

The German Empire and Genocide: The Genocide Against the Herero and Nama in (German) History

Genocide: The Meaning and History of a Term¹

Genocide is a relatively new term, but a much older crime. It was first defined during the Second World War by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in his ground-breaking study *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. During his exile in the United States, Lemkin came to an important realisation derived from his personal experience of the crimes of the National Socialists and from the knowledge he had gained studying the Turkish mass murder of Armenians during the First World War: namely, that certain cases of mass violence could not be encompassed by the existing instruments of international criminal law, let alone punished by them. For this reason, he created a new term: “New concepts require new terms. By ‘genocide’ we mean the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group.”²

After the end of the Second World War, Lemkin’s definition became the basis of the Genocide Convention adopted by the UN in 1948. In this document, genocide is defined as

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such:

1 For a closer examination of some these issues, see my discussion in Jürgen Zimmerer, “Krieg, KZ und Völkermord in Südwestafrika. Der erste deutsche Genozid”, in Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, eds, *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, Berlin 2003, pp. 45–63; Jürgen Zimmerer, “Holocaust und Kolonialismus. Beitrag zu einer Archäologie des genozidalen Gedankens”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 51/12 (2003), pp. 1098–1119, English translation: “Colonialism and the Holocaust. Towards an Archaeology of Genocide”, in Dirk A. Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society. Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australia*, New York 2004, pp. 49–76 (a revised version appears in this book on pp. 125–153).

2 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Law of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, Washington 1944, p. 79. More on the origin and meaning of the term genocide can now also be found 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 (English version: “Colonial Genocide? On the Use and Abuse of a Historical Category for Global History”, pp. 175–197 in this book); A. Dirk Moses, “The Holocaust and Genocide”, in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, London 2004.

- (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.³

Since then, the term has achieved an unprecedented degree of currency, and is now used to categorise phenomena that are thoroughly diverse in nature. The term “Holocaust”, often used as a synonym for “genocide” is applied in areas as wide-ranging as environmental protection issues and economic crises. Nowadays one can read of “environmental Holocausts”,⁴ or of a “Holocaust on your plate” as a plea for animal rights.⁵ The Australian Prime Minister John Howard spoke of the economic crisis of the late 1990s as an “economic holocaust” that Australia had come through pretty well.⁶ Used in slogans such as “The American Holocaust”,⁷ the “American Indian Holocaust”,⁸ “The Black Holocaust”⁹ or “The Herero

3 United Nations: *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Article 2, 9 December 1948, as reproduced in Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies*, New Haven 1990, pp. 44–49, here p. 44.

4 See, for example, S. K. Chadha, ed., *Environmental Holocaust in Himalaya*, New Delhi 1989; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño famines and the making of the Third World*, London 2001. Interestingly enough, the book was published in German under the less sensational title *Die Geburt der Dritten Welt (The Birth of the Third World)*, Berlin 2003.

5 In March 2003 the animal protection organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) drew vehement criticism, especially from Jewish groups, when as part of an advertising campaign entitled “Holocaust on your Plate” it placed pictures of children behind barbed wire in a Nazi concentration camp alongside a picture of pigs in a cage. Brian Willoughby, “PETA Sparks Outrage with Holocaust Comparison”, 23 March 2003, https://www.alternet.org/2003/03/peta_sparks_outrage_with_holocaust_comparison, accessed 12 Jul. 2023.

6 “Transcript of the Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard MP, Address to the Tasmanian Division, State Council Dinner, Burnie Civic Centre, Burnie, 6 November 1998”, *Prime Minister of Australia, News Room*, <https://pmt transcripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10972>, accessed 12 Jul. 2023.

7 David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust. The Conquest of the New World*, Oxford/New York 1992.

8 Russel Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival. A Population History since 1492*, London 1987.

9 Black History Resource Working Group in conjunction with the Race Equality Management Team, ed., *Slavery: An Introduction to the African Holocaust; with Special Reference to Liverpool, ‘Capital of the Slave Trade’*, 2nd edn, Liverpool 1997; Thomas Mordekhai, *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust*, Philadelphia 1993. There are now also museums and societies that

Holocaust”,¹⁰ the term serves to characterise colonial mass violence and mass suffering. The terms “genocide” and “Holocaust” are no doubt among the few such buzzwords from the field of history that are understood globally. Victims of such crimes in particular are prone to use the terms “Holocaust” or “genocide” in order to tap into the worldwide outrage over the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich – an outrage that is not matched to the same extent with regard to mass crimes committed under colonialism¹¹ – to gain audiences for their own causes.¹² This is evinced by the way the term “genocide” has been replaced by “Holocaust”, which was originally applied only to the murder of the European Jews. At the same time, this is also one of the reasons why the use of these two terms in colonial history has generated such bitter controversy. From the perspective of the ‘perpetrator society’ – in the colonial context, that is White settler society – the admission that cases of genocide did take place in the colonies fundamentally calls into question the assumption that the Europeanisation of the world was a progressive project, precisely because it would implicitly associate it with the crimes of the Nazis.¹³

The term ‘genocide’ was also applied very early on to the German war against the Herero and Nama in German South West Africa,¹⁴ and quickly unleashed in-

commemorate the “Black Holocaust”, such as “America’s Black Holocaust Museum” and “The Black Holocaust Society” in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

10 Jeremy Silvester, Werner Hillebrecht and Casper Erichsen, “The Herero Holocaust? The Disputed History of the 1904 Genocide”, *The Namibian Weekender* (20 August 2001).

11 On this subject, see (for example) the complaints of Stannard and Churchill: David E. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship”, in Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, Oxford 1996, pp. 163–208; Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492–Present*, San Francisco 1997.

12 See, for example, the reparations claim of the Herero before the court of the District of Columbia, United States. The “First Amended Complaint” explicitly listed “Violations of International Law, Crimes Against Humanity, Genocide, Slavery and Forced Labor”. The grounds of the action refer repeatedly to the relevance of the act of genocide under criminal law. Statement of complaint by the “Herero People’s Reparations Corporation” before the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, 18 Sept. 2001.

13 I have depicted the political dimensions of this problem, and in particular those relating to the politics of remembrance, in greater detail in: Jürgen Zimmerer, “Colonial Genocide? On the Use and Abuse of a Historical Category for Global History”, pp. 175–197 in this book.

