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In Memoriam

Gerald D. Feldman

1937–2007

Frederick E. Sontag

1924–2009

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life . . .

Proverbs 13:14

the basis for an influential career under the Nazis, during which Fischer advocated the sterilization of the children fathered in western Germany during the 1920s by occupation forces from French West Africa (Madley 2005). Much could be made of the fact that in the early 1940s SS men commonly called their Ukrainian auxiliaries "askari," which was the Swahili term used decades earlier for the indigenous troops of German East Africa. Still, such direct linkages seem more arresting than consequential.

The tenuous nature of these connections has led some recent scholarship to emphasize morphological rather than empirical continuity. Jürgen Zimmerer, the most prominent exponent of this contemporary school, highlights the "structural parallels" of "race and space" shared by the Holocaust and the genocidal counter-insurgency against the Herero and Nama people in German Southwest Africa between 1904 and 1907. On the basis of these parallels, he claims that the Nazi campaign "against Poland and the USSR was without doubt the largest colonial war of conquest in history" (in Moses 2004: 49). The African case was an "important precedent" for "race war," without which the Holocaust "would probably not have been thinkable." Breaking the taboo against destroying entire peoples, it showed that a colonial war and a war of extermination could be one and the same (Zimmerer 2008). Isabel Hull reasons similarly, but from an earlier starting point that leads her to a different conclusion. She finds the historical precursor of the Holocaust and especially German military brutality toward civilians during World War II in a specifically Prussian-German military doctrine that was forged during the war against France in 1870-71. That doctrine stressed massive and concentrated violence to achieve "absolute destruction" of enemies, particularly those operating behind German lines. Thus, in her view, the murderous campaign in Southwest Africa was less a cause than a result, and the real harbinger of German viciousness in World War II lay further back in history (Hull 2005).

To demonstrate how colonialism enabled the Holocaust requires yet another approach, one that focuses on how the generic concept illuminates broader and deeper connections. This perspective directs attention to the totality of European imperial history since the late nineteenth century. Imperial centers and their colonial peripheries were porous economic, cultural, and military domains that contended with one another in fields of action governed by philosophies of struggle and survival. Because Europe comprised colonial powers and continental empires, Nazi Germany cannot be understood outside a colonial or imperial frame. To understand how the guerrilla wars, racism, colonial rule, and settlement patterns of the imperial era are related to the Nazi conquest of Europe and the destruction of Jews, Roma, and Slavs entails examining German expansionism in relation to European empire in general, as well as determining the colonial and imperial features of the Holocaust.

CHAPTER 4

COLONIALISM

A. DIRK MOSES

IDENTIFYING colonialism as an enabler of the Holocaust invites the objection that antisemitism and World War I were more powerful progenitors. Colonialism usually refers to maritime or blue water empires, and Germany held its seven major overseas possessions in Africa and the Pacific region only from the 1880s until the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. How could such an ephemeral episode be of great consequence? Even the proposition that colonialism enabled fascism faces problems: For a long time, Britain and France had large empires, but those nations did not go the way of Italy or Germany. Besides, did not Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) shun colonialism in Africa as a distraction from hegemony in Europe?

These objections slight some sixty years of fruitful analysis of National Socialism's relationship to colonial expansion and imperialism (Neumann 1944; Arendt 1951; Césaire 1955; Dallin 1981; Koehl 1957; Fanon 1963). Nevertheless, challenges remain in demonstrating significant *empirical* links between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonialism and the Holocaust. Imperial Germany's colonial possessions and the associated governmental infrastructure were relatively small. The number of former colonial officials, soldiers, and scientists who became Nazis also was not large. Much has been made of the facts that Heinrich Göring (1839-1913), the infamous Hermann's father, had been a colonial administrator in Southwest Africa and that Franz Ritter von Epp (1868-1946), an officer of the German forces that crushed the Herero, became a Freikorps leader who nurtured the young Hitler. Also, the anthropologist Eugen Fischer (1874-1967) conducted field work in Southwest Africa for studies that Hitler apparently read, thus laying

