expansion”<sup>37</sup> established “as a product of the complex interplay of domestic political forces resulting from rapid socio-economic change, the empire itself was never a practical success.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the colonial project meant “a significant factor in making Germany not just a great power on the continent of Europe, but truly a world power.”<sup>39</sup>

## 5. Case Study: German South West Africa

While Osterhammel mentions an ‘African’ model of colonization where colonizers relied on an indigenous workforce,<sup>40</sup> Meinig introduces a phase approach for the colonization process in which he identifies eight stages.<sup>41</sup> The settlers’ demand for the livestock in the South West African case assisted annihilation of the labor force. This event undermines a narration based on indigenous labor force, thus adoption of African model. A chronological approach seems fit for the purposes of this paper. Thus, over the course of this section, the phases of German colonialism in South West Africa will be provided and if necessary, modifications to the Meinig’s framework will be introduced:<sup>42</sup>

### a) Reconnaissance of the unknown terrain

The initial stage of Meinig’s framework simply needs to be modified to encompass civilian and missionary reconnaissance and establishment. According to the original scheme, civilian settlement would have been stage seven. Nevertheless, the German presence in South West Africa started with the missionary activities of the Rhenish Missionary Society

36 Helmuth Stoecker, *German Imperialism in Africa*, (translation by C. Hurst & Co. London, 1986), p. 14, quoted in Zimmerer and Zeller, p. xix

37 Woodruff D. Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), p. 233.

38 Ibid.

39 Zimmerer and Zeller, p. xxiv.

40 Osterhammel, p. 7.

41 D.W. Meinig, *Atlantic America, 1492-1800 Vol. I of The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 65 quoted in Osterhammel, p. 41.

42 Osterhammel suggest modifications to the Meinig’s theory, except the Brazilian, North American and Caribbean, and some South Sea cases. (See Osterhammel, p. 41).



(RMG) as early as 1842.<sup>43</sup> Although RMG raised the Prussian flag over its missionaries, and received King's assurances for their activities, it had not only a relative autonomy but also a pragmatic orientation of encouraging and collaborating with the British colonial rule in South Africa. This was intended to solidify the mission's interest.<sup>44</sup> However, the British later failed to meet the mission's requests; this, in return, led to RMG's even stronger appeal for the German imperial protection.<sup>45</sup> As Drechsler acknowledges, "from 1880 onwards the Rhenish Missionary Society openly called for German intervention in South West Africa."<sup>46</sup> However, German Imperial documents present that Chancellor Bismarck did not approve the RMG's visions for the region.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, as the British rule became problematic in the face of indigenous uprisings, change of British domestic politics, and RMG's manipulation of events promoted its demands for the German protection with even more vigor.<sup>48</sup>

### b) Gathering of coastal resources

In 1881, a German expeditionary campaign for mining began.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, RMG had founded the West German Association for Colonization and Export.<sup>50</sup> In the next two years, however, the main coastal activity began underway as a German merchant acquired the minor coastal section of Angra Pequena.<sup>51</sup> Having realized the diminishing British power in the region and the feasibility of a colonial rule as evidenced by the German coastal presence in Angra Pequena, finally German protection was granted to the region on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1884.<sup>52</sup> How did this policy change come about? According to Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox and Zantop, "why Bismarck changed his mind about German colonies is still a matter of conjecture."<sup>53</sup> Possible

43 Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966. trans. *Let us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism*. trans. Bernd Zöllner, (London: Zed Press, 1980).

44 Drechsler, p.19.

45 Drechsler, p. 20.

46 Drechsler. p. 20.

47 Imperial Colonial Office, File No.2098, p. 10, Memorandum for Herr von Kusserow, 13 May 1880 quoted in Drechsler, p. 20.

48 Drechsler, p. 20-21.

49 Drechsler, p. 21.

50 Drechsler, p. 21.

51 Drechsler, p. 21.

52 Drechsler, p. 22.

53 Friedrichsmeyer, p. 10.

explanations encompass a variety of theories ranging from geopolitical, to economic and even sociological approaches. While Smith acknowledges various pertinent theories, perhaps it is best to agree with his conclusion that “in Germany, the real meaning of colonialism must be found in its domestic political function”<sup>54</sup> and that policy change was due to domestic political rivalry.<sup>55</sup>

### c) Barter with the local population

Stage three also requires modification. Instead of bartering with the local population, what German settlers did was apparently to compete over economic sources of revenue. For the majority of German settlers, cattle-stock-raising seemed a viable option; however, the indigenous people, especially the Hereros, were not fond of selling neither their land nor their cattle. The rest of the settlers sought to extract metals and precious stones. At the outset, manipulation was the key to acquire land for the entrepreneurs. Some indigenous groups had agreed to sell their lands by the mile, whereas the German settlers, such as Adolf Lüderitz “...cheated the Africans...”<sup>56</sup> by utilizing geographical miles. Moreover, various territories bought by the German settlers were claimed by the Hereros as their land.<sup>57</sup> The frictions between the settlers, and the indigenous groups as well as rivalry among them persisted and led to armed uprisings. This development, however, led to the administration’s forcefully taking away the Herero lands. “By 1903, more than half the Herero cattle had passed into the hands of the settlers, whose farms were encroaching alarmingly on Herero pasture land.”<sup>58</sup> Thus a vicious cycle emerged. Land-loss induced the Hereros to rebel. The land confiscations became the means of punitive German action which led to further native rebellion.