14 As Dominik J. Schaller has recently been able to demonstrate by analysing writings of Lemkin about the Herero War that had previously been largely neglected, Lemkin himself saw von Trotha’s policies as fulfilling the criteria for being regarded as genocidal. On this subject, see 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. This thesis was then brought to more general attention by Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonial-*

tense controversy.¹⁵ The fact that the issue as to whether genocide was committed during the War of 1904–1908 is so hotly contested also raises the question of the place this conflict occupies in German and in international history; that is to say, in short, of its historical localisation. This question becomes all the more pressing when the temporal proximity to the Holocaust and the fact that it was Germans who were the perpetrators in both cases are taken into account; factors that in turn suggest that the genocide against the Herero and the Nama played a role as a precursor to the crimes of the Third Reich. I will therefore attempt below to clarify whether the term ‘genocide’ can meaningfully be applied at all to the events in German South West Africa between 1904 and 1908, and which of those events in particular may be regarded as having been genocidal in nature. In my closing remarks, I will then add reflections on the positioning of the genocide against the Herero and Nama in the history of genocide in general, and thus also on its relationship with the Holocaust.

The inflationary use of the term ‘genocide’ as outlined above makes it necessary to ascertain its true meaning if we wish to establish ‘genocide’ as a category that is viable for use in historical analysis. Several such categorisations have already been made.¹⁶ I base my definition on that of the UN Convention inspired by Lemkin, as it seems to me to be the most widely acknowledged. In Lemkin’s own words:

herrschaft. Der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus 1884–1915, 2nd edn, Berlin 1984, p. 20.

15 For a summary of the arguments of those who criticise the thesis that genocide occurred, see Brigitte Lau, “Uncertain Certainties. The Herero-German War of 1904”, in Brigitte Lau, *History and Historiography – 4 Essays in Reprint*, ed. Annemarie Heywood, Windhoek 1995, pp. 39–52. A good overview of the debate is given by Tilman Dederling, “The German-Herero War of 1904. Revisionism of Genocide or Imaginary Historiography?”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19 (1993), pp. 80–88. The following have appeared more recently: Henrik Lundtofte, “I believe that the nation as such must be annihilated ...’ – The Radicalization of the German Suppression of the Herero Rising in 1904”, in Steven L. B. Jensen, ed., *Genocide: Cases, Comparisons and Contemporary Debates*, The Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2003, pp. 15–53; Jan-Bart Gewald, “Colonization, Genocide and Resurgence: The Herero of Namibia 1890–1933”, in Michael Bollig and Jan-Bart Gewald, eds, *People, Cattle and Land: Transformations of a Pastoral Society in Southwestern Africa*, Köln 2001, pp. 187–225; Alison Palmer, *Colonial Genocide*, Adelaide 2000; Tilman Dederling, “A Certain Rigorous Treatment of All Parts of the Nation: The Annihilation of the Herero in German South West Africa, 1904.” in Mark Levene and Penny Roberts, eds, *The Massacre in History*, New York 1999, pp. 205–222.

16 On this subject, see: Dirk A. Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36/4 (2002), pp. 7–36; Zimmerer, *Colonialism and the Holocaust*.

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation [...] It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. [...] Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.¹⁷

The decisive factor is therefore the intention of the perpetrators. There needs to be a will to ‘exterminate’ a certain group defined by the perpetrators. Equally, there needs to be actual action, i.e. the initiation of the genocidal process, but not necessarily its completion. This means that the murder of a relatively small number of people is sufficient if the reason they were murdered is that they belonged to a certain group. It is not the number of victims that determines whether genocide has taken place. Thus the repeated attempts by revisionists to demonstrate lower and lower numbers of victims in order to refute allegations that genocide was committed against the Herero and Nama lead nowhere. In establishing whether genocide took place, it is irrelevant whether 50,000 to 70,000 or ‘only’ 10,000 to 20,000 Herero were killed.

For acts of genocide in the colonial context, this is a significant point, since in comparison with the Holocaust, perceived by many as the archetypal model of genocide, the numbers of victims are often relatively small.¹⁸ The aura of a large number (of victims) is a powerful one, but at the same time gives rise to the danger that smaller ethnicities, which find it difficult enough in any case to attract the attention of the public and the interest of historians engaged in research, will be disregarded. The importance of ‘intention’, on the other hand, demands that we should focus on the motives and actions of the perpetrators.

‘Driven into the Desert’

In the case of the Herero War, a crucial document pointing to the genocidal intentions of those responsible on the German side is the infamous Proclamation or ‘Annihilation Order’ issued on 2 October 1904 by General Lothar von Trotha, the Commander in Chief of the German colonial forces:

¹⁷ Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, p. 79.

¹⁸ On the other hand, many North American genocide researchers claim that the colonisation of North and South America involved the biggest genocide – also in numerical terms – in history, with up to 100 million deaths. On this subject, see: Stannard, *American Holocaust*, or Ward Churchill, who even speaks of the Nazis having imitated the colonial conquest of North America: Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide. Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492-Present*, San Francisco 1997.

The Hereros have ceased to be German subjects.

They have murdered and robbed, have cut off the ears and noses and other bodily parts of wounded soldiers, and are now too cowardly to want to go on fighting. I say to that people: Whoever delivers one of their *Kapteins* to one of my posts as a prisoner will be given 1,000 marks; whoever brings Samuel Maharero will be given 5,000 marks. But the Herero people must quit this country. If they do not, I will compel them to do so with the *Groot Rohr* [cannon].

Within the borders of German territory, any Herero, with or without a firearm, with or without livestock, will be shot; nor will I give refuge to women or children any more. I will drive them back to their people or have them fired upon.¹⁹

In an Order of the Day of the same date, he sought to clarify this by stating that for the sake of the reputation of the German soldier the order to "fire upon women and children is to be understood in such a way that shots are to be fired over their heads, in order to force them to run away. I definitely assume that this Proclamation will lead to no further male prisoners being taken, but will not degenerate into atrocities against women and children. They will doubtless run away, if shots are fired over their heads a couple of times."²⁰

As this text unambiguously demonstrates, it was von Trotha's intention to permanently expel the Herero from the colony. How exactly he imagined that could be brought about is not revealed in the Proclamation text itself, which only states that he intended to expel the Herero and to have any Herero shot who nevertheless remained within the *Schutzgebiet*. Though such a mass expulsion would in itself have been a particularly brutal course of action to adopt, even by the standards of a colonial war, it would still not have been sufficient to amount to genocide. However, the passage in question serves merely as camouflage. For if the Proclamation is read in conjunction with a letter that von Trotha wrote to the General Staff in Berlin two days later, his intentions become plainer:

