

Germany's Racial State in Africa: Order, Development and Segregation in German South West Africa (1884–1915)

Like European colonialism in general, German colonialism in particular continues to have about it a whiff of the olde-worlde, the quaint, the exotic and the far-away. For most Germans, terms like 'Africa', 'Natives' or 'colonies' invoke images of a European civilising mission, of self-sacrificing missionaries, bold conquerors and fearless explorers. Where the topic is 'colonial society', it is practically only 'White' society that is meant; and where this mental disposition prevails the African exists only as the object of the 'civilising' task to be performed by the 'White man'. All of this applies especially to Namibia, the only one of the former German colonies, or *Schutzgebiete* as they were officially called, that even today is home to a German-speaking minority which is more than insignificant in numbers. Tourism is booming there, and many people book a holiday in this southern African country precisely because it is still possible to use German there when one goes shopping or orders a meal in a restaurant. Of the colonial crimes that were committed there in the name of Germany, the genocide against the Herero and the Nama is the only one that is remembered – and even that has been the case only since 2004. The racism that the German colonial administration pursued in everyday life has, by contrast, been completely forgotten, even though it made German South West Africa an important precursor not only of the later apartheid regime in South Africa, but also of the racial policies of the Third Reich.¹

An essential trait of modern colonialism, especially settler colonialism, is the binary distinction between the rulers and the ruled, the colonisers and the colonised. A certain territory was to be settled, regardless of the fact that there were

¹ On racial policies in German South West Africa in general, see Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*, 3rd edn, Hamburg 2004, pp. 94–109 [English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects. State Aspirations and the Reality of Power in Colonial Namibia*, New York 2021]. I have considered the relationship between the society of racial privilege in South West Africa and the Nazi policy of domination in: Jürgen Zimmerer, "Von Windhuk nach Warschau: Die rassische Privilegiengesellschaft in Deutsch-Südwestafrika – ein Modell mit Zukunft?", in Frank Becker, ed., *Rassenmischungen – Mischlinge – Rassentrennung. Zur Politik der Rasse im deutschen Kaiserreich*, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 97–123 (English version: "From Windhoek to Warsaw: The Society of Racial Privilege in German South West Africa – a Model with a Future?", pp. 201–229 in this book). Henning Melber was also among the first scholars to point out the relationship between the apartheid regime and Nazism: see Henning Melber, "Kontinuitäten totaler Herrschaft. Völkermord und Apartheid in Deutsch-Südwestafrika", *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 1 (1992), pp. 91–116.

people already living there. These were to be subjugated, displaced, and in some cases even exterminated. This was motivated and even ideologically justified through racism, the division of people into 'higher races', destined to rule, and 'lower races', destined to be subject to them. At the lowest end of this scale were groups that were considered 'doomed races' (having been left behind by 'cultural evolution' and so being seen by the self-proclaimed more advanced 'races' as being no longer viable in the modern world), who were predestined to perish, or rather, who were to be deliberately murdered.² Even in those cases where the objective was not mass murder, but the integration of the indigenous population into the colonial economy as cheap labour (cases where the 'Natives' were to be 'educated to work'), there was never any attempt to create a partnership on a basis of equality as between the existing population and the newly arrived colonists. German South West Africa is the best example of this in the German colonial empire, as it was the first attempt to establish a 'racial state', i.e. to construct the colonial community on the basis of 'racial' affiliation as the colonialists saw it.

The Founding of German South West Africa

Germany had made its entrance onto the stage of formal colonial rule very late; for a long time it lacked the framework of a strong central state necessary for a policy of imperial expansion.³ The establishment of the German Empire served to

2 I have discussed the connection between colonialism and extermination extensively in Jürgen Zimmerer, "Kolonialer Genozid? Vom Nutzen und Nachteil einer historischen Kategorie für eine Globalgeschichte des Völkermordes", in Dominik J. Schaller, Boyadjian Rupen, Hanno Scholtz and Vivianne Berg, eds, *Enteignet-Vertrieben-Ermordet. Beiträge zur Genozidforschung*, Zürich 2004, pp. 109–128. (English version: "Colonial Genocide? On the Use and Abuse of a Historical Category for Global History", pp. 175–197 in this book); and Jürgen Zimmerer, "Holocaust und Kolonialismus. Beitrag zu einer Archäologie des genozidalen Gedankens", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 51/12 2003, pp. 1098–1119 (English version: "Colonialism and the Holocaust: Towards an Archaeology of Genocide", pp. 125–153 in this book). On colonial racism and the colonial racial hierarchy, see also Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies. Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Victoria 1997; Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, Cambridge 1995.

3 Colonialism as a mental disposition and an enthusiasm for colonialism had however both enjoyed a relatively long history in Germany. For an overview, see Sebastian Conrad, "Doppelte Marginalisierung. Plädoyer für eine transnationale Perspektive auf die deutsche Geschichte", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28 (2002), pp. 145–169; Andreas Eckert and Albert Wirz, "Wir nicht, die Anderen auch. Deutschland und der Kolonialismus", in Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, eds, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt 2002, pp. 372–392; Hans Fenske, "Imperialistische Tendenzen in Deutschland

remedy this lack. An enthusiastically pro-colonial public thereupon began to demand that Germany too must have its share in the partitioning of the globe. These voices eventually became so insistent that in 1884 Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was persuaded to perform a U-turn in his colonial policy. Up until then he had always rejected the idea of establishing colonies, as he saw them on the one hand as an albatross around the country's neck in respect of foreign policy, and on the other hand as entailing incalculable costs – both financial and in terms of human resources. Now, though, he declared himself prepared to support the formal acquisition of colonies.⁴ Within only a few years, territories roughly corresponding to the present-day African states of Togo, Cameroon, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Namibia, as well as a few smaller possessions in the South Seas, were declared German *Schutzgebiete*, although this designation was a misnomer.⁵ In view of the climatic conditions only German South West Africa was considered suitable for the establishment of a settler colony, i.e. for permanent occupation by German settlers. This latter circumstance fired the imaginations of a whole generation in Germany,⁶ and contributed to certain features of German rule which were to prove to be harbingers of future developments, including in the further course of German history.

