Lebensraum in Context: A Challenge to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Department of History

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Beginning in the mid-2000s, a historiographical debate centering on the relationship between German colonialism in Southwest Africa and Nazism arose on both sides of the Atlantic. Those revisionist scholars who see continuity between German Southwest Africa and Nazi Germany belong to the so-called “Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis School.” Using structural analyses and direct personal linkages as proof, these scholars make the claim that the German colonial experience in Southwest Africa greatly influenced the development of Nazism and of the Holocaust. The debate—which still continues today—covers a wide variety of topics, such as German colonial violence, ideology, economics, and social and racial relations. Those individuals advancing the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis identify the Social Darwinist theory of *Lebensraum*, or “living space,” as one of the central structural similarities between German colonialism in Southwest Africa and Nazism in Germany. By analyzing settlement patterns and violence in Southwest Africa from 1894 until 1907, this thesis presents a challenge to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis and suggests that *Lebensraum* was—unlike in Nazi Germany—irrelevant to the German colonization of Southwest Africa.
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Introduction

Historical works seeking to link German colonialism in Southwest Africa and the Holocaust have become increasingly more popular over the past ten years. Often structural in approach, these works draw lines of continuity from Southwest Africa to Auschwitz, arguing that Hitler and the Nazis engaged in a colonial genocide modeled after—and heavily influenced by—the German colonial experience in Southwest Africa. Journalists Casper Erichsen and David Olusoga as well as historians Jürgen Zimmerer and Benjamin Madley are some of the most well-known individuals advancing the “Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis.”¹ For these individuals, German colonialists, unlike other European colonialists, perpetrated a particularly ruthless genocide against the “other” in Southwest Africa and then later turned this colonial-style genocide on the “other” in Europe. In this sense, German Southwest Africa is unique to European colonialism—which fits well into the Sonderweg, or special path—of German history.

Those individuals supporting the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis should be commended for taking a comparative, transnational approach to Nazism and the Holocaust. Their works are a worthy exercise and yield insights into the nature of racially-motivated violence. Although their pieces are provocative and some striking structural similarities between the Herero and Nama Genocide and the Holocaust do exist, there are holes in this narrative that must be addressed before the

¹ Although many historians use the term “Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis”, this thesis employs ‘Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis’ since it is more precise.
revisions of Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis should be seriously considered by the historical community.

Claims regarding Lebensraum represent one such hole. Those individuals advancing the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis identify Lebensraum as one of the strongest structural similarities between the Herero and Nama Genocide and the Holocaust. Have these authors correctly assumed that Lebensraum shaped German colonial policy towards native peoples in German Southwest Africa? This thesis aims to answer this question by focusing on the theory of Lebensraum, or “living space,” and its relevance to settlement patterns and violence German Southwest Africa.

A new term coined by German geographer and ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel just a few years before the Herero and Nama Genocide began, Lebensraum is a Social Darwinist theory that refers to the need for “living space” for a particular ethnic group. In developing Lebensraum, Ratzel drew most of his inspiration from Native American displacement in the United States. In Ratzel’s theory, stronger organisms, including groups of people, naturally seize and repopulate the land, or living space, of weaker organisms through expulsion or physical destruction.

It is widely accepted among historians that the expansion of German Lebensraum in Eastern Europe was a fundamental political concern of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis during World War II. Operation Barbarossa was initiated in part to create more German Lebensraum through the premeditated expulsion and extermination of Jews and ethnic Slavs in Eastern Europe and the subsequent colonization of their lands by Germans. Nazi ambitions to realize the Generalplan Ost, or General Plan East, and increase German Lebensraum in the East resulted in the murder of millions of Jews and ethnic Slavs in a matter of years.
Although the term *Lebensraum* never appeared in the rhetoric of settlers or officials in German Southwest Africa, those supporting the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis claim that *Lebensraum* permeated the thoughts and actions of Germans in the colony before and during the Herero and Nama Genocide. They view Southwest Africa as a laboratory for *Lebensraum*, a place where Germans incubated ideas that led to the Holocaust. They contend that the end goal of German immigrations to Southwest Africa and of the Herero and Nama Genocide was the complete annihilation of native Africans and the resettlement of their lands by German settlers. By examining the practice and ideology of German settlers, colonial officials, officers, and soldiers in Southwest Africa, this thesis demonstrates that *Lebensraum* was irrelevant during the German settlement of Southwest Africa and during the Herero and Nama Genocide.

The first chapter in this thesis is a brief overview of native African resistance against and war with German colonists in Southwest Africa from 1894 until 1907. It presents the most crucial figures and events of the numerous conflicts that occurred in this short span, with a particular emphasis placed upon the Herero and Nama Wars between 1904 and 1907. This introductory chapter provides critical background information and allows the reader to progress seamlessly through the rest of the text without needing to reference any further materials.

The second chapter is a literature review. It locates the origins of this school of thought primarily in Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Sven Lindqvist’s *Exterminate All the Brutes*. It also devotes time to the *Sonderweg* theory and Fritz Fischer’s *Germany's Aims in the First World War*. Helmut Bley’s *South-West Africa under German Colonial Rule, 1894-1914* is the final work discussed in this section. This chapter then summarizes the historiographical debates surrounding
the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. As stated prior, supporters of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis include journalists Casper Erichsen and David Olusoga and historians Jürgen Zimmerer and Benjamin Madley. Selected examples of opposition come from historians Pascal Grosse, Robert Gerwarth, and Stephan Malinowski. Although criticisms of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis have attacked it on many fronts, this section shows that a void exists in the historiography and thus validates the undertaking of this study.

The third and final chapter deals with patterns of settlement in the colony and also the nature of violence perpetrated by Germans against native Africans during the Herero and Nama Wars. The first half of the chapter begins with a discussion of Friedrich Ratzel and his notions regarding Lebensraum. For Ratzel, Lebensraum meant the establishment of a pre-industrial agricultural society in German settler colonies. Ratzel’s conception of Lebensraum was never realized in Southwest Africa. Disruptions, such as the Herero and Nama War, made German settlers a transient group that was predominately made up of new arrivals throughout the course of its existence under German control. These disruptions also stunted the growth of colony’s German population. Exterminating Africans to clear up the countryside and expand German Lebensraum would have been impractical since Germans depended on native African labor to run the colony efficiently. Furthermore, the geography of Southwest Africa could not accommodate the implementation of Ratzel’s vision of Lebensraum. All of this debunks the notion that Lebensraum was a crucial piece of German settlement in Southwest Africa.

The second half of this chapter searches for the motivations and intentions behind the atrocities committed by Germans in the aftermath of native uprisings. Weeks after the uprising began fear of rebelling Hereros quickly transformed into
rage. This incited German settlers and the *Schutztruppe* in the colonies to retaliate. In Germany, panic and anger about the blow the uprising dealt to German power and prestige pushed the Kaiser to mobilize his military. The heinous acts of violence perpetrated by German officers and soldiers in Southwest Africa during the Herero and Nama Wars were a communicative means to repress the revolts and reassert German control of the colony. Through the practical application of violence and genocide, German colonial officials wanted to send a message to native peoples: any resistance would be met with violent force and, in extreme cases, even extermination. It was the desire, pressure, and inability to obtain a decisive victory in the war which caused Germans to perpetrate violence and genocide against the Herero and Nama people. *Lebensraum* had absolutely nothing to do with the Herero and Nama Genocide.

