

Leseprobe

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Weimar Colonialism

Discourses and Legacies of Post-Imperialism
in Germany after 1918



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Florian Krobb and Elaine Martin

Introduction: Coloniality in Post-Imperial Culture

German colonialism was marked by its brief lifespan: Germany was a late-comer to the colonial scene in 1884 and was also the first of the major European powers to leave the colonial scene after being forced to relinquish colonial possessions in the aftermath the First World War – a mere thirty-five years later.¹ Germans, however, partook in the European colonial project for a decidedly lengthy period prior to the acquisition of colonies and in the aftermath of their confiscation. The former – the “colonial fantasies” of pre-colonial Germany – has been the subject of extensive research.² The latter – the German colonial imagination following the end of formal empire – is the subject of this volume. Entirely stripped of its colonial possessions at the Treaty of Versailles, Germany, unlike other European nations, was faced with the end of empire well before the end of the European colonial project. Germany became, to borrow Marcia Klotz’ phrase, “a postcolonial state in a still-colonial world”.³ During the period of high imperialism, with its race for strategic positioning on a global scale, German colonialists had envied the colonial might of its global rivals. The postwar engagement with these same Western powers that had recently benefitted from Germany’s confiscated colonial possessions is of a different quality. Weimar Colonialism is characterised by three distinct perspectives: firstly, a look

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- 1 Germany’s colonial empire included German Togoland (now part of Ghana and Togo), Cameroon, German East Africa (now Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania), German South-West Africa (now Namibia), a string of possessions in the Pacific including German New Guinea (today part of Papua New Guinea) and Samoa, and the Chinese concession Jiaozhan (Kiautschou).
 - 2 Susanne Zantop: *Colonial Fantasies. Conquest, Family and Nation in Pre-colonial Germany, 1770-1870*. Durham: Duke University Press 1997. See also George Steinmetz: *The Devil’s Handwriting. Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007.
 - 3 Marcia Klotz: *The Weimar Republic. A Postcolonial State in a Still-Colonial World*. In: Eric Ames/Marcia Klotz/Lora Wildenthal (eds.) *Germany’s Colonial Past*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2005, pp. 135-147 (p. 145).

to a past that, in hindsight, appears as a period of colonial glory; secondly a look to the present that is perceived as deficient in contrast to the present status of former rivals in the colonial arena – the very nations that had deprived Germany of her colonial possessions; and, thirdly, a speculative eye on the future with the objective of restoring Germany's former status, or a new version thereof.

Colonial loss left behind a strong legacy for Weimar Germany; reaction to this outcome of the Great War permeated many political and cultural discourses of the period. The colonial imagination, in other words, continued to be deeply rooted in German society beyond the brief duration of the formal colonial experiment. Curiously, however, the topic of Germany's colonial past has played a minimal role in the way in which the history of the Weimar Republic has been studied.⁴ The contributors to this volume address this desiderate by investigating the extent to which confiscation of the colonies gave impetus to colonial discourse. The volume thus complements the literature on Germany's pre-colonial imaginative agenda. It demonstrates that the duration of Germany's short colonial phase is an untrustworthy metric not only because, as Zantop and others have shown, it betrays the long period of colonial fantasy and desire in pre-colonial Germany, it is also unreliable on the basis that it masks the significance of the colonial project for the German psyche in the aftermath of colonial loss. "Mit dem Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges", writes Dirk van Laak, "endete zwar die deutsche Kolonialzeit als Realgeschichte, nicht aber als Phantasie- und Projektionsgeschichte." [While the end of the First World War marked the end of the German colonial period as actual history, its fantasy and projection history continued.]⁵ This volume seeks to explore this fantasy and projection by examining the

4 Only a few recent monographs have studied this period more intensively. See for example: Stefan Hermes: 'Fahrten nach Südwest'. Die Kolonialkriege gegen die Herero und Nama in der deutschen Literatur (1904-2004). Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2009; Wolfgang Struck: Die Eroberung der Phantasie. Kolonialismus, Literatur und Film zwischen deutschem Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik. Göttingen: V&R Unipress 2010; Volker Langbehn/Mohammad Salama (eds.): German Colonialism. Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany. New York: Columbia University Press 2011.

5 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: Birthe Kundrus (ed.): Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus, Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2003, pp. 71-90.

colonial consciousness of the former metropole with a view to teasing out the complexities of the revanchist debate in Weimar Germany. It seeks to map out the field between loss and desire, and between imaginings and realities. It is, in other words, concerned with the retrospective processing of German colonial history. The contributors to this volume trace aspects of the colonial melancholy in the literature and public discourse of the Weimar period and beyond (insofar as discursive patterns that emerged during the Weimar years experienced a continuation after 1945, and insofar as Weimar coloniality features in very recent literary engagements with Germany's colonial pasts); they expose the feverish efforts made by the colonial lobby (colonial associations, for example) in keeping interest in colonial expansion alive; they analyse how expansionist ideals and chauvinistic rhetoric of alleged German superiority are propagated implicitly and explicitly in the discourse of the period.