Imperial Commissioner Heinrich Göring took formal possession of the colony with two fellow officials in 1885. However, this was little more than a symbolic act. It must have been clear to those responsible at home that they would never be able to establish a functioning administration in this vast territory with only three officials: a territory that towards the end of the nineteenth century was inhabited by an estimated 90,000–100,000 Ovambo, 70,000–80,000 Herero, 15,000–20,000 Nama, 30,000–40,000 Berg Damara and San and 3,000–4,000 Basters.⁷ In 1893,

vor 1866. Auswanderung, überseeische Bestrebungen, Weltmachtträume", *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 97/98 (1978), pp. 336–383; Hans Feske, "Ungeduldige Zuschauer. Die Deutschen und die europäische Expansion 1815–1880", in Wolfgang Reinhard, ed., *Imperialistische Kontinuität und nationale Ungeduld im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt 1991, pp. 87–140. Russell Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture*, Lincoln 1998; Susanne Zantop, *Kolonialphantasien im vorkolonialen Deutschland, 1770–1870*, Berlin 1999.

4 What exactly it was that induced Bismarck to take this step continues to be a matter of dispute among academics. For a summary, see Horst Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, Paderborn 1995, pp. 51–62.

5 For an initial introduction to the histories of the various colonies, see: Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*. Kiauchow in China was added to the list later on.

6 Regarding the fantasies connected with 'South West' see for example: Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten. Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien*, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2003.

7 The details given by Theodor Leutwein for the year 1892 are based on very rough estimates made by travellers, colonial officials and missionaries, and give more of an indication of the pro-

with the arrival of Theodor Leutwein, who was later appointed the first Governor, the systematic establishment of German rule and the methodical build-up of a German administration began in earnest. The increasing complexity of the bureaucratic structures amply illustrates this process. In 1894 the territory was divided into three *Bezirke* (regions or districts), namely Keetmanshoop, Windhoek and Otjimbingwe; by 1903 this number had already doubled, and by 1914 there were sixteen *Bezirke* and autonomous *Distrikte*, which in their turn were divided into police station areas or 'police wards'.⁸

It was also Leutwein and his young administrative team who embarked on the implementation of a utopian vision for colonial rule with the ultimate goal of building a model colonial state based on a racial ideology. Through a series of shifting alliances with African rulers such as Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, to name only the two most important, the colonisers superficially secured the territory for the short term, with the aim of converting the African societies into a 'Black working class'; a status in which the Africans, though not completely without rights, nonetheless suffered severe discrimination.⁹

The constant expansion of the German administration, the pronounced 'master race' attitude of the settlers who began to arrive in the colony in larger and larger numbers, and which manifested itself in repeated instances of murder, rape and fraudulent dealing, and last but not least in the increasingly prevalent seizures of Herero land, ultimately led to the Herero and Nama War, which broke out on 12 January 1904.

This is not the place to analyse the war and the genocide in detail.¹⁰ The following must suffice: the war with its tens of thousands of victims on the African

portionate strengths of the various ethnicities than of the actual sizes of their populations. Theodor Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, 3rd edn, Berlin 1908, p. 11.

8 On this gradual intensification of the administrative presence, see Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 13–31, 112–118 [English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects*]. On the history of the bureaucracy, see also Udo Kaulich, *Die Geschichte der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1884–1914). Eine Gesamtdarstellung*, Frankfurt 2001.

9 On the 'governmental and administrative utopia' or 'utopia of dominance' see Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft* [English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects*]. The 'divide and rule' policy is described by Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft. Der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus 1884–1915*, 2nd edn, Berlin 1984; and especially in Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1914*, Hamburg 1968.

10 I have done so in detail elsewhere: Jürgen Zimmerer, "Das Deutsche Reich und der Genozid. Überlegungen zum historischen Ort des Völkermordes an den Herero und Nama", in Larissa Förster, Dag Heinrichsen and Michael Bollig, eds, *Namibia-Deutschland. Eine geteilte Geschichte. Widerstand, Gewalt, Erinnerung*, Köln 2004, pp. 106–121 (English version: "The German Empire and

side, with its forced migration and internal displacement, gave the German administrators the opportunity to accelerate the realisation of their visions of domination, as the tactical need to show consideration for the African 'tribes' no longer applied. The war was thus a catalyst, facilitating the implementation of ideas that had already been in the air in the pre-war period. It is important to emphasise, however, that all the subsequent measures towards the setting up of a society of racial privilege had already been considered and to some extent already initiated before the outbreak of war in 1904. The war was therefore not the cause of a radicalisation of German policy, leading it in the direction of the creation of a racial state. Rather, it simply offered the opportunity to implement extreme positions that had already been put forward in the pre-war years.¹¹