A short conclusion follows the body of this work. It ties together all three chapters, arguing that the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis School has greatly over exaggerated the impact of *Lebensraum* on Southwest Africa. It also outlines some of the major methodological issues associated with the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Finally, it details the implications of this thesis and sets them within the context of current political debates surrounding Namibian demands for reparations.
Chapter 1: A Brief Overview of Resistance and War in Southwest Africa

Native Land and Cattle Dispossession

The native peoples, most notably the Herero and Nama, of Southwest Africa were not averse to resistance or war with Germans. Even before the Herero and Nama Wars broke out in the early 1900s, native peoples were accustomed to rebelling against German authority in Southwest Africa. Conflicts between German colonialists and native peoples almost always revolved around land and cattle. Governor Theodor Leutwein is credited with formulating German policy in the Southwest Africa, which sought to divide and conquer native peoples, but also minimize the damage done to their economy and psychology. Through initiating a war against Hendrik Witbooi and the Nama people—who were the enemies of the Herero—in the south the country in 1894, he received the passive support of the Hereros, the largest ethnic group in the colony. In September of 1894, Governor Leutwein signed a peace treaty with the Nama and ended hostilities in the colony.²

At this, they were around forty different tribes in Southwest Africa. Almost all belonged to one of two different ethno-linguistic groups. There were the Bantu-speaking groups of the more hospitable north and central lands and the Khoisan-speaking people of the southern desert regions. The Bantu tribes in Southwest Africa consisted of the Herero and the Ovambo. The Ovambo were the largest ethnic group

making up half of the total population in the colony. They were never brought under
the German control due to their hostility to outsiders and large military force. The
Herero lived in the central plains of Southwest Africa and were pastoralists. Cattle
were the staple of their economy and culture. The Hereros were a peaceful people.
Only when their cattle interests were threatened did they become confrontational.\(^3\)
The Nama—or Hottentots as they were known by Germans—were a smaller group in
the southern fringes of the colony and lived alongside the Saan, Bushmen, and
Oorlam. Like the Herero, they were also pastoralists.\(^4\)

With the natives in Southwest Africa effectively pacified, Governor Leutwein
and German colonial officials then looked to bring German settlers to the colony.
They viewed German settlements as essential to maintaining this newfound peace.
Officials considered cattle ranching to be the most viable economic pursuit for
German settlers. But in order to ranch, German settlers needed great amounts of land
and cattle. The arable Herero lands and their large herds of cattle in the north of the
country were Leutwein’s target.\(^5\) The first conflict over land and cattle, called the
“War of the Boundary”, took place in 1896 and pitted the Germans and Nama against
the Herero. Governor Leutwein sought to acquire Herero land and cattle in the
northeastern parts of Southwest Africa, which were well-suited for settlements unlike
most of the colony, through a treaty with the leader of the Hereros, Samuel Maharero.
The treaty created a border that ran through the middle of Hereroland and allowed
Maharero and German officials to sell all cattle and give away all land south of the
boundary. Maharero received 2,000 marks per year for his compliance. Ultimately,
the treaty provoked resistance from those being dispossessed. Since all land was held
commonly among Hereros, Maharero did not own the lands—or the cattle for that

\(^4\) Ibid., 23.
\(^5\) Ibid., 49.
matter—that he signed away. Those Herero affected by the treaty resisted. Their resistance was put down quickly and the treaty was upheld due to Governor Leutwein’s diplomacy, which was effective in preserving the neutrality of other native African tribes and even pushing the Nama into the conflict on the side of the Germans.6

The loss of Herero cattle was augmented by the rinderpest virus of 1897. This cattle epidemic killed somewhere between 80% and 90% of their entire stock. Five years later, the Herero cattle totaled only 50,000, 50% of their numbers before the virus struck. German cattle ranchers, who had by now established themselves in the colony, fared reasonably well during the rinderpest virus. Cattle inoculations allowed them to avoid the same disastrous fate. In 1902, German ranchers—who numbered just above 1,000 individuals—owned as many cattle as the 80,000 Hereros in the colony.7

The rate of dispossession of Herero land and cattle alarmed Governor Leutwein. By 1903, much of the Herero cattle and nearly 25% of Herero lands were now under German control. Governor Leutwein surmised that at the current rate the Herero would be completely dispossessed in a matter of years. Deeply troubled by this prospect, he and other German colonial officials began to have serious talks about forming Herero reservations that would protect against further losses of Herero land and cattle. But before reservations could be established, the Herero—who by this time were fed up with the disappearance of their land and cattle—rebelled.8

7 Ibid., 50.
8 Ibid., 51-52.
Revolt in the Bush

The Herero Uprising against German authority began on January 12th, 1904. The uprising was first reported in Germany on January 15th. A telegram arrived from Swakopmund in Berlin on January 13th detailing the beginnings of the uprising and of hostilities between natives and Germans, which centered at Okahandja north of Windhoek. It recounts how the Hereros destroyed a railway bridge and also severed the telegraph lines between Windhoek and the coast. Fifty six German reservists, two officers, and a doctor were sent to find out more information. At Waldau near Okahandja, the railway lines were no longer passable and the men encountered Herero resistance.\(^9\) The first full report appeared in Germany on January 29th. The article described the Herero revolt as something drastically different than previous uprisings in Southwest Africa or in other German colonies. The report, which was front page news, surmised that the uprising had spread to all of Hereroland and that the Hereros had become “a hostile people”. The Hereros and their 3,000 rifles were by now a serious threat to German colonial interests. At this point, sixteen Germans had been killed and seventy were still missing.\(^10\)

Governor Leutwein, who was in the south of the country fighting a small war against the Bondelswarts people, was shocked by the outbreak of the uprising. He believed the cause of the uprising to be Herero “discontentment” with their current state.\(^11\) For former Schutztruppe officer and later author Kurd Schwabe, the motivation behind the conflict was clear. He contended that the violence perpetrated by Hereros against Germans was due to hatred. Schwabe, who served in Southwest Africa from 1893 until 1897 and was a promoter of the German colonial presence in

\(^10\) “Der Herero-Aufstand in Deutsch-Südwestafrika,” Coburger Zeitung, January 29, 1904.
\(^11\) Theodor Leutwein, Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1908) 30.
the region, understood the Herero Uprising to be motivated by *Rassenhaß*, or “racial hatred” directed at Germans by Hereros. For Schwabe, vehement hatred of whites and their “superior” culture created the crisis with the Hereros in Southwest Africa.\footnote{Kurd Schwabe, *Der Krieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1904-1906* (Berlin: C.A. Weller Verlag, 1907), 70.}