GERMAN EMPIRES, AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN

German colonialism, like that of other nations, was an expression of aspirations for power, prosperity, security, and status. Expansionism to these ends could aim just as well at contiguous as remote lands, providing a country was willing to pay the price in conflict. For this reason, applying the term "colonialism" only to maritime empires is misleading. "Modern colonialism," as one scholar put it recently, "can be defined as the annexation of a territory by people with ties to a foreign state who perceive the conquered population as culturally distant and inferior. Annexation is followed by efforts to appropriate the resources of the colony and to dominate its inhabitants in an ongoing way, that is, by a state apparatus" (Steinmetz 2007). *Weltpolitik* (the acquisitions of extra-European colonies with a strong navy) and *Ostpolitik* (eastern Europe as Germany's imperial space) represented flip sides of the same coin (Liulevicius 2000: 166–7).

The affinity between these notions accounts for the ease with which Hans Grimm's book about German colonialism in Africa, *Völk ohne Raum* (People without Space), published in 1926, morphed in the public mind into a book about Germany's possibilities in eastern Europe (W. D. Smith 1986). That region long had been regarded, in the words of General Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937), as "primal German settlement territory," because German settlers had colonized it centuries earlier and in some places still constituted the leading social stratum (Koehl 1953: 56). Furthermore, Imperial Germany already was a continental land empire that, like its Russian and Austro-Hungarian counterparts, included national minorities—above all Poles, who composed more than 6 percent of the population, mainly in Prussian border regions, where they often constituted a majority. Attempts to drive these people out and replace them with German speakers enjoyed considerable support. Indeed, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) launched the Royal Prussian Colonization Commission in 1886 to acquire Polish-owned estates for German farmers as part of an effort to change the ethnic composition of Germany's eastern provinces, and the Society for the Support of Germanism in the Eastern Marches was established in 1894 to advance similar aims. The latter group (nicknamed the H-K-T Society or *Hakatisten* after the initials of its founders) depicted Poles and Slavs as primitive people who deserved to be supplanted by Germans and modernity (Eley 1980, Tims 1941).

Before as well as during the Nazi period, a versatile form of colonial rhetoric saturated political discourse. *Lebensraum*, a term coined in the 1890s by the political geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), became the chief rationale of German overseas and continental expansion. Ratzel literally rooted success in the Darwinian struggle for collective survival in a people's possession of sufficient land to provide prosperity. *Lebensraum* became a slogan for the political right in the 1920s and a central concept of the new academic discipline of "geopolitics," which

explained national foreign policies as responses to the location and resources of states. Via Rudolf Hess (1894–1987) and Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946), such thinking influenced Hitler, who concluded that Germany's *Lebensraum* lay in eastern Europe (W. D. Smith 1986).

COLONIAL RULE AND ANTISEMITISM

By the end of the nineteenth century, antisemitism and colonial racism were intertwined, especially in the right-wing milieu of the Pan-German League (Eley 1980). In the period prior to World War I, this group's understanding of a future German empire in Europe was influenced by contemporaneous discussions about German colonialism in Africa and the Pacific. Upset by the success of Jewish integration into German society, the Pan-Germans became obsessed with racial mixing, contending that such "bastardization" had brought about the fall of the Roman Empire. Their ideal of a "tribal empire" (*Stammesreich*) in Europe posited a racially pure utopia of German rule over Slavs (von Joeden-Forgey in King and Stone 2007: 31).