The German Governmental and Administrative Utopia

The Germans' utopian vision of colonial rule was derived from the model of the bureaucratic and centrally administered state that modern Germany represented, and its goal was the construction an efficient economic system on the basis of a society of racial privilege in which the institutions of government, the European settlers and the African population each occupied their firmly assigned place. The indigenous population was to be comprehensively registered and kept under surveillance, integrated into the colony's economic system as cheap labour and re-educated to function as a compliant workforce through a process of social disciplining. In this way, it was assumed, the economic development of the colony could be

Genocide", pp. 154–174 in this book). An introduction with an overview of the relevant literature can be found in Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, eds, *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg in Namibia (1904–1908) und seine Folgen*, Berlin 2003. Since then further books have been published: Jan-Bart Gewald, "Imperial Germany and the Herero of Southern Africa: Genocide and the quest for recompense", in Adam Jones, ed., *Genocide, War Crimes, and the West: Ending the Culture of Impunity*, London 2003; Reinhart Kößler 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 etc. 2004, pp. 37–75; Dominik J. Schaller, "Kolonialkrieg, Völkermord und Zwangsarbeit in Deutsch-Südwestafrika", in Dominik J. Schaller, Boyadjian Rupen, Hanno Scholtz and Vivianne Berg, eds, *Enteignet–Vertrieben–Ermordet, Beiträge zur Genozidforschung*, Zürich 2004, pp. 147–232; Dominik J. Schaller, "Ich glaube, dass die Nation als solche vernichtet werden muss": Kolonialkrieg und Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904–1907", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 6/3 (2004), pp. 395–430.

¹¹ I have furnished demonstrations of this continuity in: Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 56–109 [English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects*].

pushed ahead with and the extraction of minerals guaranteed, so that the *Schutzgebiet* would be able to develop into a settler colony in an orderly manner.¹² The end result was intended to be a unified economic area across which the African people were to be distributed as workers in such a way as to meet the needs of the colonial economy. The focus of the whole strategy was on planning and centralised direction.

Native Law was codified in von Lindequist's so-called Native Ordinances of 1907, consisting of the Pass, Control and Master and Servant Ordinances.¹³ These regulations were the new straitjacket by which African society was to be reshaped; they provided for the progressing social disciplining of the Africans and laid the basis for a 'semi-free labour market', one which reduced the Africans to a pool of labour freely available to the colonial masters as a result of a compulsion to enter into dependent employment, but nevertheless – at least in theory – still allowed them a degree of freedom to choose their employers and to negotiate their wages.

An essential prerequisite both for this economic exploitation and for the protection of the colonialists against further 'Native uprisings' – another factor that ranked high on the scale of priorities after the recent experiences of the war – was the registration and surveillance of the African population through the establishment of a seamless system of control that encompassed every aspect of their lives. The Administration was to be put in the position of being able to determine how many Africans were present in a particular District at any given time, who they were, where they lived and whether and how they were employed. To

12 On this, see Jürgen Zimmerer, "Planning Frenzy: Forced Labour, Expulsion and Genocide as Elements of Population Economics in German South West Africa", pp. 57–76 in this book. I have also documented the failure of this utopian vision in Jürgen Zimmerer, "Der totale Überwachungsstaat? Recht und Verwaltung in Deutsch-Südwestafrika", in Rüdiger Voigt, ed., *Das deutsche Kolonialrecht als Vorstufe einer globalen 'Kolonialisierung' von Recht und Verwaltung*, Baden-Baden 2001, pp. 175–198 (English version: "Total Control? Law and Administration in German South West Africa", pp. 77–103 in this book).

13 Imperial Governor's Office Windhoek: "Verordnung betr. Maßregeln zur Kontrolle der Eingeborenen" ("Ordinance concerning Measures for the Control of the Natives"), 18 August 1907, NAN ZBU W.III.A.1. Vol. 1, Sheets 61a–62b; "Verordnung betr. die Paßpflicht der Eingeborenen" ("Ordinance concerning the Pass Requirement for Natives"), 18 August 1907, *ibid.*, Sheets 63a–65b; "Verordnung betr. Dienst- und Arbeitsverträge mit Eingeborenen" ("Ordinance concerning Contracts of Service or Employment with Natives"), 18 August 1907, *ibid.*, Sheets 66a–68a; "Runderlaß zu den Verordnungen, betr. die Kontrolle und Paßpflicht der Eingeborenen sowie die Dienst- und Arbeitsverträge mit diesen" ("Circulated Decree accompanying the Ordinances concerning the Control of and the Pass Requirement for Natives and Contracts of Service or Employment with them"), 18 August 1907. For a detailed analysis, see Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 84–94 [English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects*].

achieve this, all Africans had to ensure that they were entered in Native Registers kept at their local District Offices. In order to enable them to be unambiguously identified, all individuals over seven years of age needed a 'pass', consisting of a metal token bearing the Imperial crown and a registration number, which had to be worn visibly around the neck and shown on demand to the police and "any white person". As a pass was valid only in one District and bore a sequence of numbers that showed which District this was, it was supposed to make it possible to determine at any time whether an African had left his or her home district. Anyone who wished to do this legally – for a limited period of time – had to obtain a travel pass from the police station under whose jurisdiction they fell. At their destination they then had to obtain confirmation of their arrival, specifying the time. Thus the Africans were under comprehensive surveillance, and were not to be allowed any freedom of movement.

