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The Imperial Legacy: An Examination of the Trends of Empire and Genocide from German Southwest Africa to the General Government

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Introduction

The study of history is often mistaken for a static subject bent on the examination of fixed events from which can be derived only a singular conclusion. However, such a perspective presents a woeful ignorance of the subject itself and the events under study. While the matters of the past are most certainly fixed in space, the insight and opportunity for engagement presented by these same events are nearly limitless in regard to the present and future. To this end, it is beneficial, even vital, to pursue at least a general understanding of human history. The story of humankind is not typically one of outstanding moral character or wisdom; indeed, there are multiple chapters in which general sense and dignity seem to have abandoned our race altogether. There exists no greater example than that of the era extending from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, during which the subjugation of different ethnic and cultural groups beneath others never was or has been equaled. This subjugation was largely the product of the rise in imperialism within the European political landscape that characterized the 1800s. Although imperialism was hardly a new invention at the time, it was given far greater popularity and potential in the wake of the Industrial Revolution around the turn of the nineteenth century. The concept of empire building often conjures up images of British India, French Algeria, or even the Belgian Congo, but, despite their late arrival to the imperial playing field, it was Germany who commanded the world's third largest overseas empire. This empire was responsible for crafting a unique experience of occupation for a multitude of ethnic groups on both the African and European continents. These experiences, however, were far from isolated, either from each other or from other imperial experiences, yet they are often considered in ostracism from these other cases. To combat this inclination toward ostracism, it is necessary to examine the unifying themes of violence, imperialism, and genocide within the evolution of the German imperial experience from German Southwest Africa

through World War I and up to the conclusion of World War II. By understanding the shared trends of empire and genocide, and how each of these cases are uniquely German, one can develop a greater understanding of the origins and outcomes of imperial violence in order to bring the actions of the National Socialist party out of its prolonged ideological isolation and into a global context of implication.

The path taken to arrive at this question of imperial trends and significance was not a straight or narrow one. Instead, I came to this question through many shifts and changes in trajectory, focus, perspective, and even major. I initially entered my undergraduate research process as a major in English Literature hoping to examine the effects of various written works on progress and development within the spheres of society, politics, race, environment, and gender by looking at the changes enacted by works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Jungle*, *Silent Spring*, and *Heart of Darkness*. As it would happen, I arbitrarily decided to open Joseph Conrad's work first and was struck by the historical implications already at play within the short novella. Under the guidance of Dr. Pizzo, I decided to narrow my concentration into an examination of exclusively imperial literature in order to work with a four-part case study of British, French, German, and Belgian imperialism, but by the time I ended my freshman year, I had resolved to abandon the role of literature altogether and instead delve further into the historiography of solely German imperialism. Upon returning to my research in the spring of my sophomore year, I intended to renew my comparison between the genocides of the Herero people of Southwest Africa under the Kaiserreich and the Jews of Europe under the National Socialists; however, that fall I introduced a third case to my study by including the occupation experience of Eastern Europeans during World War I, despite the fact that this case did not fall into the category of genocide. Nevertheless, each of these cases were prime examples of imperial ventures gone terribly awry that serve as a warning for future generations of the dangers and sorrows of racist expansionism.

The origins of the term imperialism offer a certain limited insight into the nature of its meaning; the word stems from the Latin root in the word *imperare*, meaning to command. This meaning can stretch from the most basic form, command of a group, to the more complex and indicative form, command of a nation, an idea, a land. Certainly, many European nations of the modern age engaged in both levels of *imperare* on every continent across the globe, Germany not the least of which. The simple knowledge of imperialism's etymology, however, is far from sufficient to grasp its origins, characteristics, or aims. Imperialism was actually born centuries before Germany ever united under a single national banner. In fact, in many ways, imperialism is as old as civilization itself, shaped by mankind's constant desire to expand and accrue wealth and power. This selfsame desire has never evaporated from humanity and indeed gained considerable traction over the course of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries so that by the nineteenth, the powers that be in Europe had come to base their international power and influence on the pursuit and acquisition of large and profitable overseas holdings. The last decades of the eighteenth century would have perhaps the largest impact on the trajectory of the following centuries with the birth of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain. The innovation of the steam engine, the mechanization of industry, and the development of the factory system suddenly resulted in a rapid increase in demand for raw materials and laborers. Most European powers saw fit to pursue this demand in other lands on the backs of other peoples, regardless of their interest or consent. Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, and multiple other nations carved up the rest of the "uncivilized" world in their quest for palm oil, coal, and rubber. By the outbreak of World War I, hardly a fraction of Africa remained independently ruled, and huge swaths of Asia and South America also remained under the yoke of European imperialism.

So, what then qualifies imperialism now that its origins as a mode of human expansion are understood? Imperialism can be best quantified in terms of

psychological, political, and economic factors. The psychological factors at play are most often distilled down to a simple reference to Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden," in which Kipling references the almost divine duty of the white man to liberate the rest of the world from its perceived cultural inferiority. This racist precept was fueled by the growing popularity of new academic disciplines like ethnography, anthropology, and other fields shadowed by racism based on Darwin's concept of competition and natural selection. Under the guise of scientific racism, European empires justified their aggressive expansionism as an obligation to uplift the "savage hordes" and force European culture, politics, and society on them. Working in tandem with this psychological motivator were the political elements of nationalism and prestige. By basing a country's self-worth on its ability to conquer other nations, European states became engaged in a patriarchal struggle of proving their virility as a marker of national pride and glory. The development of nationalism as a tangible term and concept in the early years of the nineteenth century was intrinsic to the development of this second factor in imperialism. Beforehand, countries were much more preoccupied with the third factor of imperialism: economic interests. Although the Industrial Revolution added a new facet of demand for raw materials, empires were already highly interested in the acquisition of new markets and ports for international trade as well as creating settlements in areas where lucrative materials were readily available. With the addition of the demands of the Industrial Revolution, expansion took on a whole new fervor in an effort to outrace other groups and achieve market superiority, thus securing a rich influx of goods and products at a fraction of their worth. Each of these factors coalesced to create an environment in which imperialism was not just desirable but viewed as nigh on vital for the future of the nation.

The choice to concentrate on German imperialism, despite the fact that the German Empire was not the largest on the globe, was made based on the unique

trajectory of German history. To be fair, there is no model of normality against which any nation's history can be measured, but Germany has walked a path that diverges so starkly from that of its neighbors, moving from reticent empire-builders to genocidal harbingers and finally to peace activists almost within the same century, that it stood to reason to ask *why*. To answer this, the development of German imperialism must be analyzed through four primary realities: German pathos, radical improvisation, cognizance of their contemporaries, and modern industrialization. Each of these factors combined to create a uniquely German experience of imperialism. It then became a matter of identifying which cases of German imperial history would be addressed and investigated. The Herero genocide seemed a logical beginning based on its chronology, characteristics, and status as an example of genocide. The occupation of Eastern Europe during World War I was the next step due to its position between the two greatest examples of genocide committed by Germans, while simultaneously retaining a level of horror unprecedented until that point and not sharing its neighbors' genocidal categorization. The final step had to fall upon the years of World War II, in which the National Socialists occupied vast swaths of land east of their original border and committed unequalled acts of horror and violence. Each of these three cases serves to outline the evolution of imperialism within German history so that by tracing this development, a conclusion may be drawn that can help point out future situations of atrocity and bloodshed before they can denigrate into full on slaughter. Through a better understanding of how such horrors originate and progress, mankind might better its ability to prevent them rather than remove them.

To properly consider each case and the historiography that connects them, a vast array of secondary literature was consumed. In the early days of this project's evolution, when the question of research still dealt with the role of literature within the political sphere, the book first analyzed was that of Swedish author Sven Lindqvist. His 1992 work *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man's Odyssey into the*

Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide was slim in form but heavy in content. The author meandered effortlessly from cover to cover in a melding of genres and styles: part travelogue, part historical reflection, and part creative writing exercise, all the while having been elegantly translated into English from his native Swedish. Organized as a series of sections numbering a startling one hundred and sixty-nine, Lindqvist uses Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a literary lens through which he transitions from present day observations of his travels across the Saharan desert to analyses of these countries' colonial pasts, while interjecting occasional ruminations on human nature and his own experience with the legacies of the lands and people he encountered on his journey. Even aside from the unique organization utilized by the author, this book serves as one of the first examples of the push to consider the actions of the Holocaust in relation to previous instances of genocide on a European scale rather than as an anomaly or a purely German phenomenon. Indeed, Lindqvist takes great pains to document not just the actions and ideologies of German figures like Georg Gerland and Friedrich Ratzel, the latter of whom made the ominous observation that "a people that does not wish to share the fate of the dinosaurs must constantly increase its living space...territorial expansion is the safest, indeed fundamentally the only real sign of the vitality of the nation and the race," but also the horrors committed by Frenchmen Voulet and Chanoine, Belgium's King Leopold, and the Welsh-American journalist Henry Morton Stanley.¹ Yet the greatest value of Lindqvist's work lies in his final words on section one hundred and sixty-nine in which he states, "it is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and draw conclusions."² This final thought was the thought that

¹ Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man's Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 155.

² Lindqvist, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, 172.

redirected an entire research project and turned it to a new trajectory aimed at understanding and challenging preconceived notions of racism, violence, and culpability. Rather than merely borrowing from German precedent or understanding, my research would turn to contemplate the global consequences of these cases.

The next step came in the form of Shelley Baranowski's concise analysis of Germany's specific imperial odyssey: *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler*. Opening with an observation of German-Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt's coverage of Adolf Eichmann's 1961 trial, Baranowski succinctly dissects the origins and existence of the two competing perspectives of Germany's imperial legacy by stating how "the first focuses on the long-term impact of Imperial Germany's maritime colonialism before the Great War, and explores the possible continuities between Imperial German colonial practices and the Third Reich...[while a] second and more recently articulated position that challenges the first recognizes that 'Germany,' be it the Holy Roman Empire until its dissolution in 1806, or the Second Empire after 1871, was a continental empire well before it ever ventured overseas."³ Yet Baranowski argues that each of these perspectives is limited in their scope by their inability to grasp the unifying factors of empire, colonialism, and genocide. Instead, she offers a third view that takes into account all the various stressors on German identity from the failure of the Teutonic knights through the upheaval of the Reformation and the devastation of the Thirty Year's War, past the debasement of the Napoleonic Wars and the failure of the 1848 Revolution, up to the incomplete Unification of 1871, and finally the shameful dissolution of the Kaiserreich in the aftermath of the First World War. She uses this context to create a narrative that understands the complex

³ Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

interplay of ambition and dread that characterized German imperialism from 1871 to 1945. Although Baranowski's scholarship begins only on the eve of Unification, the fact that she takes into consideration all of Germany's difficult and disparate past is telling of the ramifications it has on the present. Throughout the course of her work, the author details the evolution of imperialism through this self-constructed prism, noting how "the perceived 'failure' to eliminate social, religious, and ethnic divisions at home led increasingly to the demonization of domestic 'enemies,' who appeared to be the agents of foreign foes."⁴ By synthesizing such a vast body of work with such a unique scope, Baranowski offers a startlingly compelling argument behind the origins of imperial violence.

