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Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz

Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski

If race-thinking were a German invention, as it has been sometimes asserted, then “German thinking” (whatever that may be) was victorious in many parts of the spiritual world long before the Nazis started their ill-fated attempt at world conquest.

– Hannah Arendt¹

HISTORIANS on both sides of the Atlantic are currently engaged in a controversy about the allegedly genocidal nature of western colonialism and its connections with the mass violence unleashed by Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1945. The debate touches upon some of the most “sensitive” issues of twentieth-century history: the violent “dark side” of modern western civilization, the impact of colonial massacres on the European societies that generated this violence and, perhaps most controversially, the origins and uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Following the (not entirely dissimilar) controversy about the violent legacy of Communism and its relationship to Nazi atrocities, which was triggered by publications such as Ernst Nolte’s “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will,”² François Furet’s *Le passé d’une illusion*,³ and Stéphane Courtois’s *Livre noir du communisme*,⁴ the current “colonial turn” in historiography is posing yet another challenge to the Holocaust’s long-standing “narrative monopoly” on extreme mass violence.⁵ Convinced that the idea of the Holocaust’s “uniqueness” or “singularity” has too long overshadowed “lesser,” “marginal,” or “incomplete” genocides in various colonial contexts (from Australia, Asia, and

The authors would like to thank the numerous readers of preliminary versions of this article for their constructive criticism and the Guggenheim Foundation and the British Academy for their financial support which enabled us to write this essay.

¹Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1973), 158.

²Ernst Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 6, 1986.

³François Furet, *Le passé d’une illusion: Essai sur l’idée du communisme au XXe siècle* (Paris: Laffont/Calman-Lévy, 1996).

⁴Stéphane Courtois et al., *Livre noir du communisme: Crimes, terreur, répression* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997).

⁵Charles A. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 807–831, here 825–829.

Africa to Latin and North America), scholars such as Enzo Traverso, Sven Lindqvist, Dirk Moses, Mark Levene, and Dan Stone have recently offered challenging reinterpretations of colonial genocides and their repercussions on the western World.⁶ Most importantly, Moses and others have linked the colonial genocides of the “racial century (1850–1950)” and the Holocaust to a single modernization process of accelerating violence that culminated in Auschwitz. Rejecting the idea that the roots of fascism can be found in German history alone, they argue that rather than “taking a ‘special path’ to modernity or standing apart *sui generis* from the other European powers, Germany is the exemplar of an experience they all underwent in varying degrees of intensity. It is the country where the process occurred most radically.”⁷

The “new” school of genocide studies draws heavily on ideas that were first formulated within the context of the highly politicized French decolonization debate; prominent intellectual critics of colonialism such as Aimé Césaire, Octave Mannoni, and Frantz Fanon pointed to the enduring psychological deformation of the “colonial masters” and interpreted fascism as European colonialism turned inward.⁸ As Aimé Césaire famously remarked in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950), the white Christian *bourgeois* could not forgive Hitler for unleashing colonial violence within Europe and for treating the White Man in a manner previously reserved for Indians, Africans, and Arabs.⁹ Even before Césaire, the African-American intellectual W. E. B. DuBois wrote in *The World and Africa* (1947) that “there was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women, or ghastly blasphemy of children—which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folks in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.”¹⁰ In short, colonialism, as Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued, was a “boomerang” that returned to Europe in the form of fascism.¹¹

⁶Enzo Traverso, *La violence nazie: une généalogie européenne* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2002), and Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate All the Brutes* (London: New Press, 1997); Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State*, vols. 1 and 2 (London and New York: Tauris, 2005); Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36 (2002): 7–36, and A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008); Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of Genocide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁷Moses, “Conceptual Blockages,” 34.

⁸Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961), with a foreword by Jean-Paul Sartre; Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Réclame, 1950); Octave Mannoni, *Psychologie de la colonisation* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1950).

⁹Césaire, *Discours*, 10 f.

¹⁰As quoted in Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940–1970* (Washington, D.C., and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 47.

¹¹See Sartre’s foreword to Fanon, *Les Damnés*.

The most intellectually influential interpretation of the connections between the era of imperialism and National Socialism was, however, offered in Hannah Arendt's masterpiece, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which offered a challenging (though not empirically proven) interpretation of the destructive effects of imperialism on normative political and moral values within Europe. According to Arendt, during the late nineteenth century, European imperialism served as a laboratory of amalgamated racial doctrines and anonymous bureaucratic policies that were based on "decrees" rather than the rule of law. These ideas and practices were subsequently reimported into Europe where they merged with a newly secularized and racialized anti-Semitism that went hand in hand with the *völkisch* nationalism promoted by pan-movements in the multi-ethnic empires of Russia, Germany, and Austria.

In recent years, Arendt's arguments have been rediscovered by various academic disciplines, ranging from postcolonial studies to genocide studies.¹² The current wave of scholarship has challenged many orthodoxies in the field of genocide studies and has uncovered stimulating new ways of overcoming Eurocentric perspectives on the history of mass killings. But the hypothesis of the Holocaust's non-European roots has also been taken too far, most notably in some of the most recent literature on the German "genocides" against the Herero and Nama in Southwest Africa between 1904 and 1907 and their alleged role as "models" for the Nazi war of extermination after 1939/41.¹³

¹²See, for example, the essays printed in Richard H. King and Dan Stone, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2007). See, too, Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Culture, and the Allure of Race* (London: Allen Lane: 2000), and Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹³This idea was first formulated by Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1914* (Hamburg: Leipzig Verlag, 1968). More recently, see Jürgen Zimmerer, "Krieg, KZ und Völkermord in Südwestafrika. Der erste deutsche Genozid," in *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904 - 1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2003); Jürgen Zimmerer, "Holocaust und Kolonialismus. Beitrag zu einer Archäologie des genozidalen Gedankens," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51 (2003): 1098–1119; 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* (2004): 10–43; Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhoek nach Auschwitz. Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster: LIT, 2007); Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Included Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 33 (2005): 429–464; Janntje Böhlke-Itzen, *Kolonialschuld und Entschädigung. Der deutsche Völkermord an den Hereros 1904–1907* (Frankfurt: Brandes und Apsel, 2004). See, too, Rosa Amelie Plumelle-Urbe, *Weisse Barbarei. Vom Kolonialrassismus zur Rassenpolitik* (Zurich: Rotpunktverlag, 2004). Trutz von Trotha, "Genozidaler Pazifizierungskrieg. Soziologische Anmerkungen zum Konzept des Genozids am Beispiel des Kolonialkrieges in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904–1907," *Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung* 4 (2003): 30–57. Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*, 2nd ed. (Münster and Hamburg: LIT, 2002). Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia 1890–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Among others, they