Motifs employed to justify Germany's call for a reversal of the stipulations of the Versailles Treaty include the alleged 'sorrow' of the indigenous populations upon the departure of their colonisers, the success of German 'cultural work' in the colonies and the wrongful termination of this important 'civilising work' by the Versailles Treaty. By exploiting the tension between 'fiction' and historical 'truth' – without becoming bogged down in the debate on history's own alleged 'narrative' – the contributors show how literary and other cultural objects, as by-products of the imagination of a nation imagining empire, pave a more illuminating pathway into the psyche of the former metropole in the aftermath of empire than could ever be achieved by historiographical enquiry alone. The volume's underlying hypothesis is that the propagandist tropes utilised by revanchist writers were an attempt to thwart the so-called *Kolonialschuldfrage* [lie of colonial guilt] and that Weimar revanchist discourse was an attempt to salve a humiliated national ego and refashion Germany as a model agent of the 'civilising mission' in Africa against the backdrop of military defeat, political collapse and foreign occupation.

I

One of the most striking aspects of colonial discourse during Weimar Germany's "crusade for colonies" is "the enormous amount of language, paper, ink and futile energy" expended on the recovery of Germany's overseas

territories after the Versailles settlement.⁶ Heidrun Kämper's opening article affords a taste of the terminology and rhetoric strategies employed by political parties and organisations, and highlights features of the debate that suggest an understanding of them as manifestations of a collective identity crisis. At the same time, the argumentative patterns and language employed by opponents of colonial revanchism is indebted to a general leftist ideology that considers colonialism as but one example of militarism and imperialism, and the attendant political and economic injustice. She shows that their interventions were similarly heated. In both cases, the engagement with all matters colonial is revealed as part of wider political and ideological agendas, yet the colonial discourse seemed to have been a particularly divisive, emotive and sensitive one. However, the manic effort invested in advocating the German colonial cause, together with the urgency that characterises the Weimar colonial conversation, is curious when measured against the criterion of economic and military utility: none of Germany's African or Pacific possessions had previously benefitted the homeland in any meaningful sense. In 1913, for example, Germany's trade with her colonies accounted for only half of one percent of the country's total trade; the provision of foodstuffs and raw materials was similarly insignificant, whereas the costs of establishing a colonial infrastructure were substantial.⁷ Historians are in agreement that emigration to the colonies in Africa and the South Pacific was negligible: even the most populous colony, German South West Africa, counted fewer than fifteen thousand German settlers when the war broke out in 1914.⁸

6 David Thomas Murphy: *The Heroic Earth. Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933*. Kent: Kent State University Press 1997, p. 191.

7 Arthur J. Knoll and Hermann J. Hiery: *Economy*. In: Arthur J. Knoll/Hermann J. Hiery (eds.): *The German Colonial Experience. Select Documents on German Rule in Africa, China, and the Pacific 1884-1914*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2010, pp. 193-222 (p. 193).

8 Murphy: *The Heroic Earth* (note 6), p. 192. Revanchist commentators evade this reality by avoiding official statistics as to the colonies' worth in financial and emigration terms. They concentrate instead on the fact that the Allies are now scrambling for the German colonies and present this as 'proof' of their worth: "Früher lächelten die alten Kolonialvölker wohl über unsere mageren Kolonialbesitzungen, heute klammern sie sich daran [...]. Das ist der beste Beweis dafür, daß unsere Kolonien ein sehr wertvoller Besitz sind mit grenzlosen Möglichkeiten für unseren wirtschaftlichen Wiederaufbau [...]." [The same colonial powers who used to mock our few colonial possessions now

In order to reconcile the feverish tone that characterises the Weimar colonial debate with the reality of the colonies' insignificant value, the backdrop to the German colonial venture and the atypical constellation of circumstances that dictated its termination must be taken into account. Germany's belated entry into the colonial race has been interpreted in numerous ways by scholars of imperial history. The main line of argumentation, and that which bears particular resonance for Weimar colonialism, is the status hypothesis: Germany's drive to colonise was based on the desire to be on an equal footing with other European powers. The bid for colonies was influenced by the "dichotomous structure" of the world in the 1870s and 1880s: Germany could consider itself a European nation only by establishing a colonial empire like fellow European powers.⁹ The confiscation of this empire, therefore, gave impetus to the notion that Germany was now a lesser nation: it served as a reminder of Germany's diminished status within the post-war world order. Forced renunciation of empire represented "a humiliating loss – not just of territory, but of face, of status as a 'world power'".¹⁰ The fact that the German colonial project was brought to an end not because of independence struggles on the part of colonial subjects or formal processes of decolonisation, but rather as a consequence of defeat in the First World War, profoundly affected the German postcolonial conversation. Germany's transition from imperial power to postcolonial nation took place, in other words, amidst domestic political collapse, military defeat and foreign occupation. The new postcolonial German identity that emerged from this complex of domestic conditions was thus "inflected with a profound sense of victimhood".¹¹

Loss of face internationally coupled with a postwar identity grounded in the conviction of victimhood gave rise to a distinctly frenzied colonial dialogue that posited the immediate resumption of the colonial project as

cling to them. This is the best proof that our colonies are valuable and hold limitless opportunities for our economic recovery.] [anon.]: Betrachtungen zur Kolonialfrage. In: *Übersee- und Kolonial-Zeitung* 42.15 (1930), pp. 332-333 (p. 333).