German rule over Africans provided the model of racial subjugation, segregation, and oppression. In the 1890s, for instance, German antisemites simultaneously demanded that Jews be placed under a special alien law and that Africans be subjected to a separate "native law." They defended Carl Peters (1856–1918), the German colonial adventurer whose brutal treatment of the locals in German East Africa scandalized sensibilities at home, by insisting that European norms of war could not apply to Africans, who inhabited an inferior moral universe. Above all, the Jewish presence in Germany became understood in the context of a race-conscious worldview in which conquest and colonization of foreign peoples, hierarchies of civilization, progress and decline, survival and extinction were central elements. In 1912, Heinrich Class (1868–1953), who led the Pan-German League from 1908 to 1939, published *Wenn ich der Kaiser wäre* (If I Were the Emperor), which called for banning Jews from public office, the legal profession, and any position that might give them dominance over Germans. During World War I, Class advocated German expansion and annexation in eastern Europe, complete with "an ethnic housecleaning" to ensure German control in that region, including the expulsion of all Jews. By then, such ideas had moved from the periphery to the mainstream of conservative nationalist thinking, a trend illustrated by the German acquisition of territory, at least for a time, in the Baltic region, Belarus, Ukraine, and even the Caucasus after the defeat of the Russian army in 1917 (Liulevicius 2000; H. Smith 2008: 222–3).

An important distinction between colonial racism and antisemitism pivoted on the facts that Jews were *in* Germany and doing well. These circumstances inverted the framing dichotomy of colonizer–colonized in Germany. Especially during World War I, German antisemites played up Jewish success and non-Jewish German suffering and construed both as results of Jewish domination over non-Jewish Germans. Already during the 1912 national elections, right-wing Germans had decried supposed Jewish control of international communism and capitalism. In Austria, antisemites complained that Jews owned more than 50 percent of the banks and held 80 percent of the key positions in banking. The development of capitalism was presented as a Jewish imposition, a “control system” over gentiles (Mosse 1964: 142). During the war, the military, in particular, complained about shirking and profiteering by Jews. No less a figure than General Ludendorff leveled an accusation that became common during the Weimar Republic. “They [Jews] acquired a dominant influence in the ‘war corporations’ . . . which gave them the occasion to enrich themselves at the expense of the German people and to take possession of the German economy, in order to achieve one of the power goals of the Jewish people” (quoted in Friedländer 1997: 74).

Many Germans regarded themselves as an “indigenous” people who were being slowly colonized by foreigners, namely Jews. Indicative of this outlook was a *völkisch* obsession with “ancient German tribes” whose virtues of simplicity and honesty were contrasted with the decadent civilization of the French and British. This ideology culminated in the “blood and soil” rhetoric of the Nazis, who idealized the peasant rooted in the land. Nomadic peoples—such as Arabs and Jews—were parasites, whereas settlers, such as the “Nordic” colonists in North America, spread civilization and advanced humanity (Mosse 1964: 67–71).

Anxiety about “colonization” by Jews was compounded after World War I when parts of the Rhineland were occupied by French troops from Africa. The imperial rivals that had stripped Germany of its overseas possessions now added insult to injury by making Germany the colonized, not the colonizer (Poley 2005). Right-wing Germans launched a massive propaganda campaign against the “black disgrace” of the occupation, replete with lurid tales of rapes and violence against local women. In thrall to conspiracy theories, they believed the occupation was an international plot to contaminate Germans with “inferior blood.” Foreign Minister Adolf Köster (1883–1930) spoke for many when he complained, “the German *Volkskörper* was facing permanent annihilation on its western front” (Koller in Hagemann and Schüller-Springorum 2002: 145–7). In short, the occupation was portrayed as an act of premeditated genocide against Germans, as by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*:

It was and is the Jews who bring the negro to the Rhine with the same concealed thought and clear goal of destroying, by the bastardization which would necessarily set in, the white

race which they hate, to throw it down from its cultural and political height and in turn to rise personally to the position of master. (1940: 448–9)

Hitler’s sense of panic about reverse colonization was palpable. Jews, a “foreign people,” had erected a “tyranny” over Germany, enslaving it through the stock exchange, the media, cultural life, and the governmental machinery of the Weimar Republic (Hitler 1940: 426–33). His arguments that Jews had infiltrated the ruling strata by intermarriage later were shared by many, including the National Socialist *Sippenforscher* (genealogical researcher) Heinrich Banniza von Bazan (1904–1950), who deplored the “flood” of Jewish immigration from Poland and complained that, “Following the collapse of the German people after the world war, [Jewish] domination over the political fate of the nation became totally naked. A racially alien stratum developed that arrogated to itself the power to codetermine the welfare and direction of the German people.” Moreover, Bazan fearfully calculated that by the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, “some 2.5 million residents had Jewish blood coursing through their veins” (Bazan 1937: 92–3).

