ABSTRACT

“Colonizers Are Born, Not Made”:
Creating a Colonialist Identity in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

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Abstract

After the First World War, Germany lost its overseas territories, becoming Europe’s first post-colonial nation. After 1919, and especially between 1933 and 1945, however, German colonialists advocated for the return of these colonies and for their central importance to Germany. This dissertation tells the paradoxical story of these colonialists’ construction of a German national character driven by overseas imperialism despite the absence of a colonial reality to support this identity. In contrast to views of colonialism as marginal in Germany after the First World War or the colonialist organizations as completely subsumed under the Nazi regime, this dissertation uncovers both the colonialist organizations’ continuing public presence and their assertive promotion of their overseas goals in the Third Reich. It also reveals the space available for debates over the contours of national identity in the public sphere of the Third Reich.

Using organizational records of colonialist groups and Nazi propaganda offices, the colonialist press and other publications, photography, graphics, films, and public opinion reports, this dissertation examines the vibrant two-million-strong colonial revisionist movement that flourished in the Third Reich. German colonialists, straddling between anachronistic fantasy and the National Socialist world-view, reintegrated overseas imperialism into Nazi Germany and thereby reinterpreted the meaning of Germanness. They proclaimed a new vision of German national identity that drew on the imagined glories of the past but also held out the promise of a revitalized future for Germany through Africa. They did so however in conflict with the Nazi regime’s
expansionist goals in Eastern Europe. Colonialists, however, elided disagreements in favor of projecting a public image that emphasized the deep interconnectedness of overseas colonialism and Nazi goals. Through their public agitation and cultural products, colonialists affirmed the continuing relevance of overseas colonialism to Germans in the Third Reich.
Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. iv

List of Figures ....................................................................................................................................... vii

List of Abbreviations ......................................................................................................................... ix

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Colonial Guilt and Colonial Redemption: The Stakes of Overseas Colonialism in post-1919 Germany .............................................................................................................. 45

Chapter 2: “To be national means to be colonial.” Gleichschaltung and the Beginnings of a Mass Movement, 1933-1935 ........................................................................................................... 88

Chapter 3: Caring for Africans Here and There: Race, Place, and the Myth of the Good German Colonizer ........................................................................................................................................ 152

Chapter 4: “If you believe in the absoluteness of the Führer, there can be only one leadership!” The Second Gleichschaltung in 1936 .................................................................................................... 219

Chapter 5: The Paradox of Success, 1936-1939 ................................................................................ 258

Chapter 6: “The Path from the Eyes to the Heart is Shorter than that from the Ears”: Colonialist Visual Culture, 1936-1943 .......................................................................................................... 325

Chapter 7: Africa or the East? Colonialists during the Second World War, 1939-1945 405

Epilogue: Echoes of Colonialism ........................................................................................................ 457

Works Cited ........................................................................................................................................... 468

Biography ............................................................................................................................................. 492
List of Figures

Figure 1: “Halifax: What England does, it does for the freedom and civilization of the nations.” ................................................................. 181

Figure 2: “Did you know that…” ........................................................................ 187

Figure 3: “America needs colonies, because...” ................................................. 189

Figure 4: “Herr Doktor” ..................................................................................... 193

Figure 5: “Hottentot Children” .......................................................................... 194

Figure 6: “Foreign in Clothing and Manner” .................................................... 195

Figure 7: Eva MacLean, “Vom Neger zum ‘Nigger’” ......................................... 198

Figure 8: The “Peters Flag” is the first flag in the foreground. ...................... 263

Figure 9: The “Peters flag” after the second Gleichschaltung ......................... 264

Figure 10: RKB Colonial Congress Exhibition, Bremen, May 1938. ............ 279

Figure 11: RKB Colonial Congress, Vienna, May 1939. .............................. 284

Figure 12: RKB Colonial Congress, Bremen, May 1938. .............................. 285

Figure 13: Unidentified Exhibition ................................................................ 295

Figure 14: Colonial Beer Coasters ................................................................. 315

Figure 15: Colonial Kitsch ............................................................................... 317

Figure 16: “Fight with the Reich Colonial League!” ....................................... 332

Figure 17: Urban Colonizing Gaze ................................................................ 333

Figure 18: Rural Colonizing Gaze ................................................................ 334

Figure 19: An Alpine Scene in Africa ............................................................. 336

Figure 20: German Garden in Swakopmund ................................................. 340

Figure 21: Kaiserstraße in Windhoek ............................................................. 342
Figure 22: East African montage ................................................................. 350
Figure 23: “The woman in Africa is self-sufficient.” ................................. 353
Figure 24: “Ladies’ fashions in Africa” ......................................................... 354
Figure 25: Werner Peiner, Massaimädchen (1936) ....................................... 359
Figure 26: Werner Peiner, Das schwarze Paradies (1937/1938) .................. 360
Figure 27: Dresden train station, ca. 1938/1939 ......................................... 365
Figure 28: “Fight in the Reich Colonial League!” ca. 1938 ......................... 367
Figure 29: Reich Colonial League draft poster, 1941 ................................. 370
Figure 30: “Raw Materials from Our Own Colonies!” ................................ 371
Figure 31: The British in Africa .................................................................. 372
Figure 32: Bremen Colonial Exhibition, 1938 ............................................. 374
Figure 33: Bremen Colonial Exhibition, 1938 ............................................. 375
Figure 34: Sidol-Bilderdienst, Deutschlands Kolonien ................................ 378
Figure 35: Carl Peters Montage .................................................................. 385
Figure 36: Carl Peters advertisement .......................................................... 397
Figure 37: “Oh boy, when I see you like that, I always think about our colonies.” ..... 425
Figure 38: “Africa from Europe’s View” ..................................................... 435
Figure 39: Bremen Colonial Monument ...................................................... 463
List of Abbreviations

AN  Afrika-Nachrichten
BDM  Bund deutscher Mädel, League of German Girls
DKG  Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, German Colonial Society (1887-1936)
DKZ  Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung, German Colonial Newspaper
DNN  Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten
FK  Der Freiheitskampf
HJ  Hitler Jugend, Hitler Youth
KdF  Kraft durch Freude, Strength through Joy
KORAG  Koloniale Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft, Reich Colonial Working Group (1922-1933)
KPA  Kolonialpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, Colonial Policy Office of the Nazi Party (1934-1943)
NSDAP  Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, National Socialist German Worker’s Party
RKB  Reichskolonialbund, Reich Colonial League (1933-1936, then re-formed 1936-1943)
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Introduction

While in Berlin in December 2011, I visited the famous department store, KaDeWe (Kaufhaus des Westens). With dozens of other tourists and Berliners, I made the pilgrimage to the gourmet foods level and marveled at the variety of marzipan, chocolates, coffee, and other delicacies. In one of Germany’s oldest department store (and the second largest in Europe), the gourmet food floor has become a tourist destination, highlighted in guidebooks as a must-see. After purchasing a box of tea, I noticed with surprise that the cashier had rung the tea up under the category of Kolonialwaren/Kaffee/Tee. Referring to goods such as coffee, chocolate, tea, sugar, and tobacco cultivated in overseas colonies, the term Kolonialwaren (colonial wares) originally evoked exoticism, luxury, and the adventure of far-off lands.

Curious, I asked the cashier about the term. She explained its origins in the products of the former colonies. In addition to coffee and tea, this department in KaDeWe encompasses oil, spices, and a surprisingly large selection of mustards. Germany had not had colonies, the cashier informed me, but then—reflecting for a moment—corrected herself to say (incorrectly) that Germany had had only one colony but only for a short period of time. When I asked why KaDeWe still used the term Kolonialwaren, she told me that it had become vernacularized (eingebürgert).

In her response, the cashier expressed both a distorted memory of the German colonial past as well as a sophisticated understanding of the integration of the colonial period (through language) into contemporary Germany. Ninety years after Berlin ceased
to be an imperial capital, the concept of colonialism still resonated in *Kolonialwaren*. Today it stands for exotic luxury, but stripped of the association with overseas territorial possessions. While KaDeWe’s choice to use this designation for its products does not reflect an imperial irredentism on the part of the department store, the casual use of the term hints at a larger unresolved relationship with the colonial past in Germany.

Like the term *Kolonialwaren*, overseas colonialism has had different resonances in German public culture since the end of the overseas empire in 1919. By public culture, I refer to discourse carried out for the public through the media, communal gatherings, and interventions into public space. In this study, I examine one period of this post-colonial era: the Third Reich. From 1933 to 1945, colonialists in Nazi Germany sought to convince Germans that they possessed an inherent colonial character that rivaled the implicit imperial identity of the British and other imperial powers. By fostering this awareness, colonialists believed they could motivate Germans and the Nazi regime to demand the return of the former overseas colonies.

Central to this study is the distinction between the events of German overseas colonialism between 1884 and 1919 on the one hand, and the reworking of this past by colonialists *after* 1919 on the other. In a time when other European nations still possessed overseas territories, German colonialists felt humiliated by their exclusion from overseas colonialism. Colonialist advocacy in the Third Reich served three purposes: justifying the continued existence of colonialist organizations; vindicating the careers of colonial officials, soldiers, and settlers who had spent their lives in the colonies; and providing an
alternative view (to that of the French and British) with Germany as a world power. No longer “colonial,” these individuals, organizations, and activities now became “colonialist,” a term appropriately more abstract and less directly related to the existence of colonies.

Why colonialism and not imperialism?¹ For German colonialists, especially in their efforts to assert their relevance vis-à-vis National Socialism after 1933, the term “imperialism” had negative connotations through its connection to liberal democracy. Imperialism, they held, meant assimilation, as in the example of France, which colonialists rejected out of hand.² Similarly, Nazi views on overseas colonies denigrated imperialism, as for example, in a 1940 article in the SS journal, Schwarze Korps, which negatively labeled Imperial Germany’s economic concern with colonies as “liberal-mercantile” (liberalistisch-merkantilistisch).³ Colonialism, by contrast, had more positive connotations as an active, productive process by which Germans could transform foreign

¹ Scholars such as Ania Loomba and Robert Young have defined the differences between colonialism and imperialism as conceptual, practice-based, and spatial. For Young, colonialism represents “an activity on the periphery,” what happens on the ground overseas. Young sees colonialism as a practice and imperialism as a concept. Imperialism occurs in the metropole, the place “from which power flows.” “Imperialism,” according to Loomba, “can function without formal colonies…but colonialism cannot.” Given these definitions, the phenomenon of colonialist activities in Germany after 1919 would classify as imperialism rather than colonialism. I defer, however, to the terminology used at the time. German colonialists in the 1930s and 1940s did not define their own activities and their demands as imperialism, but rather as colonialism. Ania Loomba, Colonialism/Postcolonialism (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 11-12; Robert Young, Postcolonialism: an historical introduction (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 17.


territo
ry into German territory.\(^4\) National Socialists and German colonialists in the mid-
twentieth century defined imperialism as economically focused (with negative
connotations) and colonialism as a creative and regenerative force.

While necessary labels for the practicalities of description, the categories of
“colonialist” and “Nazi” are not mutually exclusive. These categories were distinct in the
Weimar Republic. After 1933, however, colonialists self-identified as Nazis. Many joined
the Nazi Party and viewed Hitler as the leader who could fulfill their demands for the
return of the colonies. The friction between colonialist leaders and Nazi officials resulted
from colonialists’ “single-issue dissent.”\(^5\) They stubbornly believed that their public
support for the regime entitled them to continue their agitation. Conversely, the conflicts
between their publicity activities and Nazi officials’ desires did not represent a rejection
of the Nazi regime as a whole. In fact, many considered their advocacy of overseas
colonialism as an expression of their support for the regime. While individuals’ identities
as “colonialist” and “Nazi” are often set against each other in this study, the former
qualifies rather than opposes the latter.

\(^4\) German colonialists were not alone in using terms at odds with our contemporary definitions; the British
preferred the label “imperialist” to the French identity as “colonialists.” Thomas G. August, *The Selling of
the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press,
1985), xi. Similarly, the circle of German right-wing Socialists around Max Cohen-Reuss who supported
colonialism drew a distinction between *social* colonialism and *imperial* colonialism. “Social colonialism”
linked falling birth-rates, eugenics, and the “quality” of Germans to colonial territories, rather than the
purely economically exploitation implied by the designation “imperial colonialism.” David Thomas
Murphy, *The Heroic Earth. Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933* (Kent: The Kent State
University Press, 1997), 210-211.

\(^5\) Claudia Koonz, “Ethical Dilemmas and Nazi Eugenics: Single-Issue Dissent in Religious Contexts,”
The Third Reich provided both a platform for the colonialist movement’s expansive growth in membership and public support as well as the greatest threat to their independent existence. In order to balance their desire for success in terms of membership and public presence, and their efforts to resist opposition from Nazi officials, colonialists reframed the meaning of the overseas colonial past to conform to the Nazi worldview. Cultivating a colonialist character, they asserted, could regenerate Germans’ culture and collective identity, and would thereby support Nazism’s promises of an ethnic awakening and the creation of a racially pure Volksgemeinschaft (ethnic community). In colonialist propaganda, German settlers became exemplars of this Volksgemeinschaft who maintained their racial and cultural purity while surrounded by racial inferiors in an alien territory. The colonies were transformed by this propaganda into the proving ground for a German fighting spirit and Kameradschaft (camaraderie), as well as territories that would support the metropole with raw materials and Lebensraum.

Germans, colonialists argued, were not brutal colonizers, as the Entente powers had depicted them to rationalize taking control of the German colonies after the First World War. Rather, they asserted, the qualities that the Nazis sought to awaken in Germany—racial awareness, a sense of community, a belief in order and discipline, and an appreciation of their heroic past—epitomized an inherent German colonial character. These qualities, both in Nazi Germany and in the former colonies, made Germans better colonizers than their European counterparts. Colonialists promoted the overseas colonies
as unique territories for the manifestation of the ideas of Lebensraum, ethnic struggle and expansion, and German superiority.

By framing the German overseas colonial past within the discourse of the Nazi present, colonialists created a supplementary definition of Germanness. In this formulation, colonizing became synonymous with Germanness, and national identity became defined as character. Especially after the Nazi takeover in 1933, when the colonialist movement transformed itself into a Volksbewegung (ethnic mass movement), colonialists asserted an inherent German colonial character. Through their publicity activities, they hoped to activate these latent characteristics. They created a “global vision” that would restructure the relationship of Germany and the world. German national identity as promoted in the public culture of the Third Reich not only included the Nazis’ racialized Aryan-Jewish binary or their territorial emphasis on Eastern Europe, but incorporated a wider global lens that stressed European comparisons and a mobile Germanness that could create a German Heimat (homeland) overseas.

Colonialism, National Socialism, and Public Culture

The colonial history that colonialists in the Third Reich promoted had begun a mere fifty years earlier. Germany was a latecomer to formal overseas imperialism and

6 In this regard, the colonialists’ view of Germany and Germans proved compatible with what Claudia Koonz has called the “ethnic fundamentalism” of the Nazis. Claudia Koonz, The Nazi Conscience (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), 13.

only possessed overseas territories for thirty-five years, factors that influenced Germans’ view of themselves as colonizers. Germans, unified as a nation by the Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1871, referred to this nation as the Second Reich, or Kaiserreich. This designation stemmed from the continental past rather than overseas empire, with the Kaiserreich as the successor to the Holy Roman Empire. Pro-colonial groups in Germany, however, began to demand a “place in the sun” for Germany in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1884, Carl Peters, founder of the Society for German Colonization, travelled to East Africa and concluded treaties with local representatives. Prompted by Peters’s actions, Bismarck reluctantly claimed overseas protectorates for Germany in 1884.

Between 1884 and 1900, German adventurers and businessmen signed treaties with local leaders in Africa and the Pacific, eventually claiming these territories as official German colonies or Schutzgebiete (protectorates). Territories in Africa included Togo, Cameroon, Southwest Africa (present-day Namibia), and East Africa (present-day Tanzania and part of Burundi and Rwanda). In the Pacific, Germany claimed part of

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8 In the cultural realm, Susanne Zantop has identified colonial fantasies in German literature between 1770 and 1870. She argued that the lack of German colonies allowed Germans to imagine themselves as ideal colonizers. This fantasy often played itself out in literature as a family romance (either as a patriarchal father-child relationship or as an eroticized matrimonial bond between European men and native women and/or land), and functioned as part of efforts to create a unified German national identity before 1871. The accrued weight of these fantasies throughout the nineteenth century laid the groundwork for the push by colonialists to claim overseas colonies in the 1880s. Susanne Zantop, Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

9 While the political designation between a protectorate and a colony differ, these differences will be overlooked in this study, as colonialists in the 1930s and 1940s referred to all of these territories as colonies.
Samoa, northeastern New Guinea, and the Bismarck, Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands. The German navy administered the province of Kiaochow on the Shantung Peninsula in China.\textsuperscript{10} Most of these colonies proved unprofitable, becoming a burden far beyond the minimal involvement that Bismarck had imagined. Only German Southwest Africa and German East Africa became settler colonies, occupying the most important places in the colonialist imaginary as sites for German rejuvenation.

The First World War signaled the end of the short-lived German overseas empire, as the conflict extended from Europe into colonial battlefields. British, French, Australian, South African, Japanese, and German colonial troops engaged each other in the German colonies, despite the promise of the neutrality of colonial possessions agreed upon at the 1884 Berlin Conference.\textsuperscript{11} In 1914, the British and French captured Togo, and Japan took control of the Pacific colonies and Kiaochow. South African troops occupied Southwest Africa in 1915, and France and Britain took Cameroon in 1916. Only in East Africa did German officers and their native \textit{Askari} troops manage to hold out until November 25, 1918, two weeks after the armistice in Europe.\textsuperscript{12} In the Treaty of


\textsuperscript{11}Article 11 of the General Act of the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 guaranteed the neutrality of the colonial possessions of any signatory that was involved in a war. Colonialists saw the violation of this article of the “Congo Act” as part of the larger injustice of the Allied handling of colonial possessions. Franz Epp, \textit{The colonial problem} (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939), 5.

\textsuperscript{12}Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop, \textit{The imperialist imagination: German colonialism and its legacy} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 15. The legend of the “undefeated German soldiers” and their “loyal \textit{Askari}” troops became part of the revisionist colonialist
Versailles, the Entente powers placed the former German colonies under the authority of Britain, France, South Africa, and Japan as mandates.

With the end of its overseas empire, Germany became “a postcolonial state in a still-colonial world.” As this study shows, however, for some Germans the post-coloniality of Weimar and Nazi Germany referred to their chronological position after the end of the overseas empire rather than to their changed attitude toward Germany’s relationship with the non-European world. Germany’s overseas decolonization did not result in either a “decolonization of public space” or a “decolonization of the mind” in the metropole. Rather, colonialists considered themselves to be on a hiatus from colonialism, in a constant state of expectation of the imminent resumption of their colonial duties. Throughout this study, therefore, I use the term post-colonial as a temporal rather than ideological concept, and to refer to Germany as a post-(overseas)colonial power. This distinction becomes crucial after 1938, when Nazi myth about German colonial rule in Africa and its end. Lettow-Vorbeck continued to be active in the colonialist movement in the period under examination. Sandra Maß, Weiße Helden, Schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918-1964 (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 3-4.


Germany once again became an imperial power, but in command of a continental rather than overseas empire.

With Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933, the colonialist movement’s position in Nazi Germany encompassed contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, colonialists eagerly displayed their allegiance to Hitler and the Nazi regime. On the other hand, they staunchly resisted organizational incursions by Nazi officials to stymie their propaganda efforts or downplay the importance of Africa (vis-à-vis Eastern Europe). The main colonialist organizations—the German Colonial Society (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, hereafter DKG), the Reich Colonial League (Reichskolonialbund, hereafter RKB), and the Colonial Policy Office of the Nazi Party (Kolonialpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, hereafter KPA)—proved organizationally resilient despite the obstruction and outright antagonism of some Nazi officials. After “coordinating” (Selbstgleichschaltung) themselves into the umbrella Reich Colonial League in 1933, the DKG and several smaller organizations managed to maintain their independence for three years. In 1936, Joachim von Ribbentrop, ambassador-at-large, and Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s deputy, ordered the individual organizations to dissolve themselves and reconstitute as a new, unified RKB. Turning this second Gleichschaltung to their advantage, the new RKB reached a membership of two million in 1941 and continued its public activities until 1943. For a decade under Nazism, the colonialist organizations maintained their goal of reclaiming the overseas colonies, using their extensive publicity efforts and cultural products to bring their message to the German public.
In this organizational and cultural history, I view these cultural products as vehicles for the negotiation and articulation of politics and national identity in Nazi Germany. I explore how members of the colonialist organizations (especially its leadership) used their publicity to make sense of their colonial past and of their current position in the Third Reich. I examine the organization and content of meetings, methods of propaganda, and their use of print and visual discourses. Through their constant anxieties about colonial kitsch, for example, colonialists expressed their ambivalence about their relationship with the Germans they recruited. Analyzing these cultural products and public discourse, I uncover colonialist leaders’ concerns about maintaining their position in Nazi Germany, both as an expert elite and as the leaders of a mass movement. Neither the organizations’ self-coordination in 1933 nor their forced coordination in 1936 completely resolved these concerns. Previous studies have centered on the political machinations between the organizations’ leaders and high-ranking Nazi officials. The colonialist organizations’ publicity activities, such as the press, exhibitions,

15 In doing so, I draw on the methodology outlined by Roger Chickering in his study of the right-wing Pan German League. To understand the political significance of the Pan-German League, Chickering first ascertained its cultural significance. He asks a central question: “What did the activity in the Pan-German League mean to the people who were active?” Employing psychology and cultural anthropology, Chickering analyzes the language used by the Pan-German League to identify the anxieties of the League. Looking closely at its rituals and forms of sociability to study the inner dynamics of the League, Chickering identifies “[h]omologies between the Pan-German League’s ideological vision and the social roles played by most of the organization’s local leaders.” Integrating experience, ideology, and organization, Chickering discovered the increased influence of the Pan-German League in the nationalist politics of Imperial Germany. The Pan-German League’s activities not only gave the League’s radical nationalism symbolic and cultural significance, but provided the arena for a “critical transformation” through which participants “were also politicized and channeled into concerted action.” Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914, 16-17, 118.
films, and publications, introduced a third factor into the colonialists’ desire for organizational relevance—the German public.

After 1933, colonialist organizations framed the meaning of the colonial past not only for their members, but, more importantly, for the general public. Public culture, as a “zone of cultural debate” served as the arena for the construction of a German colonialist identity. It offered a space to bring the colonies to life and to lobby for their return. Through visual, written, and oral publicity, colonialists endowed the colonies with meaning. They showed their audiences both the exceptionalism of the colonies and of the Germans who lived there as well as the adverse effects of the loss of these colonies on Germany. Through public discourse, colonialists attempted to create what Roger Chickering calls a “German-national public,” a sphere “constituted by a consensus on the primacy of ethnic solidarity, a devotion to the national symbols and to the values and imperatives that these symbols implied.” Colonialists in the 1930s and 1940s created a


17 As Michael Warner notes, discourse that is meant for a larger, public audience “must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable shape, and attempting to realize that world through address.” Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” Public Culture 14, no. 1 (2002), 81.

18 Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914, 156.
colonially-inflected version of this “German-national public,” in which overseas colonialism became a central component of German national identity.

In order to shape public culture, colonialists framed Germanness in the Third Reich to support their irredentist claims. As defined by Erving Goffman, a frame is a “schemata of interpretation” that allows people to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” events and experiences in their lives.¹⁹ Creating frames, people give meaning to inchoate experiences. As a political movement attempting to influence the broader public, colonialists had to achieve what David Snow and Robert Benford term “frame resonance.”²⁰ By adapting their claims to the understanding of a broad-based audience and the expectations of the Nazi regime, colonialists succeeded in mobilizing Germans.

Colonialists’ presentation of the colonial past possessed “narrative fidelity” by resonating with existing cultural idioms such as Germans’ ability to work and create, and the special German relationship with land.²¹ Facing the Nazi regime’s expectations, colonialists argued, if not always successfully, for the centrality of their claims to Nazi ideology. Failing this, they asserted the connections between colonialism and other aspects of Nazism to maintain a presence in the public sphere.


²¹ Ibid., 210.
What role did public culture have under the National Socialist dictatorship? Ian Kershaw, in his study of popular opinion and political dissent in Bavaria under the Nazis, states that “‘*public* opinion,’ in the sense of opinion publicly held and expressed, was after 1933 almost wholly that of the Nazi regime, or at least of rival sections within the ruling elites.” Kershaw acknowledges the continued existence of “an inchoate ground-swell of spontaneous, unorchestrated attitudes,” which the regime monitored closely. Similarly, Detlev Peukert imagined a scale of dissident behavior in Nazi Germany ranging from private partial criticism to public general criticism of the regime. On this scale, any public criticism of the regime manifested itself as protest and resistance, both relatively limited occurrences in Nazi Germany. Kershaw and Peukert view the public sphere in Nazi Germany as heavily censored and dominated by the Nazi regime and Party.

The colonialist organizations, however, functioned within a public culture that scholars such as Daniel Mühlenfeld and Thymian Bussemer have recently defined as less monolithic than previously imagined. The statements of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels (including those in his copious diaries), these scholars contend, cannot be read

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23 Ibid.

as accurate reflections of the role and effectiveness of propaganda in German life.\textsuperscript{25} Mühlenfeld has suggested that after the Nazi seizure of power, “the work of propaganda was in some senses a circular process of communication” in an effort to secure the loyalty of the population and to assert the legitimacy of the regime.\textsuperscript{26} This “integration propaganda” contrasted with the Nazi Party’s activity in the Weimar Republic, when the Party’s central goal was to undermine the democratic government.\textsuperscript{27} As Gerhard Bauer observes, “[t]he public sphere [Öffentlichkeit] of a state that allows no opposition, and the cooperation of the population in this public sphere, functions in a more complex manner than can be deduced from the unilinear concepts of dictatorship and Gleichschaltung.”\textsuperscript{28}

Nazi propaganda, following this view, had to take into account pre-1933 attitudes and cultural expectations to a certain extent in order to ensure support or at least passive


\textsuperscript{27} Thymian Bussemer explains that this “integration propaganda” (roughly from 1934-1938/1939) consisted of a “komplizierte Verschränkung von Angeboten von oben und Verarbeitung von unten.” In the 1930s, the Nazi regime set the themes and boundaries of public discourse, but “[d]ies war aber nur möglich, da das Regime gleichzeitig in der Lage war, der Bevölkerung weitgehende Zugeständnisse zu mahnen, Populismus häufig wichtiger war als Politik.” Bussemer, Propaganda und Populärkultur, 18.

acceptance. Entertainment films in the Third Reich exemplified this phenomenon, referencing core characteristics and elements of Nazi political culture, but not showing any of the physical manifestations of this political culture (political emblems, party slogans, etc.). The Third Reich represented the “heyday of mass culture,” not only of the Nazi-controlled and coordinated mass culture, but also “of a broadly accessible cultural space in which different social groups could readily find something in common.” For those Germans defined as Aryan, the public sphere and mass culture in the Third Reich provided opportunities to display their support for the regime, to seek professional advancement, and to find personal fulfillment within the structure of a larger ethnic German community.

Analyses of the public sphere in Nazi Germany, therefore, define it as strictly controlled by a regime that was also responsive to attitudes within the Volksgemeinschaft. Within this public sphere, the colonialist organizations’ ability to publicly produce a narrative of Germany’s past and future that at times stood at odds with the desires of high-ranking Nazi officials is remarkable. Between 1933 and 1943, Nazi leaders such as Rudolf Hess, Martin Bormann, and Joachim von Ribbentrop obstructed colonialists’ activity, seeing it both as representative of a discarded past and as irrelevant when


compared with the European *Lebensraum* soon to be occupied. Like many groups and individuals who attempted to “work towards the *Führer*,” colonialists did not view the opposition of officials such as Hess, Bormann, and Ribbentrop as the regime’s definitive rejection of their cause and so continued their activities.

After 1933, the Nazi regime rapidly took control of the German press and media (the colonialist movement’s most important method for reaching the public), thereby narrowing the avenues by which oppositional voices reached the general public. But, while one-quarter of the newspapers in print in 1933 had shut down under pressure from the regime by 1935, colonialists continued to publish a range of journals and to expand membership. Their ability to do so indicates the lack of consensus on the issue of overseas colonialism among Nazi officials. Colonialists took advantage of the space created by the inconsistency among these officials to assert their organizational importance and the relevance of their demands.

How then can we define colonialists’ position vis-à-vis the Nazi Party and the general public of Nazi Germany? In the Weimar Republic and the early years of the

31 Kershaw observes that Hitler’s statements were often vague, providing space for lower-level functionaries to independently interpret Hitler’s wishes in an attempt to “work towards the *Führer*.” This structure often fostered interorganizational rivalry, which served to stymie any direct challenges to Hitler. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

32 As Corey Ross has shown, “The competing networks of communication that characterized the German press before 1933 were by and large abrogated or overlaid by an unprecedented layer of political and economic centralization.” Ross, *Media and the making of modern Germany*, 300.

33 Ibid., 297-298.
Third Reich, the membership of colonialist organizations consisted of former settlers and colonial officials, a niche audience defined by a particular experience and the expert knowledge that it brought. After 1933, colonialists expanded their audience to all members of the general public. They asserted that their colonial claims were central to the territorial demands of the racially purified, culturally strengthened, and internationally resurgent Third Reich. As their social position changed after the Nazi takeover, colonialists faced the challenge of maintaining a carefully bounded (and thereby mostly insular) audience of dedicated colonialist activists with expert knowledge, while also convincing all Germans of their inherent colonizing character. This study explores the friction between these two positions, in particular in Chapter 5. Their activities represent both the limitations and the spaces available in the Nazi public sphere for special interest-driven discourses.

Also central to this study are colonialists’ psychological responses to their position in the Third Reich. The colonialists’ entire existence after 1919 centered on promoting an overseas colonial empire that few Germans missed—first under Weimar governments that ignored them and then under the Nazi regime which tolerated them in principle but often obstructed them in practice. To continue—and strengthen—their activity after the loss of the colonies meant that colonialists refused to acknowledge the constraints of their current reality. Germany did not at present have an overseas colonial empire, they acknowledged, but it would again someday and they, as a vanguard, had a role to play towards this goal. Over the years, colonialists developed a strong sense of
inner mission that deflected all opposition. This inner mission included both their colonial claims and their perception of the value of their pre-1914 work in the colonies, manifesting in illusions of self-importance in the Third Reich.

These delusions undergirded their public narrative of overseas colonialism and psychologically cushioned colonialists from Nazi officials’ opposition. During the interwar years, colonialists could successfully function with these delusions, because their narrative of German exceptionalism served the Nazi regime. After 1939, the Second World War both sharpened ideological priorities for the Nazi regime and imposed inescapable practical realities, leading to the total shutdown of the colonialist movement in 1943. As will be shown, however, some colonialists continued to interpret this cessation as a temporary, logistical measure, demonstrating the strength of colonialists’ self-serving illusions in Nazi Germany.

Through their public culture, colonialists framed a vision of German national identity that included the overseas colonial past so as to popularize the demand for the resurrection of this colonial empire. By creating a high degree of frame resonance with the public discourse of National Socialism, the colonialist movement could continue its activities until 1943. This frame resonance, coupled with inconsistent responses from Nazi officials, also convinced colonialists of their own importance to the Third Reich. While never accomplishing their final goal of inspiring a reconquest of the overseas colonies, colonialists kept these territories alive as a topic of public conversation for a
decade under Nazism. In doing so, they shaped the discursive space within the Third Reich and actively contributed to a public conversation on the meaning of Germanness.

**Why Colonialism? Why Germany? A Historiographical Overview**

Following the Second World War and the Holocaust, overseas colonialism received scant scholarly attention from historians of Germany, with a few important exceptions.\(^{34}\) With the German Colonial Society’s and the Colonial Office’s archives located in Potsdam in the German Democratic Republic, East German historians authored numerous works on German colonialism in the decades after 1945. Their Marxist approach defined imperialism as the “highest stage of capitalism” and connected this imperial history with the Federal Republic of Germany’s contemporaneous activities.\(^{35}\)

Concerned with the trajectory of modernity rather than capitalism, Hannah Arendt understood National Socialism and the Third Reich’s aggressive eastward expansion through the lens of European imperialism in her 1951 *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt argued that colonialism served as a “laboratory of modernity,” which bred totalitarianism

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\(^{34}\) Lora Wildenthal outlines five categories of scholarship on German colonialism: 1) historiography produced in the German Democratic Republic, 2) “basic monographs on each German colony and on the colonial administration and agitation movement in Germany,” 3) scholars who examine German colonialism as a predecessor to totalitarianism and National Socialism, 4) works examining German colonialism “as a means of analyzing the cultural and political importance of race in German history, including the history of German women,” and 5) German colonialism as “social imperialism,” a model proposed by Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Lora Wildenthal, “Notes on a History of ‘Imperial Turns’ in Modern Germany,” in *After the imperial turn: thinking with and through the nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 146-47.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 146. See for example Jürgen Kuczynski, *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Imperialismus* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1952).
through the racial doctrines and bureaucratic practices in the colonies then transferred back to Europe. Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon advanced similar arguments in the 1950s and 1960s, identifying Nazi genocide as the application in Europe of tactics and procedures usually reserved for use on non-white colonial populations. In the Marxist argument as well as those of Arendt, Césaire, and Fanon, colonialism is part of the development of modern European history—either toward capitalism and eventually communism, or towards modernity—connecting colonialism with National Socialism.

In the 1960s, Wolfe Schmokel and Klaus Hildebrand studied the diplomatic and political history of the Third Reich to connect overseas imperialism and National Socialism. Surveying colonialists’ activities between 1919 and 1945, Schmokel and Hildebrand focused on the concurrent interaction of the Nazi regime and colonialists, rather than on what National Socialists had learned from the colonial past. While they outlined the contours of the colonialist organizations, Schmokel and Hildebrand concentrated primarily on the relations between colonialist leaders and the Nazi Party,


37 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1950]), 36. Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). Isabel Hull engages with this thesis and argues that the genocidal suppression of the Herero revolt in German Southwest in 1904-1907 was influenced by German military culture. The brutalization of warfare and occupation, by this argument, did not originate in German experiences in colonial rule but were a combination of this and military values already existent and a lack of civilian oversight. Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute destruction: military culture and the practices of war in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

particularly on the role of colonialism in foreign policy negotiations with England. Klaus Hildebrand dismissed the colonialist movement as merely a tool of Hitler’s anti-British campaign and his judgment has long deterred historians from further examining this period. Woodruff Smith began to reassess the relationship between colonialism and National Socialism in the 1980s, but he studied the ideologies of Weltpolitik and Lebensraum and their political supporters rather than their popular expression. More recently, Karsten Linne focuses on organizational planning for future colonies, but barely mentions colonialists’ mobilization of public opinion.

Why do scholars continue to study this topic? What is left to say about this marginal historical phenomenon, as Lewis Gann defined it? A cultural perspective can revise our view of the dominant political and economic historical narratives of German colonialism. In the last fifteen years, a wealth of scholarship has documented the deep infiltration of colonial themes and ideas into the development of German culture and society. Pascal Grosse has shown the centrality of colonialism to eugenicist thinking at


40 Karsten Linne, Deutschland jenseits des Äquators? Die NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008).


the turn of the century. Andrew Zimmerman and the contributors to *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* have identified the extension of colonialism’s scientific influence to anthropology and ethnography. Birthe Kundrus demonstrates the importance of the overseas colonies in shaping Germans’ self-conceptions in Imperial Germany. Lora Wildenthal, in her groundbreaking *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945*, explores the role of German women as agents and symbols of empire in Imperial Germany, showing how female colonialists used race as an inclusive category across gender lines in ways that justified their activism in support of colonialism. Several recent edited volumes expand both the period under study (from the 1850s to the present) and the variety of sources studied. These works focus on the

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43 Pascal Grosse, *Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1850-1914* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2000).


46 Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). See also Roger Chickering, “‘Casting their gaze more broadly’: Women's Patriotic Activism in Imperial Germany,” *Past & Present* 118(1988). This argument is similar to that made by Antoinette Burton in the case of British feminists and their paternalist attitudes toward Indian women between 1865 and 1915. British feminists used their ability to act imperially toward Indian female subjects as evidence of their readiness to take on the political trappings of citizenship in Britain. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

mutually constituted nature of the metropole and the colony. Returning to Arendt’s concerns through a cultural lens, they seek to integrate overseas colonialism into German history.

*New Imperial History, Colonialist Propaganda, and Decolonization*

Much of this recent work grows out of the field of New Imperial History, which developed within British historiography in the 1980s and 1990s and reflects increased attention to the influence of imperialism on the metropole. These scholars redefined the meaning of “Englishness,” positing that empire represented “a fundamental and constitutive part of English culture and national identity at home.” In the German case, this symbiotic relationship underlies the stakes of colonialists’ continuing agitation after the loss of the colonies. Whether Germany had colonies or not, they argued, would prove fundamental to the character of Germans at home and abroad and to their role in the

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*German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama, *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

48 Antoinette Burton, “Introduction: On the Inadequacy and the Indispensability of the Nation,” in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3. The process of decolonization after the Second World War and struggles for racial and gender equality since the 1960s served as the impetus for this scholarly “imperial turn.” This motivating force reaffirms the complicity of history writing and scholarly works in maintaining the separation of empire and nation. Acknowledging this complicity, New Imperial History asserts the responsibility of historians and other colonial studies scholars to participate—through their work—in these struggles by renegotiating the relationship between metropole and colony.
world. Domestically, in Britain as well as in Germany, imperial propaganda served as the explicit expression of the colonies and of their role in the metropole.

As John MacKenzie and others have shown, British imperial propaganda reached into a wide variety of cultural and social fields in the metropole, from the music hall to the Boy Scouts and the BBC. This diffuse network of imperial propaganda organs cut across class and social strata, but membership in the imperial propaganda societies remained—as in Germany during the Weimar Republic—middle-class and elitist. These societies, working together with official imperial propaganda and the imperial studies movement, increased public knowledge about the British Empire so as to strengthen appreciation of its value to Britain. British imperial propaganda, unlike colonialist publicity in Germany, carried the possibility of colonial adventure and a career in the colonies. The existence of a long-established empire meant that these societies supplemented rather created what MacKenzie terms an “imperial world-view.”

In addition to studying Britain, scholars have explored the creation of a domestic colonial culture through propaganda in other European imperial powers such as France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Thomas August and the contributors to the volume Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France have questioned the elite nature of French imperialism, arguing instead that “the empire


50 Ibid., 253.
continued to play an integrative and unifying role in France long after the main scrambles [for territory] were over."\textsuperscript{51} Belgian colonial propaganda, as Matthew Stanard has shown, “produce[d] a nationalist message in Belgium by offering the Congo as a project around which disparate elements in the nation could associate."\textsuperscript{52} In fact, Stanard has argued, a broader European colonial culture emerged in interwar Europe. This colonial culture existed in European imperial powers such as Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Portugal, and the Netherlands, and embodied shared themes and practices. The transnational and comparative study that Stanard proposes would illuminate issues that spanned all European colonial projects, such as imperial comparisons with British and French role models, the importance of mass politics and mass culture in both parliamentary and fascist states, and the mobilization of myths and traditions to rationalize the establishment of racist colonial regimes.\textsuperscript{53}

Within the interwar European colonial culture that Stanard outlines, however, Germany stands alone as a post-colonial power. Thus, German colonialism \emph{after} 1919 complicates our understanding of the role of overseas empire in European national


\textsuperscript{52} Matthew G. Stanard, “Selling the tenth province: Belgian colonial propaganda, 1908-1960” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2006), 34.

\textsuperscript{53} Matthew G. Stanard, “Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 44, no. 1 (2009), 47.
identities. This moment in German colonial history—Germany’s decolonization—is unique when viewed together with the imperial histories of other European nations.\(^{54}\) Imagining German colonialist activities after 1919 as “colonialism without colonies”\(^{55}\) throws the colonialism of more established European imperial powers such as Britain and France into sharp relief. The fraught environment for German colonialists after 1919 provides scholars with the opportunity to explore the redirection of imperial identities in the transition of European imperial powers to post-colonial nations.

In Germany, in contrast to the diffuse “generalized imperial vision” MacKenzie identifies in Britain,\(^{56}\) the short three and a half decades of colonial rule left colonialism as a contested issue after 1919. Colonialist propaganda in the Third Reich presented a vision not only of Germany’s colonial subjects, but more importantly of *Germans as colonizers*. Living in a chronologically post-colonial nation, German colonialists turned their colonizing gaze back on themselves in order to frame their colonial experiences in the past, the present, and in the hoped-for future. The colonialist organizations outlined a

\(^{54}\) Some, such as David Blackbourn, have debated the moment of German decolonization, suggesting that “the German counterpart to the dissolution of empire, which had such a deep impact on British and French perceptions of their national history, was not the breakup of the German colonial empire in 1919 but rather the dissolution of German settlements in East and Central Europe after 1945.” David Blackbourn, “Das Kaiserrreich transnational. Eine Skizze,” in *Das Kaiserrreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt, 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2004), 324.


distinctively German definition of overseas colonialism that spoke to specific facets of German national and cultural self-perception. As the days of formal empire faded into the past, these unrelenting advocates of overseas colonialism had to reiterate the contours, significance, and implications of imperialism to Germans seemingly undisturbed by the loss of the colonies.

To mobilize these apathetic Germans, colonialists in the Third Reich relied heavily on visual culture. In doing so, they made use of Germans’ visual literacy and aligned themselves with the Nazi regime’s sophisticated usage of the visual. As Jeffrey Schnapp observes of Fascist Italy, fascism requires “an aesthetic overproduction” to compensate for its “unstable ideological core,” often resulting in spectacle. 57 Spectacle is important to the formation of modern national identities and the individual’s subjectivity in reference to the state, whether through mass events, 58 exhibitions, 59 processions, 60 or


58 Ibid.


60 Takashi Fujitani, Splendid monarchy: power and pageantry in modern Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
the “aesthetics of power” in the everyday. These spectacles articulated the elements of the Nazis’ ideal of an ethnically unified, racially pure Volksgemeinschaft, shaping Germans’ interactions with each other and with the regime in an effort to realize this vision. Through their visual culture, colonialists contributed their view of German history and character to this Nazi vision.

Given the importance of the visual in the twentieth-century, scholars have recently begun to explore the circulation of colonial images from Imperial Germany through the Third Reich. Leading a project at the University of Cologne examining colonial picture postcards, Jens Jaeger and his students have investigated the prolific circulation of these postcards and their power to create visual analogies between the Heimat and the colonies. Volker Langbehn’s 2010 edited volume brings together scholars working on a variety of visual representations of colonialism, such as film and television, maps, and satire magazines, from 1884 to the present. Joachim Zeller,

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61 Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).


through his studies of colonial monuments and of colonial trading card books, has shown
the pervasive presence of colonial imagery and symbols in everyday life in Germany.\footnote{Joachim Zeller, \textit{Kolonialdenkmäler und Geschichtsbewußtsein: Eine Untersuchung der kolonialdeutschen Erinnerungskultur} (Frankfurt: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2000); Joachim Zeller, \textit{Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen: koloniale Reklamesammelbilder} (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008).}

In his groundbreaking 2011 book, \textit{Advertising for Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany}, David Ciarlo presents the most methodologically rich study of images of empire in Germany to date.\footnote{David Ciarlo, \textit{Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).} Ciarlo traces the construction of a “consumer imaginary” through the relationship between advertising imagery and colonialism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany. Advertising images of Africans and the African colonies created what Ciarlo terms a “visual hegemony,” “a codification of representation so ubiquitous that those seeking to craft a representation need[ed] to deploy it to be easily understood.”\footnote{Ibid., 17.} To situate the creation of this visual hegemony, Ciarlo emphasizes the “historical dynamism of visuality,” that is how visual tropes shift and what political, cultural, and commercial factors are involved in these shifts.\footnote{Ibid.} Colonialist visual culture in the Third Reich not only built on this longer history of representing the overseas colonies, but also on the new visual conventions developed by the Nazi regime. In this study, I survey a wide range of visual representations of the


\footnotetext[65]{}{David Ciarlo, \textit{Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).}

\footnotetext[66]{}{Ibid., 17.}

\footnotetext[67]{}{Ibid.}
overseas colonies—graphics, photographs, and films. Through this visual culture, I explore not only how colonialists chose to represent the overseas colonies and their narrative of the colonial past, but also how these representations resonated within the broader visual culture of Nazi Germany.

While recent works on German colonialism greatly expand our understanding of the integral role of overseas colonialism to Germany, most concentrate on the period of “formal” colonialism, from 1884 to 1914/1919. Scholars are beginning to turn their attention to the colonialist movement in the Weimar Republic, and to the post-1945 period, but studies on the colonialist movement in the Third Reich remain limited and focus primarily on Nazi plans for future colonial rule rather than the domestic cultivation of colonialism. No thorough study of the Reich Colonial League exists to date, in part due to the destruction of the RKB’s organizational records during the Second World War.

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The present study draws extensively on the underused published organizational materials from the RKB held in the Library of the German Colonial Society in Frankfurt and in the Hoover Institution Library in Stanford, California. This perspective shifts our focus away from economic and political justifications for colonialism to the drive to create a uniquely German colonial character. It reveals how discourses and representations of Germans as colonizers created a German national identity that could be fulfilled not just within European borders but globally. Overseas colonialism continued to be an integral component of German national identity in the absence of colonies and despite the failure of colonialists in the Third Reich to reclaim the former colonies.

Tracing Colonial-National Socialist Continuity

This study examines the interactions between colonialists’ public discourse and Nazi ideology and state policy in the Third Reich. Imperial Germany’s defeat in the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles served as a catalyst both for the end of overseas colonialism and for the emergence of National Socialism. The relationship between colonialism and Nazism in the Third Reich can therefore illuminate underlying commonalities that speak to larger national and cultural concerns in Germany after the First World War. Some scholars, however, have searched for longer continuities and parallels between overseas colonialism and Nazism, reaching back into the imperial period. These scholars, following the lead of Jürgen Zimmerer, present a thesis of continuity between colonialism and the Third Reich that claims to explain the trajectory of the latter.
Zimmerer’s linkage of colonialism and National Socialism has sparked a great deal of debate. Zimmerer connects the Herero genocide in German Southwest Africa in 1904-1907 to the Nazi war of extermination in the East.\(^7\) He claims not only conceptual but also literal connections between German colonialism (and genocide) and Nazi genocide. Zimmerer identifies structural similarities between the two genocidal policies and methods of warfare such as the mental disposition to mass murder (stemming from Social Darwinism, ideas of space and race, etc.), the state as perpetrator, and the bureaucratization of the process of annihilation itself.\(^7\) Supporting Zimmerer, Benjamin Madley asserts that linguistic connections (such as the use of the terms “Lebensraum” and “Konzentrationslager”) demonstrate that German overseas colonialism, especially in German Southwest Africa, served as a model for Nazi colonialism and genocide in Eastern Europe.\(^7\) Zimmerer identifies colonial warfare and genocide as the “breaking of a taboo,” which made the Holocaust possible.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Ibid.


The most vocal advocates of a direct connection “from Africa to Auschwitz” have come under harsh criticism for their one-dimensional arguments and for foreclosing a deeper analysis of colonialism in German history. Birthe Kundrus proposes a model of transfer rather than continuity, pointing to several other simultaneous contexts of experience and meaning to contextualize the relationship between colonialist and National Socialist histories of violence. Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski stress the importance of the First World War in radicalizing racism and violence in Germany. For these scholars, a direct causal link between colonialism and Nazi genocide is too simplistic.

Approaching the question of continuity from the perspective of the 1940s, scholars such as Mark Mazower, Wendy Lower, and Kristin Kopp have begun to incorporate colonialism to re-conceptualize the Nazi war in Eastern Europe. As Mark Mazower observes,

75 These contexts include colonialism from the 1880s through the Nazi plans for Africa; the discourse on Eastern Europe from Imperial Germany through the Nazi war of extermination against the Soviet Union; the radicalization of anti-Semitism; the development of an industrialized and totalized warfare; and the “German Question” of how to create a nation and secure a place in the world for Germany. Birthe Kundrus, “Kontinuitäten, Parallelen, Rezeptionen: Überlegungen zur >>Kolonialisierung<< des Nationalsozialismus,” WerkstattGeschichte 43(2006), 53. See also Birthe Kundrus, “Kolonialismus. Imperialismus. Nationalsozialismus? Chancen und Grenzen eines neuen Paradigmas,” in Kolonialgeschichten. Regionale Perspektiven auf ein globales Phänomen, ed. Claudia Kraft, Alf Lüdtke, and Jürgen Martschukat (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010), 187-210.


For [the Nazis], empire was an “ideal”—or, to put it more bluntly, a violent fantasy of racial mastery, a demonstration of the prowess of a martial elite bred to lord over hundreds of millions of subjects. The Germans would have to be trained in these virtues, Hitler believed, in order to compete with the rulers of “great spaces” for the globe’s resources.  

Bringing colonialism into analyses of the Second World War in the East deepens our understanding of warfare and genocide to include the Nazis’ creative or regenerative goals for their occupation of Eastern Europe. Mazower’s observation also highlights the importance, for both colonialists and National Socialists, of training Germans as colonizers.

While Jürgen Zimmerer, Mark Mazower, and others have employed colonialism as a heuristic device to understand Nazi expansionism and genocide, this project uncovers discussions of language, history, culture, race, and politics in the public sphere that reinterpreted the substance of colonialism in the Third Reich. Making a claim of continuity between the first decade of the twentieth-century in Southwest Africa and the 1940s in Eastern Europe without incorporating the events of the intervening thirty years undermines this connection. Colonialists in Nazi Germany framed and reframed the German colonial past to serve their contemporary purposes. In colonialist propaganda, the colonial past both remained tied to the African context and also became extrapolated

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78 Mazower, Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe, 2.
as emblematic of an inherent German colonial character. The lessons of the colonial past that colonialists promoted included Germans’ ability to create and maintain a *Heimat* abroad, the need for *Lebensraum*, and a brand of racially-aware yet benevolent colonialism. These lessons had easily recognizable value in the Third Reich, a value that kept both their organizations and their demands comprehensible to the German public and the Nazi regime. Nostalgia peddled by colonialists framed overseas colonialism as a panacea for the problems of the present rather than a faithfully imparted account of the past.

**Chapter Outline**

In seven chronological and thematic chapters, I explore the colonialist organizations’ efforts to foster a German colonial identity in the Third Reich. The chapters are based on archival research in the records of the main colonialist organizations (German Colonial Society, Reich Colonial League, and the Office of Colonial Policy of the Nazi Party), the former Colonial Office (within the Foreign Office), the personal papers of Heinrich Schnee (president of the German Colonial Society and the Reich Colonial League until 1936), the German Colonial Society Library, and Nazi organizations responsible for propaganda. Twelve journals published by colonialists between 1933 and 1945, as well as several non-colonialist and Nazi journals and newspapers, provide a rich trove of cultural information. Targeting a variety of audiences and published in a variety of formats, these journals chronicle debates about the ideological direction of the movement and reveal the spectrum of colonialist
activities. Sources of colonialist visual culture, such as photographic travelogues, films, exhibitions, the German Colonial Society Picture Archive, and the illustrated magazine *Kolonie und Heimat*, show how colonialists depicted the overseas colonies to a metropolitan audience. To examine the responses of the Nazi Party and the general public to colonialists’ claims and activities, I utilize reports produced by the Socialist Party in exile, the secret domestic reports of the Security Service of the SS, the Propaganda Ministry’s press briefings, articles from non-colonialist newspapers, and the archives of the Reich Chancellery, the Finance Ministry, the Interior Ministry, and the Nazi Party’s Reich Organization Office (*Reichsorganisationsleiter*) and Reich Propaganda Office (*Reichspropagandaleiter*).

The marked focus in this study on the former African colonies rather than the Pacific territories, and within Africa on Southwest and East Africa over Togo and Cameroon resulted from several considerations. First, with the “scramble for Africa” in the late nineteenth-century, Africa became the object of European imperial ambitions and these colonies became prestigious territories in Germany’s overseas empire.79 Within Africa, the colonies of Southwest and East Africa served as the main settler colonies and so were tied most closely to the idea of maintaining Germanness abroad. The population of German settlers in the colonies in the imperial period never exceeded 12,300 in

Southwest Africa and about 4,000 in East Africa (in 1913), but the 1,600 Germans in Cameroon and 1,600 in the Pacific colonies paled in comparison. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the leaders of the colonialist movement had earned their colonial credentials in the African colonies. Heinrich Schnee, president of the German Colonial Society from 1930 to 1936, began his colonial career in New Guinea and Samoa, but was best known as the last governor of German East Africa, holding this post from 1912 to 1919. Franz Ritter von Epp, head of the Colonial Policy Office of the NSDAP and later head of the Reich Colonial League, had participated as an infantry company commander in the Herero genocide in Southwest Africa in 1904-1907. The frame of reference for these colonialist leaders, therefore, remained Africa, and specifically Southwest and East Africa.

The first chapter explores the stakes of the colonialist movement after the loss of the colonies in the Weimar Republic. How did colonialists begin to come to terms with the end of their personal and professional involvement in overseas colonialism? In this chapter, I employ Wendy Brown’s concept of a “wounded attachment” to explore how

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80 Of the total 19,696 Germans living in the African and Pacific colonies in 1913, William Otto Henderson estimates that over 3,000 of them were soldiers or policemen. In 1934, 16,774 Germans lived in the former colonies, 12,000 of whom in South West Africa. These statistics should be compared with the approximately one million Germans who immigrated to the United States between 1887 and 1906. William Otto Henderson, Studies in German Colonial History (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1962), 34-35.

81 Schnee’s predecessor, Theodor Seitz, German Colonial Society president from 1920 to 1930, had served as governor of Togo from 1907 to 1910 and of Southwest Africa from 1910 to the occupation of the territory by the British and South Africans in 1915.
German colonialist organizations managed their transition into the post-colonial period.\textsuperscript{82} For colonialists after 1919, the “wound” of the lost colonies continued to fester, making them unable to let go of this past and prompting them to convince the German public that losing the overseas colonies was a national tragedy. Colonialists framed this loss as symbolic of the injustice done to Germany by the Entente powers and claimed that Germany could only recover its economic status and national prestige by repossessing the overseas colonies. To maintain their continued agitation, colonialists increased their attempts to attract the support of the masses and to seek new political alliances, both efforts which would not bear fruit until after 1933.

The second chapter begins with the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 and examines the colonialist movement through 1935. Colonialists saw the Nazi takeover as fertile ground both ideologically and organizationally, and quickly adapted to their new reality in the early years of the Third Reich. Conflicts between colonialists and National Socialists continued over the next decade, however, in particular over colonialists’ focus on Africa rather than Eastern Europe. The colonialist organizations underwent their first (voluntary) \textit{Gleichschaltung} (coordination) in 1933, creating the Reich Colonial League as their new umbrella organization. They also expanded their publicity infrastructure to reach across Germany. Between 1933 and 1935, German colonialists established the

organizational structure and the propagandistic goal of a mass movement that would continue throughout the entirety of the Third Reich.

Turning to the content of colonialist discourse after 1933, the third chapter explores colonialists’ responses to Nazi racial laws (and to British responses to these laws) as they integrated Nazi racism into their narrative of peaceful German-African relations. Colonialists’ image of the German as a benevolent colonizer served as the lynchpin of their imagined colonial past. While holding to this image, colonialist authors and propagandists negotiated its fit within the racialized Nazi worldview. Their efforts to support former colonial subjects living in Germany brought the conflict between their benign narrative and the realities of the Nazi racial state into sharp relief. Differentiating between Africans and Jews, colonialist authors expressed support for anti-Semitism and framed Nazi racism as complementary with benevolent colonialism.

While colonialists publicly declared their close alliance with the Nazi regime, they still maintained their independent position within society until 1936, when the DKG and the dozen smaller colonialist organizations were forcibly “coordinated” into a unified Reich Colonial League. The fourth chapter addresses this coordination by following the efforts of Heinrich Schnee, DKG president, to halt its progress. Schnee considered this coordination premature as long as Nazi officials obstructed colonialists’ work and Hitler had not issued a declaration in support of the movement and the goal of reclaiming the overseas colonies. Ultimately unsuccessful, Schnee’s private and semi-public expressions of disapproval represent the last attempts of the colonialist organizations to retain their
organizational autonomy, with their traditional position and variety of duties in German society. The chapter ends with the contrast of the colonialist press’ public image of willing coordination.

Despite some colonialists’ initial objections, however, the 1936 *Gleichschaltung* led to an upsurge of colonialist propaganda and recruitment, with RKB membership peaking at two million in 1941. The fifth and sixth chapters examine the variety of propagandistic tactics employed by colonialists after 1936. Through these tactics, colonialists hoped to create an emotional investment in the overseas colonies among Germans.

Chapter 5 focuses on the scope and planning of RKB activities both for its members and for the general public. With its annual national congresses and training courses from the local to national level, the RKB strengthened its members’ commitment to the cause. The RKB also planned meetings, lectures, and exhibitions that would reach the general public and would align colonialists with the public activities of Nazi organizations, such as at the 1939 Dresden Colonial Exhibition. Through these activities, colonialists aimed to create a mass movement. They struggled, however, with the popularization of overseas colonialism and the circulation of cultural products that supposedly devalued the seriousness of the overseas colonies, which they termed “colonial kitsch.” Viewing themselves as an elite with privileged first-hand knowledge of the overseas colonies, colonialists questioned the sincerity of new supporters of their
cause and attempted to retain control over the kinds of colonialist publicity circulating in Germany.

Colonialists turned to visual culture, discussed in Chapter 6, to develop metropolitan Germans’ sense of identification with the faraway colonial territories. They mobilized a variety of visual forms, including posters, photography, and film, to reach Germans who had proven immune to their written and oral propaganda. Aided by the power of the image, colonialists believed, they could capture the attention of Germans, who would absorb their message uncritically and unconsciously. This visual culture created a dual image of a German Heimat in Africa, with separate but peaceful coexistence of German settlers with a native population that maintained its supposedly authentic Africanness.

The seventh chapter examines the colonialist movement during the Second World War, when the Nazi pursuit of race war and empire in Eastern Europe put colonialists under greater pressure to justify their African focus. While Africa remained a future possibility, Eastern Europe offered readily accessible territory for the fulfillment of colonial ambitions. Nonetheless, colonialist authors presented the outbreak of war as finally providing the opportunity to fulfill their irredentist demands, and so urged continued activism. Nazi officials, in particular within the Propaganda Ministry and the NSDAP’s Reich Propaganda Office, objected to colonialists’ persistent propaganda efforts that distracted attention from the more urgent needs of the war effort. Aided by the declaration of total war in the wake of the German defeat at Stalingrad, Martin Bormann,
Hitler’s deputy in the Reich Chancellery, shut down the colonialist movement in January 1943, ending sixty years of organized overseas colonialist agitation in Germany.

After the First World War, Germany lost its overseas territories, becoming Europe’s first post-colonial nation. Between 1933 and 1945, however, German colonialists advocated for the return of these colonies and for their central importance to Germany, and a vibrant two-million-strong colonial revisionist movement flourished in the Third Reich. In this study, I tell the paradoxical story of these colonialists’ construction of a German national character driven by overseas imperialism despite the absence of a colonial reality to support this identity. In contrast to views of colonialism as marginal in Germany after the First World War or of the colonialist organizations as completely subsumed under the Nazi regime, I uncover both the colonialist organizations’ continuing public presence and their assertive promotion of their overseas goals in the Third Reich. In doing so, this study also reveals the space available for debates over the contours of national identity in the public sphere of the Third Reich.

German colonialists, straddling between anachronistic fantasy and the National Socialist world-view, reintegrated overseas imperialism into Nazi Germany and thereby reinterpreted the meaning of Germanness. Mobilizing visual culture, exhibitions, rallies, training courses, press, and publications for their cause, German colonialists in the 1930s and 1940s proclaimed a new vision of German national identity that drew on the imagined glories of the past but also held out the promise of a revitalized future for Germany through Africa. They did so in concert and often in conflict with the Nazi
regime’s expansionist goals in Eastern Europe. Colonialists, however, elided disagreements in favor of projecting a public image that emphasized the deep interconnectedness of overseas colonialism and Nazi goals. Through their public agitation and cultural products, colonialists affirmed the continuing relevance of overseas colonialism to Nazi Germany.

Like the term Kolonialwaren on a KaDeWe receipt, the public culture of overseas colonialism in Nazi Germany explored in this study is at times both seemingly superficial yet packed with meaning, both very public yet seemingly without influence. Yet it is precisely in navigating this space between relevance and nostalgia, and between politics and culture, that the colonialist organizations in Nazi Germany were able to continue their propaganda efforts until 1943. In doing so, they reframed national identity in the Third Reich as colonialist, confirming to themselves and to the German public that “colonizers are born, not made.”

83 “Man wird zu einem Kolonisator nicht geschult, sondern geboren.” “Mitteilungsblätter, June 1940,” Koloniale Frauenenschule Rendsburg, DVII 942 161-350, Stadarchiv Rendsburg, Rendsburg, Germany.
Chapter 1: Colonial Guilt and Colonial Redemption: The Stakes of Overseas Colonialism in post-1919 Germany

With the stroke of a pen, Germany went from a colonial power to the first post-colonial state in Europe. While many Germans hardly noticed the change and some welcomed it, the now former colonial officials, settlers, and advocates experienced this transition as traumatic. Without overseas colonies, they had lost their careers, their homes, and their frame of reference for understanding their role in the German national project. The shock of this loss, coming as it did in combination with military defeat and revolution, motivated German colonialists to continue their agitation for overseas colonialism.

Given the arguably more urgent demands of economic stabilization and domestic order, colonialists gained little traction in the Weimar Republic until the years of stability, roughly 1924 to 1929. With the return of economic stability due to the Dawes Plan and the gradual reacceptance of Germany into the international community, Germans could again turn to the question of reclaiming their overseas empire—even as the pain of this loss began to fade with time for many. In the second half of the Weimar Republic, colonialists struggled to reestablish themselves after their shock of losing the colonies. In a new era of mass culture, they toyed with the idea of creating a mass movement, tried new tactics to reach the masses, and grappled with the baggage of their

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1 Germany’s reentrance into the international community was signaled by the Locarno Pact in 1925 and Germany’s entry into the League of Nations in 1926.
primarily elite demographic. These efforts proved largely unsuccessful, furthering the colonialists’ sense of their own oppositional position in the Weimar Republic. The experience of these years and their lack of success prompted colonialists to look for new political partners in the late 1920s and early 1930s, including the nascent Nazi Party.

The traumatic loss of colonies in 1919 followed by the apathy of German society outside of their elitist core created an atmosphere in which many colonialists welcomed the rise of National Socialism. In Hitler and his movement, colonialists saw a powerful foe of the Treaty of Versailles and an advocate for German territorial expansion as a central component of Germany’s resurrection as a world power. This potential alliance would find fulfillment when the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 eliminated alternative sources of political support. The experiences of the colonialist organizations in the Weimar Republic that had made them attempt to form an alliance with the Nazi Party in the late 1920s and early 1930s would remain into the Third Reich. These experiences shaped colonialists’ sense of Hitler’s support of their movement, their attitudes towards mass propaganda, and their perception of the importance of their demands to Nazi ideology. Colonialists’ encounters with international criticism, public apathy, and political ambivalence during the Weimar years are therefore crucial to understanding their actions and attitudes in Nazi Germany.
Experiencing Colonial Loss and Challenging Colonial Guilt

With the Treaty of Versailles, Germany became a “postcolonial state in a still-colonial world.” The European nations that surrounded Germany (and which Germans still considered their equals) maintained the world power status symbolized by overseas colonies. Furthermore, Germany had not lost its colonies to indigenous freedom movements—as other European imperial powers would decades later,—but to its European peers. Colonialists’ discourse after 1919 centered on overcoming this moment of decolonization and the concomitant loss in status in relation to other still-imperial European powers.

Germany’s transition from a colonial to a post-colonial power occurred within a period of continued European popular imperial propaganda. In Britain and France, the critical contributions of the colonies to victory in World War I emphasized the importance of the empire to the metropole in the interwar years. As Thomas August observes, “the Great War was in one sense therapeutic, even refreshing: it made Britons and Frenchmen stand up and take notice of their imperial realm…. [it] instilled the imperialist movement with a new energy, a sense of purpose, and above all a mission.”

This mission centered on a closer union between metropole and colony to achieve

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imperial self-sufficiency (or even autarky) as a cornerstone of national security. This imperial self-sufficiency included making economic use of the former German colonies, which had become British and French mandates. German colonialists vehemently objected to these plans, protesting against plans to form a “Closer Union” between the territory of Tanganyika (former German East Africa) and the British colonies of Kenya and Uganda in the late 1920s. While the imperial unity of the war years changed to claims (often associated with this wartime service) for increased rights and privileges and independence, pro-imperialist rhetoric in the interwar years in Britain focused on the beneficial nature of the British Empire.

The postwar attack on militarism after World War I has led many scholars to posit that popular imperialism did not survive after World War I. Instead, other scholars have recently shown, the image of empire in England and France in the interwar years forged a new relationship between the metropole and the empire (including the growth of the Commonwealth idea in the British Empire). Recent studies, such as those of August and Andrew Thompson have shown that “if anything the inter-war years witnessed a deeper cultural penetration of imperial ideals.” The 1920s also saw a rapid expansion of mass media (radio, film, mass press), of which colonialists in England, France, and Belgium

4 Ibid.

took advantage. Even mostly landlocked Poland began to assert overseas colonial ambitions in the late 1920s.  

German colonial comparisons, especially to the British, began as soon it became clear that the Entente powers intended to strip Germany of its overseas empire. In 1918, the Union of South Africa submitted a “Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and Their Treatment by Germany” (known as the 1918 Blue Book) to both houses of Parliament in London. After their forces had defeated the German army in Southwest Africa in 1915, the South African government decided that the territory should not be returned to Germany and so built a case against such an eventuality. Through the 1918 Blue Book, the South African government (and by extension the British, who supported its cause) documented the brutal injustices inflicted upon the local population under German rule. As Jan Smuts, the general who led the British troops in battle against German Southwest Africa, declared, “The British Empire is not founded on might or


7 This movement continued through the 1930s and received notice in the German colonialist press. Taras Hunczak, “Polish Colonial Ambitions in the Inter-War Period,” Slavic Review 26, no. 4 (December 1967): 648-656.  

8 Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald, Words cannot be found: German colonial rule in Namibia: an annotated reprint of the 1918 Blue Book (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), xv.
force, but on moral principles—on principles of freedom, equality and equity... Our opponent, the German Empire, has never learnt that lesson yet in her short history.”

Using documentary evidence and first-hand accounts, the Blue Book lambasted the German administration for its separate legal system for Africans and the Herero genocide in 1904-1907.

In response to the British Blue Book, the German Colonial Office published a White Book in 1919 delineating faults in the evidence of the Blue Book as well as highlighting atrocities in the British colonies. Dismissing the British Blue Book as a piece of war propaganda, the authors of the German White Book asked, “[i]s England of all nations called upon to sit in judgment upon questions affecting the treatment of native populations?”

Germans viewed themselves as equally successful colonizers as the British and rejected the latter’s ability to pass judgment on Germany’s colonial history.

The victors’ given justification for stripping Germany of its colonial possessions rested on two charges: Germans’ brutality towards their colonial subjects (which the Blue Book framed as colonial incompetency) and their militarization of the native population. The post-1919 colonialist movement thus began from a defensive position, always under

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9 Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932*, 160.

10 Silvester and Gewald, *Words cannot be found: German colonial rule in Namibia: an annotated reprint of the 1918 Blue Book*, xxx-xxxii.

pressure to demonstrate the speciousness of the Blue Book’s charges. In the mid-1920s, Heinrich Schnee, former governor of German East Africa, coined the phrase that encapsulated colonialists’ antagonism to the Blue Book and the larger context of opposition in which this colonialist movement emerged: the “colonial guilt-lie.” Schnee first used the term in January 1925, in an article in the Munich Süddeutsche Monatshefte, and published a tract in English entitled German Colonialism Past and Future in 1926. The term “colonial guilt-lie” referred both to the contents of the 1918 Blue Book and to the contemporaneous so-called “war guilt-lie,” by which Germans referred to Article 231 in the Treaty of Versailles that gave Germany sole blame for starting World War I. In his 1926 book, Schnee refuted this “guilt-lie” by providing complimentary assessments of German colonization expressed by Americans and Englishmen before the war, by denying outright the charge of militarization, and by comparing German and mandate rule to the benefit of the former. In 1926, the South African government suppressed the 1918 Blue Book as part of an effort to maintain the white solidarity between Afrikaners and Germans in Southwest Africa (a South African


13 Schnee’s book was also translated into Spanish and French and in 1932 into Italian. Erich Duems and Willibald von Steumer, Fünfzig Jahre Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, 1882-1932 (Berlin: Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, 1932), 114.

14 Schnee explicitly made this connection, stating, “For there rests upon the German nation just the same necessity of refuting the ungenerous fiction of ‘colonial guilt’ as of repudiating the charge that it alone must bear responsibility for the late war…” Heinrich Schnee, German Colonization, Past and Future: The Truth about the German Colonies (New York: Knopf, 1926), 50.
mandate since 1920). The government removed the Blue Book from libraries and destroyed the remaining copies.\textsuperscript{15} Yet colonialists in Germany continued to use widespread opposition to the “colonial guilt-lie” as a mobilizing factor in their propaganda through the 1940s.

On the European continent, the French occupation of the Rhineland in Germany from 1920 to 1923 further inflamed German humiliation at their loss of international status, particularly through the French use of soldiers from their African colonies. If, before the war, the world divided along the lines of colonizer and colonized—“imperial powers on this side, areas either colonized or destined to become so on the other”\textsuperscript{16}—the use of African soldiers to occupy the Rhineland indicated to Germans that they had moved from one side of this dichotomy to the other. Firstly, the use of these troops continued the militarization of the overseas colonies, which Germans rejected according to agreements signed at the Berlin Conference in 1884. In contrast to France and Britain, Germany had pointedly decided \textit{not} to employ indigenous forces in its European army, although it did use African soldiers in its colonial army. “The colonial military policies of the Allies,” historian Pascal Grosse observes, “ethnicized the military conflict and intensified the German understanding of the idea of the universal ‘struggle of the races’ [\textit{Rassenkampfes}]. Its symbolic materialization was the several hundred thousand colonial

\textsuperscript{15} Silvester and Gewald, \textit{Words cannot be found: German colonial rule in Namibia: an annotated reprint of the 1918 Blue Book}, xxx-xxxii.

soldiers that the Allies mobilized against the German Empire." To Germans, the use of these colonial soldiers on European soil, and to occupy a European nation represented a breach of white European solidarity. Together with German defeat, the presence of these African soldiers in Germany heightened the sense of the instability of these racial and national categories: Germany had gone from colonizer to colonized. German opponents of this occupation fomented a rape scare, indicating the racial, sexual, and gendered threat to the German nation that they perceived in this occupation. They saw the use of colonial troops as the first deliberate step in undermining the German nation (and by extension the white Western world) through racial pollution, thereby recasting Germany from a defeated nation into a heroic racial martyr.