- 9 Marcia Klotz: Global Visions. From the Colonial to the National Socialist World. In: *European Studies Journal* 16.2 (1999), 37-68 (p. 47).
- 10 Susanne Zantop: Kolonie and Heimat. Race, Gender, and Postcolonial Amnesia in Veit Harlan's *Opfergang* (1944). In: *Women in German Yearbook. Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 17 (2001), 1-14 (p. 5).
- 11 Lora Wildenthal: *German Women for Empire, 1844-1945*. Durham and London: Duke University Press 2001, p. 174.

the ‘cure’ for the ‘illness’ that had beset the German body politic. Regaining colonial possessions is presented as “lebensnotwendig für das deutsche Volk” [necessary to sustain the life of the German people]¹²; without colonies “[muss] unser Volk [...] notwendig verkrüppeln” [our people will necessarily be crippled].¹³ In an attempt to infuse logic into their argumentation, the revanchists made use of organic state theory. The state is ascribed a creative ability and colonial space is presented as a natural extension of the mainland: “Kein Volk kommt hoch, das seinen natürlichen Raum nicht erfüllen kann [...]. Das Volk macht sich den Raum zu eigen, aber auch der Raum schafft sich sein Volk.” [A people that cannot occupy its natural space never rises very high. A people makes space its own, but space also creates its people].¹⁴ The idea of the state as an organism emphasised the intimate, life-sustaining relationship between metropole and colony and the irreparable destruction wrought by the Allied powers in cutting off this lifeline: the Germans, so the argument went, needed colonial space, “wenn wir nicht untergehen wollen” [in order not to go under].¹⁵ The use of medical and anatomical language equipped colonial lobbyists with a medium with which to express the indivisibility of colony and metropole: the German mainland is deemed “verstümmelt” [mutilated];¹⁶ the Allies are castigated for having maimed the German ‘Volkskörper’ [ethnic body] and German ‘Raum’, thereby physically compressing Germany itself; Germans are “eingeperfect” within “enge Grenzen” [cooped up within narrow borders]¹⁷ to the point where Germany and by extension the German people are “kaum noch lebensfähig” [barely viable].¹⁸ This kind of language is representative of the discourse of the

12 Arthur Dix: *Weltkrise und Kolonialpolitik. Die Zukunft zweier Erdteile*. Berlin: Paul Neff 1932, pp. 282 and 286.

13 Erich Obst: *Wir fordern unsere Kolonien zurück*. In: *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* 3.3 (1926), 151-160 (p. 153).

14 Wilhelm Volz: *Lebensraum und Lebensrecht des deutschen Volkes*. In: *Deutsche Arbeit* 24 (1925), 169-174 (p. 174).

15 Hans Simmer: *Grundzüge der Geopolitik in Anwendung auf Deutschland*. Munich: Oldenbourg 1928, p. 83.

16 [anon.]: *Betrachtungen zur Kolonialfrage* (note 8), p. 332.

17 Klaus Ebhardt: *Bevölkerungspolitik und Raumnnot*. In: *Großdeutsche Blätter* 4.10 (1927), 218-225 (p. 218).

18 Josef Maria Abs: *Der Kampf um unsere Schutzgebiete. Unsere Kolonien einst und jetzt. Ein Beitrag zur Wiedergewinnung unserer Kolonien. Eine Lebensfrage für unser deutsches Volk*. Düsseldorf: Friedrich Floeder 1926, p. 13.

period: it conjures up the image of a claustrophobic national collective. The cure for the ‘illness’ that has taken hold of German ‘Raum’ and the people therein is similarly presented in anatomical terms: “Laßt [...] Tropensonne hineinscheinen in das deutsche Krankenzimmer – und der Patient wird genesen!” [Allow the tropical sun to shine into the German sick room – and the patient will recover.]¹⁹