Hitler’s “indigenous” response to this perceived colonization and foreign rule was to expel the Jewish colonists and establish an autarkic economy removed from “international finance control”—that is, from their influence (Hitler 1940: 380). Otherwise the fate that met other peoples in the past awaited Germany: “Carthage’s fall is the horrible picture of such a slow self-earned execution of a nation” (Hitler 1940: 969). Time was short. The alleged Jewish colonizer was pressing its rule over the world: “The British Empire is slowly becoming a colony of the American Jews!” (Hitler 1980: 305).

HITLER’S IMPERIALISM

The loss of Germany’s colonies in World War I occasioned a persistent effort to win them back, especially since the great powers remained unremittingly imperialist. Much was at stake. Article 22 of the Treaty of Versailles disqualified Germans from governing “natives” by highlighting, somewhat hypocritically, German colonial abuses. Driven by German colonial associations, the counter-campaign used trade fairs, exhibitions, publications, and lobbying to raise consciousness in the German population, to restore national honor, and to advance the cause in the international community. Hitler was no enthusiast for this colonial revisionism, although he rhetorically supported the return of German colonies. He saw no point in challenging the British maritime empire. The ambition to do so after the 1890s had led to a disastrous war, and the German colonial possessions were not worth the sacrifice. He greatly admired the British Empire, which he thought was based

not on the professed humanitarian ideals of its apologists, but on the "capitalist exploitation of 350 million slaves" (Hitler 1953: 193). Long rule in India had inculcated in the British a racial arrogance and born-to-rule mentality that he wanted Germans to emulate.

In the 1920s, Hitler's eclectic reading and exposure to the new discipline of geopolitics and its concepts of continental domination and *Lebensraum* (living space), led him to conclude that Germany's future lay in a European empire. Analogies with past empires—Greek, Persian, Mongol, Aztec, Inca, and Spanish—were integral to Hitler's worldview. He attributed Rome's success to the absorption of Aryan blood by its ruling strata and Rome's decline to racial intermixing and Christianity, with its pernicious doctrine of racial equality. According to Hitler, Bolshevism, another Jewish invention, performed the same corrosive, leveling function in his own time (Hitler 1953: 78).

Traumatized by Germany's loss in World War I and convinced that Germans faced extinction, Hitler applied the lessons of a world history that he imagined imperialistically and without sentimentality. Germany must never again be vulnerable to internal colonization by a foreign people (Jews) or at the mercy of foreign powers in the manner of the Weimar Republic. Salvation lay in founding a self-sufficient, continental, Germanic empire, eradicating opposition, clearing away superfluous Slavs, and settling the new border regions with "Aryan" colonists (Lower 2005). His imperial commissars in Ukraine should act like viceroys (Dallin 1981: 103). The essence of National Socialism was imperial expansion (W. Smith 1986: 231).

Hitler has been interpreted as being, in principle, against far-off colonies, but a careful reading of his texts shows that he admired how the British used their colonies for both settlement and resource exploitation. The problem with Germany's former African colonies was that their climates and soils were ill-suited to North American- or Australian-style settler colonialism (Hitler 2003: 77). By 1936, Hitler had recommitted to *Weltpolitik*, but now on the assumption that Africa would be a source of raw materials and eastern Europe a receiver of German settlers (Schmøkel 1964: 51). A "folkish land and space policy" for Germany must be based, therefore, on contiguous territory in eastern Europe. Germany needed to colonize this space as it had so successfully in the past (Hitler 1944: 26–7). Dismissing the western rhetoric of civilizing uplift as brazen hypocrisy, Hitler enjoined ruthless exploitation to match how he thought the western powers actually governed their colonial possessions (Hitler 1944: 353). He wanted an extractive empire as the British had in India, but also settler colonies—enriched by plunder—as had developed in North America. In Hitler, the imperial models of centuries of human history congealed into a single, total, imperial outlook that entailed genocidal conquest, colonization, and exploitation.