### d) Plunder and initial military actions in the interior

Plunder, in contrast to Meinig’s framework came in the form of economic conquest and private acquisition of land. However, private entrepreneurship eventually ran into fiscal difficulties, which in turn,

54 Smith, p. 233.

55 Smith, pp. 238-239.

56 Drechsler, p. 23.

57 Drechsler, p. 25.

58 *SWAPO 13* Report quoted in Friedrichsmeyer, p. 13.

compelled Adolf Lüderitz to turn his properties over to German South West Africa Company.<sup>59</sup> This company thusly received the blessing of the German state since its acquisition nullified the British bid for the Lüderitz property.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the rhetoric in its petition for tax-exemption and the Parliament's exemption testify to the close relationship between the two entities.<sup>61</sup>

### **e) Securing of outposts**

The securing of outposts also differed from the Meinig's framework. Whereas the German presence occurred earlier, the securing of the "northern coastal strip between 22° and Cape Frion"<sup>62</sup> did not finalize not "until June or July 1885."<sup>63</sup>

### **f) Imperial imposition**

Long-before the imperial imposition, the civilian settlement began in South West Africa. Consequently, the civilians (missionaries, merchants, colonial society in general) launched a public relations campaign to induce the German state for a colonialist project. When the German state finally declared its rule over this territory, it assigned only a handful of ranking German officials to the Southwest Africa.

As the German officials entered the natives into treaties and guarantees, they started to feel disappointed by the invalidity of the agreements.<sup>64</sup> By 1888, resentment led to the Herero's uprising and the fleeing of the German officials from the Hereroland.<sup>65</sup> In the aftermath of such a breakdown of the German colonialist rule, RMG, whose activities were suppressed by the indigenous groups, once again appealed to Berlin and asked for "a standing militia composed at least 400 men plus two batteries so that any manifestation of arrogance and violation of interests can be punished."<sup>66</sup> Governor Goering also advocated for military

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59 Drechsler, p. 30.

60 Drechsler, p. 30.

61 Drechsler, p. 31.

62 Drechsler, pp. 24-25.

63 Ibid.

64 Drechsler, p. 38.

65 Drechsler, p. 39.

66 Imperial Colonial Office File No. 2105, pp. 32-4 quoted in Drechsler, p. 40.

presence, RMG Inspector Büttner even suggested playing the natives against each other.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, in late June, 1889 a small German force, traveling on a British commercial ship under the disguise of explorers arrived in South West Africa.<sup>68</sup> Despite their initial orders favoring collaborating with the natives against the British, the German commander, Captain Curt von François, soon enough alienated the Hereros, and consequently asked for an increase in military presence. According to him:

*in order to straighten matters, out here, it is necessary to crush the Herero and to drive their friends, the English out of the country. To achieve this would require no more than 140 infantrymen and 10 gunners in full combat gear plus two pieces of light artillery...The larger the force the greater the benefits resulting from the capture of the sizeable cattle herds of the Herero (approx. 200, 000 head.)<sup>69</sup>*

The German settlers' response -as they shared with François- was positive towards the military option:

*Your energetic and vigorous action over the English issue has completely upset the Herero. It is a pity they haven't hanged a couple of them right away, as rumour here first had it. I feel that exemplary action like that would have had a salutary effect because the Herero need to be ruled with an iron hand lest they think we're afraid of them or don't mean business.<sup>70</sup>*

Despite Berlin's initial resistance, the decision to make a major increase (214 men and two officers) in military personnel came about in 1893.<sup>71</sup> However, François's adamant militaristic engagement and provocation targeted at the natives counter-produced results that led to the attacks on the German settlers. German military was not able to prevent or suppress the assault which in return brought the official removal of François.<sup>72</sup>

67 Drechsler, pp. 41-42.

68 Drechsler, pp. 42.

69 *Imp. Col. Off. File No. 2107*, pp.68-70, François to Bismarck, 20 August,1889 and File 2108, François to Krauel, 29th October, 1889 quoted in Drechsler, pp. 44.

70 Curt von François, *Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Drei Jahre im Lande Hendrik Witboois*, (Berlin , 1896), p. 56 quoted in Drechsler, p. 44.

71 Drechsler, p. 69.

72 Drechsler, pp. 69-75.

The next German colonial ruler was Theodor Leutwein, who, according to Drechsler, was able to amalgamate the diplomatic dealings and military policy to suppress the natives<sup>73</sup> and enhanced the German authority in South West Africa. However, his policies were equally too brutal and eventually collapsed in the face of a Herero uprising in 1904.

**g) Implantation of a first group of non-military immigrants and initiation of a self-sustaining colony**

It is doubtful whether West Africa ever became a self-sustaining colony. At the outset, it was an economic failure. Bismarck, especially in the case of West Africa refrained from the colonial project in the face of bleak economic prospects.<sup>74</sup> He even had to overlook the private entrepreneurship and missionary activity. As Smith emphasized, “effective occupation meant a much heavier colonial involvement than Bismarck had ever intended for Germany, with attendant expenses that threatened his entire colonial scheme.”<sup>75</sup>

Eventually, the discovery of precious metals and minerals propelled a turn-around for a few enterprises. The major transformation, however, was complemented by the “the gradual transfer of land and cattle of the Herero and Nama into the hands of Germans settlers, a development that was completed with the crushing of the great uprisings between 1904 and 1907.”<sup>76</sup>

**h) Development of a complete colonial ruling apparatus.**

As mentioned above, a more structured and extensive colonial rule emerged under the administration of Governor General Leutwein. He successfully maintained a divide and rule policy upon various native tribes, and when diplomacy and collaboration did not provide the results sought, he did not hesitate in resorting to military campaigns against the natives such as the Witbooi tribe.<sup>77</sup>

Leutwein’s policies, however, could not alleviate the resentment

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73 Drechsler, p. 75.