Moreover, the African population was prohibited from owning riding animals or other large livestock. As the Herero and the Nama had already had their land expropriated, the Africans essentially had no other option than to hire themselves out as farm labourers, to the engineering companies building the railways or in the diamond mines. Anyone who nevertheless did not take up such work would in all probability be punished as a 'vagrant', a fate that threatened anyone found "roaming around [...] without any demonstrable means of support".¹⁴

In addition to the compulsion to take up employment, a further measure introduced in the field of population economics was the control of the distribution of the population. By refusing to issue travel passes the colonial administration could regulate the distribution of the African workforce, as people were simply prevented from moving away from any District where labour was in short supply. But an unbalanced concentration of Africans, for example on farms near to the graves of their ancestors or other culturally important sites, or else simply with particular employers, was not in tune with the vision of an economic utopia either. So in order to secure as even a distribution as possible of the African population across the country and thus also on individual farms and in individual businesses, African settlements of more than ten families were prohibited.

As practically all adult Africans had to work for Whites, a legal codification of employment relationships was necessary. At the same time, the Administration could use this to supplement the system of surveillance and control. One instrument to this end was the *Dienstbuch*, the Employment Logbook, which was pre-

¹⁴ Verordnung, Kaiserliches Gouvernement Windhuk, betr. Maßregeln zur Kontrolle der Eingeborenen (Imperial Governor's Office, Windhoek: "Ordinance concerning Regulations for the Control and Surveillance of Natives"), 18 August 1907, NAN ZBU W.III.A.1. Vol. 1, Sheet 61a-62b.

scribed for all employment contracts with a term of more than one month and was issued to the individual by the police, who also entered the conclusion of such contracts in the Native Register. The Employment Logbook had to contain the name, 'tribal affiliation' and pass token number of the employee, but also the name of the employer, the date on which employment commenced, the term of the contract, the period of notice, and the "amount and type of remuneration to be granted to the Native". The Logbook was therefore supposed to provide an unbroken sequence of information about the Africans' employment relationships and their availability for work, the 'willingness to work' so often invoked in colonial discourse.

Racial Segregation

The heated atmosphere prevailing at the outbreak of war in 1904, when settlers throughout the colony were crying out for revenge and retribution, provided the Administration with the opportunity to effect a change of course in another matter as well – a change of course it had previously been unable to implement due to resistance from Berlin. In response to an enquiry from a District Office as to whether it was permitted to register the marriages of two soldiers in the colonial army to African women, Deputy Governor Hans Tecklenburg instructed all register offices "not to conclude such marriages until further notice", since they were "undesirable [...] in view of their legal, political and social consequences".¹⁵

Although the Colonial Department in Berlin had decreed as late as 1899 that such marriages were admissible, it was now possible for the colonial administration, under the impact of the war, to achieve what Theodor Leutwein had failed to achieve: to give legal effect to the drawing of a line between 'Black' and 'White', between 'Native' and 'Non-Native'.¹⁶ For even Leutwein, the first Governor of the *Schutzgebiet*, had deemed 'mixed marriages' to be less than desirable, because not only any children born of such marriages but also the African spouse herself would be able to gain German nationality.

The question regarding the permissibility of 'mixed marriages', and especially regarding the status of the children born of relationships between White men and African women, the so-called 'people of mixed-race', was an important

¹⁵ Imperial Governor's Office Windhoek, Circulated Order to Register Offices, 23 September 1905, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheet 22a.

¹⁶ A general overview of the racial politics in the German colonial empire is to be found in Becker, *Rassenmischehen*.

issue; the Whites who migrated to South West Africa were predominantly men, so that there was a glaring gender imbalance.¹⁷ It was above all the missionaries who, applying a culturalistic definition of 'Native', argued in favour of the recognition of 'mixed marriages', and even of their active encouragement, as they believed that the "gradual development of a new race, standing between the [...] Natives on the one hand and the outsiders with their higher nature on the other" would "work a marvellous transformation of the wretched conditions that exist at the present time. People of mixed race, endowed with a new level of drive and with almost unlimited opportunities to further improve themselves, will be in a position to open up their far-off countries completely to the German nation."¹⁸

However, this 'culturalistic' attitude, which assumes assimilation and gradual advancement to a position of equality, did not go down particularly well with those who bore political responsibility on the spot, as it did not fit in with their vision of the model racial state they aspired to create, resting as it did on a clear division between the colonisers and the colonised. This vision seemed to be at risk, as Tecklenburg wrote in 1903, a year before the outbreak of the war:

Panzlaff's Hottentot woman is now taking up a lot of space alongside our German ladies at the festivities of the Soldiers' and Marksmen's Associations, although still without managing to form much in the way of relationships with them. This would change if two or three more such women were to gain admittance to the circle. [...] So we have no other alternative than to get legislation in place while there is still time that will erect a strong barrier between non-Natives and Natives, even if this represents a hard blow to some mixed-race individuals or people married to mixed-race individuals, and it initially leads to something of an increase in the number of illegitimate children.¹⁹

17 As of 1 January 1903 there were 4,640 Whites living in South West Africa, of whom 3,391 were men. Leutwein, "Elf Jahre Gouverneur", p. 232. Lora Wildenthal has recently quite rightly pointed out that there was not a shortage of women at all, there were plenty of African women; only that they were of the wrong skin colour or "race". See: Lora Wildenthal, "German Women for Empire, 1884–1945", Durham 2001, p. 6. The colonial administration and circles of enthusiasts for colonialism in Germany tried to remedy this by deliberately encouraging single women of marriageable age to go to South West Africa. On this subject, see: Karen Smidt, "'Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest'. Auswanderung, Leben und soziale Konflikte deutscher Frauen in der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1884–1920. Eine sozial- und frauengeschichtliche Studie", University of Magdeburg 1995 (Ph.D. Thesis).

