Colonial Trajectories: On the Evolution of the German Protectorate of Southwest Africa

Matthias Leanza

ABSTRACTS

Kolonialismus manifestiert sich in einer Vielzahl von Formen. Durch vergleichende Fallstudien können wir diese systematisch erforschen. Komparative Studien tendieren jedoch dazu, Temporalität und Wandel nur unzureichend zu berücksichtigen, insofern sie sich auf wiederkehrende Muster konzentrieren, um zu bestimmen, was für einen bestimmten Fall – im Gegensatz zu anderen Fällen – typisch ist. Dieser Aufsatz befasst sich daher mit folgender Frage: Wie können wir dem sich entwickelnden, fortwährender Veränderung unterliegenden Charakter der Vergleichsgegenstände gerecht werden, ohne eine systematische Betrachtung unmöglich zu machen? Zu diesem Zweck wird der Begriff der „kolonialen Trajektorien" diskutiert, der es erlaubt, prozess-sensible Typologien zu entwickeln. Dieses Argument wird anhand einer – in drei Schritten erfolgenden – Rekonstruktion der Entwicklung des „Schutzgebietes" Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Vorläufer des heutigen Namibia, erläutert. Obwohl dieser Aufsatz nicht selbst komparativ angelegt ist, spannt er einen konzeptionellen Rahmen auf, der es erlaubt, Muster soziopolitischen Wandels im kolonialen Kontext zu vergleichen.

Colonialism manifests itself in a variety of forms. Through comparative case studies, we can systematically explore these varieties. However, by focusing on recurring patterns in order to determine what is typical for a given case, in contrast to other cases, comparative studies tend to neglect temporality and change. Hence the question arises: How can we acknowledge the evolving nature of the objects of comparison without rendering systematic accounts impossible? In order to answer this question, I will discuss the notion of "colonial trajectories", which allows us to create process-sensitive typologies. I will illustrate this argument by tracing – in three steps – the evolution of the German protectorate of Southwest Africa, the precursor of present-day Namibia. Although this essay is not itself comparative, it does lay out a conceptual framework for comparing patterns of socio-political change in a colonial context.

Colonialism is not a single or uniform phenomenon but encompasses a wide array of manifestations. How colonial empires establish themselves and exercise power varies considerably, both between them and within them. Comparative case studies allow us to explore these varieties systematically. On this basis, we can elaborate generalized typologies and theories, which help us to structure complex historical data.[1] However, there are also problems associated with this approach. The objects of comparison are not always independent of each other but may interact or even represent different aspects of one and the same object. This fact is particularly apparent in the case of the European overseas empires, whose dynamics were deeply intertwined. Thus taking a comparative approach might run the risk of treating those empires as if they were isolated cases, rather than part of the same international order. Another issue concerns temporality and change. By focusing on recurring patterns in order to determine what is typical for a given case, in contrast to other cases, comparative studies tend to emphasize what remains stable over time, or they pick out a single episode and treat it as representative of the entire process. As a result, they create snapshot-like images of what are, in reality, dynamic and evolving structures.

Both of these concerns – that is, the issues of entanglement and evolution – should not be understood as objections to a comparative approach per se. Nonetheless, they must be considered and dealt with when comparing regimes of colonial rule. This essay more narrowly addresses the second concern: how can we capture the temporal character of the objects of comparison without making systematic accounts impossible? In order to answer this question, I will discuss the notion of "colonial trajectories". As I will explain in the first part of the paper, by charting colonial (or imperial) trajectories, process-sensitive typologies can be created that reflect the dynamic character of colonial (or imperial) forms of domination. In the second part, I will illustrate this argument by tracing – in three steps – the evolution of the German protectorate of Southwest Africa, the precursor of what is now Namibia (for a justification of the case selection, see the next section). This essay is thus not itself comparative, but it does lay out a conceptual framework for comparing patterns of socio-political change in a colonial context.

1. Towards Processual Typologies of Colonial Rule

In a seminal article published in 1976, the classical scholar Moses Finley outlined a typology of colonies.[2] Given the inconsistent use of this term in both everyday speech and legal parlance, he recommended that historians and sociologists establish their own classification. If used as a technical term, Finley argues, "colony" presupposes political

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1   E.g. G. Steinmetz, The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa, Chicago 2007; J. Go, Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present, New York 2011.

2   M. I. Finley, Colonies – An Attempt at a Typology, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 26 (1976), pp. 167–188.

dependence, which rules out independent settlements. Only if the newly conquered, or otherwise acquired, lands are subordinated to the political institutions of the home country can a colonial relationship be said to emerge. Accordingly, the Greek and Phoenician "colonisation" of the Mediterranean led to the establishment not of colonies but of independent city-states.