74 Drechsler, p. 40.

75 Smith, p. 39.

76 Drechsler, 111.

77 There are various indigenous groups in South West Africa, ranging from the Hereros, which Steinmetz refers as Ovaherero, to the Witbooi, the Nama, the Basters, the Orlam, etc.

indigenous tribes had towards the German rule. According to Friedrichsmeyer, in the face of socio-economic problems imposed by the German settlers and the administration, Herero and subsequently Nama "...declare[d] war on the Germans in January 1904..."<sup>78</sup> Drechsler further informs that "under the leadership of their supreme Chief Samuel Maharero," Hereros, ...who preferred to die in arms in hand rather than wait in resignation until their last possessions [land and cattle] had been taken away from them..."<sup>79</sup> rebelled on January 12, 1904, believing that Germans were not abiding by the guarantee treaties.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Leutwein's persuasion in obtaining a strip of Hereroland for a new railway free of charge and the anticipation of a flow of German settlers had further strained mutual relations. There were also numerous accounts of maltreatment (rape, murder, and other forms of humiliation) of the natives by the German settlers.<sup>81</sup> Finally, Zimmerer points to the "provocation by the district officer of Okahandja, Leutnant Zürn [that] led to an escalation of tension."<sup>82</sup>

Leutwein's initial tactics did not result in checking this calamity. In a short span of time "...the Herero had occupied the whole of central Namibia, with the exception of the military posts, and had plundered settlements and farm;"<sup>83</sup> killing 123 Germans.<sup>84</sup> According to the New York Times, "...Colonel Leutwein, in the tropical heat, incumbered by his sick men, harassed by the rebels, and possibly deserted by his carriers, may have been unable to force his way through the hostile tribesmen, and that he has been obliged to intrench himself and wait for the arrival of a rescuing expedition."<sup>85</sup> In the next couple of weeks, Leutwein's safety was assured and the rebels attacking a police post were repelled and sixty natives perished in this assault.<sup>86</sup> In April, rebellion picked up pace, Hereros engaged a German column on the way to Oniatu, killing thirty-three German military personnel and losing, according to an unofficial German account, ninety-two of their men.<sup>87</sup> On April 11<sup>th</sup>, an 8 hour engagement took place, forcing Hereros to leave their stronghold. On this account, an article presents Leutwein's cable:

78 Friedrichsmeyer, et. al., p. 13.

79 Drechsler, p. 132.

80 Drechsler, p. 132.

81 Drechsler, pp. 133-135.

82 Zimmerer, p. 43.

83 Ibid., p. 44.

84 Ibid.

85 *The New York Times*, February 2, 1904, p.2.

86 *The New York Times*, February 24, 1904, p.2.

87 *The New York Times*, April 10, 1904, p.4.

*With the united Principal Division (Duerr) and Western Division, (Estorff,) I attacked the enemy's chief force, about 3,000 strong, at Onganjira, a short distance to the eastward of Okahanja.*

*The Hereros were in a strong, semi-circular position on a hill fronting the northwest. We first flanked and forced back the enemy's left wing, and then attacked the centre and right. Two energetic counter-attacks of the enemy against our left were repulsed.*

*The enemy's position was broken through at nightfall, after eight hours' fighting, and the enemy was driven back on all sides. The chief forces apparently retired in a northeasterly and easterly direction.<sup>88</sup>*

However, the remaining German forces were not as lucky as the above-mentioned. Two weeks later, it was reported that Major von Glasenapp's column (Eastern Division) was "down with typhoid, the number of cases having more than doubled in three days."<sup>89</sup> The following excerpt further described the clear and present danger for the German colonial project:

*GERMAN "Little War"*

*Proving Disastrous*

*Disease Prevents Advance of Column in Africa.*

*Emperor William is Angry*

*Considers that the Expedition Has Been Mismanaged-Heavy Reinforcements Thought Necessary*

*London Times-The New York Times*

*Special Cablegram*

...

*The present apparent deadlock, together with the severe losses sustained through disease and in the field confirms the impression*

<sup>88</sup> *The New York Times*, April 12, 1904, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> *The New York Times*, April 29, 1904, p. 5.



*that the strength of the expeditionary force is inadequate to secure the radical suppression of the insurrection.*

*A composite force will therefore in all probability have to be equipped and dispatched.<sup>90</sup>*

Meanwhile Leutwein's actions and the bleak reports created resentment in Berlin. Colonialist voices in Berlin, especially the German Colonial League, had already blamed the Governor:

*The results of Governor Leutwein's policy of window-dressing, procrastination and appeasement are now patent to everyone. Throughout the country, the natives who, unlike European private citizens, have for years pampered and made immoderate in their demands through the Governor's blandishments are now in a state of ferment which threatens to assume dangerous proportions. Anyone familiar with the life of African and other less civilized non-white peoples knows that Europeans can assert themselves only by maintaining the supremacy of their race at all costs. Moreover, anyone familiar with the situation knows the swifter and harsher the reprisals taken against rebels, the better the chances of restoring authority. The authorities in German South West Africa have grossly infringed these two fundamental tenets of colonial policy towards the native problem... that the current system of colonial administration be abandoned following the successful completion of military operations and that the policy pursued so far towards the natives be changed in favour of our own race.<sup>91</sup>*

In return, Berlin sent its 'big gun' to the country: General von Trotha. It was reported that German Emperor "overrides Ministers"<sup>92</sup> and appoints the General to "succeed Gov Leutwein".<sup>93</sup> This decorated general assumed military-high command of German troops. According to British sources:

*in June of that year [1904] General von Trotha arrived upon the scene and took command of nearly 8,000 troops. His mission was to stamp out rebellion by force. Whenever he captured natives*

90 *The New York Times*, April 29, 1904, p. 5.