18 Rhenish Missionary Society, "Denkschrift betr. die Schließung von Ehen zwischen Weißen und Farbigen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten" ("Memorandum on the Conclusion of Marriages between Whites and Coloured Persons in the German Protectorates") [transcript], 1887, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 3a–6b.

19 Report by Tecklenburg [transcript], 24 September 1903, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 61ca–61ea.

During the war it then seemed that those responsible were not able to wait any longer;²⁰ and Tecklenburg issued an Ordinance prohibiting “mixed marriages”. In September 1907, Windhoek District Court reinforced this position by retrospectively declaring even marriages that had already been validly entered into to be null and void. This was a highly questionable procedure from the point of view of legal theory, since retroactive legislation was then and still is today incompatible with the principles of the rule of law. It demonstrated, however, that the colonies existed in a legal sphere of their own, separate even from that of the German Empire itself.²¹

Definitions: Culturalistic v. Biologistic

The shift in the definition of the term ‘Native’, of what constitutes the ‘Other’, was to prove crucial in the further course of Namibian, South African (apartheid) and German history. During the early years of colonial rule, a culturalistic definition for these terms predominated. Assimilation was rewarded and ‘mixed marriages’ were regarded positively, as is demonstrated in a memorandum of the Rhenish Mission:

Such people of mixed race, who have been brought up by their white fathers and so are able to count themselves, and like to count themselves, as being in every respect part of the ‘white’ community, will strengthen the German element in the *Schutzgebiet*, and that increasingly as time goes by; and increasingly as time goes by, the Native population, whose leading families are related by marriage to the settlers, will truly feel themselves happy and at ease as subjects of the German Empire and enjoying its protection.²²

Tecklenburg’s complaint about ‘Hottentot women’ who mingled with the Germans at marksmen’s fairs basically provides evidence of this. They may not have been completely integrated, but they were in relationships with German men and took part in social life. Their entry ticket was their assimilation.

²⁰ The rapid increase in the number of Afro-German children as a result of rape and the forced prostitution of African women now made the issue seem even more urgent. On the matter of the ‘mixed-race question’ see Frank Becker, “Soldatenkinder und Rassenpolitik. Die Folgen des Kolonialkriegs für die Mischlinge in Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1904–1913)”, *Militär-geschichtliche Zeitschrift*, 63/1 (2004), pp. 53–77.

²¹ On the status of the colonies under international law, see Harald Sippel, “‘Im Interesse des Deutschtums und der weißen Rasse’, Behandlung und Rechtswirkungen von ‘Rassenmischehen’ in den Kolonien Deutsch-Ostafrika und Deutsch-Südwestafrika”, *Jahrbuch für afrikanisches Recht*, 9 (1995), pp. 123–159.

²² Rhenish Missionary Society, *Denkschrift* [transcript], 1887, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 3a–6b.

All of this was now changed by a judgment in which Windhoek District Court decreed that 'Natives' were "all the blood members of a primitive people, including the progeny of native women that they have borne to men of the white race, even if there should have been miscegenation with white men over a period of several generations. As long as descent from a member of the primitive people can be proven, the descendant is, by virtue of his blood, a Native."²³

The confirmation of this judgment by the Superior Court of South West Africa²⁴ meant that the principle of descent had finally established itself in a legally binding manner in the definition of who was a 'Native', so that the cultural concept of 'race' was replaced by a biologicistic one. The degree of assimilation was no longer the key criterion. Basically, indeed, assimilation was not possible any more anyway, as the biologicistic interpretation of the concept of the 'Other' closed the boundary between the two sides, preventing any crossing. There naturally continued to be relationships between German men and African women, but in terms of the social construct the 'races' were segregated from each other.

Yet why did this problem suddenly seem so urgent after the turn of the century? There are two closely interwoven answers to this question. On the one hand, this was just the time at which the idea of 'race' as a biological concept was gaining much more widespread acceptance, and finding adherents especially among a certain part of the population – interestingly enough, often people with a rather higher standard of education – who wanted to "protect [...] the ranks of the Europeans against being mixed with coloured blood",²⁵ as they were afraid that otherwise the settler population would 'go Native', or 'go kaffir', to use the local idiom. This was, after all, a process that was regarded as being demonstrated by history, as could supposedly be seen in the "deterioration of the European race in the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies in America and in Portugal's African possessions", as Tecklenburg wrote later.²⁶ Or, as the missionary Carl Wandres formulated it a few years later in the course of a discussion as to how one could also prevent extramarital sexual relations:

Mixed marriages are not only undesirable, but are truly immoral and a slap in the face for Germanness. [...]

Mixed marriages are always a sin against racial consciousness. A nation that sins against its own honour in this way definitely sinks to a lower level and, as can be seen from the Latin nations, is not capable of carrying out any thorough colonisation. [...]

²³ Judgment of Windhoek District Court, 26 September 1907 [transcript of 25 April 1908], NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., II-37a–40b [spec. pag.]. Original of the judgment in NAN GWI 530 [R 1/07], 23a–26a.