Following this trend of long-term contextualization of mass violence is Yale University history professor Ben Kiernan's sobering work *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. As befitting its substantial size, Kiernan's book is unique for both the chronological length of its scope and the global nature of his enquiry. Throughout the course of *Blood and Soil*, Kiernan analyzes no fewer than fifteen separate cases of genocide from the dawn of civilization to cases that are still ongoing, including the Herero Genocide and the Holocaust, through a lens of four unifying themes: racial competition, glorification of agriculture, the need to expand borders, and obsession with the precedent set by antiquity. Phrased in such a way, these themes can seem difficult to associate, not only with each other but also with the subject of genocide in the first place, but Kiernan painstakingly defines and identifies each of the trends within each genocidal chapter so as to make note of the fact that "the persistent recurrence among genocide perpetrators of ideological obsessions with violent ethnic prejudice, whether racial or religious, with cults of antiquity and agriculture, and with territorial expansion, reveals possibilities for predicting and hopefully

⁴ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 4.

preventing further cases of genocide in the twenty-first century.”⁵ Therefore, over the course of his book, he points out that racism has existed under many guises since the dawn of civilization while veneration of agriculture has fluctuated in popularity; however, the drive for expansion has always been popular among cultures on every continent. The cult of antiquity is perhaps the most difficult trend to understand, but Kiernan simply states that each group that has engaged in genocidal actions has invoked the image and blessing of a past group from whom they claim heritage, whether that lineage is factual or not. In most Western societies, this cult often manifests itself as an obsession with the Greek or Roman pathos, which can be clearly identified in nearly every European nation’s art, architecture, and political design. With such specific trends laid out in each case, Kiernan’s work is a one-of-a-kind contribution to the development of genocide studies and the push to recognize previously ignored instances of horror.

Some of the more recent additions to the scholarship of German-Eastern European relations are Dr. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius’s 2000 installment *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* and his 2009 novel *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, in which the University of Tennessee-Knoxville professor analyzes the relationship between Germany and Eastern Europe in politics, religion, and culture. Both books offer a concise synthesis of the German perspective of the East in all its contradictory fascination and repulsion, ultimately outlining how this perspective has shaped German identity to this day. Opening the latter book with a remark on the similarities between the German view of the East and the American myth of ‘Manifest Destiny,’ Liulevicius articulates the curious nature of the former as an almost existential question fraught with the interplay of the East as “both a site of

⁵ Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (Harrisonburg: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 40.

the future and its promise and at the same time a location of peril, associated with the past.”⁶ Continuing his examination, the author is also careful to define the terms of his title: German, myth, and East. In this book, “German” refers not only to those inhabitants of the nation-state but speakers of the language in all parts of the continent, while “myth” refers not to a cluster of lies but rather to a complex of ideas and hopes. Rather more difficult to understand is the concept of the “East” which, for the purposes of this enquiry, defies the confines of geography and instead embodies a concept of disorganization and low culture. Building from these established principles, Liulevicius outlines three topics for the scope of his work: the flexibility of the German myth of the East; the definition of what constituted a “German;” and the presence of recurring terms and themes throughout the fluctuations of the Eastern myth. Each of these questions is subsequently explored throughout the course of Liulevicius’s work, even as he takes great care to reject the tired *Sonderweg* theory of the mid-twentieth century, which argues for the inevitability and peculiarity of German history’s march toward National Socialism. The *Sonderweg* theory was first proposed during World War II as a justification for German exceptionalism, yet it fails to explain the proposed norm against which German history is measured. As such, Liulevicius argues that continuities cannot be misconstrued as causations by referring to his three research questions at hand, whose answers firmly reject the notion that an extermination of the people of the East was a foregone conclusion.

In 2003, Dr. Claudia Koonz, then professor of history at Duke University and one of the preeminent historians on feminism within the Third Reich, published her last academic work, *The Nazi Conscience*, in which she examined the intangible construction of the Nazi moral complex. The idea of the National Socialists having

⁶ Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

a system of moral standards to which members were held in strict accordance seems to contradict modern stereotypes about bloodthirsty, warmongering, savage Nazis who rejected any kind of cultural diversity or freedom of expression. To be sure, such rejection is not incorrect, but then, neither is the presence of this moral complex despite the stereotype. In an effort to articulate this oft-dismissed layer in the full picture of National Socialism, Koonz offers her work as a basis for critique by laying out four assumptions upon which the Nazi conscience operates: the life of a *Volk* organic in its life cycle; community values are dependent on their nature and environment; outright aggression against “undesirable” populations in conquered lands are justified by the advantage to the *Volk*; and the right of the government to void the rights and protections of assimilated citizens were based on race. These assumptions cleared the way for the implementation of the Nazis’ central ideological principles of the cult of the *Volk*, phobic racism, and the pursuit of *Lebensraum*, the mythic concept of land destined for German use in the East. Yet the bridge between the baseline assumptions and the tenets of National Socialist philosophy is the very conscience upon which the latter relied. In short, the Nazi conscience relied on glorification of the *Volk* and its concerns above all else in the effort of promoting a strong and healthy community that need not fear foreign intervention. To accomplish this, Koonz echoes the vexation of German poet Hans Carossa who wrote, “there’s a lot going on here in Germany: we are being laundered, purified, scrubbed, disinfected, separated, nordicized, toughened up, and, I caught myself almost adding, alienated.”⁷ Carossa’s fears of alienation were directly in tune with the fears of the time in which Nazi propaganda strove to dissect German society into a multitude of dichotomies: Aryan or not, Jewish or not, friend or not.

⁷ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2003), 69.

A decade into the new millennium saw the addition of a remarkable new body of work to the field of modern historical scholarship. While working as a professor of history at Yale University, author Timothy Snyder created this new addition, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, to investigate the ideologies and experiences of Eastern European occupation under both the German and Soviet dictators. Snyder's work is exceptional because of the geographical region in which he writes, including not only Eastern Europe but also the eastern and western peripheries that make up the occupying forces themselves. As a history of political mass violence, this book places its roots firmly in the soil of World War I whilst wading through the events that led up to and involved the Second. Indeed, Snyder makes the point that this work operates on the observation made evident by the First World War that "showed that millions of men would obey orders to fight and die, for causes abstract and distant, in the name of homelands that were already ceasing to be or only coming into being."⁸ In a departure from the more common practice of round figures, Snyder represents these men and the victims of their violence at complete numerical figures, never rounding them off to clean even thousands but rather calculating them down to the individual. This choice underlines both his respect for those affected by political mass violence and his understanding of the lives represented by those figures. Each tally mark represents someone's son or daughter, mother or father, friend or cousin. Snyder's resolve to symbolize that significance is a testament to the importance of his argument: violence, whether stemming from identical or opposite political doctrines, ruins lives and lands more effectively than any other factor or event.

Study of the Nazi Reich has been a central component of Modern European historical study for the last seven decades, with the atrocities of the East often taking

⁸ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books: New York, 2010), 1.

a secondary role in relation to the Western Front. Nevertheless, those who did study the horrors in the East divided the cadre into three levels of complicity, ranging from sadists at one end of the spectrum to dissenters at the other. While historical discourse had originally focused on these two extremes, retired professor of history Christopher R. Browning's 1992 book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* was one of the first works to shift the focal point to the previously ignored middle group comprised of those who merely went through the motions of their orders, neither objecting nor capitalizing on them. Over the course of this work, Browning examines the men of Reserve Police Battalions 101 who, as middle-aged, working-class individuals drafted from Hamburg, were their SS superiors' opposites in every way. Yet despite their contradiction to the typical Nazi profile, these men were an accessory to the round-ups, marches, and mass shootings that characterized the earliest stage of the Holocaust in the East. To make matters worse, several of the men were offered an opportunity to accept other roles that did not require murder, but each offer was summarily rejected. To determine why any of the perpetrators in the East, SS or otherwise, would become willing executioners, Browning proposed a number of reasons, including "wartime brutalization, racism, segmentation and routinization of the task, special selection of the perpetrators, careerism, obedience to orders, deference to authority, ideological indoctrination, and conformity."⁹ In the case of Reserve Police Battalion 101, however, Browning distilled his argument down to three primary factors: vertical, lateral, and environmental pressures. Drawing equally on historical as well as psychological research, Browning's assertion is critical for the universality of its application. These pressures are not uniquely German, but rather

⁹ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Harper Perennial: New York, 1992), 159.

uniquely human, and are therefore subject to repetition until such a time as mankind acknowledges its darker nature.

Chapter One: The Herero and Nama Genocide

Though distant from Germany both in geography and societal makeup, the lands comprised of present-day Namibia were nevertheless brought under German occupation in the late nineteenth century and would remain so until the invasion of South African troops in 1915 during the First World War. Yet while conquering European powers liked to stylize their actions as “discovery” of new territories, these lands had in fact been populated for millennia before the coming of European explorers by peoples like the Nama and, later, the Herero. The Herero were not the original inhabitants of the region of Namibia, nor were they a single people, but rather composition of numerous subsets that share a common tongue within the Bantu language tree. Most Herero peoples lived as pastoralists, herding cattle, sheep, and goats and basing their social hierarchy on the size of one’s herd. Contrary to standard Western ideals, the Herero hierarchy was not simply patrilineal but operated on the basis of a double descent system, which placed value on the mother’s as well as the father’s family lines. In a review of Carlos Laranjo Medeiros’s short work on the Herero people’s kinship customs, Alan Barnard briefly identifies the aspects discussed in Medeiros’s chapter on kinship as “an analysis of the complicated system of relationship terms, together with a description of the double descent system, a statement of the rules of incest avoidance, preferential marriage and inheritance, and even an account of burial customs as these relate to descent group structure.”¹⁰ The Nama were likewise a people based

¹⁰ Alan Berend, Review of *VaKwandu: History, Kinship and Systems of Production of an Herero People of South-West Angola*, written by Carlos Laranjo

on herding, but their language belonged within the Khoe-Kwadi language group, a separate family entirely from the Bantu languages. The establishment of their relationship with the Herero peoples was relatively recent, however. The Herero did not trickle into present-day Namibia, the traditional homeland of the Nama, until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In doing so, the Herero brought themselves into contact and eventual conflict with the pre-established people as each vied for grazing land and the opportunity to build their respective herds. With the introduction of European imperialists who deigned not to learn the difference between the two peoples, however, both the Herero and Nama would share a similar fate of exploitation and extermination.

The terrible commencement of this fate began decades earlier than its fulfillment with the calling of the infamous Berlin Conference in the winter of 1884. Having unified only thirteen years earlier, Germany had yet to embark on any overseas conquests, a reticence that predated unification and was encouraged by Otto von Bismarck, Germany's iconic Iron Chancellor. Previous involvement in colonial enterprise was limited to the signing of the 1879 "Friendship Treaty" with Samoa and several other European powers, but according to co-authors Julia Hell and George Steinmetz, "the conventional date marking the onset of the formal German empire is April 24, 1884, when Germany declared Southwest Africa a protectorate."¹¹ Later that year, the Conference for the partition of Africa began with representatives from nearly every major and minor Western power and the Ottomans in attendance but notably excluded those from any existing or prospective African colonies. The conference would outlast the year and continue onto the next,

Medeiros, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 54, no. 2 (1984): 110, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1159923>.