However, according to Finley, political subordination to the government of the metropole is only a necessary, and not a sufficient, condition for a colony to exist. A second feature must be added: large-scale migration from the core polity into the subjugated region. Without the significant and permanent presence of members of the ruling power, an outlying dependency cannot be described as a colony in the proper sense. At least this is what Finley suggests here, reverting directly to the original meaning of the word. Derived from the Latin *colonia*, meaning "settled land, farm, landed estate", a colony was originally an ancient Roman settlement outside Italy. "Colony" became broadly synonymous with overseas dependencies only in the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] Against this backdrop, Finley concludes provocatively that "the late nineteenth-century struggle for Africa was largely not a struggle for colonies".[4] Put in more formal terms, he suggests using "dependency" as the generic term and "colony" as one of its subcategories, reserved for those peripheries of an empire that are settled by a substantial number of people from the metropole.

Although such a narrow definition has advantages, it creates more problems than it solves. If we were to accept that substantial parts of what is commonly referred to as "colonial Africa" did not constitute colonies in the proper sense, we would then find ourselves in the peculiar situation of having to invent new terms for these and similar imperial dependencies that we could no longer call "colonies". One way of dealing with this issue is to extend and further differentiate our understanding of the category of "colony", without overstretching it by including every manifestation of structural inequality and dominance between political communities. Colonies of settlement might be the archetypal colonies, but they are not the only possible form. We also find colonies of exploitation and trading outposts, typically set up on the peripheries of expanding empires. At the same time, the concept is still specific enough to leave room for other, non-colonial dependencies. As Jürgen Osterhammel notes with regard to provinces such as Bohemia under the Habsburgs or Macedonia within the Ottoman Empire: "Not all imperial peripheries were colonies, and colonial frontiers were not equally dynamic in all empires. Colonialism is but one aspect of nineteenth-century imperial history".[5] Not every imperial dependency falls under the category of a "colony", and yet there are more than merely colonies of settlement.

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3   Ibid., p. 170.
4   Ibid., p. 171.
5   J. Osterhammel, The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century, P. Camiller (trans.), Princeton, NJ 2014, p. 431.

However, as useful as this typology is for structuring a vast and complex field of inquiry such as the study of empires, there is a danger of subsuming individual cases under these general types without sufficiently acknowledging the immense variety within each category. Moreover, like other typologies, too, it struggles to capture temporality and change. A dynamic and evolving reality is represented through a fixed set of classes. These issues are also apparent in the field of settler colonial studies, which has increasingly gained traction in recent years. According to the Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, one of the main proponents of this approach, "settler colonialism is a specific social formation and it is desirable to retain that specificity".[6] In the same vein, Lorenzo Veracini not only distinguishes settler colonialism from (non-settler forms of) colonialism but also treats the two as opposing concepts in his influential account. While in colonialism, a foreign minority rules over a "native" population, settler colonialism "is premised on the domination of a majority that has become indigenous", meaning immigrant settlers.[7] Moreover, Wolfe and Veracini both argue that settler colonialism operates as a zero-sum game.[8] This would ultimately lead to the elimination of the native Other through assimilation and forced relocations, frontier homicide, and mass killings. In this connection, Wolfe has coined the term "structural genocide". According to this theory, the "logic of elimination" that is inherent to settler societies can flare up into "genocidal moments" when circumstances allow.[9]

The problems with this approach are twofold. First, both Wolfe and Veracini employ a highly generalized notion of settler colonialism, which draws too sharp a contrast with other forms of colonial domination. Consequently, little room is left for gradual transitions and intermediate forms. Second, the historical process itself is almost entirely reduced to a mere epiphenomenon. It appears that for Wolfe and Veracini, the structural "logic" inherent to settler colonialism predetermines – top down – the sequence of events. If one agrees that this notion is problematic, what would an alternative approach look like? How can we take into account the evolving character of colonies and empires, including extended periods of transition, without abandoning systematic categorisation and comparisons?

One possible answer is to reconstruct the trajectories along which colonies and empires evolve in order to develop – bottom-up – categories that reflect the resulting pattern of change. A "trajectory" is defined as a phase of slow-moving, incremental change that can be interrupted by "turning points" that drastically alter the course of development.[10] In this vein, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper trace the dynamics of empires in world

6   P. Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, in: Journal of Genocide Research 8 (2006), pp. 387–409.

7   L. Veracini, Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview, Basingstoke 2010, p. 5.

8   Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, p. 387; Veracini, Settler Colonialism, p. 33.

9   Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, p. 402–403.