Now the only question for me was *how* the war with the Herero was to be brought to an end. The opinions on this subject of the Governor and some of the 'old Africa hands' on the one hand and myself on the other are diametrically opposed. For quite some time, there has been a desire on the part of the former to enter into peace negotiations, and they describe the Herero nation as being essential as labour for the future exploitation of the territory. I am of a completely different opinion. I believe that the nation as such must be destroyed, or, if that should prove not to be possible by tactical actions, they must be expelled from the country operationally and by means of further individual actions. With the watering holes

¹⁹ Proclamation by von Trotha, Osombo-Wind[imbe], 2 October 1904, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch), Imperial Colonial Office R 1001/2089, Sheets 7a f. This is a transcript of the original document. Other transcripts of the Proclamation are to be found in the Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv Freiburg and in the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek.

²⁰ Ibid.

from Grootfontein to Gobabis having been occupied and the military convoys being constantly on the move, it is bound to be possible to track down those small groups of people who have begun moving back westwards and gradually finish them off.²¹

Against the background of the concrete historical situation in which the Proclamation was issued, it can be seen that 'expulsion' and 'murder' were essentially one and the same thing.

When precisely von Trotha made the decision to commit genocide cannot be determined. What is certain, however, is that he had no knowledge either of the country or of its people,²² but was obsessed with the idea that this conflict was a 'race war' and so right from the start planned a military operation that can only be described as a war of extermination.²³ Von Trotha himself maintained that he had not been given any instructions or directives at the time of his appointment; he had merely been called upon by Emperor Wilhelm II to quell the uprising by

21 Von Trotha to the Chief of the General Staff of the Army, 4 October 1904, quoted according to Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*, p. 163.

22 Born on 3 July 1848 as the son of a Prussian officer, he too joined the army and took part in the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian Wars. Between 1894 and 1897 he was the Commander of the colonial forces in German East Africa, where he gained military renown through his suppression of the 'Wahehe Rising'. Thereafter he took part voluntarily, as Commander of the First East Asian Infantry Brigade, in the campaign to suppress the Boxer Rising in China. See Gerhard Pool, *Samuel Maharero*, Windhoek 1991, pp. 260 f.

23 By the middle of the 19th century at the latest, the idea that not only would 'higher races' subjugate 'lower' ones, but that the latter were also 'doomed', was thoroughly widespread, and not only in Germany. For examples, see the following: 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. Dan Stone has also recently pointed out similar attitudes among German anthropologists on the sidelines of the war against the Herero and Nama: Dan Stone, "White Men with Low Moral Standards? German Anthropology and the Herero Genocide", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 35/2 (2001), pp. 33–45. The same holds true for the vision of a battle of annihilation. For initial systematising reflections on the significance of the military campaign in China, see: Susanne Kuß, "Deutsche Soldaten während des Boxeraufstandes in China: Elemente und Ursprünge des Vernichtungskrieges", in Susanne Kuß and Bernd Martin, eds, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Boxeraufstand*, München 2002, pp. 165–181. For a general exposition of the history of 'total war' and its origins, see the "Total War" conference series organised by Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, which explicitly concerns itself with the exploration of the "Road to Total War": Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, eds, *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871*, New York 1997; Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds, *Anticipating Total War. The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914*, Cambridge 1999; Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds, *Great War – Total War, Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, Cambridge 2000; Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds, *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919–1939*, New York 2003.

any means necessary".²⁴ His own ideas as to how that was to be done were revealed in a letter to the colony's Governor, Theodor Leutwein: as he believed Africans would "yield only to force", he was willing to exercise such force "with blatant terrorism and even with cruelty". He wanted to "annihilate the rebellious tribes with rivers of blood".²⁵ This letter having been written four weeks after the issue of the 'Annihilation Order', there is no reason to doubt that von Trotha was totally serious about its content.

This course of action had been embarked on in June 1904, when von Trotha, who was still on his way to the *Schutzgebiet* – and so certainly not in the heat of battle or in view of any personal experience of military difficulties or reverses – issued orders from his ship which empowered his officers in South West Africa to have all armed 'rebels' shot immediately on the basis of summary proceedings:

- a) Every commanding officer is authorised to have coloured inhabitants of the territory who are caught in the act of carrying out treasonable activities against German troops, for example all rebels who are found under arms with belligerent intent, shot without any prior court proceedings, as has been customary practice in this war up to now.
- b) All other coloured inhabitants arrested by German military personnel on suspicion of having undertaken punishable activities will be sentenced by special field courts.
- c) The troops are to be instructed that any punitive measures against coloured people inflicted by troops acting on their own initiative will be met with the most severe punishments provided for under the general legal provisions on bodily harm, unlawful killing and murder, and that outside combat situations they are only permitted to make use of their weapons in self-defence or to prevent attempts to escape.²⁶

The intention of this order was twofold. Firstly, von Trotha was attempting to impose order on the spontaneous illegal actions that had been occurring since the beginning of the war and that had led to downright massacres of Herero at the hands of incensed settlers and soldiers, and had in their turn caused Herero who until then had not participated in the war to join in the fighting. At the same time, however, while von Trotha's order did put a stop to the arbitrary actions of individuals, it instead turned massacres and terror into planned instruments of German warfare: whoever resisted the Germans would be shot. Without any doubt, this meant that at that time, if not before, the first step was taken along the road to a war of annihilation and to genocide: for where any member of the

²⁴ Quoted according to Lundtofte, "I believe ...", p. 28.

²⁵ Von Trotha to Leutwein, 5 November 1904, quoted according to Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*, p. 156.