91 *Flugblätter des Deutschen Kolonial-Bundes, IX: Zu den Unruhen in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika' in Imp. Col. Off. File No. 2111*, p. 26 quoted in Drechsler, pp.141-142.

92 *The New York Times*, May 8, 1904, p. 4.

93 *Ibid.*

*these commands were carried out to the latter (large sums of money were offered for the capture of the Herero chiefs, and General von Trotha assured that tribe that he would spare neither women nor children.) A few trivial successes were obtained but by war and by sickness the Germans suffered great losses, and last October their troubles were increased by the rising of the hitherto friendly Witboois.<sup>94</sup>*

The New York Times also informed about the new orders General issued:

*I, the great General of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Herero Nation. The Hereros are no longer German subjects. They have murdered and robbed, they have cut off ears and noses and other members of wounded soldiers, and now they are too cowardly to fight. I say to the people: Whosoever brings one of the Captains a prisoner to one of my stations shall receive 1,000 marks, (\$250) and for Samuel Maherero I will pay 5,000 marks. The Herero Nation must now leave the country. If the people do it not I will compel them with the big tube, (presumably guns are meant.)*

*Within the German frontier every Herero, with or without a rifle, with or without a cattle, will be shot. I will not take over any more women and children. But I will either drive them back to your people or have them fired on. These are my words to the nation of the Hereros.*

*The Great General of the might Emperor, von Trotha.<sup>95</sup>*

Trotha's policies had meant a new turn in terms of native policy. Trotha's vision, perhaps in line with François's tendencies, sought total submission of the Hereros. For that end, "an expeditionary force of 14,000 under the command of General Lothar von Trotha undertook to exterminate the Herero, and to "settle" the native question once and for all."<sup>96</sup> British newspapers even acknowledge the presence of almost 20,000 German troops.<sup>97</sup> In the aftermath of German military built-up,

94 News of the Week, *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London: England), Saturday, October 21, 1905; p. 245; Issue 2317.

95 *The New York Times*, August 27, 1904, p. 4.

96 Friedrichsmeyer. p. 13.

97 News of the Week, *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London: England), Saturday, October 21, 1905; p. 245; Issue 2317.

change of native police and Governor General, it is now evident that “so badly has the temper and confidence of the natives shaken that success seems unlikely [for them].”<sup>98</sup>

While there seems to be a major difference between Governor General Leutwein’s policies and General von Trotha’s, Steinmetz posits that both administrators’ policies towards indigenous groups had genocidal outcomes. The only difference perhaps, according to Steinmetz, was that Leutwein spared children and women in his action against the Witbooi uprising.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps, it is more plausible to distinguish Leutwein and von Trotha in terms of method and economic rationality. Within this concept, it is important to acknowledge not only Leutwein’s preference towards negotiation with the natives but also his firm belief in the preservation of the natives as the main labor source in the colony.<sup>100</sup> General von Trotha, on the other hand, regarded the indigenous population as the enemy which had to be suppressed with every means possible. In an interview given by Leutwein, upon his return to Hamburg, he informs the readers of the following: “I am accused of too much leniency, and I cannot find this wrong. I was firmly convinced that I could win the natives by mild methods. At the same time, had I had 10.000 men instead of 400, it would have been better.”<sup>101</sup> This statement clearly distinguishes Leutwein from Trotha in many ways. Not only did he prefer more peaceful methods, but also he lacked necessary means for the massive brutality to be inflicted upon the natives under Trotha.

Steinmetz also surmises that “if Leutwein had been backed by the German Government against von Trotha rather than being out of power, he might have acted to halt the genocide by switching from an ethnographic to an economic logic.”<sup>102</sup> However, the notorious ethnographic branding of the Hereros prevented Leutwein’s arguments to be heard in Berlin. As Steinmetz underlines “novel ethnographic representations can not be created on command, from scratch.”<sup>103</sup>

General von Trotha’s policy was not limited to armed action; it also included driving Hereros to the Omaheke desert where they would

98 Ibid.

99 Steinmetz, p. 189.

100 Drechsler, p. 148.

101 *The New York Times*, December 31, 1904, p.2.

102 Steinmetz, p. 201.

103 Ibid.

perish of draught and hunger. It was reported that “the records of the [German] General Staff tell a harrowing tale of the spectacles presented by the trackless waste of the Omaheke desert, where hundreds of bleaching skeletons testify to the relentless manner in which the Commander in Chief carried out his determination to make no prisoners.”<sup>104</sup> In conclusion, the native policy under this administration became ironic since it eradicated the natives.<sup>105</sup> The following excerpt acknowledges the exterminationist aims of the German army more explicitly:

*This bold operation shows in a brilliant light the reckless energy of the German leadership in pursuing the beaten enemy. No trouble, no deprivation was spared to rob the enemy of the last remnants of his capacity to resist. He was driven from water-hole to water-hole like a beast hounded half to death, until, having lost all will, he fell victim to natural forces in his own country. The waterless Omaheke would complete the task begun by German force, the annihilation of the Herero people.*<sup>106</sup>

As this section investigates the factual and chronological accounts, it aims to present a general narrative that sheds light on the complexities of identity formation, colonialist thinking and the peculiarities of German history. Thus, another category that needs to be added alongside Meinig’s framework. This category should certainly be the pre-colonial ethnographic discourse. On that, Steinmetz acknowledges that “representations of the Ovaherero were overwhelmingly hateful, even exterminationist.”<sup>107</sup> In the face of Herero’s resistance to being Christianized, the Rhenish Mission Society’s<sup>108</sup> turned sour: “... a human emotion is still unknown to them... God is exterminating the Herero because of their doglike nature, their sharing of wives, their sodomy, their incest and sins with animals... The Hottentots are the stick with which God is striking them.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the Hereros, due to their holding to their ancestral cattle herding practices and refusing to

104 *The New York Times*, August 27, 1904, p. 4.