10 See A. Abbott, Time Matters: On Theory and Method, Chicago 2001, pp. 240–260. As Abbott points out, the relationship between trajectories and turning points is a fractal one: phases of transition unfold along a specific trajectory and smaller turning points often alter the predominant course of development.

history. Instead of assuming a linear progression from the empire to the nation-state, as modernisation theory commonly does, they track much more intricate patterns of development and change at a macro-historical level. "A focus on empires, their repertoires of rule, and their intersecting trajectories", explain Burbank and Cooper, "thus revises conventional chronologies and categories and helps us see how, when, and where world history took new directions."[11] The present essay illustrates how this conceptual framework can be utilized to create typologies that reflect the evolving nature of the phenomena they seek to represent. However, instead of considering entire empires over long periods of history, as in Burbank and Cooper, the scope here will be more limited, comprising a single colony – the German protectorate of Southwest Africa.

Bordered by the Orange River in the south, the Kunene and Okavango Rivers in the north, the Kalahari in the east and the Atlantic Ocean in the west, colonial Namibia covered an area one-and-a-half times as large as the German Empire before the First World War. By European standards, it was sparsely populated, containing roughly 200,000 inhabitants before the Germans arrived. In 1884, Southwest Africa – or, more precisely, only parts of the coastal area at first – became a German *Schutzgebiet* (protectorate). The German Empire lost de facto control over Southwest Africa during the First World War. After the war, the Treaty of Versailles stipulated that Germany had to cede its overseas territories to competing powers as League of Nations mandates. Thus what was to become modern-day Namibia remained under South African rule – with changing legal status and administrative organization – until independence in 1990.

In the following three sections, this essay traces the trajectories along which German Southwest Africa evolved before the First World War. This case is particularly appealing for those interested in revising conventional categories and chronologies. Southwest Africa is commonly perceived as Germany's sole settler colony. Although this categorisation is not wrong, it might not capture the change and evolution the protectorate underwent. European settlements began rather sluggishly at first. It was not until the late 1890s and more pronounced after the war against Herero and Nama from 1904 to 1907 that they gained momentum. For this reason alone, it would be misleading to subsume the entire history of German Southwest Africa under the category of "settler colonialism". Moreover, although it is true that the mounting tensions between settlers and Herero after the 1896–1897 Rinderpest (cattle plague) led to the violence in early 1904, the further escalation of the conflict was the result of strategic decisions taken by the metropolitan elites. What explains the course of events during the war is not a binary opposition between settlers and the indigenous population. Instead, at least three sets of actors must be taken into account. Finally, the reforms launched after the war brought about significant change (which, for the colonial subjects, were mostly for the worse). While the category of "settler colonialism" is misleading for, say, the first decade of German rule

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11   J. Burbank / F. Cooper, Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference, Princeton 2010, p. 21.

in Southwest Africa, it also obscures structural transformations that occurred in the last two decades before the Union of South Africa occupied the protectorate.

2. Establishing a Sphere of Influence

Like other latecomers in the race for global dominance, Germany expanded overseas at roughly the same time as its nation-state was forming. After the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War, the German lands (with the exception of Austria) became unified under Prussian hegemony. The challenge facing the newly established state was to create an integrated nation that found its place within the Concert of Europe. At the same time, however, throughout its history, Imperial Germany remained a Prussian-dominated empire.[12] The situation of the Poles in the eastern parts of Prussia can even be interpreted as a case of "internal colonialism".[13]

German overseas expansion must be understood against this backdrop. Colonial pressure groups considered it a sign of national greatness and cultural superiority to rule additional territories overseas. Friedrich Fabri, former head inspector of the Rhenish Missionary Society in Barmen and one of the founders of the German Colonial Association, further argued that the "acquisition" of colonies would help to alleviate domestic problems by creating new opportunities for investment and providing farmland for German settlers.[14]

Conversely, leading factions of the country's political and military elite, including Reich Chancellor Bismarck, considered this an unnecessary adventure. As they saw it, Germany first needed to consolidate itself as a nation and redefine its role as a great power in Europe before considering expanding into "far-off lands". In 1881, Bismarck expressed his position on the subject as follows: "As long as I am Reich Chancellor, we will not pursue a colonial agenda. We have a fleet that cannot operate […] and we must not have any vulnerable points in distant parts of the world that will fall to the French as booty as soon as it gets started."[15]

Unsurprisingly, German colonialism was initially not a state-driven project. The momentum came from the colonial movement, which coalesced through private associations and trading companies. It included figures like the far-right-wing Carl Peters, a trained historian and philosopher who, in 1884, founded the Society for German Col-

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12 For the simultaneity of nation building and empire formation in modern German history, see S. Berger, Building the Nation among Visions of German Empire, in: S. Berger / A. Miller (eds.), Nationalizing Empires, Budapest 2015, pp. 247–308.

13 P. Ther, Imperial instead of National History: Positioning German History on the Map of European Empires, in: A. Miller / A. J. Rieber (eds.), Imperial Rule, Budapest 2004, pp. 47–66; S. Conrad, Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany, S. O'Hagan (trans.), Cambridge 2010, chap. 3.