²⁶ Proclamation made by von Trotha on board the steamship *Eleonore Woermann*, June 1904, National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek (NAN), Imperial Governor's Office (ZBU) classified files, IX.A. Vol. 1, Sheet 1b.

enemy forces was seen merely as a rebel acting illegally, rather than as an opposing belligerent of equal and equally honourable status, it was no longer possible for him to be afforded protection or fair and humane treatment. And such attitudes and behaviour were typical of colonial wars.²⁷

Researchers into genocide have established that in order to set in motion a war of annihilation, and in particular an act of genocide, certain processes of exclusion are necessary in order to prevent the perpetrator from coming to identify in any way with the victim. The potential victims must be dehumanised, they must be robbed of their human dignity and placed outside the sphere in which moral responsibility applies. They must be banished from the circle of those “whom we are obligated to protect, to take into account, and to whom we must account”, as Helen Fein writes.²⁸ In the colonial situation, the ground had already been prepared for this process by the racism that underpinned colonial rule; and this situation was further reinforced by the atrocity propaganda that accompanied the outbreak of the war. Thus immediately after 12 January 1904 it was being said that the Herero had ‘slaughtered’ women and children and mutilated their victims.²⁹

In his Annihilation Order von Trotha specifically made reference to these rumours in order to justify his policy of murder and expulsion. According to this logic, the Herero were themselves to blame for their fate, as they were ‘barbarians’ and ‘savages’ in contrast to the ‘civilised’ and ‘disciplined’ German army they faced. The fact that the Herero demonstrably spared women and children while German soldiers deliberately waged war against them may be pointed out here without further comment.

The truly genocidal phase of the war began after the setback suffered by the Germans at the Battle of Ohamakari (Waterberg), when von Trotha, having failed to prevent the majority of the Herero from escaping his attempted encirclement, deliberately forced them into the waterless regions in the eastern part of the colony. German troops pursuing the fleeing Herero initiated a pincer movement, driving them in the direction of the *sandveld*, the sandy waste of the Omaheke

27 On this subject, see Jürgen Zimmerer, “Kriegsgefangene im Kolonialkrieg. Der Krieg gegen die Herero und Nama in Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1904–1907)”, in Rüdiger Overmans, ed., *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Köln 1999, pp. 277–294.

28 Helen Fein, “Definition and Discontent: Labelling, Detecting, and Explaining Genocide in the Twentieth Century”, in Stig Förster and Gerhard Hirschfeld, eds, *Genozid in der modernen Geschichte*, Münster 1999, pp. 11–21, here especially p. 20.

29 On these atrocity rumours, see also Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewusstsein: Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia 1904 bis 1907*, Göttingen 1999, pp. 104–115.

Desert.³⁰ Already at this juncture, terrible scenes must have unfolded: as the official history of the campaign reports, "Masses of sick and helpless men, women and children, having collapsed from exhaustion, lay parched with thirst [...] in the bush, apathetically awaiting their fate."³¹ The German officer Captain Maximilian Bayer wrote that wherever the pursuing German units came upon Herero, summary executions took place: "Now and then, whenever our patrols came upon stragglers, shots were to be heard among the thorn bushes to the right and left."³²

By this time at the latest, the idea had taken root within the German military command that the Omaheke Desert could "complete what German arms had started: the annihilation of the Herero nation", as the consequences of this policy are described in the official war chronicle quoted above.³³ It was in this situation, in which German troops were also systematically occupying the waterholes, that von Trotha issued the Annihilation Order quoted above. His war aim, the extermination of the Herero or their expulsion into the desert, was therefore by no means merely a feverish fantasy. Rather, it was the expression of a policy that was already in progress, since he already knew that the Herero were confined to the largely waterless *sandveld* of the Omaheke Desert, while his troops had closed off the edges of the desert in order to prevent the Herero from returning to the waterholes. In von Trotha's view, there was no escape for the Herero men, objects as they were of the General's Proclamation. They were shot or died of thirst. At the same time, however, the passage in the Proclamation that women would not be targeted became meaningless, because they too had no other choice but to flee into the desert, where the same fate awaited them as the men.

There are plentiful eye-witness accounts from German soldiers as to how the extermination unfolded.³⁴ Ludwig von Estorff, who had been one of the critics of von Trotha's policy of extermination even before the Battle of Ohamakari (Waterberg), may serve as one example among many. This is how he described the scene facing the pursuing German troops:

I followed their tracks, which led me to a number of wells where I beheld terrible scenes. All around them lay heaps of cattle that had died of thirst, having reached the wells with their last remaining strength, but not having being able to drink in time. The Herero contin-

³⁰ On this pursuit action, see: Lundtofte, Henrik, "*I believe ...*", pp. 33–38.

³¹ Kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung I des Großen Generalstabes, *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika*, 2 vols, Berlin 1906/07, Vol. 1, p. 203, see Lundtofte, "*I believe ...*", p. 38.

³² Maximilian Bayer, *Mit dem Hauptquartier in Südwestafrika*, Berlin 1909, p. 162, see Lundtofte, "*I believe ...*", p. 35.

³³ *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen*, p. 211.

³⁴ On this subject, see Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*, pp. 73–103.

ued to flee before us into the *sandveld*. The terrible spectacle was repeated over and over again. The men had worked with feverish haste to dig wells, but the water had become more and more sparse, the waterholes scarcer and scarcer. They fled from one to the next, losing almost all their cattle and very many people. The nation was shrunk to meagre remnants which gradually fell into our hands, though both then and later some escaped through the *sandveld* into British territory. The policy of shattering the nation in this way was as foolish as it was cruel; many of them and their wealth of cattle could still have been saved if they had now been shown mercy and received back; they had been punished enough. I proposed this to General von Trotha; but he wanted them completely exterminated.³⁵

In their distress, some of the Herero cut the throats of their cattle to quench their thirst with the blood, or squeezed the last remnants of moisture out of the content of the stomachs of dead animals.³⁶ But many could not save themselves even in this way; thousands died, even though no precise figure can be given for the number of the victims.³⁷

If we follow the definition of genocide set out in the UN Convention quoted above, using it as a category for historical analysis as is done also in respect of the murder of the European Jews by the Germans, then the way von Trotha and the German army proceeded is to be identified unambiguously as a case of genocide. Both the crucial requirement for genocide – the intention – and its execution are undeniably present, the latter both in respect of direct murder (Letter (a) of the UN Convention) and of expulsion into the desert (Letter (c)). The fact that Emperor Wilhelm II revoked von Trotha's Annihilation Order a few weeks later, for fear of its being exploited in anti-German propaganda and also because of new developments in the military situation, does not make any material difference. The crime had already been committed by then.

The fact that humanitarian considerations were not a primary factor in the decision to revoke von Trotha's order is confirmed by the Chief of the General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, who on the occasion of the revocation explicitly emphasised once again that he shared von Trotha's genocidal attitudes:

35 Ludwig von Estorff, *Wanderungen und Kämpfe in Südwestafrika, Ostafrika und Südafrika 1894–1910*, ed. by Christoph-Friedrich Kutscher, Windhoek 1979, p. 117.