¹¹ Julia Hell and George Steinmetz, "The Visual Archive of Colonialism: Germany and Namibia," *Public Culture* 18, no. 48 (2006): accessed April 24, 2016, <http://publicculture.org/articles/view/18/1/the-visual-archive-of-colonialism-germany-and-nam>.

yet, despite its length, A.G. Hopkins, in his review of *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*, remarks on the significance of preeminent scholar S.E. Crowe's reading of the event, stating "there is general agreement...that [the Conference] did not cause partition and that Crowe was broadly correct in minimizing its influence."¹² Nevertheless, the Conference was responsible for marking a sudden shift in public opinion concerning colonialism. Despite the claim that such endeavors were in favor of commercial expansion, research conducted by Dr. Rempel at Western New England College states that "by the 1820s several countries, after having long colonial connections, had lost these connections without suffering any apparent economic deprivation."¹³ Harmut Pogge von Strandmann, however, points out that no fewer than six factors in the rise of German overseas aspirations arose in the latter half of the nineteenth century, including emigration, increased investment in global trade, growth of missionary societies, a fascination with exploring "exotic" landscapes, the creation of colonial pressure groups, and the spread of colonial propaganda.¹⁴ Echoing the argument of Rempel, Joseph A Schumpeter reasoned instead that imperialism was driven more by the act of action, for the simple sake

¹² A. G. Hopkins, Review of *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference, 1884-1885, and the Onset of Partition*, edited by Stig Forster, Wolfgang Mommsen, Ronald Robinson, *The Journal of African History* 33, no. 2 (1992): 350, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/183027.pdf?eq=1461649233872>.

¹³ Gerhard Rempel, "The New Imperialism," *Internet Archive*, last modified December 16, 2002, <http://web.archive.org/web/20021216072333/http://mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempe1/courses/wc2/lectures/imperialism.html>.

¹⁴ Harmut Pogge von Strandmann, "The Purpose of German Colonialism, or the Long Shadow of Bismarck's Colonial Policy," from *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, edited by Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 195-196.

of being a goal for a nation to accomplish.¹⁵ Schumpeter's strongest argument, however, is one that coincides with Yale scholar Kiernan's pre-established theories on genocide: imperialism is an atavism. Just as certain species honor their hereditary roots with retentive genes, both imperialism and genocide exhibit tendencies to revert back to a preconceived notion of an ancestral precedent. This tendency served as one of the largest prompting factors in validating colonial ventures abroad.

With the establishment of Southwest Africa as a German protectorate in 1884 and the claiming of modern day Tanzania and the Republics of Cameroon and Togo by the following year, Germany had established itself as a serious player in the realm of colonial enterprise, superseded only by the French and the British in scale of conquest. Having created an overseas empire of considerable diversity, the German Reich was able to call upon the resources provided by "hunters in the Kalahari desert, Nama pastoralists, Ngoni soldiers, Islamic lords in the Sudan, Swahili-speaking traders, and many others" to provide the economic gain that purportedly accompanied imperialism.¹⁶ With the smallest number of indigenous people living within the second largest territory under German imperial control, alongside the virtual nonexistence of malaria, Southwest Africa appeared to be the most ideal location to begin colonizing in earnest. Thus, the invasive acquisition of land and resources once occupied by the Herero and Nama peoples began, whose lifestyle relied on the freedom to let their herds graze across vast tracts of land. Rather than simply seizing the land through brute force, German colonial officials,

¹⁵ Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The Sociology of Imperialism, 1918," *Modern History Sourcebook*, accessed April 25, 2016.

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1918schumpeter1.asp>.

¹⁶ Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay, "German Imperialism in Africa: The Distorted Images of Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, and Togo," *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 2 (1992): 235-46, accessed April 25, 2016,

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/2784532.pdf>.

led first by Heinrich Göring, father of Hermann Göring, then Curt von François, and finally by Theodor Leutwein, relied on the strict traditions of Herero kinship and their own stereotypical ideas about “tribal” governance to bribe and blackmail local Herero leaders into working with the invaders against the best interest of their people. One such leader was Samuel Maharero, a man who had been educated in local Lutheran schools and initially attempted to maintain peaceful relations with the German colonial administration. Maharero was far from the only Herero man to receive a Western education, and, indeed, many of the indigenous peoples were highly familiar with Western dress, customs, ideals, and technology. Even with this knowledge, however, Maharero and plenty of his contemporaries were transformed into puppet proxies, while Leutwein and the German officials stripped countless Herero clans of their land, committed numerous cases of rape against Herero and Nama women and girls, used alcohol as a tool of exploitation, and withheld the right to testify in colonial courts. The myriad of indignities compounded to create an intense atmosphere of tension and resentment between the German subjugators and the subjugated Herero and Nama.

Life under German rule was harsh and uncompromising for the indigenous population. Their land, which had been virtually stolen from them by intoxicating local leaders and forcing their signatures on legal documents in a language they could not read, was converted from its original use as grazing territories to mass plantations for cotton and other export crops or as building sites for new railroads. The indigenous people were then used as cheap labor for the plantations, a direct insult to both their humanity and their former way of life. The final blow came in the form of a vicious viral infection that ravaged entire herds of cattle and domestic buffalo. In hardly any time at all, this rinderpest epidemic destroyed nearly ninety percent of the cattle population in the region and thus eliminated the primary source of wealth and diet for the Herero and Nama peoples. Having already been undermined by the machinations of the German colonists, Herero society was

further weakened by this cattle plague by “forcing large numbers of Hereros off the land and into the labor market [while] new warlords such as Kajata and Willy Kain, as well as Samuel Maherero, sought to exploit the situation by exporting labor and selling land.”¹⁷ The loss of their land was, for many Herero and Nama peoples, the final blow. Unable to preserve their disease-ridden herds, left without a means to pay back the loans they had taken from German settlers at exorbitant interest rates, and faced with the prospect of continued rape, forced labor, unlawful representation, and betrayal by their own ruling elite, the Herero peoples, led by the man who had once contributed to their misery, Samuel Maharero, joined their neighbors and rose up in a mass revolt in January of 1904.

The initial response of the Herero people to this intolerable environment was a desperate attack on a German settlement that ended with the deaths of between 120 and 150 colonists. Governor Leutwein, hoping to maintain a semblance of peace and order within the protectorate, negotiated the armistice of a group of Herero rebels, but, while Leutwein believed the conflict to have been resolved and thus withdrew many of his armed forces, Maharero and his followers occupied Okahandja and declared independence from the German colony based in Windhoek. Now forced to acknowledge that the situation had escalated beyond his control, Leutwein sent to Berlin for reinforcements to deal with the uprising in May of 1904. By June of that year, these reinforcements had arrived with a new commander for the colony, General Lothar von Trotha. Whereas Leutwein had favored a policy of surrender for the renegade Herero people, von Trotha immediately differentiated himself from his predecessor by articulating his

¹⁷ Richard A. Voeltz, Review of *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Heroes of Namibia, 1890-1923*, by Jan-Bart Gewald, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 435-36, accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/220700.pdf?_=1461657007646.

perception of the indigenous peoples as a naturally violent culture and then announcing his intention to eradicate the whole of the indigenous population, an echo of the passionate request of a Pan-German leaflet some fourteen years earlier that called for all Germans to “be a conquering people which takes its portion of the world itself!”¹⁸ Just two short months after their arrival in Southwest Africa, von Trotha’s forces had defeated the brunt of the Herero fighting force in the Battle of Waterberg. Cutting off access to all watering holes in the area, the German soldiers drove the survivors into the Omaheke region of the Kalahari Desert, ruthlessly cutting down any individuals who fell behind, including women, children, and the elderly, despite their being unarmed and unable to offer any resistance. Of the thousands who fled the killing ground of Waterberg, less than a thousand made it across the desert to British-controlled Bechuanaland, where they were offered asylum from the Germans. Most were not so lucky.

In October of 1904, von Trotha sealed the doom of the Herero peoples with the issuance of his infamous Extermination Order, in which he set a price on the head of the Herero elite and promised armed retribution to any Herero who attempted to return to his homeland, including women and children, whom he promised to “drive...back to their people or let them be shot at.”¹⁹ In recent years, some historians have attempted to deemphasize the importance of the Extermination Order, yet such a proclamation represents indisputable proof of the German colonial military’s willingness to employ the most extreme measures possible to achieve their goal of living space in Africa. In light of their obsession with ancestral precedent, reliance on racial tropes, pursuit of foreign territory, and

¹⁸ Mildred S. Wertheimer, “Program of the Pan-German League, 1890-1898,” *Modern History Sourcebook*, accessed April 26, 2016, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1890pangerman.asp>.

¹⁹ Lothar von Trotha, “Extermination Order,” *Canvas*, accessed December 20, 2017, <https://murraystate.instructure.com/courses/1252425/assignments/4831433>.

exploitation of preexisting economic factors, the German occupation of Southwest Africa was a textbook example of Kiernan's genocidal themes. Although von Trotha purportedly intended for his troops to merely shoot over the heads of fleeing women and children, co-authors David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen rightly point out that for these troops "hundreds of miles from their senior commanders, operating on the fringes on an endless desert and under orders to shoot Herero on sight, it may well have been a very small step for exhausted men to reinterpret their orders as a license to kill all Africans."²⁰ Most women and children were, in fact, spared a death by bullets yet subjected to sexual assault before being turned out into the desert to die of starvation and dehydration. In response to these vast cruelties, the Nama people joined their former neighbors in rebellion in the same month that von Trotha issued his order, yet, by the end of the year, new orders from Berlin had come that mandated the removal of "survivors" to newly erected concentration camps under German colonial control.

The modern concept of the concentration camp, or *Konzentrationslager*, is often given German origins; however, the first such settlement was in fact implemented by the British during the Second Boer War during the turn of the twentieth century. The first German iteration came less than a year into their conflict with Herero, most notably in the form of Shark Island, a miserable, windswept mass of rocks just off the coast of Namibia. In this camp, as well as the others scattered across the colony, Herero and Nama peoples were crowded into squalid barracks where disease, starvation, and exhaustion through work rapidly diminished the population. Missionaries of various faiths were even allowed inside to proselytize the prisoners on a weekly schedule, despite the purpose of the conflict being "to eradicate the Herero as an ethnic group from German South-West Africa,

²⁰ David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Holocaust* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2010), 153.

either by their extermination or by their wholesale expulsion from the colony.”²¹ Hundreds of prisoners of all ages and sexes were used in systematic studies to validate European ideals of racial superiority; German guards put their captives to work doing hard physical labor while countless women were pressed into sex slavery. These studies were powered by the drive to develop the fields of anthropology and ethnography, which at that time served to perpetuate the idea of “tribalism” as a way of over simplifying and trivializing the monolithic social structure of indigenous peoples. This racist ideology, already prevalent among intellectual groups and growing with each passing year, was also rampant among the common people, though to a much less precise degree. In his written recollections, a German foot soldier named Gustave Freensen documented his experiences while on campaign from 1903 to 1904, during which he remarked how he “was surprised that so many hard undertakings, of which I had never heard or read so much as a word, had been carried through by Germans, and that already so much German blood had been lavishly spilled in this hot, barren land.”²² Underlining the fact that the common German displayed little understanding of his environment while maintaining a deeply ingrained complex of blood superiority, Freensen’s story is also a chilling tale of brutality against “the enemy,” a brutality that Kaiser Wilhelm II praised in his speech to the Reichstag in November of 1905 in which he proclaimed that “I know that I speak for the German people when I warmly thank and proudly acknowledge the officers and troops who answered my call and defended our territories with heroic courage at risk to their own lives.”²³

²¹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust*, 150.