14 F. Fabri, Bedarf Deutschland der Colonien? Eine politisch-ökonomische Betrachtung, Gotha 1879.

15 H. v. Poschinger, Fürst Bismarck und die Parlamentarier, Dritter Band 1879–1890 (Unterredung mit Grafen von Frankenberg im Winter 1881), Dresden 1894, p. 54 (own translation). See also H. Gründer, Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien, Paderborn 2012, chap. 3.

onisation in Berlin.[16] The association's purpose was "to identify and acquire suitable colonisation sites".[17] Later that year, its members organized their first expedition to East Africa, where they signed "protection treaties" with African leaders.[18] At the other end of the spectrum were businessmen, interested in opening up new markets by investing in areas of the world not yet been incorporated into the capitalist system. Economic expansion, however, often entailed political expansion, as happened at a remarkable pace in colonial Namibia. In 1882, Adolf Lüderitz, a tobacco dealer from Bremen, informed the German Foreign Office that he intended to purchase a stretch of the coastline north of the Orange River in order to establish a trading outpost.[19] He asked that his company be put under state protection. This status was to include protection against the British who, in 1878, had occupied the strategically important Walvis Bay on the Atlantic coast. Lüderitz wanted not only to avoid British import tariffs but also to exploit any mineral deposits he found in the territory. For this reason, official recognition from the German state seemed highly desirable.

Reluctant to get involved in this matter, the Berlin authorities made a generic promise to support Lüderitz if he could establish himself on the ground. At Bismarck's instigation, the British Foreign Office was immediately informed of this arrangement, emphasizing that Germany had no intention whatsoever of acquiring formal colonies.[20] Meanwhile, Lüderitz went about creating facts on the ground. Through his agent, he purchased the bay of Angra Pequena, including five miles of the interior, from Nama "captain" Joseph Frederics of Bethanien in spring 1883. Only three months after the first purchase, the territory expanded as the result of another sales contract. "Lüderitzland" now stretched all the way south to the mouth of the Orange River, and from the coast 20 miles inland. After concluding the agreement, Lüderitz maintained that the measurement was not in English miles – as he had led the other side to believe – but in German geographical miles, which were much longer (7.5 kilometres per mile versus 1.6 kilometres per mile). Shortly after these events, the British government changed its mind. Heavily influenced by the Cape Colony's lobbying for a "South African Monroe Doctrine", the authorities in London now claimed the entire territory from the southern border of Portuguese Angola down to the Orange River as Great Britain's natural sphere of interest. In response, the German government also changed course by dispatching a gunboat to the region and granting Lüderitzland official state protection in April 1884.[21] The short summer of informal empire came to an end.

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16   A. Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism 1856–1918: A Political Biography, Oxford 2004.

17   C. Peters, Aufruf der "Gesellschaft für Deutsche Kolonisation", auf ihrer Gründungsversammlung am 28. März 1885 angenommen, in: W. J. Mommsen, Imperialismus: Seine geistigen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen: Ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch, Hamburg 1977, pp. 124–125, here p. 124 (own translation).

18   M. Pesek, Koloniale Herrschaft in Deutsch-Ostafrika: Expeditionen, Militär und Verwaltung seit 1880, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2005, pp. 168–179.

19   H.-U. Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus, München 1976, pp. 265–267.

20   Ibid.

21   Ibid., pp. 270–275.

The immediate result, however, was not formal empire.[22] Instead, what arose was a German sphere of influence. As American diplomat and political scientist Paul S. Reinsch noted in 1902, the concept of a sphere of influence "is distinguished from occupation in that it does not involve material possession, nor the immediate creation of the machinery of government". Its primary purpose is a negative one, namely to ensure "that no other power or nation except the one in whose favour the sphere of influence exists shall be permitted to exert any political authority within a certain territory".[23] According to this definition, a sphere of influence is more indicative of virtual claims in the diplomatic realm than actual presence on the ground. This lack of effective control makes spheres of influence vulnerable to both the aspirations of competing empires (prepared to create diplomatic tensions) and the resistance of the local population.

As early as the summer of 1884, the Cape Parliament, at London's urging, decided to annex the entire coastline up to Portuguese Angola. Germany responded by sending military ships to the region, in a successful move to pre-empt the Cape Colony.[24] Spurred by his success, Lüderitz soon acquired, through an agent, claims to the Santa Lucia Bay in the Zulu Kingdom. He envisioned a colony for German settlements that stretched from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.[25] Before long, however, Lüderitz ran out of money. The consortium that had bought his land in Southwest Africa – mainly in order to prevent the British from getting their hands on it first – showed no interest whatsoever in taking on administrative tasks. But the German Empire did not opt out of its engagement at this point. On the contrary, the authorities in Berlin reinforced their commitment by appointing, in 1885, an imperial commissioner for Southwest Africa. Accompanied by two assistants, the diplomat in question, Heinrich Göring, established the first German administration in Otjimbingwe later that year. Supported by local missionaries familiar with the region and a small police unit, the delegation concluded a half-dozen "protection treaties". Although no agreements were reached with the kingdoms in the north, or the powerful Witbooi Nama in the south, the German Empire now considered all of Southwest Africa to be its sphere of interest.[26]