According to Jürgen Zimmerer, the most productive and challenging proponent of this particular argument, the connections between the “genocidal” war in German Southwest Africa and the Nazi war of extermination in east-central Europe go far beyond mere phenomenological similarities. Although Zimmerer has repeatedly distanced himself from any mono-causal explanations of the Holocaust, the apparent causal nexus between “Windhoek and Auschwitz” remains at his arguments’ core, implying that, by ignoring the “African roots” of the Holocaust, international scholarship on the history of the Third Reich has overlooked a central element in explaining the Nazis’ mass murder of European Jewry. The German colonial wars against the Herero and Nama represent, he argues, a “decisive link to the crimes of the Nazis” and were an “important source of ideas” for Germany’s war of annihilation in eastern Europe after 1939/41. Both Germany’s “obsession” with “space and race” and the fact that the expulsion and murder of the European Jews was not viewed as a “taboo violation” are represented as direct legacies of Germany’s colonial past.¹⁴ “The willingness to exterminate certain groups of people” is the “ultimate taboo violation,” which first took shape in the colonies and ultimately assumed “its most radical form in the Holocaust.” The campaign against the Herero was therefore “paradigmatic for the Nazi war of extermination”: “even the murder of the Jews” would “probably not have been possible” without Germany’s colonial experience.¹⁵ The title of Zimmerer’s most recent book, *From Windhoek to Auschwitz*,¹⁶ suggests the Herero War as the starting point of a genocidal path that ended in the Holocaust, and represents the semantic climax of a thesis that challenges whole libraries of literature on

reject the interpretations put forward in Horst Gründer and Gisela Graichen, eds., *Deutsche Kolonien. Traum und Trauma*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Ullstein, 2007). With respect to continuities between the violent suppression of the Chinese Boxers’ Rising and the Third Reich, see Susanne Kuß, “Deutsche Soldaten während des Boxeraufstandes in China. Elemente und Ursprünge des Vernichtungskrieges,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Boxeraufstand*, ed. Susanne Kuß and Bernd Martin (Munich: Iudicium, 2002), 165–181.

¹⁴Jürgen Zimmerer, “Colonial Genocide and the Holocaust: Towards an Archeology of Genocide,” in *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 49–76, 68; Jürgen Zimmerer, “The Birth of the ‘Ostland’ out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (June 2005): 197–219.

¹⁵Zimmerer, “Holocaust und Kolonialismus,” 1116, 1119; Zimmerer, “Krieg, KZ,” 62f.; Jürgen Zimmerer, “Rassenkrieg und Völkermord. Der Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und die Globalgeschichte des Genozids,” in *Genozid und Gedenken. Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Henning Melber (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2005), 48; Zimmerer, “Die Geburt des ‘Ostlandes,’” 29.

¹⁶Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz*. For a similar line of argument, see Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 429.

the origins of the Holocaust as well as recent general histories of the Third Reich in which Germany's colonial past plays no role whatsoever.¹⁷

Building on Zimmerer's articles as well as other ideas on "totalitarian continuities" between German Southwest Africa and Nazi Germany put forward by Henning Melber,¹⁸ the American historian Benjamin Madley also suggested that the idea of *Lebensraum* and the concept of concentration camps was first tested in German Southwest Africa and that the Nazis "borrowed ideas and methods from the German Southwest African genocide that they then employed and expanded upon. Genocidal rhetoric, a new definition of *Vernichtungskrieg*, executing POWs, murdering civilians en masse, and deporting POWs and noncombatants to work and death camps were all introduced to modern German history through the Namibian colonial experience."¹⁹

One problem with these arguments is that their chronological and spatial boundaries are not always clearly stated, making critical engagement difficult. In the majority of Zimmerer's numerous articles on the subject, the German war against the Herero and Nama takes center stage.²⁰ His key argument is that the war of 1904 and the accompanying or subsequent expulsion and extermination of the Herero and Nama in concentration camps represented an unprecedented "taboo violation" (the "first genocide of the twentieth century") and a new level of state-sponsored violence against civilians with devastating long-term effects. In other publications, however, the German colonial massacres of 1904 are for Zimmerer only one case among a number of historically and geographically diverse examples, suggesting the more encompassing nature of colonialism's destructive potential and legacy. Even within this considerably more expanded perspective, however, Zimmerer emphasizes the German war against the Herero and Nama as an "outstanding event in a global history of the unleashing of violence."²¹

The idea of direct continuities of "colonial violence" from Windhoek to Auschwitz has received both support and sustained criticism. While Michael Brumlik has recently suggested that the "exemplary character of the German

¹⁷See, for example, Peter Longerich, *Policy of Destruction: Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy and the Genesis of the "Final Solution"* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Museum, 2001). Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, 1939–1942* (London: Heinemann, 2004); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997 and 2007).

¹⁸Henning Melber, "Kontinuitäten totaler Herrschaft: Völkermord und Apartheid in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Zur kolonialen Herrschaftspraxis im Deutschen Kaiserreich," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 1 (1992): 91–114.

¹⁹Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 458.

²⁰Strangely enough, the much more large-scale violence inflicted on the indigenous population during Maji-Maji war is not mentioned in this context although the death figures are significantly higher than during the Herero uprising. See Felicitas Becker and Jigal Beez, eds., *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1905–1907* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2005).

²¹Zimmerer, "Rassenkrieg und Völkermord," 48.

colonial wars” for the Nazis’ extermination policy is “gaining increasing plausibility,”²² scholars such as Pascal Grosse and Birthe Kundrus have pointed to some important structural shortcomings of the continuity thesis. On the one hand, Grosse has emphasized that the peculiarities of German colonialism are to be found less in its violent suppression of indigenous uprisings than in its abrupt end in 1918. The Versailles Treaty made Germany a postcolonial power in a colonial world and contributed to the reorientation of colonial fantasies toward east-central Europe: “While the major colonial powers underwent a process of decolonization much later and as a result of independence movements in the colonies themselves, Germany was stripped of its colonial possessions as a direct consequence of its defeat in World War I, which left a complete vacuum in the sphere of expansionism exactly when expansionist aspirations had reached their height.”²³ Kundrus, on the other hand, has convincingly argued that superficial phenomenological similarities between colonial and fascist violence should not be confused with direct lines of continuity and that colonial rhetoric is not the same as colonial policy.²⁴

Building on these first reactions, this essay will engage more systematically with the hypothesis of “connections” and structural similarities between “Windhoek and Auschwitz.” First, it will critically examine the allegedly “exceptional” character of the German colonial wars within the broader transnational context of colonial violence, a context that was central to Hannah Arendt’s arguments about the origins of totalitarianism. It argues that the “taboo violation” of 1904 was in fact very much in line with common European colonial standards and practices. Neither massacres of an indigenous population classified as “inferior” nor the scope, nature, and objectives of the violence unleashed in German Southwest Africa constituted genuinely “new” or exceptional levels of violence previously unknown to European colonialism.