²⁴ Judgment of Windhoek Superior Court, 10 November 1909, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 52a–55a.

²⁵ Report by Tecklenburg [transcript], 24 September 1903, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 61ca–61ea.

²⁶ Tecklenburg to Colonial Department, 23 October 1905, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 24a–34a.

As far as people of mixed race are concerned, we have to say on the basis of widespread experience that these people are a calamity for our colony. These pitiable creatures are almost all very severely impaired genetically. All that is to be seen among them are lies and deceit, sensuosity and stupid pride, an inclination to dishonesty and to alcoholism, and last but not least they are almost without exception syphilitic. And it could scarcely be otherwise, since their fathers are not good for very much, and their mothers for nothing at all.²⁷

On the other hand, the 'people of mixed race' did actually call into question one of the constitutive principles of the colonial state, resting as it did upon the binary distinction between 'White' and 'Black', between 'Native' and 'non-Native', between 'masters' (i.e. members of the 'master race') and 'servants'. If this boundary were to become blurred, then confusion and ambiguity would threaten and ultimately endanger German rule. For as Tecklenburg put it:

Males of mixed race will be liable to serve in the forces, will be capable of occupying public offices, and will be beneficiaries of the right to vote, which is likely to be introduced at some time in the future, and of other rights attached to nationality. These consequences are extremely alarming and in view of the present situation in German South West Africa they represent a grave danger. They will not only compromise the maintenance of the purity of the German race and of German civilisation to a major extent, but also put the white man's entire position of power in jeopardy.²⁸

White 'Masters' – Black Servants

Perhaps even more strongly than was the case in other colonies, the German governmental and administrative utopia in South West Africa was based on the distinction between 'Natives' and 'non-Natives'. In such a society of racial privilege there was a need for a precise definition of who belonged to the privileged and who to the disadvantaged 'race'.²⁹

This governmental and administrative utopia rested on a legal and administrative system that displayed a discriminatory dichotomy. While for Europeans, or more precisely for all Whites, a separation of powers existed as between the

²⁷ The missionary Carl Wandres, "Bemerkungen über Mischehen und Mischlinge aus der Praxis für die Praxis" ("Remarks on Mixed Marriages and Mixed-Race People, from Practical Experience for Practical Application") [transcript, n.d.], NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 143b–145b.

²⁸ Tecklenburg to Colonial Department, 23 October 1905, NAN ZBU F.IV.R.1., Sheets 24a–34a.

²⁹ I have gone into this in detail in Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft* [English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects*].

executive and the judicial branches of government – in addition to four Imperial Courts there was a Superior Court that acted as a Court of Appeal – this was not the case for the ‘Natives’. For them, the district officials were prosecution, judiciary and executive all rolled in one. From 1910 onwards a Native Administration with a Native Affairs Department and Native Commissioners was established alongside the classic district administrations.

The three Native Ordinances of 1907, which represented the regulatory foundation for the society of racial privilege, did not only introduce an obligation to enter into employment and a system of complete overall surveillance, they did not only initiate a process of social disciplining, but they also elevated every White person to the status of an overseer of the Africans. For example, the passes which the Africans had to wear visibly around their necks had to be shown to any White on demand, and the Whites took on crucial tasks in the sophisticated system of reporting. Whites were superior, so they had to be saluted; when an African met a White person, the African had to stand aside. What this linking of real and symbolic subordination could lead to, this mingling of private economic superiority as employers with the function of an official authority in the surveillance system, was manifest in the so-called *väterliches Züchtigungsrecht* – ‘parental powers of physical chastisement’. The settlers claimed for themselves this right to physically chastise their workers, as these were considered to be at a stage of development equivalent to that of children and therefore to need a ‘firm hand’. By giving their sanction to this as a common law right, the courts opened the doors wide for the development of a *Prügelkultur*, a general culture of physical violence. This led to an extreme brutalisation of relations between Whites and Africans. In 1912 the Governor was seriously worried by the “alarming increase” in the number of “brutal excesses of whites against natives”, in some instances even involving police officers, since he was afraid that such cases, in which individuals “rage against the Natives with the violence of madness, and see their White skins as giving them carte blanche to commit brutal crimes”, would arouse “feelings of hatred among the Natives” which were bound “sooner or later, to the extent that no determined measures are taken to remedy them, to lead to a renewed desperate rebellion on the part of the Natives, and thus to the economic ruin of the country”.³⁰

In order to avoid becoming victims of this inhuman treatment, many African workers would try to escape from the farms they were employed on. In doing so,

³⁰ Circulated Order, Imperial Governor's Office Windhoek, 31 May 1912, NAN ZBU W.III.R.1. Vol. 1, Sheets 7a–8a.