36 Pool, *Samuel Maharero*, p. 282.

37 In view of the lack of any exact figures either for the pre-war population of the Herero – estimates vary between 70,000 and 100,000, though this does not yet take account of the number of victims of the rinderpest epidemic and its consequences – or for the post-war population, estimated at 17,000 to 40,000, no exact assessment of the losses during the war can be made. There are not even any precise figures with regard to the strength of the German colonial forces; however, the number of soldiers involved in the military operations was probably between 14,000 and 19,000. For more information on the various estimates and the problem of determining reliable figures, see: Lau, *Uncertain Certainties*, pp. 43–46.

His [von Trotha's] intention to annihilate the whole nation, or to drive it out of the country, is a matter in which one can agree with him. [...] The race war that has broken out can only end with the annihilation or else the complete subjugation of the one party. But the latter course is one that cannot be sustained in the long term, given current attitudes. One is therefore able to approve of General v. Trotha's intentions; the only thing is that he does not have the power to implement them.³⁸

The Anti-Guerrilla Campaign and the War of Annihilation

The genocidal strategy was however not restricted either to the war against the Herero or to the phases of actual combat. It was also implemented in the war against the Nama, and was practised in the concentration camps as well. As is commonly known, the Nama under Hendrik Witbooi attacked the Germans in October 1904, although prior to the Battle of Ohamakari (Waterberg) they had provided military support to the German colonial forces. This volte-face was decisively occasioned by demands that were being raised particularly in settler circles, now that there were strong forces present in the region, for the Nama too to be disarmed and permanently subjugated.³⁹ Learning from the mistakes of the Herero – the Nama had recognised what great difficulties the German troops had experienced in pursuing the fleeing Herero – they avoided a set-piece battle and initiated a guerrilla war. Knowing the country better than the Germans did and possessing greater mobility, they were able to offset the advantages enjoyed by the more numerous and better equipped colonial troops; thus they were able to keep hostilities dragging on, tying down large forces and eventually wearing them out and overcoming them by attrition.⁴⁰

In order to defeat the Nama, German troops had to be withdrawn from the centre of the *Schutzgebiet*, where the genocidal strategy with its requirement for an enormous number of troops, the “whole misguided operation against that unhappy people”, in von Estorff's knowledgeable formulation, continued to “keep strong military forces tied down in a thankless task”.⁴¹

³⁸ Von Schlieffen to von Bülow, 23 November 1904, quoted according to Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*, p. 166.

³⁹ Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*, p. 172.

⁴⁰ Von Estorff, *Wanderungen*, pp. 116–120. For more on the conflict with the Nama see also Werner Hillebrecht, “Die Nama und der Krieg im Süden”, in Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, eds, *Völkermord. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, Berlin 2003, pp. 121–132.

⁴¹ Von Estorff, *Wanderungen*, p. 117.

Against the Nama, as against the Herero, the Germans adopted a strategy of annihilation, systematically occupying watering holes – as they had done in the Omaheke – in order to kill their opponents by thirst. The deliberate destruction of the livelihoods of those who supported the guerrillas was a tactic that had already been tried out ‘successfully’ in German East Africa at a time when von Trotha was serving there. As early as the 1890s, when punitive expeditions were being carried out against the Wahehe people, burning villages and crops and “devour Mkwawa’s [the leader of the Wahehe] land”, as Eduard von Liebert, the Governor of German East Africa, called it,⁴² had been regarded as promising tactics. Likewise in the war “to suppress the Maji-Maji rebellion”, which was taking place in German East Africa almost contemporaneously with the war against the Herero and the Nama in South West Africa, it was part of the colonial army’s tactics “to confiscate the opponent’s possessions (livestock, provisions) and to devastate his villages and crops”,⁴³ in order to erode the crucial support for the guerrilla fighters among the population by destroying people’s livelihoods and their infrastructure.

As in the war against the Herero, so also in that against the Nama, the Germans exploited the hostile natural environment found in parts of the territory as a tactical instrument. As a result, this campaign too turned into a war against women and children, whose deaths were, at the very least, accepted and condoned, if not perhaps even positively pursued, as part of the strategy of annihilation. At the same time, the policy embraced a ‘purging’ or ‘cleansing’ of the land through mass internment. Von Trotha called upon the Nama to surrender, as otherwise they might expect to meet the same fate as the Herero:

To the rebellious Hottentots.

The great and mighty German Emperor would like to show mercy to the Hottentot people, so that those who surrender of their own accord will be granted their lives. Only those who at the beginning of the rebellion murdered whites or gave orders that they should be murdered have, in accordance with the law, forfeited their lives. This I proclaim to you, and I further tell you that those few who will not submit will suffer what the nation of the Herero has suffered. In their delusion they believed they could wage a successful war against the mighty German Emperor and the great German people. I ask you, where is the Herero nation today, where are their chiefs today? Samuel Maharero, who once called thousands of

⁴² von Liebert, “Neunzig Tage im Zelt – Meine Reise nach Uhehe Juni bis September 1897”, Berlin 1898, p. 33, quoted according to Martin Baer and Olaf Schröter, *Eine Kopfjagd. Deutsche in Ostafrika*, Berlin 2001, p. 57.

⁴³ *Militärpolitische Denkschrift über die Auswirkungen des Aufstandes*, Dar-es-Salaam, 1 June 1907, quoted according to Detlef Bald, “Afrikanischer Kampf gegen koloniale Herrschaft. Der Maji-Maji-Aufstand in Ostafrika”, *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 19/1 (1976), pp. 23–50, here p. 40. On the Maji-Maji Rebellion see also Felicitas Becker and Jigal Beez, eds, *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika, 1905–1907*, Berlin 2005.

cattle his own, has fled, hunted like a wild animal, across the British frontier. He has become as poor as the poorest of the *Veldherero* and no longer has any possessions. The other Big Men have fared the same, most of them having lost their lives, and so has the entire Herero nation. Some died of hunger and thirst in the *sandveld*, some were killed by the German cavalry, others were murdered by the Ovambo. The Hottentot people will meet no other fate if they do not surrender voluntarily and give up their weapons. You are to come to us with a white cloth on a stick and with all the inhabitants of your *werfs* [African settlements], and no harm shall befall you. You will be given work and food until the war is over, when the great German Emperor will order the territory anew. Anyone who from now on believes that this offer of mercy will not be applicable to him shall emigrate, because wherever he is found within German territory he will be fired on, until all such people have been annihilated. For the handing over of those guilty of murder, dead or alive, I set the following rewards: for Hendrik Witbooi 5,000 marks, for Stürmann [*sic*] 3,000 marks, for Cornelius 3,000 marks, for all other guilty leaders 1,000 marks.