In a further effort to refute the Allied allegation of colonial ineptitude as a slur by “neidische Feinde” [jealous enemies]²⁰, Weimar colonial lobbyists engaged in a self-congratulatory discourse regarding Germany’s peaceful overseas expansion, her benevolent colonial methods and her model rule within her colonial territories. The German colonial project, in contrast to the French colonial venture, for example, is presented as entirely removed from “Militärischer Machtentfaltung” [the display of military power]. Instead, the Germans “begehren in des Wortes tiefster Bedeutung Schutzgebiete” [establish protectorates in the truest sense of the word]. They come not as conquerors but as “aufrichtige Freunde zu Menschen anderer Rassen [...], die nach unserem Schutz verlangen” [sincere friends to peoples of other races who demand our protection]. As distinct from fellow European powers who now scramble for Germany’s colonies with exploitative intent, Germans see their role in terms of guardianship and trusteeship: “Eltern wollen wir jenen sein, Eltern im heiligsten Sinne des Wortes” [we want to be their parents, parents in the most sacred sense of the word].²¹ Weimar colonial discourse is marked by consistent efforts to stress the humanitarian mission of German colonisation: the assumed loyalty of black members of the so-called ‘Schutztruppe’ [protective force], for example, was cited as evidence that the German masters (represented by *Schutztruppe* officers) had befriended and won over the hearts of the German East Africans. Colonial lobbyists neglected to acknowledge that members of this force were in fact conditioned “to look at the local people as fair game, that is [...], not as humans but as Washenzi who could [...] be killed without too much of a psychological load”.²² Moreover, they suppressed memory of the genocide of the

19 Arthur Dix: *Weltkrise und Kolonialpolitik* (note 12), p. 346.

20 Hans Simmer: *Grundzüge der Geopolitik* (note 15), p. 83.

21 Erich Obst: *Wir fordern unsere Kolonien zurück* (note 13), p. 151.

22 Kapepwa I. Tambila: *The German Invasion and Occupation of East Africa. Policies, Processes and Tactics*. In: Peter Heine/Ulrich van der Heyden (eds.): *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika*. Pfaffenweiler:

Herero and Nama committed by German troops between 1904 and 1907 and the brutal suppression of the Maji Maji rebellion in East Africa between 1905-1907. Instead, they emphasised the Germans' success in saving the natives, who "bis dahin sich [...] in ewigen Stammeskämpfen befehdet und zerfleischt hatten" [had feuded and mauled each other in never-ending tribal struggles], from themselves by extending to them "[d]en Schutz des Reiches" [the protection of the Reich].²³ In taking 'protectorates' under her wing, Germany had acted "als Mandatar [...] der Zivilisation und des Friedens" [custodian of civilisation and peace]²⁴ and had 'raised' the natives to become co-workers and friends by way of "schonendster Behandlung der Rasse und der Stammeseigentümlichkeiten [gentle treatment of the respective races and tribal peculiarities].²⁵ In this respect Russell Berman writes: "If there is a feature that characterises the discourse of colonialism in Germany, it is [...] the capacity to recognize and appreciate – appreciate even at the moment of colonial appropriation – the other culture".²⁶ Cognisance of the colonial Other was just one of several qualities the Germans, ascribed to themselves that made them particularly adept when it came to the colonial venture. In order to colonise effectively, a number of further key attributes were required all of which "dem Deutschen sozusagen im Blute liegen" [which run in the German's blood, so to speak]. These included "Scharfblick" [perspicacity], "Schaffenstrieb" [creative drive], "Organisationstalent" [organisational talent], "Ordnungssinn" [sense of order] and "Anpassungskraft" [adaptability].²⁷ The Germans' colonial aptitude also produced benefits for the wider

Centaurus 1995, pp. 501-520 (p. 502). Recent studies by Jürgen Zimmerer and Isabell Hull have highlighted the violent nature of the German colonial project in Africa. See Jürgen Zimmerer: *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*. Münster: LIT 2007; Isabell Hull: *Absolute Destruction. The Practices of War in Imperial Germany*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2005.

- 23 Arthur Dix: *Was Deutschland an seinen Kolonien verlor*. Berlin: Verlag der Werbestelle 'Wieder Kolonien' 1927, pp. 17-18.
- 24 Arthur Dix: *Was Deutschland an seinen Kolonien verlor* (note 23), p. 24.
- 25 August Winnig: *Das Kolonialproblem und die deutsche Zukunft*. In: *Übersee- und Kolonial-Zeitung* 42.18 (1930), 373-374 (p. 333).
- 26 Russell Berman: *Enlightenment or Empire. Colonial Discourse in German Culture*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1998, p. 235.
- 27 Hans Meyer: *Geopolitische Betrachtungen über Deutsch-Ost-Afrika*. *Einst und Jetzt*. In: *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* 3.3 (1926), 161-174 (p. 166).