²² Gustave Freensen, “In the German South African Army, 1903-1904,” *The World’s Story: A History of the World in Story, Song and Art* 3, edited by Eva March Tappan, *Modern History Sourcebook*, accessed April 26, 2016, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1904freesen.asp>.

²³ Kaiser Wilhelm II, “The Kaiser on Southwest Africa: Reichstag Speech by Wilhelm II (November 28, 1905),” *The Speeches of Kaiser Wilhelm II*, edited by

That “heroic courage” culminated with the extermination of some 65,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama people, an eighty percent and fifty percent depopulation, respectively.²⁴

With the completion of their genocidal goals in 1907, German settlers experienced less than a decade of “prosperity,” during which they were permitted to use Herero and Nama laborers for work on their plantations and construction projects. These laborers were the last survivors of the concentration camps that were finally closed in the last year of the conflict. Signifying their status with a metal disc worn around the neck, the exploited Herero and Nama peoples were forbidden from owning land or cattle and existed only in their role as manual workers. While this short era was a time of misery for the indigenous peoples, German settlers thrived in such a way that, years after the territory had been lost to war and the Treaty of Versailles, later regimes would tap into this nostalgia and “the memory of German South-West Africa and the era of the ‘settler paradise’ between the Herero and Nama genocides and World War I.”²⁵ The use of this nostalgia, in conjunction with the racist tropes employed by the colonial administration, would become a powerful tool, particularly in the repertoire of Nazi Germany, who would brazenly employ the appropriation of national identity, culture, and memory to validate their racial ideology. While the validation of this ideology was reliant at least in part on such nostalgia, its implementation was fully reliant on the realization of genocide. To this end, historian Shelley Baranowski points out that while “the colonial army’s pacification in the name of security at the

Johannes Penzler, *German History in Documents and Images* 3: 289, accessed April 26, 2016, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=788.

²⁴ Jürgen Zimmerer and Benyamin Neuberger, “Herero and Nama Genocide,” *The Combat Genocide Association*, accessed February 2, 2018, http://combatgenocide.org/?page_id=153.

²⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust*, 300.

very least carried genocidal potential...Nazism's ideological project, the racial remaking of its *Lebensraum* largely unchecked by dissent at home, created its own unique agent."²⁶ This lack of dissent at home was partially mirrored during the Kaiserreich by many high-ranking officials like Alfred von Schlieffen and the Kaiser himself, even as the SPD vehemently opposed the methods employed by von Trotha. The elections that followed the genocide would be marked as the only time in German history where the SPD actually lost seats in the Reichstag due to their opposition to the Herero and Nama genocide.

While Europeans failed to voice sufficient objection to the horrors visited on the Herero and Nama peoples, the indigenous populations did not suffer the same reticence. With 1915 marking the loss of Southwest Africa from German control to the invasion of South Africa under British command, 1919 marked the year in which Namibia became a de facto "fifth province" of South Africa. Over the following years, South Africa enforced considerable executive authority over their mandate territory, even going so far as to introduce apartheid in conjunction with the rise of the South African National Party. In response to these increasingly authoritarian actions, both the Herero and Nama leadership bodies submitted complaints to the United Nations, which went largely unheard until 1988 when Namibia finally won her independence. The genocide that had so terribly redesigned Namibia's demographic and cultural landscape had been recognized as such by the U.N. only three years earlier. Since that time, relations between Germany and Namibia have been strained, as the former avoided issuing a formal apology for nearly twenty years after the recognition of the genocide while the latter has filed multiple lawsuits demanding reparations and the return of property to descendants of the victims. Many of these lawsuits are ongoing still today, while others have resulted in compromised compensation and the delayed return of

²⁶ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 241.

certain relics from German universities.²⁷ Ultimately, the legacy of this genocide and the war that surrounded it is one of long-lasting resentment and bureaucratic reticence to right the wrongs of the past. By drawing on this example of cultural concerns, hurried extemporization, awareness of related events, and industrial possibilities at work, the Herero and Nama genocide serves as an outline for later, darker realities.

²⁷ “Germany sued for damages of 'forgotten genocide' in Namibia,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/05/germany-sued-forgotten-genocide-namibia-herero-nama>.

Chapter Two: The Ober Ost

Between the Volga River and the Rhine lies a vast stretch of land south of the Baltic Sea and north of the Adriatic in which Ivan Berend of Cambridge University has observed “similar economic, social, and political structures have established in the course of European history a distinct region.”²⁸ This region is home to people from an assortment of ethnic groups, the most prominent of which was the Slavic people. Although perceived as scattered, divided, and leaderless by their immediate western neighbors in the Holy Roman Empire and beyond, the peoples of Eastern Europe, particularly in areas of a Slavic majority, were, in fact, already well established and economically stable. Nonetheless, much of Central and Eastern Europe was inundated with German immigrants during the High Middle Ages under the flag of the expanding Teutonic Knights. The introduction of an entirely new ethnic group, particularly one that rivaled the preexisting majority, put considerable stress on the demographic of Eastern Europe. While German émigrés regarded their movement as a fulfillment of *Ostsiedlung*, their predestined expansion into the East as promised and encouraged by the Teutonic Order, many indigenous groups felt crowded and were agitated by the influx of new people. For decades, many historians regarded this influx as not just a physical movement of people but also a movement of ideas, culture, and social structures. While this belief was true to a certain degree, Eastern Europe had already established cities, laws, and a rich culture of folklore for itself before any German immigrant had crossed their borders. Nonetheless, *Ostsiedlung* did reshape much of the societal structure of the region by introducing German town law, in which urban dwellers were granted certain property rights, personal freedoms, and trade protections from foreign

²⁸ Ivan T. Berend, “The Historical Evolution of Eastern Europe as a Region,” *International Organization* 40, no. 2 (1986): 329, accessed October 13, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/2706839.pdf>

merchants. Though initially offered only to ethnic Germans, these laws were soon expanded to include all inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity. Ethnic identity did not dissipate with the inclusion of non-German peoples in the new town law, however. Indeed, the relationship between ethnic identity and fervent loyalty to one's land was not foreign to Eastern Europe, but, whereas this relationship had manifested itself as nationalism in the West over the course of the nineteenth century, such a concept was inherently more difficult to create and convey between the disparate peoples of the East, resulting in a disunity that was repeatedly exploited by foreign powers in the modern era. In Poland however, a conscious national identity had been created in response to this continuous foreign intervention and manipulation, so that "to be a Pole...meant to be cognizant of the past, to recognize the existence of a community shaped by a common history, culture, language, and faith (or some combination of the above)."²⁹ Cognizance of this common community, which became characteristic in almost every area of the continent, would become the most important societal development in modern Europe.

The idea of the common community, linked by shared history, language, and culture, was a concept that was rapidly circulating in the late eighteenth century during the French Revolution before gaining enormous traction and popularity across Europe in reaction to the spread of the First French Empire under Napoleon. The term "nationalism" had already been coined in 1772 by Prussian scholar Johann Gottfried Herder in his "Treatise on the Origin of Language," in which he emphasized the crucial importance of language in the construction of a national

²⁹ Patrice M. Dabrowski, "Uses and Abuses of the Polish Past by Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski," *The Polish Review*, 56, no. ½ (2011): 73, accessed September 14, 2016
<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/41549950.pdf>.

identity and the cognizance of the human spirit.³⁰ Herder expounded on this ideal in other works as well, asserting that “the time [is] coming when we shall return in earnest to our language, to the merits, to the principles and goals of our fathers and learn therefore to value our own gold.”³¹ Hardly three years after Herder’s death, German statesman Johann Fichte called on French-occupied Berlin, and to all German-speakers abroad, to distinguish themselves from their geographic neighbors in other countries, saying that any country that “wishes to absorb and mingle with itself any other people of different descent and language, cannot do so without itself becoming confused...and violently disturbing the even progress of its culture.”³² In the vein of these early proponents of nationalism were figures like Ernst Moritz Arndt and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, both of whom were supporters of a romanticized German agrarian state in which the rural *Volk* were viewed as the most genuine Germans and thus the personification of the true German spirit. The field of ethnography lent itself to the support of nationalist ideals by circulating pseudoscientific concepts about race that relied heavily on stereotypes, ignorance, and religion-based fears. The interest of German political, philosophical, and scholarly figures in the creation of a national identity hearkens back centuries to the Thirty Years War of the early seventeenth century, which left a lasting mark on the German psyche by instilling an enduring fear of foreign domination and

³⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Treatise of the Origin of Language,” Marxists Internet Archive (1772), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/herder/1772/origins-language.htm>.

³¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism,” quoted from *The Marrow of Human Experience* by William A. Wilson, (University Press of Colorado, 2006), 108, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/j.ctt4cgkmk.1.1.pdf>.

³² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “To the German Nation,” *Modern History Sourcebook*, accessed November 21, 2017. <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1806fichte.asp>.

exploitation, as well as a subsequent need for unification and protection. With the occupation of the French during the Napoleonic Wars, this centuries-old fear was rekindled and finally realized in 1871, largely through the machinations of Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck.

Under Bismarck's nominal rule from Unification to 1890, Germany pursued a course of foreign diplomacy characterized by the concepts of *realpolitik*, a pragmatic approach to "real world politics" regardless of ideology, morals, or ethics. Concurrent with this diplomatic style was the hope held by many that "the new Germany was but the first stage in the achievement of a dominion that would extend beyond its present borders to include ethnic Germans scattered throughout Europe, a realm that would reach as far as Constantinople and the Black Sea."³³ Although Bismarck was resistant even to the idea of building an overseas empire, he nevertheless agreed to its creation by hosting the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, which would ultimately lead to Germany's short but bloody control of East Africa and Southwest Africa. Yet despite Bismarck's careful construction and maintenance of a complex system of treaties, alliances, and agreements with all of the major powers and many minor powers in Europe, he was summarily replaced by a series of weaker politicians who bowed to the newly crowned Kaiser's political ideations, which included an abrupt shift away from Bismarck's defensive *realpolitik* in favor of the more aggressive *Weltpolitik*. Under the Kaiser's new leadership, Germany relentlessly pursued acquisition of overseas territories while also adopting a more assertive diplomatic approach to their continental neighbors. This pugnacious attitude was undeniably provoked by Germany's wholehearted adherence to the principles of "nationalism, the civic religion of the new state, [which] reflected the centrality of military values, as well as an aggressive confidence in Germany's growing industrial power and the conviction that German

³³ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 9.

influence in the world ought to correspond to the country's economic might."³⁴ By 1914, tensions on the continent were brought to a head with the assassination of the Austrian archduke by a Serbian nationalist sect. Within weeks of the assassination, the complex web of alliances and treaties that had so characterized foreign diplomacy for the last several decades were called into action, and Europe was once again at war with itself. For the peoples of Eastern Europe, World War I was hardly the exciting prospect hailed by the West. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had not been kind to the region, which had suffered under continued divisions and rule by foreign powers while simultaneously upholding the "industrialized, urbanized, and educated West...[as] a far away, admired, envied, and hated promised land for the agricultural, rural, partly illiterate peasant societies of the East."³⁵ Indeed, while nations like Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium had continued to exercise their imperial muscles and enjoy ever-rising prosperity, the failure of achieving an equal status in the East resulted in the "extreme ideologies and political trends that emerged in turn-of-the-century Central and Eastern Europe...all of [which] repudiated the West and rejected the previous imitative road of development."³⁶ Instead, despite being dramatically unprepared for modern warfare and ardently wishing to avoid such a conflict, the lands of Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, which were ruled at the time by Tsarist Russia, would find themselves front and center for the duration of the nearly four-and-a-half-year campaign.