17 "Die koloniale Militärpolitik der Alliierten ethnisierte daher den militärischen Konflikt und verstärkte im deutschen Verständnis die Idee des universellen >Rassenkampfes<. Seine symbolhafte Materialisierung waren mehrere hunderttausend Kolonialsoldaten, die die Alliierten gegen das Deutsche Reich aufboten.” Pascal Grosse, Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1850-1914 (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2000), 35.


19 Tina Campt, “Converging Spectres of an Other Within: Race and Gender in Prewar Afro-German History,” Callaloo 26, no. 2 (2003), 324.
In contrast to the British and French deployment of colonial soldiers on the European battlefield, Germans could reminisce about the heroic service of their colonial troops in Africa. In German East Africa, General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, his white German Schutztruppe (colonial troops), and about 1,200 African soldiers known as “Askaris” held off the British forces through 1918, only surrendering when news of the armistice in Europe arrived. Lettow-Vorbeck, an unconquered colonial hero, represented a bright spot of victory in an otherwise dark period of defeat. Regardless of their more complex motivations for fighting alongside the German colonial Schutztruppe, the Askari soldiers of German East Africa emerged from the war mythologized as the “loyal Askari” and as a symbol of German colonial aptitude. On March 2, 1919, Lettow-Vorbeck, accompanied by Governor Schnee, received a hero’s welcome when he marched triumphantly in a parade through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. The legend of the “undefeated German colonial soldiers” and their “loyal Askari”


21 See ibid.

22 Several scholars have recently explored the myth of the “loyal Askari.” Sandra Maß, Weiße Helden, Schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918-1964 (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2006); Moyd, “Becoming Askari: African Soldiers and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa, 1850-1918”; Susann Lewerenz, “‘Loyal Askari’ and ‘Black rapist’: two images in the German discourse on national identity and their impact on the lives of Black people in Germany, 1918-45,” in German Colonialism and National Identity, ed. Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2010), 174-186.
troops became part of the revisionist colonialist myth about German colonial rule in Africa and its end.\textsuperscript{23}

After 1919, German colonialists constructed a narrative of their colonial past that aggressively rejected all accusations of colonial brutality and mismanagement. Instead, they framed the colonial past—and by extension their argument for the return of the colonies to Germany—as a question of national honor as well as economic necessity. They argued for the return of the colonies by legal right as well as on grounds of national prestige. In stark contrast to British depictions of Germans as inept, colonialists posited themselves as exceptional, evidenced, for example, by the loyalty of the Askari soldiers. These aspects of the colonialists’ narrative remained largely unchanged into the Third Reich. Serving as advocates for this narrative, the colonialist organizations (many of whom had existed before 1914) began their work in the Weimar Republic with renewed vigor and sense of mission.

\textbf{Colonialist Organizations in the Weimar Republic}

Suddenly demoted from officials of a colonial empire to anachronistic figures left behind by the course of events, colonialists in the Weimar Republic rapidly assured their continuing relevance and gave meaning to their previous thirty-five years of colonial activity. Overseas colonialism had, as some scholars have argued, served to bridge

\textsuperscript{23} Lettow-Vorbeck was involved in the Kapp Putsch in 1920, which forced his resignation from the army, and continued to be active in the colonialist movement through the 1930s. Maß, \textit{Weiße Helden, Schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918-1964}, 3-4.
domestic social conflicts in Imperial Germany.\textsuperscript{24} Beginning in 1919, however, support for overseas colonialism became the basis of colonialists’ oppositional political identity. The loss of their livelihoods and careers heightened the importance of the overseas colonies for colonialists more than any event had during their active service.\textsuperscript{25} In fact, this loss marked their transition from \textit{colonists} to \textit{colonialists}, with all of the distance and abstraction that the latter implied rather than the concrete action of the former.

Colonialists extrapolated the trauma of losing the rationale for their professional existence into a collective national trauma. In this projection, we see the beginnings of a contradiction that would continue into the Third Reich. On the one hand, colonialists (especially those with experience overseas) felt that they had privileged (i.e. personal and/or expert and thereby often guarded) knowledge about the importance of overseas colonialism for Germany. On the other hand, they expressed a desire to cultivate this knowledge in the public sphere so as to regain their relevance. By foisting their personal trauma onto the German people as a whole, colonialists could give greater value to their experiences, but would also have to compromise some of the prized authority of their closeness to the colonies and the trauma of their loss.


\textsuperscript{25} Daphne Berdahl observed a similar process in a town in Germany, once on the border between East and West Germany. In order to give value to their experiences over the previous forty years—devalued in relation to the West of which they were now a part—villagers defended the socialist past and “[g]radually….these defenses frequently came to be expressed as nostalgia and mourning for an East Germany that had never existed.” Daphne Berdahl, \textit{Where the world ended: re-unification and identity in the German borderland} (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 219.
After 1919, colonialists turned overseas colonialism from a matter of economics and international diplomacy into a politicized and cultural identity in Germany. As articulated by Wendy Brown, a political identity formed out of a sense of marginalization or subordination becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion, augments or “alters the direction of the suffering” entailed in subordination or marginalization by finding a site to blame for it.26

The “wounded attachment” created between colonialists and the loss of the colonies became their raison d’être after 1919. The continuation of the colonialist organizations after the disappearance of the colonies they claimed to support centered on the experience of loss. The colonialist identity created after 1919 “[made] claims for itself only by entrenching, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics and [could] hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumph[ed] over this pain.”27 The full ramifications of the lack of a future inherent in a colonialist identity based on loss would not become clear until well into the Third Reich. Colonialist agitation after 1919 centered on transferring this pain to Germans so as to explain the urgent necessity of reclaiming the overseas colonies. “If,” as Nietzsche stated, “something is to stay in the memory, it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory.”28


27 Ibid.

28 Quoted in ibid., 390.
In civil society after 1919, colonialist organizations markedly increased their promotional output. Since the 1880s, they had mobilized support for overseas colonialism, mostly among middle-class Germans with ties to the colonies. The German Colonial Society (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, hereafter DKG) had led a number of smaller colonialist organizations after 1919 in protesting Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles. In 1922, twelve colonialist groups led informally by the DKG formed the umbrella Colonial Working Group (Koloniale Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft, hereafter KORAG) to coordinate their efforts in advocating colonial revisionism.

Most members of these organizations had previous experience or investment in the colonies, and their ranks now included former colonial officials and settlers deported back to Germany by British, French, and South African authorities. Theodor Seitz, former governor of Cameroon and German Southwest Africa, for example, served as DKG president from 1920 until 1930, when Heinrich Schnee, the last governor of German East Africa, took up the position. Close to twenty colonialist organizations represented a variety of interest groups. Despite the plethora of organizations, the number of colonialists active in these groups remained small, and many of the same people held memberships in numerous organizations. In 1926, the DKG had between

29 The Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft was founded in 1887.
30 Mary Townsend, “The German Colonies and the Third Reich,” Political Science Quarterly 53, no. 2 (June 1938): 188.
31 Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB) R 1001/6682, Bl. 5-9, 11-15.
20,000 and 30,000 members and the Frauenbund (Women’s League) of the DKG had 8,000 members (later reaching 20,000 in 1930). Socially, colonialists came almost exclusively from the leading administrative, military, and economic classes as well as the university-educated middle classes, with nearly ten percent from the aristocracy. While the organizations’ membership reflected an elite sector of society, the DKG made some attempts to spread their irredentism to a broader audience. After experiencing the government’s manipulation of information during the First World War, “propaganda was [perceived by Germans as] nothing less than a modern necessity, and indeed no less so in the realm of mass politics than in the sphere of commerce.” The conservative and bourgeois parties which represented the majority of DKG members were, however, according to one advertising journal, “dragged down by the lead weight of old-fashioned, hollow ideas from the realm of higher education and suffered from officialese [Papierdeutsch].” Throughout the Weimar Republic, the DKG made new attempts to overcome this lag in effective propaganda. In 1926, the DKG distributed 1.5 million flyers, published essays in over 100 newspapers, and distributed 3.5 million beer coasters.

32 Schmokel cites 30,000, while Hildebrand cites 16,000. Schmokel, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945*, 10; Frauenbund der DKG, *Jahresbericht 1929/1930*, BAB R 1001/6693, Bl. 284.


35 Quoted in ibid., 191.
printed with colonialist sayings to restaurants, taverns, and cafes to reach Germans who would not otherwise attend a colonialist rally or lecture.36 Flyers targeting women emphasized the availability of Kolonialwaren (colonial wares) such as coffee and chocolate, and other colonial goods like rubber and sisal.37 The DKG also financed Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte (World History as Colonial History), a 1926 silent film that demonstrated how many objects in everyday life came from colonial products, from a child’s rubber ball and baby bottle tops to cotton clothing and soaps.38 Through these efforts, the DKG hoped to convince larger sectors of the German public of the necessity of reclaiming the overseas colonies as a matter of legal right, national honor, and economic necessity.

The DKG’s propaganda had a limited effect, as indicated in a 1928 article in the society’s professional newsletter outlining the size of DKG branches in comparison with the total population.39 The DKG branches fall into four categories: (1) towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants; 2) from 10-50,000 inhabitants; 3) from 50-100,000 inhabitants; and 4) cities with over 100,000 inhabitants. The percentage of the population that had joined the DKG decreased as the size of the town increased. The highest percentage for a

37 Box 10, Koloniale Frage, German Subject Collection, Hoover Institution Archive, Palo Alto, CA.
38 Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte. Directed by Hans Cürlis, 1926; Berlin, Institut für Kulturforschung e.V.
town in category 1 reached 2%, decreasing to 1%, 0.45%, and 0.20% with each category. The article explained this phenomenon not as the result of greater competition among organizations and societies in larger cities (as this competition was often more acute in small towns), but as a result of declining interest in organizational life in urban areas. This argument overlooked the fact that larger cities, such as Berlin (whose DKG branch included a mere 0.05% of the four million inhabitants), had larger concentrations of groups that would have mounted opposition to the colonialists’ appeals, such as Communist and labor organizations.

The article framed the state of affairs positively, despite the numerically insignificant presence of the DKG in all categories of towns. The presence of branches in the border regions of the Pfalz, Upper Silesia, and East Prussia in the higher range of the membership statistics demonstrated the success of its propaganda. Furthermore, the author declared, the DKG’s membership numbers (vis-à-vis total population) compared favorably with other organizations in the Weimar Republic, such as the sports movement. The determinately positive tone of this article, however, could not hide the fact that the DKG had not succeeded in reaching most of the German population.

Anti-Imperialism and Colonial Skepticism in the Weimar Republic

In the Weimar Republic, despite the DKG’s efforts, overseas colonialism did not receive much popular support and, in fact, an active anti-imperialism movement emerged in Germany. Many Germans, in particular Socialists and Communists as well as those within political and business circles, expressed skepticism if not rejection of overseas
colonialism. In December 1927, the editors of *Europäische Gespräche* (a journal of international politics) published the responses to a survey they had sent to 200 leading German personalities, offering a rare snapshot of influential (middle and upper-class) German views on colonialism in the Weimar Republic. While the journal’s editors did not take a position either for or against overseas colonialism, their interest in knowing the views of Germany’s notables demonstrates that the “colonial question” remained under debate in the late 1920s.

Germany had joined the League of Nations in 1926, which afforded Germany a position of parity with other League members in pushing for the return of the colonies or at least for participation in mandate administration. *Europäische Geschichte*’s survey, consisting of three questions, covered the variety of colonial options believed available to Germany in its new international political position: 1) Should the German Reich aspire to the acquisition of colonies? If yes, on what grounds, if no, on what grounds? 2) Should the German Reich aspire to colonial activity in the form of a colonial mandate? If yes, on what grounds, if no, on what grounds? 3) Should the German Reich limit itself to claiming full equality for its subjects and its raw material supply with other nations in foreign colonies as well as in Mandate territories?

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40 *Europäische Gespräche. Hamburger Monatshefte für Auswärtige Politik* was a monthly journal on international politics published in Berlin-Grunewald by Verlag Dr. Walther Rothschild from 1924 to 1933.

While the editors sent surveys to 200 individuals, the journal printed only fifty responses.\textsuperscript{42} According to the editors, many of the non-respondants explained that they had not yet formed an opinion on the questions, while a number of economic leaders declined to answer on the grounds that they viewed the questions as purely political and so did not care to comment. This latter justification for non-participation indicates a general awareness of the overseas colonies’ insignificant economic value to Germany, despite colonialist propaganda. Similarly, the response that those asked had not yet formed an opinion can be interpreted as an indication that these respondents felt it impolitic to comment either for or against, a view hinted at by the editors.\textsuperscript{43} As the responses to the \textit{Europäische Gespräche} survey indicate, colonialists faced ambivalence if not opposition from many circles in Germany. Nonetheless, the survey itself indicates that overseas colonialism remained a debated issue in the late 1920s, one on which a disparate collection of leading Germans cared to comment. For colonialists, this

\textsuperscript{42} It is unclear whether the journal only received fifty responses or only chose to publish fifty. The editor’s introduction states, “Bei den fünfzig Antworten, die wir im Folgenden veröffentlichen.....” Ibid., 609.

\textsuperscript{43} “Bei den fünfzig Antworten, die wir im Folgenden veröffentlichen, mag der Leser bedenken, daß die beamteten Führer der Regierung nicht um eine solche Äußerung angegangen werden durften. Wir wollen nicht verschweigen, daß eine Anzahl der Befragten, bei denen ihre Bedeutung für Volk und Staat uns ihre Ansicht besonders wichtig gemacht hätte, die Antwort ausdrücklich mit der Begründung abgelehnt haben, daß sie sich noch kein Urteil gebildet hätten.” Ibid., 609-610.
discussion, even if not always in their favor, kept colonial revisionism in the public sphere.

Most respondents who favored continued German colonial activity had personal interests in the colonies, such as the former colonial governors Heinrich Schnee and Theodor Seitz, DKG members Konrad Adenauer and Max Cohen-Reuss, and the colonialist publishing house Safari Verlag. Their rationale centered on prestige, settlement of excess populations, and access to markets and raw materials. Some responses also focused on ethnic and cultural justifications for colonialism. Adenauer, for example, argued that “[i]t is precisely the daring, strongly progressive (vorwärtsstrebend) elements, those who cannot function domestically but instead find in the colonies a field for their activity, who go [abroad] and are permanently lost [without colonies].”

Philosopher Leopold Ziegler emphasized “the biopolitical necessity to retain for ourselves the colonial and colonizing type of person.” These answers reflected the core aspects of colonialists’ irredentist discourse after 1919, which centered on legalistic and economic justifications and on cultural and national honor.

Of the fifty responses to the journal’s three questions, however, over half responded negatively. Opponents fell into two camps: those who expressed pragmatic

44 “Gerade die etwas wagemutigen, stark vorwärtsstrebenden Elemente, die sich im Lande selbst nicht betätigen konnten, aber in den Kolonien ein Feld für ihrer Tätigkeit finden, gehen und dauernd verloren.” Response by Konrad Adenauer, ibid., 611.

45 “...die biopolitische Notwendigkeit, den kolonialen und kolonisierenden Typus Mensch uns selber zu erhalten.” Response by Leopold Ziegler, ibid., 674.
opposition and those who expressed ideological opposition. Many of the respondents in the pragmatic camp, such as the former (and future) Reich Chancellor Hermann Müller (SPD, 1920, 1928-1930), declared themselves ideologically in favor of colonialism, but not at the present time when Realpolitik made such plans unfeasible.\footnote{Responses by Reichskanzler a.D. Hermann Müller, ibid., 655.} According to those making pragmatic anti-colonial arguments, pursuing overseas colonialism would exacerbate tensions between Germany and other European nations, Germany no longer possessed the military force necessary to maintain overseas possessions,\footnote{As a condition of the Treaty of Versailles, the German army was restricted to 100,000 men, conscription was banned and the German navy was restricted in tonnage.} the German economy lacked the capital, and the colonies had neither proved terribly profitable nor had they provided settlement for large numbers of Germans. If, these respondents argued, one thought of politics as “the art of the achievable” or “the art of the possible,” then at the present colonialism represented neither an achievable nor a possible goal.\footnote{“die Kunst des Erreichbaren,” “die Kunst des Möglichen,” Responses by Reichskolonialminister a.D. Dr. Bell, M.d.R., and Noske, Oberpräsident, Hannover, “Soll Deutschland Kolonialpolitik treiben? Eine Umfrage”, 613, 656.} A few respondents, such as politician Paul Bang (DNVP) and public intellectual Harry Graf Keßler proposed Eastern instead of overseas colonialism, and Keßler and others such as Albert Einstein favored inner colonization.\footnote{The term “inner colonization” was introduced at the turn of the 20th century in Germany and referred to more intensive cultivation and settlement of eastern German provinces to avoid their “Polonization.” Responses by Paul Bang, Albert Einstein, and Harry Graf Keßler, ibid., 612, 626, 645.} Their pragmatic opposition foreclosed
overseas colonialism in the late 1920s when Germany faced other more pressing political, economic, and social concerns. But, the underlying assumption in these responses was that most of these respondents would support overseas colonialism if the domestic and international conditions proved more favorable. Colonialists could conceivably rely on these respondents to lend their support in the future.

Those in the ideologically anti-colonial camp proved more troubling for colonialists. These respondents believed that the era of colonialism had passed. Taking the side of the European colonial powers at the moment when colonial peoples had begun to declare their independence did not make sense, strategically to some and ideologically to others. “It is not Germany’s duty,” declared Professor Dr. M.J. Bonn,

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\text{to support with inadequate means a system that is dying off; rather [Germany] must, as ombudsman of peoples threatened by colonization and as leader of the states without colonies, do everything possible to smoothly lead the transition from the era of colonization to the era of anti-colonization.}^{50}
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Aligning themselves with emerging nations such as China served Germany’s best interests, as “in the international setting, the German overseas and foreign businessman is the most important advertiser for German world development—the colonist however only

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in close combination with [the businessman].” Supporting this view, most who answered no to the first and second question responded positively to the third question concerning the rights of Germans to operate economically as individuals in colonies. On the whole, according to novelist Thomas Mann, “events have taught many Germans to consider our freedom from colonial baggage as an advantage.” Rather than a national trauma, according to these well-respected respondents, Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles had given Germany increased freedom of movement in the “racial conflict” (Rassenauseinandersetzung) they saw coming in the future as colonial subjects demanded their independence.

The anti-imperialist movement, beginning to organize internationally in the late 1920s, appreciated Germany’s advantage, as Mann had described it, of no longer possessing overseas colonies. From the late 1920s until 1933, Berlin became the capital of European anti-imperialism. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union promoted anti-imperial and colonial independence movements as a step towards destroying the capitalist system in which imperialism served as a cornerstone. In 1926,


52 “Ich glaube, daß die Ereignisse viele Deutsche gelehrt haben, unsere Freiheit von kolonialen Gepäck als einen Vorteil zu empfinden.” Response by Thomas Mann, ibid., 652.

the Comintern supported the foundation of the League against Colonial Oppression (*Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung*).\(^{54}\) The Comintern based its choice of Berlin for the headquarters of this League precisely on the fact that Germany was no longer a colonial power, believing that this status would add greater credence to the League’s activities. As George Padmore, Trinidadian member of the Comintern, described, “it was thought that an anti-imperialist call coming from Berlin would arouse less suspicion among colonial and dependent peoples than one coming from Western European capitals—London or Paris—possessing overseas empires.”\(^{55}\) As the first post-colonial state, the Weimar Republic could serve, as Paul Bonn had stated in the *Europäische Gespräche* survey, as the “ombudsman of peoples threatened by colonization and as leader of the states without colonies.”\(^{56}\) As the international communist movement saw Weimar Berlin as the source of an authoritative voice against imperialism, colonialists had every reason to worry about the apathy of Germans towards their demands.

While the German Socialists should—ideologically—have supported the Communists’ anti-imperialism, some Socialists (in Germany and in other European

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countries) to support what they termed “socialist imperialism.” Before the First World War, both the center and left of the German Socialist Party had theorized imperialism in ways that gave it an important role in Imperial Germany. On the left, Rosa Luxembourg, among others, rejected imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. Others on the left argued that “imperialism was the historically necessary and inescapable precursor to revolution and socialism, that German capitalists were serving the general interest in challenging Britain’s industrial monopoly and maritime supremacy, [and] that socialist opposition to imperialism and war was futile, utopian and un-Marxist.” This argument was double-edged; through this position, as Roger Fletcher observes, “such writers lent powerful support to the cause of Wilhelmine expansionism.”

In the center, Socialists such as Karl Leuthner and Eduard Bernstein saw imperialism as a potentially productive rather than inherently negative policy for Germany. Leuthner emphasized the national identity of German workers, arguing that “the triumph of the proletarian cause was directly dependent on German living space (Lebensraum), for socialism presupposed economic prosperity far more than it did a libertarian constitution.” Furthermore, arguing for expediency, Leuthner posited that

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57 Lenin outlined these arguments in a 1916 essay entitled *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.*


59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 93.
taking on a nationalist foreign policy position would gain Socialists popular and even bourgeois support, and would thereby bring them into power.\textsuperscript{61} While more interested in internationalism than Leuthner, Bernstein viewed colonialism as not necessarily deleterious. The dangers of weakening the metropole through excessive expansion, of fostering international conflicts, and of abusing colonial subjects did not as such argue against colonialism as a whole. Bernstein believed that “the advantages of colonization could be achieved without them.”\textsuperscript{62} Numerous factions within the pre-1914 German Socialist Party therefore supported overseas imperialism—the left as capitalism’s weapon of its own destruction, the center out of expediency or nationalism.

After the First World War, the ruling Social Democratic Party had to adopt more nationalist and conciliatory positions. The Socialist Party, unlike the Communists, joined the Inter-Party Colonial Association formed in the Reichstag in 1925. While Hermann Müller rejected colonialist demands on behalf of the Socialists in 1928, other Socialists advocated “colonialism without imperialism.”\textsuperscript{63} Max Cohen-Reuss, Socialist Reichstag representative, led these colonially-inclined Socialists. In the \textit{Sozialistische Monatshefte} and in his response to the 1927 \textit{Europäische Gespräche} survey, Cohen-Reuss outlined an idealized conception of overseas colonialism, in which Germany could secure the

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\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{62} Quoted in ibid., 161.
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\textsuperscript{63} David Thomas Murphy, \textit{The Heroic Earth. Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933} (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1997), 211.
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quantities of raw materials necessary to feed the increasing industrialization without resorting to the international market. Through this colonialism, Cohen-Reuss proposed, Germany could contribute to a partnership with England, France, and Italy in the European task of African colonization, and Africans could realize their full economic potential under the beneficent guidance of Germany (and the other European powers). The era of the “the Whites’ previous commonly accepted primitive methods of exploitation” was over: “In the future the only possibility is cooperative work between colonizers and natives.”

While Cohen-Reuss’s support of overseas colonialism rested in large part on economic arguments, he and other Socialists associated these economic concerns with larger questions of nationalism. Socialists who supported colonialism differentiated between social colonialism and imperial colonialism. “Social colonialism” connected falling birth-rates, eugenics, and the “quality” of Germans to colonial territories, rather than the purely economically exploitation implied by the designation “imperial colonialism.” Cohen-Reuss, for example, saw the potential for future mass settlement in the colonies as a strengthening component in the “cultural and economic connection with


65 Murphy, The Heroic Earth. Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933, 210-211.
Socialist supporters of overseas colonies distinguished between colonialism and imperialism, presaging the Nazi linkage of imperialism with economic rather than ethnic or cultural values. The infiltration of geopolitical and Darwinist terminology into the colonialists’ discourse in the 1920s helps to explain this seemingly illogical alliance of Socialism and imperialism. Socialists in the Weimar Republic also supported Social Darwinist-inspired movements like eugenics as efforts that would help regulate society and lead to the betterment of society and of German workers in particular, goals which they argued could also be achieved through their model of “social colonialism.”

The only unequivocally anti-imperialist voice in the Weimar Republic thus came from the Communist Party, which received very little support from mainstream German society and none from the circles in which colonialists sought endorsement. If the middle and upper-class German views expressed in the Europäische Gespräche survey were in part unsympathetic to overseas colonialism, colonialists faced stronger opposition from the working classes—even with the support of Socialists like Max Cohen-Reuss. Despite their efforts at popular propaganda, by the late 1920s the colonialist organizations led by the DKG risked atrophy.

For many working-class (especially Communist) Germans, overseas colonial ambitions held no value or, in many cases, negative connotations. In the abovementioned

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survey, for example, the colonialist publishing house Safari Verlag reported that interest
in the reacquisition of the colonies in the German readership had decreased sharply in the
last five years. Safari speculated that this decline resulted from the fact that wide circles
of the working class decried lobbying for new colonial territories as reactionary.\textsuperscript{67}

Associated with international business and capital, colonialism seemed to hold no
advantage for the working class. Hans Reepen, editor of the journal \textit{Afrika-Nachrichten},
expressed this concern in 1928, stating, “[i]t cannot be enough to hold together those who
adhere to the colonial idea because of tradition or of society membership [\textit{Gesellschaftszugehörigkeit}].” Colonialists’ inability to win the German working class
weakened their cause and Reepen blamed the movement’s leaders: “Our leaders, who in
most cases are respected colonial officials, find favor among their peers to be sure, but
not in the working class or in the parties that distinctly represent the working class.”\textsuperscript{68}

The DKG and other colonialist organizations had trouble convincing the broader
German public of the urgency of overseas colonialism. At the same time, the extreme
right and left-wing parties (Nazi and Communist), with their open opposition to the

\textsuperscript{67} Safari also reported that interest in colonialism remained stronger in northern Germany than in the south. Response by Safari-Verlag, Berlin, ibid., 659.

\textsuperscript{68} “....Es kann nicht genügen, die zusammenzuhalten, die aus Tradition oder Gesellschaftszugehörigkeit dem kolonialen Gedanken anhängen....Es ist nicht gelungen, die deutsche Arbeiterschaft zu gewinnen. Das ist das Grundübel, an dem der deutsche Kolonialgedanke krank ist. Fast will es scheinen, als fehlte es uns an kolonialen Führern, die aus dem Volke heraus im Volke wurzeln und im Volke eine Stimme haben. Unsere Führer, die den meisten Fällen verdiente Kolonialbeamte, finden wohl ein Echo unter ihresgleichen, nicht aber in der Arbeiterschaft oder den Parteien, die nun einmal ausgesprochen die Arbeiterschaft verkörpern...” Quoted in Hildebrand, \textit{Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945}, 96.
Republic and efforts to mobilize the masses, were increasingly popular and won greater representation in the Reichstag. For colonialists, the new times called for a different tactic. 69

Aware of their political and social position in Germany, the member organizations of the KORAG met in Cologne in 1928 to approve a new “General German Colonial Program” that asserted the unity of the various colonialist organizations, but also refuted accusations of colonialists’ retrograde (gegenwartsfremd) nature which made them unable to prepare for a colonial future. 70 At this stage of the Weimar Republic, the colonialist organizations realized that their activism would have to function differently than in the imperial era. As Hans Zache explained in his accompanying comments to the Program,

*Today….we live in a democratically governed state, in which the will of the people tips the scales. The will of the people, however, finds its expression in the political parties. For over forty years the German Colonial Society has exerted itself to win the people in its entirety to the colonial idea; then new organizations emerged that set the same goal for themselves, which they also did not achieve. I am convinced that one can only succeed with the goals reversed: first one must win the leader, then one also wins the people.* 71 (emphasis in original)

69 As Kenneth Holston reflects on this period, “the DKG’s tried-and-true compound of publicly disavowing partisan politics while working behind the scenes to effect its agenda, proved superannuated.” Holston, “‘A Measure of the Nation’: Politics, colonial enthusiasm and education in Germany, 1896-1933,” 259.


Zache advocated the politicization of the DKG and the KORAG as the method to reach the politicized masses of the late Weimar Republic.

First read at the Cologne Colonial Congress, the KORAG then published the “General German Colonial Program” in pamphlet form (together with DKG president Seitz’s opening remarks, Zache’s comments, and explanatory notes on the colonial program from a selection of professions). In this format, colonialists intended this Program to be read not only by other colonialists but more importantly by the German public more broadly. The Program represented a rebranding of colonialism as the solution to Germany’s problems. The concluding notes on the Program from representatives of trade, industry, and the scientific and other professions served as endorsements of the Program and the colonialist movement from these fields. These endorsements, former colonial governor Theodore Seitz asserted in his closing remarks, indicated that “the majority of the German Volk endorses our Program,” increasingly the working classes as well.72 (emphasis in original)


The General Colonial Program and colonialist discourse more broadly addressed general German insecurities in the Weimar Republic, offering the reclamation of overseas colonies as the solution to each concern. According to Seitz, the KORAG had formulated the Program after “careful assessment of the contemporary general political, colonial political, and economic situation.” (emphasis in original) In this way, colonialists explained that they based their revisionism on the needs of the German present and not merely on their personal colonial nostalgia. The Program outlined colonial claims made on the basis of law (Rechtsansprüche) and those made on the basis of supposed necessity. Legal claims (also tied to the issue of German honor) consisted of the revision of Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles and the transfer of the mandates to German control after Germany had joined the League of Nations (which thereby classified it as a member of the “advanced nations”). The argument for Germany’s colonial necessity centered on the maintenance of the German economy, on ensuring world peace, and on the participation of Germany in the duties of the developed nations (Gemeinschaftsarbeit der


All of these issues would have found resonance with a general German audience, who may not have previously considered colonialism as the primary guarantee of Germany’s international status. By emphasizing current need over past legal right, DKG General Secretary Erich Duems explained in his comments, the program spoke to the present, representing “not only a new tactic, but also a fundamental readjustment.”

(emphasis in original) Through this Program, the member organizations of the KORAG gave their demands current and future significance so as to assert their critical nature to all Germans. As Hans Zache had declared in his introduction to the Colonial Program, colonialists had to target the political parties in order to access the public through their leaders.

Colonialists and National Socialists in Weimar Germany

In the late Weimar Republic, colonialists faced an array of potential political allies. Most political parties called for the return of the German colonies as a default political position. Given the strong association between this issue and the Treaty of Versailles, politicians did not dare support an anti-colonial stance for fear of being branded pro-Versailles—an almost universally unfavorable position in the Weimar


Republic. In 1925, representatives from political parties ranging from the German nationalists to the Socialists had formed the Inter-Party Colonial Association (Interfraktionelle Koloniale Vereinigung).\(^77\) The center-right German People’s Party (Deutsche Volkspartei, DVP) displayed the strongest commitment to colonial revision, with the right-wing German National People’s Party (Deutschenationale Volkspartei, DNVP) committed at least in principle as part of their nationalist program. Continuing to the center and the left on the political spectrum, members of the Catholic Center Party, the conservative Catholic Bavarian People’s Party, the left-wing German Democratic Party (Deutsche Demokratische Partei, DDP), and the Socialist Party (SPD) expressed more contested and equivocal support for colonial revision. Only the Communist Party abstained from the coalition.\(^78\) While their party programs supported colonial revisionism, Reichstag representatives of the ostensibly pro-colonial political parties rarely raised the topic.\(^79\) Weimar politicians therefore expressed widespread though often passive support for colonial revision.

Colonialists assessed the suitability of each political party as a recipient of their support. In advance of the April 1932 Landtag (state parliament) elections in Prussia and other states, the DKG organizational newsletter (Mitteilungen der Deutschen

\(^{77}\) Schmokel, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945*, 11.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 11-14.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 14.
Kolonialgesellschaft) urged the DKG’s members to press their political parties to take a position on the “colonial question.” While the Landtag chosen through these elections did not deal with foreign policy, the article stated, “…it is by no means unimportant how the majority of the state parliaments and the governments that they support stand in terms of colonial demands.”\(^8^0\) (emphasis in original) Furthermore, the article stated, DKG voters had to ensure the high representation of those parties from the right and the “middle-class center” in each Landtag.

To better inform the voting choices of the colonialist voting bloc, the DKG newsletter evaluated each political party’s position on colonialist demands, concluding that “this opinion is positive in all parties from the NSDAP to the State Party [on the political spectrum], evasive in the Social Democratic Party, and one of rejection in the Communist Party.”\(^8^1\) The journal reprinted the stated positions of those parties from the right to center which included colonialism in their party platform: the Nazi Party (NSDAP), the German National People’s Party (Deutsche Nationale Volkspartei, DNVP), the German People’s party (Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP), the Economic Party (Wirtschaftspartei), the Bavarian People’s Party (Bayerische Volkspartei), the Catholic Center Party (Zentrumpartei), and the German State Party (Deutsche Staatspartei). Each


of these political parties supported the return of the overseas colonies, making the Nazi Party one of a number of potential political allies in the late Weimar Republic.

With the beginning of their electoral breakthrough in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Nazi Party began to come to colonialists’ attention as a potential ally and solution to their problems mobilizing the public. The Party’s 1920 program appeared to take a decisive stand in support of reclaiming the overseas colonies, declaring in Point 3 that “[w]e demand land and territory (colonies), to feed our people and in which to settle our excess population.” But as all political parties in the Weimar Republic excluding the Communists made such (often token) claims to protest against the Treaty of Versailles, Point 3 of the 1920 program alone did not make the Nazi Party as an exceptional supporter of colonialism. Before 1928, furthermore, the Nazis had ignored colonialist issues. While a proponent of German territorial expansion, Hitler, in Mein Kampf (1925/26), flatly denied an overseas focus in favor of a “soil policy of the future” in Eastern Europe. Rejecting Germany’s pre-1914 foreign policy, Hitler declared that Germany would “[take] up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east.”82 While advocating the overturn of the Treaty of Versailles and irredentism in general, Eastern European territorial expansion took precedent for Hitler and the NSDAP over the history of German overseas expansion.

By 1928, colonialists had begun to look for ways to revitalize their movement, as seen through the General Colonial Program. While the NSDAP had not yet achieved the peak of their parliamentary success, they began to appear as a potential alternative to some colonialists.\textsuperscript{83} The relationship between colonialists and the Nazi Party in the late 1920s and the early 1930s rested on a selective support on both sides. Hitler and the growing Nazi Party would have been happy to have the colonialists’ support but not at the expense of prioritizing Eastern Europe over overseas colonies (an attitude that would continue after 1933). Colonialists identified with the Nazis’ irredentism, but did not wholeheartedly support all points of the Nazi program, as seen by the absence of overt anti-Semitism or discussion of Jews at all among colonialists. The DKG welcomed the support of its Jewish members such as Max Cohen-Reuss. The Nazi Party offered the promise of political support but did not yet represent the ideal partner for the colonialists.

Franz Ritter von Epp, former colonial soldier and *Freikorps*\textsuperscript{84} leader, served as the linchpin between the two groups, facilitating their interactions. In 1928, Epp had joined the Nazi Party in order to stand for Reichstag elections as a candidate from Bavaria. Born in Munich in 1868, Epp had had a long military career, serving both in the colonies and


\textsuperscript{84} Voluntary paramilitary groups composed of demobilized soldiers that formed after the end of the First World War who fought with Communists.
in Germany. He had served in 1900 as a member of the German East Asian expeditionary forces sent to repress the Boxer Rebellion in China, took part in the war against the Herero in Southwest Africa between 1904 and 1906, and commanded the Bavarian Infantry Guard Battalion in France, the South Tirol, Serbia, and Romania during the First World War. After WWI, Epp formed an eponymous Freikorps regiment, which fought in the Ruhr and Hamburg. In October 1923, Epp retired from the army as a lieutenant general (Generalleutnant) and became the head of the League of Colonial Soldiers in 1925.

Briefly a member of the conservative and monarchist Bavarian People’s Party (BVP), Epp joined the NSDAP on May 1, 1928. Although Epp aligned himself with the ideological goals of the Nazi Party, his support also furthered his self-serving ambitions. In this way, he epitomized a characteristic response of conservative nationalist Germans to National Socialism. With his entrance into the Nazi Party, Epp represented the point of connection between colonialists and National Socialists in the Weimar Republic. The Nazis gained some legitimacy through their support of Epp as their Reichstag candidate (he was known and respected among the Bavarian middle-class, and had good relations with the people, those in power, and with the military). To build on this support, Hitler

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appointed Epp as Reich Governor (*Reichsstatthalter*) of Bavaria in April 1933. With their support for Epp, the Nazis also had to engage with colonialism, at least tactically.\(^{87}\)

In the last years of the Weimar Republic, other colonialists began to cultivate relationships with leading Nazi officials. For example, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels records meeting with Heinrich Schnee seven times in November and December 1932, often engaging in long conversations. Goebbels described him as “a special, puzzling person. Full of contradictions and ludicrousness. But nonetheless sympathetic.” \(^{88}\) Goebbels held a similar opinion of Epp, describing him as “very clever and clear” and “a good guy” (*ein guter Kerl*). \(^{89}\) Goebbels’s opinion of Epp would dampen somewhat after 1936, when he began to assert his colonial demands more vigorously as head of the Colonial Policy Office of the NSDAP and the Reich Colonial League. In the years leading up to the Nazi seizure of power, however, both men sought the favor of leading Nazis such as Goebbels in order to ensure the Nazi Party’s support for their cause.

Sometimes the Nazi Party’s support seemed confused or contradictory. In August 1928, for example, Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg published an article in the Nazi

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\(^{87}\) Ibid.


\(^{89}\) Entry for November 23, 1932, Ibid., 66; Entry for March 23, 1933, Ibid., 153.
newspaper Völkischer Beobachter entitled “Colonial Treason” (Kolonialverrat). Although he misidentified the statement on colonialism in the 1920 Party Program as Point 1 rather than Point 3, he reiterated the importance of reclaiming the overseas colonies to the Nazi Party. Rosenberg qualified this support, however, by emphasizing the Nazis’ desire for settler colonies in the “Polish-Czech direction” (polnisch-tschechischer Stoßrichtung) rather than in Africa, and suggested that the question of the return of all of the former colonies or of a proper compensation for their loss remained open.90 Public acts of support, such as the Nazis’ protest in 1930 in the Reichstag against the British plan of Closer Union between its colonies of Kenya and Uganda and the former German colony of East Africa (now Tanganyika), would have publicly aligned colonialists with National Socialists.91 Organizationally, colonialists also began to cultivate ties with the Nazi Party. In February 1932, Erich Duems, DKG General Secretary, organized a speakers’ bureau with the propaganda administration of the Gau Berlin of the NSDAP to provide colonialist lectures to Nazi organizations.92


92 Because of the presidential election in March and April 1932, the activities of this speakers’ bureau were delayed, but 26 lectures were held between October 1932 and May 1933. “Bericht über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschuss am 3. Oktober 1933,” BAB R 8023/712, Bl. 222-223.
By 1932, colonialists counted the Nazis among their supporters, but understood that, for the Nazis, the Eastern territories had priority over the overseas colonies. However, the Nazi Party’s position on colonial territories still appeared open to discussion. Some in the Party, for example, argued that reclaiming the colonies first would provide the raw materials and markets necessary to conquer the East, or that the meaning of the colonies lay in their spiritual and nationally instructive importance.\textsuperscript{93} As with other aspects of their electioneering in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Nazis’ message on colonialism proved sufficiently vague to allow colonialists to read their own desires into the Nazi Party. This continuing discussion encouraged colonialists to take hope in the Nazi Party as the political vehicle needed for the fulfillment of their colonial demands. When Hitler’s machinations led to the formation of a new cabinet with him as chancellor in January 1933, the colonialists’ investment in garnering the support of the Nazi Party paid off. The new government promised to overturn the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and return Germany to its place as world power and colonialists hoped to be part of this process.

\textsuperscript{93} Erich Duems described the relationship of the Nazis to colonialism as still open to discussion: “Aus dieser Erklärung ergab sich die wesentliche Feststellung, dass die nationalsozialistische Bewegung die Notwendigkeit deutscher Raumerweiterung bejaht, diesen Raumgewinn sowohl im Osten des Reiches wie in Übersee erstrebt, der Ostraumpolitik aber den Vorrang vor der Kolonialpolitik zuerkennt. Über diese Frage setzt eine lebhafte Erörterung innerhalb der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung ein, wobei für die Kolonialpolitik geltend gemacht würde, dass kolonialer Raum unter den gegebenen politischen Verhältnissen eher zu gewinnen sei als Ostrum, eine grosszügige deutsche Ostopolitik nicht ohne die Schaffung eigener überseeischer Rohstoff- und Absatzgebiete möglich sei, und dass die besondere Bedeutung kolonialer Raumerweiterung gegenüber einer rein kontinentalen Raumpolitik, abgesehen von ihrer wirtschaftlichen Notwendigkeit vor allem auf geistigem und nationalerzieherischem Gebiete liege.” Duems and Steumer, \textit{Fünfzig Jahre Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, 1882-1932}, 112.
Conclusion

Looking back on fifty years of colonial activism in Germany in October 1932, and in particular on the previous thirteen years since the loss of the overseas colonies, Erich Duems, General Secretary of the DKG, lamented the “abysmal despondency” (grenzenlose Mutlosigkeit) in Germany brought on by the Treaty of Versailles.\(^9^4\) This despondency affected colonialist circles as well, leading to resignation regarding the colonial future. More threatening for the DKG, “…voices [were] getting louder that [said] that the duties of the German Colonial Society [were] now at an end and its dissolution [was] the necessary consequence of the circumstances created by the Versailles Diktat.”\(^9^5\) Despite the DKG’s attempts to escape its elitist reputation by launching major propagandistic drives throughout the 1920s, the DKG had not created a colonialist mass movement. Nevertheless, Duems rationalized his disappointment. He distinguished between a visible and invisible colonial front, between the small colonial vanguard (made up of the DKG and the other colonial organizations) and the reserve (made up of the majority of the population, which stood ready to be deployed when the “colonial hour” came).\(^9^6\) Erich Duems concluded his review of the DKG’s recent history

\(^9^4\) Ibid., 59.

\(^9^5\) “...es wurden Stimmen laut, die der Meinung Ausdruck gaben, nun sei die Aufgabe der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft beendet und ihre Auflösung sei die notwendige Folge des durch das Versailler Diktat geschaffenen Zustandes.” Ibid.

\(^9^6\) Ibid., 101.
with the hope that the future would bring better times for the DKG and for colonialists in general:

When the German Colonial Society entered the fourth decade of its existence, the political heavens of Germany were full of heavy clouds and the possibility of a colonial revision lay in the misty distance. At the end of the fifth decade of its existence, let the German Colonial Society be able to say that it inaugurates [this decade] with brighter prospects of at long last a victory in the colonial matter, not the least thanks to its untiring efforts to raise awareness both in Germany and abroad.97

A few months after Duems published these reflections, Hitler and the Nazi Party seized power. In its fifth decade, the colonialist movement entered a new stage in its activism, one which would bring them unparalleled success and the promise of erasing the trauma of 1918, but which would not completely remove the obstacles to their efforts to spread the colonialist message to the entire German Volk.

Chapter 2: “To be national means to be colonial.” Gleichschaltung and the Beginnings of a Mass Movement, 1933-1935

Hitler’s appointment as chancellor on January 30, 1933 ushered in the golden age of German colonialist activism. Colonialists in Germany welcomed the Nazi takeover in January 1933, believing that it provided an ideologically and organizationally fertile environment in which to promote their cause. By the last years of the Weimar Republic, colonialist leaders had reconciled themselves to a political atmosphere no longer conducive to the fulfillment of their demands. In 1929, Theodor Seitz (president of the DKG) and Franz von Epp (head of the League of Colonial Soldiers [Kolonialkriegerbund]) argued that, because the current government did not support colonialist claims, “strident opposition” (scharfe Opposition) to the policies of the government remained the only available option.¹ The Weimar Republic represented a period of politicians’ empty words (when they did not completely ignore the movement) and frustrations for colonialist activists.

In Nazi Germany, by contrast, colonialist revisionism fit within National Socialism’s aggressively anti-Versailles program to resurrect Germany, ensuring colonialists of the new regime’s tolerant, if not always enthusiastic, support. Reciprocally, many colonialists viewed the Nazi takeover as validation of both National Socialism and colonialism. In the early years of the Third Reich, the colonialist

¹ Karsten Linne, Deutschland jenseits des Äquators? Die NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008), 24-25.
movement quickly adapted to its new reality. The main organizations restructured themselves to cooperate with the formations of the Nazi Party and state through a process of “self-coordination” (*Selbstgleichschaltung*).

Synchronizing all aspects of society to create a unified, mobilized *Volksgemeinschaft* (ethnic community), the Nazi Party and state utilized a process of *Gleichschaltung* or “coordination.” During the early years of the Third Reich, the Nazis “coordinated” most aspects of German associational, professional, economic, and cultural life. For example, after September 1933, all Germans working in the fields of literature, fine arts, music, radio, theater, film, and the press had to join the Reich Chamber of Culture under Propaganda Minister Goebbels to continue their professional careers. As a result of these organizations’ *Gleichschaltung*, only Party members could serve as organizational officers, all agendas required approval by the appropriate Party or state authorities, and the organization had to expel all non-Aryans. By co-opting groups into the National Socialist organizational universe and unifying all aspects of civil, political, cultural, and economic life along the “Party line,” *Gleichschaltung* offered the surest way to suppress opposition. Ultimately, organizations confronted with *Gleichschaltung* had few options; they could either “coordinate” or dissolve themselves. Faced with the prospect of *Gleichschaltung* or dissolution, some groups took preemptive action and reorganized themselves along the lines demanded by *Gleichschaltung* in the

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phenomenon of “self-coordination” (Selbstgleichschaltung). Some chose this path because of ideological loyalty, or to avoid the new regime’s attention, or because they (like the conservative politicians who had arranged Hitler’s appointment as chancellor) believed that they could still assert some control through their Selbstgleichschaltung.³

German colonialists’ Selbstgleichschaltung was motivated by their belief that the Nazi Party represented the best government for the colonialist cause because of both groups’ advocacy of irredentism and national regeneration. Through their Selbstgleichschaltung, colonialists believed that they had maintained their organizational autonomy, but that, by doing so, they could wield increased influence through their affiliation with the Nazi regime. At the 1934 Colonial Congress in Kiel, for example, Erich Duems exuberantly described the utopian era in which colonialist propagandists supposedly found themselves:

…Today the unity of the nation has produced the unity of will, and colonial propaganda no longer has to agonize [zu ringen] about the acceptance of its colonial demands. On the topic of colonialism there are no longer two enemy fronts facing one another, but rather today [colonial] propaganda can occur in close cooperation with the organizations of the new Volksgemeinschaft. [If] the German Colonial Society [was] a purely private association up to this point, which fulfilled its duties out of its own calling, today it is in a sense commissioned and legitimated through the fulfillment of its duties.⁴

³ Ibid., 75.
⁴ “…Heute ist mit der Einheit der Nation auch die Einheit des Willens hergestellt, und die koloniale Propaganda braucht nicht mehr zu ringen um die Anerkennung ihrer kolonialen Forderungen. Auf kolonialen Gebiete stehen sich nicht mehr zwei feindliche Fronten gegenüber, sondern die Propaganda kann heute geschehen in enger Zusammenarbeit mit den Gliederungen der neuen Volksgemeinschaft. Wer [sic.] die Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft bisher ein rein privater Verein, der seine Aufgabe aus eigener Berufung erfüllte, so ist sie heute in gewissem Sinne in der Erfüllung ihrer Aufgabe beauftragt und
Duems expressed the colonialist viewpoint that their cause would reach its fulfillment in the Third Reich, both in the reclamation of the colonial territories and in the creation of a colonialist identity throughout the German Volk.

Despite this organizational restructuring, however, colonialists’ relationship with some National Socialist offices remained fraught with conflicts over organizational terrain, over territorial goals (Africa vs. Eastern Europe), and over Nazis’ continuing demands that colonialists subordinate their activism to Nazi priorities. In their reactions to these conflicts, however, colonialists elided any differences of opinion and projected a public image emphasizing the deep interconnectedness of overseas colonialism and National Socialist goals. Colonialists’ professed belief in the steadfastness of Hitler’s—and by extension the Nazi Party and state’s—support encouraged them to turn their attention from political lobbying to popular agitation. Creating a colonialist mass movement would not only prepare a groundswell of popular backing for the moment when Hitler decided to reclaim the colonies, but would also garner support for the colonialists themselves, in the hope of ensuring their continuing existence. Between 1933 and 1935, German colonialists established the organizational structure and the propagandistic goal of a mass movement that continued throughout the Third Reich.

In many ways, colonialists’ acceptance of the new regime appeared logical. Colonialists had gradually adapted the language of geopolitics (such as theories that tied together Raum, Lebensraum, and the survival of the German race) to frame their claims during the Weimar years, a period when geopolitical ideas and rhetoric circulated widely. In doing so, they accentuated the semantic overlap between colonialists and National Socialists existed before 1933. While semantic overlap did not equal conceptual consistency between the two groups, the increasing presence of these geopolitical terms in colonialist thinking created a link to National Socialism. Furthermore, many colonialists, like other German conservatives, believed that the Nazis’ seizure of power would benefit their own position. Colonialists in Imperial Germany and in the Weimar Republic had aligned themselves predominantly with the conservative political parties, a factor that eased their transition into the Third Reich.

Given colonialists’ readiness for alignment with National Socialism, how did they react to the Nazi takeover and position themselves in the early years of the Third Reich? Within months of the Machtergreifung (Nazi seizure of power) in January 1933, the Nazis had eliminated the conservative political parties with which many colonialists

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aligned themselves. Yet colonialists managed to continue their activities. Despite colonialists’ early expectations, historian Klaus Hildebrand characterizes the years 1933 to 1935 as a period of growing isolation for the DKG and the umbrella organization of the Reich Colonial League (Reichskolonialbund, hereafter RKB) founded in 1933. As evidence of this isolation, Hildebrand notes that Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Hess and Walther Funk, Secretary of State in the Propaganda Ministry, rejected a plan for the Nazi government to officially recognize the colonial memorial day in 1934 (on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the colonial empire). Furthermore, Hildebrand observes, no prominent Nazi leaders (such as Hermann Göring, Joseph Goebbels, or Hess) attended the official colonial memorial day. Some colonialists such as Wilhelm Solf, former governor of Samoa, were reticent, wondering about how to harmonize colonialists’ enthusiasm with Hitler’s negative statements on overseas colonialism in Mein Kampf.

Those in charge of the colonialist organizations, however, did not publicly express Solf’s apprehension. Hildebrand’s interpretation of the isolation of the DKG (because of the absence of leading Nazis at the colonial memorial day celebrations) underestimates colonialists’ ability to skirt these organizational conflicts in their publicity

7 Ibid.
8 In 1933, Rudolf Hess was Hitler’s deputy in the Nazi Party and Walther Funk was state secretary of the Reich Ministry for People’s Enlightenment and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda). Klaus Hildebrand, Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945 (Munich: W. Fink, 1969), 283.
work. They did so in a manner that continued to assert to Germans the critical importance of colonialism for the nation and for National Socialism. Perhaps Goebbels and Göring had not attended the memorial day, but colonialists never doubted Hitler’s (and therefore by extension the Nazi regime’s) support for their claims. Furthermore, many Party formations and representatives of the Ministry of Interior, the Foreign Office, and various other organizations did participate, and the Propaganda Ministry banned negative articles about the colonial memorial year.¹⁰

Thus, colonialists represented a general trend in Nazi Germany—the process of “working toward the Führer,” that is, independently interpreting Hitler’s wishes.¹¹ Having placed their trust in the National Socialist dictatorship, colonialists did not disavow their ideological alignment with the Nazis. In this regard, the explicit official support offered to colonialists by the Nazi regime mattered less than the propagandistic mileage colonialists could make out of their interpretation of their situation in Nazi Germany. Because they took the government’s support for granted, colonialists could turn their attention to creating a colonialist identity among the German public.


¹¹ Ian Kershaw identifies this concept, taken from a phrase in a speech by Werner Wilikens in 1934, as the framework for Nazi Germany and for the Holocaust. Ian Kershaw, Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).
Beginning with measures to restructure the colonialist organizations and to assert their allegiance to the Nazi regime, this chapter explores the conflicts that nonetheless remained between colonialists and National Socialists. Colonialists’ responses reveal their efforts to navigate this friction without giving up their sense of continuing relevance in Nazi Germany. Finally, the chapter examines the beginnings of a colonialist mass movement, designed to convince Germans of the seamless cooperation between colonialist and National Socialist thinking. After 1933, most German colonialists welcomed the Third Reich with the hope that their demands would finally receive active governmental support, but soon realized that the Nazis desired a thoroughgoing revolution that would require the colonialists to change as well.

**Gleischschaltung: Meanings and Motivations**

One month after Hitler’s appointment as chancellor, Erich Duems, General Secretary of the DKG, expressed the hopes of the colonialist movement for the new regime: “On January 30 the cabinet of national concentration was established. *To be national means to be colonial.* We can expect that the new government will not merely pay lip service to the colonial commitment, but will demonstrate it through their actions.”

12 (emphasis in original) By linking colonialism with nationalism, Duems stressed the centrality of overseas colonialism to the national reawakening promised by

the Nazis. In order to fulfill their nationalist agenda, colonialists asserted, National Socialists would have to champion the colonial cause. One month later, Duems expressed colonialists’ belief that, coinciding with the strengthening of the “national will” under National Socialism, colonialism would finally find a receptive audience in Germany. “Only now,” Duems declared, “is the nation inwardly ripe enough for a new colonial epoch, one that will be borne by the rejection of internationalism and by the affirmation and the will of the united nation. This will also finally bring the hour of the German Colonial Society.”

German colonialists’ public reception of the new Nazi regime emphasized the correspondence between their goals and values and those of National Socialism. Between 1933 and 1935, colonialist organizations underwent a process of “self-coordination” or Selbstgleichschaltung to emphasize this correspondence and to streamline cooperation with Party organizations. Throughout this process, colonialists framed their reorganization as structural rather than ideological, as an affirmation rather than a defeat. Because “to be national meant to be colonial,” colonialists undertook to make this colonialist identity central to the Nazis’ national revolution.

In the spring and summer of 1933, colonialists made several public gestures to indicate their acceptance of the new Nazi regime and to affiliate the colonialist movement with the regime. Meeting with Hitler on March 30th, DKG president Heinrich Schnee expressed to the new Chancellor the colonialist movement’s expectations that Hitler’s government would actively take up the charge of reclaiming the overseas colonies.\(^{14}\) Describing his thirty-minute audience with Hitler in his postwar memoir, Schnee recounts providing Hitler with an overview of the German colonies and then emphatically advocating for a public statement from Hitler attesting to the importance of the overseas colonies to Germany. “After I finished,” Schnee recalls, “there was a small pause. Then Hitler said, slowly and hesitantly, ‘I will think about it.’”\(^{15}\) Instead, Hitler stated that, while he had no qualms about Schnee continuing as head of the DKG, he considered “membership in the NSDAP as a necessary precondition for a lasting function as the leader of a politically important organization.”\(^{16}\) Schnee remained without political affiliation, but stated in his memoir that he felt the “National Socialist pressure” more and

\(^{14}\) “Bericht über die Sitzung des Ständigen Ausschusses der KORAG am 3. April 1933,” BAB R 8023/571, Bl. 76.


\(^{16}\) “die Zugehörigkeit zur NSDAP für eine notwendige Voraussetzung für das dauernde Wirken als leiter politisch wichtiger Organisationen.” Ibid.
more from the younger elements within the DKG. Schnee eventually joined the Nazi Party, serving as a representative for the Nazi Party in the Reichstag from November 1933.

In July and August 1933, respectively, the journals Der Koloniale Kampf and Kolonial-Post printed a photograph of Hitler examining a display at the German Colonial Exhibition (possibly from May 1933). By publishing these images, the journals touted Hitler’s presence at a colonial exhibition as irrefutable evidence of his support for their cause. The DKG also discussed giving Hitler and Goebbels honorary memberships in May 1933. On May 1st, leading members of the colonialist movement such as Agnes von Boemcken (Women’s League of the DKG), Erich Duems, Hanswerner Nachrodt, and Hans Reepen (editor of the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung, German Colonial Newspaper, DKZ) joined the Nazi Party. These gestures signaled the desire of some colonialists to publicly associate themselves with the new Germany. While those colonialists who

17 Ibid., 54.
19 Der Koloniale Kampf 6, no. 7 (15 July 1933), [3]; Kolonial-Post 8 (23 August 1933), 101.
20 “Bericht über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschuss am 23. Mai 1933,” BAB R 8023/712a, Bl. 115.
joined the Nazi Party in May 1933 counted among the “March violets” rather than long-standing Nazis, they quickly established their allegiance to the new regime.

In June 1933, the member organizations of the umbrella colonialist organization KORAG met for their first congress after the Nazi takeover. At this meeting, the representatives of the colonialist organizations, led by the DKG, took the opportunity to publicly express their allegiance to the new regime and to frame the importance of the Machtergreifung for the colonialist movement. Heinrich Schnee, as president of the DKG and on behalf of all of the organizations present, sent Hitler a telegram declaring that the colonialists “vowed abiding loyalty to the Volkskanzler [people’s chancellor] in the struggle for German freedom and equality, also in the colonial territories.” This combination of loyalty and expectation reflected the mood of the Frankfurt Congress and colonialists’ hope for a reinvigorated colonialist movement. Schnee expressed this mood when he stated that, “The victory of the national uprising (Erhebung), vigorously welcomed by the German Colonial Society, demands a rebuilding of the Society, which will simultaneously bring about its long-desired rejuvenation and vitalization

22 After the March 1933 elections, many Germans sought to join the Nazi Party. The “old fighters” ridiculed these new members as “March violets” who joined the Party motivated by opportunism. In order to stave off this influx (and so as to continue to give meaning to the label “Parteigenosse” or “party comrade”), the NSDAP stopped accepting new members in May 1933. Membership in the Party opened up again in 1937.

23 “...geloben dem Volkskanzler treue Gefolgschaft im Kampfe für deutsche Freiheit und Gleichberechtigung auch auf kolonialem Gebiete.” BAB R 8023/80, Bl. 442.
Schnee and others such as Duems continued to assert that the creation of the Third Reich called for a reorganization of the colonialist movement—at the same time that it legitimated the movement. At the Frankfurt Colonial Congress, the member organizations of KORAG took their first steps towards this reorganization.

Following the Frankfurt Colonial Congress in June 1933, the member organizations replaced KORAG as the umbrella colonialist organization with the Reich Colonial League (Reichskolonialbund, RKB). At the May 27 meeting of the DKG standing committee, a member had suggested the dissolution of KORAG and the combination of all the other colonialist organizations into the DKG as a unity organization (Einheitsorganisation), three years before the order to do so came from


25 „Durch die Schöpfung des neuen Reichs sei die Kolonialgesellschaft erst richtig zur Erfüllung ihrer Aufgaben legitimiert.” Duems, Kiel, 15 June 1934, BAB R 8023/83, Bl. 54.


27 While this organization has the same name as the coordinated organization founded in 1936, it differed in that the individual colonialist organizations maintained their independent existences.
above from Hitler’s deputy. The idea of folding the other organizations into the DKG reflects the DKG’s self-perception as the dominant organization and may explain why the other organizations did not pursue this proposal, as they were not likely to agree to their own absorption into the DKG.

Accompanying the creation of the RKB, the DKG reorganized over the course of 1933 and 1934. This reorganization mirrored the organizational structure of the Nazi Party, a conscious effort to facilitate cooperation between the two groups. Gau-, Kreis-, and Ortsverbände (regional, district, and local chapters) formed throughout Germany along the same lines as those in the NSDAP. Each Gau established a Press and Propaganda Office, ideally led by the same person who served as the head of colonial propaganda (Kolonalreferenten) for the NSDAP in that district, thereby ensuring close cooperation.

The organizational structure of the DKG was streamlined to reflect Nazism’s leadership principle (Führerprinzip). Later, in 1935, at a workshop of the Gau level leaders, the DKG proposed a halt to elections or plebiscites within the organization and

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28 General Director Kemner (Vereinigung Kameruner Pflanzungen) agreed to Dr. Lessel’s suggestion, as did Carl W.H. Koch, who suggested that the organization be called the Deutscher Kolonialbund. “Bericht über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschuss der DKG am 27. Mai 1933 vormittags 10 1/2 Uhr in der Bibliothek der DKG,” BAB R 8023/712a, Bl. 108-109.

29 “15 October 1933,” BAB R 1001/9698.

30 Following the Führerprinzip or leadership principle, every leader had authority over those below him/her and responsibility towards those above him/her. Power and authority was concentrated in the leader, and then delegated to individual followers.
assert that every chief of office (Dienstellenleiter) would have complete authority (Befehlsgewalt) over his subordinates. The fundamental changes to the organizational structure of the DKG enacted in 1933 facilitated these later proposals.

Further intertwining colonialist and National Socialist interests, the new executive committee in June 1933 included Staatskommissar Engel, head of the NSBO (Nazi workers’ organization); Karl Jung of the colonial department of the NSDAP; Herbert Seehofer of the Nazi newspaper the Völkischer Beobachter; and Baldur von Schirach, Reich Youth Leader, among others. Not only did the DKG add representatives of the Nazi Party to its leadership organs, but it also expelled its non-Aryan and politically-suspect members. The DKG kicked out Konrad Adenauer, its vice president since 1931, and Max Cohen-Reuss, Jewish representative of the Socialist Party in the Reichstag, “voluntarily” resigned from his position on the general assembly on May 5, 1933.


32 Following the 1933 reorganization, the general assembly (Hauptversammlung or Mitgliederversammlung) no longer met, replaced by a meeting of delegates (Vertreterversammlung) made up of representatives of the departments and districts; the standing committee (Arbeitsausschuss) had ten to twelve members; and the executive committee (Vorstand) was smaller (with 42 members) than before 1933. Elections decided half of the Vorstand members, the other half through appointment. “Circular from Schnee to the members of the executive committee and the executive committees of the departments of the DKG. 20 June 1933,” BAB R 8023/80, Bl. 141-144.

33 BAB R 8023/1108, Bl. 12.

34 Linne, Deutschland jenseits des Äquators? Die NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika. 26. Undermining the voluntary nature of Cohen-Reuss’s resignation from the general assembly, at the 1933 KORAG meeting in Frankfurt, a petition from the Abteilung Oschatz in Saxony called for closer cooperation with the NSDAP, “giving up the fiction” of the nonpartisan (überparteilich) nature of the DKG, and the ejection (Entfernung) of Adenauer and Cohen-Reuss. BAB R 8023/80, Bl. 390-393.
Schnee welcomed the new Nazi members of the DKG working committee in May 1933, stating that their appointment not only facilitated the principle of coordination with the Party but also aided the goal of integrating the colonialist movement into the broader public ("bei den breiten Volksmassen"), the younger generation, and the press.\textsuperscript{35}

On May 5, 1934, the Nazi Party made its interest in overseas colonialism official when it created the Colonial Policy Office of the NSDAP (\textit{Kolonialpolitisches Amt der NSDAP}, hereafter KPA). Three years earlier, Franz Ritter von Epp had founded a colonial department within the Military Policy Office of the NSDAP (\textit{Wehrpolitisches Amt der NSDAP}). He remained its head when Hess ordered the elevation of the department into its own administrative office in 1934.\textsuperscript{36} The KPA consisted of four departments: 1) Colonial Instruction; 2) Economy and Currency; 3) Transportation; and 4) Law, Schools, Science, Health, and Geography. As the creation of these departments indicates, the newly established KPA focused primarily on planning for the future colonial administration after the reclamation of the colonies. The KPA also had the responsibility of providing guidelines for the treatment of colonial topics within the Nazi

\textsuperscript{35} "Die Ernennung von Mitgliedern der Nationalsozialistischen Partei als Mitglieder des Arbeitsausschuss dient nicht nur der Durchführung des Prinzips der Gleichschaltung, sondern vor allem auch bei den breiten Volksmassen, bei der jungen Generation, insbesondere der akademischen Jugend, in der Presse, beim Kultusministerium hinsichtlich der kolonialen Willensbildung unter der Schuljugend, vor allem aber auch gegenüber der Regierung." As reported in the "Bericht über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschuss am 23. Mai 1933," BAB R 8023/712a, Bl. 113.

\textsuperscript{36} Hildebrand, \textit{Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945}, 345, and BAB R 8023/152, Bl. 199.
Party and its press.\textsuperscript{37} While the DKG and the RKB remained the primary agents of colonialist propaganda, they issued their guidelines for this propaganda in concert with (or under oversight of) the KPA. In May 1935, Schnee asked the KPA to use the RKB’s official “Peters flag” (the old colonial flag used by Carl Peters) as another sign of the close cooperation between the two organizations.\textsuperscript{38}

Colonialists viewed themselves as equal partners in the process of \textit{Selbstgleichschaltung}. While by no means an opponent of closer cooperation between the colonialist movement and National Socialists, Erich Duems nonetheless had certain criteria for the Nazi officials appointed to DKG committees. They should be those who would not only facilitate the \textit{Gleichschaltung} of the colonialist movement, but also its \textit{Aktivierung} (revitalization). Duems proposed only accepting onto these committees those Nazis “with whom we have cooperated for two years.”\textsuperscript{39} Incorporation of National Socialists into the colonialist movement’s leading positions should, according to Duems, still occur according to standards set by colonialists.

Faced with few other options, \textit{Selbstgleichschaltung} represented a best course that could maintain and perhaps strengthen colonialists’ position in Germany. Emphasizing the revitalization of the colonialist movement (a goal he had advocated since he joined


\textsuperscript{38} BAB R 8023/152, Bl. 27.

\textsuperscript{39} “…die wir seit zwei Jahre zur Mitarbeit herangezogen haben.” Quoted in Hildebrand, \textit{Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945}, 349.
the DKG in 1928\(^{40}\), Duems believed that this reorganization confirmed the renewed importance of the colonialist claims under the new regime. In a May 1933 article entitled “Gleichschaltung,” Duems asserted that coordination did not mean “internal readjustment” for the DKG, as it did for other organizations. Coordination for the DKG meant “affirmation and assurance” of the organization’s work in the “spirit of the politics of the new Germany.”\(^{41}\) (emphasis in original) Expanding his February 1933 statement on the relationship between the national and the colonial, Duems declared that

> Just as we recently coined the phrase “To be national means to be colonial” as a charge to the national Germany, the reversed sentence also represents our intentions: “To be colonial means to be national.” For the last 50 years we have coordinated [gleichgeschaltet] the representatives of various political perspectives to this fundamental direction of national colonial politics and so in the narrow range of a particular national idea [in engerem Bereich einer bestimmten nationalen Idee] united the contradictory [auseinanderstrebenden] forces together in a communal front.\(^{42}\) (emphasis in original)

The DKG, far from capitulating to the new regime and having lost itself in the newly Nazified society, asserted that its internal coordination strengthened the organization by

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 108-109.

\(^{41}\) “Das Gesetz der Gleichschaltung...bedeutet für die Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft nicht wie für viele politische und wirtschaftliche Organisationen eine innere Neueinstellung...So bedeutet für die Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft Gleichschaltung nicht Umstellung, sonder Bestätigung und Sicherung des national-kolonialen Kurses unseres Verbandes im Sinne der Politik des neuen Deutschland ” Erich Duems, “Gleichschaltung,” Der Koloniale Kampf 6, no. 5 (15 May 1933).

\(^{42}\) “Wenn wir vor kurzem das Wort als eine Forderung an das nationale Deutschland prägten ‘National sein heisst kolonial sein,’ so gilt von unserem Wollen der umgekehrte Satz: ‘Kolonial sein heisst national sein.’ Seit 50 Jahren haben wir die Vertreter der verschiedensten politischen Anschauungen auf diese Grundrichtung einer nationalen Kolonialpolitik gleichgeschaltet und so in engerem Bereich einer bestimmten nationalen Idee die auseinanderstrebenden Kräfte in eine gemeinsame Front zusammengefasst.” Ibid.
making the Nazis available to colonialist propaganda through this new organization. Duems appropriated the term *Gleichschaltung* for his own use by claiming that colonialists had already coordinated political parties to the colonialist cause for fifty years. By tying the colonial to the national and vice-versa, colonialists asserted the vital importance of this symbiotic relationship to the “national awakening” under National Socialism.

**Reorganizing Colonialist Propaganda**

In the Weimar Republic, the colonialist organizations had begun to reach out to the general public through efforts such as colonial exhibitions and public rallies. These efforts proved largely unsuccessful within a burgeoning culture of mass media and mass politics. After 1933, as the Nazi regime quickly silenced oppositional voices, the public sphere in Germany became both constrained and streamlined. As dozens of organizations and newspapers underwent *Gleichschaltung* or voluntary *Selbstgleichschaltung*, the means of accessing these newly coordinated groups simplified through the Nazi efforts to control propaganda and reorganize society—as long as the message had the approval of the appropriate Nazi Party officials.

Taking advantage of these newly available Nazi audiences, the propaganda branch of the DKG also underwent reorganization in 1933 to systematize propaganda and ensure that it reached into all corners of the Reich and into Nazi organizations. This newly created propaganda department carried out activities throughout the Reich (especially in areas not covered by local propaganda departments on the county and city
level), prepared materials, and conducted propaganda in the Gau Greater Berlin.\textsuperscript{43} The local propaganda departments also established colonial offices in the SS, the SA, the Hitler Youth, and with other branches of the Political Organization (PO) of the Nazi Party. For the content of their materials, these propaganda departments received instructions to follow the “political program of the NSDAP and the colonial political demands of the Führer.”\textsuperscript{44}

The DKG’s Propaganda Department used three publicity media: lectures (\textit{Wortwerbung}), written materials (\textit{Schriftwerbung}), and visual materials (\textit{Bildwerbung}). The DKG had run a speakers bureau in Berlin since 1931, providing colonialist lecturers to various organizations including the Nazi Party.\textsuperscript{45} In 1933, the DKG also supported a Reich Speakers Service (which covered areas not served by a Gau level Speakers Bureau), a Reichswehr Speakers Bureau (for units of the army and navy), and a NS Speakers Bureau (for political divisions of the Nazi Party). Finding appropriate lecturers for these Speakers Bureaus served as an important avenue to create a new face of the colonialist movement. Through a process of “Verjüngung” (rejuvenation), the DKG asserted its relevance in a youth-oriented Nazi society. Duems had already declared in May 1933 that not everyone who had spent some time in the colonies had the

\textsuperscript{43} “Koloniale Propaganda. Referat von Generalsekretär Duems zur Sitzung des Vorstandes am 1 Dezember 1933,” BAB R 8023/800, Bl. 5-9.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., Bl. 6.