German settler Helene von Falkenhausen’s memoirs provide a detailed, first-hand account of the uprising. When the SS Marie Woermann slowly pulled away from the dock at the port of Hamburg in 1893, Helene was deeply saddened. She and her family stood on the deck with the rest of the passengers and caught their final glimpses of the fatherland. Helene recalled that one question was on the mind of every German aboard the ship on that July day: When would I return home again?\footnote{Helene von Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale, Elf Jahre in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1893-1904* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1907), 1-2.}

Helene’s story is much like that any other immigrant. It is full of hope, uncertainty, frustration, triumph, and tragedy. After five long weeks on the steamship, Helene and her family arrived at Swakopmund in August of 1893 along with numerous families, single men, and between 120 and 130 soldiers.\footnote{Ibid., 6.} The Nitze family was among the first colonialists to arrive in German Southwest Africa and established a farm in Klein-Windhoek, a district just outside of the colonial capital.\footnote{Ibid., 37.} Like almost all German farmers, they settled in the interior plateau where the land was suitable for grazing cattle.\footnote{Guido G. Weigend, “German Settlement Patterns in Namibia,” *Geographical Review. Vol. 75, No. 2* (New York: American Geographical Review, 1985), 156.}

By 1904, it was roughly ten years since Helene first set foot in Southwest Africa. She was thirty years old and married to a merchant by the name of Friedrich von Falkenhausen. She was the mother of two—and soon to be three—and lived with her husband on a farm near Otjihaenena, ninety or so kilometers northeast of Helene’s
parents’ original home near Windhoek. Otjituesu, the name of the family farm stood, near the banks of the Wit Nossob, a small river that begins high in the Otjihavera Range and winds through the Busch of Damaraland before gradually transforming into a dry bed as one travels deeper into the heart of the Kalahari.  

It was January and life on the farm was ordinary. Helene had just returned from a visit to Windhoek, where she and her family celebrated Christmas and New Year’s Eve. She and her husband knew of a small uprising by the Bondelswarts tribe in the south that began in November. German troops were sent, but the rebellion continued. This was not a cause for concern. Helene reasoned that their farm in the north was far enough away from the danger. Besides, the local tribes near her were Hereros and had no ties to those rebelling in the south.

The day of the uprising started like many others. Helene set aside a good deal of work. She tasked herself with writing letters to her relatives and also ironing the family’s fine linens. She began by sitting down at her husband’s writing desk and drafting the letters. A little later, Anna, the family’s Herero servant who had previously worked for Helene’s parents in Klein-Windhoek, informed Helene that a cow was sick. Helene left the house and went outside to have a look for herself. Two days earlier, Helene’s husband had left their home in Otjihaenena to go on a business trip in Windhoek. Helene and the children had begged him to stay, but it was of no use. Friedrich calmed them down and assured them that he would be back in a few days. Just before the sun set, he mounted their finest horse and left. If only he had stayed, Helene later thought. Maybe he would have survived.

17 Helene von Falkenhausen, Ansiedlerschicksale, Elf Jahre in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1893-1904 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1907), 105.
18 Ibid., 203-205.
19 Ibid., 206-208.
After checking on the sick cow, Helene returned to the house to continue writing her letters, but was again disturbed, this time by knocking on the front door. She walked to the door and asked who was there. Two Herero men, Ferdinand and Wilfred, told her that they wanted to be let in. Helene responded by asking if they wanted to buy something. The two men said no and Helene demanded that they leave. The men then told Helene that they had a letter from her husband. Since Helene was expecting a letter from her husband, she cracked the door open to receive it. The two Hereros forcefully pushed the door ajar and struck Helene on the head with a large club. She fell to the floor and lay there for an indefinite amount of time. When she awoke, her head was in pain and bleeding and she was unable to move. The two Hereros ordered Helene to surrender all of the ammunition cartridges in the house. She fainted once again.

After lying bloodied on the floor for some time, Anna and another servant were able to bring Helene back to consciousness and on her feet again. Anna advised Helene to write a letter to a local missionary pleading for help. Helene wrote the letter and then ordered Anna to hide all of the ammunition cartridges under the mattress in her bedroom. Her husband’s three rifles and two revolvers had already been stolen by the intruders. Dazed and still unsure where she was, Helene went outside of the house and rested on the ground. A Herero servant, Kajou, gave Helene a blanket to shield her from the hot sun. After a few minutes, she was approached by a group of Herero women armed with clubs. These women, who Helene had helped in cases of illness and had often made small gifts, squatted around her and grinned. One of the Herero women, Gerhardine, showed the others Helene’s wounds and pressed on them

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relentlessly, causing Helene a great deal of pain. A devilish look came upon the faces of the women. The Herero women then stole the blanket off Helene’s body and called her a “dumb animal.” Never would Helene forget this encounter. Dreams of the hideous look in the women’s eyes would haunt her for the rest of her life.23

Although Helene treated, at least in her personal account, native Africans with respect, she was atypical among her contemporaries in German Southwest Africa. Life for Africans after the Germans arrived was far from ideal. Harsh racism against natives Africans was endemic in Southwest Africa. Brutal beatings of Africans were commonplace throughout the colony. The murders and rapes of Africans by German officials and settlers went largely unpunished by colonial courts.24

After Anna returned to where Helene was resting on the ground outside of the house, the Herero women dispersed. Helene asked Anna to fetch a glass of milk for her back in the house to relieve her thirst. That was impossible, Anna responded. The house was full of Hereros. The looting had begun. This was war and Helene and her family had to leave immediately.25 Anna quickly made the determination to flee. “Come, come, to the missionary,” Anna said. Helene, along with her children, Anna’s children, and a few other servants, followed Anna’s lead. They ran through the Busch, directly through the thorny shrubs without stopping to get far away from the house. Helene continued despite the constant anxiety that this could be the end. Fortunately, they reached missionary Hammann’s home safely that night. There they found food, water, and, most importantly, protection for the night.26

The next morning, Helene awoke to the missionary and his wife sitting at her bed. Mrs. Hammann, the missionary’s wife, began to cry. At first, Helene thought that

23 Helene von Falkenhausen, Ansiedlerschicksale, Elf Jahre in Deutsch-Südwestafrica 1893-1904 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1907), 211-212.
26 Ibid., 212-215.
Mrs. Hammann was expressing sympathy over her current situation. Mrs. Hammann spoke softly and explained that three settlers, including Helene's husband, had been killed near Otjihaenena by Hereros the day before. Pausing for a moment to gather herself, Helene screamed out, “That cannot be true!” She later discovered that her husband was unarmed when he was killed by six Hereros who proceeded to rob him after he died.

After a few weeks staying with the missionaries, Helene, Anna, and their families caught a wagon ride with other fleeing German settlers to Windhoek. It was now roughly six weeks since the uprising had begun. Residing in Windhoek was expensive and with no steady source of income Helene had no choice but take the money her husband had set aside for returning to Germany. Unfortunately, her youngest son, Friedel, became sick on the ship and passed away en route. In April, Helene arrived in Hamburg. She was overjoyed to return to the fatherland she had left behind eleven years earlier. While staying with an aunt in Dresden, she gave birth to a healthy girl.