²²Michael Brumlik, “Das Jahrhundert der Extreme,” in *Völkermord und Kriegsverbrechen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Irmtud Wojak and Susanne Meinel (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2004), 19–36, here 28. For a similar view, see Uta G. Poiger, “Imperialism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Germany,” *History & Memory* 17 (2005): 117–143, particularly 122.

²³Pascal Grosse, “What Does German Colonialism Have to Do with National Socialism? A Conceptual Framework,” in *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, ed. Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 115–134, here 118–9. Pascal Grosse, “From Colonialism to National Socialism to Postcolonialism: Hannah Arendt’s ‘Origins of Totalitarianism,’” *Postcolonial Studies* 9 (2006): 35–52. See, too, Dirk van Laak, “Afrika vor den Toren. Deutsche Raum- und Ordnungsvorstellungen nach der erzwungenen ‘Dekolonisation,’” in *Ordnungen in der Krise. Zur politischen Kulturgeschichte Deutschlands 1900–1933*, ed. Wolfgang Hardtwig (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), 95–114.

²⁴Birthe Kundrus, “Kontinuitäten, Parallelen, Rezeptionen. Überlegungen zur ‘Kolonialisierung’ des Nationalsozialismus,” *Werkstatt Geschichte* 43 (2006): 45–62. Birthe Kundrus, “Von den Herero zum Holocaust? Einige Bemerkungen zur aktuellen Debatte,” *Mittelweg* (2005): 82–91. Birthe Kundrus, “Von Windhoek nach Nürnberg? Koloniale ‘Mischehenverbote’ und die nationalsozialistische Rassengesetzgebung,” in “*Phantasiereiche*.” *Der deutsche Kolonialismus aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, ed. Birthe Kundrus (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2003), 110–131.

Second, the essay will highlight the lack of evidence for direct personal and structural continuities between Windhoek and Auschwitz. Rejecting some of the rather constructed continuity arguments that have been suggested so far, it will be argued instead that National Socialism and the German war of annihilation constituted a *break* with European traditions of colonialism rather than a continuation.

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If Hannah Arendt's hypothesis about the colonial roots of European fascism is to serve as a genuine starting point for an investigation into the interconnectedness of colonialism and fascism, then the inter- and transnational nature of colonial violence must remain at the center of any analytical framework. The assertion of a peculiar German "taboo violation" in Southwest Africa that consisted of the declared intention of "exterminating a certain group of people" may appear plausible within a nation-centric framework of investigation, but it is highly questionable when placed within the broader context of western colonialism.²⁵ Unlike some scholars in recent years, Hannah Arendt never advocated the notion that "taboo violations" and colonial careers, institutional practices, and mentalities reached all the way from the Waterberg to Auschwitz. On the contrary, in her chapter, "Race-Thinking before Racism," Arendt explicitly argues that neither the Germans nor the Nazis invented racial theories. The continuing appeal of Arendt's interpretation partly stems from the fact that she analyzed anti-Semitism, racism, and colonialism as *transnational*, European phenomena. Her focus on *elements* of totalitarian rule (a word that was omitted from the English title of *Elemente und Ursprünge totalitärer Herrschaft*), whose effects could be felt at different times and in different places, is one of the study's great strengths. In Arendt's analysis, Gobineau and Rhodes, Conrad and Kipling are more important than Trotha, Maercker, and Epp. The relevance of the German colonial experience is outweighed by the Boers, the building of the Suez Canal, the "alliance between capital and the mob," as well as by the attempt to reorder "humanity into master and slave races."²⁶ All of these ideas and violent colonial practices existed long before General von Trotha unleashed his extermination campaign against the Hereros. Transgressions of "civilized warfare" in the colonial sphere were common currency among Europe's colonial powers, and it is no coincidence that Joseph Conrad's frequently invoked metaphor of the "heart of darkness," which originally referred to the Belgian Congo, quickly became the international synonym *par excellence* for parallel colonial universes of violent suppression and exploitation. Even defenders of the "positive achievements" of

²⁵Zimmerer, "Krieg, KZ," 62.

²⁶Arendt, *Origins*, 341.

colonialism do not deny that the violent usurpation of land and resources, the systematic destruction of the economic and cultural infrastructure of the vanquished, and the introduction of racist legislation by European colonial powers were standard procedure rather than an exceptional “taboo violation.”²⁷

Three cases of colonial mass violence may suffice as examples to illustrate this point: the American conquest of the Philippines, the Spanish colonial wars in Cuba, and the French massacres in nineteenth-century Algeria.²⁸

The American conquest and colonization of the Philippines between 1898 and 1902 and the ensuing expulsion and extermination of an indigenous civilization defined along racist criteria reveal several structural similarities with the subsequent events in German Southwest and Southeast Africa. A number of military orders exist that can be seen as the functional equivalents of Lothar von Trotha’s frequently quoted “extermination order” of 1904, including Brigadier General Jacob H. Smith’s order that “I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn, the more you kill and burn the better it will please me. I want all persons killed who are capable of bearing arms in actual hostilities against the United States.” Smith had previously described how his experiences in the wars against Native Americans had taught him how to combat “savages” and threatened to transform the entire region into a “howling wilderness.”²⁹ When, like Trotha in 1904, Smith was asked to clarify his order, he said that every person over the age of ten was to be shot.³⁰

In quantitative terms, the American colonial massacre (to which Rudyard Kipling dedicated his frequently quoted poem *The White Man’s Burden*) exceeded the death rates in German Southwest Africa many times over.³¹ It resulted in the deaths of some 4,000 Americans, 20,000 Philippine soldiers, and between

²⁷Daniel Lefeuve, *Chère Algérie: La France et sa colonie (1930–1962)*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2005); Daniel Lefeuve, *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007). For Britain, see the otherwise “Empire-friendly” book by Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2002) as well as the most recent survey of British imperial history by Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997* (London: Random House, 2007).

²⁸For further cases of colonial mass murder, see Boris Barth, *Genozid: Völkermord im 20. Jahrhundert. Geschichte, Theorien, Kontroversen* (Munich: Beck, 2006); Mark Levene, *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* (London and New York: Tauris, 2005). See, too, Marc Ferro, ed., *Le livre noir du colonialisme—XVIe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

²⁹Leon Friedman, ed., *The Law of War: A Documentary History*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1972), 804–809; Glenn Anthony May, “Was the Philippine-American War a Total War?,” in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914*, ed. Manfred Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 446 f.