\textsuperscript{45} “Bericht über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschuss am 3. Oktober 1933,” BAB R 8023/712, Bl. 222-223.
propagandistic fitness to work as a colonial leader. Older “colonials” may have had colonial experience but many could not speak well, while younger “Mitkämpfer” understood the importance of propaganda but did not have the colonial experience to give their lectures authority. In 1934, the conferral of a “speaker’s identity card” (Rednerausweis) regulated this problem. Both the RKB and the KPA had to approve the identity card, which demonstrated the bearer’s fitness to lecture. Only with this identity card could one give lectures on colonialist subjects, thereby standardizing the subject matter and format of colonialist lectures in Nazi Germany.

Colonialist written materials (Schriftwerbung) consisted of fiction and non-fiction books, pamphlets, journals, and magazines. In 1936, the RKB published a partially annotated bibliographic guide to dozens of colonialist writings to date by “ethnic German” (volksdeutscher) authors. The sixty-page guide divided the publications into the categories Colonial and Discovery History; Research Trips; The German Colonies (with individual sections on each territory, colonial wars, colonial economy and political writings); Fiction (Belletristik); Colonial Books More Generally; and Colonial

46 Erich Duems, “Führerauslese,” Der Koloniale Kampf 6, no. 5 (15 May 1933).
47 “fellow fighters”
48 The advantages and disadvantages of each group as colonialist speakers continued to be discussed throughout the 1930s, such as in Hans Ernst Pfeiffer’s 1937 lecture on propaganda techniques to the Gauverband Berlin. Hans Ernst Pfeiffer, “Die kolonialpolitische Propaganda im Dienste der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung,” Vortrag, gehalten am 3. September 1937 beim Schulungslehrgang C des Gauverbandes Berlin in der Universität Berlin,” 4-5.
Newspapers. In his introduction to the guide, Paul Ritter, explained the importance of colonialist writings, stating that “the ideal colonial literature is meant to ensure that the German gains a clear, true picture of our foreign [fremd] colonies wrested away, that his thinking becomes more proud and tied to his Volk [volksverbundener] the more he widens his gaze for world history and world politics.” Colonialist wanted their publications—even fictional works—to provide edification on the colonies to educate the worldview of Germans.

In consolidating their message and to reach a broad audience, colonialists also published a range of journals. The Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung (German Colonial Newspaper, DKZ) represented the main journal of the colonialist movement, serving the leading organization, the DKG. Originally established in 1884, the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung ceased publication in 1922 due to economic reasons, but restarted again in the late 1920s. Hans Reepen edited the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung until 1937, when Paul Ritter took over the position of editor. The Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung presented a general picture of the current state of the colonialist movement and targeted a general

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50 “Vor allem aber soll vorbildliches koloniales Schriftum dazu dienen, daß der Deutsche ein klares, wahres Bild von unseren entrissenen und fremden Kolonien und Ländern erhält, daß er um so stolzer und volksverbundener denken lernt, je mehr er seinen Blick für Weltgeschichte und Weltpolitik weitet.” Kolonien im deutschen Schriftum. Eine Uebersicht über deutsches koloniales Schriftum unter Berücksichtigung nur volksdeutscher Autoren (Berlin: Verlag Die Brücke zur Heimat, 1936).

51 Hans Reepen was born on June 8, 1887 in Schwerin, served as editor of Afrika-Nachrichten until 1933 and joined the Nazi Party on May 1, 1933. NSDAP Ortsgruppenkartei, National Archives Microfilm Publication A3340, Series MFOK, card for Hans Reepen.
audience (although the newspaper had a circulation of only 50,000 by 1941\textsuperscript{52}). For its members, the DKG also published the *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* (*Notices of the German Colonial Society*). Edited by Erich Duems, the newsletter changed its name in 1933 to *Der Koloniale Kampf* (*The Colonial Struggle*) to reflect the spirit of the times. Agnes von Boemcken edited *Die Frau und die Kolonien* (*The Women and the Colonies*) from 1932 to 1943, targeting the women in the colonialist movement and concerned with women’s issues and the care of colonial Germans.\textsuperscript{53} *Afrika-Nachrichten* (*Africa-News*) appeared from 1920 to 1942, with the subtitle “Illustrated Colonial and Overseas Newspaper” and without affiliation with a colonialist organization. Several smaller journals served specialty audiences, such as *Kolonial-Post* (1928-1943, for former colonial soldiers), *Jambo* (for youth), *Afrika Rundschau* (1935-1944, focused on economics), and *Koloniale Rundschau* (1909-1943, focused on scientific issues).

Colonialists’ coverage of the overseas colonies and of their activities extended beyond their own newspapers to the non-colonialist press. The author of a 1942 report on the German colonies and the press saw the destruction of opposition parties (almost all of


\textsuperscript{53} Agnes von Boemcken was born in Hannover on April 17, 1884. Boemcken’s husband was a colonial army officer and she had lived in German Southwest and East Africa for sixteen years, had nursed wounded soldiers in German East Africa during the First World War, and returned to Germany as part of General von Lettow-Vorbeck’s procession. She joined the Nazi Party on May 1, 1933. Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945*, 278, fn. 50, and NSDAP Zentralkartei, National Archives Microfilm Publication A3340, Series MFKL, card for Agnes von Boemcken.
which he defined as hostile to colonialism) in 1933 as crucial. Now, he stated, “for the first time since the emergence of the colonial question, a unified opinion [Stellungnahme] of the entire German press to [the colonial question] can be achieved.”

While the press after 1933 did present a “unified opinion,” its coverage of colonialist issues did not always satisfy all colonialists. After the 1935 Colonial Congress in Freiburg, for example, photojournalist and colonialist author Eva MacLean studied the press coverage of the congress and published her findings in *Die Frau und die Kolonien*. MacLean found that throughout fifty-two German cities, seventy-five daily newspapers published 170 articles (references, discussions, etc.) on the congress, not including the three daily newspapers in Freiburg itself. The Nazi Völkischer Beobachter published the most articles, especially in its Berlin, Munich, and southern German editions, which MacLean took as a sign of growing interest in colonialism within the Party. Analyzing the number of articles geographically, MacLean observed that the Rhineland had the most, followed by the northern German coast to East Prussia (all of the large harbor cities except for Lübeck). Throughout central Germany, the cities reporting on the congress divided themselves evenly up to the Main River. Based on this division of coverage of the Freiburg conference, MacLean concluded that “the farther one travels

54 “…zum ersten mal seit dem Auftauchen der Kolonialfrage überhaupt eine einheitliche Stellungnahme der gesamten deutschen Presse zu ihr erzielt werden.” Dr. Adolf Dresler, *Die deutschen Kolonien und die Presse* (Konrad Triltsch Verlag: Würzburg, 1942), 91-92.

from the west and north of Germany, the more the colonial interest ebbs in the population.”

Emphasizing the importance of good press coverage, MacLean hoped that this lopsided report would encourage colonialists in certain Gaue to increase their press work.

In addition to spoken and written publicity, colonialists promoted visual images (Bildwerbung) to promote their colonialist claims. Images could achieve a level of pervasiveness that other publicity could not. Outlining the role of images in newspaper advertising (especially the widely circulated daily press), Paul Bohn, colonial expert adviser (Referent) in the administration of Gau Westfalen-Süd, emphasized that this kind of advertising would spring immediately before the eyes of even those who only cursorily read colonial articles or those who are otherwise uninterested, and, through the methodical repetition [of these images], will steer them again and again to the colonial cause.

The DKG and the RKB provided newspapers with colonial visual materials, as well as its new colonialist posters, “Our Lebensraum Is Also Here” (“Auch hier liegt unser Lebensraum”), introduced in September 1933, and “Germany, Your Colonies!” (“Deutschland, deine Kolonien!”), introduced in December 1935. These two posters

56 “Es scheint also, dass, jemehr man sich vom Westen und Norden Deutschlands entfernt, auch das koloniale Interesse in der Bevölkerung abnimmt.” Ibid., 121.


58 “Das Werbeplakat des Reichskolonialbundes,” Mitteilungen der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft 6, no. 8 (15 September 1933); Koloniale Kampf 8, no. 10 (15 December 1935).
visually aligned the colonialist movement with National Socialism by placing the Nazi swastika flag in an African context. In the 1933 poster, the swastika flag and the black-white-red flag of Imperial Germany fly together in front of a palm tree, while on the globe below, Togo, Cameroon, Southwest and East Africa radiate in red, as does Germany on the northern horizon. In the 1935 poster, the Imperial German flag has disappeared, and the swastika flag flies above an eagle with wings outstretched, while Mount Kilimanjaro rises in the background. Colonialists’ use of such visually arresting posters, as well as other colonial images, aimed to create familiarity—and thereby an affective connection—with the distant overseas territories.

While colonialists reorganized their publicity efforts to streamline cooperation with the organizations of the new regime, events in the early years of the Third Reich indicate that their self-coordination did not necessarily result in increased influence with high ranking Party officials. However, colonialist leaders’ responses—or at least the interpretation that they presented to the members of their organizations—reveal efforts to “spin” these events in their favor. One such example occurred in November 1933, when the Propaganda Ministry asked the colonialist organizations to temporarily cease their propaganda efforts in advance of the November 12th referendum on Hitler’s decision to leave the League of Nations. Schnee had agreed to this cessation with the Propaganda Ministry in late October, but insisted to the standing committee of the DKG that this order represented a temporary measure and not the government’s rejection of the
colonialist cause. The rationale for shutting down colonialist propaganda before the referendum is uncertain. It could have stemmed from concern that the colonialists would have supported remaining in the League of Nations in order to have a seat at the table to negotiate the return of the colonies. Colonialists’ public support for remaining in the League of Nations would have undermined the impression of nationwide consensus behind Hitler’s actions that Nazi propagandists created.

This episode tested the colonialists’ willingness to subordinate their desires to those of the Nazi regime. Colonialists did so in a manner that cloaked their subordination and instead situated their claims as part of the larger regeneration of Germany under the Nazis. In August 1933, for example, at the national meeting of the Navy and Colonial Soldiers Association (Marine und Kolonialkriegerverein), Franz Ritter von Epp encouraged his audience not to despair if the new regime did not “…beat the great Negro drum of colonial promotion.” The Nazi regime still had to proceed with caution, Epp explained, presumably because the colonies represented a sensitive diplomatic issue between Germany and England. Similarly, in June 1934, Schnee admitted that while other foreign policy issues remained unresolved, colonial claims would for the most part


60 Germany joined the League of Nations in 1926 after the Treaty of Locarno (1925), providing it equal status with other European colonial powers.

remain a secondary issue. The increase in colonialist publicity in the late 1930s in concert with the “resolution” of these other issues (the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the successful plebiscite in the Saar, the Anschluss of Austria, and the annexation of the Sudetenland) lent credence to this justification.

Trying to smooth over inconsistencies between the Nazi Party’s occasional assertions of support for the colonial cause and changes in statements and attitudes after 1933, colonialists such as Erich Duems stridently held to the universality of the Nazi stance on colonialism as expressed in the 1920 Party Program. Duems asserted that any conflicting statements by National Socialists did not contradict the original Nazi position:

> Everything that the Führer otherwise has said or will say about colonial claims can only be an interpretation and explanation [Ausdeutung und Ausführung] of these fundamental colonial demands. It will do us good to remember that the Führer has more than once expressed that he thinks a certain flexibility [Beweglichkeit] is necessary, not in the goals but to be sure in the tactics of the struggle, which keeps the goal in sight, even when for the time being it seems to lead away from this goal. (emphasis in original)

Following this logic, statements against overseas colonialism, even those made by Hitler himself, did not represent the true Nazi position on colonialism—which was stated in the

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63 Point 3 of the 1920 NSDAP Party Program read “We demand land and territories (colonies), to feed our people and in which to settle our excess population.”

64 “Alles was der Führer sonst zur kolonialen Forderung jemals gesagt hat oder sagen wird, kann nur Ausdeutung und Ausführung dieser kolonialen Grundforderung sein. Dabei aber tuen [sic.] wir gut, uns dessen zu errinern, dass der Führer mehr als einmal zum Ausdruck gebracht hat, dass er nicht in den Zielen, wohl aber in der Taktik des Kampfes eine gewisse Beweglichkeit für notwendig erachtet, die das Ziel im Auge hält, wenn sie auch zunächst von ihm abzuführen scheint.” Erich Duems, “Die unabänderliche Forderung,” Der Koloniale Kampf 7, no. 8 (15 October 1934).
1920 Party Program. In this way, colonialists maintained the centrality of their claims in Nazi Germany, despite signs of disinterest or even outright rejection from some Party organizations.

Conflicts between Colonialist and Nazi Organizations

Even as Duems predicted a utopian era of cooperation between the colonialist organizations and the “organizations of the new Volksgemeinschaft,” relations between the colonialist organizations and Nazi organizations did not always run smoothly. This friction reflects the colonialist organizations’ inability to comprehend their own powerlessness within the new Nazi society where interest groups had to subordinate their needs to that of the Volksgemeinschaft, the state, and the regime as a whole. Simultaneously, it indicates colonialists’ firm belief that their activities in fact benefited the entire Volk. Therefore, from colonialists’ perspective, all opposition stemmed not from ideological disagreement but from petty squabbling between organizations.

Most of these problems not surprisingly came from competition over turf. The colonialist organizations saw themselves as responsible for all issues dealing with the colonies and Germans living in the former colonies. But the Nazis’ Foreign Organization (Auslandsorganisation)\(^\text{65}\) claimed authority as a Party organization, as did the Propaganda Ministry. In June 1933, Schnee spoke to Epp to ensure that no other

\(^{65}\) The branch of the Nazi Party responsible for Nazi Party members outside of Germany.
organizations (especially the Propaganda Ministry) would involve themselves with colonial matters (sich mit kolonialen Dingen befassen).

Despite this measure, the DKG continued to feel that rival organizations impinged on their organizational domain, such as their plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the German colonial empire in 1934. Mirroring colonialists’ response to the ban on colonialist propaganda in advance of the November 1933 referendum, DKG leaders refused to believe that Hitler himself had ordered these measures. While Hitler may have asked colonialists to minimize their propaganda, he “surely does not also want such a completely negative outcome from these restrictive orders.” At their April 1934 meeting, the DKG standing committee attempted to ascertain who had disrupted their colonial year activities. The Hitler Youth (HJ) and the League of German Girls (BDM) (now including the colonialist youth) had been banned from participating and Party organizations discouraged from taking part in colonialist parades. Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg also appeared to reject the idea of a solidarity week (Opferwoche) in July to celebrate the anniversary. Behind these and other measures, the DKG saw the machinations of either the Auslandsorganisation, the People’s League for Germandom

66 “Bericht über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschuss am 27 Juni 1933,” BAB R 8023/712, Bl. 280.
68 Ibid.
Abroad (Volksbund für das Deutschum im Ausland, VDA), or organizations in favor of Eastern European expansion. Even when the Party seemed to take proactive measures to support the colonialist cause, as at the 1934 Party Rally in Nuremberg, colonialists such as Duems still attempted to retain control. Upon receiving a newspaper clipping from the Völkischer Beobachter that outlined the Nuremberg Party Rally program and the colonial lecturers supposedly speaking on behalf of the KPA, Duems wrote to the KPA to protest that he did not know these speakers. Colonialists needed to protect their authority on colonial issues in order to maintain their institutional relevance as well as control of colonialist discourse in Nazi Germany.

Colonialist groups and Nazi organizations also contended over the distribution of money collected for charity purposes. The uniformed SA man or Hitler Youth collecting money for charity on the street represented a common sight in Nazi Germany. Established in 1933 as a social welfare organization, the Nazi Volkswohlfahrt (NSV) ran programs such as the Winter Relief program (Winterhilfswerk), which collected money to support poor Germans with food, clothing, and coal. In September 1933, Agnes von Boemken, head of the Women’s League of the DKG, protested to the Foreign Office about the NSV’s demand to appropriate part of the proceeds from their activities. The Women’s League petitioned to have itself and other colonialist organizations (such as the

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69 Letter from Duems to Oberstleutnant Frank Koel in Fürth, 24 August 1934, BAB R 8023/152, Bl. 142.
DKG and the Women’s Organization of the Red Cross for Germans Overseas) exempted from this measure because they needed all of their proceeds to support schools and student homes for Germans in Africa.\textsuperscript{71} In the Women’s League’s view, the charitable activities of the colonialist organizations in Africa equaled the work of the NSV in Germany, and their forced participation in the NSV’s domestic drives would impose a double burden on the colonialist organizations. The prospect that the NSV did not view the colonialist organizations’ overseas work as equally valuable, which could result in a more general questioning of the place of the overseas Germans within the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}, motivated the Women’s League’s concern. Furthermore, the fact that von Boemcken turned to the Foreign Office for support indicates that the Women’s League did not feel that the NSV would respond sympathetically to their concerns without the support of a more powerful patron. In fact, von Boemcken’s petition met with no apparent success, as in December 1935 the Women’s League again petitioned the NSV to lower its contribution to the \textit{Winterhilfswerk}. While all other organizations had to contribute forty percent of their takings during the months of the \textit{Winterhilfswerk}, the Women’s League had asked the NSV and the Interior Ministry to lower colonialist organizations’ percentage to thirty percent—again without success.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71} Letter from Agnes von Boemcken to Geheimrat Gunzert, 22 September 1933, BAB R 1001/6695, Bl. 37.

The Dissolution of the Colonialist Youth Organizations

The absorption of the colonial youth organizations into the Hitler Youth in 1933 represented the greatest organizational setback for the colonialist movement in the early years of the Third Reich. In the Weimar Republic, colonialist organizations had supported several youth groups, coordinated in 1924 into the Youth Committee of the KORAG (Jugend-Ausschuss der KORAG). After 1931, the youth organizations (then known as Bund Deutscher Kolonial-Jugend: Jugend Organisation der DKG, League of German Colonial Youth: Youth Organizations of the DKG) had three branches: Jambo (a colonial youth magazine) readers’ circles and Colonial School groups; Kolonialsturm (an organization outside of school); and Hedwig von Wissman-Jugend (the girls’ organization). Additionally, the Deutsche Kolonial Verein founded the Colonial Boy Scouts (Koloniale Pfadfinder) in 1926. This plethora of youth groups united in June 1933 into the Young Colonial Circle (Jungkolonialer Ring).

74 Ibid. 358.
75 Ibid. 359.
76 Schmokel, Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945, 21.
In July 1933, the Hitler Youth incorporated the colonialist youth groups, with Adolf Friedrich von Oertzen appointed as the new Kolonialreferat of the Hitler Youth.\(^77\) The Nazi Party’s incorporation of the colonialist youth groups into the Hitler Youth represented a measure to strengthen the Party and weaken the DKG, by ensuring future generations for the Party instead of for the colonial movement.\(^78\) German youth would have received indoctrination within the Hitler Youth that would have framed their understanding of the importance of colonialism as secondary to Nazi territorial goals in Eastern Europe.

Representative of their attitude toward Selbstgleichschaftung more generally, however, colonialists framed the incorporation of the colonialist youth groups into the Hitler Youth as a measure of integration into Nazi society rather than dissolution. The Kolonialscharen (colonial bands) in the Hitler Youth wore an emblem of the “Southern Cross” (Kreuz des Südens, which also appeared on the RKB flag) on the lower left arm of their uniforms, a sign to colonialists that their youth still had a distinctive role within the Hitler Youth.\(^79\) Schnee also invited the new head of the Kolonialscharen, von Oertzen, to join the RKB standing committee, “to thereby establish a continuous strong connection

\(^{77}\) Ibid. 21. Oertzen, born on 6 November 1891, had joined the Nazi Party in May 1932, but had not been involved in the colonialist movement in the 1920s. Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945*, 345

\(^{78}\) Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945*, 403.

with the leading colonialist organizations and their local formations.”80 Schnee saw continued value in the colonialist youth as messengers of the colonialist message throughout the German people, and specifically among the German youth.

Part of the justification for incorporating the colonialist groups into the Hitler Youth, however, centered on their romanticism, a feature that did not align with the Nazis’ image of German youth. The adventures of swashbuckling heroes in exotic lands were out of place with Nazism’s vision of the hard reality of racial conflict. Even after the Hitler Youth’s absorption of the youth groups, colonialists attempted to amend this reputation. Articles in the journal Afrika-Nachrichten in September and November 1933 urged colonialists to change the ideology of its youth groups. In the September issue, a Dr. Alfred Lehmann questioned the superficial nature of some colonialist propaganda. Lehmann asked “[i]sn’t it sometimes merely a decorative figurehead (dekoratives Aushängeschild)? Doesn’t the colonial idea sometimes remain here about appearances (Äusserlichkeit)? Südwester hats are picturesque and colonial symbols awaken curiosity.”81 Responding in the November issue, Hans Gerd Esser, a leading member of the colonialist youth with five years experience, admitted that he regrettably had to agree


with Lehmann’s assessment. While the colonialist youth groups of the past considered their mission accomplished after donning the distinctive Südwester hats, singing a few African songs, and listening to the hunting tales of “old Africans,” Esser declared that the colonialist youth of today approach their mission differently. 82

Nonetheless, factions within the Hitler Youth continued to view the colonialist youth as, at best, romantics, and, at worst, as traitors, as in a July 1934 article published under the pseudonym “Colonisator Orientis” in the Hitler Youth magazine Wille und Macht. “Colonisator Orientis” charged that the colonialist youth’s focus on Africa meant a rejection of the idea of Eastern European settlement that could fracture the German people. 83 Dr. W. Oetting of the Academic Colonial League (Akademischer Kolonialbund) responded to the charges of “Colonisator Orientis,” rejecting the allegations of treason and asserting the importance of the Eastern territories to colonialist youth as well. This exchange reveals the colonialists’ lack of success at this point in their attempts to convince the organized Nazi youth of the importance of the overseas colonies in addition to Eastern Europe.

Within the Hitler Youth (HJ) and the League of German Girls (BDM) after 1933, colonialists encouraged their youth to spread the colonialist message to their peers and to encourage all German youth to identify more closely with their overseas compatriots.

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Colonial bands (Kolonialscharen) in the BDM maintained contact with German communities in the colonies through pen pal exchanges and ensured that their BDM groups discussed the colonies at least once a month.\(^{84}\) While the Reich Youth Directorate (Reichjugendführung) insisted that the colonialist organizations had no control (keine Befehlsgewalt) over the Kolonialscharen in the Hitler Youth and the BDM,\(^{85}\) colonialists described these colonial youth in the Hitler Youth as operatives who would spread the colonialist message.

The dissolution of their independent youth organizations represented a blow to colonialists, even with this new mission within the Hitler Youth. At the 1934 Colonial Congress in Kiel, Lotte Wunderlich, colonial specialist in the Reich Youth Directorate, consoled members of the DKG Women’s League by reminding them that they represented only one part of the national rebirth. “It is obviously difficult for some local groups to let the so-to-say ‘fully fledged’ [flügge] children of the group out of their direct supervision,” Wunderlich commiserated, “But when you see the rich blessings that the independent work of the colonial groups in the BDM brings for our entire Volk, you will soon get over this pain.”\(^{86}\) Wunderlich used the analogy of a mother and her married

\(^{84}\) Lotte Wunderlich, “Kolonialarbeit im Bund Deutscher Mädel,” *Die Frau und die Kolonien* no. 8 (1 August 1934): 121-122.


\(^{86}\) “Es ist selbstverständlich für manche Ortsgruppe nicht leicht gewesen, das nun sozusagen ‘flügge’ gewordene Gruppenkind aus der direkten Betreuung zu entlassen. Aber wenn Sie sehen, welche reichen
daughter to describe the relationship between the Women’s League and the colonialist youth in the BDM. The mother could only retain influence when she respected (nicht antastet) the daughter’s new independence. Through their subordination to National Socialism within the BDM, Wunderlich suggested, colonialist girls and colonialist youth in general took part in a movement larger than themselves (and larger than the colonialist movement). But they supposedly did not lose their attachment to the colonialist movement, as a daughter remained related to her mother.

Even after the incorporation of the youth groups into the Hitler Youth, at the 1934 Kiel Colonial Congress Duems proposed the organization of “colonial shock troops” (kolonial Stosstruppen) in each department for young people up to the age of twenty-five, “as a sort of colonial SA, that will be available for colonial actions and above all for colonial instruction.” It is unclear whether the DKG ever formed these “colonial shock troops,” but Duems’ proposal indicates that the DKG attempted to get around the loss of its youth groups to retain its young members and to continue the process of Verjüngerung of the colonialist movement. Both colonialists and National Socialists recognized the

Segen die selbständige Arbeit der Kolonialscharen im BDM bringt für unser ganzes Volk, so wird dieser Schmerz bald überwunden sein.” Lotte Wunderlich, “Kolonialarbeit im Bund Deutscher Mädel,” Die Frau und die Kolonien no 8 (1 August 1934): 121-122.

87 Ibid.

importance of indoctrinating youth to prepare for the future realization of irredentist claims. Despite this organization setback, colonialists portrayed the incorporation of the colonialist youth into the Hitler Youth as an opportunity to spread their particular colonialist claims within the expansionist-minded Nazi youth.

**Africa or the East?**

As seen in “Colonisator orientis’’ attack on the colonialist youth, colonialists’ territorial goal of Africa and overseas territories provoked ideological conflicts with the Nazis’ focus on Eastern Europe as a realm for expansion. According to Nazi propaganda, Germany required its overseas colonies to rectify the dishonor done by Versailles and to produce the tropical raw materials needed for German industry such as rubber, sisal, and wood as well as luxuries like bananas, coffee, and karakul pelts. The “Ostraum” (the eastern territories of East Prussia and after 1939 beyond German borders into Eastern Europe) would fulfill Germany’s settlement needs. The Nazis’ interest in Eastern European space rested on their belief in the importance of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil), or what Hitler described in *Mein Kampf* as the “soil policy of the future.”

Proponents of Ostraum settlement questioned the suitability of overseas territories for Germans in part because of the climate. The life of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could only be maintained over time in its Central European *Heimat*, or in a territory with a similar

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89 “…At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future.” Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1943), 654.
climate and where one could prevent mixing with the native population.\(^{90}\) The belief in a Drang nach Osten (drive to the East) that had supposedly brought German culture to Eastern Europe for centuries as well as the more recent experience of the First World War marked Eastern Europe as a better alternative to Africa.\(^{91}\)

Opposition to overseas colonialism within the Blut und Boden circles in the early years of the Third Reich was led by Richard Walther Darré, Reich Minister for Agriculture from 1933 to 1942. Darré had been born in Argentina and briefly attended the Witzenhausen Colonial School (before being expelled in 1920 on charges of lying\(^{92}\)). Given this familial background, colonialists could have hoped that Darré would support their cause, but they were mistaken. Darré was a “radical agrarian” who restricted his territorial dreams to lands on the European continent that had once been German. In fact, in 1933, Darré attempted to convert his alma mater, the Witzenhausen Colonial School, into a settler school for the East (Ostsieder-Schule). Only the school’s close relationship

\(^{90}\) Georg Fritz, *Kolonien? Das koloniale Schicksal des deutschen Volkes—Gesichtlich als Lehre—Politisch als Aufgabe* (Berlin: Zentral-Verlag, 1934), 71. Georg Fritz was formerly active as a district officer (Bezirksamtmann) in the German Pacific islands. Concern about Germans and the colonial climate was also expressed in Fritz Zumpt, *Kolonialfrage und Nationalsozialistischer Rassenstandpunkt* (Hamburg: Paul Hartung, Verlag, 1938), 22-23.


\(^{92}\) Darré stated that he had told a lie to protect a comrade’s reputation. With the support of teachers at Witzenhausen, the verdict that led to his expulsion was eventually overturned and he received a diploma from the school in 1930. Anna Bramwell, *Blood and soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s "Green Party"* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985), 21. See also Eckhard Baum, *Daheim und überm Meer. Von der Deutschen Kolonialschule zum Deutschen Institut für Tropische und Subtropische Landwirtschaft in Witzenhausen* (Witzenhausen: Deutsches Institut für tropische und subtropische Landwirtschaft, 1997), 108-115.
with the Interior Ministry and the intervention of Reich Minister of the Interior Frick
allowed Witzenhausen to maintain its overseas focus.  

As a “radical agrarian,” Darré opposed what he described as “sentimental on-
hangers” and “liberal overseas politicians,” promoting the ideology of Blut und Boden
as the only racially healthy option for establishing German territory. In his short preface
to Georg Fritz’s 1934 Colonies? The Colonial Fate of the German People—historically
as lesson—politically as duty (Kolonien? Das koloniale Schicksal des deutschen Volkes—
geschichtlich als Lehre—politisch als Aufgabe), Darré explained that “[t]he essence of
National Socialist lies in the collection of the people’s strengths on the soil of the Heimat,
their renewal from the blood source [Blutquelle] of the sedentary [sesshaften] peasantry.”
Those Germans who had left this Heimat “sank into the surroundings which are alien to
them and into the foreign population.” The pursuit of overseas colonies, Darré asserted,
would weaken rather than strengthen the German people. Germanness rested on the
maintenance of a close connection between Germans and their “naturally-given Heimat,”
a qualification that ruled out the Heimat colonialists claimed to have created in Africa.

94 Hildebrand, Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945, 315.
95 “Das Wesen des Nationalsozialismus liegt in der Sammlung der Volkskräfte auf dem Boden der Heimat,
ierer Erneuerung aus der Blutquelle des sesshaften Bauernstums…Die Volksteile…die, der Not oder dem
Abenteuerdrange folgend, über die Grenzen der naturgegebenen Heimat hinaustreiben, versanken in der
naturfremden Umgebung und im artfremden Volkstum, je schneller sie in der Ferne den lebendigen,
dauernden Zusammenhang mit dem sesshaften Heimatvolke verloren.” Preface to Georg Fritz, Kolonien?
Das koloniale Schicksal des deutschen Volkes—geschichtlich als Lehre—politisch als Aufgabe (Berlin:
Zentral Verlag, 1934).
Blut und Boden advocates’ disapproval of overseas colonialism extended to the domestic promotional activities of the colonialist organizations. In an article written against the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the colonial empire in 1934, Erich Müller-Boedner, in the Reich Minister for Agriculture, protested the efforts of colonialists to adopt the ideology of Blut und Boden for their own goals. “The Reich Minister for Agriculture Richard Walther Darré has not tenaciously fought for years,” Müller-Boedner protested, “so that his great, ideological [weltanschaulichen] ideas would be ‘kaffir-ized’ [verkaffert]!” Müller-Boedner most likely used the term “verkaffert” intentionally so as to further delegitimize the colonialist movement’s efforts to frame their celebrations using National Socialist language. Müller-Boedner’s perspective received further support (albeit outside of public view) on April 14, 1934, when the daily secret press briefing from the Propaganda Ministry to selected German journalists declared that colonial propaganda could not adopt the National Socialist ideology of Blut und Boden.


Colonialists, however, had their own misgivings about Eastern settlement before 1933. The most important of these held that the population in the East would prove too large to accommodate further settlement. In a 1932 editorial titled “Colonial Politics or Space Politics” (“Kolonialpolitik oder Raumpolitik”) in the DKG newsletter, Erich Duems stated that:

Colonial politics are...a form of space politics, but the most complete and promising, because the policy of the most efficient exploitation of available national space (internal settlement in its various forms) is limited by the capacity of this space. Eastern space policy is likewise limited in its possibilities by the relative overpopulation of the European Lebensraum, by the necessity for existence and expansion of the developed national states in this space, and by the limited economic possibilities of the Eastern space.98

In an earlier editorial in July 1931, Duems had laid out the demographic differences between Eastern Europe and Africa; 61 people lived per square kilometer in East Prussia, 43 in Posen-West Prussia, compared with 143 in Germany, but only 4.8 people per square kilometer in “Reserveaum Afrika.” Germans could maintain racial separation more easily in Africa than in the East, Duems asserted, where “unavoidable mixing” with Slavic elements would change the German type (Typus). Furthermore, European nations would continue to fight each other for Lebensraum on the continent, so turning to Africa

would secure this space peacefully. As late as 1935, Epp declared at a colonialist rally in Düsseldorf that the number of other people currently living in Eastern Europe made German expansion eastward impossible.\(^9^9\) Colonialist discussions of Eastern European space in the early 1930s contested a unilateral focus on European expansion, arguing not only that Africa continued as an option but that it was the only rational and productive solution to the demographic and resource problems facing the Volk.

After 1933, however, Nazi organizations such as the Propaganda Ministry privileged Eastern Europe and concentrated Germans’ attention on this territorial goal. In a December 1933 memorandum, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels categorically vetoed the option of mass settlement of German farmers in Africa. An African Heimat did not exist, he proclaimed: “National Socialism recognizes only one Heimat: Germany, only one Volk from one blood, on native soil” (heimischen Boden).\(^1^0^0\) (emphasis in original) While declaring that Hitler rejected tropical settlement, Goebbels acknowledged that some National Socialists still favored mass settlement in Africa, or “colonial policy in the old sense.”\(^1^0^1\)

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\(^1^0^0\) “Der Nationalsozialismus kennt nur eine Heimat: Deutschland, nur ein Volk aus einem Blut, auf heimischem Boden.” Cited in Hildebrand, Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945, 863.

\(^1^0^1\) He concluded, “Mit einem Wort: es herrscht noch keine Klarheit. Eine autoritäre Entscheidung ist z.Zt. nicht zweckmäßig.” Ibid.
The Propaganda Ministry restricted colonial promotion to the RKB and further limited the RKB’s propaganda to rebuttals of the “colonial guilt-lie” and economic demands for the return of the colonies. The May 7, 1934 secret press briefing from the Propaganda Ministry declared that promoting colonies with the idea of settlement must “absolutely to be kept out of every discussion” [ist absolut ausser jeder Diskussion zu halten].\(^{102}\) Instead, the briefing referred journalists to the chapter on colonialism in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, concluding by emphasizing the seriousness of the briefing’s recommendations and encouraging the journalists to strictly adhere to its contents. Heinrich Schnee, president of the DKG, and Dr. Karl Jung, of the KPA, received further clarification from the Propaganda Ministry that the ban only applied to discussions of mass settlement and not to settlement itself, taken to mean individual settlement.\(^{103}\) In practice this propaganda restriction proved fairly permissive, as mass settlement represented only one of a number of colonialist claims. By not banning all discussions of the colonies but merely the idea of mass settlement, the Propaganda Ministry’s directive still left colonialists with a great deal of latitude in their activism.


Without the option of calling for mass settlement of an imagined excess population overseas after 1933, the raw materials argument came to the fore in colonialist propaganda. Yet, colonialists continued to uphold the colonies—especially German Southwest and East Africa—as uniquely fertile ground for German settlement. In March 1934—after the December 1933 directive banning the promotion of mass settlement—the standing committee of the DKG still overwhelmingly agreed that they should not abandon propaganda for settlement. Furthermore, they felt that colonial settlement fully complied with the territorial (bodenpolitisch) claims laid out by Hitler in Mein Kampf; leaving only the question of the extent and form settlements in the individual colonies would take.

German colonialists grappled with the tension between economic and population arguments for colonies as well as with the conflict between Kolonialpolitik (colonial politics) and Ostpolitik (Eastern politics). Many colonialists expressed a strong desire for the return of the Eastern European lands lost after the First World War. Rhetorically, colonialists navigated these competing territorial priorities with the saying that the colonies and the East did not mutually exclude, but rather supplemented each other.

104 Historically, the German colonies had never been a site of “mass” settlement. In 1914, only about 20,000 Germans lived in the German colonies (5,300 in German East Africa and 14,800 in German Southwest Africa, the two most populated colonies). Dorothea Siegle, “Trägerinnen echten Deutschtums”: die Koloniale Fraenschule, Rendsburg (Rendsburg: Kreisverein Rendsburg für Heimatkunde und Geschichte, 2004), 43.

Colonialists had used this phrasing before the Nazi seizure of power put Eastern expansion on the national agenda. As a guiding principle for the colonialist movement’s spatial politics, this maxim kept the option of both colonial and European expansion open and did not apply a hierarchy to these goals.

To clear up the confusion over who had the responsibility for discussing the colonies and to ensure that the discussion of the colonies continued, colonialists believed that they had to work more closely with the Nazi Party. Because placing themselves in opposition to the Nazis would have resulted in organizational suicide, colonialists aimed instead to further integrate their organizations and their discourse into Nazi social structures. This at times resulted in a certain measure of self-censorship in order to maintain influence. At the 1934 Kiel Colonial Congress, for example, General Kemner of the Association of Cameroon Plantations complained that the Nazi Party organs in the provinces did not always cooperate with the RKB. Relations between local party leaders and the colonialist organizations often depended on the personal views of these local leaders—colonialists found support in Frankfurt and Bremen, for example, but less so in Hamburg. As a solution to this problem, however, Kemner did not suggest that colonialists should encourage greater cooperation from the Nazi Party, but rather that the

106 See for example, Duems, “Kolonialraum und Osträum,” Mitteilungen der DKG, 15 July 1931, 50.

107 BAB R 8023/83, Bl. 36-37.

108 Schmoke, Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945, 26.
RKB should organize its propaganda so that it did not contradict *(querschiessen)* Party propaganda. As a measure to create allies out of Nazi organizations, various colonialist groups undertook the responsibility for providing instruction on colonialist issues within these Nazi organizations. The Women’s League of the DKG took responsibility for education within the NS-*Frauenschaft*, the League of Colonial Soldiers within the SA Reserve I and II, and the DKG for the German Labor Front, the Reich Labor Service, and other political organizations of the NSDAP.109 By lecturing on colonialism within these Nazi organizations, colonialists demonstrated that their colonial claims embodied part of what a “good Nazi” needed to know.

**Creating a Mass Movement**

In conjunction with their efforts to educate members of Party organizations, the colonialist organizations begin shifting their focus towards creating a mass movement. With the problem of convincing political parties to support the colonialist cause supposedly resolved by the Nazi takeover, colonialists wanted to create a colonial mass movement, a desire that reflected the rhetoric of *Volksgemeinschaft*110 and the Nazi mass movement (*Volksbewegung*). In May 1932, Erich Duems had declared that the colonialist

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110 Michael Wildt has shown that the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a integrative term existed before the rise of National Socialism, as early as 1918. Michael Wildt, “Die Ungleichheit des Volkes. ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ in der politischen Kommunikation der Weimarer Republic,” in *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Michael Wildt and Frank Bajohr (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009).

135
groups did not aim to organize the masses, but rather to present a unified colonial will to the targets of their efforts (the political parties and the German government). By mid-1933, however, the changed political situation resulted in a changed target for colonialist publicity.  

In July 1933, Hans Reepen appealed to colonialists to lay the groundwork domestically for the day when Hitler decided to reclaim the colonies, and to create a “true people’s movement” (wahre Volksbewegung) aimed at “the broadest social classes, in the masses.” Through their publicity activities, colonialists created an identity that reflected what, in Britain, John Mackenzie has called a “generalized imperial vision rather than any sophisticated concept of Empire.” The colonialist organizations aimed not so much to make Germans into colonists but rather into colonialists. With the idea of mass settlement in the colonies negated by the Nazi regime, colonialists still fostered a colonialist identity among the German people, an identity that could find its fulfillment not only in the colonies but also in Germany—and through National Socialism.

111 “...Bestehen bleibt jedoch die Tatsache, dass die organisierte koloniale Bewegung im Verhältnis zur Grösse ihres Zieles und der Masse des Volkes gering ist und notwendig gering bleiben muss, dass es aber auch nicht die Aufgabe der Bewegung sein kann, die Massen organisatorische zu erfassen, sondern mit einem einheitlichen kolonialen Wollen zu erfüllen, damit dieser Wille diejenigen zur politischen Tat drängt, bei denen die Erfüllung unseres kolonialen Wollens liegt: die Parteien und durch die Regierung unseres Landes.” Erich Duems, “Koloniale Idee und Organisation,” Mitteilungen der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft no. 5 (15 May 1932): 33-34.


Colonialist discourse emphasized the regenerative nature of the colonies for Germans. This discourse on the regenerative nature of the colonies (based on struggle, ethnic history, and community) matched Nazi rhetoric against decadent culture and about the elements needed for Germany’s regeneration. Prohibited from promoting mass settlement, colonialists drew on the qualities of colonial Germans and of colonial pioneers such as Carl Peters and Hermann Wissmann to claim that the colonies and colonial life possessed a regenerative power that could recreate Germans into better versions of themselves. To do so, many colonialists used the metaphor of a sieve to describe the spiritual power of the colonies. Time spent in the colonies would weed out those Germans who had spiritual, physical, and racial strength from those who did not. W. Oetting of the Academic Colonial League declared in 1935 that “the colony is a powerful filter, in which the unable are separated from the able.” Oetting suggested that if young people spent a few years in the colonies, the experience would not turn them away from the “great European duties of the German Volk,” but would rather “steel them, ripen them, [and] create leaders (Führer schaffen)” for these responsibilities. Oetting saw this colonial experience as part of a continuum of experiences that linked the colonial space to Nazi endeavors in the European space.


115 Ibid.
The idea of the colonies as a school for character resonated widely with imperial ideologies both in Germany and in Europe and America. In Germany, this idea preceded the Nazi takeover, for example in the March 1926 special colonial edition of the Zeitschrift für Geopolitik. In an article on Southwest Africa in this special edition, Leo Waibel poetically described the former colony as “the great school of personality, it widens the vision and steels the character. Precisely our Southwest, with its wild nature, was for us Germans a sort of fountain of youth for the nation, or it could have become one. It was our ‘Wild West’…”\(^\text{116}\) The American frontier provided a model of the regenerative influence of expansion and the strengthening of character through struggle for both colonialists and National Socialists. The work of German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, originator of the concept of Lebensraum in 1897, had had a major influence on American historian Frederick Jackson Turner and his theory of the importance of the frontier in American society. Turner’s writing, in turn, in part influenced Hitler’s ideas that “a combination of superior racial stock and the frontier experience could prove transformative.”\(^\text{117}\) Likewise, in the British Empire, the 1890s saw an increase in the promotion of the empire as a “way of life.” After the First World War, the empire


provided “a mythical alternative to an obsolete social and economic order.” Ideas about a certain “British character” that depended on empire, however, became difficult to sustain as the empire came to an end after the Second World War. In contrast, the end of their empire did not stymie German colonialists. Instead they continued to assert the deep connection between imperial expansion and German character. Their ability to continue to do so speaks more to their awareness of their still-imperial European milieu rather than to a special concern with character in Germany.

Colonialists in Nazi Germany directed their propaganda inward to awaken the German Volk’s will for colonial activity and to fight “the people’s tepidity, laziness, and cowardice,” rather than outward to persuade foreign leaders to return the colonies. The raw materials argument focused on the economic need for colonies to alleviate the international situation in which the Entente powers had placed Germany through the Treaty of Versailles. Other aspects of colonialist agitation engendered spiritual (geistig) enthusiasm; as a later 1938 article put it, “[t]his spiritual side of the colonial question is


120 “Unsere Arbeit richtet sich auf die Weckung des Willens im Volke zur kolonisatorischen Betätigung...unser Kampf richtet sich nicht gegen äußere Mächte, sondern gegen die Lauheit, Bequemlichkeit und Feigheit im eigenen Volke.” (emphasis in original) “Die steigenden Kräfte im kolonialen Kampf: Glaube und Wille,” Der Koloniale Kampf. Mitteilungen der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft 8, no. 10 (15 December 1935).
less visible, but it has a deeper and more enduring impact.” Stirring descriptions of colonial space and of the Germans who lived there painted a new picture of the German Volk that emphasized its colonial history. Key elements of this new Volk included the heroic German personality, the idea of an expanded perspective, and Germans’ inherent colonizing qualities.

Claiming that Germans colonized “out of an internal mission,” Erich Duems poetically outlined the inherent relationship between Germans and colonization in Der Koloniale Kampf in 1934. For Germans, territory did not merely represent an economic asset. “As [the German] devotes his industry and his work to this soil,” Duems explained, “he grows together with it into a new unity.” The result is the transformation of “foreign land to German homeland [Heimatland]” through “his strength and his love.” “Colonization,” Duems concluded, “is an expression of the heroic in people, the other side of the martial heroism in Germans.” (emphasis in original)


The idea of the “colonizing German” not only justified colonialist activism as central to Germany’s regeneration, but did so in language that W. Oetting explicitly associated with National Socialism in 1935:

_Uplifting the honor and greatness of our Volk, forming a new, wide-looking, purposeful person, who feels connected with German culture and German thinking as a member of a great Volksgemeinschaft with all of the hundred thousand others, these are the foundations of National Socialism as well as colonial work._

Ernst Gerhard Jacob similarly asserted the unique value of colonialists’ overseas experience to the Third Reich, calling colonialists the best campaigners and colleagues (_Vorkämpfer und Mitarbeiter_) for National Socialism. As the earliest exemplars of the values of Nazi Germany, they had combined strong national feelings with a social sensibility and racial pride while living overseas. Colonialist activities and awareness would enable Germans to tap into these innate abilities that served both colonialist and National Socialist goals.

In 1935, the heads of the _Gau_ level DKG groups met in Berlin to discuss the duties of the DKG. With the repossession of the colonies as the organization’s first priority, the DKG’s propaganda had to fulfill the domestic preconditions for reclaiming

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124 Dr. Ernst Gerhard Jacob, “Die nationalsozialistische Staatsidee und die Kolonialpolitik,” _Afrika-Nachrichten_ 14, no. 11 (1 November 1933): 281-283.
the colonies, according to a transcription of a proposal at the meeting. These preconditions consisted of 1) the dissemination of colonial thinking, 2) awakening the belief among the German Volk of its colonizing calling, and 3) the cultivation of a colonial-political will (Bildung des kolonialpolitischen Willens). Furthermore, the proposal encouraged the Gau level leaders to spend fewer resources on economic and scientific interests in the colonies—propaganda represented the first priority.

Through their publicity activities, colonialists saturated daily life in Nazi Germany with their colonialist message. The DKG standing committee proposed a set of postage stamps in 1934 with scenes from the colonies, and police stations in Berlin displayed the posters “Here too lies our Lebensraum” and “Germany, your Colonies!” in the offices where residents registered their addresses. The display cases (Schaukasten) located on the street offered small colonialist groups without the manpower for lectures or other publicity events the opportunity to locally promote the colonialist cause. Der Koloniale Kampf offered suggestions for the design of these display cases: they should include information on the work and goals of the colonialist movement (in a few catch-phrases in large font); short selections from colonialist journals about colonial Germans and other themes; images cut from the old and new colonial calendars; colonialist quotations from leading personalities; short suggestions of colonial writings and books; a


listing of that month’s colonial memorial days; announcements of upcoming events; and the addresses of local colonialist organizations and the RKB in Berlin.\textsuperscript{127} These materials—especially the images—should ideally change often, even weekly. Given this multitude of materials, these display cases may have appeared more cluttered than compelling, but their presence on the streetscape would provide constant reminders of the colonies.

Entering into the intimate spaces of people’s lives, Ernst Gerhard Jacob instructed colonialists to speak constantly about the colonies at every opportunity and in every situation. In an article in \textit{Der Koloniale Kampf}, Jacob recounted a breakfast he had attended, where he had engaged in a debate with a foreigner (a colonial opponent) about Germany’s right to colonies.\textsuperscript{128} The unwillingness of the other Germans at the table to come to the defense of Germany’s colonial right, or even to involve themselves in the discussion, astonished Jacob—especially in the presence of a foreigner. “What is the use,” he asked, “if a foreigner reads in the German newspapers about Germany’s unanimity on the issue of the return of its colonies, when, at his first opportunity to speak

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\textsuperscript{128} Ernst Gerhard Jacob, “Sprecht stet s von Kolonien!” \textit{Der Koloniale Kampf} 8, no. 10 (15 December 1935).
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with Germans, he sees that very few here advocate for the German colonial claims?"129 The solution, Jacob maintained, rested with individual work and conversations (and not just with foreigners), because experience had shown that those personally converted to the cause in turn proved most able to win others over.

Colonialists, Jacob continued, should start conversations about colonialism at their *Stammtisch*, during walks and at social evenings (*Kameradschaftsabenden*), in the office, in businesses, on the train, and at summer resorts. Even dancing offered the opportunity to win the heart of one’s dance partner “not only for oneself, but also for the colonialist cause.” How, the reader would ask, could one bring the colonies into discussion with one’s dance partner? Jacob provided several sample discussion starters: “Yes, if we still had our colonies…!”; “All of that would be different, if our colonies hadn’t been stolen!”; “Have you thereby ever thought about our colonies?”; “That reminds me of an experience from our colonies”; or “On that subject I have read the following about our colonies….”130 Or one could compare Germany’s colonial claims with those of other nations, saying “The English gain such experience from their colonies”; “The Japanese and the Italians are people without space”; “Even Poland makes


colonial demands today.” What success such political discussions would find in such a nonpolitical situation is doubtful. But Jacob’s injunction to his readers to bring the colonialist cause into the personal sphere demonstrates colonialists’ desire to reach nonpolitical Germans to counter the image of colonialism as a narrow special interest.

In 1935, Jacob again provided advice on word choice when promoting the colonies, in the form of “Ten Commandments for Colonial Public Speakers.” These “commandments” encouraged speakers to describe the colonies so as to emphasize their continuing relevance to the average German. Never speak of “our former colonies,” but rather of “our old colonies” or “our stolen colonies,” Jacob recommended. Colonialist speakers should emphasize the centrality of the colonies by saying “above all the colonies…” rather than “also the colonies…,” and differentiate between the former colonies and those other overseas territories where Germans had settled, such as Brazil.

Building on the importance of martial language to National Socialism, Jacob encouraged speakers to militarize the colonialist movement in their speeches, providing a list of suggestions and declaring that “every colonial event becomes a colonial comradeship, every colonial talk is a colonial victory, every colonial meeting is a colonial parade of the

131 “Die Engländer holen sich solche Erfahrungen aus ihren Kolonien”; “Japaner und Italiener sind ein Volk ohne Raum”; or “Selbst Polen stellt heute koloniale Ansprüche.” Ibid.

colonial leader and colonial following."\(^{133}\) (emphasis in original) The close attention colonialists paid to the integration of their propaganda efforts into German life—through Schaukasten, personal conversations, and the word choice of speakers—demonstrates colonialists’ aim of fundamentally changing the way the average German thought about themselves in relation to the overseas colonies.

Understanding the power of visual images, colonialists also turned to film as a mass medium for fostering Germans’ attachment with the former colonies. The highpoint of colonialist-produced feature films came in 1934 with *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* (*The Riders of German East Africa*). Released in the memorial year commemorating the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Germany’s colonial empire, *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* told the story of a German couple in East Africa at the start of the First World War. Peter Hellhof and his bride Gerda—who had recently arrived from Germany—live on a coffee plantation in companionable harmony with their English neighbor, Robert Cresswell. The First World War breaks out, Peter goes off to join General Lettow-Vorbeck’s troops, Gerda remains on the plantation, and Cresswell joins the British army, returning in 1916 to take control of the area surrounding the farm. Because of their previous friendship, Cresswell promises to protect Gerda and her young German farm assistant, Klix. In an attempt to help her husband, Gerda brings African

\(^{133}\) "...jede Kolonialveranstaltung werde eine Kolonialkameradschaft, jede Kolonialrede sei ein Kolonialsieg, jedes Kolonialtreffen sei eine Kolonialparade, der Kolonial Führer und kolonialen Gefolgschaft." Ibid.
masks to Peter and his troops, who then use them to hold up a munitions transport headed for the plantation, which the English had planned to use as a munitions depot. Noticing that the masks are missing, Cresswell warns Gerda that he has orders to shoot all civilians who help the enemy. Defying this warning, Gerda and Klix smuggle water out of the plantation to Peter. Gerda and her African servants are captured but Klix—shot while escaping—manages to reach Peter and tell him what has happened before he dies. Peter and his troops ride back to the plantation to save Gerda and collect horses and supplies. Returning to Klix’s grave, Peter promises that “one day we will return, sooner or later,” before the group rides off over a hill to end the film. *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* epitomized the narrative of German community, solidarity, and bravery when faced with the treachery of a British friend, as well as the loyalty of Africans to Germans. With its highly dramatic plot as well as its prophetic ending, colonialists used the film to arouse an emotional response to overseas colonialism among its viewers.

*Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* premiered in October 1934. From February 28 to March 15, 1935, the film screened in fifty-four German cities, another eighteen cities between March 19 and 31, and another thirty-six cities in April.134 During this time, Berlin schools also held 200 morning screenings of the film.135 Colonialists and film promoters treated the premieres of the film as an event, such as in Leipzig in October

134 “Der Siegeszug des Afrikafilms,” *Der Koloniale Kampf* 8, no. 3 (15 March 1935).

135 BAB R 8023/592, Bl. 289.
1934. The Leipzig Ufa-Palast Gloria decorated its entrance as an African landscape including a lion skin, palm trees, and a “dyed-in-the-wool” (waschechte) Askari, the Borna Bergkapelle played “snappy marches,” the flags of the Schutztruppe and colonial organizations decorated the screen, and the wind section dressed in tropical uniforms with the colonial flag tied to their trumpets. As part of its advance materials for Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika, Terra-Filmmkunst production company had suggested these elements of the Leipzig premiere to theater owners as methods to promote the film.

Colonialist journals responded with overwhelmingly positive reviews of Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika. The film promoted the idea of the exceptionally courageous, loyal, and noble nature of German men and women, the loyalty of Germany’s colonial subjects, and the perfidy of the English in Africa—the basic themes of the colonialist narrative. Colonialists also praised the authenticity of the film, which they claimed resulted from their participation in its production. Theodor Eggert, writing in Afrika-Nachrichten, highlighted the advisory role of Afrika-Nachrichten editor Geheimrat von Stürmer in creating the high level of the film. Eggert reported on the large number of “old German East-Africans” present at the screening, who paid tribute to the

136 “Erinnerung an Deutsch-Ostafrika,” Leipziger Abendpost (20/21 October 1934). [Bundesarchiv Filmmarchiv BA 13628]

137 Bundesarchiv Filmmarchiv BA 13628.
film by their spontaneous applause throughout. Erich Duems dismissed potential complaints from former East African settlers that the film did not adequately show the richness of the African landscape or the diversity of colonial work. The film wasn’t and did not intend to be “an educational film nor a documentary short that occupies the spirit and pleases the eyes.” Rather the propagandistic value of the film lay in its portrayal of “the ethos and acts, in the loyalty and readiness to sacrifice of people, who are not isolated phenomena, but rather the norm (Typ) of the East African farmer and soldier, the German farmer’s wife and the Askari.” The individual characters in the film became “representative of all of Germany and [their] ethos [became] the complete and conclusive evidence of German colonial accomplishment.” (emphasis in original) Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika succeeded in its propagandistic value; the film was still screened as


part of the Hitler Youth film hours and in the countryside by the Nazi Party film evenings in 1936.\textsuperscript{140}

As Duems observed, *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* and colonialist publicity efforts in general aimed to transmit the outlines of a “colonial type” to the public in Nazi Germany. This type would serve as a standard for behavior in Germany as well as the colonies. Peter and Gerda Hellhof represented the ideal of Germanness, and woe to the German who dishonored their noble sacrifice through indifference to colonialist demands. Colonialists’ public narrative emphasized the regenerative effects of a colonialist identity that also matched Nazi imaginings of the new National Socialist German. By integrating the “colonial question” into everyday life in Nazi Germany, colonialists declared to the German public that they could fulfill themselves as National Socialists and as Germans by cultivating an imperial vision.

**Conclusion**

By 1935, the colonialist movement had achieved a level of unity and of state (or Party) support that exceeded their efforts during the Weimar Republic. Colonialists had affirmed their support for the Nazi regime through their reorganization into the Reich Colonial League and the restructuring of the German Colonial Society and its propaganda functions to cooperate with the Nazi Party structure. Colonialists sidestepped conflicts between themselves and aspects of Nazi ideology or organizations to present a public

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{140}{Hans Gerd Esser, “‘Koloniale’ Begegnung mit einen Filmkünstler. Etwas besinnliche Gedanken nach einem Gespräch mit Peter Voss,” *Afrika-Nachrichten* 17, no. 5 (1 May 1936): 126.}
\end{footnotes}
image of close alignment. While they faced some restrictions on their autonomy, such as the incorporation of the colonialist youth organizations into the Hitler Youth and some restrictions on their propaganda activities, colonialists continued to express their faith in Hitler’s support for their colonial demands.

As Erich Duems had proclaimed, to be national meant to be colonial, and to be colonial meant to be national. Colonialists anchored their imperial vision firmly within the new *Volksgmeinschaft* and set out to convert every *Volksgenosse* to the cause. Asserting the centrality of colonialism to the Third Reich, colonialists had to explain how their claims related with other priorities of the Nazi regime, in particular anti-Semitism. After their seizure of power, the Nazi regime institutionalized anti-Semitic persecution, leading to the passage of the Nuremberg racial laws and provoking international reaction against this persecution. When international observers related Nazi anti-Semitism to the issue of the return of the colonies, German colonialists were forced to articulate their ideas about race in Germany and overseas in the form of a racialized colonialist identity.
Chapter 3: Caring for Africans Here and There: Race, Place, and the Myth of the Good German Colonizer

In August 1941, the Gestapo arrested the Sudanese former Askari Mahjub bin Adam Mohamed (born ca. 1904 and known in Germany as B. Mohamed Husen) on the charge of Rassenschande (racial defilement).\(^1\) Husen had been married to Maria Schwandner, a white German woman with whom he had two children (in addition to at least one other illegitimate child), since January 27, 1933—three days before the Nazi seizure of power. The charges of Rassenschande stemmed from a relationship he had with another white German woman whom he had met and fathered a child with while working on the set of the colonial film Carl Peters in 1940. After a month in the Gestapo cells in Alexanderplatz, Berlin, Husen was sent to the concentration camp Sachsenhausen on September 27, 1941. While, according to the Gestapo, “criminal proceedings on the charges of Rassenschande could not be initiated,” the policy of “protective custody” and its analogous application from Jews to other “foreign races” in Nazi Germany justified his incarceration in a concentration camp.\(^2\) After more than three years in Sachsenhausen, Husen died on November 24, 1944.

Husen had served as a child soldier with the Askari troops in East Africa during the First World War and had come to Germany in 1929. After the Nazi takeover in 1933, 

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\(^1\) The sources do not reveal who denounced Husen, though historian Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst proffers a variety of culprits, ranging from Husen’s wife to Professor Martin Heepe at the Berlin Seminar for Oriental Languages, where Husen also worked. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, *Treu bis in den Tod: von Deutsch-Ostafrika nach Sachsenhausen: eine Lebensgeschichte* (Berlin: Links, 2007), 137-140.

\(^2\) “Gegen Husen konnte ein Strafverfahren wegen Rassenschande nicht eingeleitet werden.” Ibid., 142.
he had increasing difficulty finding work and, with a family to support, turned to the collo
cionalist organizations as a source of income. Husen appeared frequently at colonialist festivals and rallies throughout the 1930s (often dressed in an Askari uniform) and acted in at least twenty-three films between 1934 and 1941, beginning with Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika (1934). In his greatest role (which would also proved to be his last) in Carl Peters (1940), Husen played Peters’s guide and translator during his first expeditions to what would become German East Africa, working both as an actor and a Swahili consultant on the set. For colonialists, Husen epitomized the “loyal Askari” and appeared to affirm their assertions of Germans’ exceptional colonizing skills. An hour after the radio announcement of the declaration of war against England in 1939, Husen had arrived at the League of Colonial Soldiers’ headquarters, stating his desire to once again join the German troops.3 “This token of loyalty,” the colonialist press declared in its account of Husen’s action, “speaks for itself.”4

Husen and other former colonial subjects living in Germany remained vulnerable to Nazi racial policies, despite their value to colonialists as living evidence of a heroic colonial past. Husen’s arrest for Rassenschande even as he worked on a film about the life of the greatest German colonial hero highlights the confrontation between these two versions of Germans’ treatment of Africans. Colonialists’ narrative of the benevolent

3 “Koloniale Rundschau: Askari-Treu,” Kolonial-Post 33, no. 9 (September 1939): 168.

German colonizer clashed with the Nazis’ aggressive persecution of racial others. In the trajectory of Husen’s life and in his death, we see the tensions for colonialists between their narratives of German benevolence in the colonies and their unsuccessful attempts at munificence in Germany. Geographic place proved crucial to the fulfillment these narratives, resulting in the inability of colonialists to prevail in their positive portrayal of Africans in the face of Nazis’ mobilization of race.

Colonialists’ idealized narrative in their propaganda suppressed the different ways in which Germans had dealt with their colonial subjects in Africa and with Africans who lived in Nazi Germany. Some scholars have argued that the treatment of Africans in the German colonies represented the “breaking of a taboo” against the annihilation of entire ethnic groups, so that the Herero genocide of 1904-1907 provided a model for the Holocaust. However, colonialists’ memory of German colonial rule and of the treatment of colonial subjects produced in Nazi Germany highlighted memories of the loyalty of colonial subjects while ignoring those of the violent suppression used to ensure this loyalty. External factors such as British anti-colonial propaganda radicalized colonialists’ anti-Semitism, while domestically Nazi racial policies in Germany guided colonialists’ discussions of the treatment of their former colonial subjects. As such, colonialists’

evocation of the myth of the good colonizer illustrates their use of race to advantageously positioning themselves within Nazi Germany.

Because race played a central role in Nazi Germany, it is necessary to briefly outline how the Nazis and colonialists understood this malleable term. Traditionally, German ideas of national identity and citizenship fall into the category of jus sanguinis, that is, citizenship by descent. German national identity rested on ties of blood and kinship, leading to what Rogers Brubaker has described as an exclusionary “ethnocultural cultural idiom.” German settlements outside the boundaries of the German nation including the overseas colonies retained their exclusionary nature.

Efforts to maintain a bounded German community in the overseas colonies culminated in bans on marriage between Germans and the native population, as well as with the so-called Rehoboth Basters, descendants of the native population and Dutch settlers. These bans were passed in German Southwest Africa (1905), German East Africa (1906), and German Samoa (1912). Starting in Southwest Africa, these bans grew out of the war against the Herero, with its accompanying “ideas of race war and race purity [that] supplanted the older imperial vision of crisscrossing agreements among various groups under German rule.” Here German colonialists defined race as a legal and a social construct, requiring legal certification often based on a combination of blood

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percentages (three-quarters “nonnative”) and cultural upbringing. Requiring German men to obtain racial certification for their wives and children in fact conflicted with the German citizenship law in the metropole, which would have granted this citizenship as a man’s right.

In the 1930s and 1940s, National Socialists drew on the same traditions of kinship-based German identity as the colonialists and other nationalists in Imperial Germany. They limited Party membership not only to kinship, but also to communal ties, phenotype, hereditary qualities, and other categories in an effort to create a pure Aryan Volksgemeinschaft. The concept of Aryan, as used by the Nazis, was an empty term that bore no relation to the ancient people it supposedly represented. In many ways, Nazi racial theorists defined an Aryan by what he or she was not: not a Jew or descendant from Jews, not a Gypsy or descendent from Gypsies, not a “Negro” or descendant from “Negroes,” etc. Nazi racial theorists and lawmakers continued to struggle against this “conceptual anarchy” in their efforts to define who was a Jew, as the various categories of the Nuremberg Laws (which combined kinship and religious affiliation as defining attributes) make clear. Nor was the category of Aryan a clear-cut matter of physiological identification—a common joke circulating in Nazi Germany highlighted


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8 Ibid., 93, 106-107. In Samoa, culture served as the critical criteria in determining who could be classified as “treated as white.” Ibid., 127.

9 Ibid., 93.

the gap between the tall, blond, blue-eyed Aryan of Nazi propaganda and the physical characteristics of Nazi leaders. During the Second World War, in contrast, Polish children who matched the Aryan image were kidnapped and brought up as Germans by German families.

The category of race remained a jumble of cultural stereotypes, legal categories, and futile tests for define physiological difference. While inadequately defined, race persisted as a widely and aggressively used term both in propaganda and law. Both colonialists and National Socialists held to a belief in the fundamental difference of Africans—physically, culturally, hereditarily, and legally. As individuals, their views of the categories of “Aryan” and “Jew” may have differed from the Nazi Party line. But their overlap in views of Africans allowed colonialists to find common ground with Nazi racism, both ideologically and as a means of organizational survival.

This chapter explores the colonialists’ reworking of public memory about race relations in the colonies to support their narrative of successful Imperial German

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13 While both Jews and those of African descent threatened the Nazis’ vision of racial purity, Birthe Kundrus has argued that “die Intensität der Hetze gegen sie erreichte nie die Intensität des Antisemitismus. Deutlich wird dieses zwischen >>Schwarzen<< und >>Juden<< differenzierende Bedrohungsszenario mit seinem je spezifischen Griff in die Vorurteilskiste vor allem an der unterschiedlichen Haltung gegenüber Mischlingen und deren >>arischem Blutseinschlag<<.” Birthe Kundrus, “Von Windhoek nach Nürnberg? Koloniale ‘Mischehenverbote’ und die nationalsozialistische Rassengesetzgebung.” in “Phantasiereiche”: Der deutsche Kolonialismus aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2003), 125.
colonization. Commemorations of the 30th anniversary of the Herero uprising in 1934 and British anti-colonial arguments relating contemporary Nazi racism to the colonial question promoted this reworking. In response, colonialists extolled the glories of German colonial history while eliding the brutal realities of colonialism for colonized subjects. Through these discursive elisions, colonialists constructed the German as a capable and beneficent colonizer who upheld Nazi values of racial superiority and segregation. After examining colonialists’ discourse on the exemplary role of the Germans as colonizers in Africa, the chapter turns to colonialists’ attempts to live up to their altruistic self-image through their efforts to protect former colonial subjects living in Germany under the confines of Nazi racial policy. The change of place from the colonies to Germany, however, reveals contradictions between the colonialist narrative and the realities of the racialized public sphere in Nazi Germany. The physical presence of Africans and Afro-Germans in Germany forced the issue of the German treatment of Africans from the abstract to the concrete. This opportunity to fulfill their rhetoric, however, often made it difficult for colonialists to maintain their idealized image of German-African relations, as seen in the German Africa-Show (Deutsche Afrika-Schau, 1935-1940). Through their use of memory and history, colonialists asserted the continuing relevance of their portrayal of the exemplary colonial prowess of Germans.

The Herero Genocide Thirty Years Later

Scholars who have connected the period of German colonial rule with Nazi occupation and extermination in Eastern Europe during the Second World War have
focused on the German Schutztruppe’s genocide of the Herero as the “breaking of a taboo” against exterminating entire ethnic groups that directly connects these two periods through racial and colonial violence.\textsuperscript{14} David Furber claims that, although Germans serving in the East in the 1940s had only the vaguest conception of colonialism, “[t]heir image of colonialism may have been more brutal than elsewhere because of the history of Germany's colonies, especially the ‘colonial scandals’ of 1904-7.”\textsuperscript{15} These authors assume that the memory of this colonial violence remained a fixed narrative of extermination—in popular culture, according to Furber—through to the Second World War. However, closer analysis of colonialists’ narrative of the Herero uprising and especially of discussions in the colonialist press on the 30\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the uprising in 1934 reveals a whitewashed version of this history, which represents German colonists as victims and rarely mentions the ultimate fate of the Herero. The public memory of the events of 1904-1907 in Southwest Africa did not, in other words, remain fixed. Colonialists used their sanitized memory to maintain their narrative of Germans as capable—but not brutal—colonizers.


\textsuperscript{15} David Furber, “Near as far in the colonies: The Nazi occupation of Poland,” International History Review 26, no. 3 (2004), 576. Furber incorrectly identified these “colonial scandals” as including both the Herero and Mahi-Mahi revolts and Carl Peters’s trial for murdering his African concubine. Peters’s trial took place in 1896.
Colonialists made no mention of General Lothar von Trotha’s infamous October 1904 proclamation—pronounced after the Germans had defeated the Herero militarily in the battle at Waterberg—giving orders to shoot every male Herero within the German borders and “drive [women and children] back to their people or have them shot.”\(^{16}\) As a result, the *Schutztruppe* reinforced by German troops from the metropole drove the starving Herero into the Omaheke Desert. Although a handful of Herero managed to reach the English colony of Botswana, about seventy-five percent of the Herero population perished (about 16,000 out of a population of between 60,000 and 80,000 survived).\(^ {17}\) Furthermore, in their accounts of the events of 1904-1907 colonialists did not mention the concentration camps in which the Germans incarcerated those Herero who returned to the German territory and in which thousands more died.

Colonialists’ memory of the Herero uprising thirty years later in 1934 for the most part ignored rather than directly contested the Blue Book’s charges of brutality and genocide. This silence, however, also indirectly contested what the colonialists viewed as the Entente’s tendentious fixation on the brutality of German colonial practices. Rejecting the claim that the events in Southwest Africa in 1904 served inexorably as evidence of

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\(^{16}\) Quoted in Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute destruction: military culture and the practices of war in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 56.

\(^{17}\) Helmut Bley, *Namibia under German rule* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1996), 149-150. The Nama, another ethnic group in Southwest Africa, also revolted beginning in October 1904, carrying on a guerilla war for the next three years with a total cost of 30 to 40 percent of their population. Bley, *Namibia under German Rule*, 151. Following the end of military hostilities, the remaining Herero and Nama were collected into prison camps, where—according to an official 1908 report—approximately 45.2% died (7,682 out of the 15,000 Herero and 2,000 Nama captured). Isabel Hull estimates that these numbers were actually higher. Hull, *Absolute destruction: military culture and the practices of war in Imperial Germany*, 89-90.
their brutality, German colonialists told a different story. In colonialists’ account, German soldiers and settlers emerged as heroic figures unburdened by their participation in genocide. While acknowledging the death of hundreds of thousands of Herero and of Nama, colonialists framed this loss of life as an unfortunate consequence of the Herero uprising—and one for which the German settlers and military need not take personal responsibility. By murdering about one hundred white German male settlers and disrupting railroad and telegraph lines, the Herero had supposedly provoked the Germans’ violent reaction. This provocation left the Schutztruppe unblemished by, if not justified in, their involvement in the disproportionate response to this uprising.