**The German Response**

Just months after the uprising erupted, German soldiers began landing in mass on the coast. Upon arrival, they heard many stories about the Hereros that disturbed them. Veterans of the *Schutztruppe* likely spoke of the early days of the revolt, when the Herero tribe suddenly rebelled against colonial rule. The veterans recounted the destruction of German farms in the countryside and the vicious murders of over one

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28 Ibid., 249.
29 Ibid., 232.
30 Ibid., 246.
31 Ibid., 255.
32 Ibid., 258.
33 Ibid., 260.
hundred settlers, including women and children.\textsuperscript{34} Thousands of miles from their homes, German soldiers came to the colony in 1904 to assist in suppressing the Herero Uprising. Under the new leadership of decorated General Lothar von Trotha, soldiers of the German Imperial Army brimmed with confidence. General von Trotha, an experienced and ruthless commander having served in German East Africa during the Wahehe Rebellion and in China during the Boxer Rebellion, had been appointed by the Kaiser to lead them and the thousands of other German troops to crush the Herero rebellion.\textsuperscript{35}

As soon as the soldiers arrived in German Southwest Africa, they began to prepare for a major assault on the 6,000 Herero warriors and between 40,000 and 50,000 women, children, and elderly encamped south of Waterberg, a plateau just to the northwest of the Omaheke. The Herero leader, Samuel Maharero, was a clever tactician. Having successfully avoided significant losses and evaded capture, Maharero led a neat campaign.\textsuperscript{36} Remaining in Waterberg was his first and also last miscalculation. On August 10, 1904, the night before the Battle of Waterberg, German scouts scaled Mount Waterberg to help establish a signal station. Perched atop the plateau, the scouts watched as the Imperial Army encircled the Herero at Waterberg the following morning. Despite being significantly outnumbered, the Germans inflicted heavy losses on the Herero during the first day of fighting. The relentless bombardment of the Hereros by German artillery forced the Hereros to retreat. German troops surged from the north, the south, and the west.\textsuperscript{37}

With no other options, the Hereros fled to the southeast. General von Trotha’s soldiers advanced from the west, north, and south, herding the Hereros further east.

\textsuperscript{34} Jon M. Bridgman, \textit{The Revolt of the Hereros} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 73-74. 
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 111.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 73-74.  
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 124-127.
After the commotion subsided and the firing stopped, the scouts made their way down the mountain and into the former Herero camp. The armed, the unarmed, the old, the young, the disabled, many were murdered. The German soldiers, assisted by other native tribes, killed indiscriminately in Waterberg that day. They burst into the Herero camp and fired on anything that moved. Thousands died in Waterberg.\(^\text{38}\) To the southeast, tens of thousands of Hereros entered the Omaheke.

Meanwhile, a second uprising threatened German control of the colony. In October, the Nama people, led by former German ally Hendrik Witbooi, also revolted. They resided in the sparsely populated southern fringes of the colony. Their forces totaled only 1,800 warriors, or less than one third of the Herero’s combined strength at Waterberg. Since the Nama posed little risk to German settlements and interests—which were concentrated in the north and on the coast—a full-scale military engagement came later.\(^\text{39}\)

The Herero that sought shelter from the Germans in the Omaheke encountered harsh conditions. The Omaheke region lies on the western edge of the Kalahari Desert. It sat deep in the heart of German Southwest Africa, far from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean or the comforts of the colonial capitol Windhoek. In Otjiherero, the language of the native Herero people, Omaheke means “deep sand.” The greatest danger in the Omaheke was dehydration. Groundwater was nowhere to be found under this terrain. After the Herero entered the Omaheke, the Germans set up heavily armed camps on the perimeter which prevented the Hereros from leaving. When German patrols searched the desert, they discovered hundreds of dead bodies. They

also found large holes in the middle of the sand that the Hereros dug in a desperate attempt to construct makeshift wells and get water.\textsuperscript{40}

General von Trotha sought to deliver the final blow to the significantly weakened Herero. On October 2\textsuperscript{nd} 1904, General von Trotha drafted the infamous “Extermination Order”. It declared that the Hereros were no longer subjects of the German colonial authorities. The order also authorized the extermination of all Herero men and stated that the Germans would not accept any more Herero women and children as prisoners.\textsuperscript{41} By the end of 1904, 1,000 Hereros made it to British territory. Another 2,000 escaped into Ovamboland and Namaland. Of the roughly 50,000 Hereros that sought refuge in the Omaheke, the majority died of thirst. In 1903, the Herero tribe numbered 80,000. By the summer of 1905, that number shrank to 20,000. Soon the Nama met similar fate. By 1911, the Nama—who numbered 20,000 seven years before—were reduced to fewer than 10,000. Although most Nama perished during a protracted guerilla war against the Germans, some 1,600 prisoners, including both men and women, died in concentration camps on the coast.\textsuperscript{42}

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\textsuperscript{40} Jon M. Bridgman, \textit{The Revolt of the Hereros} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 127.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 164-165.
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Chapter 2: Historiographical Debates Surrounding the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis

The Origins of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis

Critical to understanding the historiographical debate surrounding the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis is Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt was the first scholar to search for the relationship between imperialism and totalitarian regimes. Her work is the chief predecessor to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Arendt argues rather convincingly that there is a connection between New Imperialism and totalitarianism. She points to two new devices that Europeans discovered for political organization and to rule over foreign peoples. She states:

“One was race as a principle of the body politic, and the other bureaucracy as a principle of foreign domination. Without race as a substitute for the nation, this scramble for Africa and the investment fever might well have remained the purposeless “dance of death and trade” (Joseph Conrad) of all gold rushes. Without bureaucracy as a substitute for government, the British possession of India might well have been left to the recklessness of the “breakers of law in India” (Burke) without changing the political climate of an entire era.”

It is important to note that Arendt strays away from a mono-causal explanation of totalitarianism and instead locates its origins in many different movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. In fact, she identifies Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism as the most

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influential factors in the rise of Nazism and Bolshevism. Still European imperialism in Africa occupies a central place in Arendt’s book.

Race, for Arendt, was invented by Europeans as an “emergency explanation” to the problem of perceived African backwardness and savagery. Deeply confused by and afraid of their encounters with native peoples in Africa, Europeans created the concept of race to come to terms with the “other”. Arendt points to the Boers of South Africa who used racial categories to create a stratified society and dominate native peoples. This invention of “race as a principle of the body politic” also introduced extermination as an ordinary and respectable means to pacify natives. Examples include the Boer extermination of Hottentot tribes in South Africa, Carl Peters’ murderous journeys through German East Africa, and the damage inflicted by King Leopold II and the Belgians on the native population of the Congo.