³⁴ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

³⁵ Ivan T. Berend, "The Failure of Economic Nationalism: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II," *Revue économique* 51, no. 2 (2000): 316, accessed October 9, 2016,

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/3503126.pdf>.

³⁶ Berend, "The Failure of Economic Nationalism," 316.

While World War I is often remembered in the West for its static trench borders that never wavered more than a few miles in either direction over the course of the war, the border in the East was a different matter altogether. This boundary was a fluid line, bulging and shrinking hundreds of miles as the Germans and Austro-Hungarians struggled against the Russians and their Eastern European holdings. Yet for much of the war, Germany held control of vast swaths of eastern territory, each section of which was organized and governed differently; but none were governed more ruthlessly than the parts of present-day Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Poland, and Courland that made up the zone under the control of the *Oberbefehlshaber*, known as the *Ober Ost*. The *Ober Ost*, effectively controlled by Erich Ludendorff until 1916 and then by the Bavarian Prince Maximilian until the end of the war, operated as a formal military occupation that had replaced the previous Russian presence while allowing the native Polish administration to remain intact, though powerless. Driven by a multitude of motivations ranging from militaristic strategy to deeply embedded ideals about eastward expansion, the Germans hoped to create a model state in which native Slavs would be elevated to the standards of their German occupiers while also making room for German immigrants to the East. To prepare the land for its intended purpose, the Germans divided the region into three districts, in each of which were implemented two policies of occupation identified in Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius's work *The German Myth of the East: Verkehrspolitik* and *Deutsche Arbeit*. The policy of *Verkehrspolitik* restricted the movement of the native population between the districts and called for forced labor and the expropriation of available resources; yet "while *Verkehrspolitik* controlled the land, borders, and movement, a program of *Kultur* would accomplish the same on the spiritual plane, controlling entire

peoples, their national identities, and future development.”³⁷ Stemming from early racial ideologies about Slavic ethnic groups that would provide a later basis for the Nazi ethos, the cultural concept of *Deutsche Arbeit* promoted the purification of Eastern societies and cultures through integration with the German model. Toward this end, “the army devoted astonishing effort in time of war to cultural improvement behind the front: newspapers in native languages, publication of dictionaries, folk museums, school regulations, archaeological and historical investigations, and theatre.”³⁸ As a result of these conflicting policies and the positioning of the Eastern Front, the *Ober Ost* and much of occupied Poland were ravaged over four long years.

The reality of German occupation could often be much different than the original aims and concepts proposed by the racial narrative of German ideology about the East. The term *Verkehrspolitik* itself is a reference to the ominously panoptic possibilities at play; difficult to assign to a single definition in English, the root “verkehr” refers to “traffic, movement, communications and relations, or (most broadly) any kind of interaction.”³⁹ Such interaction went beyond simply determining where the indigenous peoples could and could not go to include the acquisition of manufactured resources, the movement of raw materials, and the mobilization of troops. By operating under such a broad term, the German military acted with the freedom to secure each of these factors while also addressing reconstruction efforts and partisan uprisings, all with the ultimate goal of permanent ownership of the land via colonialization. Of course, while “many competing interests, economic, political, and financial, were to be taken into consideration in

³⁷ Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 113.

³⁸ Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 139.

³⁹ Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 89.

forming policies, [sic] the overruling interest in any instance was always the army's demand for security and 'ordered circumstances.'⁴⁰ The decisions made in the name of this policy were handled by an administrative section of the same name and in conjunction with other offices as demanded by the incredibly ambitious concerns of the policy. As a result, no section of the *Ober Ost*'s administrative body was spared involvement or fulfillment of *Verkehrspolitik*. The impact this had on the people who had lived in the area now controlled by the Germans was deep and lasting, from the creation of fixed resource prices to the drive of Polish laborers to German farms in the West, but not altogether unique. Even in the lands of the Entente, residents of "enemy origin" were treated with distrust and suspicion in ways that often manifested in movement policies that echoed that of the *Ober Ost*. In Scotland at the very start of the war, a German woman, Edith Herring, was arrested for traveling outside her permitted five-mile radius, despite her claims that she attempted to procure a travel pass. Nevertheless, Herring was arrested and sentenced to five days in prison before being sent back to Germany.⁴¹ Native residents in the *Ober Ost* were not granted the same treatment, since their enemies resided in their own lands. Yet the all-encompassing movement policy was not the only occupation strategy employed by the Germans.

While *Verkehrspolitik* was adopted as a means of controlling the movement of people, resources, and information in the East, a project of *Kultur* was employed to accomplish the same reordering of the people's identities. When the German army came into possession of their new lands, the overwhelming reaction of the German military can be welded into a single descriptive term for the whole region: *Unkultur*, or the lack of any recognizable culture. This imperious verdict

⁴⁰ Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 91.

⁴¹ "Restrictions on Enemy Aliens and Prisoners of War: Contravention of Aliens Restriction Order," Court proceedings regarding Frau Edith Herring, 3 September 1914, *Scottish National Records*, HH31/10/15.

materialized in the *Deutsche Arbeit* policy and prompted the creation of an ethnic missionary cult, which was bent on merging Eastern identity with proper German culture to create a new regional self-concept that was reliant on German influence and reinforced the narrative of their own racial preeminence. In the works of various German writers, including Thomas Mann, the concept of *Kultur* was identified and touted as “an organic, rooted, idealistic, and authentic expression of the creative essence of German national character. By contrast, the Latin word ‘civilization’ stood for artificial, merely technical achievements of a soulless western way of life, embodied by the decadent French and the coldly mercantile British.”⁴² In fact, the term *Kultur* stems from the Latin word *colere*, meaning to cultivate, which brings to mind Kiernan’s genocidal trend of agriculture by summoning “the image of the helmeted German soldier sowing in the East.”⁴³ The image of the farming soldier representing the best of true German culture would only grow to mythic proportions in the decades following World War I. The revival of *Ostsiedlung*, the medieval emigration of Germanic peoples into Eastern Europe, was yet another echo of this colonial desire that grew louder with the creation of a “demarcation line to the East which coincided largely with the easternmost line held by the medieval Teutonic Knights—a coincidence, which gave the more romantic among the German officers the feeling of guarding once more the West against the East.”⁴⁴ To this end, the German occupation forces dedicated themselves to creating order and cultivation in order to create a positive image of German Work, define native identity, and contextualize the meaning of the German

⁴² Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 131.

⁴³ Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 142.

⁴⁴ Alfred Vagts, “A Memoir of Military Occupation,” *Military Affairs* 7, no. 1 (1943): 24, accessed September 6, 2016,

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/stable/pdf/1982990.pdf>.

presence in the East, so that the *Ober Ost* would remain a German holding for time without end.

The interaction of ideology and action is precisely the place in which reality and meaning find a common root. While the ideologies fueling the actions taken in the *Ober Ost* were highly reminiscent of those invoked in Southwest Africa, and later by the National Socialists, from the near-divinely inspired pursuit of territory to the racialized preconceptions toward the indigenous populations, the *Ober Ost* never descended into genocide despite the nominal presence of each of Kiernan's genocidal trends. The obsession with agriculture, fertile soil, and genetic predispositions toward cultivation manifests itself in the *Ober Ost* not only in Liulevicius's image of the soldier-farmer working to "civilize" the "barbaric" East for the benefit of all the ethnic Germans living outside the Fatherland, but also in Theodore Abel's account of the farmer's story, in which the subject recounted how "the greater our need became, the more deeply the farmer attached himself to the soil. Everyone felt that if he had to leave the soil his life would be destroyed, uprooted."⁴⁵ Closely related to this obsession, the drive for expansion was evident in Germany's war aims and military strategy that led them to occupy this massive territory, just as the concerns of ancestral precedent urged them to redeem lost land and legend. Military giants like Ludendorff and Hindenburg were far from the only ones in support of this territorial expansion: "as the antidote to the Polish 'flood' and as the protectors of German communities outside the Reich's borders threatened by 'Russidication' or 'Magyarization,' the Pan Germans stood at the forefront in pushing for the continental consolidation of ethnic Germans in one polity."⁴⁶ Yet the racism that had dominated interaction between colonists and the colonized in the southern hemisphere reappeared in a milder format just a decade

⁴⁵ Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came into Power* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1938), 294.

⁴⁶ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 43.

later. Roger Chickering admits that “aspects of German rule during the First World War did anticipate the Nazi ‘population policy’ of the next war, the attempt to reengineer society in the occupied lands according to racial principles;” however, the goal of German occupation during World War I was the harnessing of economic resources for the good of the civilized *Volk*.⁴⁷ Though still disparaging, critical, and exploitative, interactions between the German occupiers and the occupied peoples was not inherently genocidal or systematically orchestrated to be violent and bloody. The very nature of Germany’s occupation was fundamentally different from its earlier and later incarnations, as their aim was to elevate the East to German standards of culture and society rather than dedicated to the exploitation and eventual erasure of the indigenous populations.

At the same time that Germany’s military was struggling with their goals of cultivating and civilizing the perceived barbarity of the Eastern regions, it was also dealing with a war on two fronts that was slowly sapping the country’s life, resources, and will to fight. While fighting in the west had ground down to a static war of attrition, fighting in the east remained highly intense and mobile until the withdrawal of Russia from the conflict. The massive country’s surrender came after more than a year of dissatisfaction, mutiny, and political upheaval that finally culminated with the infamous October Revolution that saw the ascension of the Bolshevik Party to the most powerful institutions in Russia. Though remembered today as a singular event of 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution was an uprising that took years to fully realize, involving millions of lives from the conscription of the Red Army to the effects of widespread legal revision. More immediately, however, the Bolsheviks directed their energies at extracting Russia from the conflict on the European continent with all due haste, an urgency which forced the new regime to sign the draconian Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The infamous treaty, signed after only

⁴⁷ Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War*, 82.

two months deliberation, detailed Soviet Russia's renunciation of obligations to the Entente as well as its relinquishment of the Baltic States, Finland, Belarus, and Ukraine, while Poland was ignored entirely. The loss of these territories, as well as the revolution itself, served as the effective end of the Russian Empire, if only in name; in the following years, the Red Army would regain the vast majority of these lost lands. In the aftermath of the War in the East, the removal of Soviet Russia from the struggle was meant to bring an end to armed conflict in the East, but the violence of the First World War continued to plague the entire region for years afterward in the form of new conflicts, like the Russian Civil War and the Polish-Soviet War, as well as the presence of the German *Freikorps*. Each of these sources of conflict would contribute to the social and political makeup of Eastern Europe during the Interwar Period.