This narrative reflected shifts in colonialists’ understanding of the events of 1904-1907, changes that owed a great deal to their increasing temporal distance from the genocide. At the time of the Herero genocide and in the years immediately afterwards, the numerous German publications (literary and otherwise) on the events of the war neither suppressed nor criticized the genocide. These publications described the extermination of the Herero as a necessary step in the German “civilizing mission” in the colonies through containment of the native population. Published in 1906, Gustav Frenssen’s novel Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest. Ein Feldzugsbericht (Peter Moors Journey to South-West. A Campaign Report) is the most famous account of the Herero

18 See Medardus Brehl, Vernichtung der Herero. Diskurse der Gewalt in der deutschen Kolonialliteratur (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007); Medardus Brehl, “‘The drama was played out on the dark stage of the sandveld.’ The extermination of the Herero and Nama in German (popular) literature,” in Genocide in German South-West Africa. The Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its Aftermath, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Monmouth, Wales: Merlin Press, 2008), 100-12.
A much quoted passage of the novel outlines the evolutionary grounds for the genocide:

these blacks deserved to die, before God and mankind, not because they murdered the two hundred farmers and rose against us, but because they built no houses and dug no springs....God allowed us triumph here because we are more noble and more progressive....the world belongs to the most vigorous, the most alive. That is the justice of the Lord.\(^\text{20}\)

While Frenssen’s novel, expressing this uncompromising defense of massacre, remained popular through 1945, colonialist literature avoided the Herero war and genocide after the First World War. When German colonial brutality served as a justification for stripping Germany of its overseas territories, colonialist authors denied this brutality.

In the Weimar Republic, Franz Ritter von Epp, former colonial soldier and president of the League of Colonial Soldiers, glorified the virtues of the colonial Schutztruppe. On March 23, 1929, Epp spoke at the 25\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary of the battle of Waterberg. In his speech, reported in the colonial veterans’ journal Kolonial-Post, Epp

\(^{19}\) Frenssen’s novel was translated into English (1908), Danish, Dutch, Afrikaans, and Swedish.

\(^{20}\) Quoted in Brehl, “‘The drama was played out on the dark stage of the sandvelt.’ The extermination of the Herero and Nama in German (popular) literature.” 106. The argument to deny the Herero the right to their territory (and their existence) based on their inability to properly exploit the land on which they lived finds parallels in American settlers’ attitudes towards Native Americans and the German attitude towards Poles expressed in the concept of “Polish economy.” Patricia Seed, American pentimento: the invention of Indians and the pursuit of riches (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); David Blackbourn, The conquest of nature: water, landscape and the making of modern Germany (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006); Vejas G. Liulevicius, War land on the Eastern Front: culture, national identity and German occupation in World War I (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
contemplated the meaning of the Herero War. According to Epp, colonists’ cries for help from the Heimat had resulted in the domestic army (Heimatheer) and General Staff taking over the leadership of the war, with positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the German soldiers served as much needed reinforcements to the Schutztruppe. But, with the involvement of these troops, much of the colonists’ local knowledge—“the experience of the South African steppe”—was lost. These new troops fought with “tactics from the homeland” (heimatlicher Taktik). Most critically, however, Epp asserted that

[t]he principle of the extermination strategy—brought from the homeland and transferred to the colony—was also unfortunate. It was applied here against a primitive people, in the wrong location, and consequently weakened the colony’s greatest asset…its labor force [Menschenkräften].

By claiming that the exterminationist strategy applied to the Herero had originated in Germany, Epp denied a colonial imperative for the genocide.

Epp retroactively applied a characteristic of post-1904 German colonialism, which viewed colonial subjects solely as units of labor rather than as objects of a civilizing mission. In the colonies, Germans saw their mission as “educating the Negro


22 “Auch der vom Heimatland auf die Kolonie übertragene Grundsatz der Vernichtungsstrategie war nicht glücklich. Er war hier gegen ein primitives Volk angewandt, am falschen Ort und schwächte in der Folge die Kolonie am wertvollsten, dessen man zu ihrer Entwicklung bedurfte, an Menschenkräften.” Ibid.

23 Theodore Leutwein, Governor of Southwest Africa, also expressed this view at the time, writing in February 1904, “I cannot agree with those imprudent voices which would not like to see the Herero completely destroyed (vernichtet). Aside from the fact that a people with sixty to seventy thousand souls is
to work.” In Southwest Africa, the complete destruction of Herero and Nama autonomy led to their transformation into wage laborers, a process facilitated by the discovery of diamonds in the territory in 1908. Epp’s military analysis predates the arguments advanced recently by historian Isabell Hull. According to Hull,

Germany approached colonial wars from inside the frames of their military culture as it had developed in Europe. The colonial situation merely provided the opportunity to practice on Africans or Chinese what the military experts took to be the immutable precepts of warfare.

Epp’s account, like Hull’s, frames the actions of the Schutztruppe as driven by military imperatives rather than racism.

Epp’s 1929 reflections on the war in Southwest Africa seem muted compared with the dramatic retellings of the Herero revolt on and after the 30th anniversary of the battle of Waterberg in 1934. These accounts celebrated German victimhood and the not so easy to annihilate, I would consider such a measure a grave mistake from an economic point of view. We still need the Hereros as breeders of small livestock and especially as workers. We only have to kill them politically. If possible, they should no longer be allowed to have a tribal government and should be confined to reservations that are just big enough to meet their needs.” Quoted in George Steinmetz, *The devil’s handwriting: precoloniality and the German colonial state in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 192.


26 Hull, *Absolute destruction: military culture and the practices of war in Imperial Germany*, 3.
heroism displayed by the vastly outnumbered Schutztruppe in battle against the Herero, but rarely discussed the fate of the Herero. These depictions belittled the motivations for the Herero revolt, as in a December 1933 Kolonial-Post article. Samuel Maherero was not the driving force behind the uprising, the article explained, because “[g]iven over to drink and without energy, he was anything but a leader.” The other “more decisive and energetic” leaders were upset by the construction of the railroad from Swakopmund to Windhoek and the corresponding encroachment of Germans into the heart of Herero land. Most important, however, was the Hereros’ indebtedness to merchants and traders, which “presented a constant danger in the history of the colonies. Indebted tribes have often sought a ‘restructuring’ [Sanierung] through revolts!” Such accounts dismissed the revolt without addressing more intractable issues the Herero had with their status as colonized subjects.

Colonialists’ narrative focused on the German colonists who were attacked and killed by the Herero in the early days of the revolt. Accounts depicted the Herero as cowardly (they had attacked only when the bulk of the Schutztruppe were occupied in the south of the colony) but also as an incomprehensible and ruthless race (“the psyche of the black remains a puzzle to the white”) who celebrated their massacres with alcohol and orgies. Bavarian author Senta Dinglreiter, in her 1935 book *Will the Germans Ever Return? (Wann kommen die Deutschen endlich wieder?)*, graphically described an attack in which Herero servants assaulted three Germans on a farm, killing one and leaving the other two for dead, who then barely managed to escape the seventy kilometers to the next farm.

Andreas Eckl has shown that, during the Nazi period, authors did not investigate the origins of the uprising because they viewed such a clarification as unnecessary. Instead, a simpler explanation proved more useful:

Central to the depictions of the origins [of the war] stands in most cases the unavoidability of a conflict between Europeans as colonizers and bringers of culture on the one hand, and Africans as the colonized and without culture on the other hand, in the face of which the background to the actual origins of the war became

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28 More than 100 white settlers were killed in the early days of the revolt. Bley, *Namibia under German rule*, 149.


Colonialist author Paul Rohrbach referred to this condition as the Hereros’ “guiltless guilt” (schuldenlose Schuld). Colonialists’ dismissive responses to the potential of legitimate anti-colonial complaints reflect this view of an inevitable colonial conflict. Instead, colonialists’ accounts of the warlike nature of the Herero both emphasized the brutality of their attacks on German settlers and set the stage for the heroic entrance of the German Schutztruppe to fight this “worthy opponent.”

In accounts of the heroic Schutztruppe, authors emphasized how the Herero outnumbered the German soldiers. Only 730 men and twenty officers of the Schutztruppe in 1904 had to control a territory one and a half times as large as Germany. Not outfitted with the most modern weaponry, they also lacked the four cannons (Geschütze) they had sent to Germany for repair. The Schutztruppe faced an enemy numbering in the thousands while battling heat and thirst, but they represented the ideal relationship

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 183-185.


This relationship would have resonated with the Nazis’ emphasis on trench camaraderie born out of the First World War and their reorganization of society along the lines of the “leadership principle” (\textit{Führerprinzip}). Such accounts emphasized the camaraderie of the \textit{Schutztruppe} and their bravery. In October 1934, for example, the department store Karstadt in Berlin displayed tin \textit{Schutztruppe} soldiers in a diorama of colonial scenes—including the battle of Waterberg—in honor of the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of German colonialism and in advance of the Christmas shopping season.\footnote{“Zinnfiguren-Ausstellung,” \textit{Kolonial-Post} no. 10 (23 October 1934): 162.}

These descriptions of the events in Southwest Africa in 1904 entirely ignore the extermination of seventy-five percent of the Herero, reflecting a break in the representation of the Herero genocide after the First World War.\footnote{Brehl, \textit{Vernichtung der Herero. Diskurse der Gewalt in der deutschen Kolonialliteratur}, 135-138.} Despite the increase in colonial literature after the First World War, works addressing the genocide remained an exception, mostly “cheap editions in paperback series” about the thrilling adventure of the colonies. Such overt accounts of genocide did not represent the organized colonialist movement’s narrative of events in Southwest Africa. Instead, vague descriptions in the colonialisist press recounted how the Herero “ran off into the desert,” but do not mention General von Trotha’s infamous order to shoot Herero men and to turn back Herero.
women and children if they attempted to escape the desert. Given their emphasis on refuting the “colonial guilt-lie,” colonialists welcomed such misdirection in accounts of the Herero war and actively discouraged accounts that would not serve this purpose.

In July 1934, Heinrich Schnee rejected author Bernhard Schwertfeger’s proposed article on the late General von Trotha at Trotha’s widow’s request. The British Blue book—even with its numerous errors and false accounts—was a tool of British war propaganda, including in Southwest Africa, Schnee stated. “But the fact of General von Trotha’s proclamation in the Herero war and the death by starvation of a sizeable number of natives,” Schnee reminded Schwertfeger, was known in Germany at the time and even debated in the Reichstag. Schnee advised that “[i]t could foster uncomfortable discussions domestically and abroad and under the circumstances could bring the opposite effect than what [Trotha’s] widow expects.”

Instead, colonialists described the Hereros’ flight into the desert as tragic and unforeseen. Despite their overwhelming numerical superiority, author Senta Dinglreiter observed, the Herero were driven to flight and “they ran into the waterless Kalahari, into

38 1868-1952, retired major in the Reichswehr, lecturer at the technical college in Hanover from 1926 and Göttingen University from 1929.

39 Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB) R 8023/667, Bl. 495.

the parched land that ground them into dust. Only a small part could be rescued in the English territory [on the other side of the desert].”

Dinglreiter placed the onus here on the surrounded Herero, who “chose” retreat into the inhospitable desert rather than an alternative route that Dinglreiter does not identify.

For colonialists in the Third Reich, the Herero uprising represented a dramatic episode in colonial history worthy of retelling at its 30th anniversary in 1934. The uproar led by the Socialists in the metropole at the time of the uprising expressed shock both at the violent attacks on German settlers and at Trotha and the German army’s equally violent methods of eventually repressing the uprising. In contrast, colonialists in the 1930s emphasized only the initial Herero attack and the heroic German troops. Any glorification of the violent destruction of seventy-five percent of the Herero population would sit uneasily with colonialists’ myth of the good German colonizer, whom the Africans supposedly loved and respected. The passages on the Herero war in Senta Dinglreiter’s book Will the Germans Ever Return?, for example, could not contradict the story of good relations between Germans and Africans expressed in the title. Colonialists’ refutation of the “colonial guilt-lie” hinged on maintaining their narrative of Germans’ exemplary qualities as colonizers. They therefore reframed episodes in German colonial history that threatened to contradict this narrative.

41 “Die Hereros waren zwar in überwältigender Übermacht, doch wurden sie in die Flucht geschlagen und sie rannten hinein in die wasserlose Kalahari, hinein in das Durstfeld, das sie zerrrieb.” Dinglreiter, Wann kommen die Deutschen endlich wieder?, 100.
Colonialist Responses to the “Future Guilt-Lie”

Given colonialists’ whitewashing of the history of the Herero genocide, they used their narrative of the good German colonizer and the happy African native to counter British anti-(German) colonial statements in 1935 that linked Nazi racism and overseas colonialism. In their protest, colonialists evoked Nazi racial theories to support their colonial claims. By doing so, they asserted the interwoven nature of colonialism and National Socialism. After outlining a Nazi colonial view of race relations, they situated this racism within a nexus of European colonialism and “Judeo-Bolshevik” conspiracy. Triggered by an article in the British Manchester Guardian that pointed out this inconsistency, these discursive maneuvers allowed colonialists to maintain their myth of benevolent colonialism in the face of a racist regime.

In April 1935, the Foreign Office of the Nazi Party (Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP) circulated a press report on an article published on the 16th of that month in the Manchester Guardian.42 In drawing attention to this article, the Foreign Office of the NSDAP identified its contents as a method of anti-(German) colonial propaganda on the part of the British to be expected given the Nazis’ racial policies.43 According to the article, the British claimed that

…whether [Nazi Germany] is altogether suited to the exercise of mandatory functions,

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42 BAB R 43 I/627, Bl. 50-51.

43 “Der nachfolgende Leitartikel aus der liberalen Handelszeitung ‘Manchester Guardian’ wirft ein Licht auf die zu erwartenden Methoden, mit denen uns die Fähigkeit Kolonien zu verwalten möglicherweise wieder abgesprochen werden soll.” Ibid.
as the German Empire would certainly have been, is another matter. She has adopted a racial doctrine that is incompatible with the very principle of the mandate. It is true that several mandatories in their practice fall short of this principle, but none of them so far short as Germany has fallen in her treatment of “non-Aryans.” In no mandatory area are the natives treated as the Jews are treated in Germany—and the natives of territories that once belonged to Germany and are now reclaimed are all “non-Aryans.”

Giving the *Manchester Guardian* the benefit of the doubt, the Foreign Office of the NSDAP’s press report acknowledged that, “[i]t remains to be determined to what extent the remarks of this newspaper are based on ignorance and un-enlightenment [Unaufgeklärtheit] about German outlooks on racial questions, or if they can be traced back to concealed anti-German Jewish propaganda.” The *Aussenpolitisches Amt* document, found in the files of the Reich Chancellery, must have circulated to the Colonial Policy Office of the NSDAP (KPA) and from there to other colonialists because the *Manchester Guardian* article—and other British accounts along similar lines—formed the basis of what the KPA later identified as the “future colonial guilt.” The idea of a “future colonial guilt” semantically built on the Entente’s “colonial guilt-lie” of the Germans’ abuse of their colonial subjects before 1919, reinforcing these charges by

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45 “Es bleibt dahingestellt, inwieweit die Ausführungen dieser Zeitung auf Unkenntnis und Unaufgeklärtheit bezüglich der deutschen Auffassung von Rassenfragen beruhen, oder auf versteckte anti-deutsche Judenpropaganda zurückzuführen sind.” Ibid.

46 This phrase (Zukünftige “Kolonialschuld”) appears as point 6 in the 1937 *Richtlinien für Vorträge, Ausbildungskurse und Abhandlungen über Kolonialpolitik und Kolonialwirtschaft* published by the KPA. BAB R 1001/9670, Bl. 153-155.
referencing Nazi Germany’s contemporary racial laws. Increased legislation against German Jews between 1933 and 1935\textsuperscript{47} motivated the Manchester Guardian to comment on these policies and to connect them to the diplomatic issue of the former German colonies. According to this thinking, the former Entente powers should never return the mandates to Germany because the Third Reich’s racial discrimination (as evidenced by the persecution of German Jews) would only lead to mistreatment of the mandates’ non-Aryan inhabitants.

Colonialists’ reactions to the charges of a “future guilt-lie” demonstrate their skill at integrating aspects of National Socialism—in this case racism—into their narrative in order to support their claims on the former German colonies. The British accusations struck not only at the colonialists’ domain of the African colonies but also at the underpinnings of National Socialist ideology—racial policy. Nazi race theorists such as Walter Gross also intervened to frame the colonialists’ response. By making the old “colonial guilt-lie” contemporary and thereby putting both colonialists and National Socialists on the defensive, the charge of a “future guilt-lie” brought these groups closer together in their rhetoric. Nazi commentators insisted that the British did not understand the fundamentals of Nazi racial policy and that this misunderstanding blinded the British

\textsuperscript{47} Between 1933 and 1935, German Jews were expelled from the civil service, laws applied quotas for Jewish students at schools and universities, Jews were prohibited from owning land, being newspaper editors, and excluded from the arts. In September 1935, months after the Manchester Guardian article, the Nuremberg Laws were passed, which stripped German Jews of their citizenship and outlawed marriages and sexual relationships between Jews and “Aryans.”
to their own racism in their colonies. Colonialists explicitly discussed how the overseas colonies fit into the Nazis’ racist goals. Reacting to the *Manchester Guardian*’s accusations, they reiterated their narrative of German colonial history as a peaceful coexistence between Germans and Africans and demonstrated that their claims to colonialism did not base themselves in racism.

Colonialists fought against the *Manchester Guardian*’s accusations on several fronts. First, they argued that the Nazi racial laws did not represent a departure from the policies of Imperial Germany vis-à-vis its colonial subjects. This argument denied that Nazi laws and ideas of race threatened Africans and Pacific Islanders. In fact, German polices had proven better for native populations than English or French colonial rule. Hans Reepen, in the *Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung* in February 1936, outlined the positive features of Nazi racial thought for colonized populations. Nazism rejected all mixing of blood, first for the sake of the “Aryan” race, but also to maintain “the purity of the colored race.” The Aryan paragraph, Reepen explained, “means the safeguarding of all races.” The Third Reich had formalized racial principles “where other peoples—whom

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we award pride in their own race in equal measure—do not have a law but deal instinctively out of similar blood-based ties.”

The racial segregation in German colonies (past and future) would benefit both the colonizer and the colonized by supposedly allowing both groups to maintain their essential racial characteristics. Thus, Nazi racial laws did not imply a racial hierarchy, but supposedly merely stated that empirically based differences between the races existed. The mental gymnastics necessary for colonialists to argue that Nazism did not segregate between supposedly superior and inferior races—while living in a state that increasingly marginalized and persecuted its Jewish citizens as well as former colonial subjects—are extraordinary.

Colonialists’ selective and self-serving blindness to the true nature of the National Socialist regime led them to assert the benevolent (and even inclusive) nature of National Socialism, despite the evidence of the Nazis’ domestic racial policy and later their genocidal behavior during the war. Because these racial laws—in the colonialists’ interpretation—promised esteem and reverence (*Achtung und Ehrfurcht*) for foreign races

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as well as the Germans, colonialists asserted that the laws benefited both groups.\(^{51}\) In a December 1940 article in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, for example,—at a time when Nazi Germany ruled half of Europe—Ernst Wilhelm Bohle, head of the Foreign Office of the NSDAP, declared that “[t]he National Socialist honors foreign people precisely because he loves his own.”\(^{52}\) Rudolf Asmis of the KPA added that the future German colonial administration would protect the freedom of religion of both Christians and non-Christians (identified as Muslims and “fetishists” but supposedly not Jews).\(^{53}\) In support of their larger narrative of peaceful German-African relations, colonialists recounted episodes from the colonies that demonstrated that most Africans acknowledged the Nazi regime as the rightful heir to the Imperial German colonial tradition. In May 1934, for example, the Matthias Rohde & Company described how a native choir had surprised the company representatives in Lüderitzbucht in Southwest Africa with a rendition of the Nazi Horst Wessel song.\(^{54}\) Feeble accounts like these allowed colonialists to maintain


\(^{53}\) Rudolf Asmis, “Grundlagen und Ziele der künftigen deutschen Kolonialverwaltung,” *Afrika-Nachrichten* 21, no. 9 (September 1940): 130.

\(^{54}\) BAB R 8023/83, Bl. 104. Also in 1934, the DKG forwarded a letter from the Togolese Prince Joseph R. Byll (written in June 1933) to Hans Heinrich Lammers in the Reichskanzlei, in which Byll thanked Hitler for all the work he was doing for Germany, wished him luck, health, and a long life so that Hitler could rebuild Germany to its stature before the war in 1914, and also so that Hitler could fight for the lost colonies, in particular to free Togoland from the treatment of the French government. BAB R 43 I/626a, Bl. 215, 217, 222.
that Nazi racism would not interfere with their desire to rule benevolently over non-European subjects.

Several colonialist commentators referenced Germans’ medical work in the colonies as evidence of their humanitarian treatment of all races—a central component of the colonialists’ narrative of the “good German colonizer.” In the great battle against disease in the colonies, these commentators reminded their audiences, the Germans had not distinguished between black and white, and had saved “hundreds of thousands and millions of poor natives.”55 The 1943 film *Germanin* about the invention of the medicine Bayer 205 to treat sleeping sickness in Africa is the epitome of this narrative. Emphasizing their humanitarianism, colonialists mobilized Germany’s international scientific reputation in support of German colonialism.56

In addition to the positive nature of German colonialism, colonialists’ responses to the *Manchester Guardian* article also asserted Germany’s role in a global racial struggle against world Jewry. Colonialists took affront at the comparison of Germany’s treatment of colonial subjects and of Jews, reasserting Nazism’s claims about the specific threat that Jews posed to Germany. The “Aryan Paragraph,” according to Hans Reepen,


represented a defensive rather than offensive measure. Foreign critics, he claimed, did not understand the level of “judafication” (Verjüdung) of German public and private life that had existed in Germany before the Nazis intervened. Dr. Wilhelm Arning, former director of the Witzenhausen Colonial School, declared that Nazi Germany did not direct its racial policies against “non-Aryans,” but rather protected the Aryan elements of the German Volk from degeneration through non-Aryan influences. Reepen and Arning’s distinction between Jews and other non-Aryans allowed colonialists to maintain a positive image of Africans while simultaneously asserting their loyalty to the Volksgemeinschaft by vilifying its primary enemy (Jews) using National Socialist tropes. A cartoon in the colonialist illustrated journal Kolonie und Heimat from March 1940, for example, asserted that Jews had settled in the colonies as traders, but never as farmers or “colonizers,” reiterating the claim of Jews’ obsession with money. Colonialists’ assertion of the distinction between anti-Semitism and the treatment of Africans represents a reversal of earlier nationalist and anti-Semitic thought in Imperial Germany, which closely aligned the subjugation and racial separation of both groups.

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57 As part of the April 1933 Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service, the so-called “Aryan Paragraph” restricted employment to those who could demonstrate their Aryan (that is, non-Jewish) heritage.
60 Kolonie und Heimat 4 no. 6 (12 March 1940): 120.
61 Christian Davis, “Colonialism, antisemitism, and Germans of Jewish descent in Imperial Germany, 1884—1912” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University-New Brunswick, 2005).
In line with National Socialist depictions not only of Jewish capitalists but also of the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” colonialists portrayed German involvement in the overseas colonies (especially in Africa) as a “bulwark against Bolshevism.” Nazis leaders viewed Bolshevism as a Jewish plot, an argument stemming from the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion and promoted in Nazi Germany by Alfred Rosenberg under the concept of “Judeo-Bolshevism.” One can read references to Bolshevism, therefore, as referring to Jews as well. In 1934, Rudolf Dittrich, head of the central office of the KPA, declared that “[t]he white race needs Germany in Africa. Africa must be a bulwark against Asia [sic: Bolshevism], if Europe does not want to disappear from the stage of world politics.”\(^62\) The 1937 KPA guidelines for propaganda (Richtlinien) explicitly connected Germany’s role in the fight against communism with the refutation of the “future guilt-lie” under point 6 (“The Future ‘Colonial Guilt-Lie’”).\(^63\) The intertwining of Jews, communists, and Africans (and African-Americans) reached extremes, such as in a notice in the non-colonialist journal Deutscher Lebensraum about the activities of Jewish communists in the United States, titled “Jews promise white women to Negroes.”\(^64\)

In this formulation, Germany’s role in Africa did not represent self-interest, but rather would serve Europe as a whole. In a 1936 article in Deutscher Kolonialdienst, K.-

\(^{62}\) “Richtlinien der Kolonialpolitik,” BAB R 8023/152, Bl. 75-80.

\(^{63}\) BAB R 1001/9670, Bl. 153-155.

A. Stuckenberg explained that part of communism’s plan for world domination was to spread communism throughout the colonies to “…agit[ate] the masses of half-civilized peoples against Europe, to scatter Europe’s raw and reserve materials, and thereby to accelerate and bring about the downfall of the Occident.”65 The blame for the spread of communism in Africa lay with the European powers, according to Max Gerd Weser, “as a result of their offenses against the order of creation and standing disregard of all laws of nature.”66 As the only European power that upheld the “order of creation” through its colonial policies and had diagnosed the threat of communism, these authors argued, Germany would have to defend both Europe and the colonies against Bolshevism.

Colonialists’ sense of communal European anti-communism, however, did not prevent them from employing comparisons with other European colonial powers as part of their reaction to the “future guilt-lie.” Not only did the English underestimate the threat Jews posed to Germany and misunderstand the real nature of the Nazi racial laws, colonialists argued, but the English and the French practiced racism in their own colonies. These colonial comparisons inverted the original “colonial guilt-lie” by highlighting the brutality of English and French rule, thereby asserting the superiority of

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German colonial rule. **Figure 1** Colonialists also extended this criticism to the treatment of African-Americans in the United States. These tropes of colonial comparison and critique also extended beyond the personally invested circle of the colonialist movement, for example in the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*, emphasizing the importance of this aspect of the colonialist argument to larger feelings of German inferiority within Europe.

**Figure 1**: “Halifax: What England does, it does for the freedom and civilization of the nations.”
Source: *Afrika-Nachrichten* 20, no. 5 (May 1939): 129.
The English—as Germany’s rival in global and European politics—received criticism from colonialists for their colonizing practices and for the hypocrisy of their complaints about Nazi “racial awareness.” Dr. Arning, in a 1935 article titled “The German Racial Laws as the Obstacle for the Acquisition of the Mandates,” found reasons other than German racism for unrest among native populations. If one could speak the local language, Arning asserted, one would discover that the topics of concern were unemployment or low wages. It is “not racial politics—as the Manchester Guardian thinks—that occupies the people.”

Dissatisfaction among the indigenous populations, Arning asserted, stemmed from the supposed economic failures of the British mandate, not from Nazi racism. Without the strong hand of German rule, Arning reported from his conversations with older Africans, the youth ran wild, “burglary, theft, [and] a life of debauchery are the order of the day with them.” These problems under the English mandate, Arning observes, had nothing to do with Nazi Germany’s racial policies and in

67 “Wenn man der Sprache gut kundig ist und sich einmal zwanglos mit dem einen oder anderen Eingeborenen unterhält, so kommen sie heute ganz regelmäßig auf die wirtschaftliche Lage zu sprechen, die es mit sich gebracht hat, daß entweder Arbeitslosigkeit herrscht, oder die Löhne wesentlich geringer sind as in früherer Zeit.....Aber man sieht, wo der Schuh drückt, und daß nicht die Rassenpolitik, wie sie der ‘Manchester Guardian’ sich denkt, es ist, die die Leute beschäftigt.” Dr. Arning, “Die deutsche Rassengesetzgebung als Hemmnis der Übernahme von Mandaten,” 176.

68 “Das junge Volk sei aus Rand und Band, Einbrüche, Diebstahl, Luderleben seien bei ihm an der Tagesornung, ja, es habe selbst von den Eltern keinen Respekt mehr, und das ist etwas, was den seit Urzeiten in patriarchialischen Zuständen lebenden Leuten nicht in den Sinn will.” Ibid.
fact demonstrated that older Africans held the old German colonial policies in high regard.  

Arning’s argument echoed a 1934 article entitled “Racial Pride and Politics” by Walter Gross, head of the Racial Policy Office of the NSDAP, reprinted in the *Koloniale Rundschau*.  

Gross observed that the English comported themselves from a position of racial superiority vis-à-vis the other peoples and races in the British Empire as a matter of course, and were met with an equally pronounced racial awareness among the majority of these foreign races, particularly in the matter of racial mixing.  

Gross’s article did not directly address the issue of the colonies, but by declaring racial consciousness a universally held virtue, Gross provided a template for colonialist refutations of the “future guilt-lie.” The section highlighted by the *Koloniale Rundschau* editors read “Therefore, let it once again be established with the utmost clarity that National Socialism in no way intends to degrade other races or to designate them as inferior.”

Nazi racial thinking, according to Gross, centered not on “inferiority” (*Minderwertigkeit*)

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69 “Auch das ist eine Klage, die zur Rassenpolitik des dritten Reiches nicht die geringste Beziehung hat, wohl aber dafür spricht, daß die alte deutsche Eingeborenenpolitik, die auch die der Zukunft sein würde, in hoher Achtung steht.” Ibid.  

70 [Walter] Gross, “Rassenstolz und Politik,” *Koloniale Rundschau* 26, no. 3/4 (August/October 1934): 271-272. This article had previously been published in the *Deutscher Allgemeine Zeitung* in September 1934, but was reprinted in *Koloniale Rundschau* with certain sections highlighted in bold by the journal’s editors.  


72 “Deshalb sei hier noch einmal mit Schärfe festgestellt, daß der Nationalsozialismus gar nicht daran denkt, andere Rassen herabzusetzen oder als minderwertig zu bezeichnen.” Ibid.
but on “otherness” (Andersartigkeit). Colonialists eagerly adopted these linguistic evasions of Nazism’s uncompromising racism, finding in them the path to embracing racial policies while maintaining the benevolence of their ideal German colonizer.

Colonialists judged the French as equally race conscious although, because of their distinct style of colonialism, inadequate as colonizers. In contrast to German colonial rule, French colonialism fostered assimilation, through which French colonial subjects could conceivably become politically and culturally French. This would mean that one day “a hundred million people on this earth would speak the language of Victor Hugo,” resulting in “the unchaining and anarchizing of the black world.” The basis of this supposedly ill-conceived colonial policy rested in France’s republican political system. According to one author, Germany had barely escaped this fate:

If the dismal picture of the theft of our colonies has a positive side, it is that the liberal-Jewish, anti-race spirit of the Systemzeit [the Weimar Republic] would likely have opened the door of the country to the colored Mischlinge and probably even to coloreds [farbige] themselves, as is the case in France.

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73 Ibid.

74 This process of “becoming French” of course did not always work in practice. See for example, Gary Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State: Ngritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).


77 “Wenn das trübe Bild des Raubes unserer Kolonien einen Lichtpunkt hat, so ist es der, dass wahrscheinlich der liberalistisch-jüdische, rasseverneinende Geist der Systemzeit auch den farbigen Mischlingen unserer Kolonien, vielleicht sogar den Farbigen selbst, die Tür des Landes ebenso geöffnet
Because the French policy of assimilation, according to Ernst Gerhard Jacob, stemmed from weakness, it would prove detrimental to French colonial subjects. By emphasizing the equality of all races, the French “have been the worst in destroying the natives’ characteristic ways of life and indigenous infrastructure and replacing them with the inflexible centralism of the French administration.” The French had done so for selfish reasons: “the alarming decline in the French birth rate and…France’s desire to shore up its dwindling ethnic strength [Volkskraft] through replenishment from the colonies.”

Max Gerd Weser outlined the dangerous effects of France’s assimilation policy, including a mosque built in Metz in Lorraine, the presence of black colonial troops in the French home army stationed in Alsace-Lorraine, and a 1937 law that accelerated naturalization. The French deployment African colonial soldiers in the occupation of the Rhineland from 1919 to 1923 disqualified the French as colonizers, both for militarizing their colonial subjects and for undermining the European racial hierarchy and


Germany’s place within it.\textsuperscript{80} The French, colonialists believed, had through their policy of assimilation and their use of African soldiers in Europe corrupted the natural order of life in the colonies and therefore had done more harm than good.

Colonialists’ comparisons with America centered not on America’s involvement in its colonial territories in the Caribbean and the Philippines, but on the treatment of African-Americans. In his 1934 article, Walter Gross pointed to racial issues in America, stating, “…\textit{America} has at this time not only socially and politically conducted a conscious race war against the Negroes but has also legally assigned differing values to the races of Europe through its immigration laws.”\textsuperscript{81} (emphasis in original) Similarly, an April 1939 cartoon in \textit{Kolonie und Heimat} depicted a “trouser-nigger” (“\textit{Hosennigger}”), who tells his uncivilized fellow tribesmen in Africa of the separate restaurants and train compartments that African-Americans “enjoy” in the United States. But, the cartoon caption continues, he fails to mention that his brother was lynched.\textsuperscript{82} \textbf{Figure 2}


\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Kolonie und Heimat} 3, no. 9 (25 April 1939): 288.
The use of the term “Hosennigger” in this cartoon implied a global interchangeability of Africans and African-Americans in part through the use of a distinctly American idiom in an African context.\(^83\) Other cartoons on the same page

\(^83\) The term “Hosennigger” was used as early as 1897 by ethnologist Felix von Luschan, specifically in his description of Bismarck Bell, a Togolese man who participated in the 1896 German Colonial Exhibition and insisted on being photographed in his suit and tie. A variant of this expression, “Hosenneger” was used in 1898 by Rittmeiter von Stetten. Inken Gesine Waßmuth, “Afrikaner als Produkt kolonisatorischen Sprechens in Kolonie und Heimat,” in Deutsche Sprache und Kolonialismus. Aspekte der nationalen Kommunikation 1884-1919, ed. Ingo H. Warnke (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 336, fn. 20.
parodied the assimilation of African clothing in French fashion and the English use of technology such as radios to “enlighten” the native population, highlighting the ridiculousness of French and British attempts to “Europeanize” their colonial subjects (and in the French case, the threat of hybridity through assimilation). Another Kolonie und Heimat cartoon from September 1941 asserted that America needed colonies because “....the Americans’ demand for new excitement through ritual Negro dances is immense” and (below an image of a black man being lynched by a cowboy figure with bystanders watching approvingly) because “...America has always demonstrated its particular ability to care for Negroes through its understanding of how to dramatically raise the living condition of blacks.”

Figure 3 References to American racism and lynching also appeared in Nazi publications such as the SS newspaper Das Schwarze Korps and the illustrated magazine Neues Volk. Not only did America treat their “colonized subjects” brutally in the eyes of German colonialists, but they were themselves tainted by the degeneracy of their culture through proximity to their “natives.”


85 See Koonz, The Nazi Conscience, 249.

86 For a discussion of the change from the category of “natives” [Eingeborenen] to “Negroes” [Neger] see Zimmerman, Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany; Zimmerman, Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German empire, and the globalization of the new South.
Figure 3: “America needs colonies, because....”
Source: Kolonie und Heimat 20 (23 September 1941): 460.
Through their reactions to the “future guilt-lie” of the *Manchester Guardian*, colonialists portrayed Nazi racism and racial laws as in line with their interpretation of the German colonial past. The *Manchester Guardian* article forced colonialists to sanitize the underlying violence in both colonialism and Nazi racism. Because the article linked Nazi anti-Semitism to colonialism, colonialists could not support one without the other. In doing so, colonialists asserted the contemporary role of the German colonizer in the racialized world imagined by the Nazis, powerfully expressed through visual depictions of Africa.

**Visual Refutations of the “Future Guilt-Lie”**

Simultaneous to the vibrant discussion of the “future guilt-lie” in the colonialist press, colonialists circulated visual representations of Africans. These representations did not explicitly set themselves in opposition to the “future guilt-lie.” But, by depicting contented Africans under German rule or emphasizing the importance of maintaining the “naturalness” of these Africans, they supported the colonialists’ narrative of peaceful yet strictly separate German-African relations.

German photographers who traveled to the former colonies highlighted the naturalness of the Africans they encountered, a naturalness supposedly captured objectively through the medium of photography and under assault by the Mandate authorities. The Europeanization of colonial subjects, visualized through European clothing, threatened German ideas of colonization—not merely by blurring the line between European and African, but, in doing so, by encouraging Africans to think of
themselves as their colonizers’ equals and to demand equal respect, rights, and opportunities. Colonialist photographers who produced travelogues of their time in the colonies vigorously responded to this threat. Karl Mohri, in his 1938 book of photographs *African Travels (Afrikanische Reise)*, decried the Europeanization of Africans in South Africa, belittling an African “Herr Doktor” and students in his captions to their photographs. Figure 4 Adopting the “usual uniform of the European intelligentsia,” these students wear sports jackets, flannel pants, and loafers. Similarly, Ilse Steinhoff derided two men in East Africa for wearing garishly-colored ties, flat caps, and knickerbockers on their way to church in the city. When worn by Africans, the emblematic clothing of the Englishman—the school uniform and the knickerbockers—made these Africans ridiculous to German colonialist observers, even as they conveyed the visual threat of a future racial parity.

This blurring of racial hierarchies began with the youth. In their 1941 photographic travelogue, Helmut and Erna Blenck photographed a young boy and girl in Southwest Africa, the boy wearing only a loincloth and the girl in a gingham dress. Figure 5 The Blencks captioned the photograph “Hottentot Children. How much more

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88 “Wird ein Neger ‘höherer Schüler,’ trägt er nur noch die bei der europäischen Intelligenz übliche Uniform: Sakko, Flannelhose, Halbschue. Auch darin will er ihr gleichen.” Ibid.

natural the boy in a loincloth seems than his sister in a cheap cotton dress!"\textsuperscript{90} The Blencks reiterated this theme in other photographs, such as one of Herero girls in their school uniforms with the caption “Foreign [\textit{Artfremd}] in clothing and manner—that is native education as we don’t want it."\textsuperscript{91} \textbf{Figure 6} This sartorially expressed hybridity contained the greater threat of racial mixture, as the Blencks articulated in their association of clothing and manner in this caption and in the following image of two men, captioned “[Rehoboth] Bastard and Bantu Negro, degenerate in race and in clothing.”\textsuperscript{92} Looking European could spill over into racial mixing with Europeans, who supposedly would exercise less racial awareness when encountering Africans who appeared in the guise of Europeans.

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\textsuperscript{90} “Hottentottenkinder. Wieviel natürlicher wirkt der Junge im Lendenschurz als seine Schwester im billigen Kattunkleidchen!” Helmut Blenck and Erna Blenck, \textit{Afrika in Farben: Das Farbbild-buch der deutschen Kolonien, Deutsch-Ost- und –Südwestafrika} (Munich: Paul Wustrow Verlag, 1941).

\textsuperscript{91} “Artfremd in Kleidung und Wesen, das ist Eingeborenerziehung, wie wir sie nicht wollen.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{92} “Bastard und Bantuneger, in Rasse und Kleidung entartet.” Ibid.
Figure 4: “Herr Doktor”
Source: Karl Mohri, Afrikanische Reise (Berlin: Horst Siebert Verlag, 1938): 21.
Figure 5: “Hottentot Children”  
Figure 6: “Foreign in Clothing and Manner”
While colonialists mocked the preening of Africans dressed in European clothing, they warned that Europeanizing colonial subjects threatened these Africans socially, culturally, and morally. A March 1942 photo-essay in *Kolonie und Heimat* by Eva MacLean entitled “From Negro to ‘Nigger’” used the supposed distinctions between the labels “Negro” (*Neger*) and “Nigger” to emphasize the natural purity and innocence of the former versus the corruption by European civilization that created the latter. **Figure 7** While the German definition of “Neger” came from the American New South, here MacLean creates a further distinction and indeed upends these definitions, connecting “Neger” to an authentic Africanness and “Nigger” to a corrupted Europeanized state.\(^9\)

In the caption to a photograph of an old man looking through a pair of binoculars, MacLean describes how the man lives, practically naked, deep in the jungle. After looking through the binoculars, the old man regarded whites as magicians for possessing such a tool.\(^9\) By contrast, a photograph of a young boy in an open, tattered shirt and cap too large for him emphasizes the boy’s degenerate and corrupt life. “This small hoodlum [*Strolch*] in his African harbor city” had lost his African heritage; “he knows neither the stars nor the wind nor the drum signals.” Dressed in rags and with an eye for profit, he is

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\(^9\) The “Negro” in the post-Civil War New South was a contradictory figure: on the one hand hard-working and inexpensive labor, on the other hand, rebellious and lazy. The term, therefore, was linked to African-Americans’ position as a labor force. Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German empire, and the globalization of the new South*, 39.

\(^9\) This description seems to match the anthropological term “*Eingeborene*” or “natives” rather than the labor-oriented “Neger.”
“the budding ‘trouser-nigger,’ [Hosennigger] who today swarm the coast of Africa.”

Again, the boy’s clothing serves as emblematic of his marginal position: as a “Hosennigger,” he is caught between his African past and a European future that he can never fully attain.

The contrasts depicted in these photographs—between the old, primitive, natural Africa and the new (young), Europeanized but corrupt or ridiculous Africa—demonstrated the negative changes to Africa that colonialists claimed occurred after the Germans’ departure. Such depictions reiterated the themes of colonialists’ responses to the “future colonial guilt” outlined by the *Manchester Guardian*. German colonial rule had been proven superior because it preserved racial differences, thereby protecting authentic African culture. Entente (specifically British) colonial rule resulted in the opposite, namely the corruption of Africans through their Europeanization.

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Figure 7: Eva MacLean, “Vom Neger zum ‘Nigger’”
Source: Kolonie und Heimat 6, no. 7 (24 March 1942): 104.
The primitive naturalness of Africans glorified in the Blencks’, Mohri’s, and MacLean’s photography contrasted starkly with the existence of Africans and Afro-Germans living in the Third Reich. Many of these Africans came from the former German colonies and some were naturalized German citizens and had white German wives and children. They did not reflect—in dress, manner, or speech—the silent, stoic, primitive African who “knew his place” (i.e. in Africa) in these visual representations. While colonialists could seamlessly correlate the German role as colonizer with Nazi racism, their narrative faltered when this racism impinged on the lives of former colonial subjects living in Germany, highlighting the contradiction between the narrative of colonial history and life in Nazi Germany.

**Former Colonial Subjects in Germany**

Colonialists’ interpretation of Nazi racism had a direct impact on the lives of the few former colonial subjects and Afro-Germans living in Germany. The history of the Herero uprising and genocide appeared only in sanitized form. Colonialists emphasized instead the myth of the “loyal Askari,” the African troops who had bravely fought alongside their German superiors in East Africa. As a result of this military service, colonialists believed that they should repay the loyalty of their former colonial subjects. Some of these Askaris came to Germany after the war, where they caused a problem for colonialists, especially after 1933. Contemporary estimates placed the number of formal colonial subjects in Germany at several dozen. Praising these former colonial subjects when they lived in Africa was one matter, but their presence in Germany—in the German
Volkskörper where they were subject to Nazi racial laws—complicated this rhetoric of support. Geographic place defined Germans’ attitudes toward their former colonial subjects. Colonialists’ efforts to protect Africans living in Germany and the fate of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau (German Africa-Show, 1935-1940) reveal the incongruity of the colonialist narrative when applied to the colonies and—in the context of National Socialist racial ideology and propaganda—when applied to Germany.

After 1933, when the Nazis’ prioritization of race became an organizing principle for German society, colonialists expressed concern about the fate of former colonial subjects under the new regime. In January 1934, a Dr. Marcus from the Colonial Economic Committee (Kolonialwirtschaftliches Komitee) presented a paper entitled “The Negro Question in Germany” to the Reich Colonial League’s standing committee.97 Marcus surveyed the background and status of former colonial subjects in Germany. Most, he declared, were not former Askaris and could not be equated with Askaris (which would have supposedly granted them a higher level of respect and a greater claim to German protection because of their service98). Most came from Cameroon or Togo and worked as artists, supposedly avoiding heavy manual labor. When they were


98 Military service in Germany carried great cultural and social significance. For example, German Jews who had served in the First World War received some exemptions from Nazi racial laws, such as the 1933 Law for the Protection of the German Civil Service. Marcus’ distinction between former colonial subjects from Togo and Cameroon and Askaris from German East Africa draws on this understanding of privilege accorded to military veterans.
unemployed, they were supported by unemployment insurance—though Marcus was quick to point out that “[t]hey are in no way worse off than other [sic. “other” crossed out and replaced by “unemployed”] German ethnic comrades [Volksgenossen].” These Africans, according to Marcus, did not have German citizenship (neither Reichsangehörigkeit nor Staatsangehörigkeit). Although designed to target Jews, the Aryan paragraph introduced in 1933 had made their lives more difficult. In response to this difficulty, Marcus proposed that “if exceptions are made with regards to other non-Jewish non-Aryans, a similar exception could be made for those former colonial subjects, the more so because their number is small.”

Marcus’ analysis of the “Negro Question” in Germany highlights colonialists’ conflicting views on Africans. On the one hand, Marcus argued for these former colonial subjects’ viability as workers in Germany and proposed granting them exceptions from recently introduced racial laws. The most important function of African colonial subjects in the German overseas colonies had, after all, been as laborers. Because Nazi racial policies and the attitude that they encouraged among the public meant that many Africans and Afro-Germans living in Germany could not find work, providing them with


100 “Sollten hinsichtlich anderer nicht jüdischer Nichtarier Ausnahmen gemacht werden, so dürften eine ähnliche Ausnahme auch zu Gunsten der früheren Schutzgebietangehörigen möglich sein, zumal ihre Zahl klein ist.” Ibid., 135.
employment would ensure that they did not become a burden on the state or cause other kinds of public disruption. On the other hand, however, Marcus maintained that the presence of Africans in Germany represented an “unwanted phenomenon,” adding the non sequitur that under no circumstances should they allow Africans to lecture to schoolchildren.\(^{101}\)

Following Nazi theorists, colonialists on the Reich Colonial League’s standing committee drew distinctions between different categories of colonial subjects and discussed the appropriate treatment for each group. At its December 1933 meeting, members agreed that while the number of people of mixed-race (Mischlinge) of African blood was small, mixed marriages (leading to Mischlinge) must be prevented in the future.\(^ {102}\) They expressed more consideration for “pure natives” (reinfarbigen Eingeborenen) who were in Germany because they could no longer serve the Germans in the colonies.\(^ {103}\) Colonialists also faced problems in defining the racial status of some former colonial subjects, specifically Samoans. The Reich Colonial League’s standing

\(^{101}\) Ibid.


\(^{103}\) Belief in the inferiority of mixed-race people from the colonies stemmed from Eugen Fischer’s 1908 study of the so-called “Rehoboth Bastars” in Southwest Africa (descendents of Cape Colony Dutch and African women), widely accepted inside and outside of Germany during this period. Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother bastarden und das bastardierungsproblem beim menschen; anthropologische und ethnographische studien am Rehobother bastardvolk in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1913). See also Christopher Hutton, *Race and the Third Reich: linguistics, racial anthropology and genetics in the dialectic of Volk* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2005).
committee stated that children from mixed German-Samoan marriages could not be considered as non-Aryans, because—according to important authorities on the subject—Samoans could be classified as Aryans.\textsuperscript{104} Through these discussions, colonialists showed their awareness of the centrality of Nazi racial categories for life in the Third Reich.

Seeking to ameliorate the effects of these racial categories on Africans and Pacific Islanders in Germany in terms of employment, however, colonialists asserted that these non-Europeans’ affiliation with Germany’s colonial past trumped Nazi racial categories—or at least should privilege these former colonial subjects vis-à-vis other non-Aryans. Because former colonial subjects literally embodied the colonial past through their presence in Germany, colonialists protected them as part of their larger efforts to assert the importance of colonial claims to Nazi Germany.

In a September 1933 meeting, the Reich Colonial League’s standing committee had discussed the problem of citizenship for former colonial subjects living in Germany, as they had become stateless with the loss of the German colonies. The members of the standing committee declared that “[u]nder no circumstances can it be tolerated that the loyal natives in Germany are treated as foreigners and…suffer adverse effects from the standpoint of racial policy.”\textsuperscript{105} Because of their stateless status, former colonial subjects

\textsuperscript{104} For discussions of the Aryan origin of Samoans, see for example K.R. Howe, \textit{The Quest for Origins: Who First Discovered and Settled New Zealand and the Pacific Islands}? (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{105} “Auf keinen Fall geht es an, dass die treu gebliebenen Eingeborenen in Deutschland selbst als Ausländer behandelt und gegebenenfalls unter dem rassenpolitischen Gesichtspunkt Beeinträchtigungen erleiden.”
could only receive a foreigner’s passport (*Fremdpass*). But, the committee resolved, it should be possible for these former colonial subjects to also receive a special identification from the Foreign Office that declared that they were natives of the German territories.

In March 1936, Martin Bormann circulated a memorandum to all *Gauleiter*. He stated that once the Foreign Office ascertained which Africans deserved special status because of their military service, they would receive a certificate (*Bescheinigung*) attesting that the Foreign Office had no reservations about their employment. Bormann estimated that fifty Africans meeting these criteria (and their families) lived in Germany. Carrying such a form of identification, the RKB committee seemed to believe, would provide a level of protection for former colonial subjects and alleviate their condition in Germany.


106 This memorandum was re-circulated on June 25, 1940 from a Pg. Tornow to Reichsamsleiter Tiessler, USHMM Record Group 1996.A.350, “Deutsche Afrika-Schau.”

107 According to Bormann, the majority of these Africans had fought for the Germans during WWI and were now without constant work. Bormann’s list of 50 Africans living in Germany most likely did not include Afro-Germans such as Hans Massaquoi, Fasia Jansen, and Hans Hauck, who were children and young adults at the time and lived with their white German mothers (and were thereby more integrated into Aryan German society and not considered a burden on society nor as having a deep personal connection with Africa). Tina Campt refers to this position as the “outsider within.” Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Hans J. Massaquoi, *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: William Morrow, 1999).
Complaints lodged by Africans living in Germany often informed the concerns of colonialist organizations such as a letter sent by Kwassi Bruce to Edmund Brückner in the Colonial Department of the Foreign Office in 1934. Bruce had come to Germany from Togo as a child to participate in the 1896 German Colonial Exhibition and had remained in Germany, where he was raised by German foster parents. In 1913, he returned to Togo to visit his family and, being trapped there when the First World War began, served in the colonial army. After the war, he returned to Germany and became naturalized in 1926. In his letter, Bruce strategically promoted Nazi racial ideology. He stated that “[w]hen the new Germany in its almost complete majority has the desire to organize its entire life, in both spiritual and material forms, on a new basis, and [when it] has become convinced that the persons of other races living within its boundaries should not be allowed to take part in this productive development of its particularity [Eigenleben], this is its right.” Using Nazi anti-Semitism for his benefit, Bruce also stressed that National Socialists were wrong to categorize Africans and Jews together,


111 Quoted in ibid.
stating that “[o]ne cannot for the life of him make the same accusations against us as against the Jews!”\(^{112}\) But, he emphasized, some measures would have to be taken for the Africans and Afro-Germans living in Germany:

If one wants us Africans to disappear from Germany, including those from the former German colonies, one must give us not only the trip but also the means for us to start a new life in our original homeland, which has been taken from us here, because we had the bad luck of coming into this world with black skin.\(^{113}\)

Here, Bruce employed an anti-colonial and anti-racist argument to simultaneously emphasize the responsibility of colonialists and Germans in general to their former colonial subjects. Barring transportation back to Africa, Africans in Germany should be allowed to work to support themselves.

Colonialists’ concern for the welfare of Africans living in Germany also stemmed from pragmatic concerns about maintaining positive relations with Germany’s former colonies. In a note from November 1934, Edmund Brückner, former Governor of Togo and head of Colonial Department in the Foreign Office, traced a direct causal connection between the conditions of Africans living in Germany and the prospects of Germany’s return to the African continent in the future.\(^{114}\) Difficulties for blacks living in Germany, according to Brückner, came less from the steps taken by officials than from the

\(^{112}\) Quoted in ibid. 517.

\(^{113}\) Quoted in ibid. 516.

\(^{114}\) BAB R 1001/7540, Bl. 9-10. Martin Bormann expressed the same concerns in his March 1936 memo. USHMM Record Group 1996.A.350, “Deutsche Afrika-Schau.”
prevailing attitudes among average Germans. For example, employers reported they did not hire blacks because they feared the reaction of the general population. This in turn led to discord amongst the blacks living in Germany about their condition and treatment.

But of greatest importance to Brückner, discontent with their treatment did not limit itself to those former colonial subjects living in Germany, but made its way back to Africa through the contacts between blacks in Germany and in Africa. Stories of mistreatment in Germany would ruin the supposed good reputation of the Germans in Africa and make their involvement in the mandates more difficult. Such stories could also sully Germany’s international reputation among Western powers, as when the New York Times reported on the treatment of Africans living in Germany in an article on the German reaction to the Manchester Guardian’s accusations.115 Susann Lewerenz has posited that this concern explains the exemption of children of colonial migrants from the 1937 sterilization of Afro-German children (mostly the children of German mothers and French African soldiers).116 Colonialists envisioned former colonial subjects living in Germany as liaisons between Germany and Africa and therefore attempted to protect them. Their efforts faltered when the presence of former colonial subjects upset the boundaries of the racialized public sphere, as in the case of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau.


The *Deutsche Afrika-Schau, 1935-1940*

In 1935, Kwassi Bruce and his business partner Adolf Hillerkus formed a travelling performing group named the *Deutsche Afrika-Schau* (German Africa-Show) to provide employment for Africans still living in Germany. The group consisted on average of thirty members (including some children and a third of whom were women) and performed at yearly markets.\(^{117}\) Susann Lewerenz describes the *Deutsche Afrika-Schau* as a marginal space in Nazi Germany,

an apparent regulative grey zone, in which...black people were to some extent made “invisible” through their public display. Staged as “exotics,” they were located in an imaginary space outside of the societal domain and could thereby achieve room to maneuver.\(^{118}\)

Similar to the *Völkerschauen* of Imperial Germany, the *Deutsche Afrika-Schau* featured a variety of “authentic” performances including “war, fire, and prayer dances” and “King Walton, the African Fakir with his spear and war dance on nails.”\(^{119}\) In addition to these


\(^{119}\) “King Walton” was most likely portrayed by Clarence Walton, who as an African-American, further complicated the question of the authenticity of the *Deutsche Afrika-Schau*. Spielfolge, USHMM Record Group 1996.A.350, “Deutsche Afrika-Schau.”
exoticized performances, the show included animals, “African villages,” colonialist lectures, and the sale of exotic products. After its first year, the German Labor Front, the Foreign Office, and the Society for the Study of Natives took economic and operational control of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau. The show thrived, attracting an average daily attendance of 475 visitors in 1940. The Deutsche Afrika-Schau also supported colonialist propaganda. When the show was in Gau Niederdonau in Austria in the summer of 1940, W. Soller, the show’s business manager, reported that in every month the show had procured 400 to 500 new members for the Reich Colonial League and almost as many Kolonie und Heimat subscriptions.

The Deutsche Afrika-Schau had its critics. In a May 1940 letter to the Gauleiter of Niederdonau, Dr. A. Dyk, head of the regional office of the Racial Policy Office of Gau Niederdonau outlined the complaints that he had received about the show. These objections highlighted the performers’ excessive familiarity with the German audience. Herr Stock, the director of the show, called the performers “my comrades,” to which the anonymous complainant objected that “the National Socialist concept of ethnic


121 The average number of visitors in Kreis Gmünd in April was 457; 428 in Kreis Waidhofen from 1-19 May; 661 in Kreis Neubistrts from 20-26 May; 429 in Kreis Zwettl from 27 May to 15 June; and 400 in Kreis Horn from 16 June to 25 June. Letter from W. Soller, business manager of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau to the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Eingeborenenkunde, 25 June 1940, USHMM Records Group 1996.A.350, “Deutsche Afrika-Schau.”

comradeship [Volkskameradschaft] in no way covers [them].”

Furthermore, almost all of the performers wore the German Labor Front insignia (which included a swastika), some of the performers had white German wives and children (whose parents proudly proclaimed their service as Mischlinge in the German army), and these Africans and Afro-Germans “uttered blasphemy” when they declared “We believe in Germany, Heil Hitler!” The performers in the Deutsche Afrika-Schau had drawn the wrong kind of attention to themselves. Through their behavior, they had publicly asserted their assimilation into metropolitan German life. In the view of those who complained to Dr. Dyk, Africans should only appear in the German public space when they represented themselves as foreign and as African, reassuring German viewers through their difference that their presence in Germany was a temporary rather than a permanent state.

These complaints underscore the inauthentic nature of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau and its critics’ anxieties about the instability of an “Aryan” German identity highlighted in these performances. The Africans in the show had revealed themselves to be “too German” despite their efforts to present “authentic” African entertainments. One performer, Clarence Walton, was in fact African American, further blurring a German

\[\text{123} \text{“Der nationalsozialistische Begriff von Volkskameradschaft‘ deckt sich hiermit keinesfalls.” Letter from Dr. A. Dyk, Gauamtsleiter, Rassenpolitisches Amt, Gauleitung Niederdonau to Gauleiter von Niederdonau Dr. Hugo Jury, 13 May 1940, USHMM Record Group 1996.A.350, “Deutsche Afrika-Schau.”}\]

\[\text{124} \text{Ibid.}\]
definition of authentic Africanness. Inauthenticity was not a problem, however, in the use of blackface by white Germans to represent Askari soldiers at colonialist events, such as in a parade during the Naval and Colonial Soldiers Congress in Leipzig in 1935 and the Christmas celebration of the former colonial soldiers of Mannheim in 1936. While Ilse Steinhoff’s 1939 photographic travelogue Deutsche Heimat in Afrika cited a photograph of a swastika on a coal house in Southwest Africa approvingly (“there since 1927!”), the sight of Africans wearing swastikas in Germany provoked a different reaction. Racial border crossing could only work in one direction. White Germans could mimic their former colonial subjects without losing their whiteness, but Africans who displayed their identification with Germanness threatened to upset these racial divisions.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, positive portrayals of Africans challenged Nazi anti-British and anti-French war propaganda. Once again colonialists positioned the “loyal Askari” against the “French African rapist.” The political usefulness of “loyal Askari,” however, paled in comparison to that of the brutal French colonial soldier. In

125 A photograph of Clarence Walton and fellow performer B. Mohamed Husen is reproduced in Reed-Anderson, Rewriting the footnotes: Berlin and the African diaspora, 72.

126 An image from this parade is reproduced in Joachim Zeller, Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen: Koloniale Reklamesammelbilder (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008), 249; A photograph of the Mannheim Christmas celebration appears in Kolonial-Post, no. 1 (23 January 1936): 19-20.

127 Steinhoff, Deutsche Heimat in Afrika: Ein Bildbuch aus unseren Kolonien.

June 1940, for example, an article in the journal *Deutscher Kolonialdienst* described the supposedly bestial atrocities committed by French colonial soldiers against German soldiers, but laid the blame for these crimes on the French and their colonial methods.\(^{129}\)

In the district of Horn in *Gau* Oberdonau in Austria, the *Afrika-Schau* came to town in mid-June 1940, simultaneous with the increase in propaganda against the use of French colonial troops as the *Wehrmacht* invaded France. The combination of these two events caused consternation among local Nazi leaders: “Negroes fight against our fathers, brothers, and sons, murdering them in horrible ways and here they sit with our racial comrades [Volksgenossen] at a table, consort in all public locales, greet others with the German greeting, and accost our women and girls.”\(^{130}\) Their complaints finally prompted the district leader (*Kreisleiter*) Hoffmann to write to the Nazi Party chief of staff of Niederdonau in Vienna in August 1940. Hoffmann warned of the detrimental effects of the *Deutsche Afrika-Schau* on Nazi anti-French propaganda:

In the elementary school in Horn, a small boy stood up and explained that he had seen Negroes and that the Negroes were not nearly as wild and horrible as was always reported. On the contrary, they were very friendly, spoke with people and laughed continuously. This opinion is to some extent expressed by the population and thereby shatters the plausibility of the Reich’s propaganda. Black is black in the eyes of the


\(^{130}\) “Neger kämpfen gegen unsere Väter, Brüder, Söhne, morden sie in grausamen Weise und hier sitzen sie mit unseren Vg. an einem Tische, verkehren in allen öffentlichen Lokalen, grüßen mit dem Deutschen Gruß und sprechen unsere Frauen und Mädel an.” Quoted in BAB NS 18/519, Bl. 40.
Nazi racial propaganda did not allow for more subtle racial distinctions such as “our Africans” versus “French Africans.” Despite colonialists’ insistence that former colonial subjects’ loyalty (especially their military service) should trump racial legislation in Germany and despite their desire to make distinctions between Africans and Jews as racial Others, Hoffmann asserted that for the German public, “black [was] black” and “Negro [remained] Negro.” In Hoffmann’s account this idea of eternal blackness created a positive image that supposedly undermined Nazi war propaganda. But the tables could easily turn against colonialists’ more positive depiction of loyal African colonial subjects through this association. With the full force of Nazi war propaganda, operations such as the Deutsche Afrika-Schau, which complicated a clear racialized division of friends and enemies, became a casualty of war.

Confronted by local criticism of the show and by concerns about war propaganda, the Reich Propaganda Office and the Racial Policy Office of the NSDAP shut down the Deutsche Afrika-Schau in Horn on June 21, 1940. The performers found other means

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131 “In der Volksschule Horn stand ein kleiner Junge auf und erzählte, dass er Neger gesehen habe, die Neger sind gar nicht so wild und grausam wie immer erzählt wird. Im Gegenteil, sie sind sehr freundlich, sprechen mit den Leuten und lachen fortwährend. Dieselbe Ansicht wurde auch teilweise von der Bevölkerung geäußert und damit die Glaubwürdigkeit der Reichspropaganda erschüttert. Schwarz ist eben in den Augen der Bevölkerung schwarz und Neger bleibt Neger.” Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Once the show ended, however, the actors remained in Horn and—through their interaction with locals—continued to provoke concern amongst local leaders. Elisa von Joeden-Forgey notes that “…although the order from one Party office may have appeared to solve the ‘problem’ of the Africa Show
of support. B. Mohamed Husen, for example, returned to films, appearing in Carl Peters in 1941.\textsuperscript{134} The pro-colonial propagandistic value of the show had reached its limit. When it began to interfere with Nazi racial propaganda, the show lost whatever support it had previously received from Nazi propaganda officials.

**Conclusion**

With the beginning of Second World War in 1939, colonialists repeated their account of the Herero uprising on its 35\textsuperscript{th} anniversary. Their narrative of German victimhood and heroic victory may have had added resonance in the context of the so-called “Polish atrocities” and the recent invasion of Poland. These accounts, such as Walther Wülfing’s 1939 booklet *War in German-Southwest. Tales from the Herero Uprising (Orlog in Deutsch-Südwest. Erzählung aus dem Hereroaufstand)*, still downplayed the Schutztruppe’s actions that led to genocide.\textsuperscript{135} Wülfing recounted a soldier’s description of the Herero retreat as a “rash and panicked flight” (”kopfloses Fliehen”) and assured his readers that “was certainly not what the German leadership


intended, instead they wanted only strict punishment for the horrors committed and the surrender of the murderers.” But, the Germans had ultimately succeeded: “With the battle of Waterberg the Hereros’ power to resist was finally broken… Today they are settled on reservations, the days of their high-handedness are over forever.”

Wülfing then reminded the reader that Samuel Maherero, leader of the uprising, later asked to be returned from the English colony to which he had escaped and to be buried under the German flag in Southwestern soil, thereby providing closure to the whole episode. Thus, Maherero’s rebellion did not represent a fundamental conflict with German colonial rule. In colonialists’ interpretation, Maherero’s desire to be buried in German South West Africa demonstrated that—despite the fact that the Germans had killed seventy-five percent of his countrymen—Maherero had come to accept German rule and symbolically absolved Germans for the Herero war.

The lessons of the Herero genocide as understood through works such as Wülfing’s reappeared in 1941 and 1942 in the tactical lesson plans for the Colonial Police School in Vienna which trained police for the future colonies. The guidelines began with an assertion of the universal application of German military tactics, stating that “[t]he principles of our European tactics and way of waging war fully retain their validity in

colonial wars.” Only “the nature of the enemy, the climate, and to a small measure through the nature of the ground” affected their implementation.\textsuperscript{137} When discussing tactics, however, the guidelines differentiated between the war aims in combat against European powers and colonial wars on the one hand (the destruction of their ability to fight, \textit{die Vernichtung ihrer Kampfkraft}) and against Bolshevism on the other hand (their utter destruction, \textit{ihre Vernichtung schlechthin}). Again, Bolshevism (or Judeo-Bolshevism) represented a greater existential threat that required a more drastic response.

Repressing native unrest in the colonies could be achieved with milder measures than complete destruction, the lesson plans advised, such as “[o]ccupation of territories, extermination or displacement of the leadership, expulsion out of fertile settlement territories into barren land, capture of watering holes.”\textsuperscript{138} While “extreme cruelty is the rule when responding to the enemy's first tactical advance,” the use of these milder responses would benefit the colony in the long run, \textit{“for the native is the colonies’ most

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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valuable asset [Gut].”139 (emphasis added) Here the Vienna Colonial Police School reiterated a central theme of the colonialist narrative, using similar terminology as Franz von Epp in 1929: the importance—the value—of colonial subjects to the colony as laborers. Neither extermination nor a Vernichtungsstrategie (strategy of extermination) had a place in German colonial history. The narrative of the benevolent German colonizer set the tone for the future return to the colonies when German colonizers would fulfill the “African saying” that the German rules with a strong hand but with a tender heart.140

Colonialists could not continue this narrative as easily when protecting former colonial subjects in Germany, as seen in the fate of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau. The issue of place proved central to their failure; colonialists could speak of their respect for the native peoples of their former overseas colonies to refute the Manchester Guardian’s accusations, but such respect could not extend to Africans living in Germany under National Socialism. The story of Alexander Olympio from Togo is emblematic of the inability of colonialists to maintain their narrative of peaceful coexistence within the Nazi racial state. In October 1942, Olympio wished to visit Germany to study. His request was passed through the KPA and the Foreign Office, and was finally rejected by the Racial Policy Office of the NSDAP, which offered a frank response to Olympio’s case:

Even if one accepts that the Negro [Olympio] gives no cause for complaint on his part, it is inevitable that while residing and working in Germany he will come into

139 Ibid.
140 This saying was repeated to the German public in the 1939 documentary film Deutsches Land in Afrika.
contact with circles of the German population that are less oriented to him and his deportment. It will be unavoidable that even he will become aware of the hostile position of the German public; there may even occur incidents of an unpleasant nature. In any case, however, a lengthy stay in Germany should provide the Negro with experiences that will change, or at least dampen, the obviously earnest pro-German attitude he currently holds.

His sympathy for Germany and his readiness to work for us will surely be stronger with appropriate German support in Paris than by an extended presence in Germany, where the fundamental rejection of the Negro would of necessity become uncomfortably apparent even to him.  

The Racial Policy Office’s statement revealed the insurmountable contradictions between colonialists’ efforts to maintain positive relations with Germany’s former colonies and the racialized public sphere in Nazi Germany. While the Colonial Policy Office of the NSDAP had sought the advice of the colonial department in the Foreign Office on the matter of Olympio, it was the Racial Policy Office of the NSDAP that made the final decision—indicating the preeminence of racial concerns over colonial or foreign policy concerns in Nazi Germany. It also indicated the dominance of Nazi Party organizations over the colonialists, a process that had begun with the colonialist movement’s second Gleichschaltung in 1936.

141 “Auf Grund bisher gemachter Erfahrungen bin ich gegen die Erteilung der Einreisegenehmigung. Auch wenn angenommen wird, dass der Neger seinerseits keinerlei Anlaß zu Beschwerden gibt, so ist bei seinem Aufenthalt und seiner Arbeit in Deutschland unvermeidlich, dass er mit Kreisen der Deutschen Bevölkerung in Berührung kommt, die über ihn und seine Haltung nicht näher orientiert sind. Es wird unvermeidlich sein, dass dabei eine ablehnende Haltung der deutschen Öffentlichkeit auch ihm selbst deutlich zum Bewusstsein kommt, wenn es nicht sogar gelegentlich zu Zwischenfällen unliebsamer Art kommen sollte. In jedem Fall dürfte aber eine längerer Aufenthalt in Deutschland dem Neger Erfahrungen verschaffen, die seine zuzeit offenbar ernstlich pro-deutsche Einstellung verändern oder zumindest dämpfen. Die Sympathie für Deutschland und die Bereitschaft, für uns zu wirken, wird bei entsprechender deutscher Förderung in Paris sicherlich stärker sein als bei längerer Anwesenheit in Deutschland, bei der die grundsätzliche Ablehnung des Negers ihm selbst unangenehm spürbar werden muss.” BAB NS 52/13.
Chapter 4: “If you believe in the absoluteness of the Führer, there can be only one leadership!” The Second Gleichschaltung in 1936

On May 19, 1936, twelve of the eighteen member organizations of the umbrella Reich Colonial League met under the auspices of ambassador-at-large Joachim von Ribbentrop in the liaison office of the Nazi Party (Verbindungsstab) at Wilhelmstrasse 64 in Berlin. At this meeting, the colonialist organizations agreed to dissolve themselves in favor of a single, unified Reich Colonial League, changing the fate of the colonialist movement dramatically. In June 1936, the newly created Reich Colonial League (RKB) had 50,000 members. Within five years, this number would reach two million.¹ After 1936, the colonialist movement made the transition from a collective of (tolerated) pre-Nazi associations to a regime-approved mass movement, but at the cost of organizational plurality.

Since 1933, colonialists had hoped to reach all Germans, but by combining the strength of their individual organizations. Maintaining a variety of groups would amplify their public presence and offer different avenues to participation for all sectors of society (women, children, businessmen, former colonial soldiers, etc.). Between 1933 and 1936, colonialists had constructed their self-image as an expert elite in German society that instructed both the general public and the Nazi Party on the importance of overseas colonialism. Their ability to do so resulted in large part from their self-coordination

(Selbstgleichschaltung) in 1933, through which they preserved their sense of organizational autonomy built on their long history and experience.

In late 1935 and early 1936, however, high-ranking Nazi officials ordered the colonialist organizations to dissolve and recreate themselves as a new unified Reich Colonial League. From November 1935 to May 1936, Nazi officials applied pressure on colonialist leaders to undergo a second Gleichschaltung. Then, under Ribbentrop’s orders, colonialist organizations carried out their own dissolution in little over a month. The force and rapidity of their coordination should have left colonialists with no illusions about their place in Nazi society. For many older colonialists, such as DKG and RKB president Heinrich Schnee, the second Gleichschaltung revealed the limits of their own influence and confirmed a generational gap of support for the Nazi Party within the DKG. Schnee’s experience, recounted in this chapter, embodies the battle between the old and the new (represented in part by Epp\(^2\) and Joachim von Ribbentrop) in this moment of transition. Sixty-five years old in 1936, Schnee would not have had the same concerns about forging a long-term career under Nazism as did younger colonialists. Schnee’s ability to maintain his independence of thought—questioning the timing and manner of the consolidation into a unified colonialist organization—exposes the limitations of Selbstgleichschaltung for the Nazi regime. The variety of colonialist organizations still in existence in 1936 and their sense of autonomy and self-importance

\(^2\) Although Epp was of the same generation as Schnee, he had aligned himself more closely with the Nazi Party, joining in 1928 and serving as the Reich Governor of Bavaria after 1933.
undercut the regime’s attempts at ideological and organizational centralization. What Selbstgleichschaltung could not achieve, Ribbentrop would now try to achieve through Gleichschaltung.