Due to its unstable internal construction, this sphere collapsed in autumn 1888. On multiple occasions, Nama "captain" Hendrik Witbooi – who had his own designs for dominating central Namibia and, therefore, refused to enter into a "protection treaty"

22   For the transition from informal to formal empire, see J. Gallagher / R. Robinson, The Imperialism of Free Trade, in: The Economic History Review 6 (1953), pp. 1–15; D. K. Fieldhouse, Economics and Empire 1830–1914, London 1973.

23   P. S. Reinsch, Colonial Government: An Introduction to the Study of Colonial Institutions, New York 1902, p. 103.

24   Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus, pp. 276–281.

25   Great Britain hastily set up the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885 to thwart a further German (and Boer) expansion. The driving force behind this decision was Cecil Rhodes, who was a member of the Cape Parliament at the time and later became its Prime Minister. See H. Zins, The International Context of the Creation of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885, in: Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies 11 (1997), pp. 54–62.

26   H. Drechsler, "Let Us Die Fighting": The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884–1915), B. Zöllner (trans.), London 1980, pp. 26–29, 31–32; Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus, pp. 275–289. The Caprivi Strip in the northeast became part of the protectorate only with the Helgoland-Zanzibar Treaty of 1890.

– and his men attacked various Herero groups and raided their livestock. Maharero, the supreme chief of the Herero tribal confederacy, eventually terminated the agreement with the Germans. He justified this on the grounds that Germany was apparently unable to protect his people from the mounted Nama commandos, who were equipped with firearms. As a result, the German delegation decided to retreat to British Walvis Bay.[27]

3. Internal Frontiers and Escalating Violence

At this point, the protectorate of Southwest Africa existed only on maps, representing claims more than realities. The German parliament debated whether these claims could or should be upheld, a controversy that was further fuelled by the 1888–1889 Abushiri Revolt in the East African protectorate.[28] Bismarck's chief concern continued to be stabilising Germany's position within the European state system. He even pondered abandoning the African colonies altogether.[29] Shortly afterwards, however, the German government sent to the region an expedition of 20, headed by Curt von François, to restore colonial rule. François often pursued his own agenda and repeatedly exceeded his powers, causing discontent in Berlin. Nonetheless, in the first two years of his mission, he managed to re-establish the station in Otjimbingwe, build a stronghold in Windhoek, and reinstate the "protection treaty" with the Herero.[30] Taken together, these events represented a critical turning point in the protectorate's development.

German Southwest Africa was henceforth on a different trajectory. It slowly morphed into an imperial borderland, shaped by wars of conquest, an expanding colonial administration, and European settlements.[31] The frontiers defining this borderland were, however, internal rather than external. That is to say, imperial expansion took place within an already-established sphere of interest as recognized by the European states. By keeping the claims of competing empires at bay, this sphere created a niche in the international system, allowing German colonizers to focus on subjugating local societies.

Several attempts to extend the German borderland further south to encompass all of the Nama territories failed. As we know from Witbooi's detailed records, François met with the Nama "captain" in 1892 in order to persuade him to bow to German rule.[32] However, Witbooi refused, pointing out that he did not intend to give up the sovereignty of

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27 Drechsler, "Let Us Die Fighting", pp. 38–42; Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus, pp. 289–292.

28 T. Bührer, Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika: Koloniale Sicherheitspolitik und transkulturelle Kriegsführung 1885 bis 1918, München 2011, pp. 54–57.

29 Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus, pp. 408.

30 M. Wallace (with J. Kinahan), A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990, London 2011, pp. 121–127. See also C. v. François, Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika: Geschichte der Kolonisation bis zum Ausbruch des Krieges mit Witbooi April 1893, Berlin 1899, chaps. 3–5.

31 For the European's strategy of small wars, see B. Vandervort, Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914, London 1998.