European imperialism also discovered a new method of bureaucratizing. Arendt asserts that the bureaucracies of Cecil Rhodes in Rhodesia and Lord Cromer in Egypt were both a radical departure from anything that had preceded it. First, their bureaucracies had a complete lack of interest in their subjects. Arendt sees them as aloof and indifferent to native peoples. Second, the universality of the law no longer mattered. Instead, it was the innate capacity of the white man’s authority that governed native peoples and reinforced the power of figures like Rhodes and Lord Cromer. Through this authority, both Rhodes and Lord Cromer became god-like figures and pursued a process of endless expansion in Africa.

46 Ibid., 212.
47 Ibid., 221.
48 Ibid., 215.
Sven Lindqvist’s *Exterminate All the Brutes* serves as bridge between Hannah Arendt and the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Lindqvist’s book takes Arendt’s claims a step further. In blending intellectual history, narrative history, and travel musing all into one, Lindqvist sets out in this unconventional book to discover the roots of Colonel Kurtz’s infamous phrase—which is also the title of his book—that appears at the end of Joseph Conrad’s novel *The Heart of Darkness*. He finds these roots in European intellectual and political movements of 19th and early 20th centuries and also in the practical application of colonial violence in Europe. Lindqvist argues that the isolation, open spaces, and sheer distance from their home countries made European colonists invisible and impossible to control.\(^{49}\) Intellectual movements, such as Darwinism, Pan-nationalism, *Lebensraum*, combined with these colonial conditions to make Europeans susceptible to perpetrating abuses such as genocide in Africa.\(^{50}\) He concludes that Auschwitz was the “modern industrial application” of a policy of extermination cultivated in Africa.\(^{51}\)

Lindqvist does discuss German Southwest Africa in one chapter. In Lindqvist’s opinion, Southwest Africa followed the North American model of colonization. He believes that Herero land displacement and reservations, prisoner work camps, and the genocide itself embody this trend. Furthermore, both Americans and Germans did not feel bound by treaties and each welcomed rebellions as an opportunity to solve the “native problem.”\(^{52}\) Nonetheless, Southwest Africa remains a small part of Lindqvist’s grand narrative, which describes a wider European process. Even though Lindqvist determines that the origins of the Holocaust lay in European imperialism in Africa, he is not a member of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 144-148.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 160.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 149-150.
Continuity Thesis School since he fails to acknowledge the singular importance and uniqueness of German colonialism in Southwest Africa.

Like Hannah Arendt and Sven Lindqvist, Fritz Fischer is also of importance to the historiographical debate surrounding the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Fischer’s contribution to the historiography does not deal directly with European imperialism in Africa. Rather, Fischer’s *Germany's Aims in the First World War* ignited a separate debate on the *Sonderweg* theory or the issue of continuity in German history. Before Fischer, the Nazi period was generally viewed by historians as an anomaly in German history. By comparing Germany’s war aims in World War I and World War II, Fischer attacked this view. Although his challenge to the conventional interpretation of German history is not explicitly stated in the body of his book, his foreword outlines the implications of his work. Fischer states that the “mental attitudes and aspirations” that colored German policy during the First World War “remained operative” after the war, suggesting a line of continuity between Germany policy in World War I and World War II. Furthermore, Fischer argues that the Age of Imperialism did not end for Germany in 1914, but reached its zenith when Germany tried to make itself into a world power, among the likes of the Russian Empire, the British Empire, and the United States, through two devastating wars of expansion.53

In his book *South-West Africa under German Colonial Rule, 1894-1914*, German historian Helmut Bley contends that German colonialism in Southwest Africa was different from other colonial projects in Africa. By zeroing in on the period of intense development in the colony, Bley attempts to demonstrate the uniqueness of

German colonialism in Southwest Africa. Regarding the exceptional character of Southwest Africa, he claims:

“The situation [in Southwest Africa] is very different from that in other European or German colonies in Africa. Even in German East Africa, where military force was also used to break African resistance, economic initiative remained largely in African hands, and the Europeans neither sought nor achieved the kind of social and economic supremacy demanded by settlers in South-West Africa. Not even in South Africa did the settler community develop similar relations with the Africans.”

For Bley, the amount of economic and political control Germans enjoyed in Southwest Africa was unparalleled. The complete dispossession of African land and cattle—by means of genocide—and the lowering African status to the level “servants” after the wars makes Southwest Africa an exceptional case.

**Selected Historiography of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis**

The Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis has surged in popularity in the last ten years. Although there are small nuances to the works of journalists Casper Erichsen and David Olusoga, and historians Jürgen Zimmerer and Benjamin Madley, their arguments are constructed in roughly the same manner. Each of these authors first tries to differentiate German colonialism in Southwest Africa from other brands of European colonialism. Structural similarities—such as genocidal violence, the establishment of concentration camps, and the presence Lebensraum—as well as direct personal linkages provide proof that German colonialism was closer in its actions and ideology to Nazi Germany than other colonial projects in Africa. After establishing this, these individuals then use this colonial Sonderweg to explain why Germans, and not other Europeans, perpetrated the Holocaust.

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55 Ibid.
David Olusoga’s and Casper Erichsen’s *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* is a popular history that seeks to revise the conventional interpretation of German colonialism and its relationship to Nazism. Both Olusoga and Erichsen are journalists by trade with Master’s degrees in history. Olusoga directed a visually emotive BBC documentary film entitled *Namibia: Genocide and the Second Reich* that appeared in 2005. The documentary takes a similar approach to their book and searches for the missing link between the Herero and Nama Genocide and the Holocaust. It is interesting to note that both Casper Erichsen and Benjamin Madley appear in the film on multiple occasions as historical authorities on the subject. Two minutes into the documentary, Madley, who will be discussed further in this section, makes the claim, “Soldiers received specific orders, which allowed them to kill anyone. It was an overall strategy aimed at ethnically cleansing the countryside to create *Lebensraum* for German settlers.”

Structural similarities are central tenet of Olusoga’s and Erichsen’s argument. They point out that the brown shirts of the *Sturmbteilung*, or SA, are the exact same uniforms that the colonial *Schutztruppe* wore in Southwest Africa, suggesting that the SA selected the uniforms as an homage to the colonial period. For Olusoga and Erichsen, German concentration camps in Southwest Africa, in particular the camp on Shark Island near Lüderitz, are structurally similar to the concentration camps of the Holocaust as they each employed slave labor, were plagued by malnutrition and high death rates, included medical experiments on inmates, and were overseen by Germans.