Through their consolidation in 1936, colonialists were able to experience both their greatest success in terms of membership and public presence, but also the greatest incursion into their control over the meaning of colonialism in German public culture. As they had after 1933, colonialists used this setback to turn their reorganization to their advantage. Schnee’s resistance to the Gleichschaltung and the hesitancy that other colonialists may have felt remained within the confines of the meetings and correspondence of the DKG and RKB leadership. Publicly, colonialist authors (most of whom were not involved in the political machinations that had led to the Gleichschaltung) welcomed their new standing within Nazi society. Despite the continued vagueness of Hitler’s public stance on overseas colonialism, these authors and propagandists took the second Gleichschaltung as a signal of state support rather than subordination. In their public materials, they declared both the end of an “old-fashioned” kind of colonialism and the consolidation of the overseas colonial past within the Nazi ideology of the present. Colonialists’ decision (and ability) to create a mass movement after the reorganization of the new RKB in 1936 reflects both their desire to increase their influence through membership and their dependence on Nazi officials’ toleration in order to do so.
Old RKB to New RKB: Creating an “Einheitsorganisation”

By June 1936, the numerous colonialist organizations, including the forty-nine-year-old DKG, had dissolved themselves, and their members had united in the new Reich Colonial League under the direction of Franz Ritter von Epp. The first discussions of this second Gleichschaltung took place among Epp, Heinrich Schnee, and ambassador-at-large Joachim von Ribbentrop\(^3\) in November 1935 and proceeded quickly, with the plan for coordination solidified in a series of meetings in May 1936 and carried out in June 1936. The speed and timing of this final Gleichschaltung concerned some older colonialists, Schnee foremost among them. In the account of this process that appears in minutes of the meetings with Ribbentrop and in the DKG, and in his personal correspondence, Schnee voiced his concern that the consolidation of the colonialist organizations was premature and therefore unlikely to succeed. Schnee also expressed this view in his unpublished postwar memoir written between 1945 and his death in 1949, entitled How It All Came About (Wie alles kam).\(^4\)

The trajectory of the negotiations between November 1935 and June 1936, and Schnee’s role in them and in the colonialist movement, encapsulates the at times

\[^3\] At the time, Ribbentrop served as an ambassador at large before months later becoming the German ambassador to England and two years later Foreign Minister.

\[^4\] The memoir is more a rumination on the Third Reich than an account of his actions during the time period. As a source, it is of course suspect, such as exculpatory sections in which Schnee declares that he never treated Jews differently and in fact arranged the release of a Jewish friend after the November pogrom in 1938. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, VI. HA Familienarchive und Nachlässe, NL Heinrich Schnee, (GStA PK) Nr. 13, Bl. 151.
precarious position of colonialists in Nazi Germany. On the one hand, colonialists hoped to maintain their pre-1933 position of independence and their strong tradition within civil society. On the other hand, however, they needed to coordinate themselves within the new structures of Nazi-organized society in order to maintain their relevance and influence. Schnee’s persistent attempts to negotiate the second *Gleichschaltung*—and his rejection of the resulting new RKB—demonstrate his inability to recognize the ultimate authority that the Nazi Party and state claimed over all areas of German civil society. Or perhaps it represents his moment of principled resistance. The constraints of Nazism by 1936 pose an interpretive challenge, as Schnee could not have expressed outright opposition to the Nazis and instead had to qualify his responses. Either way, through his attempts to negotiate the colonialists’ situation, we can see the limits of individuals’ and organizations’ freedom after the intervention of high-ranking Nazi officials.

Many colonialists, of course, supported National Socialism and welcomed this *Gleichschaltung*. Realizing that their autonomy had come to an end and wishing to continue their activism, the colonialist organizations followed the orders from above and formed the new unified RKB. After 1936, with Epp at the helm of both the RKB and the KPA, the colonialist movement became organizationally closely aligned with the Nazi Party, but maintained its positive narrative of overseas colonialism.

In November 1935, Epp, Schnee, Rudolf Hess, and ambassador-at-large Joachim von Ribbentrop began to discuss the consolidation of the colonialist organizations into a unified colonial front. While the colonialist organizations had voluntarily coordinated
themselves in 1933, pressure from the Nazi Party drove the second *Gleichschaltung* in 1936. From colonialist sources on the 1936 reorganization, it is difficult to ascertain Ribbentrop’s or Hess’s motivations except to note the Nazi officials’ close supervision of the meetings leading up to the reorganization. In his memoir, however, Schnee points to Ribbentrop as the initiator of this *Gleichschaltung*. Expressing contempt for Ribbentrop, Schnee described him as “a man, who only has important skills in his own imagination, [who] in reality is stupid and arrogant, something that discerning people quickly realize.”

Ribbentrop, Schnee asserts, used the colonialist movement, of which he had little to no knowledge, as a means to gain the recognition necessary for promotion to Foreign Minister or State Secretary.

The order to coordinate the colonialist movement in November 1935 came as a complete surprise to Schnee. Despite Epp’s and Ribbentrop’s assurances of a verbal order to this effect from Hitler, Schnee objected. In a November 23, 1935 letter to Epp, Schnee predicted that many long-time members of the DKG and other groups would leave the movement if the organizations were unified at this (in Schnee’s opinion) premature

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5 “…ein Mann, der nur in seiner eigenen Vorstellung bedeutende Fähigkeiten hatte, aber in Wirklichkeit dumm und anmaßend war, was urteilsfähige Leute schnell erkannten.” GStA PK, Nr. 13, Bl. 121-122.

6 “In dieser Situation scheint Ribbentrop in seinem Ehrgeiz nach einer Betätigung gesucht zu haben, in der er sich auszeichnen konnte. Er verfiel auf die Kolonien, von denen er keine einzige kennengelernt hatte und auch sonst nicht viel wußte….” GStA PK, Nr. 14, Bl. 358.
These “old colonial pioneers” had told Schnee that the planned new formation of the RKB “would mean in practice the complete destruction of the existing associations.” Of course, this was exactly the aim of the new RKB, with the goal of strengthening the movement through unification. The dissolution, according to Schnee, would alienate precisely those “old colonials” who had held to the colonial idea “in the hard times, when no one else in the German Reich wanted to know anything about the colonies.” Here, Schnee expressed the precise nature of the “wounded attachment” between German colonialists after 1919 and the overseas colonial past: the authority of these “old colonial pioneers” rested on their struggle during the dark days of the Weimar Republic. Understandably, they would be suspicious of the motives of the Nazis who now wanted to dissolve their organizations and form a new Nazi organization without the institutional tradition and authority they had built up over the past decades. As a possible solution, Schnee suggested that Epp take over control of the RKB as well as the Colonial

7 Schnee’s warning seems to have been accurate. In an article about the supposed dissolution of the RKB in the fall of 1936, the New York Times commented on the large number of colonial veterans who had left the movement with the founding of the unified RKB the previous spring. Guide Enderis, “Reich to Dissolve Colonial League, Courting Britain by Halting Drive,” New York Times (October 24, 1936): 1, 6.

8 “praktisch die völlige Zerschlagung der bestehenden Verbände bedeuten würde.” Letter from Schnee to Epp, November 23, 1935, GStA PK, Nr. 38, Bl. 35.

9 “Es ist zu bedenken, dass diese nicht nur einen Verlust an Mitgliederzahl und kolonialer Erfahrung bedeuten würde, sondern dass damit gerade solche alten Kolonialleute den kolonialen Verbänden entfremdet würden, die in den schwersten Zeiten, als niemand sonst im Deutschen Reich von Kolonien etwas wissen wollte, den kolonialen Gedanken aufrecht erhalten haben.” Ibid.

Policy Office of the Nazi Party (KPA), which would “eliminate the still-existing resistances [Widerstände] within the Party.”¹¹ Epp, as a Party member and head of the KPA, would bridge the gap between the colonial credentials required by his fellow “old colonials” and the loyalty necessary to placate Nazi officials.

Epp rejected Schnee’s suggestions, retorting that these proposals would not suffice to transform the current state of the colonialist movement—which was precisely the goal of the second Gleichschaltung. Relying on statements by Ribbentrop in his reply (and expressing his agreement with these statements), Epp claimed that the act of unifying the colonialist organizations would overcome the remaining opposition within the Party. “The resistances of the Party to which you refer,” Epp declared, “will automatically make way for an active cooperation, as soon as the relevant internal instructions are made by the Führer’s representative to the Gauleiter and the Propaganda Department of the Party.”¹² According to Ribbentrop, Epp informed Schnee, Hitler did not want to make a public declaration in concert with the founding of the new RKB, but preferred “the silent preparation of a tool, which he can use at the moment when he

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¹¹ “…die etwa noch in der Partei auftretenden Widerstände beseitigt werden.” Letter from Schnee to Epp, November 23, 1935, GStA PK, Nr. 38, Bl. 35.

¹² “Die Widerstände der Partei, auf die Sie sich berufen werden automatisch einer aktiven Mitarbeit Platz machen, sobald die entsprechenden internen Anweisungen des Stellvertreters des Führers an die Gauleiter und an die Propagandaabteilung der Partei erfolgen werden.” Letter from Epp to Schnee, December 2, 1935, GStA PK, Nr. 46, Bl. 16.
makes such a declaration.”13 As for the “old colonials” who Schnee feared would leave the movement: “[E]ither the gentlemen are positively inclined towards the new Germany, in which case it is a matter of course that they would want to participate, or, if they don’t, then the new Germany can happily do without their colonial expertise.”14

Epp’s letter to Schnee suggests the author’s desire to convince himself as well as his reader of what he was saying. Epp’s promise that the second Gleichschaltung would overcome resistance within the Nazi Party is filled with the phrases of Nazi propaganda that placed the needs of the Volksgemeinschaft (or the Party as the political expression of this Volksgemeinschaft) above individual interests. Epp agrees with Ribbentrop “not to keep the existing powers [of the colonialist organizations] isolated, but rather to give them resonance in Party circles through their integration [Eingliederung] into one league.”15 Epp seems to condone the dismissal of the new RKB as “the silent preparation of a tool” for Hitler, despite the fact that his description completely devalued the work of the existing colonialist organizations and rejected their claims to a public presence.


14 “entwerder die Herrn stehen zum neuen Deutschland positive, dann ist es eine Selbstverständlichkeit, dass sie mitmachen werden, oder, sie tun es nicht, so wird das neue Deutschland gern auf ihre kolonialen Fachkenntnisse verzichten.” Ibid.

15 “die bestehenden Kräfte nicht isoliert zu erhalten, sondern ihnen durch ihre Eingliederung in einen Bund die Resonanz in den Kreisen der Partei zu geben.” Ibid.
According to Schnee, Epp justified his acquiescence as the actions of a soldier who followed orders. In the short, two-page letter, Epp mentions Ribbentrop six times, most often conveying an opinion of Ribbentrop followed by a statement of his (Epp’s) agreement. Finally, Epp concludes with a warning that Ribbentrop had communicated to him—these measures were not suggestions open to discussion, but rather the new RKB was already a foregone conclusion (fest beschlossen). Here Epp seems to both distance himself from the source of the warning (Ribbentrop had told him), but also to articulate his agreement with the course of events. While this stance demonstrates Epp’s position as the (for the most part compliant) liaison between the colonialist organizations and the Nazi Party, it also foreshadows the limits of his influence within the latter which became clearer during the war years.

In March and April 1936, Schnee circulated orders banning colonialist rallies and lectures, with the exceptions of lecture events of the RKB departments, the activities of the RKB lecture service, the RKB’s German Colonial Exhibition (and other exhibitions authorized by Schnee), and public colonial rallies specially authorized by Schnee. Schnee gave no reason for these orders, and they were ultimately a temporary measure, as

16 “Charakteristiken einiger Reichsstatthalter und Gauleiter,” GStA PK, Nr. 26, Bl. 103.
17 “Herr von Ribbentrop teilt mir ferner mit, dass es sich bei den zu treffenden Massnahmen nicht um diskutierbare Vorschläge handelt, sondern dass die Neuorganisation bereits fest beschlossen ist…” GStA PK, Nr. 46, Bl. 16.
18 BAB R 8023/592, Bl. 3.
colonialists’ public activities continued until the early 1940s. These orders came in the months leading up to the dissolution of the colonialist organizations, and after Schnee had received notification of the impending reorganization in November 1935. As such, they either reflect pressure placed on Schnee to keep the activities of the organizations in check or Schnee’s effort to present the colonialist movement as coordinated and therefore not in need of a second *Gleichschaltung*. The KPA issued its first propaganda guidelines (in concert with the RKB) in March 1936, undoubtedly to begin streamlining the propaganda of the colonialist movement along Nazi lines as well. The issuance of these guidelines in March 1936 is too simultaneous with Epp’s efforts to pressure Schnee into the second *Gleichschaltung* to be a coincidence.

In the end, Schnee’s attempts to divert the second *Gleichschaltung* failed. In his postwar memoir, Schnee recounts the pressure exerted on him at the time:

> I clearly saw the threat which lay in these written remarks. Nevertheless I kept my deprecatory attitude. Because it was clear that in the Third Reich it would be impossible for the president of a private association to maintain [this position] against the will of the “Führer,” I resolved for my part to ask for a decision from Hitler.\(^1\)

Writing to Hitler in January 1936, Schnee expressed his concern that—without a strong and public statement from Hitler in favor of overseas colonialism—a single coordinated colonialist organization would not be able to overcome the opposition from local and

\(^1\)“Ich sah deutlich die Drohung, welche in dies schriftlichen Ausführungen lag. Ich blieb trotzdem bei meiner ablehenden Haltung. Da es klar war, dass es im Dritten Reich für den Präsidenten einer privaten Vereinigung unmöglich sein würde, diese entgegen dem Willen des ‘Führers’ aufrecht zu erhalten, beschloss ich meinerseits, die Entscheidung Hitlers anzufragen.” GSTA PK, Nr. 15, Bl. 100.
national Party offices that it currently faced and therefore would fail in its duty to create a unified colonial front. Schnee’s belief that he could write personally to Hitler—and recommend a course of action for Hitler—is remarkable. It attests both to his self-perception of influence as well as to his deep commitment to the success of the colonialist movement. Schnee received no reply from Hitler. Instead, State Secretary Hans Lammers in the Reich Chancellery informed Schnee of Hitler’s decision in favor of coordination on May 6, 1936.

What had changed by May 1936 so that Hitler would authorize the creation of a unified (national) colonialist organization? Beginning in 1935, Hitler, having stabilized his control domestically, adopted a more aggressive foreign policy. In January 1935, a previously scheduled plebiscite in the Saar (a region in southwestern Germany governed as a League of Nations mandate under the Treaty of Versailles) resulted in a ninety percent vote in favor of reincorporation into Germany. The “return of the Saar” in March 1935 represented the first step in overturning the territorial restrictions applied by the Treaty of Versailles. Further flaunting the limitations of Versailles, Hitler reintroduced military conscription in March 1935 and acknowledged that Germany had secretly started rebuilding the Luftwaffe. In March 1936, German troops marched across the Rhine River in western Germany and remilitarized the Rhineland. The British and French offered no

20 GStA PK, Nr. 40, Bl. 72.

21 GStA PK, Nr. 15, Bl. 101; Nr. 48, Bl. 47.

230
substantive resistance to these violations of the Treaty of Versailles, thereby strengthening Hitler’s position in Europe. The “colonial question” had previously been a sensitive diplomatic issue especially with England, as seen in case of the Manchester Guardian article discussed in the previous chapter. By mid-1936, however, these diplomatic concerns in Germany had lessened, as Hitler’s potentially risky and ultimately successful foreign policy decisions had made him the most decisive leader of Europe. Hitler could turn to Germany’s colonial claims as part of this wider renunciation of the Treaty of Versailles. While these shifts did not prioritize overseas colonialism in Nazi Germany’s foreign policy, the time had come when Hitler could not only officially support the colonialist movement but could use overseas colonialism as a political chess-piece.

After Schnee was notified on May 6th that the Gleichschaltung of the colonialist organizations was inevitable, their coordination proceeded rapidly. On May 7, 1936, Schnee received word from Ribbentrop that the time had come to reorganize the colonialist organizations “with the goal of establishing a unified colonial league.”22 Over the next few weeks, colonialist leaders and Nazi officials met several times, culminating in two meetings on May 12th and 19th of twelve of the eighteen member organizations of the RKB. While most of the RKB or DKG meetings in Berlin were held at the DKG’s

“Afrikahaus” at Am Karlsbad 10 (south of Potsdamer Platz in the Tiergarten district), these meetings took place in the liaison office of the Nazi Party (Verbindungsstab) at Wilhelmstrasse 64. The change of location to Wilhelmstrasse 64 (north of Unter den Linden in the city’s governmental district) emphasized the power dynamic between the Nazi Party and colonialists, literally putting the colonialists in their (subservient) place.

At these meetings, Schnee announced the terms of the reorganization—already a foregone conclusion—to the delegates. All RKB organizations would dissolve themselves and their members would join the newly reformed RKB as individuals, thereby further atomizing colonialists and finally destroying their loyalty to pre-1933 organizations. The new RKB had a similar organizational structure as the old RKB, with local, city, and regional chapters (Orts-, Kreis-, and Gauverbände). The remaining organizational structure of the new RKB included a business management office and seven departments (Abteilungen). Covering all of the activities of the former colonialist organizations, these departments included Abteilung I (Propaganda); Abteilung II (Colonial Training and Science); Abteilung III (Organization und Personnel); Abteilung IV (Cultural Duties, involving much of the work of the former Women’s League); Abteilung V (Colonial Welfare, particularly of former colonial soldiers); Abteilung VI

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23 The building at Wilhelmstrasse 64 served as Hess’ headquarters, and Ribbentrop had his office located there as well. The Reichkolonialamt was located at Wilhelmstrasse 62, but the meeting was not held there.
(Treasury) and Abteilung VII (Literature). Abteilung VII included the RKB publishing house (run by Erich Duems) and press office.\textsuperscript{24}

Two exceptions to dissolution remained: the Colonial Economic Committee (Kolonial-Wirtschaftliches Komitee) would become part of the KPA, and the League of Colonial Soldiers (Kolonialkriegerbund) would join the National Socialist German Naval League (NS Deutscher Marine Bund).\textsuperscript{25} The Colonial Economic Committee remained in place to continue economic planning for the future colonial ministry, while the exemption of the latter reflects the special importance of former colonial soldiers within militarized Nazi society. Franz Ritter von Epp, then in charge of the KPA in addition to serving as Reich Governor of Bavaria, became head of the newly reformed RKB as well, further removing possibilities for dissent within the colonialist movement.\textsuperscript{26}

While acknowledging the consolidation of the colonialist organizations as a foregone conclusion, Schnee still hesitated and quickly decided to reject the new Reich Colonial League. At the May 12\textsuperscript{th} meeting, Ribbentrop presented the assembled

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Hanswerner Nachrodt, \textit{Der Reichskolonialbund} (Berlin: Junker & Duennhaupt, 1939), 22
\item \textsuperscript{25} The Kolonialkriegerbund had begun its incorporation into the NS Deutscher Marine Bund before this May 1936 meeting, as seen in a March 1936 circular in the league’s journal \textit{Kolonial-Post} that announced their corporate affiliation with the \textit{NS Deutscher Marine Bund}. “Rundschreiben Nr. 3”, \textit{Kolonial-Post} 3 (March 23, 1936): 54. In November 1938, \textit{Kolonial-Post} reported that the Kolonialkriegerbund (along with all other military associations) had been incorporated into the \textit{NS-Reichkriegerbund}. “Eingliederung des Dt. Kolonialkriegerbundes in den NS. Reichskriegerbund,” \textit{Kolonial-Post} 32, no. 11 (November 1938): 214.
\item \textsuperscript{26} While the RKB had its central headquarters in Berlin, Epp worked in Munich, where he also served as head of the KPA and as Reich Governor of Bavaria. The position of Bundesführer solved this problem, with this individual working out of Berlin but reporting to Epp in Munich. Nachrodt, \textit{Der Reichskolonialbund}, 22.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
representatives with a completed constitution for the new Reich Colonial League, which followed the template for National Socialist organizations. Trying to maintain the independence of the organizations—even as they agreed to their own dissolution—Schnee recounted in his memoir his suggestion that each organization take a copy of this constitution back to their membership for discussion and ratification. When Ribbentrop demanded immediate adoption of the document, Schnee refused. With this refusal, Schnee, the public face of overseas colonialism in Nazi Germany, broke his ties with the colonialist movement that he had led and shaped for six years. Epp later invited Schnee to join the new RKB’s council, but Schnee “rejected this [invitation] in writing, and neither became a member of the new Reich Colonial League, nor ever contributed to it, nor held any function within it.”

Taking this stand, Schnee ended his thirty-eight-year career in service of German overseas colonialism.

The strength of Schnee’s opposition to the colonialist movement’s second Gleichschaltung is striking. It meant publicly disagreeing with the decisions of Ribbentrop and Hess (and by extension, of Hitler as well) and removing himself from direct involvement in the future of the colonialist movement. By no means a resistance or oppositional figure, Schnee nonetheless represented a member of the conservative

27 “Ich lehnte jedoch schriftlich ab, und bin weder Mitglied des neuen Reichskolonialbundes geworden, noch habe ich je einen Beitrag an ihn geleistet, noch eine Tätigkeit für ihn entfaltet.” GStA PK, Nr. 15, Bl. 101-102.

28 Schnee began his career as judge and acting governor of German New Guinea in 1898 at the age of 27.
traditional old-guard who had always had an uneasy relationship with National Socialism and who had finally reached a self-imposed line in the sand which he would not cross. In fact, part of his refusal to join the new RKB’s council stemmed from his feeling that his work for the DKG and the RKB had not been properly and publicly recognized in the form of an appointment as honorary president of the new RKB or of another organization such as the Olympic committee. As he stated in a letter to Epp in August 1936, “without a clarification to the public that my activity at the head of the colonial movement had the recognition and appreciation of the Führer, it is not possible under the present circumstances for me to accept a position in the RKB council.”29

Leaving his former political party, the German People’s Party (Deutsche Volkspartei) in 1932, Schnee had waited several months before joining the Nazi Party, and did so—according to his memoir—only after Hitler encouraged him to do so (though Schnee is careful to remind his readers that he did not join the Party immediately after his March 1933 meeting with Hitler). In his memoir, Schnee presents his opinion of leading Nazis including Hitler, mentioning time and again their low level of education and lack of preparation for the positions they filled.30 A product of the Bildungbürgertum (the

29 “Ohne eine entsprechende Klarstellung für die Öffentlichkeit, dass meine Tätigkeit an der Spitze der kolonialen Bewegung die Anerkennung und Würdigung seitens des Führers gefunden hat, ist unter den vorliegenden Umständen die Annahme einer Berufung in den Kolonialrat für mich nicht möglich.” GStA PK, Nr. 36, Bl. 231.

30 GStA PK, Nr. 13, 14, and 15.
educated middle classes), Schnee had little admiration for many of the new leaders of Germany.

They, in turn, had their suspicions about Schnee. Schnee also served as president of several other organizations, including the German Society for League of Nations Matters (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerbundfragen). Representing this organization, Schnee had attended the international congress of the World Federation of League of Nations Societies (Weltverbandes für Völkerbundgesellschaften) in Montreux, Switzerland in the summer of 1933. Schnee wrote personally to Hitler on two occasions during this conference and after his return to Berlin notifying Hitler of the “assessment of the measures against the Jewish population adopted by the government in Germany” at the conference.31 In Montreux, Schnee reported, the Minorities Committee (Minderheitsenausschuss) of the German Society for League of Nations Matters had met and had based its deliberations on the idea that “the ethnic renewal of Germany should proceed in a form that, as far as possible, hinders the incitement of [Germany’s] enemies

31 “Beurteilung der in Deutschland gegen jüdische Bevölkerungskreise erlassenen Regierungsmassnahmen.” Letter from Schnee to Hitler, June 10, 1933, GStA PK, Nr. 40, Bl. 69. Schnee later wrote to the Swiss League of Nations Society on the subject of the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany, assuring them that, while the Nazi government had decided to ban Jews from civil service (with exceptions for those who had served in the First World War), Jews remained unrestricted in private business: “Völlig frei dagegen steht ihnen die Betätigung in der Wirtschaft und die private Betätigung ohne amtliches Gehalt. Jüdische Ärzte oder Zahnärzte können [heute sicher sein,—crossed out] ihre private Praxis ebenso ungestört ausüben [zu können—crossed out] wie jüdische Handelstreitende oder Industrielle.” Letter from Schnee to the Swiss League of Nations Society, December 21, 1933, GStA PK, VI. Nr. 52, Bl. 150.
against Germany and the persecution of Germans abroad.”

Schnee sent this second letter to Hitler on July 14, 1933, the same day as the passage of the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring which established a sterilization program in Nazi Germany. His concern for the rights of German Jews—even when expressed as a pragmatic (if roundabout) rather than ideological concern—fell on deaf ears.

Furthermore, Schnee’s wife was English and so bound to raise suspicion. Indeed, Schnee found that a Gestapo agent had placed him under surveillance, visiting his home in his absence in the guise of a postman and installing a listening device on his telephone.

Facing such opposition in other areas of his personal and professional life and fully aware of the hostility to overseas colonialism from many Nazi Party officials, Schnee was understandably concerned about the potential for success of a unified colonialist movement.

Schnee made one final attempt to express these reservations and offer a diagnosis of relations with the Nazi Party and the prerequisite conditions for a mass movement when he spoke at the meeting to dissolve the DKG on June 13, 1936. He began with a narrative of the discussions that had led to the creation of the new RKB. Schnee then interrupted himself to remind his listeners of the strictly confidential nature of what he

32 “Den Verhandlungen hat der Gedanke zugrunde gelegen, dass die völkerische Erneuerung Deutschlands in einer Form forgesetzt werde, die den Gegnern die Hetze gegen Deutschland und die Verfolgung Deutscher im Ausland nach Möglichkeit erschwert.” Letter from Schnee to Hitler, July 14, 1933, GStA PK, Nr. 40, Bl. 70.

33 GStA, PK, Nr. 13, Bl. 56.
was telling them.\footnote{Schnee states “Ich muss hier eine kurze Unterbrechung machen, um zu erklären, dass diese Besprechungen und Verhandlungen streng vertraulich sind. Ich habe vorher vergessen, dass zu erklären. Es darf nicht darüber in die Öffentlichkeit gebracht werden. Über die Frage der Veröffentlichung werde ich nachher noch ein kurzes Wort sagen.” “Bericht über die ordentlichen Vertreterversammlung der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft, I. Ordentliche Vertreterversammlung am 13. Juni 1936 nachmittags 3 Uhr,” BAB R 1001/9698, pg. 9-10.} This interjection indicates that Schnee spoke freely among colleagues in the DKG leadership. He harbored concerns, however, that whatever tensions or hesitancy he expressed about the second *Gleichschaltung* would reach the public and thereby undermine the impression that the dissolution of the colonialist organizations had been voluntary. Referring to his discussion with Epp and Ribbentrop in November 1935 and echoing his January 1936 letter to Hitler, Schnee expressed his concerns about the creation of a unity league:

At the time I had objections [to the suggestion] that founding such a unified Reich Colonial League would succeed at the present time. I considered it premature, because it did not seem to me that the requirements for [such a league] existed yet. You all know, of course, that we—with local differences—encounter considerable difficulties in our colonial propaganda, less in some places, more in others. Indeed hindrances also abound in relation to some central offices. I believe that we will only first be able to successfully create a unified Reich Colonial League when those constraints that still exist in part within the Party are removed and, especially, when the *Führer* himself provides for [the league’s] foundation through a declaration.\footnote{“Ich habe damals Bedenken dagegen gehabt, dass gegenwärtig bereits die Gründung eines solchen einheitlichen Reichskolonialbundes erfolge. Ich habe das für verfrüht gehalten, weil mir die Voraussetzungen dafür noch nicht vorhanden zu sein schienen. Sie alle wissen ja, dass wir—je nach den Örtlichkeiten verschieden—erheblichen Schwierigkeiten begegnet sind in unserer kolonialen Propaganda, an manchen Orten weniger, an anderen mehr. Es sind auch seitens mancher zentraler Stellen gewisse Hinderungen hervorgetreten. Ich glaubte, dass erst dann ein einheitlicher Reichskolonialbund zu vollem Erfolg geführt werden könne, wenn diese Hemmnisse, wie sie innerhalb der Partei zum Teil noch vorliegen, beseitigt sein würden und insbesondere, wenn der Führer selbst durch eine Erklärung die Grundlage bieten würde.” Ibid.}
Before 1936, Schnee indicated, the colonialist organizations had achieved greater success through their separate activities, thereby maintaining their independence vis-à-vis a regime that did not act consistently in their favor. While they publicly heralded Hitler’s support of their movement, the absence of declarative statements from Hitler in favor of their colonial demands continued to worry colonialists privately and served as a stumbling block for Schnee to the creation of a mass movement. In May 1936, however, Hitler and the Party’s endorsement of a unified colonialist movement came as an order rather than a suggestion.

Because the colonialist organizations carried it out by themselves, the 1933 Gleichschaltung had not threatened but rather strengthened colonialists’ perceptions of their role in Nazi Germany. In 1936, however, the colonialists experienced the force of Gleichschaltung as other groups had in 1933. In Schnee’s view, the creation of a single unified colonialist organization on the Nazis’ timetable undermined colonialists’ success on the local level. The ability to maintain a variety of organizations strengthened colonialists’ hand vis-à-vis the Nazi state and Party by allowing for diversified duties and greater range of movement. Unlike in a democratic society, the Nazi regime aimed for centralization and control over all aspects of society. A unified organization would therefore make colonialists more vulnerable to outside interference by consolidating the movement’s leadership and reducing possible points of friction.

Understandably, this viewpoint could not reach the public. Given the colonialists’ rhetoric since 1933, a unified Volksbewegung would appear to further legitimize their
relevance in Nazi Germany and any public dissent would weaken this rhetoric. Organizationally, however, what could appear as a triumph could also result in reduced autonomy. Klaus Hildebrand concludes that 1936 marked the end of a “phase of relatively free activity.” Before 1936, Hildebrand asserts, the RKB, “the object of hostility from all important organizations of the Third Reich,” had experienced the relative freedom that came with its small size—and therefore was “more powerful and influential.”

The Gleichschaltung in 1936 “brought it official recognition and thousands of new members but at the same time also complete submission to the will of the ‘Führer.’”

In terms of organizational structure, Hildebrand’s analysis rings true. In fact, Schnee reported hearing that, after the Gleichschaltung in May 1936, Ribbentrop had tried to assert himself as leader of the colonialist movement, with Epp subordinate to him. The raw ambition Schnee saw as Ribbentrop’s motivation for the second Gleichschaltung surfaced here again. Even Goebbels appeared surprised by Ribbentrop’s attempt to take over the RKB. Recounting an evening spent listening to Epp’s complaints in October 1936, Goebbels notes, “[Epp] is an old grouser [Stänker], but Ribbentrop has also not


handled him well. Sometimes Ribbentrop makes nonsense [Quatsch]. Too aggressive. Why in this case?38 Epp rejected these attempts and was saved from further attempts by Ribbentrop’s appointment as ambassador to England.

In September 1936, according to Schnee, Rudolf Hess attempted to dissolve the new RKB while Epp was on a trip to America.39 In fact, the Propaganda Ministry press briefing on September 29th announced the dissolution of the RKB, claiming the cancellation of the RKB annual congress in Breslau as evidence of the organization’s end. Describing the dissolution of the RKB as a “purely organizational measure,” the briefing announced that in the future the Party and the Propaganda Ministry would take over colonial affairs, with Ribbentrop supposedly commissioned to do so.40 News of the imminent end of the Reich Colonial League even reached the front page of the New York Times, which reported on October 14th that, with Ribbentrop in control, Germany would use diplomacy rather than a “clamorous colonial campaign” to reclaim its colonies.41 Returning in time from America, Schnee recounts in his memoir, Epp was able to intercede with Hitler and save the RKB.


39 GStA PK, Nr. 15, Bl. 102.


While ultimately unsuccessful, Ribbentrop’s and Hess’ attempts demonstrate the potential vulnerability of the new RKB to interference from Nazi Party officials. The second *Gleichschaltung* did not result in a purge of members, as the RKB and DKG had already ejected all non-Aryan members in 1933. In addition, the activities of the new RKB remained the same as the old umbrella organization and its leading member, the DKG. Seemingly, the primary change achieved in the creation of the new RKB was the consolidation of the various points of colonialist agitation so as to more closely regulate their output and control their role in society. This *Gleichschaltung*, therefore, would be a final coordination of a group of organizations that still perceived of themselves as independent.

When considering colonialists’ understandings of these events and of the trajectory of their movement, however, the 1936 *Gleichschaltung* forced colonialists to conceive of themselves as a mass movement and allowed them to continue their propaganda work on a larger stage and scale. While reorganization into a unified organization could facilitate interference from Nazi officials, the colonialists’ narrative after the second *Gleichschaltung* did not change drastically from that before 1936. The colonialists had already proven themselves willing to temporarily stop their propaganda on Hitler’s command (as they had done in 1933), a move that did not undermine their

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42 GStA PK, Nr. 15, Bl. 102.
interpretation of their own importance. After 1936, colonialists would again publicly construe the creation of the new RKB as an opportunity rather than a defeat.

**Covering the Gleichschaltung in the Colonialist Press**

Colonialists took the opportunity of the final *Gleichschaltung* in 1936 to once again publicly assert the close and reciprocal relationship between themselves and National Socialism. Just as they had after the first *Gleichschaltung* in 1933, these public declarations of allegiance asserted the continued relevance of the colonialist movement to Nazi Germany and elided the involuntary nature of their coordination. The colonialist press did not report on Schnee’s resistance to the creation of a unified RKB. In fact, the second *Gleichschaltung*, as reported in the colonialist press, appeared as either a reaffirmation of the importance of the colonialist movement or as merely a matter-of-fact reorganization that did not call into question the colonialist organizations’ independence or narrative.

Colonialist discourse before 1936 had asserted a supposedly symbiotic relationship between overseas colonialism and National Socialism. Books promoting this discourse by authors such as Heinz Wilhelm Bauer and Adolf Friedrich von Oertzen made it difficult for colonialists such as Schnee to publicly resist the second *Gleichschaltung*, as it appeared to reaffirm this relationship. In a chapter (entitled “The Affirmation of Colonial Thinking in the Third Reich” [“*Die Bejahung des kolonialen Gedankens im Dritten Reich*”]) of his book on the Party’s attitude towards overseas
colonialism, Bauer stated that “the idea of the people’s unity and the Volksgemeinschaft will also be accomplished in the colonial field.” Grandiosely, Bauer proclaimed that

[t]he colonial Germans always possessed a positively unrivaled feeling for togetherness and camaraderie, for which National Socialism also campaigns. The idea that one is nothing without others was experienced, tested, and proven abroad, in the dangerous tropics. (emphasis in original)

Colonial life served, according to Bauer, as a precursor to and a model for the National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft.

In another piece of convoluted logic, Adolf Friedrich von Oertzen, Kolonialreferat of the Hitler Youth, declared that if Germany had still possessed colonies in 1918, thousands would have gone there to forget about the horror of what had happened in Germany. This would have meant that many of those who were in the front lines of the National Socialist struggle in the Weimar Republic and had helped in its victory would have been absent from Germany. Here von Oertzen equated the positive values of the Nazi Party’s “old fighters” with those of the type of Germans who would go overseas to the colonies. Essentially, Nazism would not have succeeded without those who would normally have gone to the colonies (although von Oertzen predicated this


success on the absence of these colonies). The hubris in these statements demonstrates the power of colonialists’ fantasy—both about the colonial past and of their relevance in the present. By reading loaded terms such as camaraderie and struggle into the colonial past, Bauer and others asserted the foundational nature of overseas colonialism to the fulfillment of the National Socialist worldview. With this interpretation, Bauer hoped to assure a privileged position for colonialism in the National Socialist Weltanschauung.

Leading up to the Gleichschaltung, some authors such as Paul Schwager in Afrika-Nachrichten had begun publicly advocating for a drastic change in the colonialist organizations so as to facilitate their greater coordination with Nazi society. In April 1936, Schwager called for the creation of a unified colonialist league, stating, “if you believe in the absoluteness of the Führer, there can be only one leadership!” (emphasis in original) The colonialist movement, which had been in danger of “sinking forever into its grave along with its last representatives,” had experienced a renewal along with the rest of German society after 1933. “The colonial renewal can only continue to be lasting and beneficial,” Schwager warned, “when [colonialists] remain in accordance with the principles of the great German rebirth,” in particular “an adjustment to the new spirit.


First of all in the ideological field [weltanschaulichen Gebiet].” The colonies (and one could speculate that Schwager would extend this to the colonialist organizations) were no place for “adventurers and asocial elements,” rather they were part of a people’s camaraderie (Volkskameradschaft). In order to create this camaraderie, Schwager declared, “[h]ere we have to make a radical end with everything that goes against the spirit of the Volksgemeinschaft.” (emphasis in original) Schwager proposed the end of all “feudal charity festivals,” (feudale Wohltätigkeitsfeste) even when they proved profitable, as a sin against the Volksgemeinschaft. The traditional activities of the DKG, Schwager alleged, represented the past. The only way to continue the colonialist movement’s upward trend and to attract younger members was to align the organizations more closely and more publicly with the regime through the creation of a unified colonialist league.

Schwager and other authors in Afrika-Nachrichten proved the most vocal advocates of a second Gleichschaltung, most likely because the journal did not represent an organization and therefore did not face organizational restructuring (Afrika-Nachrichten continued to appear until 1942). In the journals of organizations that faced


49 “Wie soll sich aber diese Kameradschaft bilden, wenn die kolonialen Organisationen nicht mit guten Beispiel vorangehen?...Hier muss radikal Schluss gemacht werden mit allem, was dem Geiste der Volksgemeinschaft widerspricht.” Ibid., 91.
the end of their independent existence in 1936, especially the smaller, more narrowly-focused groups, a more muted reaction proved the rule. In *Die Frau und die Kolonien*, the journal of the Women’s League of the DKG, no mention of the *Gleichschaltung* appeared until the July issue, which carried an announcement of the Women’s League’s dissolution on its first page.\(^{50}\) Women’s League president Agnes von Boemcken simply announced—without justification—the creation of the new RKB. With its establishment, women would also become members of the new RKB, and were expected to “apply their work under the new leadership, and continue in the new organization with as much *joy and readiness to sacrifice* as they have previously done.”\(^{51}\) (emphasis in original)

The journal of the League of Colonial Soldiers (*Kolonial-Post*) announced its absorption into the National Socialist German Naval League (*NS Deutschen Marine-Bund*) on March 23, 1936, but reassured its members that it would continue to function as an “autonomous league” (*selbständiger Bund*). The League of Colonial Soldiers would keep its constitution, flag, uniform, and journals. More importantly, the league assured its members, “this corporate annexation does not incur pecuniary costs for our comrades,” as they would maintain their previous federal contributions (*den bisherigen Bundesbeitrag*). Coordination had won them “an enlarged base for [their] activity and the opportunity to transmit to a younger generation the experience [they had] collected in active colonial

\(^{50}\) *Die Frau und die Kolonien* no. 7 (1 July 1936): 97.

\(^{51}\) “…setzen ihre Arbeit unter der neuen Führung und in der neuen Organisation fort, mit ebenso großer *Freudigkeit und Opferbereitschaft* wie sie bisher diese Arbeit geleistet haben.” Ibid.
service.” While asserting that they would maintain their existing structures and customs, the *Kolonial-Post* announcement also expressed (as a given rather than a potential) the belief that their new position would enable the aging colonial soldiers to attract younger supporters. These smaller organizations informed their members of the second *Gleichschaltung* as a matter of course, but did not dwell on the ideological meanings of the coordination. Their more narrowly defined activities (cultural development in the colonies for the Women’s League and support for former colonial soldiers in the League of Colonial Soldiers) would continue in their new formations.

*Der koloniale Kampf*, the journal of the DKG, faced a different situation. As the voice of the existing leadership of the colonialist movement—and meant primarily for DKG members rather than the general public—the journal had to justify its own organizational end while simultaneously heralding the creation of its successor. It addressed this state of affairs on the first page of its June 1936 issue by adapting the French proclamation of the transition of royalty: “The colonial idea never dies! The German Colonial Society goes on in the Reich Colonial League.”

The article drew parallels between the present events and the founding of the colonial empire in 1884.

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supposedly in the shift from disinterest to interest in colonialism among Germans. The end of the German Colonial Society, the article declared, represented nothing more than a development resulting from “the rejuvenation of our people under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.” “Nothing is destroyed,” the Koloniale Kampf article stressed, “everything is maintained, consolidated, accumulated but in the unity of a German colonial movement, which finds its high point in the newly established Reich Colonial League.”

Not only would the RKB continue the work of the DKG, but, Der koloniale Kampf promised, it would prove much more successful:

Where the German Colonial Society has failed during the years of its existence, where it had to fail, because it by itself could not meet the conditions for [success], there the Reich Colonial League will fulfill its task, the task of the German people.

Similarly, the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung admitted that the DKG’s “organization and tradition” had prevented it from reaching a mass audience, but asserted that this would change with the reorganization of the new RKB “in the style of the NSDAP.” Der koloniale Kampf and Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung struck a balance between celebrating the

54 “die sich zwangsläufig aus dem Geschehen unserer Tage und der Verjüngung unseres Volkes unter der Führung Adolf Hitlers ergibt. Nichts ist zerstört, alles bleibt erhalten, zusammengefaßt, zusammengeballt aber in der Einheitlichkeit einer deutschen Kolonialbewegung, die in dem neu errichteten Reichskolonialbund ihre Krönung findet.” Ibid.

55 “Wo die Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft durch die Jahre ihres Bestehens versagt hat, wo sie versagen mußte, da sie von sich aus nicht die Voraussetzungen dazu zu erfüllen vermochte, da wird der Reichskolonialbund seine Aufgabe, die Aufgabe des deutschen Volkes erfüllen.” Ibid.

work of the DKG over the past fifty years and acknowledging the inadequacies of the DKG that the new RKB would resolve, the only approach possible to simultaneously justify the organization’s dissolution and the continuation of the larger colonialist movement.

A proclamation (Aufruf) from Epp provided the official explanation for the second Gleichschaltung in the July issue of Der koloniale Kampf and the August issue of Die Frau und die Kolonien (and most likely circulated among colonialists more generally). As the only recognized colonialist organization in the Reich, the new RKB would work closely (“on the basis of Nazi ideology”) with Nazi Party offices and the government to bring colonial thinking to the entire Volk. Acknowledging the work of the “old colonials,” Epp reassured them that “the dedication, with which the members of the old colonial organizations have worked to keep the colonial idea alive in Germany’s hardest times, will find a permanent place of gratitude in the thoughts of the German Volk.” (emphasis in original) This praise, however, came along with the expectation of future cooperation with the new RKB: “I expect the strongest work [stärksten Arbeitseinsatz] and unwavering devotion to duty from all members of the Reich Colonial


58 „Die Hingabe, mit der die Mitglieder der alten kolonialen Verbände in Deutschlands schwerster Zeit für die Wachhaltung der kolonialen Idee gewirkt haben, soll im Denken des deutschen Volkes ein dauernde dankbare Stätte finden.” Ibid.
League.”59 In the wording of this proclamation, Epp made it clear to colonialists that if they wished to continue their involvement in colonialist publicity they would have to do so along the lines of the new RKB and the Nazi Party.

Colonialist authors’ descriptions of the second Gleichschaltung revealed—even as they tried to distract attention from—their subordination to the Nazi regime. On the one hand, colonialist authors presented the colonial past as an essential building block of the Nazi present. On the other hand, the guidelines for colonialist propaganda issued by the KPA (in concert with the RKB) in 1936—discussed below—subordinated colonial demands to the Nazi worldview. Through closer affiliation, the colonialist movement formalized its position vis-à-vis the Nazi Party, but, as a result, had to deal with the increased ability of the Party to intervene.

RKB-supported authors such as Bauer espoused a position in which National Socialism could not have come to pass without overseas colonialism. The official KPA and RKB guidelines (Richtlinien) to propaganda, however, presented a more constrained view of the place of colonialism in Nazi ideology. The 1937 guidelines emphasized the subordination of the colonial issue within the larger realm of Nazi foreign policy.60

59 “Ich erwarte von allen Mitglieder des Reichskolonialbundes stärksten Arbeitseinsatz und unerschütterliche Pflichttreue.” Ibid.

60 In the Individual Specifications (Einzelbestimmungen) section on the last page of the guidelines, two points demonstrate this subordination: “Die Politik der Fremdstaaten, vor allem die jetzige, darf nicht sarkastisch oder beleidigend für diese besprochen werden. Beschreibungen dieser Art sind taktvoll zu halten, sonst schaden sie der kolonialen Bewegung und stören die außenpolitischen Maßnahmen des Führers” and “Die Anschlußfrage Österreichs, die Deutschutschungsfrage in den abgetrennten Gebieten dürfen
“Colonial policy,” the guidelines stated, “[is] thus neither a policy for its own sake nor an ‘overseas orientation,’ but rather only a piece of the political representation of the collective interest of the German Volk.” These new guidelines supposedly brought an end to “colonial policy for its own sake,” (Kolonialpolitik an sich) as Hermann Behrens, associate editor of the KPA’s Deutscher Kolonialdienst, described it in an article in his publication. Colonialism, Behrens declared, is not a sentimental undertaking for individuals who hope to make a profit in lands bestrewn with palm trees. Such a “colonial policy for its own sake” represented a politics “that stands in a row of other ‘policies for their own sakes,’ competes with these, and is stronger or weaker.” Rather, colonialism was an activity that should be carried out for the collective good of the Volk. Behrens and the KPA Richtlinien affirmed the importance of overseas colonialism, but

61 “Kolonialpolitik ist also weder eine eigene Politik noch eine ‘Orientierung nach Uebersee,’ sondern nur ein Teilstück der politischen Vertretung der Gesamtinteressen des deutschen Volkes.” Ibid.


63 „...Kolonialpolitik an sich, die neben einer Reihe anderer ‘Politiken an sich’ steht, sich mit diesen streitet, stärker oder schwächer ist.” Ibid.
only on the condition that colonialists understood the role (and often the subservience) of their demands to National Socialism’s territorial plans.

The KPA’s authorship of these guidelines, in concert with the RKB, explains the severity of this warning against colonialist self-importance and autonomy.64 While an office focused on overseas colonialism, the KPA existed firmly within the Nazi Party’s bureaucracy and did not have a pre-1933 non-Nazi past, as the RKB had. As the voice of Nazi colonialism (versus colonialists who associated themselves with Nazism), the KPA had to maintain the prioritization of Nazi goals over colonialist goals. The overblown prose evident in writings by Bauer and others stemmed from colonialists’ desire—especially those in the non-Party RKB—to establish the centrality of colonialism (and thereby themselves) to Nazism.

This desire for relevance often extended to fanciful interpretations of Hitler’s public statements in order to read them in favor of colonialism. In a section of his 1936 Kolonien oder nicht? describing “[t]he Führer’s colonial yes!,” Bauer referred to Hitler’s statements to a Sunday Express reporter in February 1933 and to Ward Price of the Daily Mail in August 1934 as definitive proof of Hitler’s unwavering support.65 Despite

64 The press office of the KPA was affiliated with the press department of the RKB, which together ran a colonial news service for the state, Party, RKB, and the press more generally. In March 1936, the KPA published the first in this series of guidelines. Dr. Josef Himmelreich, “Die deutsche Kolonialbewegung heute,” Der Schulungsbrief. Unser Kolonien, ed. Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP 6, no. 8 (1939): 313.

Bauer’s positive description of the *Daily Mail* interview, however, this article had caused consternation among colonialists, as in it Hitler had declared that Germany would not go to war with England over the former German colonies, which were “costly luxuries even for England.”\(^\text{66}\) In fact, part of the title of this article read “No Colony is Worth a German’s Life.” After its publication, Hitler’s deputy, Hess, reassured the DKG that Hitler had made further statements not published in the article, including the qualification that “the colonies are of course a luxury for England, but are a necessity for Germany and that they naturally will be reclaimed.”\(^\text{67}\) This explanation seems to have placated colonialists, as they occasionally referred to this *Daily Mail* interview in the coming years. In the early years of the Third Reich, colonialists clung to the few statements on colonialism by Hitler such as those in the *Daily Mail*, even when most readers would have understood them as dismissive of colonial demands.

After 1936, when the establishment of the unified RKB seemed evidence of state support, colonialists interpreted more explicitly supportive statements by Hitler as validation. The reorganization of the RKB had catapulted the organization and the colonialist movement more generally from relative obscurity to a new role as a chess piece in the changing terrain of international diplomacy. The increased press coverage of


Germany’s colonial demands in England demonstrates the change in international attention to these demands after 1936. In 1932, for example, the London Times had only published two articles dealing with German colonies and only fifteen in 1933, but a total of 160 in 1936.68

Many of these British articles commented on Hitler’s statements on colonialism at the 1936 and 1937 Nuremberg Party rallies. Colonialists noted that Hitler outlined Germany’s colonial demands “clearly and unambiguously” in his proclamation. They further interpreted Hitler’s decision to discuss colonial demands at the very public (and internationally observed) site of the Party rally as confirmation of their new importance in Nazi Germany. When Hitler spoke in the name of the Volk in favor of the German colonies at the Party rally, foreign countries could no longer ignore Germany’s colonial demands.69 Secure in their belief that Hitler would now move to diplomatically resolve the “colonial question,” colonialists made the most of their new position through propaganda aimed at a broad popular audience.


69 “...wenn der Führer vor der Nation und vor der Welt den deutschen Anspruch auf Kolonien erhebt, so tut er dieses nicht allein als Führer der NSDAP und des deutschen Volkes, sondern er tut es gleichzeitig im Names des Volkes …In diesem Sinne geht es nicht länger an, dass das Ausland an den deutschen Kolonialforderungen vorbeigeht oder ihnen mit Argumenten entgegnet, die bereits längst widerlegt sind und in keiner Weise die rechtmäßigen deutschen Ansprüche zu entkräften vermögen.” “Deutschlands Kolonialforderung auf dem Reichsparteitag der Arbeit,” Afrika Rundschau no. 5 (September 1937), BAB NS 5 VI/20431.
Conclusion

Writing in *Afrika-Nachrichten* seven months after the creation of the new RKB in May 1936, Hans Gerd Esser addressed some of the “burning colonial questions of the time,” such as “why a colonial movement.” Before the First World War, Esser explained, the German people had remained “unconscious,” especially in the realm of world politics. “Neither the political nor the colonial leadership existed,” according to Esser, “who would have been able to create this colonial people’s movement [Volksbewegung],” and so the colonialist organizations had remained small and unrepresentative of the people. After the “awakening of the Volk” brought by Hitler’s rise to power, colonialists had worked to create a “colonial will” among Germans. “But,” Esser explained,

the colonial will of the German Volk can only find its origins in a colonial movement. Without a colonial movement the colonial idea will never become a [colonial] will in our people. Without the National Socialist movement the National Socialist idea would never have been able to become a National Socialist will.

The second Gleichschaltung in May 1936 established the groundwork for the creation of this colonialist Volksbewegung. Drawing an analogy between the colonialist movement

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71 “Weder eine politische Führung noch eine koloniale Führung war da, die es vermocht hätte, diese koloniale Volksbewegung zu schaffen.” Ibid., 316.

72 “Der koloniale Wille des deutschen Volkes aber kann nur seinen Ursprung finden in einer kolonialen Bewegung. Ohne koloniale Bewegung kann die koloniale Idee in unserem Volk nie zum Willen werden. Ohne nationalsozialistische Bewegung hätte die nationalsozialistische Idee nie nationalsozialistischer Wille werden können.” Ibid., 317.
and the National Socialist movement, Esser implied the possibility of a similar success for colonialists as that of the Nazi movement. As such, they were not only analogous, but bound together in a larger effort to raise awareness of Germany’s “ethnic and ideological needs and values.”

For German colonialists, 1936 represented a turning point. As seen in the relationship between Joachim von Ribbentrop, Franz von Epp, and Heinrich Schnee leading up to the second *Gleichschaltung*, the center of power in the colonialist movement had moved decisively towards the Nazi Party. Schnee’s refusal to join the new RKB and his departure from the colonialist movement marked the end of the movement’s independent status, though not its complete subordination to the desires of Nazi officials, as will be seen in the following chapters. Now publicly recognized as an official (Party-approved) national colonialist organization, the new RKB could focus on its mandate of bringing colonialist thinking to the entire *Volk*, and began creating a mass movement to do so.

73 “völkischen und weltanschaulichen Notwendigkeiten und Werte.” Ibid., 316.
Chapter 5: The Paradox of Success, 1936-1939

In his contribution to the Festschrift on the occasion of the 1938 Reich Colonial Congress in Bremen, colonialist author Hubert Coerver summarized the responsibilities and goals of the reorganized Reich Colonial League.¹ In order to compete with England’s colonial activity—built up over centuries—German colonialists had only a few years to spread colonial thinking to the entire population. To accomplish this task, Coerver explained, Germany needed a *Volksbewegung* (ethnic mass movement) so powerful that colonial education would penetrate to every last village and cottage.² This effort would involve the wholehearted involvement of all colonialists. “[E]veryone must work in their area,” Coerver declared, “so that the fanatical belief in the colonial future of the Reich is awakened and remains alive. Here as everywhere else, National Socialism acknowledges no compromise on the colonial issue.”³

In establishing a mass movement, colonialists faced the same challenges that had plagued colonialists since the Weimar years, namely the tension between their elitism and their desire for mass support. Now, on the brink of achieving their greatest numerical strength (and the corresponding sense of importance), anxieties about the nature of their


² Ibid.

movement plagued colonialists. While they rejoiced at their increased membership, some colonialists (especially “old fighters” from the Weimar days) also expressed disappointment at what they viewed as the more recent supporters’ ignorant and opportunist attitudes. Colonialists hoped to foster in Germany what John MacKenzie has called (in the British case) an “imperial world-view.” Many, however, could not come to terms with the fact that for most of the population, this world-view (in Britain as well as in Germany) was based more often on easily accessible generalities rather than in experience or expertise. The tensions between their elite nature and their desires for mass support erupted in critiques of “colonial kitsch.” This kitsch, while apparently popular, threatened to undermine the gravity of the colonialists’ cause through its romanticism and commercialism. In their planning for and commentary about their publicity activities after 1936, colonialists expressed deep-seated anxieties about their own authority in Nazi Germany. Still convinced of their ability as experts to drive colonialist agitation, many colonialists expressed frustration at what they viewed as the lack of seriousness of new supporters brought in by this agitation.

As an interest group in a dictatorship that claimed to represent the entire German people, the RKB would remain unique in Nazi Germany as a voluntary million-member non-Party organization. The Nazi trade union organization, the German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, DAF) had millions of members, but membership was usually a

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prerequisite for employment. The German Churches, like the colonialists, had strong pre-1933 organizations and identity, but—for the most part—did not intervene in political issues or foreign policy. Given their unique position, the RKB and its activities after 1936 provide a counterpoint to the government-produced propaganda of Joseph Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry and broaden the public debates on foreign policy in the Third Reich.

Part of colonialists’ desire for a Volksbewegung stemmed from their experience of near atrophy in the Weimar years, when their organizations could not rally support beyond an elite sector of society. In the Third Reich, colonialists would have seen increased membership as a way to demonstrate their participation in the new mass society. Creating a mass movement would also provide Hitler with the popular support he needed when he finally decided to address the colonial question. The ambition to create a mass movement, then, could have reflected a tactic of self-preservation. A large RKB might keep Hitler’s attention on the issue of the colonies. An organization of millions of members would have been conceivably more difficult to shut down than a marginal organization of 50,000 members. In the convoluted logic behind colonialists’ attitudes, they would have hoped to use a colonialist mass movement both as positive proof of the inherent colonizing character that all Germans shared, and as evidence of their organizational importance despite obstruction by Nazi Party offices.

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5 The Catholic Church on the issue of euthanasia and the Confessing Church represent important exceptions.
Through the RKB’s activities, explored in this chapter, colonialists both reached broader audiences and nurtured colonialist activists’ sense of the importance of their work. Colonialists integrated their activities into Nazi public space in an effort to control (mis)interpretations of colonialism, to foster their burgeoning mass movement, and to validate this movement through close and public affiliation with National Socialist organizations. International reactions to these activities, as evidenced by the German Socialist Party in exile (SOPADE) reports, indicate the perception of the success of these efforts. Despite this appearance of success, however, the problem of colonial kitsch became more prevalent for colonialists. For some, these concerns illuminated the qualified nature of their success. The RKB’s efforts to create a Volksbewegung after 1936 demonstrate colonialists’ ardent desire to integrate overseas colonialism into the awareness of all Germans but also reveal the potential for the dilution of their colonialist message inherent in this endeavor.

**Propaganda for the Masses: Creating a Mass Movement**

While Schnee had reservations about the autonomy of the colonialist movement in the face of its final Gleichschaltung in May 1936, the creation of the unified RKB proved a boon for colonialist propagandists. They promoted overseas colonialism with the same methods after 1936 as before and employed many of the same individuals. The second Gleichschaltung of the RKB would have aided these efforts by overcoming some Nazi officials’ obstruction based on concerns about whether the Nazi regime approved of the colonialists’ activity. From the Foreign Office, the RKB received 73,000 RM in 1936
to support their press and publicity activities, about 81,000 RM in 1937, and an estimated 126,000 RM in 1938 (including a 20,000 RM reserve fund). As a completely integrated organization (rather than a partially coordinated umbrella organization that still bore the marks of its pre-1933 groups), the new RKB literally carried the official Nazi stamp of approval. While the RKB flag and emblem did not originally include a swastika, after 1936 a swastika figured prominently in the center. Figures 8 and 9 The unified Reich Colonial League—instead of the umbrella Reich Colonial League—would represent the nation’s (and by default the Nazi Party’s) interests rather than those of its member organizations.

6 “Übersicht über die kolonialen Aufwendungen im Rechnungsjahr 1936,” “Koloniale Haushaltsmittel für das Auswärtige Amt 1937,” “Übersicht über die kolonialen Anforderungen und den Bedarf für 1937 sowie über die Anmeldungen für 1938,” BAB R 2/11632. These figures include funds allocated for the Speaker’s Bureau, colonial education in academic circles and among schoolchildren, colonial exhibitions, the colonial library, and a reserve fund (Dispositionsfonds, added in 1938), and exclude funds allocated for the care of former colonial subjects, for education in the colonies, economic endeavors, and assistance to settlers, among others.
Figure 8: The “Peters Flag” is the first flag in the foreground. The monument in Hannover was unveiled on October 27, 1935. Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
Figure 9: The “Peters flag” after the second *Gleichschaltung*
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main, ca. 1938.
While colonialist propaganda slowed in the months before the final
_Gleichschaltung_, it picked up again dramatically in the summer months of 1936, when
the new RKB launched a massive membership recruitment drive. As Ribbentrop and
Hess had charged the colonialists with creating a unified colonial front, colonialists had
to actively increase their membership to fulfill this imperative. In a circular from
_Abteilung_ I (Propaganda), printed in the newsletter for RKB leadership nation-wide, the
RKB set the goal of tripling its membership from July 1st to the end of September 1936.7
In order to achieve this goal, each member would have to recruit three new members,
both through individual efforts and through RKB events. Leaders of the local RKB
chapters could, for example, agitate to rename city streets after colonial pioneers.
Another circular from the RKB headquarters in August 1936 declared that “by the end of
this year there shouldn't be any city or place in Germany that doesn't at least have a
Lüderitz- or a Carl-Peters-Straße or a Tanga-Platz.”8 The RKB headquarters in Berlin
monitored the progress of the membership recruitment drive closely, asking for monthly
reports on the first of the month beginning in August and promising to reward

7 Abteilung I Propaganda, reprinted circular Nr. 2/36 from 6 July 1936 from Hauptgeschäftsführer i. V.

8 Abteilung I Propaganda, reprinted circular Nr. 10/36 from 12 August 1936 from Hauptgeschäftsführer
particularly successful departments and individual recruiters by publishing their names in the RKB journal, *Der Koloniale Kampf*.

This recruitment drive proved very successful. The RKB headquarters reported a 200% increase in membership in some areas. In the *Gauverband* Saarpfalz, for example, the RKB began 1936 with 400 members (identified as mostly women and therefore supposedly less valuable members), but increased this number over the course of 1936 to 16,000 members and reached 36,000 by the end of 1937. By January 1939, *Gauverband* Saarpfalz had nearly 50,000 members. The *Gauverband* Süd-Hannover-Braunschweig had 3,600 members in the fall of 1936 and within one and a half years of agitation had increased that number to nearly 40,000. The RKB in Berlin likewise began with 1,200 members in June 1936 and increased this number to about 100,000 by

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13 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE* 5, no. 7 (July 1938): 703.
April 1938.\textsuperscript{14} By the beginning of 1938, the RKB had 856,141 members nationwide.\textsuperscript{15} While many new members joined voluntarily, reports from the German Socialist Party in exile observed that civil servants underwent pressure to join the RKB.\textsuperscript{16} Either through recruitment or through pressure, RKB total membership increased dramatically after 1936.

This dramatic increase in membership resulted in part from the dissolution of the colonialist organizations and the creation of a unified colonialist front, which centralized recruitment efforts. However, the exponential growth of the RKB may have alarmed some Nazi officials. In April 1937, Rudolf Hess released a circular that limited the membership of the RKB to one million.\textsuperscript{17} By capping RKB membership, Hess may have hoped to avoid the creation of an organization (with pre-Nazi ties and culture) that could potentially complicate Nazi control of German society. With the \textit{Gleichschaltung} of German civil society, the Nazi state and Party intended to eliminate all potential of opposition and control the interpretation and dissemination of information in the Third

\textsuperscript{14} “\textit{Aus der Arbeit des Reichskolonialbundes},” \textit{Afrika-Rundschau} 1 (May 1938). Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB) NS 5 VI/20446, Bl. 79.

\textsuperscript{15} “\textit{Geschäftsbericht des Reichskolonialbundes für das Jahr 1938},” May 17, 1939, Zsq 4567, UB Frankfurt.

\textsuperscript{16} “In allen Ämtern liegen Listen auf, in denen sich die Beamten als Mitglieder des Kolonialbundes einzutragen haben. Wer sich davon ausschließt, wird gefragt, ob er gegen die Wiedererwerbung der deutschen Kolonien sei, was natürlich keiner zu bejahen wagt. Auf diese Art preßt man die ganze Beamenschaft zu Mitgliedern des Reichskolonialbundes.” \textit{Deutschland-Berichte} 4, no. 7 (July 1937): 930.

\textsuperscript{17} The circular also addressed the reorganization of colonialist women’s activities under the \textit{Reichsfrauenführerin} and the oversight by Ribbentrop of actions taken by Epp that would affect foreign policy, but the order restricting RKB membership garnered the most attention. “\textit{Anordnung 45/37},” BAB NS 6/225, Bl. 71-72.
Reich. Through their own initiative, however, they had helped create a colonialist mass movement with its own propaganda agenda. The Propaganda Ministry’s press briefings contain fifteen notices in 1936 (compared with one in 1934 and five in 1935) forbidding the press from publishing individual articles or editorial coverage of speeches by Hitler, Goebbels, and colonialist speakers on colonialism, or on colonialist rallies and meetings as well as the 1936 *Gleichschaltung*. One briefing, from February 1936, instructed journalists to report “in not too large a format” on the propaganda activities of the “*Deutsche Kolonialverein*” [sic. DKG], but on the local pages rather than the more prominent political pages of their newspapers. The fact that the Propaganda Ministry needed to continually repeat its ban indicates a continued interest in the topic rather than the desired press silence on the colonialist movement. Perhaps to reduce the perceived threat from the RKB, in 1937 the *Abteilung Propaganda* of the RKB changed its name to *Abteilung Werbung*, with the latter connoting advertising rather than the more politicized term propaganda.

Despite these measures, however, the membership of the RKB continued to increase, reaching the limit of one million in April 1939. This limit did not prove

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absolute, however, as the RKB continued to grow. Although the total membership had reached one million, Gau level chapters in the “Altreich” (Germany at its pre-1938 borders) that had not reached their “Sollstärke” (authorized/required strength) could recruit more members until they had reached this “Sollstärke.” These included new chapters in the Ostmark (Austria) and Sudetengau (western Czechoslovakia) after 1938. By 1941, membership in the RKB reached two million.

**RKB Meetings and Speakers**

To attract and maintain the attention of new supporters, the RKB emphasized the importance of the form as well as the content of colonialist propaganda. *Abteilung I* (Propaganda) of the RKB used the techniques of modern advertising to entice German audiences, including writings, flyers, placards, literary, musical and artistic pieces, film and radio, lectures, images, and exhibitions. In their public rallies and speeches, colonialists faced a potentially apathetic audience. Through the great concern it expressed about the planning and presentation of both meetings and speakers, the RKB hoped to

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remold itself into the dynamic mass movement necessary to secure its place in Nazi Germany.

Public meetings served as the RKB’s primary venue for colonialist propaganda, offering the RKB access to the general public and an opportunity to present its narrative of the colonial past to current and potential members. While the instructional meeting, as a form of propaganda, offered colonialists the chance to reach the public, it also exposed colonialists’ perpetual weakness of elitism and specialization. How to educate without coming across as pedantic? How to awaken the imagination of the masses while maintaining the authenticity of the colonial knowledge they shared? Amid a sea of meetings organized by the plethora of Nazi organizations, colonialists had to design their meetings and train their speakers to navigate between education and mobilization in order to continue to attract the public’s attention.

Through numerous detailed instructions for holding a RKB meeting, RKB leaders coordinated the activities of its local chapters, across the Gau, Kreis, and Ort level, so as to establish a nation-wide standard. The amount of detail in these planning guides reveals the high level of concern among colonialists about the negative impact of poorly planned meetings. Paul Bohn, for example, reminded organizers that “[t]he decisive factor is not the frequency of meetings, but solely their quality. A poorly executed general meeting
robs the participants of time and desire and thereby damages the colonial cause.”23 The general meeting, Bohn stressed, should be “the best advertisement for the next meeting.”

Bohn encouraged organizers to plan meetings at least once a month on a date and time that did not conflict with Party events, and to advertise the meeting widely (both among RKB members and the general public). Once the meeting began (in a simply decorated room), RKB business should be handled within forty-five minutes so as to leave time for the main speaker and keep the entire event under two hours. Importantly, no beer should be served during the meeting and smoking should be discouraged, as these would distract from the business at hand.24 The speaker should serve as the main attraction of these meetings, so Bohn discouraged extended introductory or closing remarks.

In a society in which countless Nazi Party organizations held numerous meetings of their own, a focused meeting would avoid the risk of boring an audience at the end of their work day. The burden of constant participation in Nazi society weighed heavily on many Germans. In the Third Reich, as Detlev Peukert observes, “[m]ass rituals, mass organizations and a string of new drives and campaigns were needed to keep up the movement’s dynamic thrust that was now directed on to the nation as a whole.” These


24 Ibid.
measures, however, “were capable only of generating manic and intoxicated moods for shorter and shorter periods before the trials and tribulations of drab everyday life reasserted themselves.”25 In this context, Hans Ernst Pfeiffer, frequent and insightful commentator on RKB propaganda methods, warned of the threat of Versammlungsmüdigkeit (“meeting exhaustion”).26 Colonialists faced a double burden: overcoming the public’s Versammlungsmüdigkeit, and doing so with a topic that many may not have seen as worth two hours of their evening (or able to offer them social advancement through their participation in meetings). The solution to this problem, in Paul Bohn’s words: “[r]ather fewer—and thereby—better [meetings]!”27

In 1938, Hans Ernst Pfeiffer described an example of an ineffective RKB meeting in Berlin and outlined the dire consequences of such poorly organized meetings for the RKB. Poorly advertised and “unpleasantly empty,” the speaker gave a “lecturing, didactic speech” that caused several in the audience to fall asleep. Following this talk, the RKB organizer proceeded to give his long-winded closing remarks, and the disappointed audience filed out of the hall.28 Pfeiffer was not alone in expressing disappointment about


RKB meetings. Describing a colonialist evening in the Rhineland in 1938, an anonymous author expressed disappointment at the unengaging speaker, the ninety-five slides rather than the promised film, the audience (mostly women), and the location adjacent to a noisy and busy restaurant.29

Such meetings, Pfeiffer complained, hurt rather than helped colonialists, fostering the impression that the RKB was more interested in collecting membership dues than in attracting new members.30 This impression, combined with a Versammlungsmüdigkeit among the population, could prove fatal for the RKB. While expressing happiness at the thousands of new RKB members, Pfeiffer reminded his readers that “leaving the Reich Colonial League is easier than leaving the Party and its organizations!”31 Because the RKB could not take these new members for granted, colonialists needed to take into account their audience’s limited interest and attention when planning propaganda evenings. Pfeiffer and the anonymous author’s critiques of colonialist meetings reveal that, despite the relentless pace of colonialist propaganda, much of it ran the risk of proving ineffective because of a pedantic, elitist style.

To create dynamism in these meetings, RKB leaders provided guidelines for the selection and training of colonialist speakers. Following an order from the Reich


31 “…das Austreten aus dem Reichskolonialbund leichter ist als aus der Partei und ihren Gliederungen!” Ibid., 2-3.
Propaganda Office (Reichspropagandaleitung), all political speakers in the Third Reich had to affiliate with an organization and receive a speaker’s identity card. A complex hierarchy existed, requiring speakers to work first on the Gau and Kreis level for a year, and then spend a year as a “Reich Expert Speaker” (Reichsfachredner\(^{32}\)) candidate, followed by another year after which they could become a Reich Expert Speaker.\(^{33}\) Through this system, colonialists (and Nazi officials) could regulate the material presented and the style of their speakers, thereby coordinating the colonialist message nationwide and avoiding the dull speaking style about which some critics complained. With these speakers, along with the assignment of “colonial experts” to a variety of Party organizations, colonialists hoped to “spin a wide network over the Reich.”\(^ {34}\)

RKB leaders worried about how to cultivate younger speakers to fill the thinning ranks of speakers who had lived in the colonies. Leaders such as Erich Duems and propagandist Hans Ernst Pfeiffer understood the importance of promoting younger speakers to make colonialism seem more relevant and dynamic. The older colonial speaker represented the “practitioner,” but, according to Duems, the young speaker

\(^{32}\) Rümann later noted that the titles “Reichsfachredner,” “Gaufachredner” and “Kreisfachredner” were only to be used by Nazi Party speakers so RKB and KPA speakers should be referred to as “Fachredner.” Walter Rümann, #47, Mitteilungsblatt der Bundesführung des Reichskolonialbundes für den Dienstgebrauch der Gau-, Kreis- und Ortsverbände 2, no. 26-80, II Folge (3 June 1937). Hoover Library.