105 Steinmetz, p. 239.

106 *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika*, Edited on the basis of official documents by the Department for the History of War on the General Staff, 2 vols, Berlin, 1906/7, vol 1, p. 211, quoted in Jürgen Zimmerer, “War, Concentration Camps and Genocide in South-West Africa”, Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and Its Aftermath*, translated from the German by Edward Neather, (Berlin: Merlin Press, 2003), p. 41.

107 Steinmetz, p. 125.

108 Their missionary activities date back to late 18th century and continue through out the later centuries.

109 “Otjikango,” *Berichte der RMG* 10 (16, 1853), p. 241; “Neun Jahre im Hererolande,” *Berichte der RMG* II (15, 1854), p. 228, quoted in Steinmetz, p. 131.

sell them to German settlers, were also branded as being ‘stingy’.<sup>110</sup> In 1876, another missionary report further established that “nothing at all can be done with these people, petrified and ossified as they are in earthly things, before God’s hand has again struck them down and smashed them to pieces.”<sup>111</sup> What is more striking is that the author of the afore-said report would be escorting the first colonial ruler of German West Africa, Heinrich Goering, (surprisingly the father of Hermann Goering, the infamous field marshal of the Third Reich).<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, as Steinmetz acknowledges, the uniformity of this discursive formulation had grave implications for the course of German native policy directed at the Ovaherero.”<sup>113</sup>

In conclusion, the escalation of the situation in South West Africa assisted the imperial imposition and as Drechsler put it, “the insurrection afforded the German imperialists a long-sought pretext- for conquering the territory military and transforming the “Protectorate” into a colony.”<sup>114</sup>

## 6. Discussions on Holocaust and West Africa:

Osterhammel, points to the presence “of a purposeful destruction of an entire populace”<sup>115</sup> within the German colonial history. Drechsler also underlines that, “Von Trotha had but one aim: to destroy the Herero nation. He believed that the easiest way of achieving it was to drive the Herero into the Omaheke desert. But such a crime can only be described as genocide.”<sup>116</sup> The following excerpt from a leading German officer’s diary clearly informs of the General von Trotha’s intentions:

*...The Herero were now fleeing further still out into the desert sands. The frightful spectacle was repeated again and again. The men had worked to open up the water sources with feverish haste,*

110 Steinmetz, p. 131.

111 Eine Untersuchungsreise im Hereróland,” *Berichte der RMG* 32 (5, 1876), p. 130 quoted in Steinmetz, p. 133.

112 Steinmetz, p. 133.

113 Steinmetz, p. 125.

114 Drechsler, p. 138.

115 Osterhammel, p. 44.

116 Drechsler, p. 155, and According to the Article 2 of “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” of 1948, “genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

*but there was less and less water and there were fewer and fewer water-holes. They fled from one to the other and lost almost all their cattle and very many of their people. The groups dwindled to occasional stragglers over whom we gradually took control. Some managed to escape through the desert and reach English territory. The policy of smashing the people in this way was as stupid as it was heartless. We could have saved a great number of them and their herds if we had spared them and helped them to recover. They had been sufficiently punished. I made this suggestion to General von Trotha, but he wanted their total extermination.*<sup>117</sup>

Bley further theorized that the lateness of the German national development induced a quasi fascist regime in the colonies, thus resembling the outcomes of Nazi policies.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, as Friedrichsmeyer et. al. argue "... the Nazis were convinced that Germany would eventually need an extensive overseas empire to guarantee its access to raw materials, markets, and investment areas, and they renewed the call for Mittelafrika<sup>119</sup> that would transcend the bounds of the prewar colonies."<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, in terms of investigating the German social and intellectual history, Zantop realizes the necessity to "analyze and explain why it was not the enlightened models of tolerance and assimilation that prevailed, but racism, xenophobia, sexism and aggressive expansionism."<sup>121</sup>

Detlev Peukert, on the other hand, developed the analysis which presented traits of racism in pre-Nazi era.<sup>122</sup> According to Peukert, fascism emerges out of contradictions in modern society. Modernity has its own utopian image, which tends to overlook the existence of winners and losers in the society which, in turn, induces agitation within the society.<sup>123</sup> In this context, Baumann also states that a particular modernist approach which sought to redefine and reshape the society,

117 Ludwig von Estoff: *Wanderungen und Kämpfe in Südwestafrika, Ostafrika und Südafrika 1894-1910*, Christoph-Friedrich Kutscher ed., 1979, p. 117, quoted in Zimmerer in Zimmerer and Zeller, p. 43.

118 Helmut Bley. *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894-1914. English South-West Africa under German rule, 1894-1914*, translated, edited, and prepared by Hugh Ridley. Evanston, Northwestern University Press Date: 1971, p. xvii, pp. 223-25, p. 282, quoted in Steinmetz, p. 141.