however, they violated some important provisions of the Native Ordinances of 1907, namely the requirement to pursue employment and the condition that they might only leave their place of residence – that is to say their place of employment – with the express permission of the Administration. If they quit their service before the expiry of their contracts “without good reason in accordance with law”, they could, upon an application from their masters, be forced to continue their employment (in the dry bureaucratic language of the Native Ordinances) “through measures of compulsion imposed on the part of the authorities”. The country was regularly crisscrossed by military patrols searching for fugitives. The labour shortage became a dominant issue during the post-war period: as a large proportion of the Herero and the Nama had been massacred by the Germans during the war from 1904–1908, there was unsurprisingly a shortage of workers afterwards.³¹ While some sections of the German colonial administration attempted to improve the lot of the Africans by pursuing a more restrained policy and granting them minimum rights, the farmers relied on pure violence: the degree to which the farmers’ attitudes were governed by a contemptuous disregard for the human dignity of their employees can be seen from the fact that in 1912 various Farmers’ Associations demanded that “Natives who display a propensity to run away should be identified by a tattoo”.³² Although the Government ultimately rejected these demands, since “no [...] colonial nation makes use of such measures”,³³ which moreover might “stir up major unrest among the Natives and be met with great resistance”, and furthermore “would be exploited at home by elements hostile to colonialism to justify wild agitation”,³⁴ this example nevertheless shows a radicalisation of thought in the field of Native Policy, with ideas being put forward which a generation later, when the State was no longer restrained by any inhibitions whatsoever, would be applied millions of times over.

31 On the importance of the ‘labour question’ see Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 176–242 (English edition: *German Rule, African Subjects*).

32 Okahandja Agricultural Association to Imperial Governor’s Office Windhoek, 16 December 1912, NAN ZBU W.III.B.1. Vol. 1, Sheet 35a.

33 Imperial Governor’s Office Windhoek, to a farmer named von Gossler, Chairman of the Agricultural Association of Okahandja, 31 December 1912, NAN ZBU W.III.B.1. Vol. 1, Sheet 36a.

34 Outjo District Office to Imperial Governor’s Office Windhoek, 4 March 1912, NAN ZBU W.III.B.1. Vol. 1, Sheet 29a.

Aporias of the Racial State

However, the administration's endeavours to put the society of racial privilege on a more stable foundation by granting the African population a minimum degree of 'protection' also failed,³⁵ mainly due to the internal self-contradictions within the racial state: the surveillance of these protective measures that the Administration and the courts were supposed to exercise was ineffective, as both judges and administrative officers showed solidarity with the European settlers and entrepreneurs.

If a White was to be punished for the 'maltreatment of Natives', he had to be sentenced under due process of law. This hardly ever happened, however, and if it did, the penalties imposed were ridiculously light. For it was as a rule impossible to find any White witnesses who were prepared to speak against the accused, while Black ones would "simply not be believed, whereas the most dubious statements made by whites under oath would be given credence", as the Lüderitzbucht District Officer complained. "And so the whole affair would end with a glowing acquittal, and there could be no more thankless task than to represent the prosecuting authorities in such cases."³⁶ In a society as strongly characterised by racism as this colonial one, the Africans' 'lack of credibility', itself an emanation of the racist system, could not be eliminated. If an official shared the view that nothing Africans said was to be believed, it was scarcely to be expected that he would help them to obtain justice. Even in the courts, they were not believed. To give the Africans any chance of being treated equally by the courts, the colonial situation itself – that is to say, the way the colonised were discriminated against in all aspects of everyday life – would have had to have been set aside. But nobody who formed part of the camp of the colonisers wanted that.

The society of racial privilege extends far beyond ethnic segregation as an end in itself or as the means of implementing diffuse ideological concepts of 'racial purity'. It refers to a social order that is designed to be permanent and is based on a biological hierarchisation encompassing all aspects of life. The members of the 'races' concerned were to be brought to an internalisation of their positions in this hierarchy through measures of social disciplining. Direct force was

35 The influence of the State Secretary for the Colonies, Bernhard Dernburg, who is referred to again and again in this connection in research, is hugely overestimated. The measures for the 'protection' of the 'Natives' had already been discussed in connection with the Native Ordinances of 1907 and dated back to the period before the Herero and Nama War. When Dernburg intervened to modify the text of the Ordinances, he most often made them more stringent.

36 Lüderitzbucht District Office to Governor's Office Windhoek, 21 April 1913, NAN ZBU W.III.R.2. Vol. 1, Sheets 156a–159a.

to be rendered superfluous, being replaced by a structural compulsion that would no longer be perceptible as such. This is not the least of the reasons why the mental deformations set in train by this situation turned into a legacy that outlasted the actual phase of colonialism for so long.

The Society of Racial Privilege in German South West Africa and Its Significance in the Context of German History

German South West Africa was Germany's first attempt to establish a society of racial privilege, a racist state. Only 35 years later, an attempt was made to construct a social system in Europe that rested upon similar principles. Once again the context was a colonial one, since the aim was to settle territory and undertake measures of land reclamation, with Germans forming the 'master race' there, to use an expression of the German colonial 'pioneer' Carl Peters.

Any examination of the Nazis' plans and visions for their 'Eastern Empire', of the motives underpinning their *Lebensraum* policy and of their ideas with regard to the future interaction between the new German 'master class' and the Slav underclass will reveal echoes of colonialism at every turn.³⁷

The parallels with colonial history were perfectly clear to those responsible on the German side, starting with Hitler himself:

The struggle for hegemony in the world will be decided in favour of Europe by the possession of Russia; this will make Europe the place that is more secure against blockade than anywhere else in the world. [...] The Slavic peoples on the other hand are not destined to lead independent lives of their own. [...] The territory of Russia is our India, and just as the English rule India with only a handful of people, so we will govern this colonial territory of ours. We will supply the Ukrainians with headscarves, glass bead necklaces as jewellery, and all the other things that appeal to colonial peoples.³⁸

Regardless of whether Hitler had a proper grasp of British colonial rule in India and elsewhere – India of all places was by no means a settler colony such as he

³⁷ I have explored this in more detail elsewhere; here, a few sketched outlines must suffice: Zimmerer; "Holocaust und Kolonialismus", (English version: "Colonialism and the Holocaust", pp. 125–153 in this book, and Jürgen Zimmerer, "Die Geburt des 'Ostlandes' aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus. Ein postkolonialer Blick auf die NS – Eroberungs- und Vernichtungspolitik", *Sozial.Geschichte. Zeitschrift für die historische Analyse des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, 19/1 (2004), pp. 10–43 (English version: "The Birth of the 'Ostland' out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A (Post)colonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Annihilation", pp. 230–261 in this book).

