

Introduction

In most newly established nation-states, issues of national identity, of nation building, arise. This applies to Namibia (the former German colony of Southwest Africa), which gained its independence in 1990, as the united Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Both are relatively new polities facing a number of dilemmas such as the creation of a national consciousness, the presence of minorities, and integration into a larger comity. Obviously there are also differences between them, but in another way each is still linked to the other: each is inhabited by a German-speaking population in search of a definition for itself in a new atmosphere. For the FRG this is rather obvious, but not for Namibia. Namibia and Germany have a long history together, a history that begins with the Scramble for Africa in the 1880s and continues to this day.

In the 1880s, Germany, under Otto von Bismarck, embarked upon a program of colonial expansion.¹ In the ensuing rush for colonies, Germany gained control of Southwest Africa along with several other territories. Of all the German colonies, experts and opinion makers determined that SWA, due to its climate, was the most suitable for colonization; nevertheless, it was not until the establishment of direct government rule and administration over the territory in 1894 that serious attempts began to establish German hegemony in the region. These efforts occupied a salient position in German popular culture even though German settlers in the region numbered only in the thousands. And, despite the loss of the colony in 1914 at the end of World War I and its transference to South African control under the mandate system, Germans remained in SWA to fight for the preservation of their status and privilege with continuing assistance from the

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homeland. Consequently, the histories of these two regions collectively provide insights into the development of German national identity, both in the motherland and abroad.

While the connection between imperialism and nationalism in Germany and in other European countries has been investigated,² the role of settler colonialism as a distinctive field of study remains underexplored.³ This field of inquiry provides a venue to examine how different groups tried to construct their ideals of citizenship and the nation in a region populated by a large indigenous population.⁴ For Germany, this was particularly important since many nationalists felt that the political unification of 1870 remained “unfulfilled.” Indeed, despite that unification, Germany still suffered from social, regional, and confessional cleavages,⁵ and colonialism became a vehicle to unite the nation:⁶ Southwest Africa, because of its favorable climate, was seen as a place to create a truly united German nation.⁷ Such a place would provide not only a place for Germany’s many emigrants to settle and preserve their *Deutschtum* but also a model for the old *Heimat*.⁸

Like other European colonies,⁹ SWA became a laboratory for socio-cultural, as well as economic, experimentation.¹⁰ For German authorities and colonial enthusiasts, it became a place to create a specific image of *Deutschtum*; namely, a hard-working, parsimonious, Protestant agrarian class filled with staunch nationalist values and devotion to the emperor, with the “traditional” German family at the core of society. It was a decidedly preindustrial vision of Germany pursued by the educated and propertied members of the middle *Stand*.¹¹ And by 1914, it appeared that they were on the road to success for there were many visible signs of the German presence, both physically and culturally.

However, from the beginning the project was skewed. First, despite claims to being a nonpartisan, universal project, it was predicated upon the ideals of only one segment of the German population.¹² Moreover, local conditions slowly and subtly undermined the entire project. This process began during the German colonial period. Many Germans quickly fell in love with the wide-open spaces and freedom that the land offered. In fact, the region offered, to both men and women, opportunities unavailable in the homeland, and the presence of Africans and other Europeans confronted the Germans with issues and problems, as well as solutions, that were almost exclusively applicable to SWA. On a more subtle level, the environment influenced and affected the German community: it was forced to adapt to different weather conditions, seasons, and local foodstuffs. By

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the outbreak of World War I, many came to see SWA as their new homeland and referred to themselves as *Südwestler*.¹³

In the 1920s and 1930s, despite South African rule and hence an increased desire to express their *Deutschtum*, *Südwestler* identified increasingly more with Southwest Africa than with Germany. Admittedly, they did this without renouncing their German linguistic and cultural traditions, which became increasing static; nonetheless, they eventually believed and felt their future lay in the territory. This applied especially to the older generation—to people who had lived there for decades—and not as much to newcomers whose ties with the homeland were still fresh, but the process of transforming Southwestern Germans into German *Südwestler* continued. In fact, the experiences of the interwar period accelerated and accentuated this tendency. By 1948, the *Südwestler* were firmly attached to the land and its future.¹⁴

While similar in a number of ways to the factors governing the experiences of other colonial Europeans (most notably in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia),¹⁵ several things distinguished the German experience. Unlike in Kenya and Rhodesia, the Germans in Namibia had to contend with a competing white population, namely, the *Afrikaners*.¹⁶ Migrating from the neighboring colonies of Angola and South Africa, the *Afrikaners* were initially seen during the period of German colonial rule (1894–1914) either as a manageable nuisance to be assimilated or as distant cousins because of their Low German heritage. However, after World War I the situation changed drastically for the German population.¹⁷ As a condition of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany had to relinquish sovereignty over its colonies. Control of Southwest Africa passed to the South African Union in the form of a mandate. The Germans perceived the South African government's actions to integrate them and to promote its own citizens as an attempt to relegate *Südwestlers* to being second-class citizens. Thus, unlike settlers from other colonial powers, the Germans went from being the rulers in the land to being the ruled.