58 Ibid., 215-217.
Lebensraum is one of the most fundamental structural similarities between the Holocaust and the Herero and Nama Genocide for Olusoga and Erichsen. They contend that General Lothar von Trotha was an ardent supporter of Lebensraum and sought to secure it in Southwest Africa by exterminating the Herero and Nama peoples for the purpose of acquiring their lands. Thus the motivation behind the genocide was Lebensraum, or the extermination of the Herero and Nama for settlement purposes. They examine General von Trotha’s infamous “Extermination Order” as well as his letters and proclamations leading up to-and during the genocide. In their interpretation, General von Trotha’s refusal to take Herero prisoners and reference to a racial war shows that he was obsessed with exterminating the Herero and Nama for reasons other than simply suppressing the rebellion. 59

They also cite the direct personal linkages. Hermann Göring—whose father was the first Governor of Southwest Africa—and Franz von Epp—a Nazi figure who served as a commander during the Herero and Nama Genocide and had some influence during the early years of the party—are most thoroughly analyzed. 60 Eugene Fischer—a medical professor and eugenicist who conducted research on the mixed race Baster people of Southwest Africa in 1908 and later worked with Joseph Mengele in Germany—provides yet another direct personal linkage. 61

Historian Benjamin Madley advances many of the same arguments as Olusoga and Erichsen and evokes almost the exact same cast of characters and events in his article From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe. However, his article places a much greater emphasis on Lebensraum as a structural similarity. For

59 David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen, The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 149-151.
60 Ibid., 6-12.
61 Ibid., 245-249.
Madley, genocide in German Southwest Africa was different than other colonial mass murders in its policy of Vernichtung, or extermination, as a means to obtain more Lebensraum, in its distinction between work camps and death camps, and in its direct personal linkages to Nazism. The German colonial experience in Southwest Africa glorified conquest “while breaking down moral and political barriers to genocide” and led Hitler and the Nazis to broadly follow patterns innovated in Southwest Africa.\(^{62}\)

Madley does not go so far as to claim that the German colonialism caused the Holocaust and he does concede that genocide Southwest Africa was not the only inspiration for Nazi policies in Eastern Europe. However, Southwest Africa did, in Madley’s words, contribute “ideas, methods, and a lexicon that Nazi leaders borrowed and expanded” on the European continent.\(^{63}\)

Madley dedicates an entire section of his article to Lebensraum as it relates to Southwest Africa and Nazism. He asserts that Friedrich Ratzel developed Lebensraum in reference to Southwest Africa and that Southwest Africa was the first place in which modern Germans realized Ratzel’s Lebensraum. Madley writes:

> “Der Lebensraum” does not explicitly refer to German South West Africa, but two facts suggest that the essay was developed with the colony in mind. First, in 1892, Ratzel wrote an article designating the colony as a great candidate for German settlement. Second, as a geographer, Ratzel would have conceived of his 1901 theory knowing that Namibia was Germany’s most populous settler colony. Thus, when Hitler wrote about Lebensraum, in the 1920s, he was likely to have been appropriating an idea developed with colonial Namibia in mind.\(^{64}\)

He later argues that German settlers and officials in Southwest Africa were espousing ideas about Lebensraum and putting it into practice through native land dispossession before the genocide began. Madley concludes this section by discussing the legacy of


\(^{63}\) Ibid., 429-431.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 433.
Southwest Africa and its influence on Nazism through Franz von Epp and Hans Grimm’s 1926 novel *People Without Space*, which was set in southern Africa.65

Madley goes on to cite numerous behaviors that Germans learned in Southwest Africa. These include viewing colonized peoples as sub-human, legally institutionalized racism, using genocidal rhetoric, and—most importantly—executing a war of extermination to expand German *Lebensraum*. He believes that this *Vernichtungskrieg*, or war of extermination, is similar to the Nazi war in Eastern Europe in four ways. First, leaders in both conflicts defined the war as a “race war”. Second, both German colonial officials and Nazis sought to physically destroy their enemy. Third, Germans systematically murdered prisoners of war and civilians. Last, public health was given as justification for mass murder. Madley states, “Like von Trotha, Nazi leaders targeted civilians in order to clear the land.” 66

German historian Jürgen Zimmerer takes the most nuanced approach to the relationship between German colonialism in Southwest Africa and Nazism. Zimmerer, unlike Olusoga, Erichsen, and Madley, specializes in German colonialism and has published numerous articles and books about Southwest Africa. Selections from his articles *The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism: a Postcolonial Perspective on Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination* and *Annihilation in Africa: The “Race War” in German Southwest Africa (1904-1908) and its Significance for a Global History of Genocide* will be used to convey Zimmerer’s central arguments. His recent book *From Windhoek to Auschwitz?*:

66 Ibid., 441-444.
Contributions to the Relationship between the Colonialism and the Holocaust will not be addressed since it expresses the same ideas he posited in earlier articles.\textsuperscript{67}

Like Olusoga, Erichsen, and Madley, Zimmerer is concerned with uncovering the structural similarities between Southwest Africa and the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{68} Unsatisfied with so-called “Eurocentric” interpretations of Nazism, Zimmerer rediscovers what he believes to be the overlooked roots of Nazism in German Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{69} He views the German occupation of Eastern Europe as “colonial rule” and suggests that the German war and genocide in Southwest Africa was paradigmatic for the Nazi military campaign. Hitler’s desire to make Russia into “our India” and also Heinrich Himmler’s statement that “All Jews must be shot. Jewish women must be driven into the marshes,”—which seems to echo General von Trotha’s Extermination Order—stand out as evidence that the Nazis looked towards European colonialism of the late 1800s and early 1900s for inspiration. Above all, the genocide of the Herero and Nama broke down the taboo associated with extermination in Germany and normalized its application during the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{Lebensraum} is one of the structural similarities that Zimmerer identifies in his works. He believes that notions of “race” and “space” are common to both Southwest Africa and Nazi Germany. In his definition, race means the superiority of one group over another and space means settler colonialism. Akin to Nazi expansionism in Eastern Europe, Southwest Africa depended on the “control, exploitation, and settlement” of new lands and also the subjugation and, in some instances,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Ibid.}, 218.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, 200-211.
\end{flushleft}
extermination of native peoples.\textsuperscript{71} Zimmerer also defends his ideas against common criticisms. Claiming that the increased role of the state makes the Holocaust different from the Herero and Nama Genocide is reductive and ahistorical for Zimmerer. The perpetrators personal identities and motivations are unimportant to him; there was a plan to exterminate and someone executed it in both instances.\textsuperscript{72} Taking into account the numerous structural similarities, Zimmerer concludes that “there are many roads to Auschwitz, starting at many places. One of these roads ran by way of the colonies, colonial warfare, and genocide, and I would argue that this road was not the least significant one.”\textsuperscript{73}

**Opposition to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis**

Soon after the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis gained popularity in the mid-2000s, it was attacked by many historians across Europe and in the United States. Two examples of opposition are provided in this section. The first comes from historian Pascal Grosse’s article *What Does German Colonialism Have to Do with National Socialism?: A Conceptual Framework*. It deals primarily with the claim of German colonial uniqueness made by the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis School and questions the idea of a colonial Sonderweg in German Southwest Africa. Grosse rejects the notion of a German colonial Sonderweg and believes that Germany behaved the same as every other European power in the colonies. Much like other powers, Germany imagined a colonial state built around the


\textsuperscript{73} Jürgen Zimmerer, “Annihilation in Africa: The “Race War” in German Southwest Africa (1904-1908) and its Significance for a Global History of Genocide,” 56.
inclusion and exclusion of specific racial groups and used colonial violence to enforce the state’s authority. Only under Nazi rule did racially defined racial groups engage in extermination as an end unto itself.