³⁰David L. Fritz, “Before the ‘Howling Wilderness’: The Military Career of Jacob Hurd Smith, 1862–1902,” *Military Affairs* 43 (1979): 186–190. Jacob “Howling Wilderness” Smith, as he was later called, was put on trial for war crimes in 1902, but was subsequently dismissed from the army without a conviction. As in the case of von Trotha, the civil institutions intervened too late.

³¹Kipling’s poem was first published in *McClure’s Magazine* (February 1899) with the subtitle, “The United States and the Philippine Islands.”

250,000 and 750,000 civilians.³² In explaining the vastly greater number of Philippine “casualties,” the commanding general, Arthur MacArthur, stated that whites were less likely to succumb to their wounds than members of lower races.³³

A useful conceptual tool in this context is the notion of a common western “colonial archive,” to be understood as common knowledge on the treatment, exploitation, and extermination of “sub-humans” accumulated by the western powers over the course of colonial history. Once established, the knowledge accumulated in the “colonial archive” could be “activated” in different geographical areas.³⁴ The fact that twenty-six of the thirty U.S. generals operating in the Philippines had gathered previous combat experience in the wars of annihilation against the Native Americans and explicitly referred to aspects of this warfare against “savages” as an important learning process for the Philippine campaign exemplifies the transcontinental character of this colonial archive.³⁵ In a Senate hearing on the atrocities in the Philippines, MacArthur himself emphasized the transnational character of colonial practices: “Many thousands of years ago our Aryan ancestors raised cattle, made a language, multiplied in numbers, and overflowed. By due process of expansion to the west they occupied Europe, developed arts and sciences, and created a great civilization, which, separating into innumerable currents, inundated and fertilized the globe with blood and ideas, the primary bases of all human progress, incidentally crossing the Atlantic and thereby reclaiming, populating, and civilizing a hemisphere. The broad actuating laws which underlie all these wonderful phenomena are still operating with relentless vigor and have recently forced one of the currents of this magnificent Aryan people across the Pacific—that is to say, back almost to the cradle of its race—thus initiating a stage of progressive social evolution

³²Stuart Creighton Miller, “Benevolent Assimilation”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 2000); John M. Gates, “War-Related Deaths in the Philippines, 1898–1902,” *Pacific Historical Review* 53 (1984): 367–378; Frank Schumacher, “Niederbrennen, plündern und töten sollt ihr.’ Der Kolonialkrieg der USA auf den Philippinen (1899–1913),” in *Kolonialkriege. Militärische Gewalt im Zeichen des Imperialismus*, ed. Frank Schumacher and Thoralf Klein (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 114 f. These figures are highly disputed, but they refer only to the number of victims up until 1902 (not until 1913) and do not include the “casualties” of the Moro Wars.

³³Miller, “Benevolent Assimilation,” 189.

³⁴See the usage of the term “settler archive” by Lorenzo Veracini in “Colonialism and Genocides: Notes for the Analysis of the Settler Archive,” in *Empire, Colony, Genocide*, ed. Moses, 148–161. On Lothar von Trotha’s transnational “learning process,” see the highly original study by Christoph Kamissek, “Lernorte des Völkermordes? Die Kolonialerfahrungen des Generals Lothar von Trotha in Ostafrika, China und Südwafrika (1894–1907)” (unpublished MA thesis, Humboldt University Berlin, 2007). A recent study has further demonstrated that the “colonial lessons” learned during the counterinsurgency campaigns in Malaya and Vietnam continue to influence U.S. military strategies. See John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002).

³⁵Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 127.

which may reasonably be expected to result in substantial contributions on behalf of the unity of the race and the brotherhood of man.”³⁶

MacArthur’s emphasis on the Aryan “civilizing mission” in particular underlines the transnational nature of the colonial archive. Similar observations can be made for the Spanish–Cuban war between 1895 and 1898. Before the commanding Spanish general Valeriano Weyler started his infamous “reconcentration” program, which herded much of the rural population into Spanish-held towns and which cost the lives of at least 155,000 Cuban civilians, he had gathered experience in suppressing and exterminating indigenous populations in the Spanish-occupied Philippines. The parallels with the German (and American) case go beyond the use of extreme violence against a local population. Just like von Trotha’s (and MacArthur’s) extermination campaign, Weyler’s actions met with fierce criticism from parts of the Spanish public, and in 1887 Valeriano “The Butcher” Weyler was replaced with a more moderate military commander who abandoned the Spanish camp system.³⁷

Weyler’s concentration camps soon, however, assumed a prominent place in the European *colonial archive*. By 1900, the Spanish term *reconcentración* had already been translated into English and was used to describe British “concentration camps,” initiated by Lord Kitchener during the Second Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902). Just like Weyler in Cuba, Kitchener had become increasingly frustrated with the Boers’ guerrilla tactics and duly “concentrated” native civilians into camps in order to deprive the enemy combatants of shelter and support. Once again, misery and famine as well as soaring mortality rates were the result. The connection between the South African camps and the Cuban camps was clear to contemporaries; at the time, the British were both praised and attacked by the international press for adapting “General Weyler’s methods” to the Transvaal.³⁸ Shortly afterward, the American army used concentration camps for Philippine civilians, particularly in the rebellious province of Batangas, where the vigorous implementation of a policy of *reconcentración* led to horrific death rates among the civilian population.³⁹ Two years later, the

³⁶MacArthur as quoted in Helmut Walser Smith, “The Logic of Colonial Violence: Germany in Southwest Africa (1904–1907), the United States in the Philippines (1899–1902),” in *German and American Nationalism: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Hermann Wellenreuther (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 205–231, here 220.

³⁷John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina University Press, 2006), 153–179 and 193–225.

³⁸See, for example, Denis Judd and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York: Palgrave, 2003). A recent attempt at writing a bibliography of the vast literature on the Boer War was undertaken by Fred van Hartesveldt, *The Boer War: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000).