Signed: Trotha.⁴⁴

It is only superficially that this call to capitulate appears to represent an abandonment of the policy of annihilation. The decisive factor in judging the military leadership's intention is the fate that awaited the Nama in captivity. And in this respect it is justified to talk of a continuation of the existing murderous policy, because the camps the Nama were deported to themselves represented a further instrument in the war of extermination. They were part of a system of camps established across the whole colony immediately following the revocation of the Annihilation Order. This system included 'collection camps', operated by the Mission and used to bring scattered Herero and those who had been living in hiding under control, and concentration camps, established and operated by the military administration.

The Concentration Camps

The concentration camps – the term was used as early as January 1905 by Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow⁴⁵ – were set up 'behind the lines' to take people off the hands of the collection camps, and to function as internment camps where

44 Von Trotha, Proclamation to the Nama, 22 April 1905, reproduced in Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung I des Großen Generalstabs, *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika*, ii, Berlin 1906/07, p. 186.

45 Following the revocation of von Trotha's Annihilation Order, Chancellor von Bülow suggested that "Herero who gave themselves up", including women and children, should with the assistance of the Missionary Society be "accommodated in concentration camps in different areas of the territory" and forced to perform "labour under surveillance". Bülow to Imperial Governor's Office Windhoek, 13 January 1905, BArch, R 1001/2087, Sheets 116a–117a. Previously, the term

‘tribes’ from the area affected by the guerrilla war could be incarcerated, in order to deprive the combatants of the support they enjoyed among the civilian population. This in itself makes clear the difference between these concentration camps and ordinary prisoner-of-war camps. At the same time it is a further indication of the fact that this was a war directed against entire peoples, since the camps were deliberately intended to serve as places of internment not only for combatants, but also for women, elderly men and children. To an extent they were also labour camps, providing urgently needed labour to both private employers and state institutions. While smaller employers would pick up prisoners from the camps every day to work for them, larger enterprises such as the Woermann shipping company even set up camps of their own.⁴⁶ At the same time, it was hoped that the prisoners, through being ‘educated to work’ in the camps, could be disciplined and prepared for their new ‘role’ as labourers in the post-war period.⁴⁷ Coupled with this there was also a spirit of retribution, as Deputy Governor Hans Tecklenburg wrote:

The more the Herero people now experience the consequences of rebellion in terms of their own physical suffering, the less desire they will have to seek to repeat the uprising for generations to come. Our military successes in themselves have made less of an impression on them. I expect the time of suffering they are now having to endure to have a more sustained effect, though in expressing this view it is by no means my wish to take up cudgels on behalf of Lieutenant General Trotha’s Proclamation of 2 October of last year. From an economic point of view, though, the death of so many people does represent a considerable loss.⁴⁸

The largest prison camp was located on Shark Island off Lüderitzbucht, and it was here that the line between murder and genocide was clearly crossed. An eye-

“concentration camp” had been used by the Spanish as early as the war in Cuba in 1896, and turned up again two years later during the American war in the Philippines. The expression gained worldwide familiarity during the South African War (1899–1902). An overview of the history of concentration camps is given by Andrzej J. Kaminski, *Konzentrationslager 1896 bis heute. Geschichte – Funktion – Typologie*, München 1990; Joël Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot, *Das Jahrhundert der Lager. Gefangenschaft, Zwangsarbeit, Vernichtung*, Berlin/München 2001.

⁴⁶ Jan-Bart Gewald, *Towards Redemption. A Socio-political History of the Herero of Namibia between 1890 and 1923*, Leiden 1996, pp. 220–222.

⁴⁷ For more on this and on the post-war order, see Zimmerer, Jürgen, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*, Münster/Hamburg/London 2001 [English translation: *German Rule, African Subjects. State Aspirations and the Reality of Power in Colonial Namibia*, New York 2021]. A summary is also to be found in Jürgen Zimmerer, “Der koloniale Musterstaat? Rassentrennung, Arbeitszwang und totale Kontrolle in Deutsch-Südwestafrika”, in Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg in Namibia (1904–1908) und seine Folgen*, Berlin 2003, pp. 26–41.

⁴⁸ Governor’s Office Windhoek to Colonial Department Berlin, 3 July 1905, BArch R 1001/2118, Sheets 154a–155a.

witness, the missionary Emil Laaf from Lüderitzbucht, described the conditions as follows:

At that time there were about 2,000 Herero prisoners of war interned at the very far end of Shark Island. [...] As long as the people were in good health, they were given work by the forces or by other whites who lived nearby. They were allowed to leave Shark Island to go to work, but came back every evening. [...] As a result of the great hardships and deprivations that the prisoners had suffered while they were out in the *veld* they were very weak, and there was great misery and much sickness among them. And in addition to all that, they found the wet, harsh sea climate hard to endure at first; and in any case they had been completely taken away from their accustomed way of life. It was mainly scurvy and intestinal catarrh that people went down sick with, and a certain percentage died at that time. [...] On 7 September 1906 yet another large transport of prisoners of war arrived in Lüderitzbucht from the north. This time they were Hottentots of various tribes, predominantly Witboois and Bethany people under the leadership of Samuel Isaak, *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi's deputy, who had surrendered to the Germans at Gibeon. Altogether, including women and children, they totalled 1,700 persons. Regrettably, a grave injustice was done to these people in transferring them to Lüderitzbucht, since it had been mutually agreed that these prisoners should be settled in Gibeon District once they had surrendered their weapons. So it is no wonder that they, and Samuel Isaak first and foremost, harboured a great grudge against the German government in their hearts. A period of great suffering and misery now began for these people. They were settled on the furthest tip of Shark Island. [...]

Above all they did not get the food that the conditions demanded. The refined German flour they received was unsuitable for baking bread, and no unrefined flour from the Cape was brought in. They were given plenty of pulses, but had no way of cooking them. Fresh meat was an extreme rarity. When Samuel Isaak complained to the missionary Emil Laaf that they got so little meat and the latter advised him to look for the very popular shellfish on the beach, he replied: "We have collected them all already, there are none left."