The one unique quality that Grosse sees in German colonialism is the stripping of its possessions in 1918 at Versailles. He writes:

Rather than making claims of continuity, we would do well to focus on what distinguished Germany from other European colonial powers: the traumatic defeat in World War I and the “premature” end of its colonial rule. After the Allies stripped Germany of its colonial possessions, Germans engaged in a dialectic of “colonialism without colonies” that perpetuated pre-1880s escapist fantasies of a powerful imperialistic Germany and mixed them militarized fantasies of dominance through racial reproduction that had developed during Germany’s short-lived formal colonial rule. Radicalized by the defeat in total war, this fusion functioned as the paradigm for the Nazi revision of the postwar order—a revision that eventually led to World War II.  

For Grosse, this stripping at Versailles left a vacuum in the sphere of expansionism when expansionist ambitions were at their peak in Europe.  

Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski present arguably the most thorough challenge to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Their article, *Hannah Arendt’s Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz* disapproves of how far arguments of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis have been taken by some, namely Zimmerer and Madley. Through comparing Southwest Africa to other colonial projects, they contend that the German Southwest Africa is unexceptional. They also attack the empirical evidence of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis and find many of its structural similarities unsound.  

Before engaging with the hypothesis of direct personal linkages and structural similarities, Gerwath and Malinowski start by examining the so-called “exceptional

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76 Casper Erichsen’s and David Olusoga’s book appeared one year after this article in 2010.
character” of German colonial warfare in Southwest Africa. They set out to prove that 1904 was not a “taboo violation” by likening the war and genocide in Southwest Africa to other colonial conflicts. The Philippine-American War, which lasted from 1898 until 1902, resulted in the death of a few thousand American soldiers, 20,000 Filipino soldiers, and somewhere between 250,000 and 750,000 Filipino civilians. Furthermore, an exact equivalent of the General von Trotha’s Extermination Order was implemented by Brigadier General Jacob H. Smith during the war. Brigadier General Smith demanded that American soldiers no longer accept prisoners, kill and burn as many Filipinos as possible, and murder everyone over ten.77 Furthermore, Americans employed concentration camps in the Philippines that had dreadfully high death rates. The Second Boer offers a second analogous situation. Deeply frustrated by the Boers effective guerilla tactics, Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener decided to deprive the Boer guerillas of shelter and support by placing noncombatants in concentration camps. Poor sanitary conditions and meager rations resulted in tens of thousands of Boer deaths, the majority of which were women and children. For Gerwarth and Malinowski, this trend goes back even further to the French conquest of Algeria beginning in the 1830s. Between 1830 and 1872, the French colonizers killed 250,000-900,000 Algerian civilians.78 Taking into account these three examples, Gerwarth and Malinowski find it difficult to uphold the theory of a German colonial Sonderweg.

Direct personal linkages are their second target. As they reveal, German officers serving in Southwest Africa during early 1900s were born sometime between the 1840s and 1860s. It is thus doubtful that they would have lived long enough to

78 Ibid., 288-289.
participate in World War II and the Holocaust. Furthermore, the claim that colonial knowledge transferred from German medical professor and eugenicist Eugene Fischer to Joseph Mengele or from Colonial Governor Heinrich Göring to his son Hermann Göring is impossible to prove. Franz von Epp is often cited as living proof of a direct personal linkage. Gerwarth and Malinowski thoroughly discredit von Epp in their article. They state that von Epp had no influence on extermination policies and was increasingly marginalized after the Madagascar Plan fell through in 1940. Furthermore, von Epp was only one figure and no evidence has been discovered yet that verifies those planning the Final Solution had Africa in mind. The sole connections that they acknowledge as relevant are a few miscellaneous quotes from Hitler and Himmler about European colonialism generally.\textsuperscript{79}

Gerwarth and Malinowski then move on to analyze the supposed structural similarities between the Herero and Nama Genocide and the Holocaust. The contextual differences between genocide in Southwest and genocide during the Holocaust are decisive for Gerwarth and Malinowski. In Africa, the war started because of a threat to the minority of German settlers in the colony. In the Holocaust, indigenous populations were exterminated before settlers arrived. Heavy criticism was directed at General von Trotha and the German military at home by the press and the parliament on account of the atrocities. During the Holocaust, there was a relative absence of reproach within Nazi Germany. In Nazi Germany, the bureaucracy “willingly and neatly” collaborated with the terror apparatus. This was simply not the

case in Southwest Africa. And finally, racism in Europe was focused on an internal enemy and racism in Africa was directed at an external enemy.\textsuperscript{80}

For these two historians, Hannah Arendt’s \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} remains the most convincing work on the relationship between European colonialism and the Holocaust because of its emphasis on colonialism as a transnational European phenomenon and its invocation of figures like Gobineau, Rhodes, Kipling and Conrad in the place of General von Trotha and Franz von Epp.\textsuperscript{81} Although the two discount the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis, they admit that it is plausible that European colonialism did have some repercussions on inner-European history, such as eugenics, settlement planning, and racist legislation\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Conclusions}

The Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis has sparked a diverse array of debate in the last ten years. The works of Arendt, Lindqvist, Fischer, and Bley demonstrate that historiography wrestling with the relationship between Nazism and imperialism, the problem of continuity in German history, and German colonial uniqueness is nothing new. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between Arendt, Lindqvist, Fischer, and Bley and those individuals advancing the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Most obvious among them is the complete absence of German Southwest Africa in the works of Arendt and Fischer and its relatively small role in Lindqvist’s book. For Arendt, the connections between Nazism and imperialism are not specific to one imperial power and are a European-wide phenomenon. Lindqvist identifies many of the same structural similarities as

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}, 285.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid.}, 297.
\end{footnotesize}
those in the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis School. But Southwest Africa occupies a small place in his book and his conclusions are remarkably similar to Arendt’s. Fritz Fischer does search for the origins of Nazism in the German past. But Fischer does not address German colonialism in Africa. Although Bley focuses strictly on German colonialism in Southwest Africa and does argue that it is unique when compared to other European colonial projects, he does not connect this to Nazism or suggest a colonial Sonderweg that leads directly to Auschwitz.

Journalists Casper Erichsen and David Olusoga, and historians Jürgen Zimmerer and Benjamin Madley fuse the ideas of Arendt, Lindqvist, Fischer, and Bley to create the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Although there are nuances to each of their works, they use almost identical evidence and assemble their arguments in precisely the same fashion as one another. They first separate German colonialism in Southwest Africa from other brands of European colonialism. Structural similarities, such as genocidal violence, the establishment of concentration camps, and the presence Lebensraum, and direct personal linkages are the backbone of this method and work to demonstrate that German colonialism in Southwest Africa was closer to Nazi Germany than to other contemporary colonial projects. After establishing this distinction, these individuals then use this German colonial Sonderweg to explain why the Holocaust originated in Germany and not in other European nations.

Opposition to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis picked up steam beginning in the mid-2000s across Europe and in the United States. Historian Pascal Grosse takes issue with the concept of a German colonial Sonderweg and finds the stripping of German colonial possessions at Versailles in 1918 to be the only unique aspect of German colonialism. Historians Robert Gerwarth and Stephan...
Malinowski refute the alleged exceptional character of German Southwest Africa by comparing it to other instances of colonial violence and genocide. They also challenge the structural similarities and the direct personal linkages of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis on an empirical level.