\(^{34}\) “...ein weitverzweigtes Netz über das Reich gesponnen worden.” “Denkschrift über den Aufbau, Werdegang und gegenwärtigen Stand der Schulung und der sich daraus ergebenden Forderung: Errichtung einer Akademie für Kolonialpolitik,” BAB NS 52/106, Bl. 41.
served as “more of a theorist of the colonial idea.” The old speaker, with one foot in the past, could only become a good speaker when he avoided seeing the colonies “only through the narrow perspective of [his] own personal, local, temporal, and professional experience” and stood instead with one foot in the past and one foot in the present.

In these older speakers, the RKB had to balance the authenticity of the colonial past with the worldview of the Nazi present. As Duems noted, “[n]ot every colonial event in the past remains valuable. Valuable…for the future are only the eternal strengths and national need that are manifested in those events of the past.” Such an approach would minimize the importance of historical accuracy in favor of propagandistic value. In fact, Pfeiffer did not view the young speaker’s lack of personal colonial experience as an insurmountable problem. Having the advantage of public speaking skills and a Nazi perspective, the young speaker could lecture with equal authority and persuasiveness as the old colonial: “[H]e must employ the self-assurance with which historians and geographers describe faraway times and places that they have not seen with their physical eyes, but of which they have fervently worked to gain a deep understanding.”

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36 Ibid., 28.

37 Ibid.

38 “Wenn er in Wort und Bild einzelne koloniale Räume und Geschehnisse beschreibt, so muss er es mit der Bescheidenheit, zugleich aber Selbstsicherheit tun, mit der der Historiker und Geograph entlegene Zeiten und Räume beschreibt, die er nicht mit leiblichen Augen sah, um deren innere Erkenntnis er sich aber heiß
young speakers’ ability to paint a mental picture of the colonies, using the colors of the Nazi worldview, would carry the same authority as that of the scholar or the old colonial. To further address their concerns about their youthful relevance, colonialists turned to the captive audience of German schoolchildren.

*Reaching the Youth*

The 1933 dissolution of the colonialist youth organizations into the Hitler Youth did not stop colonialists from directing their publicity efforts to the German youth. Some of these efforts took the form of “working-groups” (*Arbeitskameradschaften*) for young RKB members between the ages of 18 and 25 that included weekend meetings and involvement in RKB propaganda drives. Most of the RKB’s propaganda for the youth occurred in schools. In 1938, for example, the RKB provided 50,000 colonial brochures and newspapers to schools, as well as a series of twenty-one large images intended for classroom use.³⁹

The RKB collaborated with the Nazi Teachers’ League (*NS-Lehrersbund*) to integrate colonial topics into school lessons, highlighting the importance of colonialism for teaching German youth about the fundamental relationship between Germans and expansionism. The RKB liaison to the Teacher’s League, G. Hagen, for example,

recommended “hammering into the youth” Germans’ role in making North and South America, as well as South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand into “white man’s land.” Even more so, Hagen asserted, students should learn that “the creation and heyday of the empires of the ancient Indians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans only sprouted from the colonization work of the Nordic peoples.” “Yes,” Hagen concluded, “they must know: the entire German history is the colonizing history of the German people due to the necessity of an incessant struggle for German Lebensraum.”40 Hagen grandiosely attributed all of the imperial advancements and the achievements of Western civilization to the colonizing prowess of the German people. Hagen was not alone in this hyperbolic understanding of history. Maps in the 1938 Bremen colonial exhibition traced the routes of the Vikings and the Hanseatic League from the 9th to the 16th century, identifying both as antecedents of German colonization. Figure 10 Claiming the Vikings as colonizing ancestors would not necessarily support the need for African and South Pacific colonization—and indeed could more strongly justify the Nazis’ Drang nach Osten. But it did anchor colonialists’ claims in a history of colonialism and mainstreamed colonial

concepts. Students would not learn about German colonialism for its own sake, but rather for what it could teach them about Germans’ inherent and historical need for territorial expansion.

Teachers could integrate colonial topics into other classes, even though schools did not teach Germany’s colonial history as a separate subject. In fact, colonialist educators felt that colonial topics could fit into almost every class, from more obvious choices such as history, geography, and natural history, to religion and foreign languages, and even to math, drawing, and handicrafts. In arithmetic classes, for example, students could solve problems based on calculating amounts of space, percentages, populations, distances, and prices of raw materials. Doing so would supposedly make overseas colonialism not just the subject of romantic adventures but an everyday part of students’ lives by teaching them about the seriousness of colonial facts and figures.

Through these methods—meetings, speakers, and school curricula, among others—colonialists spread their message of the necessity of overseas colonial possessions to the general public, both existing and potential RKB members. To regulate the colonialist narrative, the RKB controlled the structure of meetings and the training of speakers from the top down and attempted to instruct children in this narrative in their schools. While hoping to gain new members, the RKB could not neglect the needs of its existing members.


current members, especially its leaders on the regional, district, and local level who needed encouragement from the national organization to continue their work among their respective constituencies.

Figure 10: RKB Colonial Congress Exhibition, Bremen, May 1938. Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
Bringing Colonialists Together: Training Courses and Colonial Congresses

The RKB colonial congresses and training courses reinvigorated members’ enthusiasm and prepared for the future colonies. These events brought together colonialists from across Germany and from a variety of Gau, Kreis, and Ort-level groups. These gatherings strengthened participants’ commitment by connecting them to a vibrant, nation-wide movement supported by a multitude of similarly-minded Germans.43 Through its training courses, the RKB ensured an educated, dedicated core. Its colonial congresses continued this work, attracting hundreds of colonialists to a public event. Both the training courses and the colonial congresses emphasized the seriousness, size, and national reach of the RKB and thereby its important position as a mass organization in Nazi Germany.

While the KPA retained primary responsibility for planning the administrative structure of the future colonial empire, the RKB ran a series of training courses (Lehrgänge) in the late 1930s both for RKB members and for civil servants and educators. A July 1941 training course for civil servants held in the Reich Colonial Institute in Berlin-Grunewald, for example, had forty-six participants representing a range of government offices such as the Labor Ministry, the Finance Ministry, the Foreign Office, the Forestry Ministry, and the Ministry of Aviation. The majority of

43 As Roger Chickering has observed in pre-World War I Pan-German League activities, “[t]he function of these events was acclamatory and demonstrative. Not only were they designed to affirm the patriotic commitment of the participants; they were directed self-consciously outward, to the doubters and unconverted.” Roger Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914 (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 156.
participants came from the Justice Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior (fifteen each). Of the forty-six participants, whose average age was forty-two, seventeen had already worked or lived in the German colonies, five elsewhere overseas, and four abroad in Europe.\textsuperscript{44} Some of these courses targeted specific branches of the German civil service, such as the police. In addition to a colonial police training course in Oranienburg, for example, colonialists gave 200 lectures to policemen across Germany between April 1936 and March 1937.\textsuperscript{45} By December 1937, about 60,000 policemen had reportedly joined the RKB.\textsuperscript{46}

Within the RKB, members could participate in a variety of weekend courses, from the local to national levels. These courses included local working groups, district-level seminars and weekend training courses, regional training courses, and finally the national training courses.\textsuperscript{47} Each level allowed participants to move up the organization’s hierarchy and also to serve as leaders for lower-level courses. In October 1938, the RKB opened facilities for the Reich-level training courses in Ladeburg bei Bernau, an hour north of Berlin. In 1938 and 1939, the RKB held sixteen courses in Ladeburg, with a total of 482 participants, the majority of whom represented Abteilung I (Propaganda) and II.


\textsuperscript{45} BAB R 1001/9670, Bl. 179-184.

\textsuperscript{46} Dr. R.S., “Die kolonialpolitische Schulung der deutschen Polizei. Über 400 Schulungsvorträge—Rund 60 000 Polizeibeamte Mitglieder des Reichskolonialbundes,” \textit{Völkischer Beobachter} 337 (3 December 1937), BAB R 8034 II/6356, Bl. 149.

\textsuperscript{47} “Entwurf eines Lehrplanes,” BAB NS 52/106, Bl. 40a.
(Education and Science) in the RKB. The Nazi Party had established a leadership school for the SS Security Services in nearby Bernau, making the RKB’s “Colonial Political Training House” (Kolonialpolitisches Schulungshaus) in Ladeburg close to but not part of this system of Party training. While large proportions of the participants in the two-week courses held in Ladeburg had previous colonial experience, through this course they received training to combine this experience with the Nazi worldview to create a “future colonial corps of leaders.”

The RKB and the KPA kept Gau-level statistics on participants of these training courses, creating a demographic picture of middle-class Germans, many with colonial experience. In a KPA survey in 1939 of 543 training course participants, Berlin and Hamburg ranked first and second in the number of participants per course (26 and 25 respectively). Within this group of 543 participants, 56% (308 participants) were between the ages of twenty-nine and forty-eight (28% between twenty-nine and thirty-eight; 28.6% between thirty-nine and forty-eight). The majority of this fifty-six percent would

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48 Most of the participants came from Gauen in southwestern Germany (Weser-Ems, Essen, Duesseldorf, Köln-Aachen, Koblenz-Trier, Hessen-Nassau, Baden, Kurhessen, and München-Oberbayern) as well as Thüringen, Sachsen, Brandenburg, Ostpreussen, and Holstein. The majority were between the ages of 29 and 48 (close to 57%), with a substantial number between the ages of 49 and 48 (close to 24%). “Denkschrift über den Aufbau, Werdegang und gegenwärtigen Stand der Schulung und der sich daraus ergebenden Forderung: Errichtung einer Akademie für Kolonialpolitik,” BAB NS 52/106, Bl. 57-62.


therefore have been too young to have had experiences in the colonies themselves. Civil servants represented 43% (234 participants, 135 of whom were teachers), followed by white-collar workers (17%) and the free professions (9.6%), with only eleven manual laborers participating. 126 had joined the Nazi Party before 1933, and 302 after 1933. Forty-seven were not Party members, but about half of these were members of associated Party organizations. Eighty-six of the total 543 were in the SA, thirteen in the SS, and twenty-four in the Hitler Youth. 198 of the participants had lived overseas or in the former colonies, 144 abroad in Europe, and 201 had not lived abroad. As these statistics show, the active membership of the RKB and the KPA remained similar to the Weimar years, that is, mostly middle-class and with experience outside of Germany (if not in the former colonies). The very high level of Party membership reflects both the political affiliations of RKB members and the colonialist organizations’ aim of targeting Party organizations for colonial education.

In addition to these courses, the RKB held annual national congresses, the largest of which held in Bremen in 1938 and Vienna in 1939. RKB members attended lectures, rallies, exhibitions, and festive events taking place throughout the city (heralded as having a particularly rich colonial history) and celebrated the past year’s achievements


52 The other colonial congresses were held in Frankfurt (1933), Kiel (1934), Freiburg im Breisgau (1935), and Breslau (1936). The congress planned for Hamburg in 1940 does not appear to have taken place.
both privately and through public parades together with Nazi formations. Figure 11 and

Figure 11: RKB Colonial Congress, Vienna, May 1939.
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
At these congresses, the RKB not only reported on its successful activities in that year, but also gave public thanks to its tens of thousands of active members and provided “milestones and signposts” for the next year’s work. Of additional, if not more, value, the colonial congresses provided participants with the “experience of camaraderie.” Coming together at the annual colonial congress allowed new RKB officials to gain

valuable experience from each other and from the “old colonial pioneers.” As Paul Bohn declared in the Festschrift for the Bremen exhibition, “[t]he many new office holders of the RKB, who come from all the Gauen of the Reich, will have the notable opportunity here in Bremen to get to know each other and to share their experiences.” RKB members’ experiences at the colonial congress proved lasting, “lingering in the conference participant and consciously or unconsciously influencing their coming work.”54 Like the RKB training courses, the colonial congresses reinvigorated colonialists’ commitment to the colonial cause and allowed colonialists to articulate their view of the RKB’s importance in the National Socialist organizational universe.

**Integrating Colonialism into Nazi Public Space**

As an organization fully coordinated after 1936, the RKB could take advantage of the existing apparatus of Nazi mass culture and public indoctrination to reach those Germans still immune to their message. In the first years of the Third Reich, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels had consolidated, among others, artists, musicians, filmmakers, writers, and actors into departments within the centralized Reich Chamber of Culture,

which censored the membership and works of these groups.\textsuperscript{55} In campaigns such as the Winter Aid program (Winterhilfswerk), members of the SA and other Party functionaries (including the colonial Schutztruppe in their refitted uniforms) collected money, food, and clothes on the streets and in people’s homes for the welfare of needy members of the Volksgemeinschaft.\textsuperscript{56} Through this high level of coordination and mobilization, the street, the newspaper, and the theater become spaces of propaganda.

By integrating colonial themes and events into the public culture of Nazi organizations, the RKB attempted to make all of German society colonialist, regardless of individuals’ RKB membership. If, as they stated, colonialists wanted to create a mass movement, they would have to work with Nazi social and cultural organizations, which claimed to have organized all of German society. One can imagine colonialists as an instrument in Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels’s orchestra principle of propaganda, by which all aspects of propaganda would coordinate like an orchestra.\textsuperscript{57} Colonialists’ integration into Nazi organizations’ public space would add the sound of their instrument


\textsuperscript{57} As Eric Rentschler explains, “Not every instrument plays the same tune when we hear a concert; still, the result is a symphony. Hardly monolithic or monotone, the features, documentaries, and newsreels made in Nazi Germany, together with an array of orchestrated diversions (radio programs, mass rallies, gigantic spectacles, holidays and commemorations—a world, in short, of festivals, pageants, flags, uniforms, and emblems), imbued the everyday with an aura of drama and excitement, organizing work and leisure time, occupying physical and psychic space, and thus militating against alternative experience and independent thought.” Eric Rentschler, \textit{The ministry of illusion: Nazi cinema and its afterlife} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).
to the Nazis’ propaganda symphony and would at the same time secure a job for the musician (colonialists). Colonialists’ participation in Nazi mass culture mutually benefitted both colonialists and the Nazi regime, bringing colonialists further in line with the reorganization of society, but also providing larger audiences for the colonialists’ (now officially approved) message.

On the national level, colonialists attempted to incorporate colonial themes into the working of the German Labor Front’s leisure organization Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude, hereafter KdF). Founded in 1933, KdF provided Germans of all classes with the opportunity for travel and tourism, as well as activities in the workplace. Beginning in 1935, KdF operated cruises to the territories of Nazi Germany’s fascist and dictatorial allies, Italy (including Italy’s North African colony of Libya) and Portugal. KdF cruises also followed the footsteps of the British Cook travel agency to sites in the Middle East, including Alexandria, Cairo, Istanbul, and Jerusalem.58 Through these overseas cruises, the KdF encouraged Germans to adopt a more expansive view of their place in the world, simultaneous with the Third Reich’s more aggressive foreign policy.59 As one KdF journal declared, “[t]he German Volk has once again become a nation of seafarers,” referring both to Germans’ participation on the cruises and to the Nazi


59 Ibid.
Germany’s desire to rebuild the German navy. The connections made with German expatriates living in KdF ports of call would also foster the feeling of a racial community beyond Germany’s borders. These expatriates, their nationalism supposedly reinvigorated by contact with the tourists from Germany, would establish KdF groups of their own, often travelling between countries to create a web of German tourism. Travel and tourism functioned in the KdF, as in other nationalist projects before it, as a vehicle for the cultivation of nationalism.

Colonialists eagerly capitalized on the work of the KdF. In 1938, the colonialist journal *Kolonie und Heimat* covered a recent KdF trip to Egypt with a photo-essay entitled “Dropping by in Africa” (“Auf einen Sprung nach Afrika”). While these KdF tourists did not visit a former German colony in Africa, their presence in Egypt signaled to *Kolonie und Heimat* the return of Germans to the continent. As the text accompanying the photos stated, “The English, the French, the Dutch, Belgians, and Portuguese, they all have the possibility to get to know foreign lands and foreign people overseas in *their own* colonies.” (emphasis in original) While Germans no longer had this opportunity,

60 Ibid., 137.
61 Ibid., 140-141.
64 “Engländer, Franzosen, Holländer, Belgier und Portugiesen, sie alle haben die Möglichkeit, fremde Länder, fremde Völker über See in *eigenen* Kolonien kennenzulernen.” Ibid.
“…the Labor Front has through its organization ‘Strength through Joy’ created the possibility for the German worker to be able to turn his gaze to distant lands which till now have remained foreign to him.”\(^{65}\) More closely aligned with the colonialists’ efforts to foster a stronger relationship between Germans and their African colonies, in August 1940 the Hamburg KdF chapter announced that it would begin teaching African languages (Ewe, Swahili, Nama [“Hottentottisch”], Ful and Jaunde) that September.\(^{66}\) Through these courses and cruises, KdF functioned as fellow travelers rather than active supporters of colonialism. The desire for Lebensraum and an autarkic empire embedded in KdF travel could, as colonialists pointed out, find fulfillment in the overseas colonies.

Colonialists also highlighted the importance of overseas colonies by connecting these territories to the Nazi regime’s irredentism. The reclamation of the Saar in 1935, for example, inspired colonialists. “[D]on’t refer to the colonies as the ‘former’ colonies,” a 1937 *Afrika-Nachrichten* article instructed, “we never talked about the ‘former’ Saar.”\(^{67}\) A Propaganda Ministry press briefing from February 1939 supported this linguistic reframing. Given Hitler’s remarks on colonies in his speech on January 30, 1939, the Propaganda Ministry instructed the press to refer to the overseas colonies as “the German

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\(^{65}\) “…die Arbeitsfront hat durch ihre Organisation ‘Kraft durch Freude’ die Möglichkeit geschaffen, daß der deutsche Arbeiter seinen Blick hinzurichten vermag in ferne Länder, die ihm bis dahin fremd geblieben waren.” Ibid.


colonies” or “our colonies” rather than the “lost German colonies” or the “former German colonies.” Similarly, the author of an article in the regional RKB newsletter for Gauverband Saarpfalz dramatically described the impact of the Munich conference in September 1938 on the colonial question. The publics of European nations had begun to discuss Germany’s colonial demands because Hitler promised to fulfill these demands peacefully, as he had done “in the holy struggle for the rights of our brothers in the Sudetenland.” The more clearly Hitler spoke about the German colonies, “the more those on the opposing side occupy themselves with the colonial question and help us…to make [the colonial question] topical.” The successful plebiscite in the Saar, the annexation of the Sudentenland (and the rest of Czechoslovakia a year later), and the Anschluß of Austria without military conflict seemed to confirm Hitler’s statements of his desire to resolve Germany’s territorial demands and overturn the Treaty of Versailles using diplomatic non-military means. These events also positioned Hitler as the most decisive

68 “die deutschen Kolonien” or “unsere Kolonien” rather than “verlorene deutsche Kolonien” or “ehemalige deustche Kolonien.” Gabriele Toepser-Ziegert, ed., NS-Presseanweisungen der Vorkriegszeit vol. 7, no. 1, 150.

leader in Europe and so colonialists could legitimately believe that the “colonial question” would soon be resolved. By associating their demands with other facets of Nazi irredentism, colonialists hoped to connect these issues in the minds of the public as well.

The 1939 Dresden Colonial Exhibition: A Case Study

Exhibitions provided colonialists with their most successful tool for integrating colonialist themes and topics into German public space. Continuing a longer tradition of exhibitions in Imperial and Weimar Germany, the DKG and the RKB produced six exhibitions (including two travelling exhibitions) between 1933 and 1943, in addition to the dozens of others put on by the regional and local branches of these organizations and by other organizations. Unlike English or French colonial shows, such as the 1931 Paris exhibition, most colonial exhibitions in the Third Reich focused primarily on Germans overseas rather than on colonial subjects. Only one of the fourteen sections of the 1939 Dresden exhibition, for example, presented an ethnographic show of colonial subjects.

The colonial exhibitions emphasized Germans in the colonies and German accomplishments, supporting a colonialist discourse that focused on disproving the “colonial guilt-lie.” The exhibitions encouraged visitors to experience their colonial heritage in order to discover their colonizing potential in the present. Klaus Hildebrand estimates that roughly 1.7 million Germans visited colonial exhibitions between 1933 and

1938. The colonial exhibition served as an important propaganda medium for reaching the masses necessary to create a mass movement. Through these exhibitions, the colonialists metaphorically and physically occupied space in Nazi public culture.

To attract a mass audience, colonialists simultaneously modernized and politicized the style and content of their exhibitions. In its report on the colonial show at the 1928 International Press Exhibition (Pressa) in Cologne, for example, the journal *Der Kolonialdeutsche* first described what a colonial exhibition should not be: it should not be an exhibition of ethnographic pieces or exotic weapons, it should not be an art exhibition, it should not be a collection of newsprint of varying quality, and it should above all not serve as advertisement for special purposes or for a particular colonial organization. In contrast, “through its exotic and fantasy-inducing arrangement, the Colonial Show should compel the visitor to pause for a while and contemplate the colonial idea.” Erich Duems emphasized the modern design of the 1933 travelling exhibition; “…the new exhibition follows the modern artistic lines, in that every single room is organized along the same rules of artistic interior design in terms of size, color and grouping of exhibition

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73 “[d]ie Koloniale Sonderschau soll durch ihre exotisch wirkende, phantasiebeschwingte Einrichtung die Besucher zu einem kurzen Verweilen zwingen und zu einem Nachdenken über den Kolonialgedanken anregen.” Ibid.
The modern exhibition would, like modern advertising, create a new way of seeing the world and oneself within that world.

Exhibition planners saw this clarity of design as essential to conveying the central message of the colonialist movement through the shows, which, after all, functioned as political exhibitions aimed at the wider public. The exhibitions highlighted Germany’s demand for colonies and the vitality of the colonial question for the German Volk. The best way to communicate this message, according to Paul Bohn, involved a spatial organization through which the visitors “follow[ed] the continuation of colonial themes not by force but unconsciously out of an internal drive.” Furthermore, exhibitions should remain comprehensible to the masses. R. v. Zastrow suggested in 1933 that exhibitions should show the houses that settlers had built and in which they lived, including the furniture they made from sea crates. Walking through these houses would show visitors that colonialists had made a Heimat overseas and would give them some experience (ein kleines Erleben) of this life in the colonies. Figure 13


76 “…der Ausstellungsbesucher der Fortführung des kolonialen Themas nicht aus Zwang, sondern unbewußt aus innerm Drang heraus folgt.” Ibid., 208.

77 “…Dies alles ist Anschauungsunterricht: in solchem Bauwerk herumzugehen, bedeutet ein kleines Erleben, ein Einfühlen in eine andere Welt, in andere Lebensart. Da sieht man, wie mit den primitivsten
Reflecting on the RKB’s exhibition practice up to 1939, Bohn observed that, through colonial exhibitions, visitors got to know a foreign world, one outside of their experience.

and which had hardly played a role in their lives till then. While Bohn acknowledged that most Germans paid little attention to the former colonies, he saw exhibitions as a format through which to counteract this apathy.

Colonialist planners also took into account the National Socialist exhibitionary culture. Nazi exhibitions such as “Schaffendes Volk” (Düsseldorf 1937), “Ewige Jude” (1937-1939), and “Deutsche Größe” (1940) drew millions of visitors and set a standard that colonialists consciously emulated. Hans Ernst Pfeiffer, in a 1937 lecture for the Gauverband Berlin’s instructional courses, reminded exhibition planners at all levels of the RKB that “Germans today are used to the large German exhibitions through the Strength-through-Joy trips. One should avoid ugly rooms, outmoded means of display, concentrations of statistical material only in an educational format, and the collection of too many small individual objects, which quickly dulls the interest of the visitor.”

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Planners should strive for diversity in expression but unity in the message of colonial exhibitions, Pfeiffer advised, so as to speak to the heart of the visitor. Following the guidelines provided by Zastrow, Bohn, and Pfeiffer, the ideal colonial exhibition would provide information on the colonies, but not overwhelm the visitor; would follow a clear and unified narrative; and would allow the visitor to “experience” the colonies in order to create a lasting and emotional impression of Germany’s claim to colonies.

In the summer of 1939, the RKB held its largest and most numerically successful colonial exhibition in Dresden. The exhibition ran from June 21st to September 10th and attracted 400,000 visitors. Because of its success and because of its timing with Germany on the brink of war, the Dresden exhibition provides an ideal case study through which to explore colonialists’ integration of colonialism into public space in Nazi Germany.

Originally planned for the Reich Colonial Congress in Vienna in May, the Dresden exhibition opened on June 21, 1939. Publicity for the exhibition in the two main Dresden newspapers, the *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* (hereafter DNN) and *Der Freiheitskampf* (hereafter FK, the daily Nazi newspaper in Gau Sachsen), began at the beginning of the month. The newspapers covered the arrival of objects to be displayed in the exhibition and provided an advance look at the exhibition the day before it

81 Ibid.
opened. According to the DNN, the exhibition met Pfeiffer’s demands for variety of expression and unity of message. “Even with all of the colorfulness of the diverse materials, the maps, plans, drawings, statistics, models, figures, dioramas, animals, plants,” the DNN observed, “one never loses—not even in the visual impression—the dominant fundamental idea, which forms the vision of this show…‘Greater Germany’s claim to its robbed colonies is an elementary right of existence [Lebensrecht].’”

Approval and promotion of the exhibition came not only from the city’s newspapers but from city officials. Dresden’s exhibition office had planned the exhibition in concert with the RKB, which committed its officials to the exhibition’s success. On June 20th, FK printed a notice by the mayor and Kreisleiter, encouraging Dresdners to hang out their flags the next day in consideration of the high political meaning of the exhibition. To further ensure the success of the exhibition, over the course of the summer Hitler Youth groups of up to a thousand travelled to Dresden from Hamburg, Königsburg, and other cities; the RKB organized special trains from the Gau level groups in Berlin, Thüringen,


85 “Am Mittwoch Flaggen heraus!” Der Freiheitskampf no. 168 (20 June 1939): 5.
Wien, Kärnten, Halle-Merseburg, and Baden; 200 civil servants from the Reich Forestry Office in Berlin travelled to Dresden; and the city of Dresden invited 500 welfare recipients to visit the exhibition.86

Within the exhibition, colonialist planners designed the displays to embody the narrative of their colonial claims. Most of the exhibition followed a chronological path, from the supposed centuries-old German tradition of colonizing, through the formal acquisition of the colonies in the 1880s, and the German accomplishments (scientific, technical, and medical) during thirty-five years of colonial rule. The First World War and the Treaty of Versailles represented the break in the colonial narrative, after which the exhibition focused on the work of the colonialists in Germany and their support of colonial Germans living overseas. The visitor entered the exhibition halls through a “hall of honor” consisting of a large photograph of Hitler, a quotation from his most recent Reichstag speech, and the ever-present Point 3 of the 1920 Nazi Party Program. The exhibition then divided into fourteen sections as well as full-sized tropical tents and greenhouses in the open-air grounds. The main exhibition halls began and ended with Hitler; the hall “The Colonial Demands of Today” held another large photograph of Hitler with another quotation about Germany’s colonial demands from a speech on April

28, 1939, thereby framing the contents of the exhibition as of critical contemporary importance to Germany.\(^{87}\)

Each of these fourteen sections divided further into subtopics containing exhibition pieces donated or supported by a variety of museums and organizations. The KdF stamp collecting group in Gau Sachsen, for example, organized the subsection “Postal stamps from our colonies,” the National Museum of Zoology and Ethnology in Dresden provided the ethnographic displays, the Junker and Messerschmidt factory supplied the subsection on German airplanes overseas, and the Reich Institute for Foreign and Colonial Forestry put on the special show on hunting.\(^{88}\) Involving these organizations allowed the RKB to expand the variety of materials included in the exhibition and gave visitors the impression of the number of non-colonial groups that supported the colonialists’ cause. Reciprocally, the exhibition guide identified the contributions of these organizations and provided advertising space to companies such as the Woermann shipping line, Stadtbank Dresden, the chocolate manufacturer Sarotti, and the newspaper *Der Freiheitskampf*.

Spatially, the design of the Dresden exhibition grounds required visitors to pass through the concert garden and fairground to enter the first series of exhibition rooms


\(^{88}\) Ibid.
after which they had to again cross over the fairground to reach the second series of rooms. This design encouraged fluidity between the indoor displays and the outdoor events, giving the entire exhibition grounds a sense of spectacle. The events accompanying the exhibition in this open space fell into two categories, those directly having to do with colonialism and those not having to do with colonialism. Each category served a different purpose and all worked towards the goal of a colonial mass movement.

The colonially-themed activities, especially those held outside the exhibition grounds, supplemented the work of the exhibition, served to reach those Germans who may not have attended the exhibition, and entertained visitors while maintaining a colonial focus. The Dresden zoo identified its “colonial” animals by their colonial homelands; there were several open-air showings of the documentary film “Deutsches Land in Afrika”; a June 16th article in FK listed Dresden streets named after colonial pioneers and places; and the Dresden Hygiene Museum held a series of colonial scientific lectures. These activities connected those personally invested in the former colonies with the average German, even going so far as to claim that visitors “experienced” Africa, such as at the “Colonial Ball” held at the beginning of August. “An

experience that reminds the old colonial pioneers of celebrations under Africa’s tropical sky,” the DNN reported on the evening. The party appeared “effortlessly African,” not only “because of the palm leaves and the dyed-in-the-wool [waschecht] Negroes, but above all because of the tropical temperature. But that was no wonder—four bands played for dancing.”92 This article elided the differences between authentic and artificial experiences, thereby framing Africa as an experience one could have just as authentically in Germany. Other RKB events in the 1930s also recreated the colonies in Germany, such as a festival in Nuremberg in 1937, which aimed to “…conjure up (hervorzuaubern) a real African feel.”93 Locating the colonies spatially throughout Dresden created a total experience for visitors to the exhibition and the city.

Also in August, a “singing troop” (singende Batterie) of the Wehrmacht performed a number of colonial songs at the exhibition and their performance was broadcasted to Germans living in the colonies.94 The soldiers fall into the second category of accompanying events that tied the colonialist movement both to National Socialism and to German society in general. These events include a garden party with a soprano and


dance performance,\textsuperscript{95} a boxing match as part of the NS Reich League for Gymnastics competition,\textsuperscript{96} concerts by the Dresden Philharmonic,\textsuperscript{97} KdF gymnastics,\textsuperscript{98} a basketball game between the Dresdner Police Sports Club and the Luftwaffe Sports Club (also organized by the Reich League for Gymnastics),\textsuperscript{99} and an afternoon for housewives.\textsuperscript{100}

On the last Sunday of the exhibition in September, the Party invited 3000 family members of soldiers serving in the recently begun war to a special day at the exhibition including free admission, coffee and cakes, and a gift.\textsuperscript{101}

Like the exhibition’s affiliation with scientific organizations, these activities provided legitimation. The non-colonial events not only entertained visitors but also publicized the colonialist movement’s integration into Nazi total culture, which was essential to a mass movement. The portraits of Hitler are prime examples of this. Similarly, the visit of Franz Ritter von Epp, head of the colonialist organizations, to the exhibition in August had all of the characteristics of a public Nazi Party event. Epp spoke

\textsuperscript{95} “Gartenfest in der Kolonialschau,” \textit{Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten} no. 152 (3 July 1939): 4.


\textsuperscript{97} “Der Kreuzchor in der Kolonialausstellung,” \textit{Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten} no. 201 (29 August 1939): 4.


\textsuperscript{100} “Lustige Hausfrauen in der Ausstellung. Der Reichskolonialbund hat zahlreiche Sonderfahrten vorbereitet,” \textit{Der Freiheitskampf} no. 205 (27 July 1939): 5.

before a rally that numbered into the tens of thousands.102 According to the *Völkischer Beobachter* report of Epp’s visit to Dresden, both large halls of the city exhibition palace had to be closed by the police due to overcrowding, and thousands heard Epp’s speech over loudspeakers in the open-air grounds of the exhibition.103 Through this rally, as well as the other accompanying events and the exhibition display, the RKB hoped to convince visitors that colonial claims were a German cause and therefore a National Socialist cause—and vice versa.

While these accompanying events widened the appeal of the exhibition, they also had a double-edged nature. According to a July 9th article in *FK*, as soon as the weekend began families streamed into the exhibition grounds to spend time in the gardens, with “occasional forays into the halls.”104 These visitors have chosen the right way to see the exhibition, the author declared. Rather than following the layout of the exhibition from room to room in an “hours-long, tiring tour…so that at the end one doesn’t really know anymore what one has seen,” the visitor should “like a connoisseur (*Genießer*), take one tidbit (*Leckerbissen*) after the other.”105 The exhibition was open in Dresden until

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105 “Nicht auf einmal in stundenlangem, ermüdendem Rundgang von Halle zu Halle zu laufen, um am Ende doch nicht mehr richtig zu wissen, was sie gesehen haben, sondern wie ein Genießer einen Leckerbissen
September, so one could always return another time to see sections missed in the first visit.

Similarly, the DNN reported in June that the rain showers didn’t diminish one’s visit to the exhibition grounds, because “the halls with their interesting show offered enough space to take shelter during the short periods of heavy showers.” These articles suggest that the number of individual rather than total (including repeat) visitors may have been less than 400,000. The behavior described in these articles indicates that visitors viewed a trip (or multiple trips) to the exhibition as entertainment rather than strictly education, as the subject matter of the displays would have suggested. This kind of visitor behavior threatened to dilute the impact of the colonial message. On the other hand, they would have made a visit to the colonial exhibition, and thereby would have helped to make a colonialist event. The presence of visitors in the exhibition grounds and the newspaper coverage of the exhibition normalized colonial claims as part of public culture in Nazi Germany, thereby reinforcing colonialists’ assertions of the importance of their work.

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nach dem anderen vorzunehmen. Und wenn man es bei einem Besuch nicht schaffet, nun, dann kommt man bei passender Gelegenheit wieder, die Ausstellung ist ja noch bis zum September geöffnet.” Ibid.

International (Mis)perceptions

Colonialists’ propaganda had an international audience as well as a domestic one. The German Socialist Party in exile (SOPADE) began to include commentary on colonialism and colonialist propaganda in its monthly analyses based on secret reports from within Germany. SOPADE published these reports in Prague from 1934 to 1938 and, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, in Paris until 1940. These reports, meant to take the pulse of life in Nazi Germany, present the biased perspective of the exiled and anti-imperialist Socialist Party, which hoped to find discontent under Nazism. Interpretations of the workings of colonialist propaganda reflect the contemporaneous understanding of the totalitarian nature of Nazi Germany, in which all activities were strictly controlled from the top down. While these reports as historical sources present certain problems, they provide insight into public reactions to the surge of colonialist propaganda after 1936.

In October 1936, the first SOPADE report to mention the RKB noted an intensification of colonialist propaganda and reproduced a RKB recruiting flyer. The very mention of colonialist activities in these reports indicates that this propaganda had reached a level where it would draw SOPADE attention. The reproduction of the RKB flyer also shows that it was the RKB’s methods of publicity as well as its message that interested SOPADE’s reporters. The SOPADE’s decision to monitor colonialist activity suggests that they believed this propaganda reflected an issue of national concern equal to other topics such as the German economy as worthy of comment.
Colonialist propaganda, however, sometimes bred confusion or boredom rather than enthusiasm, as recounted in a report from Saxony in September 1936. When the speaker turned to the colonial issue at a Nazi Party meeting in Marienberg, the audience did not react overwhelmingly positively. SOPADE’s informer noted the confusion created by the speaker’s talk, remarking on the amount of coughing and harrumphing from the listeners during speech, and the audible sigh in the audience when he finished talking. This account reminds one of Pfeiffer’s concurrent criticisms of the organization of RKB events. Nonetheless, the report concluded that

[i]t is certain that when they put the colonial question on the foreign policy agenda, the Nazis can count on the approval of the great mass of the population. In this matter as well, they possess the readiness of a large part of the people to fall for any campaign, whether truly important for national politics or not.108

Despite the ineffectiveness of some events, SOPADE reporters believed that the majority of the German population would support efforts to reclaim the overseas colonies. The reports describe the Nazi state and Party as the driving forces behind colonialist propaganda. The SOPADE reports viewed the increased involvement of the regime in organizing colonialist propaganda as a tactic to mollify the masses. The July 1937 report declared that one of the goals of colonialist propaganda in the Third Reich

107 *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE* 3, no. 10 (October 1936): 1261.

108 “Es ist sicher, dass die Nazis, wenn sie einmal die Kolonialfrage auf die außenpolitische Tagesordnung stellen, dabei auf die Zustimmung der großen Masse der Bevölkerung rechnen können. Sie haben auch in dieser Frage die Bereitschaft eines großen Teiles des Volkes für sich, auf alle wirklich oder scheinbar nationalpolitisch wichtigen Aktionen hereinzufallen.” Ibid., 1262-1263.
was “to stimulate for the masses a kind of ersatz democracy.”\textsuperscript{109} As the Socialists interpreted events in 1938, “[t]he population’s continued willingness to sacrifice depends…in large part on the maintenance of the National Socialist economy.” Given Germans’ nationalistic character, the goal for which they would sacrifice “can only be…a national goal,” such as overseas colonialism. “Therefore,” the SOPADE report concluded, “we believe that Hitler’s pursuit of colonies is meant earnestly and stems from the much-cited ‘driving force’ [Dynamik] of the Third Reich even more than the drive for expansion in Europe.”\textsuperscript{110}

Through colonialist propaganda, according to SOPADE reports, the Nazis encouraged Germans to greater sacrifice for the sake of future national glory. Promising increased economic prosperity, the regime would tell the workers in the factories, “you must lend your assistance, so that Germany can recover its colonies and thereby can

\textsuperscript{109} “den Volksmassen eine Art Demokratie-Ersatz vorzutäuschen.” \textit{Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE} 4, no. 7 (July 1937): 929.

overcome its lack of raw materials.”¹¹¹ Overseas colonies represented the manifestation of this national greatness and the solution to Germany’s problems. Contrary to the RKB’s statements on the inherent value of overseas colonies to the formation of German identity, however, the SOPADE reports view the overseas colonies equally as a means and as an end in themselves for the Nazis.

Not only could colonialists use the publicity apparatus of the Nazi Party and regime for their own self-promotion, but the Nazis could also use the enthusiasm for expansion mobilized by the colonialists. One report even suggested that the Nazis had begun to promote colonialism as a fungible source of income (in membership dues).¹¹² The SOPADE reporter in Silesia in January 1938, for example, concluded that “thus some, who reject the Nazis in other areas, join the ‘League of the German East’ or the Reich Colonial League. One says, Germany was deceived, why shouldn’t we also demand redress?”¹¹³ Support for overseas colonialism is presented here as interchangeable with support for the East and both as stand-ins for support for the Nazi Party.


¹¹² “...Der zweite Zweck der Kolonialpropaganda, einer nationalsozialistischen Organisation neue große Beitragseinnahmen zu verschaffen, über deren tatsächliche Verwendung natürlich keine Rechnung gelegt wird...” Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE 4, no. 7 (July 1937): 929.

Other international observers also noticed the increase in colonialist propaganda. *Life* magazine published a short article in December 1936 on the education of German youth about colonialism at the *Deutsche Auslands-Institut* in Stuttgart.\(^{114}\) Footage of colonialist street publicity and Nazi Germany’s demand for the return of the African colonies appeared in the March of Time newsreel’s January 18, 1938 episode “Inside Nazi Germany.”\(^{115}\) While describing a poorly attended colonialist rally in the Berlin *Sportspalast* in 1937 as “not a striking success,”\(^{116}\) the *New York Times* also reported on the intensification of propaganda efforts by the RKB.\(^{117}\) Like the Socialist Party’s reporters, these commentators considered colonialists’ publicity as part of Nazi propaganda, an impression that both attests to the public presence of RKB activities and matched colonialists’ self-perceptions.

**The “Kitschification” of the Colonies**

Not all publicity was good publicity. Images of colonial Africa had circulated in Germany for fifty years, often in connection with the emerging field of advertising. Colonialism and advertising represent not only concurrent, but deeply intertwined


\(^{115}\) “March of Time: Inside Nazi Germany” (January 18, 1938).


phenomena. The exoticism of colonial images in advertisements demonstrated the authenticity of the (mostly exotic) products for sale. Advertisers often proved more effective than colonialists in promoting the overseas colonies in Imperial Germany. These advertising images created a “visual hegemony” that consisted of a series of visual tropes in the depiction of Africans (often borrowed from American imagery of African-Americans) that became essential to the commercial success of the products sold. Many of these images proved long-lasting, such as the Sarotti Moor of the Sarotti chocolate company, used in Germany until recently. The establishment of a visual hegemony in Imperial Germany meant that images of the colonies or colonial subjects in Nazi Germany still carried these commercial, and not political, connotations.

Colonialists disdained advertising, with its combination of commercialism and romanticism, as kitsch. Nazi opponents of overseas colonialism had attacked colonialists using these two descriptors—commercialism and romanticism—as evidence of the lack of seriousness of the overseas colonial project for the German nation. Hoping to overcome this prejudice, colonialists rejected kitsch as detrimental to their movement.

In fact, colonialists were not alone in fearing that connections with advertising would dilute the seriousness of their cause. In 1933, Joseph Goebbels promulgated the “Law for the Protection of National Symbols,” which restricted the unauthorized use of

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119 As David Ciarlo concludes, “[advertisements] disseminated imagery of colonialism to an audience far broader than that ever reached by any institution.” Ibid., 14.
images of Hitler in order to maintain the solemnity of the Nazi Party.\textsuperscript{120} Known colloquially as the “Anti-Kitsch Law,” the regulation (added to over the following years) encouraged the public to report “offending items” to the authorities. These “offending items,” Goebbels declared, abused that which they represented.\textsuperscript{121} It is conceivable that the Nazi anti-kitsch campaign heightened colonialists’ concerns about preserving the social and political function of their colonial propaganda.

Colonialists regulated the production of colonially-related materials so as to control the public’s impressions of their cause. To contemporary eyes, it is often difficult to separate the kitsch colonialists complained about from the materials of which they approved. Was the Colonial Ball at the Dresden Colonial Exhibition, with its palm trees and “dyed-in-the-wool Negroes,” any less kitschy than a beer coaster emblazoned with a palm tree? Were middle-aged men marching through the streets of Bremen in their (refitted) \textit{Schutztruppe} uniforms and iconic \textit{Südwester} hats any less kitschy than an “Africa Revue” featuring former \textit{Askari} Mohamed Husen on Hamburg’s Reeperbahn?\textsuperscript{122} Philosopher Tomas Kulka identifies kitsch by its representation of objects or themes highly charged with stock emotions, by its instantly and effortlessly identifiable nature,

\textsuperscript{120} Claudia Koonz, \textit{The Nazi Conscience} (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), 70.

\textsuperscript{121} As Natalia Skadol observes, “A consistency between the essence of the represented object—namely its social and political function—and its representation was to be ensured at all costs—at least theoretically,” Natalia Skradol, “Fascism and Kitsch: The Nazi Campaign against Kitsch,” \textit{German Studies Review} vol. 34, no. 3 (October 2011): 599.

and by its inability to “substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted objects or themes.” By this definition, all of the above events fall under the label of kitsch.

The nagging concerns about the dangers of colonial kitsch raise the question of the possibility of any colonial themes and images not appearing as kitsch in post-colonial Germany. As Celeste Olalquiaga argues, “kitsch is nothing if not a suspended memory whose elusiveness is made ever more keen by its extreme iconicity.” A “time capsule with a two-way ticket to the realm of myth,” kitsch offers “an illusion of completeness, a universe devoid of past and future, a moment whose sheer intensity is to a large degree predicated on its very inexistence.” According to Olalquiaga, the appeal of kitsch lies in its ability to access a “pastness” in the present. This desire infused all of colonialist propaganda in Nazi Germany. Colonialist propaganda continually reworked the lost colonial past, even as it offered a vision of a future colonial Germany. Colonial images and themes carried emotional resonance (for colonialists and for many other Germans) precisely because they alluded to an already experienced past. Colonialist propaganda could therefore never be avant-garde, relying as it did on a conservative image of Germany’s past glory. Its identifiable nature, reliance on stock emotions (in particular


nationalistic pride), and its deep attachment to the past situate colonialist propaganda—visual, written, and even performative—in the realm of kitsch.

Colonialists, however, wanted their images, events, and other activities to have precisely the emotionally-charged and easily identifiable characteristics that Kulka describes. Drawing on the interrelated history of colonial images and the advertising industry, colonialists differentiated between the seriousness (authentic, political, and RKB-authorized nature) of approved works and the explicit commercialism of colonial kitsch. In the opinion of many, however, colonialists themselves did not prove above creating kitsch. *Afrika-Nachrichten* (hereafter *AN*), an illustrated journal published in Leipzig, published numerous critical articles against “colonial kitsch” that presented merely “superficial, false, and shamelessly self-promotional (reklamesüchtigen) representations,” which did more harm than good to the colonialist cause. These images would cultivate the impression that colonialists lacked serious dedication, which would thereby devalue the object of their agitation, the overseas colonies themselves. As an example, *AN* described a series of colonial beer coasters as tasteless and irresponsible.126 **Figure 14**


AN appeared from 1920 to 1942, with the subtitle “Illustrated Colonial and Overseas Newspaper,” but without affiliation with a specific colonialist organization. The greater frequency of critical articles on colonial kitsch in AN than in other publications, which seem to ignore the issue, indicates that the journal’s lack of affiliation provided a space for criticism. This reputation started in the Weimar Republic. Hans Reepen, who later served as editor of the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung from 1933 to 1937, had edited AN before 1933 when both he and his journal took a critical stance towards the DKG.127 The increase in negative articles after 1936 also suggests that the consolidation of the RKB

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127 Klaus Hildebrand, Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945, 96.
into a fully “Nazified” organization augmented the popularity of colonialism, which was now vulnerable to opportunistic exploitation. The increased attention to colonialism meant that colonialists would have to self-censor the components and tone of their message more closely.

In October 1937, the editors of AN took particular offense to a draft poster brought by two advertisers to a colonial propagandist. In the poster, which AN denigrated as kitsch, an Askari prepares to raise the swastika flag on a flagpole, with a palm tree in the background and a shield carrying a saying attesting to “Germany under the hot sun.”

Figure 15 This image, AN complained, with the wild jungle in the background, relied on exoticism without praising German achievements. AN proposed that the poster should depict a German farmer instead of an African, it should show Kilimanjaro (symbol of East Africa) in the background and a German plane in the foreground, and—instead of “romantic sentimentality”—it should include words by Hitler on colonial claims. Colonialist propaganda should dispense with romanticism and represent the stylized visual culture of Nazi Germany.

AN contributors also expressed frustration at those who indulged in the romanticism and adventure of the colonies. The journal’s main crusader against such kitsch was a writer under the pseudonym “Anti-Bimbo” (Bimbo as a pejorative term for Africans). Presumably, the “Anti” in “Anti-Bimbo” referred to the author’s opposition to the caricatured depictions of the colonies implied by the appellation “Bimbo.” In a May 1938 article, for example, “Anti-Bimbo” criticized a photo-essay published in the Illustrated Family and Fashion Magazine (Illustrierte Familien- und Modezeitschrift mit...
Versicherung), complaining that such photo-essays focused too much on the exaggerated adventure and danger of the colonies (dark jungles, black women, etc.), rather than on Germans’ colonial work.129 “Anti-Bimbo” had made it his mission “…to illuminate everything that would have the ability to distract from the clear duties of German colonial politics and to awaken romantic illusions.”130 “Anti-Bimbo” further explained his position:

[A] sense of humor and romance in a healthy measure has nothing to do with the kitschification [Verkitschung] and deflection of the serious life tasks of our people…When romance and humor and descriptions of adventure serve the building of the colonies, when they are pro-colonially slanted [sie alle voller Tendenz sind] and want to educate, that means, when they serve in their very basis the strengthening of the unitary popular will, then they are in the right place…Just as little in order are the dishonest, yes, dishonest effusions on Africa of unpolitical people. What we need are educational, effective stories about the development work done over there. When we have them, then we can also confidently read adventure stories.131 (emphasis in original)


130 “…alles das zu beleuchten, was in der Lage wäre, von den klaren Aufgaben einer deutschen Kolonialpolitik abzulenken und romantische Illusionen zu erwecken.” “Anti-Bimbo antwortet kurz!” Afrika-Nachrichten 19, no. 2 (February 1938): 40.

131 “Oh, Anti-Bimbo hat Sinn für Humor und für die Schönheiten afrikanischer Erde! Aber Sinn für Humor und Romantik im gesunden Masse hat nichts zu tun mit einer Verkitschung und Verbiegung ernster Lebensaufgaben unseres Volkes...Wenn die Romantik und der Humor und die Schilderung eines Abenteuers dem kolonialen Aufbau dienen, wenn sie alle voller Tendenz sind und erziehen wollen, das heißt, wenn sie im Urgrund der Stärkung des einheitlichen Volkswillens dienen, dann sind sie richtig am Platze...Genau so wenig am Platze sind die verlogen, bitte die verlogenen Afrikaergüsse unpolitischer Menschen. Was wir brauchen, sind erzieherisch wirkende Erzählungen von der Aufbauarbeit drüben. Wenn wir die haben, dann können wir auch getrost Abenteuergeschichten lesen.” Ibid.
The types of humorous and romantic stories that “Anti-Bimbo” rejected as kitsch would have to wait until the German population had developed a serious and in-depth understanding of the necessity of overseas colonies.

Colonialist critics often defined as kitsch those items that showed insufficient knowledge of the colonies and of the fundamentals of colonialist demands. By producing kitsch, the makers of these items had revealed themselves to be involved in colonial work for the sake of profit. The offensiveness of colonial kitsch lay, therefore, precisely in the fact that it proved so successful. In a biting review of a recently published book, for example, AV criticized the author’s incorrect translation of a Swahili phrase and confusion concerning the geography of the colonies (“In just a few sentences he mixes up three colonies with each other!!”).132 This book with its multiple errors indicates the public’s simultaneous interest in and ignorance about overseas colonies—an interest in the general but not in the specific. Because of this general rather than specialized interest, the author’s confusion of locations did not prevent the publishers from producing the book.

Colonialists’ concern about the trendy nature of colonialism continued into the war years, when the promised reclamation of the colonies seemed close at hand. In October 1940, colonialist author Paul Ritter published an article entitled “False Zeal! Pith

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132 “Er verwechselt also in wenigen Sätzen drei Kolonien miteinander!!” “Ata kufa,” Afrika-Nachrichten 20, no. 9 (September 1939): 249.
helmets do not make colonial pioneers!” in the local newsletter for the *Gauverband Oberdonau.* In this article, Ritter railed against those who had jumped on the colonialist bandwagon after the fall of France, when the restitution of the colonies seemed imminent. “We have not struggled tirelessly and assiduously for the colonial cause for over 20 years despite the often insulting lack of understanding from certain *Volksgenossen,*” Ritter protested, “so that now, shortly before the realization of the new colonial Germany, our colonial will should be diluted, distorted, and made ridiculous by blind zeal and false prophets.”

Expressing his disregard for the new popularity of colonial topics and articles, Ritter continued,

> We would like to point out clearly and unmistakably that a pith helmet, even when worn with snow-white dinner jacket on courageously carried-out countryside excursions (*Landausflügen*), does not give the wearer the necessary knowledge to make colonial music according to his own notes, just as little as buying tickets for a three-month tour around Africa with a gluttonous life (*Schlemmerleben*) on board entitles these “explorers” to burden a serious press on the basis of their “detailed studies” in African harbor towns and thereby to mislead many innocent readers…Colonial politics and colonial cooperation are not seasonal items like spring hats and coffee beans. Colonial politics is *Realpolitik.*

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135 “Wir möchten ebenso deutlich wie unmißverständlich darauf hinweisen, daß ein Tropenhelm, selbst wenn er zu blütenweißen Dinnerjackets und auf einigen mutig durchgeführte Landausflügen getragen wurde, dem Träger noch nicht die nötigen Kenntnisse verleiht, um nach eigenen Noten Kolonialmusik zu machen, so wenig wie der Erwerb einer Rundreisekarte um Afrika mit dreimonatigem Schlemmerleben an Bord diesen ‘Forschungsreisenden’ berechtigt, auf Grund seiner ‘eingehenden Studien’ in afrikanischen
Ritter’s frustration is palpable in this article. Through the “years of struggle,” the promise of mass support and the future reclamation of the colonies had motivated colonialists. But now, when they ostensibly had this mass support, many colonialists expressed their disillusionment with their own success. Perhaps they had stood in the opposition for too long: lamenting the ignorance of others and professing one’s own privileged understanding of the importance of colonialism is easier than accepting diverse opinions and levels of knowledge once an issue has come to the public’s attention. For Ritter and others, the romantic glamour attached to colonial items such as pith helmets represented Germans’ essentially shallow understanding of the real hard work involved in colonialism.

In their complaints about romanticism, kitsch, and public ignorance, colonialists often likened their fate with that of the Nazi Party. Just as the Party had been flooded with “March violets” (colonialist leaders among them) in the months after the *Machtergreifung*, colonialists described themselves as overwhelmed by opportunists. As Ernst Gerhard Jacob had complained as early as 1934,

> unfortunately here as with the national Revolution there are a large number of

Küstenstädten eine ernsthafte Presse mit seinen Machwerken zu belästigen und schließlich viele harmlose Leser irrezuführen.... Kolonialpolitik und koloniale Mitarbeit sind keine Saison- und Konjunkturartikel wie Frühlingshüte und Bohnenkaffee. Kolonialpolitik ist Realpolitik.” Ibid.
muckrakers and babblers, who were in the other camp earlier, but who now “make with the colonies,” because they sense an economic opportunity, and the fighters of the old guard of the colonial movement are pushed into the background.\textsuperscript{136} (emphasis in original)

In 1937, Hans Gerd Esser, a colonialist youth leader, could still repeat this trope of the elite overwhelmed by the ignorant masses:

Exactly as it became good form after the \textit{Machtübername} [Nazi takeover] to sign “with the German Greeting,” it is recently also good form to speak of the German colonies in every which way (\textit{in allen Tonarten}). What do these people understand about the colonial idea and colonial necessities! For them a colonial avowal is a matter of good form, just as it is good form to go to the theater once a week.\textsuperscript{137}

Comparing the sudden “popularity” of the Nazi greeting (seen as a false token of allegiance) to the sudden popularity of overseas colonialism appears presumptuous if not exaggerated, but reveals the view many colonialists had of themselves as a vanguard leading the uncomprehending masses. Like the Nazis, colonialists would have to struggle to overcome Germans’ lack of understanding of their cause. While, as a May 1937 article in \textit{AN} declared “[t]here is hardly a person today in Germany who does not carry in himself the ardent desire for colonies,” the author also lamented:


But how many of these really deal seriously with this issue? Laxity, comfort, and rest…’na ja, the Führer will make that happen soon…! Why should I concern myself about that? Why a Reich Colonial League? That is completely superfluous, isn’t it?’ So [says] the real Spießer!138

While hoping to convert all Germans to the colonial cause, these colonialists expressed distaste at the ignorance and apathy still found among the German population, a sign both of a certain resistance to their propaganda and of the work still to be done.

Conclusion

In colonialists’ complaints about the proliferation of kitsch, one sees the tension that plagued colonialists after 1936 between the aspiration to create a mass movement and the desire to maintain an elite core of ardent, knowledgeable, and dedicated colonialists. Official support brought popularity but also dilution. The RKB organized speakers, training courses, and congresses to unify its message and to create a sense of community among its members. Contrary to Hildebrand’s view that the 1936 Gleichschaltung resulted in complete submission to Hitler, the threat to the RKB’s dominance on the question of colonialism often came instead from within and from the general public targeted by the RKB. The discussion of “colonial kitsch” in AN and by other colonialists indicates the importance they placed on controlling the public image of the colonies, in order to thereby control the public’s understanding of colonialist claims.

Shaping the visual image of the colonies would prove central to colonialists’ mission to bring a “correct” and lasting understanding of the importance of overseas colonialism to the masses.
Chapter 6: “The Path from the Eyes to the Heart is Shorter than that from the Ears”: Colonialist Visual Culture, 1936-1943

As part of a 1937 training course for future propagandists of the RKB Gauverband Berlin, Hans Ernst Pfeiffer stressed the critical importance of visual imagery to modern propaganda, expounding at length on the power of the image. “The form of expression in primitive times was the image,” Pfeiffer began. To modern people, as well, “the image is instinctively more accessible than the word.” The power of the image lay in this accessibility: “Something that is easily absorbed will at the same time in most cases be uncritically absorbed.” (emphasis in original) Because “the eyes seem to grasp what people’s minds no longer see,” Pfeiffer proclaimed, “[t]he path from the eyes to the heart is shorter than that from the ears.” As such, Pfeiffer urged his audience of RKB propagandists to use images in their work: “The image…is one of the best means of struggle [Kampfmittel] of our National Socialist movement and no one can free themselves from the suggestion of a good colonial image.”¹ (emphasis in original) All sectors of the German public, Pfeiffer asserted, would absorb colonialists’ message unconsciously and uncritically through images.

¹ “Die Ausdrucksform der Urzeit war das Bild...Der moderne Mensch ist instinktiv dem Bilde noch zugänglicher als dem Wort...Etwas, was mühelos aufgenommen wird, wird aber zugleich in den meisten Fällen kritiklos aufgenommen...Der Weg vom Auge zum Herzen ist eben kürzer, als der vom Ohr dahin...Das Augen scheint zu fassen, was der Verstand des Menschen nicht mehr sieht...Das Bild, auch das Lichtbild, ist eines der besten Kampfmittel unserer nationalsozialistischen Bewegung, und niemand kann sich von der Suggestion des guten Kolonialbildes freimachen.” Hans Ernst Pfeiffer, Die kolonialpolitische Propaganda im Dienste der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung (Berlin: Reichskolonialbund, 1939), 4-5.
Having discovered the propagandistic problems associated with meetings and speakers, colonialists turned to visual publicity to overcome their audience’s apathy. Bored by facts and figures, audiences would instead experience the colonies through images in ways that would foster their identification with the overseas territories. By visually presenting the overseas colonies as foreign yet familiarly German, colonialists encouraged their public to recognize themselves in the settlers who lived overseas. In this way, colonialists used visual culture to persuade their audiences to “experience” the colonies. With these images, the lack of overseas colonies in the 1930s or of personal experience in these territories would not prove insurmountable to creating a colonialist identity. Aiding this goal of experiential propaganda, the past and the present collapsed in these images, eliding the years of mandatory rule in the colonies and emphasizing the dynamism of the “colonial question” for Germany’s future. Seeing the colonies as opposed to hearing or reading about them would overcome Germans’ disinterest or opposition and would encourage them to identify with the lost empire.

Colonialists’ visual culture employed familiar themes of Germanness—the special relationship between Germans and land, the importance of cultural endogamy, and the heroic and superior nature of Germans—to integrate the African Heimat into the heart of the German nation. Because of the recognizable nature of these representations, however, most of what colonialist commentators identified as kitsch was visual. Just as these themes of Germanness could advertise for empire, they could also advertise for
commercial products, a connection that colonialists resisted. In many ways, colonialists’ emphasis on simple graphics and photography represent efforts to avoid kitsch. Through the iconicity of the former and the supposed mechanically-captured authenticity of the latter, colonialists asserted their control over the visual representation of the narrative of colonialism.

In their decision to use images, colonialists took advantage of Germans’ fluency in visual culture. In early twentieth-century Germany, mass-produced images proliferated both for entertainment and for political purposes, a trend also prevalent in the USSR, the United States, and other nations. In the Third Reich, Nazi propagandists perfected the art of visual propaganda, from posters to mass spectacles to film. Similarly, the RKB skillfully utilized different modes of technology to spread their message. While propagandists such as Pfeiffer claimed that images offered unmediated access to audiences, the creation of these images in fact required colonialists’ sustained efforts to

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shape their meaning and control their reception. By simultaneously using a variety of forms, each with its distinctive means of reaching viewers, colonialists created a rich visual culture capable of reaching a wide audience. Through their visual materials, colonialists converted the overseas colonies from an exotic and distant locale into an integral and familiar part of the German *Heimat*.

In films, photographs, and posters, the RKB visually represented its narrative of the tripartite relationship between Germans, the African landscape, and Africans in the colonies. Beginning with the themes of colonialist visual culture, this chapter traces how colonialists created a dualistic German *Heimat* in Africa. To justify their continued overseas focus, colonialists emphasized what they identified as specifically African about this *Heimat*. At the same time, they also stressed how fundamentally German the colonies were in order to make them central to German national identity. Colonialist images presented the African landscape as a German *Heimat* created by German settlers. Within this landscape, these settlers represented an idealized *Volksgemeinschaft* of racially-aware Germans who maintained their language, culture, and identity—the markers of Germanness. Colonialists also produced images of the native populations, emphasizing a supposedly authentic Africanness uncorrupted by Europeanization to support their vision of benevolent German colonialism.

To transmit the foreignness yet familiarity of the colonies, colonialists used a range of visual materials. This diversity of media in turn affected Germans’ experience of viewing these images. Their simultaneous use amplified colonialists’ chances of
successfully transmitting their message. With this variety, colonialists could reach as many Germans as possible and make these images and the message they carried familiar to Germans. The map of the African colonies should become, they hoped, as identifiable as the map of European territories lost in the Treaty of Versailles. Through this range of media, colonialists used visual culture to demonstrate that the colonies were a German Heimat in Africa.

**Imagining Colonial Germans: Themes in Colonialist Visual Culture**

In their effort to attract supporters, RKB propagandists asserted the particular benefits of Africa to give these overseas colonies continued relevance. One aspect of this particularity was the native population, discussed in the next section. But to construct the overseas colonies as central to national identity, colonialists portrayed these territories as German, using tropes of Germanness to make the foreign colonies familiar to metropolitan audiences. Colonialists’ visual culture of the German Heimat overseas centered on two main themes: the Germanness of the overseas territories geographically, and the heroism of the German settlers who created and maintained these lands as German. With these themes, the RKB depicted Africa as a place where Germans could fulfill their national character.

*Creating a German Heimat in the African Landscape*

The African landscape had long captivated German colonialists. In Imperial Germany, these representations painted a dual image of the African landscape: aesthetic
and elevating, but also merciless and overpowering. German settlers framed the African landscape as an “aesthetic space for adventure” (*Die Landschaft als ästhetischer Erlebnisraum*). The wide open spaces, the sand, and the endless desert—imagined as uninhabited—enchanted settlers from the rapidly industrializing Germany. In the late 1880s, German geographer Friedrich Ratzel had coined the term “*Lebensraum*” to describe not only the relationship between a people and their land, but also the need for living space as a driving force for a nation’s expansion. For many Germans, the overseas colonies provided this *Lebensraum*. Germans confronted with the magical qualities of the African landscape anthropomorphized this landscape so that “German Southwest Africa didn’t offer freedom, it was freedom, it was free space.” The land radiated transcendence; the panoramic deserts and steppes “became an experience of sovereignty.”

Colonialists’ visual culture in the Third Reich also encouraged this mastery over the African landscape. Some earlier photographs from the imperial period depicted Germans posed with native leaders or administering corporal punishment to Africans,

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6 Pascal Grosse, *Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1850-1914* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2000).


8 “ Anders als der Tropenwald ermöglichten die Wüsten und Steppen Deutsch-Südwestafrikas ein panoramatisches Schauen, der Überblick wurde zur erlebten Souveränität.” Ibid., 149.
serving as overt displays of power. In the 1930s and 1940s, by contrast, when Germans no longer held positions of administrative authority in these territories, colonialists’ images instead depicted a vision of peaceful coexistence. The mastery displayed in these images was over the landscape rather than over people. Through a series of undated poster proofs from the 1930s, for example, the RKB used idyllic color images of the overseas colonies as a recruiting tactic. The only sign of human life are the covered wagons in what is presumably Southwest Africa, though one cannot make out individual figures. Figure 16 In addition to wide open spaces, colonialist photograph albums created in the 1930s and early 1940s also included images of Germans surveying these spaces, seen from behind. Through this composition, the photograph invited the viewer to put him or herself in the place of the German colonists and to adopt this colonizing gaze.

Figures 17 and 18 The overseas colonies thus remained open and available for the projection of German desires.

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10 As I only encountered these posters as proofs in the Colonial Picture Archive, it is unclear whether they were ever produced and circulated.
Figure 16: “Fight with the Reich Colonial League!”
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
Figure 17: Urban Colonizing Gaze
Figure 18: Rural Colonizing Gaze
In the Third Reich, as in Imperial Germany, colonialist imagery simultaneously encouraged a sense of familiarity in the midst of the exotic. Mass-produced picture postcards in Imperial Germany had created the African landscape as a German space, for example by referring to Mount Kilimanjaro as the “highest German mountain.”

As Jens Jaeger observes, “[w]hat mattered was not the possible strangeness of the ‘African’ view, but rather the analogy with familiar mountain sceneries and the corresponding associations.”

Objects such as churches represent the interpenetration of images (“the recognition of the familiar in the alien and the alien in the familiar”) in these postcards. As a traditional image of Heimat—and especially when depicted in isolation from its African surroundings—the church “indicate[d] neither a concrete place nor a concrete situation, but…guarantee[d] belonging, stability and security in the context of Heimat.”

In the late 1930s, Kolonie und Heimat published two such images that merged Africa and Germany through the use of visual analogies with scenes in the Heimat. Figure 19 In one image two young men hold flowers in a meadow against the backdrop of Kilimanjaro, evoking conventional Alpine scenes. In the second, the month of August is shown “in [the] colony...and Heimat,” implying a sense of simultaneity between the two locations despite their differences and distance.

11 Jens Jaeger, “Colony as Heimat? The Formation of Colonial Identity in Germany around 1900,” German History 27, no. 4 (2009), 467.

12 Ibid., 468.

13 Ibid., 478.
Figure 19: An Alpine Scene in Africa
Source: Kolonie und Heimat 2, no. 1 (January 1938): 3.
Images of colonial youth dancing around a maypole had a similar effect. Photographs of the colonies showed Germans that Africa could exist as a German space and as part of the Heimat by making the alien familiar.

Similar to these Alpine scenes, photographs of gardens imposed the scenery of Germany onto Africa. Gardens served as a metaphor for the German cultivation of African space, marking the transition between an unoccupied landscape and the increasing urbanization of colonial settlements. Germans were not the only Europeans to evoke the cultivation of land as a metaphor for possession. As Patricia Seed has shown, the English used the creation of homes, fences, and gardens as a “ceremony of possession” in the New World, drawing on the requirements for possessing land under English law.14 During the First World War, the German Army had mobilized the idea of Germans’ ability to construct order out of chaos—and the causal link between German culture and this ability—in the occupied Eastern European territories.15 This idea, described as Deutsche Arbeit (German Work) by völkisch author Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl in the 1860s, associated work methods and labor with national identity. This concept supported Riehl’s formulation of the organic connection between the German people and


their land, and the ability of Germans to make foreign territories German through their labor.\textsuperscript{16} “The soul of the nation,” Riehl declared, “springs from its idea of work, as out of its practice of work.”\textsuperscript{17} Riehl’s description of German Work was primarily agricultural, transforming supposedly chaotic territories into ordered and productive German landscapes. The process of creating order in nature could also become a metaphor for German political and/or military control, as it did in the occupied Eastern European territories during the First World War.\textsuperscript{18} Gardens could serve as showcases of this German Work, and could thereby claim ownership over land perceived to be unused (or misused) before the arrival of Germans.

Photographs of gardens in Africa also showed metropolitan audiences that Germans had put down roots in the colonies. The garden near the coastal city of Swakopmund in Southwest Africa epitomized the transformation achieved by German settlers: “Out of wilderness and desert, \textit{Kulturlandschaft} [cultural landscape].”\textsuperscript{19} Ilse Steinhoff described this garden in her 1939 photographic travelogue as the idealization of the colonial space full of nature, fertility, and possibility, but improved by the imprint of

\textsuperscript{16} Quoted in Liulevicius, \textit{War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I}, 46.

\textsuperscript{17} Quoted in ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 46.

Germanness. **Figure 20** Above an image of a path flanked by rows of planted trees, Steinhoff’s caption reads,

> Because they wanted to have a little green spot for their leisure time, [the German colonists] made this place. “It should be just like in Germany,” they say, when one asks them about it. That it is! “Just like in Germany!” Under the African sun, in the endless yellow sand dunes of Swakopmund on the Atlantic Ocean, they have built a small remembrance of the *Heimat*. Only Germans can accomplish that!\(^{20}\)

Through this example of environmental chauvinism,\(^{21}\) Steinhoff both justified German colonialism and heralded its success as the manifestation of a superior German relationship to the land. Because of the climatic differences in the overseas colonies, especially in the mostly arid Southwest Africa, colonists could not completely replicate the German landscape to which they were supposedly deeply bonded. The creation of gardens, however, symbolized the German colonists’ success at bringing civilization to Africa.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{20}\) “Nur, weil sie am Feierabend ein grünes Fleckchen haben wollten, schufen sie diesen Platz. ‘So wie in Deutschland sollte es sein,’ sagen sie, wenn man sie danach fragt. Das ist es! ‘So wie in Deutschland!’ Unter afrikanischer Sonne haben sie sich eine kleine erinnerung an die Heimat gebaut in den endlosen gelden Sanddünen von Swakopmund am Atlantischen Ozean!” Ilse Steinhoff, *Deutsche Heimat in Afrika: Ein Bildbuch aus unseren Kolonien* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1939).


Figure 20: German Garden in Swakopmund
Colonialists’ efforts to help metropolitan Germans identify with their far-off colonial territories also included representations of urban landscapes and built environments in Africa. These images showed audiences that, while Africa was a place of wild nature, part of its landscape had been tamed by Germans. Many of Ilse Steinhoff’s photographs carry this message. The caption for a photograph of the main street in Windhoek in Southwest Africa, for example, asks, “Is Windhoek still a German city today? One could write a lot about that—however, we simply take a little stroll with the camera along the Kaiserstraße, the main street of Windhoek.”23 Here Steinhoff portrays the camera as an active agent—and one privileged over the written word—, surveying the street and coming to the only possible conclusion that Windhoek is indeed still German. The Germanness of Kaiserstraße is amplified in Steinhoff’s photography, however, by the prominent staging of German signage, including a poster advertising the photo-book “Adolf Hitler’s Germany.”24

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Figure 21: Kaiserstraße in Windhoek
Source: Ilse Steinhoff, Deutsche Heimat in Afrika: Ein Bildbuch aus unseren Kolonien
(Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1939).
Similarly, in two *Kolonie und Heimat* photo-essays entitled “Berlin in South Africa” (“*Berlin in Südafrika*”) and “‘One speaks German’ in Africa,” (“*Man spricht deutsch’ in Afrika*”) Steinhoff used the existence of German-speaking residents to signify Germans’ continuing presence in the former colonies. The photo-essays are at times humorous. Playing on the parallels with the German capital city, for example, one caption to a photograph of a road sign exclaims, “And here [the road] goes to Potsdam! A few kilometers away from Berlin lies Potsdam, a small city with a few cottages!” But some are also polemical, as in the caption that declares “[t]he ‘Rheinische Hof’ in Windhoek is a German house on German soil in Africa and will remain so forever.” Language and the built environment became markers of the permanent transformation of Africa into a German territory, even after the end of formal rule.