From the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the coordinated attack on Poland in 1939, Eastern Europe endured the Interwar Period to varying degrees of independence and unease. While the immediate aftermath of the war was largely composed of even more war, by the mid-1920s, the region had mostly settled into a tenuous sort of peace. The Polish-Soviet War was perhaps the most significant of these post-World War conflicts, having evolved initially out of a border dispute and then into an all-out offensive by the Polish Army looking to create an *Intermarium*, or a confederation of states to stand against the great powers of Germany and Soviet Russia. The short but brutal conflict ended in Soviet defeat with the signing of a treaty in Riga. While the dream of Jozéf Piłsudski, the Polish Chief of State, for an *Intermarium* was never realized, and indeed, all the countries Piłsudski had hoped to unite were under Nazi or Soviet control by 1940, the conflict was instrumental in curbing Vladimir Lenin's ambitions to expand communism across the European continent. Equally instrumental in the curbing of this ambition was the reality of civil war in Soviet Russia. The new government struggled to assert itself across the vast stretch of its territory for a full four years before it finally achieved a semblance

of control in 1922. Germany's post-war experiences were no better, crippled as it was by domestic displeasure, abandonment by the elite, and the effects of the Treaty of Versailles, which had mandated the removal of German presence from their oversea holdings, demilitarization of the Rhineland, payment of reparations to Britain and France, and finally, acceptance of responsibility for having initiated the war. The effects of these treaty tenets would harden the attitude of the German populace into one of resentment and revenge, a sentiment that certain charismatic politicians would tap into in the coming decades. Indeed, this reality would only exacerbate the pathos of victimhood that had already so colored the experience of Germans since the seventeenth century. With the relentless developments of military technology pushing the bounds of what was considered possible, the continued occupation of all other European powers in their respective colonial holdings, and the failed results of this last episode of frantic administrative formulation, the Ober Ost lends itself glaringly to the development of the next stage in the German imperial experience.

Chapter Three: The General Government

The Interwar Period, spanning the scant two decades between the conclusion of the First World War and the commencement of the Second, was by no means a quiet time for Germany, despite the nominal lack of warfare. Having been saddled with the unfortunate and unpopular responsibility of negotiating the Treaty of Versailles with the victorious Entente, the Social Democrats were hard-pressed to generate sympathy or support for the new administration in Weimar. Instead, the party was viewed as traitors to the Fatherland who had bowed to the cruelty and exploitation of Britain and France and were ultimately, along with women and Jews, the reason for Germany's defeat in the war. This fabricated account of the nation's defeat, known today as the *Dolchstoßlegende*, was largely propagated by those truly culpable: the conservative military elite who had so determinedly ignored the reality of their situation and thus failed their people. As such, many of these figures escaped the consequences of their actions, retaining their heroic reputation, particularly in the case of Paul von Hindenburg, Chief of the General Staff from 1916 to the end of the war. With their support rapidly diminishing in the face of continued hardships like the hyperinflation of 1923, the Social Democrats eventually yielded to Hindenburg's still-intact popularity, throwing their support with the man's presidential run in 1925. That year and the following year saw a significant reversal in Germany's political fortunes with the signing of the Locarno Treaty, which necessitated friendly relations with France, followed by the admittance of Germany into the League of Nations. Yet even these hard-won victories could not turn the tide of German sentiment in favor of the Weimar Republic.

Even as the Social Democrats and their new conservative allies labored to rejuvenate the German economy and spirit, the sentiments that had fueled warfare and imperialism in previous decades festered in the hearts of ethnic Germans living

outside of the Fatherland. Many of these individuals channeled their frustrations and insecurities into rabid nationalism; one such individual was Adolf Hitler. Having served in the German Army during WWI, Hitler was well acquainted with the sentiments that had so shaped German military culture for decades. It was this knowledge that kept Hitler in military service after the war, which led him to join the German Workers' Party in 1919. Over the next four years, Hitler took control of the party and, in November of 1923, launched an unsuccessful coup that ultimately gave him a platform to project his hyper-nationalistic, anti-Semitic message to the whole of Bavaria and beyond. Though held in prison for a year and a half, Hitler used the time to dictate his infamous autobiography *Mein Kampf*, from which millions of Germans would draw ideological inspiration in the following years. The rhetoric of *Mein Kampf*, in combination with the discontent of the German masses under the effects of the Versailles Treaty, would be exploited over the 1920s and 30s to generate further resentment toward Hitler's chosen scapegoat: the Jew. The fueling of this racialized hatred would ultimately evolve into a continental civil war and racial war "that combined contemptuous stereotypes of long-standing, a loathing of the Bolshevik Revolution, and the wrenching impact of World War I and its aftermath, which exacerbated German perceptions of foreign dominations and ethnic contamination."⁴⁸ With Hitler's rise to the Chancellorship in 1933, the prospect of a dual war became reality.

Once appointed Chancellor of Germany, Hitler's move to assert total control over the German state was startlingly swift. Barely a month after his appointment, the Reichstag was set ablaze under mysterious circumstances and used to push through the Enabling Act, which granted Hitler widespread authoritative power and suspended civil rights for German citizens. This act was merely the tipping point that triggered the beginning of the end for German Jews.

⁴⁸ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 242.

Anti-Semitism, the centuries-old hatred against the Jewish people that took on pseudoscientific racialized qualifiers under the Nazis, was one of two primary cornerstones of National Socialist ideology alongside pro-Aryanism. This ideology was a virulent mutation of the nineteenth century's *Völkish* movement, which promoted an organic sense of German essence and, though "often at odds with modernity, was fueled by industrialization and social dislocations."⁴⁹ In the Nazi sense however, the movement took on epically racist overtones that would spawn the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which detailed how Hitler and his myrmidons viewed the *Volk* and the Jewish Question. The Nuremberg Laws were, in fact, the second in a series of four collective deaths for German Jews identified by the historian Christopher Browning in his book *The Origins of the Final Solution*.⁵⁰ In his scholarship, Browning points out four separate instances that chip away at the rights and freedoms of German Jews living in the Third Reich. The first attack on the Jewish people came in 1933, scant months after the passage of the Enabling Act, with the clearing of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which ousted all practicing Jews from government-sponsored jobs, becoming the first civic death of German Jewry. The Nuremberg Laws that came two years later represented the social death of the Jews, who were no longer permitted access to public houses, libraries, theatres, city swimming pools, or even simple park benches. Although the signs that had been erected to reinforce these laws were quietly tucked away for the 1936 Berlin Olympics, resentment toward the Jewish population returned with fervor in 1938 with Kristallnacht, the economic attack that destroyed thousands of Jewish homes and businesses in Berlin. The final, physical death came with the onslaught of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the

⁴⁹ Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 99-100.

⁵⁰ Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (University of Nebraska Press: 2004).

implementation of the Final Solution in January of 1942. Yet for all their ideological vitriol toward the Jewish people, the process of developing a broad support base for their party was much more concentrated on the latter cornerstone of their tenets: pro-Aryanism.

Both major pillars of National Socialist ideals rested on a pseudoscientific racism that had been developed over the course of previous colonial encounters, yet the pillar that mandated exaltation of the “Aryan” people also required careful cultivation in order to build popular support with the German people. While the concept of an Aryan people initially began as a phenotypical descriptor, the legal definition of the term was not granted until the 1935 Nuremberg Laws and the mandated creation of the *Ahnenpass*. Nevertheless, the idea of “Germanness” had been in circulation for centuries despite the fact that the unified German state was a recent creation of the previous century. German identity had instead been created by and survived on a rich collection of folklore that constituted a people’s customs, songs, dances, art forms, holidays, heroes, horrors, and language. In conjunction with stories, each of these individual components makes up the complete compendium of folklore, which remains fluid according to the memories and experiences of the community to which it belongs. With such a rich and diverse body of folkloric customs already available, the Nazis were able to tap into a potent sense of nostalgia to invoke the blessing of Germanic heroes and historical figures in order to create a sense of credibility and national heritage. Tales like the Pied Piper of Hamelin are a cogent example of the ease with which a story can be changed, modified, or misremembered. Without a written canon, the plot, characters, and, most importantly, lesson can vary widely from version to version, even to the extent of shifting characters from villain to hero and vice versa. While not initially a startling prospect, the ability of folkloric fairytales to shift meaning is highly troubling when considering that folklore is, at its root, a reflection of a community’s values and history. To this end, the National Socialists of Germany

capitalized on the preexisting body of folklore in German-speaking regions to create a false narrative of ethnic consciousness and cultural identity that extended beyond the border of Germany by dictating who could claim heritage with this identity and who could not.

Ideological pillars aside, the Nazis' early energy was poured purposely and carefully into dismantling and defying the hated tenets of Versailles, all in an effort to rally popular support and prepare Germany for the war that would launch it into global hegemony. Initially, Hitler and his myrmidons worked quietly and subtly to rearm the military and reintroduce conscription. Then, in 1936, the Nazis moved openly to remilitarize the Rhineland, a direct contravention of one of the major Versailles provisions. Only two years later, Hitler flouted yet another of the major clauses of the treaty with the Anschluss of Austria in March of 1938 and the annexation of the Sudetenland later that year. Although both Britain and France objected to such actions as contrary to Versailles, neither country was willing to back up their displeasure with arms. Despite what historians of today would call ample warning, the Nazis were left to pursue their coveted *Lebensraum*, land sufficient for the needs of ethnic Germans, by negotiating a Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union that ultimately spawned the Second World War. On September 1, 1939, the German and Soviet armies launched separate, coordinated assaults on the Polish nation, rapidly dividing and conquering the country in five short weeks. With Poland's invasion and partition completed, the Nazis initiated a harsh system of elimination that targeted the Polish elite, including military officers, priests, intellectual figures, and political and aristocratic leaders. Such an attack was, as Shelley Baranowski asserted in *Nazi Empire*, "an ideologically motivated total war aimed at the destruction of the Polish nation."⁵¹ Nazi soldiers were not the only ones to engage in this slaughter. Soviet officers also targeted

⁵¹ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 234.

Polish nationalists in a massacre now named for the forest in which many of the mass graves were later discovered: Katyn. The consequences of France and Britain's willful ignorance of the danger presented by Nazi Germany would collude the West in the deaths of millions of innocent people across the globe.

The Nazi drive to the East was an ideologically motivated ambition, crafted and honed by centuries of German concepts and imaginings about Eastern Europe. The idea of divide and conquer within the Polish lands was not a new one, neither in terms of concept, as explored within the colonial holdings of the Kaiserreich, nor location, as evidenced by the 1915 proposal *Land ohne Menschen* that cleaved to the idea of a German colonial destiny in the East.⁵² Therefore, "the Nazis were thus certainly not the first German nationalists to think of radical solutions for the Polish problem through colonization and expulsion."⁵³ Yet even as German nationalists idealized and romanticized the vast possibilities for prosperity in the East, the people who already lived there were viewed with a disparagement that bordered them on subhuman. As during World War I, invading German soldiers felt that they had entered a land devoid of recognizable culture, but whereas the soldiers of WWI had resolved to build up Eastern culture to German "standards," the soldiers of WWII resolved to expel, enslave, or exterminate the many distinct ethnic groups that called the vast region of Eastern Europe home. Since much of the mythology surrounding German ideas about Eastern Europe were based on tales from the Teutonic Knights and the German immigrants who settled there in the Middle Ages, the Nazis established a German Ethnic Registry constructed of four classification to distinguish those of sufficient "Germanness" by applying a complicated range of "linguistic, anthropological, eugenic, and political criteria, whereby hereditary

⁵² Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 78.

⁵³ Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 78.

health, political activism on behalf of German causes, fluency in the German language, and other cultural markers...resulted in the highest ranking.”⁵⁴

As with nearly every angle adopted by the Nazis, the Registry did not initially enjoy a smooth implementation but rather was introduced piecemeal through multiple ad hoc committees in different regions over nearly a year and a half. This system of ethnic ranking showed just how different the coming occupation of Eastern Europe would be than the previous enterprise. This time there would be no Germanization of the indigenous peoples; instead those whose “German blood could be extracted from the human residue that remained from the medieval German migrations and the conquests of the Hanseatic traders and Teutonic Knights” would return to the Reich to wash away any remaining Slavism while those who were deemed otherwise would be left to work, starve, or be expelled.⁵⁵ There would soon prove to be far more of the latter.