119 Historical German geo-political vision of domination in Africa.

120 Friedrichsmeyer, *Ibid.* p. 17.

121 Zantop, p. 16.

122 Sweeney, Dennis, "Reconsidering the modernity paradigm: reform movements, the social and state in Wilhelmine Germany," *Social History* 31, No.4 (2006), p. 406.

123 Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic : The Crisis of Classical Modernity* trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) .

even reached a state where perceived alien elements of the society were to be suppressed.<sup>124</sup>

Sweeney, on the other hand, emphasizes the existence of various competing modernist projects (“ranging from social-democratic, confessional, liberal, feminist to radical nationalist strategies of social reform”<sup>125</sup>) in the Wilhelmine era<sup>126</sup> and that the Nazi state “evolved from a process of political struggle that eliminated certain social projects and concentrated other previously independent and self-mobilized reform energies and domains of disciplinary and biopower<sup>127</sup> into its own expanding and violent carceral apparatuses.”<sup>128</sup>

In essence, while the works of the German Anthropologic Society contributed to the embryonic racist awareness in elementary schools by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany,<sup>129</sup> Sweeney points to even other cases:

*The German case itself offers the most compelling critique of this kind of argument [Argument for modernity being a ‘generative principle or impulse’] for mid-twentieth century Nazi policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide were linked genealogically to the biopolitical racism of the late Wilhelmine radical right, especially the Pan-German Leagues, which mooted plans for ethnic cleansing (völkische Furbereinigung) as early as 1912 and more comprehensively in 1914 in vehement opposition to other “modern reform visions.”<sup>130</sup>*

Therefore, it is plausible that the Wilhelmine period contained precursors of Nazism, and subsequently Nazis built upon these foundations and advanced their agenda by choosing a particular project among the many other competing ones. Zimmerer, within this context, “in an attempt to sketch archaeology of genocide” investigates a possible link between colonial policies of violence and “the extremely bureaucratized violence of Nazism”.<sup>131</sup>

124 Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Post-Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1992) quoted in Sweeney, p. 431.

125 Foucault and Governmentality quoted in Sweeney, p. 430.

126 Sweeney, p. 430.

127 See M. Foucault

128 Sweeney, p. 430.

129 Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 135-146.

130 Sweeney, p. 433.

131 J. Zimmerer, ‘Colonial Genocide and the Holocaust, Towards an Archeology of Genocide’, in *Genocide and Settler Society*, ed. Moses, pp. 49-76, in Jürgen Zimmerer, “Colonial Genocide: The Herero and Nama War (1904-8)”, ed. Stone, Dan, *The Historiography of Genocide*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 336.



While Zimmerer points to the positive correlations between the Holocaust and the Herero case, Steinmetz posits such a link as a historiographical stretch.<sup>132</sup> For Zimmerer, “a theoretically informed framework for the question of continuity”<sup>133</sup> had been present. Within this context, he further acknowledges the “the blatant sense of racist superiority” inherent in the German settlers’ radicalism<sup>134</sup> and in some of the missionaries<sup>135</sup> as well as the racial war perception of the German military.<sup>136</sup> Army Chief of Staff General von Schlieffen, as Zimmerer argues, approved von Trotha’s intentions.<sup>137</sup> Thus, the inexhaustible nature of discussion on the subject induces this paper to touch upon this controversial area as well.

Regardless of underlying the extent of the German colonial rule’s contribution to the Holocaust, it is perhaps more purposeful to conclude that the genocidal tools became available to the German imperial army before the Holocaust. While the decision to resorting to such tools was isolated events, could these practices have indeed had a bearing on the later Third Reich policies? Within this context, one spots the resemblance between dumping of the Jewry into the French territories in 1941 and forcing the Hereros to the Omaheke desert.<sup>138</sup> According to Marrus and Paxton, “well into 1941, German authorities considered unoccupied France a place to dump their unwanted Jews.”<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the use of dog-tags and the establishment of concentration camps in South West Africa seem to herald the events that will occur in the Holocaust.<sup>140</sup> Zimmerer, in this regard, also “interpreted that war of annihilation (1941-4) in eastern Europe and the related occupation policies as a colonial war and part of the German imperial project, identifying personal experience, institutional memory, and public perception as major trajectories of German colonial fantasies, knowledge and experiences.”<sup>141</sup>

Zimmerman points to the pace and to the commonalities between the

132 Steinmetz, p. 7.

133 Jürgen Zimmerer, “Colonial Genocide: The Herero and Nama War (1904-8)”, ed. Stone, Dan, *The Historiography of Genocide*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 336.

134 Zimmerer in Zimmerer and Zeller, p. 42 and p. 46.

135 *Ibid.* p. 44.

136 *Ibid.* p. 46 and p. 51.