As a result, Nazi occupation policy in eastern Europe had three central and incompatible agendas—economic exploitation (which included slave labor),

population resettlement, and security—that also were characteristic of colonial rule. In practice, even in occupied Poland, which was the object of more sustained occupation and planning than the Soviet Union, reconciling these competing agendas was impossible because ruthless exploitation and forced resettlement gave Slavs no incentive to harvest their crops and drove them into the hands of partisans. Hitler's imperialism was internally incoherent.

German plans for the racial restructuring of Polish and later Soviet territory were certainly colonial in style and form (Müller in Boog et al. 1998: 118–224). Whether in the prewar Polish territories annexed to Germany or in those grouped into the General Government or captured from the USSR in 1941, the German occupiers consistently referred to the land and their mission in colonial terms, depicting the Poles and Jews as backward and uncivilized and the land as undeveloped (Aly and Heim 2002). Demographic planners revived and extended the program of the *Hakaitisten* and set out to make room for German settlers by removing Poles and Jews (Browning 2004). The authors of the *Generalplan Ost* and later the *General-Siedlungsplan*, the long-term Nazi plans for the German East, envisaged not only the largest genocide in history—the anticipated deportation and starvation of tens of millions of Slavs to "modernize" the economic structure—but also the permanent rule of German colonists, who would occupy fortified settlements whence they would rule over a "helot" population of denationalized "slaves" (Kay 2006). In other parts of eastern Europe, "native non-Bolshevik governments" would govern on behalf of Germans, and the Slavic population would be mobilized against Jews in the manner of colonial divide-and-rule tactics (Förster in Boog et al. 1998: 481).

Jews were barely mentioned in the *Generalplan Ost* because they had no long-term future within occupied Poland's General Government, even though—against the will of its governor, Hans Frank (1900–1946)—Jews from elsewhere in German-occupied Europe were temporarily ghettoized there. Still, the fact that the systematic mass killing of Jews did not begin until the invasion of the USSR in mid-1941 indicates that settlement policy alone cannot account for the Holocaust. Moreover, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), who was in charge of German settlement, largely abandoned those demographic plans after the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 (Madajczyk in Michalka 1989: 849). Henceforth ready to compromise about population policies toward Slavs, he remained relentless regarding the extermination of Jews.

The role of security proved to be more decisive in shaping policy toward the Jews. Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942) summarized this outlook when he remarked that "political pacification is the first prerequisite for economic pacification" (quoted in Kay 2006: 105). Political pacification meant the elimination of actual or even potential resistance to German rule. Jews were particularly suspect, above all Soviet Jews, because Nazism defined them as congenitally hostile to Germans. The Nazis had convinced themselves that Jews were responsible for the traumatic collapse of the German home front and military morale in 1917 and 1918, as well as the short-lived postwar socialist government in Munich (Hitler 1944: 246;

Förster in Boog et al. 1998: 498). As the supposed bearers of Bolshevism, Jews were linked by Nazis to both insurrection at home and the terrorist regime in the USSR that had exterminated classes and peoples in an "Asiatic" manner. There could be no place for such a dangerous people in the German empire.

This worldview had much to do with colonialism and, in particular, colonial-style warfare, which had been characterized by disregard for the conventional laws of war. By criminalizing Soviet and Jewish enemies, the German state authorized its military to conduct the eastern campaign as a colonial conflict in which the laws of war regarding treatment of combatants and civilians did not apply. All resistance was regarded as illegitimate, and civilians were targeted *pre-emptively* and often collectively to forestall future resistance, just as in colonial wars of "pacification" against unruly tribes. Hitler rejected the application of the laws of war in the Soviet campaign with the infamous "commissar order" of 6 June 1941, which permitted the summary execution of Bolshevik functionaries. Three million Russian POWs subsequently were allowed to perish. Soviet Jewish men, and eventually women and children, were murdered by Einsatzgruppen acting according to the formula "Jew equalled Bolshevik equalled partisan" (Shepherd 2004: 88).