With images of natural and urban African landscapes, colonialists offered a view of the German presence in the lost overseas African colonies as static and eternal. They refuted the *Blut und Boden* circle around Reich Minister of Agriculture Walther Darré, who restricted this connection between blood and soil to continental Europe. *Kolonie und*

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Heimat’s use of the term *Kulturlandschaft*\textsuperscript{28} to describe Swakopmund in Southwest Africa, for example, drastically extended the geographic realm of the symbiotic relationship between Germans and the land implied by this term. These territories represented a “German Heimat in Africa,” as Steinhoff’s album title declared, one populated by archetypal Germans.

*The heroism of colonial Germans*

Supporting these theories of *Kulturlandschaft*, colonialist visual culture celebrated an ideal *Volksgemeinschaft* of colonial Germans who had achieved the perfect symbiotic relationship between land, people, and culture. These images emphasized the exemplary character of overseas Germans, thereby asserting that they were an idealized model for the *Volksgemeinschaft* of the metropole. In colonialist films (discussed in greater detail below), for example, the young couple in *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* (1934) represented the perfect pair of husband and wife working in harmony for a greater national cause, as did the characters in *Germanin* (1943). In the film version of Carl Peters’s life (1940), in contrast to the historical facts of his exploits in East Africa, Peters became a self-sacrificing hero who accomplished great deeds through the strength of his will. As the text for a 1940 RKB slide show declared, “What [Peters] in particular conveys to contemporary Germans is that he also defined the borders of the possible

\textsuperscript{28} This term was first used by geographer Friedrich Ratzel in the nineteenth century.
through the greatness of his own will.”29 The heroic willpower of the colonial Germans would serve as inspiration for Germans in the Third Reich.

Essential to presenting colonial Germans as a model Volksgemeinschaft, colonialists’ visual culture emphasized the extent to which colonial Germans retained their Germanness, epitomized through language, culture, domesticity, and community. In fact, maintaining these features of their German character within the drastically different environment of Africa gave colonial Germans added nationalist value. Here colonialists presented two potentially contradictory arguments. On the one hand, it was self-evident and natural that Africa could serve as a Heimat and that Germans could transform it into German land. On the other hand, colonial Germans became models for metropolitan Germans precisely because they had had to struggle against a foreign land and local inhabitants in order establish footholds of Germanness. Unlike the Heimat within Germany’s national borders, which was “inherently” German, colonial Germans had created the colonial Heimat through struggle and sacrifice. Regardless of which argument took precedent in a given image, depictions of colonial Germans made them core representatives of the best German values rather than marginal expatriates.

Colonialists emphasized colonial Germans’ affiliation with the Nazi Party as one way to connect these settlers (representative of the colonial past) with the present and

future of the Third Reich. Eva MacLean, for example, photographed Germans in Cameroon on their way to participate in a vote (Stimmabgabe) for Hitler, bearing signs that read “The Germans of Cameroon thank the Führer.”

Images of the German school in Windhoek include an assembly of the students and teachers raising their arms to salute the Nazi swastika flag, and a young boy, famous among his classmates for having sat on Hitler’s lap during a visit to Germany. Focusing on colonial youth not only emphasized their ties with future of Nazi Germany, but also the strength and vitality inherent in German youth raised in the hard but elevating landscape of Africa.

According to colonialists, colonial Germans had maintained their purity and superior characteristics even after the outbreak of war in 1939 necessitated their return to Germany, as seen in a 1942 article in Die Frau und die Kolonien that compared colonial youth from Southwest Africa with metropolitan youth. While similar to metropolitan youth in many ways, the author noted that there was something different about young people from the colonies, in part because they had not had to live through the deprivation of the post-war period in Germany. Compared with metropolitan German youth, these colonial Germans displayed a sexual innocence that the author tied to the “wide spaces, close cohabitation and the struggles of people, nature and earth.” Metropolitan Germans

30 Reprinted in Joachim Fernau, Afrika wartet, ein kolonialpolitisches Bildbuch (Potsdam: Rütten & Loeining, 1942), 58.

31 Steinhoff, Deutsche Heimat in Afrika: Ein Bildbuch aus unseren Kolonien.

expressed surprise, for example, upon hearing that colonial youth would go out together on scouting trips with girls for several weeks without “something happening.” These colonial Germans served in the German army throughout Europe but life in Europe—the haste, the cities, the traffic, living in close proximity to other people—had not had a negative influence on them. The special qualities of life in the colonies and of colonial Germans had come back in service of the Heimat.

These visual depictions of the colonies—emphasizing the landscape, the German settlements, and most importantly the value of the German settlers—carried the message that the colonial space was already German space, that it had not lost this characteristic under mandate rule, and that Germans would one day rule over it again. Despite the difficulties German photographers and filmmakers faced in traveling to Africa to document these English, French, and South African mandates, the products of their expeditions projected an idyllic German territory. Director and cameraman Paul Lieberenz, for example, could not film in the French mandate of Cameroon because of his German nationality. But in his film Deutsche Pflanzer am Kamerunberg (1936), Lieberenz described a plantation in British Cameroon as only able to exist under German rule. In 1924, the former German plantation owner had had to buy back his estate at a London auction. Now that the plantation was once again German, the colonist only

33 Ibid., 64.
employed Germans (i.e. not other Europeans, Africans were most likely employed). As a result, the re-Germanized plantation and others like it prospered: “Through hard labor, the Cameroonian Germans have brought back the plantations, which in the meantime were neglected and overgrown. The houses, either shattered or dilapidated, were restored and many new houses were erected.” With his return in 1924, the German planter rescued the estate from the neglect and mismanagement that it had surely suffered under British or French control. The German overseas colonies remained frozen in time, waiting for the return of their former and rightful rulers. Colonialist visual culture melded the past, the present, and the future with the snap of the shutter or the whirr of the camera.

**Imagining Africans: Authentic Africanness and Benevolent Colonialism**

Even as their visual culture depicted the former overseas colonies as a German *Heimat*, colonialists had to incorporate the presence of their native populations. The former colonies in Africa had to have a unique character; otherwise how did they differ from German settlements in Latin America, the United States, or Poland? If the African landscape possessed a special allure for Germans, how did colonialists describe the role of the native populations of the colonies? Feeling pressed to continually combat the allegations of the “colonial guilt-lie,” colonialists asserted instead the supposedly

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35 “In harter Arbeit haben die Kameruner Deutschen die inzwischen vernachlässigten und mittlerweile verbuschten Pflanzungen wieder emporgebracht. Die teils zerschossenen und teils verfallenen Häuser wurden wiederhergestellt und viele neue Häuser wieder errichtet.” Quoted in ibid.
benevolent character of German colonialism. This narrative centered on the authenticity of African life respected and protected by Germans.

Colonialist photographers emphasized what they termed the degeneration of Africans through Europeanization ("Vom ‘Neger’ zum ‘Nigger’")36 in both the mandates and South Africa, as discussed in Chapter 3. In contrast to the negative effects of other European powers, photographers like Ilse Steinhoff presented a peaceful and separate coexistence of Germans and Africans, where both fulfilled their ethnic and racial characteristics. This emphasis on the authenticity of African life extended beyond colonialists to the work of painter Werner Peiner. These depictions of the Africanness and often the exoticism of the colonial territories potentially undermined colonialists’ assertions of the Germanness of this land. But, for colonialists, the particularity of the African space justified their continued overseas focus. The result was a bifurcated (both German and African) visual culture of the overseas colonies.

While colonialist visual culture depicted a supposedly authentic Africanness, some images undermine these assertions of authenticity and reveal an essentializing racism at work. Several images used Africans from different regions in Africa (or even the United States) interchangeably, but presented skin color as a marker of authenticity. Among several montages, the 1938 Chapbook of the Colonies includes a montage that seamlessly blended images representing the First World War in German East Africa.

including a portrait of General von Lettow-Vorbeck, photographs of the “loyal Askaris,”
the sinking of the ship “Königsberg,” and other scenes of battle. **Figure 22**

![Montage](image)

**Figure 22: East African montage**  
*Source: Paul H. Kuntze, Das Volksbuch unserer Kolonien (Leipzig: Georg Dollheimer Verlag, 1938).*
A photograph of Louis Brody, the German-Cameroonian actor, dressed as an Askari from East Africa for his role in the film Die Reiter von Deutsch Ostafrika and overlaid on the other images is dissonant to our eyes. Colonialists, however, were apparently not concerned that a Cameroonian dressed as an Askari would confuse contemporary audiences. The montage essentializes Africanness (the Cameroonian Brody as interchangeable with an East African), so that Brody’s skin color combined with his Askari uniform came to represent the entire myth of the good German colonizer.37 Similarly, the appearance of African-American Clarence Walton in the German Africa-Show, discussed in Chapter 3, did not undermine the authenticity of the show as a representation of the former German overseas colonies. For colonialists, an authentic Africanness remained important in their narrative of benevolent colonialism but not in the mechanics of their propaganda practice.

When colonialist propaganda featured the work of photographers who had travelled to the former colonies, this experience (having “been there”) made the authenticity of their representations a foregone conclusion. Ilse Steinhoff’s 1939 photographic travelogue, Deutsche Heimat in Afrika, provides a case study of the photographic depiction of Africans in Nazi Germany that emphasized African authenticity and elided the manipulation and construction of these photographs to create

37 This essentializing of racial identity and film roles reminds one of similar anti-Semitic montage posters created by the Nazis. In particular, a poster for the film Der Ewige Jude featured the Jewish actor Peter Lorre in his role as child-murderer in the 1931 Fritz Lang film M. The Nazi “documentary” Der ewige Jude included footage of Lorre in his role in Lang’s film. The blending of the Jewish actor and his murderous character represented the imagined larger threat of the Jew.
this image of Africa. Emphasizing her authoritative first-hand experience, Steinhoff’s introduction recounted Germans’ reactions to her trip: “You were in Africa! All alone with the Blacks! That is really courageous!” To this Steinhoff answers,

It is not so dire and dangerous in Africa! Quite the contrary!...In Southwest, South, or East Africa it is no more dangerous or precarious than anywhere in Europe!...Whoever, with open eyes and heart, has seen our colonies, whoever but one time perceives the magnitude and freedom of this unending space, is held captive by this foreign yet German land.  

In this introduction, Steinhoff framed Africa as both an exotic and foreign locale (through the presence of blacks), but also an expressly German space.

Documenting urban and rural areas, Steinhoff’s photographs depict the colonies as parallel worlds inhabited by Germans and Africans. German culture influenced the colonized, for example through Africans’ purchase of sausages at the German butcher and their Hamburg accents in the harbor of Swakopmund. But one never sees this influence visually reciprocated in the photographs. The German settlers do not wear African clothing or eat African foods. Instead, several sets of images mirror each other: a German teacher cutting a child’s hair opposite an African woman braiding another woman’s hair, German women in riding clothes for a Sunday hunt are paired with a

Herero woman riding a donkey next to her husband on a horse, and German children examine the spear of a Masai man while on the opposite page two Masai men examine a car. Figures 23 and 24

Figure 23: “The woman in Africa is self-sufficient.”
Figure 24: “Ladies’ fashions in Africa”
Source: Ilse Steinhoff, Deutsche Heimat in Afrika: Ein Bildbuch aus unseren Kolonien
(Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1939).
These pairings highlight the German settlers’ integration into African life, but also emphasize their separation from the native population. While parallel, the worlds of Germans and Africans are also hierarchical. In the 160-page travelogue, only eleven photographs depict German settlers and Africans together in the same frame, mostly with the Africans as subordinate laborers.\(^{39}\) The boundaries of these hierarchical racial categories were thereby visually secured.

A few photographs allude to the violent side of German-African relations, namely the Herero genocide, but are subverted by their textual interpretation. For example, the caption of a photograph of Samuel Maherero’s gravestone, the leader of the Herero revolt, describes Maherero’s funeral in 1923. The South African Mandate government had banned the flying of the German flag, but, supposedly in accordance with Maherero’s last wish to be buried under the black-white-red flag of Imperial Germany, Herero women had subverted this ban by wearing red robes and white turbans against their black skin. In fact, wearing red cloth is a traditional Herero gesture of loyalty to the Maherero family.\(^{40}\) Again, Deutsche Heimat in Afrika presents the history of German colonial

\(^{39}\) The photographs with Germans as subjects and those with Africans as subjects are almost evenly split in Southwest Africa (23 with Germans and 27 with Africans), while photographs of Africans predominate in East Africa (25 to 11 with German subjects). A total of 65 photographs in both Southwest and East Africa have the landscape or animals as subject matter.

\(^{40}\) My thanks to an anonymous reader for the Journal of Women’s History for bringing this to my attention. Hildi Hendrickson has shown that wearing colored cloth expresses the relationship between the individual and the polity for Herero, with red cloth (versus white and green) representing loyalty to the families of Maherero. Hildi Hendrickson, “Bodies and Flags: The Representation of Herero Identity in Colonial Namibia,” in Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa, ed. Hildi Hendrickson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 213-244.
authority as beneficial rather than fundamentally detrimental to Africans, as the history of the Herero would indicate. The colonialist narrative of Africans’ desire for the reassertion of German colonial rule (‘‘Will the Germans Ever Return?’’\(^{41}\)) is supported through the ‘‘evidence’’ of Herero women’s sartorial display of loyalty.

While Steinhoff produced her photographic travelogue explicitly as colonialist propaganda, other artists in Nazi Germany such as noted painter Werner Peiner produced images of Africa less explicitly propagandistic. Peiner’s images nonetheless played their part in the colonialists’ narrative of authentic Africanness and benevolent colonialism. With his fame as a German landscape painter, Peiner’s decision to paint African subjects brought new attention to the lost colonies. In 1938, Peiner premiered a cycle of thirteen African paintings at the Prussian Academy of Art.\(^ {42}\)

Peiner based his African cycle on a 1935 trip to East Africa, from which he published a book of photographs, *The Face of East Africa (Das Gesicht Ostafrikas).*\(^ {43}\) His African paintings had three main themes: landscapes, inhabitants, and animals. Two


\(^{42}\) Peiner (1897-1984) was a World War I volunteer and a successful painter before 1933. He became a professor at the Düsseldorf Academy after other artists such as Paul Klee had lost their positions. Peiner was later the head of the Hermann Göring Academy for Painting. Peter Adam concludes that ‘‘Without the National Socialists he would have had a decent career as a realist artist. One cannot accuse him of changing his subjects to suit the National Socialists, but he allowed himself to be absorbed by them. His renderings of the earth, the changing of the seasons, the ripening of the corn were the very subjects of the blood and soil philosophy.’’ Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 99-102.

\(^{43}\) Werner Peiner, *Das Gesicht Ostafrikas, eine Reise in 300 Bildern* (Frankfurt am Main: Schirmer & Mahlau, 1937).
paintings from this cycle—*Massaimädchen* (“Massai Girl,” 1936) and the triptych *Das schwarze Paradies* (“The Black Paradise,” 1937/38)—depict Massai men and women in a style that both references state-approved paintings of Aryans and reinforces the idea of Africans as primitive, natural people. By emphasizing the naturalness of the Massai as what he called the “nobility of the East African steppe,” Peiner’s African paintings visually reinforced the colonialists’ claims by demonstrating Germans’ supposed respect for Africans through the maintenance of authentic African culture.

*Massaimädchen* (1936) depicts a young Massai woman balancing a bowl on her head with one hand against a backdrop of the African landscape. **Figure 25** The triptych *Das schwarze Paradies* (1937/1938) portrays a Massai man and woman in the left and right panels with the African landscape behind and between them. **Figure 26** The man holds a spear and shield, the woman a water pitcher on her head, thereby reinforcing the gender roles also emphasized by National Socialism.45 Peiner created a “physiognomy of the Massai” from the photographs he had taken during this trip. The result was a “representative image [Bildvorlage]...[which] had a powerfully de-individualizing effect.”46 The Massai in Peiner’s paintings represented a type rather than an individual,


46 „Zwar basieren die figuerlichen Darstellungen der Massai auf den Fotografien, die er auf der Reise machte, doch konstruiert Peiner die Physiognomien der Massai aus den Fotos; er fügt die verschiedenen
much as Nazi art created an idyllic yet static depiction of the German landscape and people. Together with the steppe and the animals behind them, these figures represent a static, eternal Africa, untouched by European intervention.


Figure 25: Werner Peiner, Massaimädchen (1936)
Source: Anja Hesse, *Malerei des Nationalsozialismus: Der Maler Werner Peiner (1897-1984)*
(Hildesheim: Olms, 1995), 395.
Peiner depicted the Massai as a racially pure people. They had “especially impressed [Peiner] by their racially pure beauty and bearing.” Here Peiner foreshadowed Leni Riefenstahl’s postwar fascination with the Nuba in Sudan. Just as colonialists had argued that German colonialism (versus British or French) would preserve the cultures of the native African population, Peiner’s paintings of the Massai

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erased evidence of European influence. The Massai reign over the East African steppe, remaining true to their traditional culture.

Critical reactions to these paintings emphasized their Germanness despite their African subjects, and linked this Germanness to Germany’s claim to the former overseas colonies. At the Prussian Academy of Art exhibition in 1938, Hermann Goering declared that “[Peiner] had not only painted the beauty of these colonies, but he also saw them with German eyes and brought their beauty closer to us.”

A critic in Kolonie und Heimat compared Peiner’s African paintings with his other work on the German landscapes, concluding that “Peiner’s great, authentic representational art” (Schilderungs- und Darstellungskunst) emerges “almost more vividly in his African landscapes” than in his paintings of German landscapes. These analyses related the authentic naturalness of the German and African landscapes, and Germans’ ability to dominate both with their “German eyes.” In fact, one can find numerous similarities between Das schwarze Paradies and an earlier 1931 Peiner painting of the German landscape in autumn (Grosse Herbstlandschaft).

Peiner’s African images circulated widely in the Third Reich, especially in the colonialist press. Franz Hanfstängel in Munich reproduced paintings from the series in

50 “[Peiner] hat nicht nur die Schönheit dieser Kolonien gemalt, sondern er hat sie mit deutschen Augen gesehen und ihre Schönheit uns allen nahegebracht.” Quoted in Hesse, Malerei des Nationalsozialismus: Der Maler Werner Peiner (1897-1984), 118.

large color reproductions and as postcards. The illustrated journal Kolonie und Heimat published Massaimädchen as the cover image for the November 1937 issue, and an article entitled “The Black Paradise in the Experience of an Artist of the Third Reich” in the March 1938 issue (which had another Peiner painting, Massaikrieger [“Massai-Warrior” (1936)], on its cover). In 1940, the Kanter-Verlag included Peiner in its series of small booklets of artists and architectural sites meant for soldiers in the field (Feldpostausgabe). Eighteen of the sixty Peiner paintings in this booklet came from his African cycle, including six enlargements of sections of Das schwarze Paradies in addition to the triptych as a whole. Bestowing the ultimate praise on Peiner’s work, Hitler purchased the triptych to hang in the new Reich Chancellery.

In Steinhoff’s and Peiner’s representations of Africans, their subjects remain authentically African, unspoilt despite German rule. For Peiner, the composite image of the Massai he created was admirable, and in many ways this positive composite allowed viewers such as Goering to read into these paintings the values and qualities they attributed to themselves (Massai as the Herrenvolk of Africa, Germans as the Herrenvolk of Europe). Steinhoff’s photographs also emphasized the separation (for the sake of

52 Hesse, Malerei des Nationalsozialismus: Der Maler Werner Peiner (1897-1984), 126.

53 The series included great European artists such as Michelangelo, da Vinci, and Botticelli, as well as German artists such as Albrecht Dürer, and architectural sites like the Pergamon altar, the Acropolis, and the new Reich Chancellery. Werner Peiner: 60 Bilder. Mit einleitendem Text von Johannes Sommer. Feldpostausgabe (Königsberg (Pr.): Kanter-Verlag, [1940]).

54 Hesse, Malerei des Nationalsozialismus: Der Maler Werner Peiner (1897-1984), 107.
protection) of her African subjects, and, in doing so, asserted the political agenda of colonialists’ refutation of the “colonial guilt-lie.” In colonialists’ visual culture, authentic Africans lived in peaceful harmony with their German neighbors and looked forward to replacing mandate rule with the Germans’ benevolent colonialism.

Thematically, colonialists’ visual publicity emphasized both the Germanness and the Africanness of the overseas colonies. Rather than highlighting the contradictions between the two, these images merged into an idyllic whole, a German Heimat in Africa. Colonialists needed both halves of these representations—the German and the African—to guide their audience’s responses. This audience should identify with the Germanness of the colonies, but also comprehend the uniqueness of Africa (its people, its landscape, and its resources). Depicting these two messages simultaneously, the RKB rejected the “colonial guilt-lie.” Furthermore, they stressed to their metropolitan audiences that Germany had a vital future in Africa. Hoping to reach the broadest audience possible, the RKB mobilized a variety of visual media to transmit this message of a German Heimat in Africa.

Seeing Colonially through Many Media

Colonialists’ visual culture took three main forms: graphics, photographs, and films. All of these forms emphasized the image as the privileged vehicle for

55 Sometimes these forms overlapped, such as in the animated graphics and maps in the 1926 colonialist film Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte (World History as Colonial History, rereleased in 1941). Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte. Directed by Hans Cürlis, 1926; Berlin, Institut für Kulturforschung e.V.
transmitting the colonialist message. By utilizing a variety of media and drawing on the visual conventions of the Nazi aesthetic, colonialists circulated their depictions of the overseas colonies as part of the visual culture in the Third Reich.

*Graphics*

Graphics had played an important role for colonialists in Imperial and Weimar Germany and continued to do so in the Third Reich. Combining images and text, the poster had served as a central tool of political propaganda since the turn of the century.\(^{56}\) Visually, the colonialist poster style reflected that of the Nazis during their electioneering in the early 1930s and throughout the Third Reich. Nazi political posters became “the vehicle of condensed versions of Nazi ideology, which stand out by their extreme compactness and directness, to the point of attacking the viewer by the immediacy of their visual appeal and verbal command.”\(^{57}\) Just as other political parties adopted the Nazis’ dynamic poster style before 1933, colonialists produced posters that mirrored those of the Nazis even to the level of slogans (in one example, “Work and Bread”).\(^{58}\)

While colonialists seldom reported on the progress of their poster campaigns, a photograph from the DKG photo archive provides a sense of these posters in action and


frames this discussion of posters as propaganda. The photograph shows a circa 1938/1939 train station platform in Dresden. **Figure 27**

![Dresden train station, ca. 1938/1939](image)

*Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.*

Along the wall of the platform, two RKB posters appear a total of twenty-eight times. Both posters, the 1935 “Germany, your colonies!” poster and an RKB recruiting poster featuring a man with a drum, are eye-catching in their simplicity. Their multiplication made the posters visible to persons standing on that platform, on the opposite platform, or even in a passing train. Posters were also widely displayed on *Litfaßsäule* or advertising
columns throughout German cities. Displayed in this way, the poster became more than its individual visual components. It became part of the constant stream of images in the cityscape of Nazi Germany, asserting its importance through its reiteration. With this photograph of the Dresden train station in mind, we can turn to the content of these posters.

Most RKB posters did not contain people, but when they did, many depicted German settlers rather than relying on the exotic appeal of colonial subjects, as the DKG at times had. These RKB posters used individuals, most often an Aryan man, to represent the colonies, such as the poster displayed in Dresden. E. Glintzer, the artist of the “Germany, your colonies!” poster, produced the second poster circa 1938, depicting an idealized Aryan man beating a drum and bearing the imperative “Fight in the Reich Colonial League.”  

Figure 28

59 Colonial Picture Archive, UB Frankfurt, ca. 1938.
Figure 28: “Fight in the Reich Colonial League!” ca. 1938
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
The man is drawn in the Art Deco-reminiscent style of prolific graphic artist Ludwig Hohlwein, who designed numerous posters for the Nazis. While not dressed in a uniform, the man—young, strong, and equipped with a drum—reads as militaristic enough to warrant the call to “fight” with the RKB. This Glintzer poster showed a man who could either be a metropolitan RKB member or a colonial German. A drawing on the cover of the February 1936 issue of Der Koloniale Kampf represented the metropolitan and the colonial German as separate individuals, but as bound together with a handshake and the text, “[t]his is how it should be. Farmers and ranchers secure the German people’s nourishment.” The DKG photo archive contains the same image, but with the inclusion of a worker, who lays his hand over the other two men’s handshake. These posters evoke Nazi posters heralding the cooperation of “workers of the head and hand,” bringing together various sectors of society for the greater good of the German Volk.

While sharing the Nazis’ visual style, RKB posters centered on the colonial context, most strikingly through the image of the African continent. The map of Africa often appeared with the former colonies highlighted as in the 1933 “Here too lies our Lebensraum” poster. This iconic image of the African continent became a visual metonym for the entire colonialist narrative. The map of Africa demarcated in this manner reflects what Benedict Anderson called the “map-as-logo”:


61 Colonial Picture Archive, UB Frankfurt.
In this shape, the map entered an infinitely reproducible series, available for transfer to posters, official seals, letterheads, magazine and textbook covers, tablecloths, and hotel wall. Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination.\textsuperscript{62}

A third RKB poster, proposed in 1941 by Wilhlem Mickausch but never produced, used the continent of Africa as logo, with a black eagle, representing Germany, hovering above.\textsuperscript{63} \textbf{Figure 29}

While Germany (and Europe) are often not identified (or even visible) on these maps, the highlighted colonies attested, implicitly if not explicitly, to the connection between Germany and Africa. In another undated image from the DKG photo-archive, the map of Africa with the outlined former German colonies is paired with the working smokestacks of a factory, meant to represent industrial Germany.\textsuperscript{64} \textbf{Figure 30} The text (“Raw materials from our own colonies”) promoted the overseas colonies as essential for the Germany’s continuing economic and industrial strength. This metonym of Africa could work as negative propaganda as well, such as in a circa 1938 anti-British flyer.\textsuperscript{65} In the poster, a hand, dressed in the British flag, scratches across the African continent, representing the negative impact of British control of the former German colonies and of


\textsuperscript{63} According to Mickausch’s 1951 note on the back of a photograph of the poster in Heinrich Schnee’s papers at the GStA PK, Hess, as head of the NS \textit{Prüfungsstelle}, confiscated the draft and prevented its production. GStA PK, Nr. 33.

\textsuperscript{64} Colonial Picture Archive, UB Frankfurt, undated.

\textsuperscript{65} Colonial Picture Archive, UB Frankfurt, undated.
Africa as a whole. **Figure 31** Simplifying the colonialist narrative to metonyms, the consistent use of these images made the colonies (and the African continent as a whole) familiar and instantly recognizable, and therefore relevant to Germans’ lives.

![Figure 29: Reich Colonial League draft poster, 1941. Source: GStA PK, VI. HA Familienarchive und Nachlässe, Ni Heinrich Schnee, Nr. 33.](image-url)
Figure 30: “Raw Materials from Our Own Colonies!”
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
Figure 31: The British in Africa
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.
Not only would the map of Africa become recognizable, but RKB images highlighted the interplay of Germany and the colonies as an organic whole. At its exhibitions, the RKB displayed maps, graphs, and charts that emphasized the vital necessity of overseas colonies as a lifeline for Germany. These graphs followed the widespread trend of German geographers in the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany, who used suggestive cartography to shape viewers’ understanding of territorial issues.66 These geographers mobilized a geo-organic definition of German territory, which depicted the territories lost in the Treaty of Versailles as cut off from the national organism and their return as essential to the continuing survival of Germany. They also visualized the vulnerability of national borders.67 Geographers’ maps created the context that made colonialist maps legible, situating them within larger discussions of the relationship between German economic autarky, cultural ascendancy, and political dominance.

A set of panels from the 1938 Bremen colonial exhibition exemplifies colonialists’ portrayal of the overseas territories in organic terms. One panel, showing a three-dimensional map of Germany as an island, declared “[t]he national economic circulation [Wirtschaftskreislauf] without colonies….interrupted. German money, currency migrate abroad,” while the other showed a circulation of arrows between

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Germany and abroad, with the caption “[t]he national economic circulation between motherland and colonies. [Our] own colonies secure—economy and living standard.”

**Figures 32 and 33**

![Image of Bremen Colonial Exhibition, 1938](image)

**Figure 32: Bremen Colonial Exhibition, 1938**  
Source: Colonial Picture Archive, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.

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The visual representation of Germany in both maps instructed the viewer in the symbiotic, organic relationship between these territories. The compression of Germany (depicted in black) in the first contrasted with its expansion (in white) in the second, and
the relative positioning of Germany and the palm-tree studded colonies denoted geographic as well as economic closeness. The use of the term “motherland” rather than the almost ubiquitous use of “fatherland” in reference to Germany further emphasized this organic relationship. These images bridged the economic and the ethnic/national arguments for overseas colonies, presenting them both as equally important to Germany’s survival.

In addition to the RKB’s posters and maps, several companies published trading card albums (Reklamesammelbilder) on colonial themes that circulated in the Third Reich. These albums continued a long history of pairing colonial images with advertising. With spaces to paste in trading cards included in the packaging of a certain product, these albums depicted events from colonial history, colonial pioneers, and African and European life in the colonies. These lavish and low-priced trading card albums demonstrate the resonance of colonial themes in German public culture. In these albums, the overseas colonies sold the products of these companies and promoted the colonies. For such trading card albums to prove profitable, the companies that produced them must have felt that overseas colonialism would attract the public’s attention. Most of the companies producing these albums sold products known as Kolonialwaren

69 Ciarlo, Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany; Joachim Zeller, Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen: koloniale Reklamesammelbilder (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008).
(colonial wares), such as tobacco or tea. The decision of these companies to participate in colonialisist promotion reflected the combination of authenticity and exoticism embodied in the colonies that the companies relied on to sell their exotic products.

The publication of colonial trading card albums by companies selling products unrelated to the colonies, such as the Sidol metal-cleaning product company (a subsidiary of Henckel), highlights the success of this promotional tactic and the legibility of the overseas colonies outside of colonialist circles. In 1938, the Cologne-based Sidol company published *Germany’s Colonies. Artwork of the Struggle for German Lebensraum (Deutschlands Kolonien. Ein Bildwerk vom Kampf um deutschen Lebensraum)*. Using the term “Lebensraum” in the title of their album, the Sidol Company aligned their advertisement with the Nazi regime’s terminology, defining Africa as one component of this territorial expansion.

Anne McClintock has shown how cleaning products and their accompanying advertisements, such as those for Pears’ Soap in Britain, were symbolic of imperial progress (through the clean, whiteness produced by soap). In the 1938 Sidol trading

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70 Oldenkott Handelsgesellschaft, *Deutschland braucht Kolonien* (Rees: Oldenkott, 1933); Onno Behrends Tee Import, *Bilder aus den Deutschen Kolonien* Bd. I and II (Süderneuland I b./Norden: O. Behrends, 1933); Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, *Deutsche Kolonien* (Dresden: Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, 1936).

71 See Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*.


card album, however, cartoon images of children carrying oversized Sidol metal cleaning products appeared incongruously juxtaposed with the collecting card images of Africa, rather than integrated into the colonial imagery of the collecting cards. **Figure 34**

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 34:** Sidol-Bilderdiest, Deutschlands Kolonien. Ein Bildwerk vom Kampf um deutschen Lebensraum

*Source: German Colonial Society Library, University Library of Frankfurt/Main.*

The mobilization of overseas colonialism for commercial purposes, more subtle in the trading card albums for colonial products, becomes explicit here because of the thematic dissonance between the metal cleaning product being sold and the exoticism of the
colonies. The decision of the Sidol company to use this form of advertisement and colonialism to sell their products is a sign of the popularity of colonial themes in German public culture in the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{74}

Through their manipulation of posters, maps, and other graphics, colonialists created a particular image of the overseas colonies. Visualizing the main points of their narrative—in particular the Germanness of the colonies and their integral role in the continuing survival of Germany—these images built upon the dynamic nationalism of Nazi imagery. While colonialists relied heavily on graphics to transmit information about the colonies at their exhibitions and other events, they also mobilized photography to evoke a sense of authenticity and experience of the overseas colonies.

\textit{Photography}

Photography has a long history in service of the European colonial project.\textsuperscript{75} In addition to scientific and pseudoscientific purposes, photographs also supplemented and functioned in their own right as a form of travel literature. During the period of German colonization in Africa, settlers and soldiers took numerous photographs, which circulated

\textsuperscript{74} In 1938, the Sidol company also published a collecting album on Austria entitled \textit{Österreich, Deutschlands Ostmark}. (Köln-Braunsfeld: Sidol-Bilderdiest, 1938).

in Germany as representations of the success of German colonial endeavors.\textsuperscript{76} The illustrated magazine \textit{Kolonie und Heimat} regularly featured colonial photo-essays and published two editions of \textit{A Trip through the German Colonies} in 1910 and 1912. After 1933, the RKB published several photographic albums chronicling expeditions by Germans to the former colonies in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, including \textit{Unforgotten German Land} (1936), \textit{African Travels} (1938), \textit{German Homeland in Africa} (1939), \textit{Africa in Color} (1941), and \textit{Africa Waits} (1942).\textsuperscript{77}

Photography as a medium framed the former colonies and Germanness in the colonies as meaningful categories by simulating a direct experience through visual representations for a faraway audience in Germany. This experience was essential for colonialists, who directed their propaganda efforts at Germans in whose lives colonies played little to no role. The viewer looked at the photograph and found a point of identification between themselves and these distant Germans that implied a shared Germanness. This point of identification centered on cultural practices grafted onto the

\textsuperscript{76} See Feliz Axster, “‘I will try to send you the best views from here’: Postcards from the Colonial War in Namibia (1904-1908),” in \textit{German Colonialism, Visual culture, and Modern memory}, ed. Volker Langbehn (New York: Routledge, 2010), 55-70; Jeremy Silvester, Patricia Hayes, and Wolfram Hartmann, “‘This ideal conquest’: photography and colonialism in Namibian history,” in \textit{The Colonising Camera}, 10-19.

African landscape, which thereby “became” German. The space of the colony became at once foreign and German in these photographs.

Photography’s claim to the objective mechanical reproduction of reality, the increased ability to mass produce these images, and the development of documentary photography during the 1930s made this medium ideal for publicity purposes (both colonialist and Nazi).78 As the German photography journal *Photofreund* declared in July 1933,

> [p]hotography should no longer distract from the struggle; no, it should lead into the midst of the fray and become a tool, a weapon in this struggle. The fact that it can be an explosive and powerful weapon is something the men of the new Germany have recognized clearly. Let the *Führer* determine the direction in which photography should develop.79

The Ministry of Propaganda established a Photography Department in 1933 to create positive memories of the Third Reich. The result was an omnipresent idyll in photojournalism. As Rolf Sachsse quips, “[n]ot only were political leaders portrayed surrounded by flowers and people in national costume, the whole of Germany now consisted of picturesque sleepy little towns and rugged market traders with rosy-cheeked


79 Quoted in ibid., 23.
children.” Through these images, Nazi photojournalism presented the utopian racial future as achievable (and achieved) in the present.

Coinciding with the RKB’s renewed determination to create a mass movement, the RKB resurrected the illustrated magazine *Kolonie und Heimat* in 1937, which would prove the most important (and perhaps the most influential) of its post-1936 publications. The Women’s League of the DKG had published an earlier version of *Kolonie und Heimat* from 1907 to 1922. The re-introduction of *Kolonie und Heimat*, and its appearance first as a monthly and after 1938 as a biweekly publication, is of note, as Nazi periodicals reduced by half between 1933 and 1938. The new *Kolonie und Heimat* relied heavily on photography, reflecting advances in image reproduction by the late 1930s. These photographs could account for the success of *Kolonie und Heimat*, which would have appealed to a broader public beyond colonialist circles by providing images of exotic locales and peoples (including colonial Germans). By 1941, the circulation of *Kolonie und Heimat* reached over 500,000, far outperforming the *Deutsche Kolonial-

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82 Ibid., 238.
Zeitung, its closest colonialist competitor (at 50,000\textsuperscript{83}), and keeping pace with the leading Nazi publication, the Völkischer Beobachter (one million in 1941).\textsuperscript{84}

Drawing on the power of authenticity promised by photography, propagandist Hans Ernst Pfeiffer also encouraged the use of photomontage in colonialist promotion. Despite the possibility of undercutting this authenticity through manipulation, Pfeiffer felt that photomontages could prove powerful propaganda when done correctly. Rather than the “indiscriminate construction and juxtaposition of photos,” colonialist photomontage would heighten enthusiasm for the colonies. For example, “[a] banana plantation, a couple of pineapples, a Berlin fruit wagon form an image on which two children discuss the future supply of tropical fruits from Cameroon to Germany. No one will be able to free themselves from the suggestion of such an image.”\textsuperscript{85} (emphasis in

\textsuperscript{83} Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung had a publication run of about 21,000 in 1934, 30,000 in 1936, and 49,000 in 1939 on average. By comparison, Africa-Nachrichten had runs of 4,333 in 1934 and 1936 and 6,166 in 1939; Die Frau und die Kolonien published about 12,781 copies in 1934 and about 13,800 in 1936; and the runs of Kolonial-Post were 5,500 in 1934, 6,816 in 1936, and 6,000 in 1939. Zeitungs-Katalog (Berlin: Verband Deutscher Annoncen-Expeditionen e.V., 1932); Zeitungs-Katalog (Berlin: Reichsverband der Deutschen Anzeigenmittler e.V., 1935); Zeitungskatalog (Berlin: Reichsverband der Deutschen Werbungsmittler, 1937); Ala-Zeitungskatalog (Berlin: Ala-Anzeigen-Aktiengesellschaft, 1933, 1937, 1941).


\textsuperscript{85} “…wahllose Auf- und Nebeneinanderkleben von Photos……In unserem Falle ist der Zweck der Photomontage doch der, die Wahrhaftigkeit des Photos durch Einzeichnung, Zusammenstellen und Übereinanderkopieren für die koloniale Idee zu begeistern. Eine Bananenpflanzung, einige Ananasfrüchte, ein Berliner Obstwagen ergeben ein Bild, auf dem sich zwei Kinder über die kommende Versorgung Deutschlands mit tropischen Früchten aus Kamerun unterhalten. Niemand wird sich von der Suggestion
original) In its original articulations, critics credited photomontage as a revolution in perception which centered on its dissonance with and dislocation of traditionally accepted ways of seeing. By the late 1930s, however, the extensive use of photomontage in European advertising design had reduced the avant-garde nature of the technique, so that it was “no longer seen as a means of exposing contradictions, but of transcending them.”

Montage enabled colonialists to transcend the paradox of promoting overseas colonialism in a nation without colonies, allowing them to collapse the time between the imperial past and the post-colonial present. A montage from *The Chapbook of the Colonies* (1938) in honor of Carl Peters, for example, merged images of Africa with the dedication of a memorial to Carl Peters in Hannover in 1935, combining a variety of time periods and locations. **Figure 35** The photomontages in *The Chapbook of our Colonies* summarized each colony, pioneer, or colonialist talking point (such as the advances of German medicine or the economic potential of the colonies). They served as easy-to-digest memory aids, in line with the popular encyclopedic aims of the book. The RKB also created montages of colonialist activities in Germany, using the medium to imply dynamism and highlighting the leader (alternatively Epp or Hitler) among the mass of

_384_

**Figure 35**

colonialist supporters. Through photomontage, colonialists advanced their narrative in a medium that, as Pfeiffer described, was particularly persuasive.

Figure 35: Carl Peters Montage
Understanding the power of the photographic image, colonialists exploited such images to create media events. Spanning the gap between still and moving images, the work of photographer and filmmaker Karl Mohri appeared both in photographic and film form in 1938 and 1939. Mohri financed his trip to Africa by selling the film footage he produced to the Propaganda Ministry, which co-produced his film. Upon his return, Mohri published Afrikanische Reise (African Travels) and co-directed the documentary film Deutsches Land in Afrika (German Land in Africa). Mohri and his crew travelled to Southwest and East Africa (as well as South Africa), as the introduction of Afrikanische Reise states, with no set plan; “We drove through the land to film it, and we photographed what seems to us noteworthy.” The photographs in Afrikanische Reise, many of which are stills of the moving versions found in the film, are accompanied by excerpts from Mohri’s diary during the expedition. The film portrayed the lives of Germans living in Southwest and East Africa, but also depicted the exoticism of Africa through shots of animals and an extended sequence of a Bushman village in Southwest Africa.


88 Karl Mohri, Afrikanische Reise (Berlin: Horst Siebert Verlag, 1938); Deutsches Land in Afrika. Directed by Johannes Häussler, Karl Mohri, and Walter Scheunemann (1938/1939).

89 “Wir fuhren durch Land, um es zu filmen, und haben fotografiert, was uns bemerkenswert erschien.” Ibid., 6.
Premiering in April 1939 to a Munich audience including prominent members of the Party and the *Wehrmacht*, colonialists used this film to reach large audiences, such as through outdoor screenings in Dresden during the colonial exhibition in 1939. The local RKB in Linz screened the film thirty-eight times in the first half of 1939 to a total audience of 18,000, with over 110,000 watching the film in the *Gauverband Oberdonau*. In Cologne, the RKB collaborated with the local *Gau* Film Office to screen the film in nineteen theaters, where the showings and the accompanying rallies were well attended. In Troppau in the Sudetenland in 1940, “[t]he screening had to be repeated several times in a row because of overcrowding.” The Reich and Prussian Ministry for Science, Education and Culture (*Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung*) published a teacher’s guide written by Walther Günther to accompany the film, which suggested colonially-themed activities for teachers after showing the film.

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92 Jahresbericht des Gauverbandes Oberdonau des Reichskolonialbundes für 1939 (Linz, 1940), 4-7.

93 Nr. 51 (9 February 1940), Heinz Boberach, ed. *Meldungen aus dem Reich, 1938-1945: die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS* vol. 3 (Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), 740.

94 “Die Vorstellung mußten wegen Überfüllung mehrfach hintereinander wiederholt werden.” Ibid.

95 Walther Günther, *Deutsches Land in Afrika* (Berlin: Der Reichs- und Preussische Minister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, 1939).
Deutsches Land in Afrika proved the most successful product of Karl Mohri’s expedition. The secret reports of the SS Security Service commented in May 1940 on screenings of Deutsches Land in Afrika, stating that “at present the population has a particular interest in films on colonial thinking [der koloniale Gedanke im Film].”96 A reviewer of Deutsches Land in Afrika in the Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger emphasized the importance of the medium of film, declaring “What we learn again and again from books and magazines of the still German character of our colonies, of the achievements and plans of German farmers and settlers today under foreign flags, the film shows [us] in wonderful clips through the incorruptibly truthful image.”97 Rather than merely reading about the former colonies, “we experience with deep sympathy [mit tiefer Anteilnahme] the difficult, hard life of our colonial pioneers,” and “travel through the land with the camera.”98 Deutsches Land in Afrika, as a documentary film, bridged the gap between still photography and film, paving the way for the production of colonialist feature films in the 1940s.

96 “der koloniale Gedanke im Film gegenwärtig bei der Bevölkerung auf ganz besonderes Interesse stößt.” Nr. 51 (9 February 1940), Heinz Boberach, ed. Meldungen aus dem Reich, 1938-1945: die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS vol. 3(Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), 740.

97 “Was wir aus Büchern und Zeitschriften immer wieder erfahren von dem deutsch gebliebenen Charakter unserer Kolonien, von den Schaffen und Planen deutscher Farmer und Siedler unter heute fremder Flagge, das zeigt der Film in herrlichen Ausschnitten durch das unbestechliche wahrheitsgetreue Bild.” Dr. Werner G. Krug, “‘Deutsches Land in Afrika.’ Ein Film von deutscher Arbeit unter Palmen,” Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger 90a (15 April 1939). BAB NS 5 VI/20445, Bl. 60.

Films

Creating a colonial film became an important propaganda goal for colonialists. Before their consolidation into the RKB in 1936, the colonialist organizations had primarily produced documentary and expedition films. But, as Hans Gerd Esser, an advocate for colonial films in *Afrika-Nachrichten*, pointed out in 1936, not all African expedition films were ipso facto colonial films because some lacked an overarching argument and a colonialist leaning. Furthermore, Esser feared that “profiteers and opportunists” without prior interest in colonialism would make colonial films in order to profit from this new genre. He concluded that only the “true masters of German cinema” and the “true fighters for the German colonial idea” should be allowed to work on colonial films.

Esser regretted that the number of these experts remained very limited. In 1938, Esser once again lamented the scarcity of German colonial films, comparing Germany with Italy, France, and England. The fact that German film companies made films based or filmed abroad, but not colonial films, outraged Esser: “[I]n our opinion, when one has money and foreign currency [enough] to produce films that are set abroad or

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100 Ibid.

even to shoot films on foreign soil, then it must also be possible to make an artistic film about the history and the work of our Volk overseas under our own flag!” Feature films (Spielfilme) would capture viewers’ emotions as well as transmit the importance of the colonialist narrative through its drama. One step towards solving the lack of colonial Spielfilme was a film prize for the best German colonial film announced by Epp at the 1938 Colonial Congress in Bremen.

Unsuccessful in producing viable colonial films, the RKB promoted another colonial book and film competition in 1940, this time co-sponsored with the Ufa film production company. The contest organizers sought a “literary embodiment of a colonial destiny” for publication as a serial novel in newspapers and as a screenplay. The advertisement for this competition in Kolonie und Heimat gave very specific guidelines for the film’s plot. The plot should be set between 1933 and 1940 in Germany and the former colonies, should support the “currently valid viewpoint of German colonial policy,” and should deal with the “colonial everyday, be it the life and struggle of a plantation overseer, farmer, businessman, technician or something similar.” The film

102 “Aber wir meinen, wenn man Geld und Devisen hat, um im Ausland spielende oder sogar auf ausländischem Boden gedrehte Filme herzustellen, dann muss es auch möglich sein, die Geschichte und die Arbeit unseres Volkes in Uebersee unter eigener Flagge filmkünstlerisch zu gestalten!” Ibid., 16.

103 The competition was advertised in Kolonie und Heimat in September 1940. Kolonie und Heimat 4, no. 19 (10 September 1940): 373.

104 “Der Inhalt des Romans muss den heute geltenden Anschauungen der deutschen Kolonialpolitik entsprechen. Er soll als Gegenstand das Schicksal eines deutschen Menschen als Kolonialmann haben. Und zwar soll es sich dabei nicht um die Schilderung von militärischen oder forscherischen Leistungen eines oder anderer Menschen handeln, sondern um ein Schicksal aus dem kolonialen Alltag, sei es das Leben und
envisioned by the competition organizers would speak to the specific context of Nazi Germany and provide an everyday story of an average German in the former colonies. This ideal film—rather than a historical film—would show the contemporary German the trials and triumphs of his or her colonial counterparts, so that colonists’ struggle and the “colonial question” would become a present issue in their lives.

Most of the dozen colonially-themed films and shorts produced in Nazi Germany, however, continued to explore heroic events in the colonial past.105 The first colonialist foray into feature film had come in 1934 with *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika*. This film centered on the First World War in East Africa which provided colonialists with ample fodder for their narrative of German colonial bravery and African loyalty. Colonialists responded positively to this film, hoping it would motivate Germans to translate this heroic story of the past into demands for a future overseas empire.


105 The films surveyed at the Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv (Berlin) include four feature films [*Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* (1934), *Carl Peters* (1939), *Ohm Krüger* (1940), and *Germanin* (1941)] and nine documentary films [*Die Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte* (1926); *Beiden deutschen Kolonisten in Südwest-Afrika* (1934); *Die deutsche Frauenkolonialschule Rendsburg* (1937); *Sehnsucht nach Afrika* (1938); *Das koloniale Bilderbuch* (1938/1939); *Deutsches Land in Afrika* (1939); *Der Film einer Autofahrt durch deutsches Kolonialland* (1930s); *Der Weg in die Welt* (1938); and *Auf deutschen Farmen in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (1941)].
In contrast to *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika*, the 1938 film *Eine Frau kommt in die Tropen* (A Woman Goes to the Tropics) received a much less positive response from colonialists. Also a Terra-Filmm Kunst production, this film was inspired by the 1913 film *The White Goddess of the Wangora* by Hans Schomburgk. The film depicted a love triangle (or rectangle) that ensued after the young Marianne followed her ex-boyfriend (but true love) Herbert to Togo, where he was working on his brother, Peter’s plantation. Unfortunately, they missed each other, as Marianne arrived on the plantation after Herbert had left to sell the cocoa crop in Hamburg. Drama ensues, as both Peter and his plantation manager Miller fall in love with Marianne, while Peter’s wife, blinded in an accident, senses what is happening but can do nothing. One highly dramatic scene involved a nighttime dance of the plantation workers, during which Marianne just barely succeeds in fighting off Peter’s amorous advances. Herbert arrives back on the plantation just in time; he and Marianne run into each other’s arms and then travel back to Germany, along with Peter’s wife who will undergo surgery in Germany to restore her eyesight.


107 Copies of this film do not appear to have survived the war. This plot summary comes from the *Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung’s* review of the film. K., “Filme, wie wir sie nicht sehen wollen! ‘Eine Frau kommt in die Tropen’ Terra-Film,” *Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung* 50, no. 9 (1 September 1938): 312.
“Films, as we don’t want to see them!” declared the *Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung*. In the film, a woman goes to the tropics, but she is the kind of vapid golden girl (*Goldtöchterchen*) who has no place among the unromantic colonial Germans.\(^{108}\) The melodramatic plot of *Eine Frau kommt in die Tropen* focused exclusively on the human drama of the characters, without addressing larger issues of the French and British mandate in Togo, Germany’s right to this territory, or the exemplary characteristics of German colonists. *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika*, in contrast, had had emotional drama, but within the context of a nationalist narrative. *Eine Frau kommt in die Tropen* seemed to justify Hans Gerd Esser’s fear that opportunists would produce colonial films without any deep commitment to the colonialist cause, despite the fact that Terra-Filmkunst produced both this film and *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika*. A review in the *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* praised the drama that the *Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung* had criticized and which the reviewer considered “very adventurous, very complex in its plot, with some realistic observations which appear as comments on the current situation of the farmers.”\(^{109}\)

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\(^{108}\) “Es handelt sich also nicht um eine Frau, die in die Tropen kommt, sondern leider um ein Mädchen jener Art, wie man sie in den Häusern unserer meist ganz unromantisch dahinlebenden Kolonialdeutschen viel weniger gern erscheinen sieht als in den Reihen des weiblichen Arbeitsdienstes, wo man der Mentalität ohne rechten Daseinsinhalt dahinlebender Goldtöchterchen verständnisvoll zu begegnen weiß.” Ibid.

With the start of the Second World War, colonial films continued to serve the dual purposes of colonialist agitation and entertainment, although both agendas were now nationalist rather than solely profit-motivated. Three films produced during the Second World War—*Carl Peters* (Bavaria Filmkunst, 1940/1941), *Ohm Krüger* (Tobis-Filmkunst, 1941), and *Germanin* (Ufa-Filmkunst, 1943)—highlighted German involvement in Africa but served primarily as anti-British propaganda. These films attacked the British as Germany’s main rival in colonial and continental affairs (before the US entry into the war in 1941), reading this rivalry back through historical events. By comparison, the Nazi censors considered *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika* too “pro-British” (the English neighbor remains a sympathetic character throughout the film), and subsequently banned the film in December 1939.\(^{110}\)

*Carl Peters*, with the German film star Hans Albers in the leading role, told the story of the “father of the German colonial empire,” Dr. Carl Peters. The historical Carl Peters had travelled to East Africa in 1884 without the support of the German government, signed “treaties” with local African leaders, and created East Africa as a German protectorate. Known by the local population as “the man with the bloody hands,”\(^ {111}\) in March 1896 the Colonial Office investigated Peters’s role in German

\(^{110}\) Nganang, “Der koloniale Sehnsuchtsfilm,” in *AfrikaBilder*, 240.

massacres that had sparked debates over the juridical powers of Germans over Africans. In this investigation, Peters was accused of executing his concubine out of sexual jealousy. The most scandalous accusation, however, was that Peters had “gone native” when he had supposedly married his African concubine according to Muslim and/or African custom. The scandal continued throughout the summer, and in September the Chancellor ordered an investigation that would lead in April 1897 to Peters’s dismissal from colonial service.\textsuperscript{112}

The film version of Peters’s life, however, occluded these more scandalous elements in favor of a narrative that emphasized Peters’s “persecution” by Socialists and Jews, chiefly Colonial Minister Paul Kayser. While Peters himself may not have been anti-Semitic, his apologists emphasized Kayser’s Jewish origins to explain his oppositional stance towards Peters and overseas colonialism.\textsuperscript{113} Surrounded by enemies, Peters was “…a veritable German man, who dedicated his entire ability [Schaffen] and his life for a greater Germany,” as Epp described him at the dedication of a monument to him erected in Hannover in 1935.\textsuperscript{114} (emphasis in original) Indeed, if Peters had been


\textsuperscript{114} “…eine wahrhaft deutschen Mannes, der sein ganzes Schaffen und sein Leben für ein größeres Deutschland eingesetzt habe.” “Unser Marschziel: Deutschland über der See,” \textit{Der Koloniale Kampf} 8, no. 9 (15 November 1935).
alive, Epp asserted, he would surely have been a staunch standard bearer of the National Socialist idea. The casting of the popular, tall, blond, and handsome Hans Albers in the film further emphasized Peters’s idealized racial qualifications. A poster for the film showed Albers gesturing forward in what, with the raising of three fingers, would have been a Nazi salute. Figure 36 Peters’s rehabilitation in the 1941 film was the culmination of a variety of revisionist accounts and publications after the turn of the century.

The strong anti-Jewish and anti-Socialist vein in *Carl Peters* also supported the Nazi regime’s anti-British propaganda by naturalizing the two countries’ animosity and giving Germany the moral upper hand. As one press response to the film noted, “British fighting methods then as now: unscrupulous murder.” Klaus Hildebrand interprets the explicit use of *Carl Peters* (along with Ohm Krüger) for anti-British propaganda as evidence that the colonialists had lost their autonomy in the Third Reich. According to Hildebrand, colonial propaganda became subsumed in the propaganda for the war and the RKB became “a formation in the fight for Hitler’s goal of German world power rather than an outfit for the reclamation of the former German colonies.” Hildebrand’s analysis underestimates the film’s simultaneous promotion of anti-British and pro-

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115 Ibid.


colonial causes. In fact, anti-British propaganda had always played a large role in the colonialist movement’s revisionist narrative. Even if colonial films supported Hitler’s foreign and military goals, they also supported colonialists’ goals.

Figure 36: Carl Peters advertisement
Source: Film-Kurier, March 29, 1941.
Other scholars have also emphasized the unsubtle anti-British attacks of Carl Peters as well as Ohm Krüger and Germanin.\(^\text{118}\) Despite the RKB’s role in co-producing Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika, it is these three films that receive the most scholarly attention in discussions of colonialism in Nazi film. The motivation behind these analyses, therefore, focuses more on the Nazis’ use of the overseas colonies as a vehicle for Nazi ideology than on colonialism as an end in itself in these films. None of the three colonial films made during the war drew on the colonialist organizations for their production, as Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika did. Alain Nganang argues, however, that all films with Africa as their subject between 1933 and 1945 participated in the effort to reclaim the colonies. “The loss of the colonies,” according to Nganang, “seemed to be too painful for Germany, this deprivation seemed too deep and the resulting wound too big, to simply fantasize [hin- und herphantasieren] about Africa.”\(^\text{119}\) Until 1945, he concludes, all films about Africa directly or indirectly supported the effort to reclaim the colonies, even if all cannot be classified as propaganda films. Distinguishing between colonialist films and colonially-themed films, and those officially supported by the


colonialists and those not supported, is difficult. But the different degree of colonialists’ involvement is crucial. Regardless of their production source, however, all of these films combined the colonialist narrative and Nazi anti-British war propaganda, linking both of these themes for their audiences.

This interweaving of narratives is seen clearly in *Ohm Krüger* (1941), the first film to receive the designation “Film of the Nation” from Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels.\footnote{Reinhart C. Lutz, “False history, fake Africa, and the transcription of Nazi reality in Hans Steinhoff’s ‘Ohm Krüger’,” *Literature-Film Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1997): 188.} *Ohm Krüger* chronicles the life of Paul Krüger, president of the South African Republic (played by popular actor Emil Jannings) and his struggle against the British in the Second Boer War. In addition to the historical facts of the Boer-British conflict, the film’s visual cues reiterate Britain’s depravity. These included a whiskey-slogging Queen Victoria who lusts after the gold in South Africa, Ferdinand Marian (fresh from his success as the Jewish villain in *Jud Süss*) as Cecil Rhodes trying to bribe Krüger, a Winston Churchill-esque camp commander who feeds choice pieces of meat to his bulldog while Boer women and children starve in his concentration camp, and a presciently eerie scene of Boer women and children slowly walking in a line between barbed wire up to a large building in the camp.\footnote{The insertion of the Churchill character (Churchill did serve in South Africa during the Second Boer War, but not as a camp commander) served to link this historical event to the contemporary war with England. Reinhart Lutz analyzes *Ohm Krüger* as a prime example of Nazi cinema’s “propagandistic proposal of (false) historical analogies”: “In terms of rhetorical strategy, then, *Ohm Krüger* operates first from the belief that an audience will accept as ‘real’ and as ‘truth’ what looks authentic. It is within this
Set in southern Africa, the film had nothing to do with the German colonial territories or with colonialists’ demands for their return. Yet colonialist journals promoted the film. The African setting and the anti-British stance made *Ohm Krüger* a colonial film. Not only colonialists appropriated *Ohm Krüger* for their cause. The February 1942 SD report on the mood of the population described a screening of *Ohm Krüger* in Oberkrain, at which Slovenes compared their fate with that of the Boers and drew correspondingly negative conclusions about the occupying Germans’ course of action.122

The ambiguous message of the film also concerned other critics, who felt that the mixed-race Boers were not an appropriate ethnic group to herald.123

*Germanin* (1943), the final colonially-themed film made during the Second World War, returned to one of the central components of the colonialist narrative of German colonizing prowess. Subtitled “the story of a colonial act” (*Die Geschichte einer kolonialen Tat*), the film chronicles the discovery of the drug Germanin (also known as Bayer 205) to cure sleeping sickness. Traveling between Africa and Germany both before

conceptual framework that *Ohm Krüger* proposes its false analogies, and invited the audience to accept its take as a ‘history lesson.’ Second, the film's efficacy as propaganda depends on an audience's willingness to believe in the applicability of history to the present, and the idea that 'real history,' as brought to light in a ‘serious’ feature film, will yield knowledge about processes which are going on today. It is here that Ohm Krueger proposes to read the supposedly unchanging, eternal English national character as one determined by abysmal perfidy.” Ibid.


123 Nr. 185 (12 May 1941), Ibid.

400
and after the First World War, Professor Dr. Achenbach (a composite figure of the German scientists behind the discovery of the drug), with his trusted assistant, Anna, and Hans (former doctor and now an animal catcher [Tierfänger] whom they meet in Africa) are finally able to perfect a cure only after Hans allows himself to be bitten by an infected mosquito. Returning to Africa after the First World War, Dr. Achenbach cures Africans from miles around, who travelled to be treated in long lines that stretch into the distance.

Not only do the English authorities forbid Achenbach—as a German—to continue his life-saving work, they also destroy his supply of Bayer 205. In the next scene, Dr. Achenbach, martyr to his good works, falls ill with sleeping sickness. With the stores of Bayer 205 destroyed, the team believes all hope is lost. Luckily, however, a cheeky monkey had previously stolen a vial of the cure and hidden it in a tree. Retrieving this last vial, Dr. Achenbach is about to take the cure when the British officer who shut down Achenbach’s work arrives, infected. Achenbach heroically sacrifices himself by administering the treatment to the Englishman rather than to himself. The film ends with Anna and Hans continuing the doctor’s work.

_Germanin_ reasserted both the themes of the perfidy of the English and the loyalty of former German colonial subjects. It also dramatized the imagined humanitarian imperialism of the Germans, epitomized by the international reputation of German
medicine.\textsuperscript{124} This film provides yet another example of the contradictions between narrative and reality in the treatment of Africans in Nazi Germany. In order to start shooting the film which needed a large cast of black extras, Propaganda Minister Goebbels approved the diversion of a transport of 300 black POWs (most likely from the French army) on their way to southern France to the set in Italy as extras in the film.\textsuperscript{125} After eight to twelve weeks of shooting, the POWs would be sent on to France. While black POWs were vilified by Nazi propaganda and mistreated by their Wehrmacht captors, here they were forced to play the role of grateful colonial subjects.\textsuperscript{126}

RKB propagandists used film, together with photography and graphics, to create a rich colonially-themed visual culture in the Third Reich. Colonialists were more successful in producing posters and photographs than films, perhaps because of the greater financial cost of the latter. Hans Gerd Esser and others understood the importance of film as a mass medium, and supported the three African-themed films produced during the Second World War. Precisely because these films fulfilled both colonialist and Nazi anti-British propaganda goals, they further integrated colonialists’ narrative into the public sphere in Nazi Germany. Similarly, the RKB’s use of visual styles and formats

\textsuperscript{124} The theme of German humanitarianism in Africa through medicine has proven persistent, even beyond 1945 and especially in the figure of Albert Schweitzer. See, for example, the 2009 film \textit{Albert Schweitzer: Ein Leben für Afrika}.


that corresponded with those used by the Nazi regime increased these colonialist images’ legibility and therefore their authority in the context of the visual culture of the Third Reich.

**Conclusion**

In his 1937 lecture, Hans Ernst Pfeiffer had heralded the value for colonialist propaganda of the image “often displayed and often seen.” “The highly developed advertising of today,” Pfeiffer explained, “uses the image on the one hand as an attention-getter [Blickfang], and on the other hand because images can make themselves rapidly and easily understood by all levels of society.”

Hoping to manipulate images’ propagandistic power to reach Germans, the RKB produced a rich visual culture that encompassed a range of forms from posters to films, and targeted a variety of audiences from the captive audience of a movie theater to the passerby on the street. Through this range of formats, colonial propagandists gave Germans an experience of the colonies that elided the incongruity of presenting Africa as foreign yet familiar and German. This visual culture deepened their audiences’ emotional investment in the overseas colonies and in the colonial Germans who lived there. In doing so, colonialists tried to convince metropolitan Germans to view themselves as colonizers.

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127 “Die hochentwickelte Werbung der heutigen Zeit verwendet das Bild, einerseits als Blickfang, andererseits, weil sie sich damit rasch und sicher allen Bevölkerungsschichten verständlich machen kann.” Hans Ernst Pfeiffer, *Die kolonialpolitische Propaganda im Dienste der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung*, 4-5.
With the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, new European territories opened for German expansion. Eastern Europe after 1939, and especially after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, provided an immediate opportunity for German colonization, in contrast to the promise of future overseas fulfillment. As Nazi officials began implementing plans to Germanize vast swaths of Eastern Europe, the RKB fought to maintain the relevance of the overseas colonies.
Chapter 7: Africa or the East? Colonialists during the Second World War, 1939-1945

Fifteen days after the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Franz Ritter von Epp, head of both the Reich Colonial League (RKB) and the Colonial Policy Office (KPA), published a proclamation in Afrika-Nachrichten. Germany stood, Epp declared, in a bitter struggle for its very right to survive (Lebensrecht). “In this struggle for vital space,” he asserted, “colonial claims occupy an urgent position because securing overseas territories is also a critical matter [Lebensfrage] for our Volk.” The RKB had worked for years to convince Germans of the importance of overseas colonialism. With the start of the war, Epp explained, colonialists had to support the RKB more than ever. “The struggle that we Germans are pursuing in Europe today,” Epp declared, “is also a struggle for our goals, because it will decide the fate of our colonies.”

For Epp, the military achievement of the Nazi regime’s economic, political, racial, and territorial demands would also fulfill colonialist claims. The war effort demanded the total support of RKB members. Their wartime work on the home front would serve as a proving ground. Epp warned:

Whoever becomes lazy now and no longer feels [himself to be] a member of our colonial combat league [Kampfbund] should not complain later after the fulfillment of our duties when he stands outside of our community and can no longer take part in the work of colonial development.²

Epp concluded with a call to arms to “stand together in this time of need, close the ranks more tightly, continue to march in step in the battlefront of the Führer. Thus we will also achieve our goal: The resurrection of the German colonial empire!”³ (emphasis in original)

Grandiosely relating the RKB’s demands to Germany’s fate in the war, Epp urged colonialists to exploit the regime’s mobilization of nationalistic patriotism for their own cause. Now that the Wehrmacht occupied most of Europe, colonialists could dream of a quick resolution of their demands. The German Blitzkrieg in the spring of 1940 that culminated in the fall of France in June and the seemingly imminent defeat of Britain encouraged colonialists to fantasize about the recreation of their African empire. Colonialists’ faith in German victory challenged them to maintain the intensity of their propaganda among a population often distracted by more immediate wartime concerns.

This chapter traces the three threads explored in this study (colonialists’ propaganda infrastructure and content, the discursive tension between Africa and the

² “Wer jetzt lau wird und sich nicht mehr als Mitglied unseres kolonialen Kampfbundes fühlt, beklage sich später nach Erfüllung unserer Aufgabe nicht, wenn er ausserhalb unserer Gemeinschaft steht und an der kolonialen Aufbauarbeit nicht mehr teilnehmen kann.” Ibid.

East, and colonialists’ organizational conflicts with Nazi Party institutions) into the war years. With the annexation of Poland in 1939 and the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Eastern Europe fed colonial fantasies and offered territories for their realization. While, as colonialists asserted in the abstract, Kolonialpolitik could supplement Ostpolitik, the East as a German colonial territory now became a concrete reality. The context of the war and Nazi expansion in the East simultaneously amplified colonialists’ delusions of importance and exacerbated the existing organizational and territorial conflicts between the RKB and Nazi officials.

Beginning with RKB propagandists’ intensified activity after 1939, the chapter traces how colonialists tied their colonial demands to the war to give themselves added significance. By targeting recently incorporated Gauen, the RKB increased its membership to two million by 1941. Turning to the question of territorial focus, the chapter reveals the RKB’s ambivalent response to the war in the East. Faced with the reality of the occupied Eastern territories, colonialists struggled to explain the distinctiveness of Africa, for example by restricting the use of the term “colony” to overseas territories. Their emphasis on Africa at times sat uneasily with Nazi leaders’ desires. Officials within the Propaganda Ministry and the Nazi Propaganda Office strongly objected to the RKB, as they strove to keep Germans’ attention focused on the war effort in the East.

In the intensified context of the war, colonialists’ delusions of self-importance reached new heights. Since 1933, they had willfully misinterpreted Nazi officials’
obstruction and ignored the political bargain that they had made with the Nazi regime. Rather than perceiving an ideological rejection of their cause, colonialists interpreted officials’ opposition as merely an obstacle to be negotiated, overcome, or explained away. By 1943, the realities of the East—both the Nazi fixation on Eastern Europe and the devastating military defeats—prompted Reich Chancellery officials to shut down the entire overseas colonialist movement. The instinctive response of colonialist leaders such as Epp to Nazi opposition made it impossible for him to acknowledge the finality of this shutdown. Despite orders from Reich Chancellery officials, Epp doggedly presented the cessation of the colonialist movement as a temporary logistical setback rather than an ideological defeat. Having asserted the centrality of their demands for overseas colonies to the Third Reich, colonialists could not comprehend their increasing practical and ideological irrelevance to the Nazi regime as the war progressed.

**Colonialist Propaganda at War**

RKB propaganda portrayed the Second World War as the opportunity to finally solve the “colonial question” as well as validation of the importance of overseas colonies. Its activities, the RKB claimed, attested to the organization’s uninterrupted importance to the Third Reich. Indeed, colonialists presented their narrative of German overseas colonialism as the necessary precondition for creating the mentality of dominance invoked by Nazi ideology. A November 1941 article in *Kolonie und Heimat* described the colonial movement as “the expression of confidence in victory” (*Ausdruck der Siegeszuversicht*). The author hailed Epp’s declaration tying the RKB’s growth to the
war, “[f]or the reclamation of colonial supplementary spaces [Ergänzungsräume] is an absolute necessity for a unified Europe under German leadership.” Part of the RKB’s duties, the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung proclaimed in July 1942, involved explaining to Germans “the fundamental military and economic requirements of the New Order in Europe and of [Germany’s] Lebensraum and [broadening Germans’] continentally-bound thinking to meet the great duties of our Volk.” Emphasizing the need for a shift in perspective to the global sphere, Epp and other colonialist authors framed colonialism, colonial thinking, and the RKB as preconditions for German victory.

The fall of France in June 1940 signaled the defeat of one colonial rival and promised the imminent conclusion of a peace with another colonial rival, Britain. Encouraged by these military successes, the KPA, with its status as a Nazi Party office, prepared for a colonial ministry. Organizationally, the office split between KPA-Partei (which continued the previous functions of the KPA within the Party) and KPA-Staat
(which began to formulate policy for the future colonies). The activities of the KPA-
Staat dramatically increased the budget of the KPA. In 1939, the KPA had a budget of
157,428 RM, 6,379,678 RM in 1940 and 29,942,060 RM in 1941. The KPA also
established satellite offices in Brussels and Paris to use the administrative records of the
occupied French and Belgian colonial ministries for the benefit of German colonial
planning.

Spurred by governmental support, KPA officials thought concretely about how
Nazi Germany would administer its overseas colonies. In Afrika-Nachrichten in
September 1940, Rudolf Asmis, head of the KPA’s Berlin office, described plans for a
new postwar colonial administration. Believing that the native populations of the former
German colonies harbored warm feelings towards Germany, Asmis did not imagine a
need for a military administration and planned a civil administration that could take
control immediately. Asmis outlined the KPA’s goals for the future colonial
administration, which included applying the National Socialist concept of the state
(Staatsidee) among Germans in the colonies, protecting the natives’ ethnic character

7 Wolfe W. Schmoke, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale
University Press, 1964), 143.

8 Ibid., 144. Converting to 2010 dollars using the relative share of GDP, these sums were worth
approximately $10.3 million (1939), $381 million (1940), and $1.79 billion (1941).