But even more than these miserable conditions, their isolation at the very far end of Shark Island played its part in destroying the people's will to live. They gradually became quite apathetic in the face of their wretched state. They were separated from the outside world by three high barbed-wire fences. [...]

The number of the sick increased day by day. In order to keep the people profitably occupied, the tribes had initially been put to work on a major blasting operation, with a view to building a quay on the side facing Roberts Harbour. At first, almost five hundred men were employed on this blasting work. But within a short time this number had dwindled to such an extent that the blasting work had to be suspended. There was scarcely a *pontok* [hut] without one or more sick people in it. A hospital unit was set up in a few large rooms, created by hanging up sacks. But the rations provided were in no way adapted to the needs of the sick. The food was simply put down in front of the people suffering from scurvy, and then it was a matter of 'Eat it or die!' If a sick person had no sympathetic relative to help him, he could easily starve to death. [...] The mortality rate was horrifyingly

high at that time. Sometimes as many as 27 people died on a single day. The dead were taken to the cemetery by the cartload.⁴⁹

Not even the need for labour could move those responsible to see that the prisoners were better provided for; rather than do that, the construction work was suspended. Criticism of the conditions came above all from representatives of the Church. Eventually, impelled by the degree of misery they had witnessed, two missionaries, Emil Laaf and Hermann Nyhof, succeeded in arranging a meeting with the Commandant of Lüderitzbucht, Captain von Zülow, during which they were able to persuade him that it was absolutely essential to improve the catastrophic conditions. According to Laaf's account, von Zülow then asked Colonel Berthold von Deimling, the Commander of the Southern Division of the colonial forces, if it would not be better to move the prisoners away from Shark Island and intern them on the mainland, as "in his opinion, they no longer had any will to live". The answer he received was that "as long as he [Deimling] was in charge, no Hottentot would be allowed to leave Shark Island alive".⁵⁰ Thus although the Annihilation Order had been revoked and von Trotha had been recalled to Germany in November 1905, there were evidently elements among the officers who clung to his policy of extermination.

In the camp on Shark Island, murder was committed through deliberate neglect. The selection of victims was solely based on their actual or assumed group identity; 'crimes' or acts of resistance carried out personally by any individual played no role in the grounds for their internment. The intent was to destroy entire 'tribes', which in the German understanding were 'racial groups'. Therefore, this policy can be deemed to be genocidal under Letter (c) of the United Nations Genocide Convention ("Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part") – to say nothing of the killing of individual members of the group (Letter (a)) or of "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" (Letter (b)), which also left its mark on the survivors. This widespread murder already displays the initial signs of a bureaucratisation of the process, because the inmates of the camp were counted and kept under surveillance. This bureaucratisation is also recognisable

⁴⁹ *Lüderitzbucht Parish Chronicle* (Report on the period from the foundation to 1920, by the missionary Emil Laaf), Archives of the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Namibia, V. 16, Sheets 1–31, here Sheets 21–26.

⁵⁰ *Lüderitzbucht Parish Chronicle*, Sheets 26 ff. In each month from October 1906 to March 1907 between 143 and 276 prisoners died. All in all, 1,032 out of 1,795 prisoners died during this period; of the 245 survivors who were men, only 25 were still capable of working, while the rest "could only get about on crutches", as von Estorff wrote in a report. Von Estorff to the Colonial Forces, 10 April 1907, BAB R 1001/2140, Sheet 88a f.

in the way deaths were handled administratively, for example in the death certificates with “death by enfeeblement” already printed on them in advance as the cause of death.⁵¹

Thus although this genocidal policy was initiated by von Trotha, he cannot be alone held responsible for its implementation. In his method of combating guerrilla opponents he stood in a very distinct tradition of German counter-insurgency that was also to be found in other German colonies. There too, the goal was to destroy the basis of life for the opposing civilian population, in order to prevent them from supporting the enemy combatants. But the fact that this non-combatant population itself thereby became a target for the German forces, and that even after the elimination of the guerrilla threat its members were doomed to certain death by being provided with inadequate rations or being displaced into arid regions, represents a crossing of the boundary line into genocide in this case as well. The genocide against the Herero may possibly be more obviously recognisable as such than that against the Nama; but for the latter too, internment on Shark Island, for example, also generally meant certain death – and that for one reason only: namely that they were Nama.

The Genocide in South West Africa and the Holocaust

Compared to the massive battles and the millions of victims of the Second World War, with its acts of genocide and the implementation of a strategy of annihilation on a gigantic scale by the German side, the colonial war in South West Africa seems but a minor prelude to the barbarisms of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the colonial war’s numerous structural similarities to the Nazi ‘war of annihilation in the East’ reveal that the colonial war against the Herero and the Nama is an important event in history, and not only in Namibian history but in German history too. Many things that appear, when we look back at the Second World War, to be unimaginable breaches of taboos had already been common practice in German South West Africa.⁵² If the underlying structure of the ‘war in the East’ – in other words, the grand design that lay behind the modern weapons and the armada of tanks and aircraft – is exposed, this ‘war of annihilation’ displays

51 Jan-Bart Gewald, “Herero and Missionaries. The Making of Historical Sources in the 1920s”, in Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig, ed., *Frühe Kolonialgeschichte Namibias 1880–1930*, Köln 2000, pp. 77–95, here p. 78.

52 I have presented the structural similarities between colonialism and the German policy of occupation and extermination in the ‘East’ during the Second World War in depth in Jürgen Zimmerer, “Die Geburt des ‘Ostlandes’ aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus. Die nationalsozialistische

elements clearly reminiscent of colonial warfare, of “war[s] of destruction”, incorporating “campaign[s] of annihilation”, such as had already been waged by, among others, the German colonial forces.⁵³ Because although in formal terms the war against the Soviet Union was a regular war between European powers, it was the case right from the start that the Germans did not conduct it as such but as a war of plunder and conquest, which thanks to the deliberate non-application of the international law of war by the aggressor more closely resembled a colonial war than an ‘ordinary’ war inside Europe. Features of this were the denial to the adversary of the status of a legitimate belligerent of equal and equally honourable status, who even in defeat and captivity was entitled to a minimum of rights, and the racist willingness to let prisoners of war perish or to murder them outright.⁵⁴ As we have seen, there had already been arbitrary shootings, summary executions of prisoners and mass murder by starvation, thirst and disease in South West Africa.