137 *Ibid.*

138 Michael Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 10.

139 *Ibid.*

140 Drechsler, p. 166 and Steinmetz, p. 171.

141 Zimmerer, “Colonial Genocide: Herero and Nama War”, p. 336.

pre-Holocaust and the Holocaust era German anthropological endeavors. According to him “such scientific exploitation of the victims of genocide had a strong precedent in the German war of extermination against the Herero of Southwest Africa.<sup>142</sup> He further surmises that “the Holocaust brought to Europe practices developed in colonial Africa, as the genocidal war against the Herero and the role of anthropologists in that war make all too clear.”<sup>143</sup>

Another resemblance, perhaps more importantly, recurs in the German colonial discourse attributing commonalities between the Jewry and the African indigenous groups.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, as Stocker posits “a close link between the laws on mixed marriages in the colonies and under the Nazis; ‘in the German colonial empire, precursors of the Nuremberg Laws already existed before the First World War.’<sup>145</sup> Moreover, Zimmerer informs of German administrative norms towards racially differentiated and serfdom creating societal order in the colonial experience.<sup>146</sup> In light of this information, I feel that the sustained ethnographic discourses deserve special attention in terms of identifying the roots of the Holocaust and even the contemporary xenophobia in Europe. In terms of identifying such roots and links to the Holocaust, Zimmerer even takes a bolder step as he stresses that

*Binary encoding and the vision of one’s own superiority, combined with viewing the original population as superfluous, inferior and vanishing, which prevailed in the colonial context, were also prone to von Trotha’s concept of race war and the Nazi’s Social-Darwinian Lebensraum ideology.<sup>147</sup>*

In addition to Steinmetz’s and Zimmerer’s point of views, perhaps a third alternative in terms of investigating the link between the Holocaust and colonialist project could be available. I propose the usage of a comparative perspective in this regard. Since Italy was also a latecomer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism and imperialism, perhaps it is better suited to compare the Italian and German experiences. Similar to Zantop’s

142 Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Anti-humanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 244.

143 Ibid.

144 Steinmetz, pp. 118-120 and p. 183.

145 Helmuth Stoecker, *Drang Nach Afrika, Die Deutsche koloniale Expansionspolitik und Herrschaft in Afrika von den Anfängen bis zum Verlust der Kolonien*, (Berlin, 1991), p. 184, quoted in Zimmerer and Zeller, p. xxvii.

146 Zimmerer, Zimmerer and Zeller, p. 58.

147 Zimmerer, “Colonial Genocide: Herero and Nama War”, p. 336.

argument, a colonialist imagination had been present in the Italian psyche.<sup>148</sup> In the case of North Africa, for instance “by 1911, Libya had become in popular imagination a veritable Eldorado, and a book about it with the title of *Our Promised Land* appeared that same year. History and geography were invoked to establish a proprietary right over this former dependency of ancient Rome.”<sup>149</sup> Missionaries too, had been advocates of the colonial project. They “supported the chamber of commerce at Genoa in encouraging the government set up trading and refueling stations in the Red Sea.”<sup>150</sup> Moreover, the first colony was founded in 1882 “on the coast of the Red Sea where there was less chance of clashing with other European interests.”<sup>151</sup>

Fantasy and imagination had also been present in the Italian colonial experience. The Red Sea colony initiative, for instance, had been branded as a way of circumventing “imprisonment in the Mediterranean,” and receiving “a key to the Mediterranean” through the Red Sea.<sup>152</sup> Thereby, as Smith emphasizes, “the realities of geography were thus obscured by rhetoric.”<sup>153</sup> Also, Pasquale Turiello had asserted that “nations had to pervade other areas with their language and culture or else would disappear in the struggle for life.”<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, colonialist project also took root in Eritrea, starting from 1890.

There had been opportunities for Italy to colonize Tunis and Egypt with Great Britain; however, such offers could not have been realized.<sup>155</sup> The weakening of the Ottoman Empire and global political conjuncture did nonetheless created room for another colonialist aspiration in Libya. Early attempts circa 1907 started with “a process of so-called ‘peaceful penetration’ of the economic and social life of the territory.”<sup>156</sup> While Banco di Roma had been the main facilitator of this initiative,<sup>157</sup> the Ottoman administration took a keen interest in quelling such an intervention by favoring mostly German enterprises in the region.<sup>158</sup> The

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148 Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 243.

149 Smith, p. 243.

150 Smith, p. 117.

151 Smith, p. 164.

152 Smith, p. 164.

153 Smith, p. 164.

154 Smith, p. 133.

155 Smith, p. 120.

156 John L. Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 26.

157 Wright, p. 26.

158 Smith, p. 243.

war between the native Arabs<sup>159</sup> and Italian forces started in 1911, and it took more than two decades for Italy to finally suppress all indigenous groups and control Libya. Meanwhile, the brutality of the military tactics “dismayed” Europe.<sup>160</sup>

In terms of domestic affairs of Italy, Smith informs that “...morale was greatly uplifted by this colonial success.”<sup>161</sup> However, this colonial project ran into major problems. As Smith puts it “colonies without colonizers proved an expensive concession to sentiment. Tripoli needed capital, but Italy had not enough even for herself and few notable public works could be set on foot...”<sup>162</sup>

In conclusion, Italy undertook a 19<sup>th</sup> century type of imperialist colonial project that transcends to the fascist period. While its legacy at times had been nationalist,<sup>163</sup> brutal,<sup>164</sup> assimilative visions such as those of Marshal Balbo who voiced the unity of “Catholic Italians and Muslim Italians” in Libya also emerged.<sup>165</sup> Despite the magnitude and the applicability of the Italian brutality, and the nationalist manipulation,<sup>166</sup> the overarching economic strains/rationale prevented an extreme mode of annihilation similar to the German project in South West Africa. Moreover, oil had been discovered in Libya as early as 1915.<sup>167</sup> Despite the nationalistic/imperialistic/fascist dichotomies of the Italian model, it is nothing comparable to the geo-politically motivated, global domination seeking German imperial and later fascist regimes. Thus, it is not necessarily the colonialism that leads to genocide, in spite of its severe brutalities. The economic rationality behind colonialism prevents from annihilating the indigenous sources of labor. But it is the “the racial segregationist state”<sup>168</sup> and the quest for global domination that obscures the economic rationale.