world: revanchists emphasised “die segensvolle Wirkung, welche die Wiederbeteiligung des großen deutschen Kulturvolkes [...] an der Erziehung und Entwicklung ihrer farbiger Völker für diese und für die ganze Welt hat” [the benefits yielded to the natives and the rest of the world by the renewed participation of the great, cultured German *Volk* in educating and raising up their coloured peoples].²⁸ The insistence on espousing the all-round benefits reaped by the wider world as a result of Germany’s participation in the colonial project represents what David Thomas Murphy describes as an “updated version” of the standard ‘white-man’s-burden’ argument according to which Germany had a moral duty to itself and to the world to resume its civilising mission.²⁹ It is on the basis of this “verständnisvollen und den Eingeborenen helfenden Kolonialpolitik” [sympathetic colonial policy of benefit to the natives] that the Germans have a right to resume their colonial mission.³⁰

A significant portion of the Weimar self-congratulatory colonial narrative was devoted to pitting model German colonial methods against the ‘less favourable’ methods of fellow colonial powers, notably the British and the French. In addition to the German ‘White Book’³¹ which purported to recount the crimes and misdeeds of other colonial powers as a counterbalance to the British ‘Blue Book’³², Germany’s superior colonial tactics occupied centre stage in countless tracts and pamphlets, and in scholarly and fictional works. In pitting the colonial ineptitude of fellow European nations against the colonial adroitness of the Germans, the primary accusation levelled at the French is their alleged view of Africa as merely a reservoir for military recruitment: “Kamerun und Togo sind [dem an Volkszahl abnehmenden Frankreich] [...] nur ein [...] Menschenreservoir, dessen Militarisierung seinen Weltherrschaftsplänen dienen soll” [France, with its depleting population, views Cameroon and Togo as nothing more than military reservoirs

28 Heinrich Schnee: Zum neuen Jahre. In: *Übersee- und Kolonial-Zeitung* 43.1 (1931), 3-4 (p. 3).

29 David Thomas Murphy: *The Heroic Earth* (note 6), p. 197.

30 Julius Lips: *Ethnopolitik und Kolonialpolitik*. In: *Koloniale Rundschau* 24 (1932), 530-538 (p. 538).

31 Reichskolonialamt (ed.): *Die Behandlung der einheimischen Bevölkerung in den kolonialen Besitzungen Deutschlands und Englands. Eine Erwiderung auf das englische Blaubuch vom August 1918: Report on the natives of South-West Africa and their treatment by Germany*. Berlin: Engelmann 1919.

32 Union of South Africa (ed.): *Report on the natives of South-West Africa and their treatment by Germany*. Windhoek: Administrator’s Office 1918.

that will serve its plans for world domination].³³ The English, meanwhile, are berated for their irresponsible methods when it comes to dealing with the natives. In his expansive study of English colonial rule as allegedly seen from the perspective of the indigenous population, Hans Poeschel argued that in contrast to the English, the Germans understood the Negro's need for clarity: "Wenn wir von den Deutschen etwas wollten, so hieß die Antwort entweder ja oder nein. Sagtest du nein, und ich kam noch einmal mit meinem Anliegen, so gab's vielleicht eins hinter die Ohren, aber ich wusste jedenfalls woran ich war, und es blieb bei dem Nein." [When we wanted something from the Germans, the answer was either yes or no. If you said no and I asked again, I got a slap maybe, but at least I knew where I stood, and the answer was still no.]³⁴ This supposed perceptive understanding of colonial subjects, expressed through the adoption of the indigenous perspective, bolsters the case for German colonial aptitude: the Germans recognise that inconsistent messages confuse the allegedly infantile Negro, just as inconsistency confuses a child. The trope of infantilisation permeates the Weimar colonial debate as it did during the colonial period: it projects the colonised as embodying an earlier stage of human development and, as such, in need of responsible – that is, German – guidance. Poeschel also pits the "Verkehrsformen" [forms of interaction] in the German colonies against those in British-held territories. The sensible distance maintained by the German coloniser played a key role in earning the respect of the natives and accounted in large measure for the unparalleled loyalty of Germany's colonial subjects:

Wir Deutschen wahren grundsätzlich, bei aller Liebe und Fürsorge für unsere Mohren, im persönlichen Umgang mit ihnen jenen gewissen Abstand, ohne den das Ansehen der weißen Rasse nur zu leicht in die Brüche geht. Unsere Schwarzen nahmen das als selbstverständlich hin und wußten es zu schätzen. [While we love and care for our Moors, we Germans maintained that distance without which the white race would go to pieces. Our blacks took this distance for granted and appreciated it.]

33 Franz Thorbecke: Die westafrikanischen Tropenkolonien Togo und Kamerun. In: Zeitschrift für Geopolitik 3.3 (1926), 175-186 (p. 173).

34 Hans Poeschel: Die Stimme Deutsch-Afrikas. Die Engländer im Urteil unserer ostafrikanischen Neger. Berlin: Scherl 1919, p. 30.