Taking into consideration the high degree of interest in the war in German South West Africa within the German Empire, and the enormous popularity⁵⁵ of war memoirs and novels extending well beyond the middle of the 20th century, which established a place for the war in the collective memory, one may well speak of a ‘tradition of warfare’. And as the period that lay between the war in South West Africa and the Second World War was less than 40 years, the absence of any connection would be more surprising than its existence.

The genocide in German South West Africa is also important in the prehistory of the Holocaust. The very terms used, terms such as ‘concentration camp’ and ‘genocide’, themselves indicate a link to the mass crimes committed under the

Eroberungs- und Beherrschungspolitik in (post-)kolonialer Perspektive”, *Sozial.Geschichte. Zeitschrift für historische Analyse des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, 19 (2004), pp. 10–43 (English version: “The Birth of the ‘Ostland’”, pp. 230–261 of this book).

53 These expressions originate from Eduard von Liebert, who used them to describe the tactic of destroying the basic necessities of life in the struggle between the German colonial forces and the Wahehe in German East Africa: Eduard von Liebert, *Neunzig Tage im Zelt. Meine Reise nach Uhehe Juni bis September 1897*, Berlin 1898, p. 33, here quoted according to Thomas Morlang, “Die Kerls haben ja nicht einmal Gewehre”. Der Untergang der Zelewski-Expedition in Deutsch-Ostafrika im August 1891”, in *Militärsgeschichte*, 11/2 (2001), pp. 22–28, here p. 27.

54 On this subject, see the classic study by Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945*, Stuttgart 1978.

55 Regarding the way the war was handled in literature, see Medardus Brehl, “Das Drama spielt sich auf der dunklen Bühne des Sandfeldes ab.” Die Vernichtung der Herero und Nama in der deutschen (Populär-)Literatur”, in Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, eds, *Völkermord. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, Berlin 2003, pp. 86–96.

Third Reich.⁵⁶ And although one needs to be on one's guard against overhasty comparisons, there are indeed structural similarities between the genocide against the Herero and Nama on the one hand and the Holocaust on the other, similarities which are worthy of being afforded closer consideration. In a general history of genocide in modern times, the colonial war in German South West Africa stands as a significant half-way house between the massacres committed on the American and Australian frontiers by groups of settlers and local militia⁵⁷ and the mass murder conducted with quasi-'industrialised' methods in the Third Reich. It represents an intermediate link between earlier acts of genocide with a low degree of state organisation and the fully bureaucratised crimes of the Nazis.

The objection has repeatedly been raised that the Holocaust differs from all other mass murders in history because of the role played in it by the State. However, this is a grossly over-simplified and essentially ahistorical view of the matter. Of course it is true that the role played by the State in colonial acts of genocide differs from the role it played in the Holocaust. This, though, is hardly surprising; because the State was far less firmly established in America and Australia, for example, during the period of colonial settlement, than it was in Germany between 1933 and 1945. If, however, one does not take the centralised and bureaucratised state of the Third Reich as the yardstick, but rather bears in mind the historical stage that the State had arrived at in each case, then the apparently fundamental differences turn into merely differences of gradation: the precise form of the murdering may change, depending on the degree of bureaucratisation of the state that carries it out or has it carried out, but there remains as a common factor the readiness to exterminate groups of people defined by the 'perpetrators'. This ultimate breach of taboo, not only to imagine exterminating entire ethnicities but actually to set about doing it, was first carried out in the colonies. This also contributed to making the Holocaust conceivable and possible, however disparate the motives for the murder of Jews or of Sinti and Roma, of homosexuals or the disabled, may have been. The Holocaust therefore represents an extremely radicalised variant of actions of a type that had already been practised in the colonial context.

⁵⁶ The relationship between genocide in the colonial context and the Holocaust can only be depicted very sketchily here. I have analysed it in greater detail elsewhere: Zimmerer, "Holocaust und Kolonialismus" (English version: "Colonialism and the Holocaust", pp. 125–153 in this book); Zimmerer, "Kolonialer Genozid?" (English version: "Colonial Genocide?", pp. 175–197 in this book).

⁵⁷ On the concept of the 'frontier' see: Stefan Kaufmann, "Der Siedler", in Stefan Kaufmann, Eva Horn and Ulrich Bröckling, eds, *Grenzverletzer. Von Schmugglern, Spionen und anderen subversiven Gestalten*, Berlin 2002, pp. 176–201; Christoph Marx, "Grenzfälle: Zu Geschichte und Potential des Frontierbegriffs", *Saeculum*, 54/1 (2003), pp. 123–143.

The most conspicuous differences from earlier cases of genocide in Africa, Australia or America are to be found in the methods of mass murder employed. Whereas the genocide in the American New England states primarily took the form of massacres committed by settlers or local militias, as early as the 19th century the State itself came to the fore in the United States or in the Australian State of Queensland in the guise of the army or the Native Police. The genocide against the Herero and the Nama is then to be regarded as a further intensified form of the genocidal war of conquest and pacification, in that largish formations of troops under a unified senior command structure were deployed for a longish period of time. At the same time, the beginnings of a bureaucratised form of extermination can be seen in the camps: admittedly not yet in the active, 'industrialised' form of killing practised after 1941 in the Nazi extermination camps, but already existent in the form of murder through neglect. Even under the Third Reich, more people were killed by shooting and starvation than through 'industrialised' killing in the seemingly clinically clean gas chambers, even though it is these that have become the archetypal symbol of Nazi genocide. It is this bureaucratised form of murder for which the name 'Auschwitz' essentially stands as a shorthand expression. The fact that this name has become lodged in the global memory of humanity has caused the link between genocide and the modern administrative state to become anchored in our collective awareness as well. Essentially, however, this gets in the way of any clear view of similar approaches and precursor events in the colonial context.

Auschwitz marks the perverse culmination of state violence directed against both the state's own and also alien populations. The war against the Herero and Nama was a decisive step in the development that ultimately produced this, and offered a portent, right at the beginning of the twentieth century, of what was yet to come. The genocide in German South West Africa is therefore neither simply a local event in the history of Namibia or of Germany, nor an isolated incident in colonial history. Rather, it is an event that stands out in a global history of the unleashing of that violence that was to culminate in the two World Wars.