The organization of Eastern Europe under the Nazi Regime involved the implementation of a policy plan known as *Generalplan Ost*, which called for the ethnic cleansing of Eastern Europe to prepare it for colonization by ethnic Germans. Combining the ideologies of *Lebensraum* with *Drang nach Osten*, the plan was never fully utilized during the war due to Germany’s defeat; however, millions of civilian deaths can still be attributed to its earlier *Kleine Planung*. This first version of the plan, to be carried out while invasion was underway, called for the removal of several million people from the Baltic states, whose political lines would be subsequently wiped out. In order to conduct their racial war in the East, Germany employed the use of not only the *Wehrmacht* but also special tasks forces called the *Einsatzgruppen* and auxiliary police battalions, which “emerged as capable instruments of annihilation...[as well as] proved equally important in the

⁵⁴ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 249.

⁵⁵ Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 240.

subjugation and governance of the areas under German civil administration.”⁵⁶ Once an occupation force had been established in Poland, the systematic institution of requisitioning land, labor, and resources began with the annihilation of political, military, and religious figures in an attempt to stamp out the carriers of Polish nationalism. Following this atrocity, the occupiers turned their focus to rounding up the Jews and shunting them into hastily established urban ghettos or massacring them outright in forests, ravines, and ditches, a prospect made easier by “the belief held by the Wehrmacht and SS commanders alike that all Jews were communists and partisans.”⁵⁷ In tandem with this belief were the brutal reprisals put in place by the Nazi occupation forces, which designated that any Pole caught aiding or abetting a Jew would be put to death, a decree which existed nowhere else in the whole of Nazi-occupied Europe. This early part of the war in the East, which was characterized by mass executions like the one at Babi Yar in September of 1941, in which more than 33,000 Jews were put to death, was poorly documented and largely only remembered by the soldiers who carried them out or, as once again in the case of Babi Yar, unauthorized photographers like Johannes Hähle.⁵⁸ Yet as the war ground on, Nazi elites began to search in earnest for a more economical method of murder.

The entrance of America into the war and the army’s failure to put a quick end to the Soviet menace led Hitler’s myrmidons to gather at the villa at Wannsee in January of 1942 to determine a more efficient approach to genocide. The infamous conference lasted all of ninety minutes, during which the fifteen members present, who “represented the SS and police bodies, the NSDAP, a number of

⁵⁶ Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler’s Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (University Press of Kansas, 2005), 200.

⁵⁷ Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (University Press of Kansas, 2003), 121.

⁵⁸ “Massacre at Babi Yar,” *Exhibit*, Wannsee Conference House, 5.5.11-5.5.12, visited May 15, 2017.

ministries and the occupying administrations in the areas of Eastern Europe under German rule,” determined the fate of Europe’s remaining Jewish population.⁵⁹ These fifteen members, headed by Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann, vowed to give their unconditional support to the new Final Solution to the Jewish Question. This solution accounted for the treatment of all Jews within Europe, from full-blooded practicing Jews to the children of second-degree *Mischlinge*. Those found to be sufficiently German would be welcomed as full members of the Reich, while those who were not were to be summarily executed in concentration camps via exhaustion, starvation, exposure, or disease. Although “freedom through work” had initially been held as the primary method of extermination, the assassination of the Conference’s chief architect, Reinhard Heydrich, by Czech partisans in June of that year instigated the creation of the *Aktion Reinhard* death camps, whose sole function would be the immediate execution of incoming prisoners. From 1942 until late in 1944, the Final Solution was worked out “over pits, in gas vans, and at the death facilities at Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz.”⁶⁰ The creation of the Final Solution is sometimes referred to the “twisted path to Auschwitz,” and indeed it aptly underlines the radical improvisation so unique to German imperialism, wherein the method and the means are often obscured until administrators arrive at it. While Auschwitz remains the darkest shadow of the Holocaust with the highest death toll, its infamy lies in part due to the simple fact that it remains standing. Unlike the death camps of Sobibór, Treblinka, and Bełżec, Auschwitz never stopped running until the Red Army was nearly at its doorstep. The three Reinhard camps had completed their assigned task; there were no more lives left to end.

⁵⁹ “The Authorities Involved in the Conference,” *Exhibit*, Wannsee Conference House, visited May 15, 2017.

⁶⁰ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 382.

By 1944, it was clear that Nazi Germany was on the run, being driven back across the territories it had stolen by the combined might of the Red Army and the Western Allies. Yet even as the Wehrmacht and its auxiliary entities retreated, the bloody work of the Holocaust was not abandoned. Instead, marginal concentration camps were emptied in anticipation of enemy liberation, where “their inmates were either killed, allowed to die on pointless death marches or herded into other camps inside the Reich, where overcrowding, overwork, the lack of supplies, disease and the brutality of the guards soon caused the mortality rate to soar.”⁶¹ It was this final stage that saw the Nazi war machine at its most destructive, bloodily sputtering across its now lost territories while cannibalizing itself as the doctrines it was built upon came crashing down. Had the Reich not been beaten back across Europe, the final stage of the *Generalplan Ost* would have been realized in the starvation, ejection, and enslavement of some thirty million Slavs so that the final dream of the Nazi Empire might be realized: Germanization of the East.

The determination to adopt both the *Generalplan Ost* and the resolution of the Wannsee Conference marked the greatest divergence from the precedent set by occupation during World War I, which had always stopped far short of outright systematic extermination, and even colonialism in Southwest Africa. This time, Eastern occupation came to resemble the even older imperial precedent set by the continent of Europe as a whole, despite a new record of cruelty being set with the first mass gassings of European Jews by the regional leader of Western Poland.⁶² It was toward this ultimatum that every aspect of the imperialist genocide enacted throughout Eastern Europe was driven, based on the claims of scientific racism, the ancient promise of a blood bond with the soil, and the draw of the Eastern

⁶¹ Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 406.

⁶² Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 160.

breadbasket as the Nazis plundered and razed Eastern Europe in the drive toward commerce, civilization, and community.

The terrible, grinding, bleeding horror of the European Theatre finally ended with the suicide of Adolf Hitler and the capitulation of Germany just days later. The whole of the war had claimed the lives of sixty million people in total, three percent of the planet, including not just soldiers but also untold millions of innocent civilians. It represents the deadliest conflict in human history and the first time in which a global trial was held to determine the punitive culpability of the survivors. These trials, held in the same city that had seen the birth of the first formal racial laws of the regime, lasted nearly a full year and tried only twenty-four of the highest ranking remaining Nazi elite, including Hermann Göring. Although the trials represented one of the best moments of cooperation among the Allies, tensions between the capitalist West and the communist East would soon prove more lasting. By 1948, the capitol city of Berlin had been partitioned between East and West with the rest of the country soon to succeed. More than forty years of division would follow, during which the two sides of Germany would advance in very different ways and at rates that would ultimately stunt their ability to properly deal with their legacy of racism and genocide. While the memory of Nazi Germany occupies the vast majority of modern recollections surrounding German history, Germany's legacy of genocide and imperialism stretches back far beyond 1933. The experiences of the Herero and Nama under colonial rule, as well as the people of Eastern Europe who endured abuse during World War I, demand the right to be recognized and assigned their proper significance, yet their struggles have been all but forgotten in the shadow of the Third Reich. Of these three cases of German imperialism, only two carry the label of genocide, but the suffering experienced by the victims of all three exhibit common factors of racial aggression, economic exploitation, and territorial expansion that reject the idea that any part of history can exist in isolation of the whole. Indeed, the presence of Germany's obsession

with creating a nationalism based on race, its awareness of the actions of its neighbors, its phrenetic attempts to make up laws as it operated, and its wanton use of industrial might to manufacture genocide are more obvious in this case than in any other, yet their presence is still noteworthy. The differences between Southwest Africa, the *Ober Ost*, and the General Government are salient to say the least, but so too, perhaps even more so, are their terrible similarities.

Conclusion

In attempting to draw conclusions from the connections between the Kaiserreich's actions in Southwest Africa, the *Ober Ost* enterprise, and the Nazi Reich's General Government campaign, certain subtle and obvious correlations must be acknowledged and assessed. Each of these cases are uniquely German for reasons that can be boiled down to four primary factors: pathos, frantic improvisation, cognizance of contemporaries, and industrial modernity. Since the Thirty Years War, ethnic Germans have struggled with a complex of victimhood that only gained strength under the rule of Napoleon and the failures of 1848. Coupling this fear of exploitation by their neighbors with the insecurity of their sense of nationalism, Germany pursued an anxious need to conquer or be conquered, which lent itself directly to the frantic improvisation that developed in all three cases of imperialism. This sense of needing to "catch up" promoted the radical violence that became characteristic of German occupation, which differed so drastically in execution from Britain's vaunted "indirect rule" and even from other nations' use of "direct rule." As such, Germany was far from ignorant of its neighbors' imperial tactics. Indeed, their desire to keep pace with Britain and France in particular can also be connected to Germany's late arrival to the international scene and its desire to be considered a leading player in global politics and trade. In all three cases, German administrators took notes from their contemporaries and incorporated them into their own plans that simultaneously fulfilled their desire to secure their national identity, while also relied on the massive power of their fully industrialized modern state. This final factor, Germany's industrial might, is one that often receives far too little attention yet is necessary to understanding the magnitude of violence created by the concerns of the first three factors. Each of these elements combine and overlap to create a picture of imperialism that is unique to the German

experience and the primary contributors to creating the genocide that characterized Nazi occupation in the East.

While each case also exhibits certain degrees of the shared themes of genocide coined by Kiernan, it is important to note that only two of the three actually qualify for such a moniker. Despite their differences in geography and regime, both the Herero Genocide and the Holocaust employed racism as a quantifiable branch of science, able to be proven through anatomical measurements, and relied on a cult of antiquity to lend legitimacy to their claims for nationhood and existence. Additionally, neither case wasted time building schools, hospitals, or new missionaries in either dominated territory, as the single goal was the conversion of the land to a Germanized agrarian state, possible only through aggressive expansionism at the price of the racially inferior as dictated by the norms established by antiquity. Meanwhile, the edicts of the *Ober Ost* also exhibited influence from these various themes, whether it was in the culturally dismissive attitude of the *Deutsche Arbeit* program or the idolization of the image of the Teutonic Knight who had fought along these same battle lines in centuries long past. Yet this chapter of German imperialism was not one that told a story of genocide. Whereas the General Government and Southwest Africa both rejected the establishment of buildings and programs that might have aided the native populace, the *Ober Ost* did in fact strive to promote schools, theatre, and the media. The differences therefore, between each of the cases, are just as salient as their similarities. Each stage in German imperialism represents a different perspective and interpretation of the goals to be pursued and the paths to be taken in this pursuit. By recognizing these subtle and obvious connections, both in terms of unifying and defining characteristics, one can become more adept at recognizing situations in which violence and destruction are imminent.