32 H. Witbooi, The Hendrik Witbooi Papers (No. 68 Record of the Meeting between Witbooi and Curt von François, Hoornkrans, 9 June 1892), A. Heywood and E. Maasdorp (trans.), Windhoek 1995, pp. 84–89. For this episode, see also Steinmetz, The Devil's Handwriting, pp. 146–168.

his people. Moreover, he questioned the entire notion of "protection" as it was constantly put forward by the Germans. In his eyes, "protection" was being used as a euphemism for subjection. "It is thus: when one chief stands under the protection of another", Witbooi explained to François, "the underling is no longer independent, and is no longer master of himself, or of his people and country."[33] The conflict escalated in the following months. In April 1893, in a surprise attack at Hornkrans, François and his men killed between 80 and 150 of Witbooi's people, among them many unarmed women and children. Despite pushing back through various raids on German posts, the Witbooi were compelled to surrender in 1894, after the *Schutztruppe* (protection force) had been increased by several hundred men, now under the command of Theodor Leutwein.[34]

In the following years, the German troops established a dozen new military stations, most of them in the protectorate's central and southern regions. Over time, these outposts acquired more and more characteristics of civil authorities, albeit without a complete separation of the two branches. Nonetheless, the expanding military frontier gave rise to a colonial administration, spreading over large parts of the country.[35] At no point, however, did the colonial authorities hold an effective monopoly on violence. In governing the protectorate, the representatives of the German state relied heavily on cooperation with African leaders. Leutwein, who in 1898 became Southwest Africa's first governor – the governor's seat was in Windhoek –, skilfully forged a web of political alliances, from which the parties involved sought to benefit to various degrees.[36] Most of the societies in the northern regions were organized into small kingdoms and remained largely autonomous. On the Ovambo alluvial plain, by far the most densely populated area in the protectorate, the colonial authorities never managed to establish direct rule. The frontiers of the German Empire's borderland in Southwest Africa remained permanently behind the borders of its sphere of influence as marked on the map.[37]

As the military frontier expanded, a settler frontier slowly emerged. Despite various efforts to attract German settlers to Southwest Africa in the early 1890s, relatively few people went to build a new life there, far from home and in unfamiliar surroundings.[38] Nonetheless, by 1902, about 2,500 Germans and another 2,000 people of European descent, mainly Boers from the Cape, resided in colonial Namibia, mostly in and around Windhoek. Roughly 800 of these were farmers; the rest included traders and craftsmen. As an immediate result of the 1896–1897 Rinderpest, the semi-nomadic Herero pastoralists inhabiting central Namibia lost up to 90 per cent of their stocks.[39] Thus many Herero began working for the Europeans as labourers, herders, or domestic servants.

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33   Witbooi, The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, p. 86.
34   H. Bley, Namibia under German Rule, H. Ridley (trans.), Hamburg 1996, pp. 27–32.
35   Wallace: A History of Namibia, pp. 148–154.
36   H. Bley, Namibia under German Rule, part 1; J.-B. Gewald, Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia 1890–1923, Athens 1999, chap. 2.
37   Wallace, A History of Namibia, pp. 97–102, 199–203.
38   Bley, Namibia under German Rule, pp. 73–119; B. Kundrus, Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien, Köln 2003, pp. 44–55.
39   Bley, Namibia under German Rule, pp. 124–129; Gewald, Herero Heroes, chap. 4.

Amid this closer contact, the white settlers hardly missed an opportunity to assert their alleged racial superiority. The colonial authorities generally turned a blind eye to settler violence or imposed merely symbolic punishments, thus exacerbating the already tense situation.[40] Another contributing factor was the dubious business practices of German traders. They readily provided credit for weapons, alcohol, and other goods but charged exorbitant interest rates. Members of the Herero elite often repaid their debts by transferring land titles, which created further tension.[41]

The Herero uprising that struck central Namibia in January 1904 must be understood against this backdrop.[42] The primary targets were farmers and traders whose reckless behaviour – as detailed above – had become intolerable to the once-wealthy pastoralists. During the following weeks and months, the initial uprising expanded into a full-scale war.[43] The gradual settlement of central Namibia caused a deep rupture in the colony's precarious order, giving rise to a new military frontier, an active battle line. This frontier drove approximately 60,000 Herero – men, women, and children alike – and their remaining livestock into the north. They began gathering at the foot of the Waterberg Plateau from around May onwards, hoping to negotiate a peace deal with Governor Leutwein.[44]

What the Herero did not know was that, in the meantime, Lieutenant General Lothar von Trotha had been sent to assume command of the colony after the German government became increasingly frustrated with the sluggish pace of the war. In previous missions, which took him to East Africa in the 1890s and China during the Boxer Rebellion, von Trotha had proven himself a hardliner. His appointment was controversial among senior members of the government, but the kaiser ultimately decided to make von Trotha commander in chief of German forces in Southwest Africa.[45] To the authorities in Berlin, the increasingly isolated von Trotha presented himself as having the situation fully under control. In reality, however, his initial strategy of encircling the Herero at the Waterberg and forcing them to surrender failed.[46] Due to the German troops' poor coordination, most of the Herero who did not die during the battle in mid-August managed to flee eastwards into the Omaheke, the western extension of the Kalahari. After several attempts at hunting them down failed, von Trotha issued his notorious "annihilation order" in October 1904. The order stated that the Herero were no longer considered Ger-

40   M. Häussler, Der Genozid an den Herero: Krieg, Emotion und extreme Gewalt in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Weilers-wist 2018, chap. 2.