Meanwhile, in orders and reports German military officials routinely associated Jews with other security threats: "It is ultimately of the utmost importance to eradicate the influence of the Jews and deploy the most radical measures to eliminate these elements, because they in particular . . . maintain contacts with the Red Army and the bandits we are fighting"; "The Jewish class, which forms the largest section of the population in the towns, is the driving force behind the growing resistance movement in some areas" (quoted by Heer in Heer and Naumann 2000: 103–4). The Nazi ideal of "preventative security" rested on the notion that Communist Party functionaries and Red Army officers would form the nucleus of organized resistance after German military victory. Such potential insurgents were to be hunted down in rear areas and liquidated (Förster in Boog et al. 1998: 48, 491–2, 1189; Shepherd 2004: 75).

By the end of the war, the logic of pacification meant that in parts of the Soviet Union everyone except active collaborators was considered a criminal resister. On 23 October 1942, the commissioner for "anti-bandit warfare" in central Russia, General Curt von Gottberg (1896–1945), criminalized the entire civilian population with the following order: "bandits, a population of bandit suspects and bandit sympathizers, Jews, Gypsies, horse-riders and juveniles to be considered spies" (Heer in Heer and Naumann 2000: 113). Hitler approved of such methods. To crush the resistance, he insisted, "barbaric methods" were justified, especially as the death of so many fine German soldiers tipped the demographic balance in favor of criminal elements at home who might support Bolshevism and insurrection, his greatest fear since the leftist uprising in 1919 (Hitler 1980: 348). Colonialism and the Holocaust are linked by the well-known formula of "race and space" and by common inflationary quests for security.

CONCLUSION

The Holocaust was not a classical case of "colonial genocide," that is, of a colonizer destroying the colonized. Nevertheless, the colonial experience was relevant to the fate of the Jews. German Jews were killed as *colonizers* who had—in the Nazi imagination—dominated Germany and led it to the brink of extinction. Eastern European Jews had to die because they provided the "breeding ground" for those colonists. Simultaneously, Hitler regarded Germans as a colonizing people. His administrators and soldiers were taught to think of eastern Jews in terms of colonial stereotypes: as dirty, lazy, and uncivilized. For that reason, they had no place in greater Germany's future. Like many other colonized people, these Jews were murdered or worked to death. Soviet Jews were labeled as security threats to the conquest of the east and therefore murdered *pre-emptively*. The Holocaust arose out of the union of imperial and colonial impulses. It was born of a frustrated imperial nation struggling against a perceived colonizer, and it fed on the compensatory fantasies of many Germans during the interwar period, fantasies of achieving invulnerability through a new empire, colonies, and the expulsion and later elimination of "enemy peoples."

Recent research has highlighted Nazism's colonial aspirations and imperial dimensions (Lower 2005; Zimmerer 2008). Integrating the Holocaust into this picture has been challenging because Jews, especially assimilated ones, do not fit conventional images of a colonized people. But the key fact is that many Germans believed that *they* were being colonized by Jews. Antisemitism and the outcome of World War I did not so much eclipse colonialism as a salient enabler of the Holocaust as become entwined with it in a new, unprecedentedly vicious form of aggression.

German antisemitism radicalized during and after World War I primarily because many right-wing Germans believed that Jews not only profited from the conflict, but also used it to take control of the Weimar Republic. Such beliefs, as real as they were paranoid and fantastic, need to be reconstructed, explained, and contextualized in a world of empires in which one either colonized or was colonized and condemned to slavery or extinction. In this apocalyptic scenario, a Holocaust could be conceived and perpetrated. Research that highlights personal and institutional continuities between German colonialism and Nazi genocide can continue to show important empirical connections between the two, but what most deserves emphasis is that the Holocaust was rooted in a Nazi imperial vision that sought to correct the mistakes of Wilhelmine colonialism by forging an empire in which inner enemies were exterminated and foreign regimes were powerless to interfere.

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