³⁹Glenn Anthony May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 262–267.

same “successful” policy was adopted in another colonial setting, German Southwest Africa.⁴⁰

Racist discourses and the administrative planning and execution of policies of colonial conquest, expulsion, and extermination can, however, be traced back even further. In the French conquest of Algeria, to name a third example, estimates of the (largely civilian) victims between 1830 and 1872 range from 250,000 to 900,000.⁴¹ Here, too, the murder of civilian men, women, and children, and the systematic destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods were standard practice for decades. In 1841, General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud proclaimed the long-term aim of the Algerian extermination campaign by stating that “the goal is not to persecute the Arabs, which would be entirely useless. The point is to prevent the Arabs from sowing, harvesting, pasturing, using their fields. Swarm out every year and burn their harvest. Or else exterminate them all to the last man.”⁴²

The American and French cases in particular illustrate that colonial violence was by no means confined to authoritarian states. Quite the opposite: the states with the longest and ultimately most violent colonial record—France, Britain, the United States, and the Netherlands—remained democracies throughout the twentieth century, thus confirming rather than contradicting Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous observations about the expansionist and potentially violent nature of democracies.⁴³

The thesis of the unique quality and significance of the German colonial massacres in Africa is therefore difficult to uphold. If one rejects the hypothetical possibility of a German colonial *Sonderweg* and interprets the use of colonial violence as a common European legacy, the issue of direct continuities becomes much more complicated. Why are the countries with the longest and (over the course of centuries) most violent colonial traditions *not* identical with those countries that unleashed the greatest degree of racist destruction both at home and abroad after 1918? If the intensive experience of colonial subjugation and extermination contributes to an individual and institutional brutalization that can be transferred back to Europe, then the discrepancies between England, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands on the one hand, and

⁴⁰Joel Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot, *Le Siècle des Camps: Emprisonnement, Detention, Extermination—cent ans de mal absolu* (Paris: Lattès, 2006).

⁴¹As in practically all colonial wars, the numbers of victims in this case are uncertain and highly disputed. For the highest estimates, see Kamel Kateb, *Européens, “Indigènes” et Juifs en Algérie (1830–1962): Représentations et réalités des populations* (Paris: INED, 2001), 47; see, too, Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser, Exterminer: Sur la guerre et l’état colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 188–192. For the lowest estimates, see Lefeuvre, *Pour en finir*, 65.

⁴²As quoted in François Maspero, *L’Honneur de Saint-Arnaud* (Paris: Éditions Points Seuil, 1993), 177 f.

⁴³See Harald Bluhm, “Tocqueville—Der klassische Analytiker der modernen Demokratie,” in *Alexis de Tocqueville. Kleine Politische Schriften*, ed. Harald Bluhm (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), 111–47, here 33.

Germany (and one could also add Austria) on the other are difficult to explain. In other words, the hypothesis of unbroken continuities between “Africa and Auschwitz” fails to account for the fact that Britain and France practiced policies of violent colonial suppression long before (and after) 1945, but simultaneously remained the bastions of democracy and never pursued policies of genocide *within* Europe.

In a cautious attempt to explain this discrepancy, Dirk Schumann has recently argued that the relative domestic stability of interwar France and Britain (relative, that is, when measured against the situation in Germany) was partly due to the fact that their violent potential was relieved in the colonies, an option no longer available to Germany after 1918.⁴⁴ This argument complements Pascal Grosse’s suggestion that while there “was probably no innate difference” between European colonialisms before 1914, there “certainly was in their experience of decolonization.” In Grosse’s view, Germany’s unique experience of decolonization and its “colonialism without colonies” after 1918 became a “fundamental factor in the interwar radicalization of pre-World War I ideas and practices of expansionist biopolitics.”⁴⁵

Even if one does not subscribe to an interpretation of National Socialism as a substitute for lost opportunities to “discharge” violence in the colonies or view World War II as a “recolonization” conflict, Schumann’s and Grosse’s interventions point to experiences of violence *between* Windhoek and Auschwitz that were of crucial significance for the personal development and careers of future protagonists in the Third Reich, but which are largely absent in the debate about continuities between 1904 and 1941. What is surprising about the course of the current debate on the continuation of colonial traditions by Nazi Germany is the extent to which World War I has been neglected.⁴⁶ The experience of the Great War, during which both qualitatively and quantitatively new dimensions of extermination were attained, the special forms the war assumed in the east as well as the years of border fighting, civil wars, and *Freikorps* campaigns that profoundly impacted east-central Europe between 1918 and 1923, play no role whatsoever in any of the studies advocating direct lines of continuity between Windhoek and Auschwitz. Instead, it is implicitly assumed that a genocidal German military machine stopped at the Waterberg and went into gear again during the attack on Poland and the Soviet Union, this time backed by a “strong state.” Yet it can reasonably be

⁴⁴Dirk Schumann, “Europa, der erste Weltkrieg und die Nachkriegszeit. Eine Kontinuität der Gewalt?,” *Journal of Modern European History* 1 (2003): 23–43.

⁴⁵Grosse, “German Colonialism,” 118–119.

⁴⁶Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich, and Irina Renz, eds., “Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch.” *Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen: Klartext, 1993); Gerhard Hirschfeld et al., eds., *Kriegserfahrungen. Studien zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen: Klartext, 1997).

argued that the roots of Germany's deviation from the path of other European colonial powers should not be sought in the year 1904 but rather in the immediate postwar period. Alongside the Great War, the experiences of defeat, revolution, and civil war retain a central significance in explaining an enhanced potential for and willingness to use violence.⁴⁷ It is no coincidence that the greatest destructive potential after 1918 emanated from those revisionist states that were either among the "official" losers of World War I or, in the case of Italy, considered themselves to have won the war but lost the peace.

Another important objection to the continuity argument is the lack of direct personal linkages between 1904 and 1939/41. A twenty-year-old soldier, who participated in the mass killings of the Herero and Nama and who survived World War I, would have been a sixty-year-old man during the Nazis' *Operation Barbarossa*. The commanding officers of the 1904 campaign were born between the 1840s and 1860s. Assuming that they were still alive at the beginning of the Nazi war against the Soviet Union, they would have been between eighty and ninety years old. Previous studies have sought to bridge this "gap" between 1904 and 1941 by pointing to "knowledge transfers" from one generation to the next. Benjamin Madley, for example, has suggested that the Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele was profoundly influenced by the anthropologist Eugen Fischer, who had conducted racial field studies in Southwest Africa in 1908. He also argued that Hermann Göring became a proponent of colonialism (in his case of eastern Europe) through his father, the first German *Reichskommissar* of German Southwest Africa (1885–91). However important these findings may be, the exact significance of such influences on the future careers of prominent Nazis is impossible to measure.⁴⁸ "Traditions" and "knowledge" can certainly be handed down from one generation to another, yet as easy as it is to assume the existence of "teacher-student relationships" and indirect transmissions of genocidal practices within the framework of individual or institutional memory, it is extremely difficult to determine the exact impact of such influences on individual careers and mentalities.⁴⁹ "Students" generally have more than one teacher, and institutions feed their "collective memory" from a vast pool of different traditions.

Even if it is possible to trace a handful of violent careers between Windhoek and Auschwitz, it is unclear what the depiction of twenty or even two hundred such military careers can contribute to our understanding of the German war of extermination. Even in the highly unlikely event that *all* of the few thousand veterans of Southwest Africa participated in the German war effort on the Eastern Front, they would have been a marginally small group within a

⁴⁷Robert Gerwarth, "The Central European Counterrevolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria, and Hungary after the Great War," *Past & Present* 200 (2008): 175–209.