41   S. Kuss, German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence, A. Smith (trans.), Cambridge, MA 2017, p. 42.

42   On the causes of war, see K. Bachmann, Genocidal Empires: German Colonialism in Africa and the Third Reich, Berlin 2018, pp. 38–57.

43   Kuss, German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence, pp. 37–45.

44   I. V. Hull, Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany, Ithaca 2005, chap. 1; Häussler, Der Genozid an den Herero, chap. 3.

45   Bley, Namibia under German Rule, pp. 155–169; Häussler, Der Genozid an den Herero, pp. 118–132.

46   My account draws on the studies of Kuss, German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence, pp. 45–52; Hull, Absolute Destruction, chap. 2; Häussler, Der Genozid an den Herero, chaps. 4 & 5; Bachmann, Genocidal Empires, pp. 57–87.

man subjects and that no prisoners were to be taken. The Herero were to leave the colony for good, and it was implied that the Omaheke was the sole exit route. By this time, however, most of the Herero who had fled eastwards were presumably already dead. According to a recent study, roughly 1,000 Herero managed to reach British Bechuanaland in this way, and another 2,000 escaped to the Cape Colony. Still others – how many is unclear – found their way back into the protectorate.[47]

After the events at the Waterberg, various Nama groups in the south also began taking up arms.[48] With only a few hundred combatants, the battle-hardened Nama commandos waged a fierce guerrilla war against the German troops, who had to be reinforced several times. Despite commanding up to 14,000 soldiers, the German Empire needed another two-and-a-half years to win the increasingly unpopular war. In early 1905, the German troops started to establish a camp system modelled on the British concentration camps of the Second Boer War.[49] There approximately 17,000 Herero and Nama were held captive, most of them women and children. The internment camps served both as a method of punishment but also as a means to buy time: the German authorities were unsure how to deal with the colony, which was in shambles.

4. Envisioning a Self-Sustaining Overseas Province

Together with the Maji Maji War (1905–1908) in East Africa, the escalating violence in the Southwest African protectorate plunged the German colonial project into crisis. The government dissolved the parliament in 1906 after it refused to provide further funds for the war in Southwest Africa. The elections held the subsequent year were overshadowed by the colonial issue. In response to this crisis, the authorities in Berlin promised comprehensive reforms.[50] In 1907, the Colonial Department of the Foreign Office was reorganized as a separate central authority and became the Imperial Colonial Office. Its newly appointed head, the liberal Bernhard Dernburg, a former banker and executive specialized in redeveloping big businesses, travelled to Africa twice to acquaint himself with the situation on the ground.[51] Ending colonial rule, however, was not on the table. The new approach aimed instead at transforming the protectorates into stable and self-sustaining provinces of a "Greater German Empire". The overseas territories were supposed to become less dependent on the German state through economic assistance and political reform.

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47   Numbers according to Bachmann, Genocidal Empires, p. 77.
48   Ibid., pp. 90–98.
49   Ibid., pp. 98–112. See also J. Kreienbaum, "Ein trauriges Fiasko": Koloniale Konzentrationslager im südlichen Afrika 1900–1908, Hamburg 2015.
50   E. Grimmer-Solem, Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919, Cambridge 2019, chaps. 8 & 9.
51   U. Lindner, Koloniale Begegnungen: Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914, Frankfurt am Main / New York 2011, pp. 139–151.

There is a bitter irony in the fact that a core element of the reform process in Southwest Africa consisted of three "native ordinances" issued in 1907. Their preparation had already begun before Dernburg's appointment. One of the main initiators was Governor Friedrich von Lindequist, who succeeded von Trotha at the end of 1905 and later became Dernburg's deputy in the Berlin Imperial Colonial Office. Although these regulations were, in some respects, a continuation of older developments reaching back to the pre-war period, they helped change the course of the colony's evolution.[52] Before the ordinances came into effect, the Herero and Nama territories were first confiscated and a police zone established as a designated area for European settlement.[53] This zone encompassed most of the southern and central regions, whereas the populous northern regions remained outside the borders of police protection. Thus the borderland's expansionist drive came to a halt, and a core region crystallized.

Within the police zone, the authorities were concerned with restricting the freedom of movement of Africans. After the war, many Herero travelled through central Namibia in search of relatives to rebuild their communities and thus regain the ability to self-organize as a social group.[54] The German authorities wanted to prevent this by any means necessary, while simultaneously accommodating the settlers by creating an African proletariat deprived of any means of production. The native ordinances stipulated that every African above seven years of age had to register with the local authorities. Travel to other districts was allowed only with a special permit. Furthermore, the regulations prohibited African settlements from consisting of more than 10 families and required their remaining cattle to be confiscated unless an exemption had been granted for livestock breeding. If they did not have a documented livelihood, Africans could be charged with vagrancy; thus, in practice, they were obligated to work for Europeans. Even within the police zone, however, the German authorities never managed to enforce these rules systematically.[55] The colonial administration was far from being the well-ordered police state envisioned by the regulations.