The English tactic of masquerading distaste for their colonial subjects under the guise of genuine friendship, by way of contrast, was soon deciphered by the natives:

[I]hre Achtung vor dem Engländer wuchs damit nicht. [...] Sie fanden flink heraus, daß hinter dieser zur Scheu getragenen Brüderlichkeit weniger echte Herzensgüte und Fürsorglichkeit stach als hinter unserer äußeren Zurückhaltung.

[Their respect for the English didn't grow. They quickly found out that there was less kindheartedness and care behind this paraded brotherliness than there was behind our unconcealed detachment.]

The Germans' honest methods have guaranteed them "einen dauernden und festen Platz im Herzen unserer schwarzen Schützlinge [...] – für alle Zeiten" [a lasting and secure place in the hearts of our black fosterlings].³⁵

Another myth cultivated by Weimar revanchists in their attempt to pit model German colonial rule against that of Britain and France was the myth of the 'loyal Askari' in the East African campaign. The valiant Askari soldier fighting loyally alongside his German comrades to the very end in spite of desperate privations served to fuel the myth of the German colonial romance and to refute alleged Allied propagandistic libel. The "beispiellos treue Hingabe der Eingeborenen" [unparalleled loyal devotion of the natives]³⁶ during the campaign was cited as proof of the pedagogical success of the German colonial project, which, in light of its comparatively short-lived duration, was "umso beachtenswerter, als wir doch ohne alle praktische Erfahrung an die Kolonisierung Ostafrikas herangegangen sind" [all the more remarkable because we embarked on the colonisation of East Africa without any previous practical experience]; the English, French and Portuguese, by contrast, were poised to draw upon their "hundertjährige afrikanische Erfahrung" [century-old African experience].³⁷ The loyal Askari thus served as a potent icon to demonstrate Germany's fitness to colonise. The fraternity topos was employed by colonial enthusiasts to 'prove' how alleged German virtues such as loyalty, courage in war and readiness to make sacrifices had been

35 All quotations Hans Poeschel: *Die Stimme Deutsch-Afrikas* (note 34), p. 30, 31 and 3.

36 Arthur Dix: *Was Deutschland an seinen Kolonien verlor* (note 23), p. 24.

37 Hans Meyer: *Geopolitische Betrachtungen über Deutsch-Ost-Afrika* (note 27) p. 16.

successfully instilled in the African Negro by the Germans. The Askaris, to borrow Stefanie Michels' words, were cast as "Beweise für die 'Kulturleistung' der Deutschen" [evidence of the 'cultural achievement' of the Germans]. By virtue of having benefited from German cultivation methods, the Askari was simultaneously cast as "[d]er [...] vorher 'kulturlose[.]' Afrikaner" [the African hitherto devoid of culture].³⁸ The willingness of the 'newly-cultured' Askari to fight alongside the Germans bolstered the myth that the natives had never wanted the Germans to leave. The fact that General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's Askaris deserted *en masse* after the allied offensive began in April 1916 was overlooked to accommodate the needs of the Weimar postcolonial agenda.³⁹

All in all, Germany's short-lived actual imperial phase is presented as the quintessential example of a successful colonial experiment. Germany had shown long-established colonial powers what competent colonial methods really involved by introducing "die [...] friedlichste Periode der Kolonialpolitik, die auf Verträgen begründete Schutzgebietspolitik" [the most peaceful period of colonial politics, a protectorate policy based on agreements]. Germans had won over the hearts of the natives in her 'protectorates' "[n]icht

38 Stefanie Michels: Reichsadler und Giraffe. Askari am Grab von Lettow-Vorbeck. In: Sunna Gieseke and Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst (eds.): *Koloniale und postkoloniale Konstruktionen von Afrika und Menschen afrikanischer Herkunft in der deutschen Alltagskultur*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, pp. 315-336 (p. 317).

39 At the height of the campaign, Lettow-Vorbeck commanded 14,600 Askaris; at the end only 1168 were left. See Tambila: *The German Invasion and Occupation of East Africa* (note 22), pp. 516-517. On the rare occasion that mass desertion is acknowledged (Maximilian Decher's 1932 memoir *Erlebtes und Erlauchtes in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1914-17* is one example), it is accounted for not on the basis of ill-treatment but on the basis of the blacks' prodigious sexual desires. Regarding Decher's memoir, Amadou Booker Sadju writes: "Decher greift zum berühmten Topos, der noch aus der Zeit des Sklavenhandels stammt und den Neger als Sexualtier einstuft, bei dem sich eine längere sexuelle Enthaltensamkeit als ungünstig für die 'Dienstfreudigkeit' auswirken soll." [Decher draws upon the famous topos which originates from the times of the slave trade and classifies the Negro as a sexual animal whose prolonged sexual abstinence has negative repercussions for his ability to render useful service to his masters.] Amadou Booker Sadju: *Das Bild des Negro-Afrikaner in der deutschen Kolonialliteratur*. Berlin: Reimer 1985, p. 223.