⁴⁸Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 450–457.

⁴⁹Zimmerer, "The Birth of the 'Ostland,'" 213–218.

German army that already amounted to roughly three million men at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa.⁵⁰ The quantitative ratio alone raises questions about the impact that Germany's African experiences of violence could have had on this enormous invasion army and its military leaders. Advocates of the continuity hypothesis have often referred to the case of Franz Xaver Ritter von Epp, a former colonial officer, Freikorps leader, and subsequent director of the Third Reich's Colonial Office, as "living proof" of continuities between Africa and the Third Reich. Yet Epp had no influence on the extermination policies of the Third Reich whatsoever and was increasingly marginalized after the abandonment of the Madagascar Plan, a process that culminated in the dissolution of the Colonial Office in 1943.⁵¹ To what extent the far more influential Reich Security Main Office's fanaticized personnel, who were directly responsible for the planning and execution of the "Final Solution," was influenced by knowledge of the German colonial massacres in Africa and the ideological concepts underpinning Wilhelmine colonialism remains an open question. Thus far the flourishing field of Nazi perpetrator studies has revealed no evidence of the significance of African colonial traditions for the radicalization of this *Generation des Unbedingten*.⁵²

The sole proof offered in support of the continuity theory is therefore a handful of overlapping biographies and a number of Hitler and Himmler quotations that suggest an analogy between colonialism and the German war of annihilation, most famously an excerpt from Hitler's table talk of September 1941: "The Russian space is our India, and just like the English have ruled it

⁵⁰Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 21, assumes that 1,500 German soldiers participated in the Battle of Waterberg.

⁵¹Katja-Maria Wächter, *Die Macht der Ohnmacht. Leben und Politik des Franz Xaver Ritter von Epp (1868–1946)* (Frankfurt: Europäische Hochschulschriften, 1999); Klaus Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP und koloniale Frage 1919–1945* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1969), 774; Dirk van Laak, "'Ist je ein Reich, das es nicht gab, so gut verwaltet worden?' Der imaginäre Ausbau der imperialen Infrastruktur in Deutschland nach 1918," in *Phantasiereiche*, ed. Kundrus, 71–90; Dirk van Laak, *Imperiale Infrastruktur. Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas 1880 bis 1960* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 301–331. See, too, the recent study by Chantal Metzger, *L'Empire Colonial Français dans la Stratégie du Troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁵²Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), and Michael Wildt, ed., *Nachrichtendienst, politische Elite, Mord-einheit. Der Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003); Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992); Isabel Heinemann, "Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut." *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003); Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heeführer. Die deutschen Oberbefehlshaber im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006); Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord. Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003); Harald Welzer, *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2005); Gerhard Paul, ed., *Die Täter der Shoah. Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002).

with a handful of men, so will we rule this colonial space of ours."⁵³ Yet, as Birthe Kundrus has argued convincingly, colonial rhetoric should not be confused with colonial practices. Far more striking than a few rhetorical references to British colonialism by Hitler, Himmler, and others are the structural differences between European colonial rule and the Nazi war of annihilation concealed by such misleading colonial fantasies. Hitler's verbal references to India, for example, may have reflected his admiration for Britain's ability to rule the world's largest empire with a handful of colonial officers, but they hardly constitute proof of the argument that Hitler pursued colonial policies in eastern Europe. Regardless of the numerous puppet regimes that were set up in some German-occupied territories (such as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia), Nazi Germany *de facto* never implemented a policy of indirect rule in any part of occupied eastern Europe. From the interwar period in particular, Britain (and to a lesser extent France) promoted the systematic "westernization" of small indigenous elites in order to raise standards of efficiency and to facilitate trade, while at the same time violently suppressing uprisings against colonial rule.⁵⁴ It is difficult to find analogies in the German war of extermination to this combination of development *and* force so characteristic of late western European colonialism. "Development" in Poland, Belorussia, and the Ukraine, for example, meant the physical annihilation of the indigenous elite, and no member of this elite was ever able to follow the example of Nehru or Gandhi by studying law at the best universities of the "colonial motherland." This observation extends to the countless collaborators from the Ukraine, Latvia, and elsewhere who were welcome to support the German crusade against "Judeo-Bolshevism" as willing executioners, but whose place in the Nazi postwar order was never clearly defined.

Although mass killings of indigenous civilians in the context of conquest of new territories and the suppression of resistance constituted a recurring pattern in the history of western colonialism, it is certainly wrong to suggest that "colonialism" is synonymous with extermination.⁵⁵ During the German war in east-central Europe, on the other hand, the policy of the extermination of "racially inferior" populations was not a means to bring the war to a triumphant end or to "restore order," but an end in itself. It constituted the very purpose of the entire Operation Barbarossa and the *Generalplan Ost*.

⁵³Hitler on September 17, 1941, as quoted in Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Hamburg: Orbis, 1980), 62–63; see, too, 193 and 361.

⁵⁴On the ambivalent nature of colonial "westernization," see Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁵As suggested, for example, by Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "The Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

An equally important difference between colonialism and Nazi Germany lies in the crucial role of settler communities in bringing about military confrontations in extra-European settings.⁵⁶ Colonial wars and colonial massacres (including those against the Herero and Nama) were particularly common and brutal where a small minority of white settlers felt existentially threatened by indigenous resistance against their rule. In the case of the German attack on Poland, however, there was no “thin white line,” no settler minorities that stood in conflict with an indigenous population. On the contrary, throughout the German military campaign, the aim was to expel or exterminate the indigenous population *before* “Aryan” settlers moved into the east.⁵⁷

Advocates of the thesis of structural parallels between colonialism and fascism have attempted to explain the numerous quantitative and qualitative differences between the violence unleashed in 1904 and 1939/41 by suggesting that the key difference is to be found in the more developed bureaucratic terror apparatus of the Third Reich.⁵⁸ Neglected in this perspective is the complete absence of a “critical public” and (potentially moderating) civil institutions in the Third Reich. Massacres of indigenous populations in the colonies were frequently criticized in the contemporary press or in the parliaments in London, Paris, or Berlin (often leading to the dismissal of the officers in charge). Even if those interventions came too late for the victims, for example in the case of German Southwest Africa (or indeed in the cases of the Spanish war on Cuba and the American–Philippine War), it is important to acknowledge the existence of civil institutions that were willing and able to intervene in colonial massacres. Lothar von Trotha, whose military orders were largely responsible for the escalation of mass violence in German Southwest Africa, had influential and

⁵⁶Jürgen Osterhammel, *Kolonialismus. Geschichte—Formen—Folgen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), 58 and 70. For Kenya and Rhodesia, see Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987); see, too, Michael Crowder, “The White Chiefs of Tropical Africa,” in *Colonialism in Africa 1870–1960*, ed. Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan, vol. II (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 329. For the post-1945 period, see John Springhall, *Decolonization since 1945: The Collapse of European Empires Overseas* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 146–185. Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, “The Thin White Line,” *African Affairs* 79 (1980): 25–44; John W. Cell, “Colonial Rule,” *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232–25; Stephen Constantine, “Migrants and Settlers,” *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5, 163–187; Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewusstsein. Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia 1904 bis 1907* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 69.