To be sure, the themes of imperialism and genocide are far from the only commonalities at play between these three cases. In fact, all three share key figures

in their related events. The father of Nazi leader Hermann Göring, who served as a fighter pilot in World War I, acted as the *Reichskommissar* of German Southwest Africa, while the future Nazi governor of Bavaria, Franz Ritter, was directly involved in the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples. Future rector of the University of Berlin during the Nazi Regime, Eugen Fischer “carried out his racialist research in German Southwest Africa, on miscegenation among the mixed Dutch/Hottentot ‘Rehoboth Bastards.’”⁶³ During his time at the University, Fischer was responsible for supporting the pseudoscience that would later compose the research of the infamous Josef Mengele. This sharing of culpable figures resulted also in the shared usage of language when referring to those deemed “unclean,” “uncivil,” or “savage.” But perhaps one of the most interesting correlations between each case is the perpetuity of the German victim complex first established by the outcome of the Thirty Years’ War. This complex would be strengthened by their later defeat at the hands of Napoleon and their failure to unify in 1848. Having been constantly overshadowed and overpowered by their more puissant neighbors, Germans began to cultivate a need for strength in numbers via unification. In order to defend that unification, there came the drive to conquer or be conquered, as evidenced by their almost immediate involvement in colonial enterprises in order to measure up to their French and British rivals. But this desire would ultimately bring ruin as the outcomes of the Great War, from the starvation wrought on the German people and the various uprisings in Hamburg and Berlin to the psychological and political effects of the Treaty of Versailles and fabricated Stabbed in the Back myth. Each of these factors combined to create an atmosphere of anger, fear, and suspicion toward fellow Germans and especially toward foreign powers so that when a new regime rose in Germany that promised to rectify the mistakes of past eras by citing the culpability of Jews and the belief that too much

⁶³ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 36.

effort “had been lavished on cultivating essentially unchangeable native populations and close contact with the East had infected the morale of the occupiers,” it became clear that this new Nazi era would be drawing on examples closer to Southwest Africa rather than their last failed attempt to cultivate the East.⁶⁴ This desire to make room for those of good or malleable ethnic background was only relinquished after the defeat and partition of Germany following World War II.

But such a legacy of expansion and slaughter cannot simply be ignored or erased in a single day. Even now, over seventy years after their last imperial conquest, Germany is still struggling to come to terms with its past and its future, and it is far from the only nation to struggle to do so. In order to mitigate the difficulty of the various imperial European powers, the United Nations (U.N.) first concentrated on the most obvious form of imperialism: the criminalization of genocide. For all that genocide has occurred many times over the course of human history, the term itself is actually not yet a century old. Instead, it was coined during the Second World War by Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin who witnessed the systematic destruction of his people and understood it to be far more than an act of war. Lemkin’s definition qualified genocide as the destruction of the political and social structure of culture, language, nationality, religion, and economy as well as the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and physical life. Although his definition was eventually rejected and modified, his efforts were instrumental in organizing the U.N.’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the 1948. This convention was pivotal in establishing a precedent for justice within international courts, based on the opening of the resolution which stated how “recognizing that at all periods of history genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity; and being convinced that, in order

⁶⁴ Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 149.

to liberate mankind from such an odious scourge, international co-operation is required.”⁶⁵ In part due to the sheer magnitude of the atrocity and also the inclination toward activism with regards to European brutality, the definition of genocide was established alongside a universal declaration of human rights in that same year, which stated that “whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.”⁶⁶ Ignoring the inherent ironies of realizing such human standards only in retrospect to a largely European humanitarian disaster, the efforts of the U.N. to quantify such a crime and attach added significance to it were commendable, and while they have been largely unsuccessful in preventing genocide, recognition for the crime has certainly increased. In tandem with this increased awareness is heightened recognition of the need for acknowledgement of and reparations for the damage wrought by non-genocidal imperial ventures. Although this has been slow in coming, the process of decolonization grinds on with each year as more nations return to autonomous rule, for better or worse.

While decolonization has experienced continuous if slow success, the understanding of how and why these imperial ventures came about is less so, particularly in the case of the Nazi Holocaust. The dangers of ignoring the commonalities between different eras and empires are vast. To disregard these similarities is to blindly believe that humanity always accounts for its actions and

⁶⁵ “Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948” *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, *The Avalon Project*, accessed on April 26, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/genocide.asp.

⁶⁶ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *U.N. Convention 1948*, *The Avalon Project*, accessed April 26, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/unrights.asp.

learns from its mistakes, yet this is glaringly untrue. At the same time, ignorance of the unifying factors of genocide and empire is not always the culprit behind the rejection of such; instead, perhaps one of the largest dangers to the integration of the Nazi Holocaust into the global narrative lies in the ideas promoted by figures like Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, whose misleading theories serve to undermine his own efforts to draw attention to the problem of violence based on race and religion. A former associate professor of government at Harvard University, Goldhagen is the author of the controversial 1996 work *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Despite the lack of historical background, Goldhagen's book works to create a new concept of eliminationist anti-Semitism, which claims that all ethnic Germans in the generations preceding World War II were virulently anti-Semitic and thus desirous of the complete eradication of the Jewish people. By arguing that "the perpetrators approved of the mass slaughter, that they willingly gave assent to their participation in the slaughter, is certain [and] that their approval derived in the main from their conception of Jews is all but certain, for no other source of motivation can plausibly account for their actions," Goldhagen's argument becomes simply ahistorical and dangerous.⁶⁷ Anti-Semitism had unfortunately been a matter of course in Europe since the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire, yet Germany was in fact the land in which Jews had experienced the most social and civic freedoms, allowing them to flourish in another Renaissance of their own making. To assert that Germany was a land of rabid anti-Semites, therefore, is a blunt myth. Of course, it existed, but not to any exceptional degree in comparison with any other European nation. Moreover, Goldhagen's deliberate distinction between ethnic Germans and non-ethnic Germans as perpetrators and Jews and non-Jews as victims simultaneously erases the complicity of a multitude of occupied European states in

⁶⁷ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 416.

the organization and execution of the Holocaust, as well as invalidates the suffering and murder of hundreds of thousands of Roma, Sinti, gay men, disabled people, and political prisoners, all of whom were targeted for reasons that had little to nothing to do with anti-Semitism.

Even setting aside the obvious ahistorical nature of Goldhagen's argument, his theory also serves to hamstring his effort to underline the horror of the Holocaust and the genocide of European Jewry by ignoring other motivational factors at play and creating the appearance that genocide can be avoided by simply not engaging in anti-Semitic behavior. To reduce the Nazi agenda to a single isolated cause is to promote the idea that all cases of genocide must operate in the same fashion, as if to say that since the German people are no longer anti-Semitic, Hitler will never again kill all the Jews of Europe. To be fair, they are absolutely correct, but there is nothing to say that the perpetrator must be Hitler or that the victims must be Jews. Yet despite the proliferation of problematic theories like Goldhagen's, the campaign to contextualize the Holocaust is ongoing. Through the efforts of historians like Ben Kiernan, the Holocaust has been successfully placed within a global history of genocide that lends meaning and legitimacy to other, previously ignored cases of horror. However, connecting the Holocaust to its imperial neighbors is often less explored and less acknowledged, but in order to understand its significance, an understanding of its predecessors is vital. This research has attempted to make such connections, not in an effort to mitigate the severity of the Holocaust but rather to identify the ideologies and practices that contributed to its birth. By recognizing this family tree of imperialism, the idea that such acts of horror, be they genocidal or not, are unrepeatable can be successfully challenged. Perhaps then humanity can take greater steps towards dismantling systems of oppression and exploitation.

The existence of these systems, however, is very real and unfortunately experiencing a regrowth in recent years. Turkey, Russia, and North Korea are all

led by parties who exercise near or total control of their states, often with blatant disregard for the laws of the land. In Turkey, the once popular President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has appropriated power with an iron fist through a recent referendum that has allowed him “wide control over the judiciary, broad powers to make law by decree, the abolition of the office of the Prime Minister and of Turkey’s parliamentary system—effectively [making] him a dictator.”⁶⁸ Even before the referendum granted him such widespread power, Erdoğan and his party worked to quell the opposition, even going so far as detaining some forty thousand people, firing over one hundred thousand government employees, and shutting down one hundred and seventy-nine media sources. If these actions sound familiar, they should. Not only did Hitler take similar measures in his rise to power, but so too did Vladimir Putin, whose views on homosexuality and women’s rights are frighteningly archaic. Putin’s actions within foreign affairs have also been incredibly militaristic, from his annexation of the Crimean Peninsula to Russian support of Syria’s own dictator, Bashar al-Assad. Yet while Putin could be argued as not fully qualifying as an authoritarian dictator, the same could not be said for North Korea’s Kim Jong-un. Despite being the youngest head of state in the world, Kim Jong-un has been responsible for a slew of harsh reprisals against perceived coups and rebellions, all the while threatening North Korea’s neighbors and enemies with open nuclear warfare. To complete the picture of an authoritarian regime, Kim Jong-un has followed in his father and grandfather’s footsteps by keeping the country closed off to any foreign presence or media to ensure a purely governmental censorship of information. Yet such matters strike much closer to home in recent months. Although the United States’ new president, Donald Trump,

⁶⁸ Dexter Filkins, “Turkey’s Vote Makes Erdoğan Effectively a Dictator,” *New Yorker*, April 17, 2017, accessed July 14, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/turkeys-vote-makes-erdogan-effectively-a-dictator>.

does not command the same level of control and fear that these three figures wield, he has continued to exhibit beliefs and actions that hint at a future similar to Turkey, North Korea, or Russia, from his blatant disrespect for minorities to his militant approach to foreign relations. In many ways not even fully encompassed by the examples already stated, the twenty-first century has already made ripples that starkly reflect those created in the previous century. It is those ripples out of which I hope to draw meaning.

A few weeks ago, in the heart of the summer before the last year of my undergraduate education, I sat down to write this conclusion and was faced with the task of distilling the last three years of reading and traveling and discussing and puzzling and not sleeping into a single cohesive work. I confess I felt outmatched. How does one begin to synthesize literally thousands of pages of reading? How does one convey the inspiration and revelation of dozens of weeks of discussion? How does one instill the overwhelming despair of a concentration camp that, even diluted by seventy years of disuse, still brought me to my knees? How does one start such a process? And more importantly, where does one end it? To answer how a beginning is created, it simply is. You force yourself to sit at the table and open your laptop and start typing words until the right ones appear on the page, whether they are the first to surface or the seventy-sixth. Endings, however, are much more difficult. In some ways, this very paper is an ending, but I hope it is not the end of everything. I hope that this research will move forward with me and evolve as my own experiences and knowledge undoubtedly will. I hope that in its next form, this research will grow to address more than just German imperialism, but European imperialism as a whole, while still looking to elucidate and legitimize its legacy. But ultimately, the true goal of this research is simply to make the point that the events that came before us continue to matter. Whether through advocacy or education, ignorance of the past must be brought to heel in order to halt the spread of apathy; without understanding, we cannot hope to empathize, for we cannot care

about what we do not understand. Yet if we can find a way, any way, to contextualize and clarify the manner and motive that went into different cases of horror based on the excuse of land, resources, prestige, or divine duty, then we will have made a step towards crippling the future that holds such ends within it. This history we share as one people, the human people, must not be forgotten, if for no other reason than that we will be doomed to relive it. As for me, I hope to give my children a world in which they will never know violence or hatred or genocide in the flesh. I hope to give this world to my neighbors' children and the children of those who are not my neighbors. Because humans are not made to hate. They are not made to kill. They are made to live.

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