Moreover, the hunt for the scapegoats and xenophobia based on ethnographic discourse creates the formula for the genocide. This is present in the German model. Thus, there is a positive correlation

159 They had been briefly supported by the Ottoman Government in 1911 prior to the start of Balkan Wars in 1912.

160 Smith, p. 246.

161 Smith, p. 247.

162 Smith, p. 248.

163 Smith, p. 247.

164 Wright, pp. 25-41.

165 Wright, p. 41.

166 Smith, p. 248.

167 Wright, p. 220.

168 Zimmerer, p. 336.

between the German experience during the colonialist period and the Holocaust.

However, nothing can be comparable to the inhumanity and the dehumanization imposed on the Jewry during the Holocaust.

### 7. Epilogue:

The reconciliation efforts between Namibia and Germany culminated in the official visit of German Minister for Development and Economic Cooperation Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul to Namibia on August 14, 2004.



(Figure 1. German Minister Wieczorek-Zeul meeting with Herero Chief Christian Zeraua in Okakarara.<sup>169</sup>)

169 Rainer Chr. Hennig, "Germany apologises for "1904 Namibia genocide," *Afrol News*, 16 August 16, 2004 [http://www.afrol.com/printable\\_article/13714](http://www.afrol.com/printable_article/13714).

During this visit, Minister Wieczorek-Zeul, “with tears in her eyes”<sup>170</sup> acknowledged that if the term had existed, the atrocities carried out during German presence in South West Africa, would have been labeled as genocide.<sup>171</sup> She also visited the battle fields and Samuel Maharero’s grave.<sup>172</sup> The Namibian news sources reported that “a senior government official offered Germany’s first apology Saturday for a colonial-era crackdown that killed 65,000 ethnic Hereros- a slaughter she acknowledged amounted to genocide.”<sup>173</sup> Moreover, Minister Wieczorek-Zeul acknowledged that:

*We Germans confess to our historical-political and moral-ethical responsibility and guilt that German at that time took upon them... I plead you as part of our Lord’s Prayer to forgive us our sins... colonial madness led to racism, violence and discrimination....All what I have said has been an apology by the German government.*<sup>174</sup>

The German acknowledgment of genocide induced claims for compensation for the descendants of the victims. However, the Government of Namibia differs from the Hereros, who merely constitute 7 % of the population, on this subject.<sup>175</sup> The Government prefers a sustained aid from Germany and rejects direct payment for any ethnic special group, meaning the descendants of the individual victims of various tribes.<sup>176</sup> Despite indigenous group’s objections, it seems Germany and Namibia agreed on this modality. It is significant that Minister Wieczorek-Zeul stated “our cooperation signifies that we feel dedicated to all Namibian citizens and that there, of course, will not be any payments to special groups.”<sup>177</sup> It is most probable that while the German government argues for exemption from any reparation due to of the ongoing and planned aid programs for Namibia,<sup>178</sup> the Namibian Government objects funneling of the funds to other entities other than its own.<sup>179</sup>

170 Ibid.

171 <<http://www.bmz.de/de/presse/reden/ministerin/2004/august/rede20040814.html>> and Zimmerer, p. 323.

172 *News Era*, “German Minister to Pay Homage at Okahanja by Christin Inambao” [www.newsera.com.na/article.php](http://www.newsera.com.na/article.php), 12 August 2004.

173 *Mostlyafrica*, “Namibia: Germany apology to the Herero”, August 14, 2004, <<http://mostlyafrica.blogspot.com/2004/08/Namibia-german-apology-to-Herero>>.

174 [http://www.afrol.com/printable\\_article/13714](http://www.afrol.com/printable_article/13714).

175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 Chrispin Inambao, “German Minister to Pay Homage at Okahandja,” *News Era*, 12 August, 2004. <[www.newsera.com.na/article.php](http://www.newsera.com.na/article.php) 12 August 2004>.

179 Ibid.

A year later after the official apology, the Namibian-German Initiative for Reconciliation and Development started its activities.<sup>180</sup> According to local press, this was “a coated offer of reparation, albeit the German authorities never admitted to this being reparation.”<sup>181</sup> Through the Initiative for Reconciliation, Germany was prepared to support a programme “to address the injustices of German colonial rule in Namibia about 100 years ago” as one Namibian daily reported. Germany would over 10 years pay N\$160 million for the programme.”<sup>182</sup> The article further informs how the Initiative “has been met with mixed feelings by the affected communities, from outright condemnation and rejection to cautious tacit approval.”<sup>183</sup> Moreover, the reaction to the Special Initiative reveals that ‘apology’ –despite its contribution to German-Namibian rapprochement- does not signal an end to the individual reparation demands. What’s more this assistance not only divides the target country but it also prevents overcoming negative perceptions. Thus, enhanced cross-cultural communication exercises are still needed. Moreover, a joint history writing that can encompass the memories of the ordinary Namibians and Germans may perhaps contribute to this end.

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180 Zimmerer and Zeller, p. xxiv.

181 Kae Matundu-Tjiparuro, “When Will Reperation or Restorative Justice Be Discussed? *Newera*, 22 February 2007, <<http://www.newera.com.na/article.php?db=oldarchive&articleid=14925>>.

182 Ibid. and according to exchange rate in 2004 (CIA the World Fact book), 1 US dollar equals to 6. 4597 Namibian dollars. Thus, German aid amounts to 24. 7 million US dollars.

183 Ibid.



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