⁵⁷On Walther Darré’s concept of the “Wehrbauernhöfe,” see Richard Walther Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich: Lehmanns Verlag, 1930); Uwe Mai, *Rasse und Raum. Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); Jan Erik Schulte, *Zwangarbeit und Vernichtung: Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS. Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001).

⁵⁸Zimmerer, “Holocaust und Kolonialismus,” 1114 f., Zimmerer, “Rassenkrieg und Völkermord,” 47.

outsspoken critics within Germany's Social Democratic Party, among the missionaries and settlers in the colonies, and even within the German officer corps.

The same cannot be said about Nazi Germany. Recent studies on the Third Reich have reinforced Ernst Fraenkel's argument—put forward in his seminal book *The Dual State* (1941)—that the traditional German bureaucracy collaborated willingly and neatly with the newly established terror apparatus of the Third Reich, an observation that cannot be extended to the situation in German Southwest Africa in 1904.⁵⁹ It is therefore highly questionable whether the Third Reich can be seen as a particularly radical example of the “modern state” or whether it constituted a new type of political regime that broke with older traditions of “checks and balances,” as well as the ambivalent traditions of colonialism.

In a similar recent debate about the French war in Algeria between 1954 and 1962, the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet rejected comparisons with Auschwitz by pointing to the important fact that in Algeria *some* generals acted *against* the existing laws of the French state, whereas Himmler, Eichmann, and Heydrich acted in accordance with them.⁶⁰ The same holds true for comparisons between German Southwest Africa and Auschwitz. Whereas the replacement of von Trotha would have made an essential difference for the escalation of the conflict in 1904, it is not clear what difference Heydrich's replacement with Kaltenbrunner made for the history of the Holocaust.

In one of the most convincing and empirically sound books on the Herero wars, Isabel Hull has recently contrasted a specifically German, unrestrained “military culture” with the British ability to control the escalation of violence, for example during the Boer Wars.⁶¹ But even Hull's findings do not support a simplistic continuity thesis between 1904 and 1941, demonstrating instead that the events of 1904 were less the result of a peculiarly German form of racism than of the implementation of unsuitable military strategies that had been devised and tested in a European context several decades before. Although Hull convincingly points to the dramatic consequences of these destructive military strategies during the Great War, it remains questionable how relevant the legacies of Imperial Germany's “military culture” continued to be during the Third Reich. After all, the Third Reich was not a military dictatorship. The particular destructiveness of Nazi Germany and Hitler's crusade in eastern Europe

⁵⁹Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941). See, too, Cornelia Essner, *Die “Nürnberger Gesetze” oder Die Verwaltung des Rassenwahns 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁶⁰Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Les assassins de la mémoire: “un Eichmann de papier” et autres essais sur le révisionnisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 168–180.

⁶¹Hull, *Absolute Destruction*.

resulted from the smooth cooperation between civil *and* military institutions rather than the marginalization of civil institutions, which Hull rightly describes as a peculiarity of Imperial Germany's "military culture."

The Nazis' systematic persecution and murder of every Jew in the Nazis' sphere of influence—regardless of age, gender, or nationality—further raises the important (but often side-lined) question about the exact relationship between, and interconnectedness of, colonial racism and genocidal anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany.⁶² Arendt herself argued that racism was *not* a uniquely German attitude and that it preceded late-nineteenth-century colonialism rather than being a product of it. In her chapter "Race and Bureaucracy," she states that the connection between colonialism and Nazism is indirect, but that it had important "boomerang effects" on European public opinion that made racism altogether more acceptable than it had been before. Yet, it still remains to be empirically proven where the boomerang originated and where it landed.

One important difference between colonial, color-coded racism and European anti-Semitism lies in the obvious fact that colonial racism was directed against non-European (i.e., non-white) populations, whereas the Nazis' anti-Semitism before 1939 was primarily directed against the "internal enemy," including secular and fully integrated German Jews. As Omer Bartov has convincingly argued in this context, the Nazis' anti-Semitism differed from color-coded racism in that the "Jewish enemy" was perceived to be both distinctly alien to European civilization but also capable of appearing physically and culturally "just like us."⁶³ From the Nazis' perspective, it was this ability of the Jewish enemy to disguise himself as European while simultaneously working toward the collapse of European civilization that made him so dangerous.

How and in what ways the immensely radicalized German anti-Semitism after 1918 was influenced by the ideologically motivated and biologically defined racism of European colonialism remains an open question, even though this very question should be at the heart of any investigation of continuities between "Windhoek and Auschwitz." It may indeed be fruitful to investigate the coinciding loss of Germany's colonies (and hence their main theater of racially motivated violence before 1918) and the simultaneous actualization of violent anti-Semitism within Germany, but such an investigation aiming to

⁶²The vast existing literature on German anti-Semitism has thus far not acknowledged any influences of colonial racism on anti-Semitism. See, for example, Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*; Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (rev. ed., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁶³Omer Bartov, "Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews, and the Holocaust," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 771–816, here 779 and 780.

explain Germany's deviation from European patterns would have to focus on the years around 1918, not a non-existent unique "taboo violation" in 1904.

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This essay has presented a number of objections to the much discussed thesis of direct continuities and structural similarities between the German colonial massacres of 1904–1907 and the Nazi war of extermination in east-central Europe between 1939 and 1945. As welcome (and long overdue) as the renewed scholarly interest in colonial massacres is, it remains questionable whether this important research is qualitatively improved by constructing direct linkages to Auschwitz. The thesis of a direct personal and structural continuity from Windhoek to Auschwitz can be dismissed on empirical grounds without making the German or European track record of colonial violence look "better."

It is equally questionable whether it is sensible to conceptualize "fascism" as a form of "colonialism" and the Holocaust as a "colonial genocide." Even though it has become fashionable to label the Nazi war of extermination a war of "colonial conquest," recent studies on the German occupation of eastern Europe have uncovered few *structural* parallels with western colonialism. Thus far, the "colonial turn" in the historiography of the Third Reich has been confined to a primarily semantic redefinition of the German war of extermination.