This book fully explores this unique feature of the German colonial experience in Namibia, and to facilitate such a study it is divided into two parts: the period of colonial rule, 1894 to 1919, and the mandate years, 1919 to 1939 (the former including the relatively brief interlude of World War I). Part I examines the German attempts to establish themselves and to become the dominant culture in the region. For the middle *Stand*, this was the period of experimentation, of the attempt to create their vision of *Deutschtum*, while for the government it was a time of establishing German hegemony

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in the region. A definite confluence of goals existed here. Important issues addressed in part 1 include the nature of German rule, the use of culture not only to establish hegemony but also to create a particular image of German culture there, and the role that race and the local environment played in defining *Deutschtum*. These chapters focus on the apparent threats to *Deutschtum* during this period and the responses to these threats both by Germans in the colony and in the homeland. These supposed dangers included an increase in *Afrikaner* settlers entering the colony, the presence of undesirable elements, the rise in miscegenation, and the growing mulatto population—the latter challenging the definitions of race and blurring the distinctions between rulers and ruled. I examine German reactions to these ostensible threats and why Germans pursued the actions they did. These included promoting increased German settlement, deporting unwanted individuals, denying mulattos their legal rights as natural-born German citizens, introducing social and legal measures against those who went against the norm and cohabited or married African women, the sending of German women to the colony, and increasing demands for support of local German schools and of the German language. Part 1 concludes with an examination of the incipient Southwestern German identity.

World War I suspended most activities in Southwest Africa, the years 1914–1918/19 constituting an interlude in the territory's development. For the Southwestern German community, the outbreak of war ushered in a period of both hope and dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction came in 1915—the result of German capitulation to the Allies, who thereafter occupied the colony for the duration of the war. Many of the activities undertaken prior to the conflict were stopped. For example, settlement ceased and schools closed. Despite this situation, a great deal of optimism reigned in the territory. Germans there, as well as in the homeland, believed and assumed that once Germany won the war the situation would return to normal. Colonial officials in Southwest Africa even made plans for the years after the war, in particular in the realm of education, where plans for reform were discussed. At the close of part 1, chapter 5 examines both the feelings of dissatisfaction and the German hopes and plans for the future.

Part 2 explores the ways in which the German community, reduced to minority status, fought to survive and preserve its position in Southwest Africa against the background of colonial revisionism.¹⁸ Their struggle for survival focused primarily on maintaining pillars of German culture and identity, above all schools and the presence of women, as well as obtaining

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certain political rights. This was deemed necessary in light of the South African administration's perceived attempts to reduce the significance of the German presence while promoting its own citizens' efforts to gain a stronger foothold in Southwest Africa. For the German community, holding onto its *Deutschtum* became a means to combat the supposedly seditious efforts of the South Africans. Furthermore, by invoking German culture and identity, the effort to preserve *Deutschtum* acquired the status of rallying point and tool to enforce conformities within the German population. The fact that some Germans in the mandate felt that this was necessary reveals that the community suffered divisions, including over the path it should pursue. The Germans normally split along generational lines and years of residency in the territory. This became particularly acute after the National Socialists seized power in Germany. Obviously, German measures to preserve their status and position in the region were intricately tied to colonial revisionism and the hoped for return to the Reich.

In addition to fighting South Africans culturally, which included the founding of German private schools and the resumption of German settlement in the colony, the Germans also extended their struggle into the political realm. Here they fought for political rights—above all the recognition of German as an administrative language—and voting rights, as well as against naturalization and the incorporation of Southwest Africa into the Union of South Africa. The Germans viewed their actions as essential to their survival as a German community. They saw that Southwest Africa was quickly becoming dominated by South Africans, especially Afrikaners, through increased immigration and enfranchisement, which the Afrikaners acquired more easily than German immigrants. Ultimately, the Germans lost this struggle with the outbreak of World War II. More significantly, the self-reflection resulting from their internal struggles caused many Germans to recognize where their hearts and future lay. They had made the final transition from being Southwestern Germans to German Südwest.