In fact, the Germans needed cheap labour if they wanted to successfully transform Southwest Africa into a self-sustaining province of a stable overseas empire. In 1908, diamonds were discovered several miles east of Lüderitz Bay, and they soon became the colony's primary source of revenue. The growing mining sector was, however, labour-intensive and required a further extension of the railroads. To meet the demand for labour, the authorities endeavoured to recruit contract workers from the northern regions and thereby integrated them, at least economically. Military conquest and direct rule were still out of

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52   J. Zimmerer, Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner: Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia, Münster 2004, chap. 2.

53   G. Miescher, Namibia's Red Line: The History of a Veterinary and Settlement Border, Basingstoke 2012, chap. 2. For the Landespolizei established in 1905/07, see J. Zollmann, Koloniale Herrschaft und ihre Grenzen: Die Kolonialpolizei in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1915, Göttingen 2010; M. Muschalek, Violence as Usual: Policing and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa, Ithaca 2019.

54   Wallace, A History of Namibia, pp. 183–189.

55   Zimmerer, Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner, chap. 4.

reach.[56] Simultaneously, a growing number of Europeans became interested in settling in the colony, including many former soldiers who had stayed after the war. By the First World War, up to 15,000 people of European descent resided in Southwest Africa, with a total population of 69,000 in the police zone. The increasing number of settlers made it necessary for the authorities to concede them greater rights to participate in the government. Organs of communal self-government and a state council were installed, which bolstered settler sovereignty.[57] This trajectory was, however, brought to an abrupt halt as the result of an external event. In 1915, troops of the Union of South Africa occupied the neighbouring German colony as part of the hostilities of the First World War. The Great War might have originated in the European state system, but it was fought out between global empires and directly affected the German overseas territories.

5. Conclusion

As this article has explained, the protectorate of Southwest Africa evolved along a specific trajectory sequence. First, in the 1880s, parts of what is today Namibia became a German sphere of influence. This sphere can be understood as a weakly institutionalized political space, only loosely attached to the metropolitan state and in which the colonizing group has only scant presence on the ground. The German Empire was, however, able to stake its claims this way and kept competing empires at bay. Since it quickly became apparent that the leading non-state actors were unable or unwilling to run the protectorate, the state reluctantly decided to take control. It did so cautiously at first and then, after having explored various alternatives, more decisively, this time sending not only a small delegation but also actual troops to the region.

Consequently, from the late 1880s onwards, Southwest Africa was in the process of morphing into an imperial borderland. However, its defining frontiers were internal rather than external. That is to say, within the diplomatically established boundaries of the protectorate, the German colonizers gradually expanded the scope of on-site control through a combination of small wars and alliances with African leaders. As the military frontier expanded, Europeans slowly settled in central Namibia, putting increasing strain on indigenous societies. It took less than a decade for this conflictual situation to escalate into massive violence. After Governor Leutwein's strategy failed to produce the desired outcome, the metropolitan elites took control. In Lothar von Trotha, Berlin found a proven hardliner who subsequently steered the fate of the protectorate, resorting to increasingly cruel methods.

The Berlin authorities responded to this crisis with comprehensive reforms. The new approach aimed at transforming the troubled colonies into stable provinces of a prosperous overseas empire. In Southwest Africa, the administration first established a police zone

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56   Ibid., pp. 211–228.
57   Wallace, A History of Namibia, pp. 197–199.

as the designated area for European settlements. A rigid system of indentured labour was subsequently introduced, and the tribal organisation of the Herero was severely weakened. The fluid and highly contentious frontiers of the borderland era solidified, and a core region crystallized, separating itself from the areas that were treated, for the time being, as an "internal exterior".

With each step, the protectorate's character changed fundamentally. If one wanted to subsume the entire sequence of trajectories along which the colony evolved under a single category, as "settler colonialism", this would obscure the profound shifts and transformations shaping its course. However, the argument here is not merely that more specific classifications are needed to better reflect the complexity of the subject. These categories must also capture the dynamic character of the protectorate, its changing shape, and its developing organisational structure. The categories of "sphere of influence", "imperial borderland", and "imperial province" thus ought not to be understood as a loose series of concepts. Rather, they represent an evolutionary sequence: the latter social formations – as described by these categories – developed out of and build upon the previous ones without being a necessary outcome of the process. They gradually unfolded as "creative" responses to disruptive events and crises that threatened the continued existence of the protectorate. Thus, understanding the transition between them is as important as identifying their differences. What remains as an object of comparison, then, are the divergent paths along which colonies and empires evolve.