9 According to Wolfe Schmoke, these offices continued their work even after the KPA was shut down in
1943. Schmoke, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945*, 149.
(völkischen Eigenart), and developing the colonies’ economy to support the Third Reich and to strengthen Germany’s position as a world power.\textsuperscript{10}

The KPA immediately set out to draft a set of laws for the future colonies, or a \textit{Reichskolonialgesetz}, which explicitly invalidated the legislation that had been in effect in the former colonies.\textsuperscript{11} Racial segregation played a central role in the form of a draft “Colonial Blood Protection Law” (\textit{Kolonialblutschutzgesetz}). As outlined in this draft law, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws prohibiting sexual relations between Aryans and Jews (as well as other non-Aryans) would take force in the colonies as well.\textsuperscript{12} The draft \textit{Kolonialblutschutzgesetz} also outlawed marriages between Germans or “foreigners” (\textit{Fremder}, defined by the \textit{Reichskolonialgesetz} as neither German nor natives [\textit{Eingeborene}]) with natives, non-white natives from non-German Africa, Australia, or the Pacific Islands, or the mixed-raced children of these natives. The punishment for these marriages would be prison or forced labor; men from these forbidden groups who had sex with a white woman would receive the death penalty. Through this \textit{Kolonialblutschutzgesetz}, the future German colonial administration would employ segregation to forcibly maintain the authentic Africanness that colonialists heralded.

\textsuperscript{10} Rudolf Asmis, “Grundlagen und Ziele der künftigen deutschen Kolonialverwaltung,” \textit{Afrika-Nachrichten} 21, no. 9 (September 1940): 130.

\textsuperscript{11} “Reichskolonialgesetz. 9. Entwurf,” BAB R 2/4966, Bl. 12-14.

KPA officials also drew up concrete plans for the organization of society in the colonies, as in a 1942 report on the “Systematic Creation of Cultural Centers in the Colonies.” This report included a “Schematic for a Settlement Center in the Thinly Settled Territory of Middle Africa [Mittelafrikas],” supposedly including territories not formerly German (implied by the term Mittelafrika). These plans, both internal and shared in the colonialist press, demonstrate colonialists’ sincere belief in the possibility of a future German colonial empire.

The increased numbers of applications received by the KPA for employment in the future colonies attest to the new popularity of overseas colonialism following the military victories in the spring of 1940. In his postwar memoir, Heinrich Schnee recalled hearing about the “surprisingly large crush” (erstaunlich großer Andrang) of such applications, which resulted more from opportunistic careerism than from genuine interest in overseas colonialism. “This was especially the case,” Schnee recounts, for the positions for higher-level colonial civil servants. Particularly grotesque was what aspiring candidates for the post of governor wrote, a position for which many Nazis felt themselves to be particularly qualified—despite lacking any

13 The term Mittelafrika gained currency during the First World War as a counterpart to a plan to create an economic (and political) sphere under German control in Central Europe (Mitteleuropa). The territories encompassed by Mittelafrika would have connected Cameroon with German East Africa. As imagined by the KPA, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Justice after the fall of France in 1940, this territory would have included not only the former German colonies but also Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Uganda, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Dahomey, French Equatorial Africa, and the Belgian Congo. Lora Wildenthal, German Women for Empire, 1884-1945 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 196. See also Alexandre Kum'a N'dumbe, Was wollte Hitler in Afrika? NS-Planungen für eine faschistische Neugestaltung Afrikas (Frankfurt: IKO, Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1993).
knowledge or experience in the colonies, and only on the grounds of their alleged merits to the Nazi Party.  

Here as in other areas of life in the Third Reich, many of these applicants assumed that loyalty to the Party held a greater role in their advancement than expertise.

Parallel with the KPA’s intensification of administrative preparations, the RKB continued its propaganda work. In its October 1939 issue, the Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung published the wartime guidelines for the RKB issued by Reich-level office manager SS-Standartenführer Richard Peter. Some Gauverbände would be combined into larger branches, while the Gauverband Silesia would expand to include some of the recently annexed areas of Poland. Peter’s guidelines required various departments in the RKB to restrict their budgets and activities. The propaganda department’s expenses, for example, could not increase. Abteilungen IV and V (which had provided help for needy colonial Germans) had to limit their activities, and all packages to the former colonies ceased until further notice. The domestic press, such as the organizational newspapers and the calendar of the RKB, however, would continue.

14 “In ganz besonderem Maße galt das für die Stellen der höheren Kolonialbeamten. Geradezu grotesk klang das, was man von Aspiration auf Gouverneursposten hörte, für welche sich sehr viele Nationalsozialisten trotz Fehlens irgendwelcher Kenntnisse oder gar Erfahrungen auf kolonialem Gebiet, nur auf Grund ihrer angeblichen Verdienste um die NSDAP für besonders geeignet hielten.” “Wie alles kam,” Das Hitlerreich und sein Zusammenbruch. Schnees bisher unveröffentlichte Memoiren,” Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA PK), VI. HA Familienarchive und Nachlässe, Nl Heinrich Schnee, Nr. 15, Bl. 104.

15 Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung 51, no. 10 (1 October 1939): 81-83.

16 Ibid.
The RKB increased its activities, despite Peter’s restrictions. Reporting on the activities of the *Gauverband* Berlin, for example, the *Völkischer Beobachter* in September 1940 attributed young people’s preparedness to go to the colonies to the years of work by the RKB, “whose effect [Wirken] one hardly notices in the public, but which continues unabated and has not experienced interruption because of the war.”17 The Berlin *Gauverband* had in fact increased its membership by twenty-two percent since the beginning of the war, the *Völkischer Beobachter* article noted.18 The RKB would surely not have appreciated the *Völkischer Beobachter*’s assessment of their public presence as hardly noticeable. Increasing the organization’s membership, and thereby its public presence, offered one method by which the RKB could change this opinion.

In the early years of the war, the RKB concentrated its recruiting activities in areas with weaker colonial traditions. This work had begun in 1938 with the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland into the Third Reich. The Hapsburg Empire and its successor states of Austria and Czechoslovakia had not possessed overseas colonies. As a result, the RKB considered ethnic Germans’ colonial ambitions underdeveloped in these countries. This assessment also applied to Germans living in other recently re-

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18 Ibid.
incorporated regions, such as the *Gauen* Silesia, Danzig-West Prussia, and the Westmark (including Lorraine and the Saar).

These areas became targets for the RKB’s intensified propaganda. In June 1939, the reports of the German Socialist Party in Exile (SOPADE) noted the first large RKB rally in Prague.  

The organizers of the Dresden colonial exhibition in the summer of 1939 arranged group trips for Sudeten Germans and sponsored a special “Sudeten German Day” in August. The RKB held its annual congress in Vienna in 1939, and the congress guide as well as the colonialist journals published articles celebrating Austrians’ colonizing exploits. By the end of 1940, the RKB had organized 2,100 officials in seventeen groups on the district level and 330 groups on the city or town level in the *Gauverband* Oberdonau (formerly Austria). By associating individual Austrians’ activities in Africa to German colonial demands and encouraging Sudeten Germans’ attendance at a colonial exhibition, the RKB asserted the importance of colonialism to the *entire* German Volk. Establishing a colonial identity, they turgidly claimed, should be an essential part of these ethnic Germans’ participation in the Third Reich.

Correlating with these efforts, the membership of the RKB increased in the targeted *Gauen* as well as across the Third Reich. The Sudetenland counted almost

\[\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\] Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE 6, no. 6 (June 1939).


\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\] “Jahresbericht des Gauverbandes Oberdonau des Reichskolonialbundes für 1939,” 1940, 6-7.
100,000 RKB members by October 1940, and newspapers in Silesia noted an increase of 5,000 members for the RKB in January 1941. The Gauverband Westmark gained over 15,000 new members between December 1940 and November 1941 for a total of over 62,000 members. In Gauverband Düsseldorf, the RKB gained 600 new members in 1941, bringing its total to 118,000 members, or 5.3% of the population. Reich-wide, the RKB had 1.4 million members in 1939, 1.8 million in 1940, and over two million by 1941.

In this successful membership drive, RKB recruitment measures developed innovative formats, such as in March 1940 in the Gauverband Oberdonau (previously Austria and part of Czechoslovakia). In 1940, the local chapters in Linz organized a recruiting competition called “Struggle and Victory 1940” (“Kampf und Sieg 1940”). Each local chapter would receive points for different kinds of publicity between March and June 1940. For every 20 Reichsmarks of publicity materials sold, for example, the chapter received one point. Display cases (Schaukasten) earned the chapter ten points,

22 Hamburger Tageblatt (“Die Kolonien”) no. 2 (October 1940), BAB NS 5 VI/20446, Bl. 13.
23 Oberschlesischer Kurier (January 29, 1941), reprinted in Aussendeutscher Wochenspiegel 5 (7 February 1941), BAB NS 5 VI/20446, Bl. 9.
24 “Koloniale Front” Mitteilungsblatt des Reichskolonialbundes Gauverband Westmark (1941), UB Frankfurt Zs 1933.
25 Jünemann, Jahresbericht des Gauverbandes Düsseldorf (1941).
26 Mickausch, Der Reichskolonialbund als Träger der kolonialen Propaganda, BAB R 20/71.
27 Reichskolonialbund, Kreisverband Linz-Stadt, Wettbewerb “Kampf und Sieg 1940” (Linz, 23 February 1940).
every lecture (of ten minutes or more with the majority of the chapter present) received two points, every five books checked out of the chapter’s library per week was worth one point, and every rally attended by the majority of the local chapter two points. Each chapter began the competition with a certain number of points in categories for which they could lose points over the four months. Beginning with twenty points in each category, chapters would lose one point for every missed meeting or for every piece of RKB-related mail that remained in their mailboxes at the Kreisverband offices longer than one week.

Through this competition, the local chapters in Linz hoped not only to gain new members but also to streamline administration between Ortsverbände and Kreisverbände. Combining positive and negative incentives, the competition encouraged RKB members to utilize the range of propaganda at their disposal, including rallies, lectures, display cases, publicity materials, and the local RKB library. Using all of these tactics, competitors would have simultaneously blanketed the public sphere of their towns and cities across Germany with colonialist propaganda over the summer of 1940, a time when nationalistic feelings ran particularly high. The Gauverband Oberdonau’s newsletter reported in 1941 on the success of this recruiting competition: the Gauverband membership had more than doubled from 23,705 to 58,216, or 5.63% of the population. Kreisverband Linz-Stadt led the competition with more than 14,000 members (11% of
the population), followed by Steyr (7,000 or 10%) and Gmunden (with almost 6,000 or 7%).

As the competition between Linz’s local chapters demonstrates, regional and local-level RKB chapters took on greater importance in continuing the RKB’s activities. During the war years, several Gau-, Ort-, and Kreisverbände started local newsletters, such as Saarpfalz in 1939, Oberdonau and Weser-Ems in 1940, and Westmark and Hamburg in 1941. What prompted this outpouring of local publications? One factor may have been the increased numbers of members resulting from recruiting and propaganda drives. With larger chapters, local newsletters—in addition to the Reich-level publications—proved essential in transmitting information about local events. As the war continued, newsletters also allowed local chapters to maintain a sense of unity and community. “In these days when it is not always possible to hold meetings and educational evenings,” the Gauverband Hamburg newsletter (Das koloniale Hamburg) explained in its inaugural issue in February 1941,

the newsletter will secure the connection among the members and between the officials and the members. At the same time, [through the newsletter] the Gauverband will attest to the fact that, despite the war, the colonial work continues and quiet work [stille Arbeit] is accomplished in the Kreis- and Ortsverbände.

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29 Adolf Dresler, Die deutschen Kolonien und die Presse (Würzburg: Konrad Triltsch Verlag, 1942), 91-92.

30 „Die Mitteilungen sollen in diesen Tagen, an denen es nicht immer möglich ist, Versammlungen und Schulungsevents abzuhalten, den Zusammenhang unter den Mitgliedern und zwischen Amtsträgern und Mitgliedern festigen. Gleichzeitig will der Gauverband Zeugnis ablegen, daß trotz Krieg die koloniale
Through these newsletters, local RKB chapters validated colonialists’ continuing existence and activity in the context of the war.

In its content, RKB propaganda addressed the relevance of the war for colonialists’ claims and vice versa. In 1940, for example, the RKB produced a slide show entitled “Germany, Your Colonies!” The text accompanying several slides framed the work of the RKB both as a domestic success and looked forward to a world in which Germany played the leading role. The caption of a photograph of a large RKB rally, for example, declared that the RKB had created a Volksbewegung and had documented to the world the “unshakeable colonial will of the German people.” The slide show ended on a belligerent note: “Now the weapons speak! The German sword has shown its sharpness in this mighty struggle. German soldiers stand from Hammerfest [Norway] to the Sahara, from the Bug [River] to the Bay of Biscay.” (emphasis in original) With the imminent demise of the “predator and war criminal England, a new order in Europe will begin and the Great German Colonial Empire will rise.\textsuperscript{31} In this bombastic statement, the RKB

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\textsuperscript{31} “Nunmehr sprechen die Waffen! Das deutsche Schwert hat seine Scharfe in diesem gewaltigen Ringen bewiesen. Von Hammerfest bis an die Sahara, vom Bug bis zur Biscaya steht der deutsche Soldat. Bald wird der letzte Hieb auf den Weltrauber und Kriegsverbrecher England darniedersausen und es wird eine neue Ordnung in Europa einziehen und damit auch das Gross Deutsche Kolonialreich erstehen. Das ist unsere Überzeugung, zu der wir durch unseren fanatischen Glauben an die Zukunft unseres Volkes und durch die Heldentaten unserer herrlichen Wehrmacht gekommen sind.” Reichskolonialbund,
connected the military struggle of the Second World War to the colonial past and to the present activities of the RKB elucidated in the preceding slide show. Now that German soldiers occupied Europe “from the Bug River to the Bay of Biscay,” and the RKB had mobilized the German population, England could not oppose the reestablishment of the German overseas empire in Africa.

After September 1939, colonialists adapted their argument for the need for a colonial future to the official characterization of the Second World War as an epic struggle for Lebensraum and the survival of the German people, which evidently gave colonialists renewed cachet. SS domestic intelligence reports, for example, indicate that the public was receptive to the RKB’s propaganda, especially to slide shows because of their supposed clarity (Anschaulichkeit). A May 1941 report stated that, “[t]he interest in colonial political questions holds (Dessau, Kiel, Braunschweig, Hannover). From Kiel come reports that ‘in the general population a great open-mindedness [Aufgeschlossenheit] to colonial questions can be observed.’”32 This interest stemmed,
according to the SD report, from the fact that these colonial lectures addressed themes relevant to current political issues (*aktuelles politisches Leben*).\(^{33}\)

RKB propaganda in the early years of the war built on the nationalistic patriotism stirred up by military victories. Positioning their demands as central to the goals of the war, colonialists claimed that the Second World War would validate their movement by achieving its demands. This viewpoint enabled them to overlook the inevitable sidetracking of their African goals in the face of the occupation of Eastern European territories. Targeting newly incorporated *Gauen*, colonialists linked overseas colonial expansion to the Third Reich’s annexation of territory in Europe. After the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, however, colonialists’ promotion of overseas territories as *Lebensraum* required a more ardent defense as the Nazi regime embarked on large-scale Germanization projects and created alternate colonies in Eastern Europe.

**Africa or the East?**

The tension between *Kolonialpolitik* and *Ostpolitik* that had plagued the colonialist movement since 1919 reached a new level of urgency with the outbreak of war in 1939 and with the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Before 1939, both the overseas colonies and Eastern European territories had functioned as spaces of desired future reclamation. When *Wehrmacht* troops crossed the Polish border on September 1, 1939, the East opened as a space for the actual fulfillment of these desires. For

\(^{33}\) "Diejenigen Vorträge, deren Themen im wesentlichen dem aktuellen politischen Leben entnommen sind, werden zumeist besonders gut besucht." Ibid.
colonialists in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, this newly acquired Lebensraum put them under greater pressure to justify their African focus in competition with Eastern Europe.

Colonialists responded to this pressure in diverse and contradictory ways. While some Nazi leaders such as Walther Darré presented African and Eastern European colonization in a zero-sum relationship (the East rather than Africa), colonialists had for years promoted a more flexible relationship between the two territories. For some, the colonies would provide raw materials to support Germans’ expansion in Europe, for others they would provide raw materials unattainable in Europe or would offer a unique Lebensraum that came with international prestige. The RKB promoted all of these views, hoping to encompass the broadest base of support.

The RKB now used this inconsistency to argue for their relevance in wartime. Connecting the RKB’s vision of Germans as colonizers implicitly (if not explicitly) to the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe exaggerated colonialists’ contemporary importance. Doing so could increase their membership as well as the security of their organizational existence. In several cases, colonialist leaders such as Epp promoted the ambiguity of the term colonialism by not restricting its meaning to overseas territories. Other institutions, such as the Rendsburg Colonial School for Women, easily made the transition from preparing women for a life in the overseas colonies to participating in Germanization projects in Eastern Europe.
For other colonialists, however, the flexibility of the RKB’s territorial focus had its limits. The colonialist press, for example, endeavored to clear up the semantic confusion surrounding the words “colony” and “colonialism” in order to preserve the uniqueness of the overseas territories. Erich Duems and others opposed any redirection of the RKB’s energies toward the war in the East. These views coexisted with other colonialists’ ambiguous support towards territorial focus, both supporting the RKB’s continued existence but also marginalizing the overseas colonies vis-à-vis Eastern Europe. The variety and often inconsistency of colonialists’ responses to the establishment of Eastern European Lebensraum walked the fine line between supporting the state-sponsored propaganda for this territory and continuing to assert the need for African colonies.

Forced to explain the fundamental differences between Africa and Eastern Europe, colonialists often had difficulty doing so. They had long insisted “colonial policy and Eastern policy are not mutually exclusive, but rather supplement each other.” In November 1941, a Dr. Hartleb spelled out his view of the exact nature of this complementary relationship in a lecture in Hamburg. Hartleb acknowledged that for the time being the overseas colonies took a secondary position to expansion in the East. While the East could provide living space and raw materials, he asserted, it could not provide all of the materials Germany needed: “The Eastern space [Ostraum] can never deliver bananas, sisal, coffee, cocoa, African exotic woods, etc. to us. For this reason we
need both supplementary spaces, the *Ostraum* and the colonies. As an RKB lecturer, Hartleb asserted that the colonies and their products were essential to Germany. Ironically, by describing bananas, cocoa, and exotic woods as indispensable to Germany, Hartleb (unintentionally) underlined the economic irrelevance of the colonies.

The polysemy of the term “colony” potentially both broadened and diluted the concept of colonialism. The term “colony” could refer to Germans living anywhere abroad, not just in the former German territories. A 1936 editorial in the non-colonialist journal *Deutscher Lebensraum* lamented this confusion with examples of how the same word could refer to describe Germans living in Addis Ababa or in Hollywood. A 1939 cartoon in *Kolonie und Heimat* played on the linguistic correlation between African colonies and garden plots (*Laubenkolonien*) in Germany, with a white German boy covered in dirt physically representing this association. Figure 37

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35 “Was ist eine Kolonie?” *Deutscher Lebensraum* 4, no. 10 (October 1936): 381-382. The term also referred at times to the sea. “Das Meer—unsere einzige Kolonie?” *Afrika-Nachrichten* 19, no. 2 (February 1938): 39. In another example, a woman reportedly told the RKB that her husband could not join the organization because he did not deliver briquettes to the local mining colony (*Bergarbeiterkolonie*). E-r., “Weitere Merkwürdigkeiten um das Wort ‘Kolonie,’” *Afrika-Nachrichten* 18, no. 5 (1 May 1937): 121.

weaken Germans’ colonial will by blurring their focus on the particularity of the former overseas territories.\(^\text{37}\)

**Figure 37:** “Oh boy, when I see you like that, I always think about our colonies.”

Other colonialists defined colonialism comparatively, although this comparison did little to restrict the concept of colonialism exclusively to the overseas territories. An April 1940 article in the *Gauverband* Oberdonau newsletter outlined three kinds of colonialism: “internal colonization” (*Innenkolonisation*), “borderland colonization” (*Grenzlandkolonisation*), and “external colonization” (*Außenkolonisation*). The proper use of the term “colonies” only referred to the last form, defined as “every acquisition of land outside of [one’s] own political system, which should serve to increase the political

\(^{37}\) "Was ist eine Kolonie?" *Deutscher Lebensraum* 4, no. 10 (October 1936): 381-382.
power of this state overseas.”³⁸ But the article failed to mention that the other categories were still defined as colonialism.

An article in the KPA’s Deutsche Kolonial-Dienst in July 1940 distinguished the word “colony” (in English) from “kolonie” (in German). “Colony,” linked to the British Empire, meant “acquisition of land for the purpose of exploitation.”³⁹ (emphasis in original) “Kolonie,” on the other hand, carried a deeper meaning: “…[it is] a matter of the heart. It aims to claim virgin soil, to bring unknown and undeveloped land under the plow and to make it one’s own Heimat.”⁴⁰ This article echoed colonial comparisons made in Germany throughout the 1930s that denigrated British imperialism as cruel and exploitative. It also repeated the supposed distinction between Entente “civilization” (Zivilisation) and German “culture” (Kultur) made in the First World War.⁴¹ In this article, the generative nature of German settlements in Africa embodied the fundamental difference between British and German colonization. But the article did not


⁴⁰ “Herzensangelegenheit. Es galt, Neuland zu erwerben, unbekanntes und unbebautes Land unter den Pflug zu bringen und zur eigenen Heimat zu machen.” Ibid.

unambiguously locate this “Kolonie” overseas, leaving room to find similar “virgin soil” in Europe.

Germans unaffiliated with the colonialist organizations explicitly invoked this applicability outside of Africa. *Deutsches Wollen*, the Nazi Foreign Organization (*Auslandsorganisation*) journal, published an article in September 1941 on the long history of Germans in the East from the *Ordensritter* and Hanseatic League in the 15th and 16th centuries, entitled “Germans colonized” (“Deutsche kolonisierten”). As Wendy Lower has shown, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck’s *About Fatherland and Colony* (*Um Vaterland und Kolonie*) and H. Schulz-Kampfhenkel’s *In the African Jungle as Trapper and Hunter* (*Im afrikanischen Dschungel als Tierfänger und Urwaldjäger*) were among the books read by regional German leaders in the Eastern occupied territories. These book selections would encourage them to “inhabit a world of imperialism within which they defined themselves, their expansionist aims, and their non-German ‘subjects.’”

Germans who were not members of the colonialist organizations cared far less about maintaining hair-splitting distinctions in terminology, compared with colonialists who emphasized these differences to preserve their unique mission. To minimize confusion, KPA *Stabsleiter* Richard Wenig issued an order to his employees in June 1942 restricting the expressions “colonies,” “colonial land,” “colonial space,” and “colonial” to

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overseas and tropical territories. Some Germans had apparently begun to use these terms to describe the occupied Eastern territories, and Wenig feared that this misapplication would lead to a confusion of concepts to the detriment of the RKB. Wenig’s attempt to restrict the meaning of colonialism reveals the success but also the superficiality of colonialists’ publicity work. While they promoted colonialism in German public culture, colonialists could not control its reception or its associations with other territories.

Colonialists had had enough success connecting the concept of colonialism to Africa, however, for some Nazi officials to reject colonial terms for their new Eastern territories and discussions of Africa in general. Hitler’s deputy, Martin Bormann, objected in November 1942 that the colonialist organizations’ propaganda diverted attention to Africa at an inopportune moment when the Allies had landed in North Africa. “We have no interest,” he declared, “in turning the eyes of the German Volk towards Africa for the time being.” Like Bormann, many National Socialists did not herald the African colonial experience as a model for German expansion. Instead it was of secondary, even tertiary importance. Germans could find everything that the colonies offered closer to home, as a September 1940 article in the SS journal Schwarze Korps asserted. In the Third Reich,

44 “Kolonien,” “Kolonialland,” “Kolonialraum,” and “kolonial” “KPA Stabsleiter Verfügung 15/42,” BAB NS 52/64, Bl. 42.

Rather than reject the idea of colonialism itself, the Schwarze Korps changed its location from Africa to Eastern Europe.

Even as the Schwarze Korps promoted Eastern Europe in lieu of overseas colonial regions, however, Nazi administrators of the Eastern territories resisted the direct discursive application of overseas colonial concepts onto the East. The Reich Ministry of the Occupied Eastern territories complained in November 1941 about Germans who thought “that the Ukrainian is to be treated like a Negro, and that the territory shall be exploited like a colony.” In April 1942, the Ministry banned flogging and whipping (a “colonial” form of punishment), and in February 1943, the Propaganda Ministry banned “expressions that Germany is establishing colonies in the East and will engage in colonial policy [Kolonialpolitik].” While the nature of the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe during the Second World War is outside the scope of this study, the multiple and often


47 Quoted in David Furber, “Near as far in the colonies: The Nazi occupation of Poland,” International History Review 26, no. 3 (2004), 571.

48 Quoted in ibid.
contradictory views on incorporating concepts of overseas colonialism into this occupation indicate that the idea of direct continuity between the two periods is too simplistic.  

On several occasions, Epp encouraged the vagueness of the term colonialism and the inconsistencies of its usage in the Third Reich. The malleability of this approach would keep colonialism a topic of discussion, even as the importance of the overseas territories ebbed. In a letter to Kurt Weigelt, head of the Group for German Colonial Economic Enterprises (Gruppe deutscher kolonialwirtschaftlicher Unternehmungen), in November 1941, Epp thanked Weigelt for relocating deported German colonial farmers to the southern part of the occupied Eastern European territories. A stopgap for the duration of the war, Epp explained that this reassignment would not alienate these settlers from their colonial tasks. Rather it would “give them the opportunity to collect further experiences and thereby to increase their capabilities, as, for the first time since the beginning of the war, they can be placed into territories which resemble their own areas of work [Arbeitsgebieten].” While primarily a social measure to support colonists


deported back to Germany, Epp’s comparisons between these farmers’ work overseas and in the newly occupied Eastern territories opened the door to broader comparisons.

Epp also framed the overseas colonial past and colonialist propaganda as essential to the Nazis’ Weltanschauung. Speaking at the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Colonial Institute in Hamburg in November 1943,—after the dissolution of the colonialist organizations—Epp addressed the capacious concept of colonialism. Concern with “colonial things” had long since “burst through a narrow geographical scope and concept and [now] includes the giant territories of the tropics and the subtropics.”

Parallel with the expansive use of this terminology, Epp remarked, the politics of the day centered on “the direction and development of entire continents to territories of German expansion [Großräumen].” While still hoping to maintain the “old” overseas definition of colonialism, Epp asserted that “in this world-wide educational work the main emphasis should be laid on [the fact] that all thinking on foreign affairs can only be world-political [ein weltpolitisches Denken].” Out of the previously narrowly defined overseas colonies, Epp extrapolated a definition of colonialism and a German colonizing character to support global expansion. This definition both gave colonialists renewed importance in

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52 “die Richtung und Ausprägung von ganzen Erdteilen zu Großräumen.” Ibid.

53 “dass auf diese weltweite Erziehungsarbeit das Hauptgewicht zu legen ist, dass alles aussenpolitische Denken nur ein weltpolitisches Denken sein kann.” Ibid.
wartime Nazi Germany and aligned neatly with the Nazi worldview of epic, continent-wide struggle.

As these examples demonstrate, colonialist discourse on the relationship between *Kolonialpolitik* and *Ostpolitik* was at times vague to the point of inconsistency. This ambivalence did not begin in the Third Reich, as the original statement of this relationship used before 1933 (“they are not mutually exclusive, but rather supplement each other”) was itself vague. Woodruff Smith has argued that the Nazis’ great innovation in terms of imperialism was their ability to combine the ideologies of *Weltpolitik* (aligned with traditional overseas colonialism) and *Lebensraum* (aligned with “*Blut und Boden*”). They solved the conflict between the two synchronically, with the fulfillment of aims of *Weltpolitik* following those of *Lebensraum*. The Nazis’ ability to combine these ideologies resulted in part from the flexibility built into colonialist discourse on Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, the RKB remained organizationally true to its African mission. Between 1939 and 1943, colonialists published dozens of pamphlets, books, and photograph albums on the colonies, despite increasing paper shortages. The RKB also

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refused to redirect its focus, as seen in the case of Hans Bender, special representative in the RKB. In his proposal for the “Colonizing Paperback [Kolonisatorisches Taschenbuch] 1943/44,” Bender suggested that the RKB concentrate fully on the war effort in the East. Bender had served in German-occupied Ukraine during the First World War, another precedent for German eastward expansion. As trade officer to Army Group Kiev, Bender had been responsible for feeding the occupation forces and delivering the remaining food and raw materials to Reich Economic Agencies (Reichswirtschaftsstellen) in Germany. His extensive travels in Ukraine persuaded him of the need for colonizing an expanded German Lebensraum. This terminology came from his experience in the First World War as he outlined it in a letter to Duems, rather than from familiarity with the overseas colonies. Bender proposed a complete redirection of the RKB, from a “Reichs-Kolonial-Bund” (Reich Colonial League) to a Reichs-Kolonisations-Bund,” (Reich Colonization League) with the latter term emphasizing a process rather than a location. (emphasis in original)

Erich Duems, head of the RKB publishing house, dismissed Bender’s proposal as “a betrayal of our idea” and “personally reject[ed] every one-sided occupation with

56 Letter from Hans Bender to Erich Duems, January 14, 1943, BAB NS 18/152, Bl. 20.
Ostpolitik as detrimental to our colonial duty.” Reflecting this view, in May of 1941, Duems had published a map in Kolonie und Heimat showing the African continent as a dynamic zone of German (and Italian) involvement and ignoring Eastern Europe. Figure 38 This map, reflecting “Africa from Europe’s view,” emphasized the nearness of the African continent through its inverted display, and its contemporary importance by demarcating the “direction and distance of militarily decisive focal points.” Even if Duems had responded differently, the Nazi Party would not have welcomed a re-direction of the RKB’s efforts. When KPA Stabsleiter Richard Wenig asked Martin Bormann in January 1942 whether the RKB should focus its press and propaganda on the East, Bormann declined this offer, stating that promotion of the East (Ostwerbung) was a Party matter.59


59 “Vermerk für Pg. Thiessler, Reichskolonialbund und Ostpolitik,” 10 February 1942, BAB NS 18/624, Bl. 56.
Figure 38: “Africa from Europe’s View”
After 1939, the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe called the supposedly supplementary nature of these Eastern territories and overseas colonies into question. The reality of the Nazi East seemed to have eliminated the need for the colonies—except to the colonialists. They could have redirected their propaganda to Eastern Europe, or ceased activity altogether, now that the Third Reich’s need for Lebensraum and raw materials had been fulfilled in Europe. But, having insisted on the necessity of reclaiming African colonies for Germany since 1919, colonialists could not reject their raison d’être. This quandary resulted in the coexistence of vague statements on the “world-political” value of colonialism and anxieties about conceptual clarity, as well as an adamant focus on Africa as colonialists strove to justify their continued activity.

**Kolomädel in the East: The Rendsburg Colonial School for Women**

One colonialist organization that did make the transition from Africa to Eastern Europe was the Rendsburg Colonial School for Women. Their pragmatic resilience combined with the role of gender ensured that the school remained open after all other colonialist organizations had closed until April 1945. The men’s colonial school in Witzenhausen, in contrast, came to a complete stop during the war as students and teachers were drafted into military service.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ The school reopened after 1945 and continues to exist till today as the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (affiliated with the University of Kassel). Emphasizing its technical education, the school rebranded itself after the war and now attracts numerous students from around the world. [http://www.ditsl.org](http://www.ditsl.org).
When describing the ideal German colonizer, colonialist organizations in the Third Reich presented this identity as implicitly masculine, but also as open to women. They emphasized the colonial Germans’ physical and cultural vitality, capability, and self-reliance—characteristics they attributed to colonial women. The broad applicability of these traits led to the creation of a colonialist New Woman built on the supposed benefits of expansionism for these women. The similarities in colonialist and Nazi representations of female gender roles attest to the ubiquity of these depictions in mid-twentieth-century German nationalist discourse. These representations of women encouraged both emancipation and the traditional strictures of family and motherhood.61 On the one hand, the promise of independent action strengthened the colonialist nation-building project overseas and the Nazi nation-building project domestically by encouraging women’s participation. On the other hand, the maintenance of traditional family roles legitimated these projects. Expansionism elided potential tensions between women’s emancipation and their traditional roles. The geographic distance between the colonies and Germany allowed for an exaggerated version of the German character overseas that colonialists hoped to foster in the metropole. Similarly, in their transition to the East, graduates of the Rendsburg Colonial School joined the numerous women who

found expanded fields of opportunity in “wild” Nazi-occupied Eastern European territories during the Second World War.  

The Rendsburg Colonial School for Women (Kolonialfrauenschule Rendsburg, hereafter KFR) was the third such school established in Germany by the Women’s League of the DKG. Located on the Nord-Ostsee Canal near Kiel in Schleswig-Holstein, the school looked outward, as a “gateway to the world.” The course of study would change slightly over time, but retained its basic two-semester foundation of practical and theoretical lessons in Rendsburg, a third semester of nursing training in Hamburg or Berlin, and a “trial” semester with a German family in the eastern German border regions before sending the graduates overseas. During their two semesters in Rendsburg, KFR students studied a wide range of practical and theoretical subjects meant to prepare them for their roles as “helpers and assistants” among German settler communities. Practical subjects included, among others, housekeeping, tailoring, carpentry, blacksmithing, child care, beekeeping, gardening, agriculture, shooting, and auto repair. Theoretical courses included racial studies, nutrition, cattle breeding, dairy

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63 The Women’s League of the DKG opened the first school alongside the men’s Colonial School in Witzenhausen (1908-1910), followed by a second school in Bad Weilbach, near Wiesbaden (1911-1914).

farming, tropical hygiene and illnesses, bookkeeping, shorthand, typing, and foreign languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Kisahela, and Otjiherero). 65

Given the wide range of courses offered, students at the school could not possibly master all of these subjects within one year. The June 1940 school prospectus addressed the question of the students’ mastery, stating that

all sorts of crafts will be undertaken, not to make our girls into master craftsmen—or into dabbles (Pfuschen)—we would much rather that they, on their own, overcome the traditional prejudice that girls are not fit for these things, and that they win the confidence to help themselves in case of emergencies. 66

This was the essence of the Kolomadel (“colonial girl”) imagined by the school’s director Karl Körner, a capable and independent girl, equipped with will and determination as much as skill, and able to resourcefully handle every unexpected situation.

The KFR curriculum proved flexible in large part because the school educated women for their domestic duties. Unlike the Witzenhausen Colonial School for men, which taught tropical agricultural techniques and science only applicable in overseas territories, the KFR emphasized skills its students would need to care for German settlers. The near absence of education about colonial topics in the school’s curriculum (beyond learning the basics of two African languages) made the students’ training applicable to

65 “Mitteilungsblätter, March 1941,” Koloniale Frauenschule Rendsburg, DVII 942 Lose Blätter, Stadtarchiv Rendsburg, Rendsburg, Germany.

more locations than the overseas colonies following their graduation. An education that did not emphasize German-African relations could prove just as applicable to work on a farm in Germany or in a village in the European borderlands as in Southwest Africa. 67

The KFR prepared women and girls to maintain Germanness within a German community imagined as hermetically sealed off from the local population. 68

Of the 888 students who finished their Rendsburg year with a certificate, only 151 went overseas between 1926 and 1940. 69 After the war began in 1939, a vast new terrain of colonization opened in the East, and the KFR quickly incorporated this new arena into its mission. During the war, and especially after June 1941, the KFR’s promotional materials began to describe the East as a colonial territory. After 1940, Körner introduced “Questions of the East” (Ostfragen) to the curriculum, and added Russian language

67 As a point of comparison, the Dutch Colonial School for Women (1921-1932) in the Hague consisted of a three-month course that emphasized servant relations and included lectures on Indonesian culture such as “Balinese dance.” Ann Laura Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 130.

68 This inward focus on the German community in the colonies rather than German-native relations reflected a longer tradition within the Women’s League of the German Colonial Society. Analyzing the earlier colonial schools and articles from the colonial journal Kolonie und Heimat, Katharina Walgenbach concludes, “The target of the cultural colonization for the Women’s League was, interestingly, less the colonized than the German colonizers themselves. To put it bluntly, the Women’s League aimed at civilizing [die Zivilisierung] of the ‘white race’ in the colonies.” Katharina Walgenbach, “Emanzipation als koloniale Fiktion: Zur sozialen Position weiße Frauen in den deutschen Kolonien,” L’Homme 16, no. 2 (2005): 61.

69 Between 1941 and 1945, no graduates are recorded as going overseas, though an asterisk on the register for 1942/1943 notes that “countless numbers of graduates went to the East.” Koloniale Frauenschule Rendsburg, Abt. 811, Nr. 57, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig, Germany.
instruction in 1943.\textsuperscript{70} The January 1943 prospectus stated that graduates of the school were favored for work overseas “and in territories with similar duties (for example, the East), and especially in the colonies.”\textsuperscript{71} In May 1944, the school’s prospectus boasted that KFR graduates were working overseas and in the East, where they served as “custodians [of the Germanness of villagers], leaders or co-workers in the ‘Mother and Child’ aid agencies, as village custodians, [as workers on] the land administered by the SS, etc.”\textsuperscript{72} In Eastern Europe, KFR graduates joined relocated German women who had been deported from the former German colonies by the British and who, like the farmers described by Epp, supposedly found the work similar to their former African homes.\textsuperscript{73} A Red Cross nurse formerly active in German East Africa, for example, described the frenzied pace of activity in the East, relating these Germanization efforts to her experience in the colonies: “Everywhere a piece of the Heimat is created with untiring energy and great love. This is

\textsuperscript{70} Siegle, “Trägerinnen Echten Deutschtums”: Die Koloniale Frauenschule, Rendsburg, 107.

\textsuperscript{71} “Für die Arbeit in Ubersee und in Gebieten mit ähnlichen Aufgaben (z.B. im Osten) und besonders in den Kolonien, werden tüchtige Absolventinnen der Schule bevorzugt eingesetzt.” “Mitteilungsblätter, January 1943.” Koloniale Frauenschule Rendsburg, DVII 942 Lose Blätter, Stadtarchiv Rendsburg, Rendsburg, Germany.

\textsuperscript{72} “Im Osten sind die Absolventinnen der Schule vielseitig tätig als Siedlungsbetreuerinnen, Leiterinnen oder Mitarbeiterinnen der Hilfsstellen ‘Mutter und Kind,’ als Dorfbetreuerinnen, als ‘deutsche Landfrauen’ auf den von der SS verwalteten Staatsgütern usw.” “Mitteilungsblätter, May 1944,” Koloniale Frauenschule Rendsburg, Abt. 811, Nr. 41, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig, Germany.

\textsuperscript{73} Agnes von Boemcken, “Kriegseinsatz der Kolonialfrauen,” Die Frau und die Kolonien no. 10-12 (1942): 78-80. Von Boemcken quotes a Frau Wanda living in the Warthegau: “‘Die Tätigkeit hier hat doch große Ähnlichkeit mit Afrika,’ schreibt sie einmal, ‘man muss hier genau so wie dort hinter den Eingeborenen her sein, man muss immer dahinterhersitzen, so soll es sein und nicht der alte Schlendrian!....’”
also reminiscent of Africa.”\textsuperscript{74} The KFR graduates’ work in the occupied Eastern territories earned the school Heinrich Himmler’s patronage and he rewarded the students at the school in May 1944 with an Easter present of 200 bars of chocolate and 100 pounds of fudge.\textsuperscript{75}

By June 1944, the KFR had completely integrated the Eastern territories into its traditional overseas colonial mission. The one-page typed prospectus, reduced from the eight-page printed document of the pre-war years, contained information on the school’s board of directors and the mission of the school, stating,

Until the war, the only mission was to give German farmers and plantation wives overseas competent helpers. During the war, preparation for the East came to the forefront. Both assignments are closely related, they are not mutually exclusive.”\textsuperscript{76} (emphasis added)

The KFR had seamlessly made the transition from overseas colonialism to furthering the Nazis’ racialized war of European conquest. That neither Körner nor the school’s promotional material remarked on this transition beyond incorporating these new duties into the school’s mission indicates their skillfully pragmatic response to altered political and national circumstances rather than an ideological change. Like the RKB, the KFR


\textsuperscript{75} BAB R 1501/127216, Bl. 121-122.

\textsuperscript{76} “Bis zum Kriege war unsere alleinige Aufgabe, deutschen Farmer- und Pflanzerfrauen in Übersee tüchtige Helferinnen zu geben. Während des Krieges ist die Vorbereitung für den Osten in den Vordergrund gerückt. Beide Aufgaben sind eng verwandt, sie schliessen sich nicht aus.” “Mitteilungsblätter, June 1944,” Koloniale Frauenschule Rendsburg, Abt. 811, Nr. 57, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig, Germany.
capitalized on the demands of the Nazi regime. As a school, the KFR had to provide placement for its graduates and so completely redirected its territorial focus to continue to function.

The KFR remained open through its final semester in April 1945 and graduated a final class of Kolomädeln who went neither to the former colonies nor the Eastern territories. The KFR existed until 1945 in a marginal position. It affiliated with the RKB, but outlasted all other colonial agitation. While supporting the regime’s Eastern mission, it never became a Party school. In its marginal position as a school for women and therefore supposedly non-political, the KFR remained viable for almost twenty years.

The image of these women as Kolomädeln, furthermore, transcended political allegiances. Nazis and colonialists as well as Germans who did not belong to these groups supported the characteristics embodied in the Kolomädel. The Kolomädel as a symbol drew on both traditional gender roles and emphasis on domesticity and a new activist role for women in the racialized Volksgemeinschaft. This representation of an idealized colonial girl contained enough fluidity to allow for its public alignment with both colonialist and Nazi propaganda and territorial goals.

As seen in the example of the KFR, colonialist rhetoric highlighted the history of German settlement in Africa, but—by arguing for the right to colonize on an ethnic level—it also applied to German settlement elsewhere. If Germans could maintain their Germanness in Africa, then why not in Eastern Europe? Colonialists walked a fine line between advocating Kolonialpolitik without rejecting Ostpolitik. This position made
outright dissent difficult when one goal seemed immediately at hand and the other put off to a later point in time. The compromise in the supposedly symbiotic nature of Kolonialpolitik and Ostpolitik (“…they supplement each other”) aided some colonialists’ involvement in the Eastern territories. The KFR students proved the ultimate example of this. The East was not colonial Africa. But it required the same characteristics (efficiency, independence, and proactivity [zupackend sein]) that the school in Rendsburg taught for life in Africa, so the KFR could describe the two territories as “closely related” rather than “mutually exclusive.”

Colonial propagandists attempted to maintain the distinctiveness of overseas colonialism during the Second World War. After six years of asserting the importance of overseas colonialism to German character, however, colonialists could not now limit the realization of this identity to Africa. The ambiguity that remained in this propaganda both allowed colonialists to continue their activities until 1943, but also helped to marginalize the overseas territories as the borders of the Third Reich expanded in Europe.

The End of the Colonialist Movement: Ideological or Logistical Defeat?

As the war continued into its second year in 1941, colonialists increasingly came under pressure from officials in the Propaganda Ministry and the Reich Chancellery to restrict their activities. Convinced of the relevance of colonialism to the war effort and adamant about maintaining their organizational existence, colonialists maneuvered around the mounting restrictions on their activities between 1941 and 1943. Epp led the defense in his meetings and correspondence with Nazi leaders such as Joseph Goebbels
and Walter Tießler and others in the Reich Chancellery. Stubbornly refusing to cease their agitation, colonialists remained active until early 1943.

The first restrictions, imposed in January 1941, limited the RKB press and lectures. Richard Peter, the RKB’s Reich-level office manager (Bundesgeschäftsführer), sent a memo on January 22, 1941 to the RKB Gauverbände addressing confusion that had resulted from a Propaganda Ministry order. Goebbels had told the regional propaganda leaders and Gau heads that public discussions about future colonial policy (such as racial, settlement, and native policy) should cease for the time being. As a result of this directive, some regional propaganda leaders had banned all colonial lectures. Peter reassured the RKB’s regional leaders that the national office intended to seek clarification on the matter from the Propaganda Ministry.

A January 28, 1941 internal memo in the Reich Propaganda Office (Reichspropagandaleitung) of the NSDAP reported that RKB representatives had sought a relaxation of the ban. Because the RKB’s publicity materials aligned with Nazi propaganda directives, no conflict existed between colonialist propaganda and the aims of

77 “…eine öffentliche Auseinandersetzung über alle Fragen zukünftiger Kolonialpolitik, wie z.B. der kolonialen Rassen- und Siedlungspolitik, der Eingeboren-Politik usw. zurzeit zu unterbleiben hat.” Rundschreiben Nr. 11/41, January 22, 1941 from Richard Peter, Bundesgeschäftsführer, Reichskolonialbund, BAB R 1001/7537, Bl. 234.

78 The Reich Propaganda Office (founded in 1926) was the Nazi Party’s propaganda office, while the Propaganda Ministry served the propaganda needs of the state. The Reich Propaganda Office was formally independent from the Propaganda Ministry.
the Reich Propaganda Office. “It is understandable,” the memo continued in response, “that the circles around the Colonial Policy Office and the Reich Colonial League will put in every effort to at least partially countermand the ban, which is exceedingly disagreeable to them.”

The Reich Propaganda Office, however, rejected the colonialists’ claim that this ban would halt their press. This press, the Propaganda Office asserted, consisted for the most part of descriptions of previous colonial work and hunting adventures, and so would not be affected by the ban on discussions of future colonialism. Because the colonialist organizations served no present or future purpose from the Reich Propaganda Office’s perspective, their lectures would hardly be missed.

Trying another tactic, Epp, in his capacity as head of the KPA, wrote to the Reich Propaganda Office on January 28, 1941 questioning their authority to ban colonial lectures. In May 1934, Rudolf Hess had given the KPA the authority to provide “the guidelines and directions for all questions of colonial politics and colonial management within the Party and its press,” Epp asserted. The KPA alone—and not the Reich Propaganda Office—could decide the appropriateness of colonial propaganda.

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80 “Es ist verständlich, dass die Kreise um das Kolonialpolitisches Amt und den Reichskolonialbund alles daran setzen, um das ihnen äusserst lästige Verbot wenigstens teilweise wieder aufzuheben.” Ibid., 32.

explained that he found a ban on discussions of future German colonial policy justifiable, but implied that RKB propaganda activities that focused on the heroic colonial past should be allowed to continue. Epp’s letter to the Reich Propaganda Office seems to have had an effect, as Peter circulated a memo on February 20, 1941 to clarify questions raised by the January 22 memo. In this new formulation from the Propaganda Ministry, the ban applied only to discussions of future colonial policy, mass settlement, and racial issues, but not to “reports of a purely descriptive nature, hunting stories, depictions of former colonial work, [and] accounts of the current conditions.”

Epp and Peter may have considered this concession a success for the colonialist movement. But, by restricting their publicity to descriptions of the colonial past and stories about big game hunting, this propaganda restriction decreased the relevance of the overseas territories to the present needs of the Third Reich.

Within the Reich Chancellery, Martin Bormann and Walter Tießler, Reich Chancellery liaison to the Propaganda Ministry, continued to express their frustration at the RKB’s obstinate desire to continue its work. In contrast to Epp’s strident declarations


82 “…bezieht sich nicht auf Berichte rein beschreibender Art, Jagdgeschichtchen, Schilderungen früherer kolonialer Arbeit, Aufzeichnungen über jetzt bestehende Verhältnisse usw. Jedoch ist darauf zu achten, dass in diesen Schilderungen nicht auf die zukünftige deutsche Kolonialpolitik Bezug genommen wird, insbesondere sollen die Fragen der Massensiedlung, des Rassenproblems und des Einsatzes der Missionen nicht erörtert werden.” Rundschreiben Nr. 20/41, February 20, 1941 from Richard Peter, Bundesgeschäftsführer, Reichskolonialbund, BAB R 1001/7537, Bl. 235.
in the fall of 1939 about colonialists’ vital contributions to the war effort, Bormann and Tießler saw colonialist propaganda as a dangerous distraction from the more urgent needs of the German war effort on the Eastern Front. In October 1942, Tießler complained to the head of the Reich Propaganda Office that “the Reich Colonial League [had] changed its position [from propaganda] to the arena of training [Schulung]” in order to evade the ban on colonialist propaganda. Tießler objected to these “so-called training courses, that is, lecture series,” especially those directed towards civil servants. Tießler furthermore continued that colonial propaganda had become superfluous because “1. The interest of the German people must be completely concentrated on the East” and “2. The people will only become uncertain, when we now open up new big goals for the future at the same time as the goal of the elimination of Bolshevism.”

In a memo (Vorlage) to Martin Bormann, head of the Reich Chancellery, in November 1942, Tießler reported, “I believe that we can be happy that in the last two years no larger-style colonial propaganda has been carried out and that we must set this topic completely aside for the coming time.” Bormann expressed his own disdain for

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83 “…verlegte sich der Reichskolonialbund auf das Schulungsgebiete.” Letter from Walter Tießler to Reichspropagandaleiter, October 31, 1942, BAB NS 18/153, Bl. 68-70.

84 “1. das Interesse des deutschen Volkes vollkommen auf den Osten konzentriert werden müsste” and “2. das Volk nur unsicher würde, wenn wir ihm zu dem Ziel der Beseitigung des Bolschewismus jetzt gleichzeitig weitere grosse Ziele für die Zukunft aufreissen würden.” Ibid.

the RKB in a letter to Epp in November 1942. While Party offices instructed the German population on the necessities of the war, Bormann complained, “the Reich Colonial League occupies itself with such remote goals!” Employing German men eligible for military service in the offices of the RKB was unconscionable. “First of all, the victory must be won,” Bormann stated, urging Epp to “suspend all colonial propaganda as currently inopportune and to release the people so employed for acute war-related tasks.”

Bormann would later declare in a letter to Hans Heinrich Lammers in the Reich Chancellery that “[e]very colonial activity is today completely out of date [inaktuell]!”

For Bormann and Tießler, Kolonialpolitik and Ostpolitik were no longer supplementary but—in contrast to colonialists’ assertions—in fact mutually exclusive.

By December 1942, Tießler’s and Bormann’s order for continued silence from the colonialists moved a step closer to implementation. The RKB circulated a memo to regional leaders with the order that RKB events of all kinds could no longer be reported


in the press. Not even the name of the organization could appear in the press.\footnote{\textquotedblleft Ebenso soll darauf geachtet werden, der Name des Reichskolonialbundes auch nicht in anderem Zusammenhang in der Press erscheint.	extquotedblright\ “Rundschreiben Nr. 62/42,” December 15, 1942, NS 18/533, Bl. 12.} The memo’s author considered this ban a temporary measure, but the completeness of this effort to totally excise the RKB from the German press marks the effective end of the movement in the public sphere. By the end of 1942, the restrictions on the propaganda work of the RKB had laid the groundwork for the complete cessation of the RKB and the KPA’s activities.

A month later, Martin Bormann ordered Epp to shut down the colonialist organizations. In early 1943, Nazi Germany faced a desperate military situation: Germany had declared war on the United States, the Allies had landed in North Africa, and the 	extit{Wehrmacht} was trapped in Stalingrad. Thirteen days earlier, Bormann informed Epp,

the 	extit{Führer} [had] mobilized the 	extit{Heimat} and thereby ordered the cessation of all nonessential activities. In the realm of the Party, I have the mandate on behalf of the 	extit{Führer} to shut down any services whose work can be viewed as not absolutely essential to the war effort.\footnote{\textquotedblleft Am 13.1.1943 hat der Führer die Mobilisierung der Heimat und damit die Einstellung jeder kriegsunwichtigen Tätigkeit befohlen. Im Bereich der Partei habe ich im Auftrage des Führers jede Dienststellen stillzulegen, deren Arbeit als nicht umbedingt kriegswichtig angesehen werden kann.	extquotedblright\ Reproduced in Klaus Hildebrand, 	extit{Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP u. koloniale Frage 1919-1945} (Munich: W. Fink, 1969), 941.}

Bormann gave the RKB and the KPA until February 15, 1943 to completely cease their activities after six decades of activism. “Europe is the center of our warfare, Africa on the
other hand the periphery,” declared Goebbels in May 1943. Goebbels conceded. But, “[f]or the rest of the war, [the Axis Powers] will have to go without [Africa]. We do not thereby lose any position that we must keep in hand in order to win the war.”

The end of the colonialist movement also signaled the beginning of the end of the Nazi war effort and of the Third Reich. Bormann’s letter to Epp came just days before the German army surrendered at Stalingrad. On February 18, Joseph Goebbels delivered his Berlin Sportpalast speech declaring total war and imposing “a Spartan way of life on everybody.” In addition to the colonialists, numerous other organizations and so-called “luxury” or non-war-essential establishments, such as shops and cafes, were closed in a massive Stillegung (suspension) in support of the total war effort in early 1943. Goebbels’s statement and Bormann’s letter to Epp indicate an ideological victory of Ostpolitik over Kolonialpolitik. The realities of the impending defeat had motivated the Nazi regime to enact this Stillegung, but colonialists’ inclusion in this shutdown

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91 “Selbstverständlich ist der schwarze Erdteil für die nationale Zukunft der Achsenvölker von lebensnotwendigem Wert. Für die weitere Fortsetzung des Krieges ist er für sie zu entbehren. Wir verlieren dadurch keine Position, die wir in der Hand behalten müssen, um den Krieg zu gewinnen.” Ibid.


93 Ibid., 426.
labeled them as non-essential. Many leading colonialists at the time, however, read this sequence of events not as a fundamental ideological rejection of their colonial demands, but merely as a logistical set-back which they shared with other organizations and the German nation as a whole. Still hoping for a victorious end to the war which would resurrect their organizations, colonialist leaders told themselves that their Stilllegung in 1943 was a temporary measure.

The septuagenarian Epp, unlike Heinrich Schnee, could not easily sever his ties to the Nazi Party when Nazi officials began to move against the colonialist organizations. His response to the Stilllegung indicates how convinced the RKB and KPA leadership were of their own assertions of their centrality to the Third Reich. In June 1942, Goebbels commented in his diary that Epp “rides his hobby-horse of the colonial question incessantly further, without regard for the passage of time and the present war aims.”

By November 1942, Goebbels expressed his frustration at Epp’s truculence. Epp remained an energetic advocate for colonialism despite his advanced age, Goebbels noted. “However,” Goebbels regretted,

I cannot satisfy his request to turn the colonial propaganda…once again to the African territories. That would be the last straw. We do not want to awaken wishes and needs, for which the possibility of fulfillment is not yet in sight.


95 “Ich bespreche mittags mit Epp die Frage der Kolonialpropaganda. Epp ist trotz seines hohen Alters immer noch ein kluger und beweglicher Kopf...Allerdings kann ich ihm seinen Wunsch nicht erfüllen, die Kolonialpropaganda bezüglich des afrikanischen Gebiets im deutschen Volke erneut anzudrehen. Das hätte
In his early seventies, Epp had devoted his entire life to Germany’s overseas empire and could not come to terms with the end of colonialists’ activity.

Epp persisted even beyond the Stilllegung in January 1943. In a letter to Lammers in the Reich Chancellery on March 8, 1943, Epp outlined how he thought colonialists should continue their work after the movement’s Stilllegung. The library and the map collection should remain intact and the head of Abteilungen II (Colonial Education and Science) and III (Organization and Personnel) should continue to work with Epp unofficially. According to Epp, it was precisely because of the state of the war that the colonial work should continue:

The present war is a colonial war in still greater measure than the previous World War and the wars of the 18th and 19th century; that is, a struggle between the great peoples for additional space. Therefore, I regard it as necessary that the further development of the so-called “colonial questions” in the world be pursued in the [KPA] departments.96

Epp continued to connect the success of Germany’s future and the war in the East to the colonial movement, thereby asserting the integration of the “colonial question” into the pressing issues of the day.

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96 “Der jetzige Krieg ist in noch größerem Maße als der vorhergehende Weltkrieg und die Kriege des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts ein Kolonialkrieg, d.h. ein Kampf der großen Völker um zusätzlichen Raum. Ich halte es deshalb für notwendig, dass auch weiterhin die Fortentwicklung der sogenannten ‘kolonialen Fragen’ in der Welt in der Dienststelle verfolgt wird.” Letter from Epp to Lammers in Reichskanzlei, 8 March 1943, BAB R 43/3598, Bl. 27.
Conclusion

Reporting to its members in April 1943, the RKB Gauverband Hamburg depicted its Stillegung as a wartime necessity. “[T]oday,” the Gauverband newsletter informed its readers, “we must all give up on a gladly fulfilled duty.” But,

a look back on the work accomplished in the last years gives us the satisfaction that it was crowned with success, and we are thereby absolutely assured that this work has never been in vain, but rather will first be visible and tangible to even greater circles of our Volksgenossen after the final victory [Endsieg] is won.97

Like Epp, the Hamburg RKB rejected the finality of the Stillegung, choosing to believe instead that their colonialist agitation would hibernate until the war was won. Even more ostentatiously, they asserted that the Endsieg would itself testify to their work and convert more Germans to their cause. The end of the RKB as an institution, however, did not mean the end of colonial desires and colonial thinking in Hamburg:

Bear in mind the words of Friedrich Schiller: “What one does not surrender, one has not lost,” we want therefore to keep unswervingly loyal to the colonial idea and now put all our strengths where they are most urgently needed and dictated by a higher need, until the final victory.98

A month before, in March 1943, this Schiller quotation had appeared in the weekly morale-boosting posters produced by the Nazi Party’s Reich Propaganda Office.99 Even


98 “Eingedenk der Worte Friedrich Schillers: ‘Was man nicht aufgibt, hat man nicht verloren,’ wollen wir deshalb dem kolonialen Gedanken unentwegt die Treue halten und jetzt alle unsere Kräfte dort einsetzen, wo sie von höheren Notwendigkeiten diktiert, bis zum endgültigen Siege am dringendsten erforderlich sind.” Ibid.
as they mourned the end of their colonialist activism, the RKB Gauverband Hamburg did so with the language used by the regime to encourage sacrifice. The Gauverband tied its hopes for a future return to their activity and to the colonies on a final military victory for Nazi Germany.

After 1939, Nazi Germany’s occupation of Europe inflated colonialists’ expectations of the imminent reposssession of the colonies as well as of their own centrality to the war effort. Since 1919, and especially after 1933, the colonialist organizations had insisted on the necessity of overseas colonies for Germany to regain its world power status. As the Wehrmacht conquered Europe, colonialists felt that their time had also come. The RKB’s propaganda increased, especially in newly incorporated Gauen. Unwilling to reject Ostpolitik in favor of Kolonialpolitik—especially as Nazi Germany occupied Eastern Europe—colonialists attempted to restrict definitions of colonialism for their cause.

Having based their organizational existence on promoting overseas colonialism and utilizing this promotion to give their colonial experience value in the Third Reich, colonialists did not voluntarily redirect their territorial focus or end their activism. Psychologically cushioning them from the reality of their increasingly marginal status, colonialists’ illusions of self-importance survived even the Stilllegung in 1943, as seen in

the *Gauverband* Hamburg article. These delusions were not only self-serving. By agitating for overseas colonialism in the name of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, colonialists lent their support to the Nazi regime.

This mutually beneficial relationship functioned during the interwar years, when the Nazi regime could no longer afford to tolerate the RKB’s colonialist agitation. Under the realities of war, this tolerant relationship proved no longer viable. When colonialist agitation began to interfere with the ideological and pragmatic goals of the war on the home front, the Nazi regime shut down the colonialist movement. While the exigencies of reality had led to their organizational end, ardent colonialists continued to believe in the ideological value of their narrative of overseas colonialism. Only the Third Reich’s total defeat and unconditional surrender to the Allies ended the dream of a German overseas empire.
Epilogue: Echoes of Colonialism

On May 8, 1945, the Allied Powers declared victory in Europe over Nazi Germany. What legacy did overseas colonialism and the colonialist movement leave in Germany after 1945? The German defeat in the First World War in 1918 had sparked a resurgence of colonialist propaganda, validated through its association with the general rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. The end of the war in 1945, however, represented a more total defeat than that in 1918, an unconditional surrender following years of bombing experienced on the home front and deprivation beginning in 1943 and continuing into the postwar years. The space that had existed after 1919 for a public critique of the victorious forces (exemplified after the First World War by the ongoing criticism of the Treaty of Versailles) narrowed in the immediate years after the Second World War. The self-pity that emerged in German public culture after 1945 focused in large part on Germans’ victimization by the Nazi regime (or alternately by the Soviets in the case of women and prisoners-of-war\(^1\)).

For the remnants of the colonialist movement, the defeat brought a drastic change in their fortunes. Serving as Reich Governor of Bavaria from 1933 to 1945 in addition to his leadership roles in the colonialist movement, Franz Ritter von Epp was in communication with the leaders of Freiheitsaktion Bayern, a Bavarian resistance group, in the spring of 1945. Ultimately, Epp did not negotiate the state’s surrender to the Allies.

Because of his correspondence with *Freiheitsaktion Bayern*, however, Bavarian Gauleiter Paul Giesler arrested Epp and his adjunct in April 1945. The Gestapo immediately shot Epp’s adjunct and Epp was relocated from Munich to Salzburg and then to the SS headquarters just south of Munich. The American army occupied Munich on May 1st and arrested Epp five days later. While not on the list of Nazi war criminals, the American army sent Epp to a prisoner-of-war camp in Mondorf, Luxemburg. Still a prisoner of the Americans, the seventy-eight-year-old general died in a Munich hospital on December 31, 1946.²

Heinrich Schnee, the other figure most publicly associated with the colonialist movement and a private citizen since 1936, survived the war. Despite breaking with the organized colonialist movement when it coordinated into the unified RKB, he continued to believe in the importance of overseas colonies for Germany. Schnee ended the manuscript of his unpublished memoir, written over the course of 1945-1949, with a lament: “The hope of reclaiming the German colonies was buried with this catastrophic end [of the war]. And yet it is a shame! For if any country needs colonies, it is the overpopulated Germany.”³ Astonishingly, Schnee continued to believe in Germany’s need for space, despite the association of these ideas with Nazism’s crimes.


At the age of seventy-eight, Schnee died in a car accident in Berlin on June 23, 1949. His wife received letters of condolence from such diverse people as Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, the British Consulate in Berlin, and Theodor Heuss (first president of the Federal Republic of Germany), reflecting his long and diverse career. Speaking at Schnee’s well-attended funeral, a Dr. Max Roscher, summarized both Schnee’s life’s work and the colonial era:

The colonial era of modern German history is over. The last governor of German-East Africa is no more. His professional mission was to work singularly for the cultural development [Erschliessung] of the German overseas territories. He too was bound by himself and his time [seins- und zeitgebunden]. The course of history brought this action to a premature end. Many of his aspirations remained unachieved, but…Heinrich Schnee’s efforts were strong, pure, and never in vain. Posterity cannot and will not forget this about him! Roscher tied the colonial era to Schnee, one of its most visible representatives, linking the end of one with the death of the other. He heralded Schnee’s pro-colonial efforts as “never in vain” and a lesson for posterity. But Roscher identified Schnee’s faith (and by extension overseas colonialism) as bounded by time, a time that had passed. He did not

Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA PK), VI. HA Familienarchive und Nachlässe, Nr. Heinrich Schnee, Nr. 15, Bl. 104.

4 “Erinnerungen,” GStA PK, Nr. 21a, Bl. vii.

lament the fact that many of Schnee’s overseas colonial goals remained unfulfilled. But “the colonial era of modern German history [was] over.”

While the remaining colonialist organizations, the RKB and the KPA, had dissolved in 1943, the semi-independent and seemingly non-political institutions of the colonial schools in Rendsburg and Witzenhausen managed to redeem their reputations from their association with Nazism after 1945. As the longest-lasting colonialist institution, the Rendsburg Colonial School for Women (KFR) continued to generate interest into the post-war period. While the school itself had closed its doors at the end of the spring semester in April 1945, the marginal position of the KFR framed the memory of the school after the war for both former students and other Germans. As late as 1950, the Rendsburg city council received letters asking about the KFR, whether it still existed, and what had become of its teachers and director. The expectation that the school would still exist reflects its disassociation, in the minds of these writers, with National Socialism. This was an effect, ironically, of its Selbstgleischaltung through which the KFR avoided aggressive Nazi intervention in the school.

Former students planted an oak at the site of the main school building (demolished in 1977 when the canal was widened) in 1983, and in 2005 the mayor of Rendsburg dedicated a plaque to commemorate the school. Graduates of the KFR continued to meet regularly until 2006 to reminisce about their experience in Rendsburg.

A Schleswig-Holsteinische Landeszeitung article on the 1983 oak tree planting elided the
school’s activities between 1933 and 1945. An article on the dedication of the plaque acknowledged the students’ training for both the colonies and the Nazi East. Yet the article is titled “Colonial School ‘has earned it,’” quoting Rendsburg’s mayor who spoke of the “worthy memories” of the school.

Similarly, the Colonial School for men in Witzenhausen—largely dormant during the war years as its students and teaching staff served in the military—created a new profile after the war. In 1955, the school received 100,000 DM from the Bonn government to reopen. Reporting on the plans for the former colonial school, the Niederhessische Zeitung approved of the resurrection of the school’s former mission to put German knowledge and skill to use for the benefit of the world: “Specialists for tropical and subtropical agriculture are required in many countries in the colonies, that is, specialists like those trained in an outstanding manner at the Colonial School. May we finally succeed in our goals in the future.”

Renamed the German Institute for Tropical Agriculture (DITSL), Witzenhausen, Germany.

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and Subtropical Agriculture in 1956, the school is now part of the University of Kassel and attracts students from around the world.

Other public representations of the colonial past such as monuments suffered a less receptive fate, differentiated in East and West Germany. Immediately after the war, many of the surviving colonialist monuments were torn down, including all of the monuments in the newly created East Germany. For the East German government, colonial history represented a central aspect of the capitalist-fascist past that the new socialist state rejected. In West Germany, accompanying the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist themes of the 1968 student movement, left-wing students carried out “actions” to tear down the remaining colonial monuments, such as in Göttingen and Hamburg. These actions often incorporated protests against the American war in Vietnam and a rejection of the previous German generations’ involvement in Nazism.

The large stone elephant erected by the DKG in Bremen in 1932 found new life as an anti-colonial monument. “Third World” and solidarity groups successfully lobbied for the rededication of the monument in connection with Namibia’s independence in 1990. As African countries fought for and gained their independence after 1945, the new plaque erected in front of the elephant recounts,

the people of Africa have, through great sacrifice, achieved a successful resistance in the liberation struggles. Many people worldwide have been in solidarity with them.

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Our society has begun to learn from this development. Africa has found new friends in Bremen. This monument is a symbol of our responsibility that comes from history.\textsuperscript{10}

An earlier 1988 plaque erected to the side of the elephant shows a cut-out of the African continent and the statement “For human rights against Apartheid.” \textbf{Figure 39}

\textbf{Figure 39: Bremen Colonial Monument}
\textit{Source: Taken by author, August 2007.}

While these two additions to the Bremen elephant announced Bremen’s new, enlightened perspective in the 1980s and 1990s, they still contain echoes of the colonialist myth of Germans’ exceptionalism. The 1988 plaque focuses on South Africa’s apartheid policies but ignores the violent crimes in the German colonial past. The plaque that transformed the elephant into an anti-colonial monument does acknowledge German culpability in the violence of imperialism in the abstract, but highlights instead Africa’s independence movements and the continent’s “new friends in Bremen.” In its existing colonial monuments and commemorative culture, “Germany’s colonial past is still largely bound to a simplified interpretation that swings between (self-) accusation and apologia” which flattens the complexities of historical reality.11

The colonialist narrative traced in this study also resonated in post-1945 West Germany despite the historiographical narrative of widespread colonial amnesia. In the 1950s, for example, German conservationists such as Bernhard Grzimek emphasized the rich yet unpopulated (by humans) landscape of Africa previously featured in the colonialist narrative, championing the creation of national parks in Africa.12 The description of the new mission of the Witzenhausen Colonial School asserted the unique placement of German science and education to fill a need (in this case tropical


agricultural education) in the colonial world. West German NGOs and development organizations working in Africa continued this narrative of Germans’ ability to provide aid to Africa.  

Similarly, East Germany framed its efforts to support colonial liberation movements as a definitive break with the Nazi and colonial past, and asserted the continuity between this past and West Germany. German development projects fit into a longer history of “secular missionaries” who aimed to civilize Africa, both before and after 1945. German government officials have recently claimed that development aid to Namibia (including $173 million for 2011-2012) eliminates the need for reparations for the 1904-1907 Herero genocide, as demanded by Namibian leaders.  

For post-war Germans, the colonial past represented a moment in their history—in contrast to the more recent horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust—of which they could


15 Nina Berman, Impossible missions?: German economic, military, and humanitarian efforts in Africa (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

be proud, leading to Germans’ amnesia of the negative aspects of colonialism. This amnesia did not begin in 1945, however, but in the 1930s and 1940s through the work of colonialists. Selectively erasing negative aspects of the colonial past and exaggerating its positive features, colonialists reframed the narrative of German colonialism to focus on an inherent German aptitude for administering Africa.

Colonialists’ narrative of overseas colonialism in Nazi Germany represented a fantasy created after the loss of the overseas empire. As this study has shown, the absence of formal overseas empire and the restrictions of the Nazi public sphere did not prevent colonialists from asserting the centrality of these overseas territories (and themselves) in the Third Reich. Unbounded from fact and unchecked by reality, colonialists glorified the German colonial past and interpreted it as vital to the present. They asserted the interconnectedness of their overseas colonial claims with National Socialism both for ideological and organizational relevance. Ironically, after 1945, this connection between institutions of the organized colonialist movement and the Nazi regime disappeared in West Germany, as seen in the postwar correspondence about the Rendsburg Colonial School for Women.

The colonialist movement had survived until 1943 by promoting its frame resonance with the Nazi regime’s propaganda. After the war in West Germany,

colonialists’ narrative disentangled itself from Nazism, leaving behind more pervasive ideals of German national identity that drove this narrative forward. Born out of myth in a decolonized Germany, colonialists’ narrative of the German colonial past did not need actual colonies to survive, making it all the more insidious in the post-1945 period.

Close to seventy years after the Second World War ended Germans’ dream of formal empire, the department store KaDeWe in Berlin continues to use the term Kolonialwaren to categorize some of its merchandise. For the store, visited by tourists from around the world including former colonies, this term does not provoke embarrassment or self-consciousness. Kolonialwaren, now evacuated of political significance, evokes a neutral, perhaps even positive resonance. Hiding in plain sight, the complicated history of Germans and colonialism still lingers on.
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   NS 5 VI Deutsche Arbeitsfront/Arbeitswissenschaftliches Institut
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Biography

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