mit der Faust des Eroberers, sondern mit dem Feder des Vertragsschließenden" [not with the conqueror's fist but with the negotiator's quill].⁴⁰ For this reason, Germany's colonial endeavours are considered "ein Ruhmeskapital, ein echtes Ruhmeskapital" [a proud chapter, a genuinely proud chapter] in German history.⁴¹ This multifaceted self-congratulatory discourse served to cater to the wounds of a bruised national ego and foster Germany's "self-delusional postcolonial memory".⁴²

II

One of the most significant elements of the Weimar colonial conversation was the newfound understanding of colonial space as a prerequisite for preserving the enterprising spirit of the Germans by way of providing a spill-over site for their surplus energies. Emigration to colonial space had been a feature of German pre-colonial discourse which, in positing a critique of a decadent, industrialised and materialistic Western society, drove a narrative of emigration in order to "project Germans outward into the presumably less degraded space of the colonies".⁴³ During the actual colonial period, this narrative evolved into one that posited the maintenance of German settlers' cultural distinctiveness in colonial space as a source of concern. In the post-colonial Weimar narrative, the question of emigration adopts an altogether new urgency: Germans now confront the challenge of preserving the cultural integrity of emigrant communities in locations recently annexed by rival European powers. Population loss due to emigration in times of a declining birth rate represented an irreparable loss to the homeland. This loss could be offset by maintaining the Germanness of the emigrants in consolidated German settlements. In addition to the concern over preserving German cultural identity in overseas territories under Allied control and elsewhere, a second

40 Arthur Dix: *Was Deutschland an seinen Kolonien verlor* (note 23), p. 23 and 17.

41 Josef Maria Abs: *Der Kampf um unsere Schutzgebiete* (note 18), p. 18.

42 Susanne Zantop: *Kolonie and Heimat* (note 10), p. 11.

43 William H. Rollins: *Imperial Shades of Green. Conservation and Environmental Chauvinism in the German Colonial Project*. In: *German Studies Review* 22 (1999), 187-213 (p. 190). See also Sibylle Benninghoff-Lühl: *Deutsche Kolonialromane 1884-1914 in ihrem Entstehungs- und Wirkungszusammenhang*. Bremen: Übersee-Museum 1983, p. 166.

pressing concern was the loss of valuable German talent. Enterprising Germans on crowded German soil no longer had overseas “Wirkungsfelder für deutschen Unternehmungsgeist” [spheres for German entrepreneurialism] in which to offload their energies.⁴⁴ The loss of these natural extensions to the mainland had weighty repercussions: “[A]ufstrebende und wagemutige junge Kräfte [gehen] dem Vaterland dauernd verloren, weil sie nicht auf eigenem Kolonialboden freien Betätigungsraum finden” [ambitions and venturous resources are being permanently lost to the fatherland because they lack their own colonial territory in which to operate].⁴⁵ In the absence of these dedicated spheres “kommt es unausbleiblich, daß die Deutschen [...] mit deutscher Tüchtigkeit den Fremden ihr wirtschaftliches Rüstzeug gegen ihr Mutterland schmieden helfen” [it is inevitable that Germans will use their capabilities against the motherland to help foreign powers shore up their economic know-how].⁴⁶ Germany is losing “Männer in den besten Jahren” [men in their prime] who are the nation’s “wertvollste[.] Elemente” [most valuable elements]. Without affording their “Schaffensdrang” [creative zeal] free reign “auf eigenem überseeischen Hohheitsgebiet” [in their own overseas territories] “[sinkt] die Leistungsfähigkeit des deutschen Volkes” [the capabilities of the entire German race dwindle]⁴⁷: loss of colonial space as a natural home for the pioneering German spirit is presented as having long-term repercussions for Germanness itself.

A second fundamental element of Weimar colonial discourse emerged in the context of endangered Germanness. Weimar lobbyists present colonial expansion as eugenic therapy for the maintenance of racial quality. In their attempt to link race with space, colonial propagandists piggy-backed on geopolitical arguments. The idea that the course of world politics is geographically determined and that the state is a living organism whose borders operate to laws independent of human agency gave colonial lobbyists a discursive framework in which to argue that colonial territory was a natural addition to the mainland’s naturally permeable borders: expansion into colonial territory

44 Hans Poeschel: *Deutschland muss seine Kolonien wieder haben*. Berlin: Verlag Dietrich Reimer 1919, p. 22.

45 Arthur Dix: *Weltkrise und Kolonialpolitik* (note 12), p. 286.

46 Hans Poeschel: *Deutschland muss seine Kolonien wieder haben* (note 44), p. 22.

47 Friedrich Ebeling: *Schafft Raum zur Überwindung einer schweren Zukunft*. In: *Übersee- und Kolonial-Zeitung* 42.20 (1930), 406-408 (p. 407).