Future research in this field will also have to address the question how useful the term "genocide" is for historians interested in the comparative aspects of mass killings. Raphael Lemkin's term "genocide"—coined in 1944 and codified in the 1948 UN Genocide Convention—constitutes an important legal instrument for the prevention of intentional mass killings or indeed for the persecution of perpetrators. It remains debatable, however, whether a legal definition that focuses on the genocidal *intention* (even if there are no victims at all) rather than the structural causes of mass violence is equally useful for historians.⁶⁴ Whether the destruction of the native peoples of central and southern America by Spanish or Portuguese *conquistadores*,⁶⁵ the extermination of the Aborigines of Tasmania by British settlers in the 1830s,⁶⁶ and the Russian army's brutal expulsion of perhaps two million Circassians and Turkic peoples in the 1830s⁶⁷ can be retrospectively classified as acts of "genocide" according to a legal definition of 1944 is a question of

⁶⁴An important contribution to this debate was made by Jacques Semelin, *Purifier et détruire: Usages politiques des massacres et des génocides* (Paris: Seuil, 2005) and in the essays of David El Kenz and Éric Wenzel in David El Kenz, ed., *Le massacre: objet d'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 7–45.

⁶⁵Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1998).

⁶⁶Mark Cocker, *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998).

⁶⁷Stephen D. Shenfield, "The Circassians: a Forgotten Genocide?," in *The Massacre in History*, ed. Mark Levene and Penny Roberts (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 149–163; Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

secondary importance to historians. It may in fact distract from the far more important historiographical task of explaining how and why European states at different times unleashed campaigns of mass violence against populations they considered “inferior.”

Furthermore, the German “taboo violation” of 1904 must be placed more consistently within the European or “western” context of violent colonial practices than has thus far been the case. Mass killings of indigenous civilian populations previously classified as racially or culturally “inferior” were common currency in Europe’s colonial empires and are not indicative of a German colonial Sonderweg. The post-1945 colonial wars and massacres, such as those in Madagascar (1947), Kenya (1952–60), and Algeria (1954–62), suggest that even full knowledge of the Holocaust was no guarantee against a certain type of colonial warfare.

Half a century after the publication of the *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt’s thesis of racist imperialism as a laboratory for totalitarianism continues to pose an intellectual challenge for historians of the Third Reich.⁶⁸ Despite the doubts about direct linkages between “Windhoek and Auschwitz” expressed in this essay, it remains plausible to assume that the ideas and practices that characterized Europe’s colonial mastery over the world had *some* repercussions on inner-European history and that “knowledge transfers” occurred in some areas (such as eugenics and “racial hygiene,” settlement planning, and racist legislation). But the extent to which these transfers affected the decision-making processes that led to the Holocaust has thus far not been convincingly demonstrated. Further empirical studies on eugenics and racist anthropology will be needed to determine the exact impact of such knowledge transfers.⁶⁹ Here, too, it will be important to remember that the other colonial powers had been active in these fields just as intensely as (and considerably longer than) Germany.

The examination of such transfers calls for an approach that can encompass both the common construction of a European colonial archive and its very different applications in various geographical contexts. Such an approach

⁶⁸Arendt, *Origins*, 12. See the critical engagement with the “laboratory of modernity” idea by Dirk van Laak, “Kolonien als ‘Laboratorien der Moderne?’” in *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 257–279.

⁶⁹Important pioneering studies in this field have been presented by Pascal Grosse, *Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1850–1914* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2001), 26–31; Sören Niemann-Findeisen, *Weeding the Garden. Die Eugenik-Rezeption der frühen Fabian Society* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2004); Christian Geulen, *Wahlverwandte. Rassen- diskurs und Nationalismus im späten 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2004). On “scientific racism,” eugenics, and the Nazis’ obsession with public health, see, too, Detlev Peukert, “The Genesis of the Final Solution from the Spirit of Science,” in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), and Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

would also have to take into account the dramatic wave of violence between 1914 and 1923, a wave of violence that had a much more immediate impact on the protagonists of the Nazi war of extermination. Only this perspective can explain why the countries that possessed the longest experience with colonial violence were not identical with those states that developed the greatest destructive potential after 1918.

It is also worth mentioning in this context that some historians who have previously focused on the effects of overseas colonialism on Europe have now modified their question as to whether *inner*-European decolonization processes, for example in the form of the dissolution of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, or the detachment of territories belonging to the German and Russian empires after 1918, can explain more about “recolonization” fantasies than the distant memories of a short-lived German colonial empire in Africa.⁷⁰ Such inquiries, which can build on a growing literature on the “colonial nature” of Germany’s *Drang nach Osten* before 1914, seem infinitely more plausible than the abstract search for the Holocaust’s “African roots.”⁷¹ Hannah Arendt herself was keen to emphasize the crucial role of inner-European pan-movements in the destruction of traditional models of the nation-state and the effects of territorial dissolution in 1917–18.⁷² Although frequently quoted as the “mother” of the continuity thesis between Africa and Auschwitz, Arendt was, in fact, quite explicit in her argument that the roots of Nazism were *not* to be found in Africa: “The immediate predecessor of totalitarian imperialism is not the British, Dutch, or French version of overseas colonial rule, but the German, Austrian, and Russian version of a continental imperialism which never actually succeeded, therefore is neglected by students of imperialism, but which in the form of the so-called pan-movements—pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism—was a very potent political force in central and eastern Europe.”⁷³

An interpretation that emphasizes the common European patterns of colonial violence, the discontinuities in German history between 1904 and 1941, and the European colonial powers’ dissimilar experiences in November 1918 may be less provocative than the conceptualization of the Nazi war of extermination as a

⁷⁰Dirk Moses, “Colonialism,” in *The Oxford Handbook on the Holocaust*, ed. Peter Hayes and John Roth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁷¹Among the growing literature on this subject, see, for example, Phillip Ther, “Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte. Polen, slawophone Minderheiten und das Kaiserreich als kontinentales Empire,” in *Das Kaiserreich transnational*, ed. Conrad and Osterhammel, 129–148. Gregor Thum, ed., *Traumland Osten. Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Die Deutschen und der Osten. Feindbild und Traumland* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2007). Gerd Koenen, *Der Russland-Komplex. Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900–1945* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005).

⁷²Jürgen Osterhammel, “Imperien,” in *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, ed. Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 56–67; Grosse, “From Colonialism to National Socialism to Postcolonialism,” 35–52.

⁷³Arendt, *Origins*, 37.

“colonial conflict”—the culmination point of a genocidal path that originated in Africa and ended in Auschwitz. Compared to the construction of direct continuities between the German colonial wars of 1904–1907 and Auschwitz, however, such an interpretation would have an important advantage: the advantage of being empirically sound.

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