³⁸ Hitler, 17 September 1941, Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier*, ed. Werner Jochmann, Hamburg 1980, pp. 60–64.

imagined the German *Lebensraum* in the east would become – he was most definitely impressed by the prestige of British colonial rule and the techniques by which it was implemented. What is more important in relation to what we are interested in here is the discursive structure Hitler uses, his recourse to the world of the British Empire as he imagined it in order to illustrate his own goals.

Similar mechanisms are repeatedly found in descriptions of the ‘barren’ eastern lands, in the manner in which both common soldiers and high Nazi officials tried to put their experience of ‘the East’ into words. Whether it was Hitler speaking of this “primeval world” (*Urwelt*) which one “only needed to see” in order to know “that nothing happens here if one does not assign people the work they have to do” and concluding that “The Slav is a born slave, they are a mass crying out for a master”;³⁹ or a soldier writing home from Russia that “there is nothing of culture, nothing of paradise [to be seen here]; but only the absolute depths, filth, people who demonstrate to us that we will face a huge task of colonisation here”;⁴⁰ it was colonial history, or what colonial history was imagined to be, that was drawn upon for the purposes of comparison. It served to endow what was unexpected, what was foreign, with meaning. Colonial attributions helped to cast the cloak of a civilising mission over conquest. Himmler’s secretary Hanns Johst, who travelled with the *Reichsführer SS* through Poland during the winter of 1939/40, wrote:

The Poles are not a state-building people. They lack even the most basic prerequisites. I have travelled all over the country at the side of the *Reichsführer SS*. A country which has so little feeling for the essence of settlement that it is not even up to the task of creating a village of any style has no claim to any sort of independent political status within Europe. It is a country crying out to be colonised!⁴¹

Seen as lacking any cultural abilities of their own, the Polish, Ukrainian and Russian populations could only win the right to survive in the function of servants, or rather slaves, to the Germans; there was no hint of their being granted equal entitlement. Segregated legally and socially from the Germans, the ‘Natives’ of Eastern Europe were above all assigned the role of servants and a labour force for the ‘ruling class’ constituted by the German ‘master race’. It was this function as a workforce that essentially gave rise to any right to survive they might have;

³⁹ Hitler, 17 September 1941, Hitler, *Monologe*, p. 63.

⁴⁰ These are the words of a soldier in the 12th Airborne Regiment, 20 July 1941, quoted according to: Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941–1944*, Hamburg 1999, p. 102.

⁴¹ Hanns Johst, *Ruf des Reiches – Echo des Volkes!*, München 1940, p. 94, quoted according to: Michael Burleigh, *Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Gesamtdarstellung*, Frankfurt 2000, p. 515.

just as in German South West Africa Theodor Leutwein had tried to divert General von Trotha from his genocidal plans by drawing attention to the need for labour in the colony.

Germans and Poles were subject to different legal systems, this dual jurisdiction being ultimately based on the criterion of 'racial' affiliation. But preferential treatment within this society of racial privilege was not restricted to formal law; rather, the *situation coloniale* permeated all spheres of social interaction. Just as Europeans were favoured always and everywhere in South West Africa, so in Eastern Europe the Germans formed the apex of the social hierarchy. If Hitler was able to say of the Ukraine, "Our Germans – this is the main thing – must form a closed community, like a fortress; outside the main centres, even the lowest stable boy must stand above any of the natives";⁴² then this attitude is ultimately based on a similar vision of a society of racial privilege.

It is this mental disposition to create a social hierarchy on the basis of biology that indicates a common mindset in the two cases. This does not represent the formulation of any causality or any irreversible *Sonderweg* leading from German South West Africa to occupied eastern Europe. Rather, German South West Africa furnished the necessary experience of the utopia of a racial state to be made the object of development and total control, experience that could be drawn upon once again when the conquest of Poland and the Soviet Union presented Nazi administrators and planners with the opportunity to implement their ideas of utopian population economics on the grandest possible scale.⁴³

Within the field of post-colonial studies it has long been advocated that academics should no longer regard colonialism only as a one-way street, understood merely in terms of the export of specific behaviours from the European 'home' countries to the non-European regions; but rather should also examine how developments in Europe and in the overseas colonies affected, spurred on and radicalised each other. The society of racial privilege in the former German South West Africa is an important starting point for such an undertaking.

⁴² Hitler, 17 September 1941, Hitler, *Monologe*, pp. 62f.

⁴³ It will be a task for researchers in the coming years to explore and set out in detail the ways in which this knowledge was passed on. I myself have analysed the factors of personal experience, preservation in institutional archives and collective imagination in Zimmerer, "Geburt des 'Ostlandes'" (English version: "Birth of the 'Ostland'", pp. 230–261 in this book).