amounted to “ein organisches Wachstum” [organic growth].⁴⁸ Whilst geopolitical thought was not new, what was new was its combination with the idea that this expansion was necessary for the survival of the German *Völkskörper* as opposed to just the economic well-being of the state. Since the loss of the colonial territories “[hat sich] die Qualität des Nachwuchses [...] verringert und wird sich nach den Gesetzen der Rassenhygiene fortzeugend weiter verschlechtern” [the quality of offspring has decreased and will continue to decrease in accordance with the laws of racial hygiene].⁴⁹ Colonial space is thus designated “ein Gebot nationaler Selbsterhaltung” [an imperative for national self-preservation];⁵⁰ the colonial question “gehört zu den brennenden Fragen der Gegenwart, von deren Lösung Deutschlands Gedeihen oder Verderben abhängen” [is one of burning questions of our time, whose solution will dictate whether Germany will prosper or perish].⁵¹

Geopolitical arguments were also directed at Germany’s youth. The youth campaign praised the publication *Zur Herrlichkeit des Sudans* (1923), co-edited by renowned ethnographer Leo Frobenius, as representative of the German spirit seeking to escape narrow borders.⁵² An article dedicated to the new publication in the youth magazine *Jambo* describes the book as having been written from a heart, “das nach einem Leben weiter Fahrten an sich selbst die qualvolle Enge verspürt, in die uns Deutsche der Schandvertrag durch den Raub der Kolonien und die koloniale Schuldflüge gebannt hat” [that after a life of travels feels the agonising narrowness into which we Germans have been locked as a result of the scandalous treaty and the lie of colonial guilt]. The author reminds Germany’s youth that they should also allow heroes like Frobenius to show them “die Wege in die Ferne” [the pathways to afar].⁵³ The combination of the theories of racial survival with theories of space marked a significant shift away from the conventional economic claims to colonial territory. Weimar revanchist propaganda, in other words, is directed less at the colony and more towards the metropole: it is less the Africans’ need for

48 Hans Simmer: Grundzüge der Geopolitik (note 15), p. 85.

49 Friedrich Ebeling: Schafft Raum zur Überwindung einer schweren Zukunft (note 46), p. 406.

50 Richard Fehn: Raumnott-Kolonien. In: Bayerische Industrie 24.14 (1930), 14-15 (p. 15).

51 Josef Maria Abs: Der Kampf um unsere Schutzgebiete (note 18), p. 9.

52 Leo Frobenius/Friedrich J. Bieber: Zur Herrlichkeit des Sudans. Stuttgart: Union 1923.

53 [anon.]: Leo Frobenius. *Zur Herrlichkeit des Sudans*. In: *Jambo* 3 (1925), p. 97.

the Germans that is at stake, than Germany's perceived need for Africa as an antidote to its demographic – and by extension racial – dilemma so as to ensure healthy offspring, the reproduction of which is alleged to be entirely dependent on physical space.

The Weimar colonial narrative marks both a continuation of and a shift away from Wilhelmine colonial discourse in the context of its contradictory rhetorics. Ambiguity had, of course, always been a marker of colonial discourse. The madonna/whore dichotomy, for instance, had been a central feature of the traditional colonial attribution: the 'virginity' of colonial landscapes, on the one hand, called for "a fecundating penetration", while the libidinousness of the colonised, on the other, "subliminally invokes the need for a policing operation".⁵⁴ This projected binary challenged conquerors of colonial space to maintain their racial integrity. The Weimar colonial narrative exhibits an overwhelming number of new incongruent subtexts between reality and perception, all of which grew out of the unique constellation of German decolonisation. The lazy, cowardly Negro is remodelled as the valiant Negro when it comes to espousing the blacks' defence of the German cause in war. The argument that the German colonial project is centuries as opposed to decades old by virtue of the German adventurers who went to Africa long before the formal project is retracted when revanchists espouse the unmatched pedagogical progress in the German colonies: in such instances campaigners are keen to stress Germany's late arrival on the colonial scene and the nation's fleeting imperial phase. The area most affected by incongruity is perhaps the space argument. When Germany's actual birth decline began to pose problems for the overcrowding argument – an overcrowded Germany, so the argument went, required colonial space⁵⁵ – the *Lebensraum* argument was tweaked to accommodate this: Germany was no longer a people bursting at the seams, a so-called 'Volk ohne Raum', as claimed by Hans Grimm. Instead Germany's birth-rate was suddenly declining, colonial advocates argued, precisely *because of* the lack of space. Some commentators went so far as to espouse both arguments within the confines of individual articles.

54 Ella Shohat/Robert Stam: *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge 1994, p. 143.

55 "Nackte Tatsache ist, daß wir auf dem engen Boden unseres Vaterlandes Millionen von Menschen zu viel haben." [The hard fact is that we have a population surplus of millions occupying the narrow space of our fatherland.] Joseph Maria Abs: *Der Kampf um unsere Schutzgebiete* (note 18), p. 13.