Although opposition to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis has addressed many different aspects of this debate, historians have not yet undertaken a deeper analysis of claims regarding Lebensraum in German Southwest Africa. Lebensraum receives surprisingly little attention in critiques of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Perhaps Lebensraum has been overlooked by historians. In any event, the current state of the historiography invites—and almost demands—the broader discussion of Lebensraum’s significance to Southwest Africa in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: The Colonial Vision: Settlement Patterns and Violence in Southwest Africa

Friedrich Ratzel, Lebensraum, and Settlement Colonies

Friedrich Ratzel’s Lebensraum certainly had a great deal of influence within geography and anthropology circles in Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. His role in the German colonization of Southwest Africa remains questionable. Although Ratzel coined the term Lebensraum four years earlier in 1897, the essay Der Lebensraum lays out his vision. It has two important themes. First, it emphasizes migration and the colonization of new lands as natural and necessary to sustain the healthy growth of a particular Volk. For Ratzel, Volk is a cultural-based—and not a racial-based—construction. Second, it views pre-industrial agricultural settlements as the essential element of this migration and colonization.83

During his formative years, a number of experiences shaped Ratzel’s ideas. Before coining Lebensraum, he spent extensive time in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean and also made a visit to North America. Ratzel was particularly intrigued by the withdrawal of Native Americans in the United States. In his writings, he described a shrinking native population, a withering native economy, and the resettlement of native lands by European farmers, most notable among them Germans.84 Woodruff D. Smith’s work on Friedrich Ratzel suggests that Lebensraum

was rather insignificant to broader German conceptions of colonization in Southwest Africa. Despite its profound impact on academia, it was not until the 1920s that Lebensraum became a popular term in German society. Through German geopoliticians and Hans Grimm’s novel People Without Space, Lebensraum became a common term and was used by contemporaries to attack the German territorial losses imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.85

Ratzel did support German colonialism and believed that German Lebensraum could be expanded overseas. He was an adherent to emigrationist colonialism, a movement of the late 19th century Germany that sought to react against the large migration of Germans to other parts of world—namely the United States—where they would be assimilated and integrated into a different Volk. By founding German settlement colonies composed primarily of small-scale farmers, traders, and artisans that would contribute to the German economy and preserve German pre-industrial culture, Ratzel thought that the problem of German emigration could be solved and, in the process, German Lebensraum could be increased around the globe.86

Fundamental to Ratzel’s Lebensraum is settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a colonial policy that, in a rudimentary sense, focuses primarily on attracting migrants from the colonial power’s home country to settle permanently in a given colony with the intention of replacing native peoples as the majority group. Settler colonialism is usually contrasted with exploitation colonialism, or a colonial policy that seeks to primarily exploit labor and natural resources. The concept of settler colonialism has been addressed by a number of historians in recent years. According to Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, two of the foremost authorities in settler colonial studies, settler colonialism differentiates itself from other forms of

86 Ibid., 64-65.
colonialism in that settler colonialists want “the Indigenous peoples to vanish” and “come to stay”.87 Patrick Wolfe, in his theories regarding settler colonialism, agrees with Cavanagh’s and Verancini’s ideas, but elaborates further upon them. For Wolfe, the acquisition of native land is the most essential characteristic of settler colonialism.88 Wolfe argues that settler colonialism “destroys to replace”. Wolfe points out that settler colonialism is not inherently genocidal, but it does have some sort of eliminatory character in all instances.89

Settlement Patterns in Southwest Africa

This chapter now turns to a more focused discussion of Lebensraum in German Southwest Africa. Although the number of settlements remained quite low throughout its thirty-one year existence, at least when compared to settler colonies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, or even South Africa, the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis contends that Lebensraum permeated settlement policies and trends in the colony. But was Lebensraum central to German settlement practices in Southwest Africa? Through analyzing the memoir of Helene von Falkenhausen, demographic statistics, and settlement procedures, this section teases out the texture of settlement in Southwest Africa.

The colonial project in Southwest Africa began as tool that would serve an economic and diplomatic purpose. It was in this sense a colony of exploitation. At first, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck wanted absolutely nothing to do with colonies since he viewed them as expensive, unpopular, indefensible, and risky to his

89 Ibid., 388.
diplomacy. Viewing a colonial empire as potentially profitable and also under the pressure of Torschlusspanik, or door closing panic, during the Scramble for Africa, Bismarck—in an act characteristic of his Realpolitik—reversed his position on colonies. In 1884, the German Empire named Togo, Cameroon, and Southwest Africa protectorates. By 1890, German settlers, such as Helene von Falkenhaussen, started arriving in Southwest Africa in larger numbers. Uncultivated land in Germany, like anywhere else in Europe, was nonexistent and Germans settlers came to Southwest Africa to buy up the small amounts of arable land in the interior of the country for raising cattle. The deep impact of German settlement persisted well into the 20th century. As of 1984, 30% of the 6,000 farm units in Namibia were owned by self-identified Germans or individuals of German descent.

Guido Weigend argues that the patterns of settlement in German Southwest Africa were no different than those of other European nations in Africa. As latecomers to the colonial game, German colonial authorities sought to emulate existing colonial projects. Between 1884 and 1903 a great deal of infrastructural changes occurred. Numerous fortresses were erected and a railroad was built to connect Swakopmund on the coast to Windhoek in the interior. Additionally, colonial authorities installed a basic legal system and also divided the country into administrative districts. By 1903, 334 German farms, which were run by mostly former military soldiers and officers, had been established near missions or near the railroad line.

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91 Ibid., 206.
92 Ibid., 214.
94 Ibid., 161.
Tragically, the arrival of German technology, social structure, and legal organization did not help native Africans or result in their bettering. In fact, these “improvements” only brought devastation and hardship. As well-known Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney once wrote, “Pre-colonial trade had started the trend of the disintegration of African economies and their technological impoverishment. Colonial rule speeded up that trend.”95 In Southwest Africa, Rodney’s words are particularly telling. The imposition of the German socioeconomic organization onto Southwest Africa had disastrous effects. Helmut Bley demonstrates that Governor Leutwein and German officials attempted to peacefully alter Southwest Africa through bringing a modern agrarian economy. This meant creating a modern European cattle industry—which was to be administered by Germans—and integrating ordinary native Africans into the workforce.96 Governor Leutwein and colonial officials wanted to remake Southwest Africa into “a disciplined and peaceful part of the German state…”. When this endeavor failed it caused Germany to enforce its authority with the sword during the Herero and Nama Uprisings.97

Given the aforementioned evidence, it is unquestionable that German settlers were aggressive in their pursuit of native lands and cattle throughout the colonial period. From the onset, German colonial authorities were successful in acquiring land and cattle through treatises and purchases with native Africans that brought land for ranching and mining under German control.98 In 1913, Southwest Africa’s second to last year under German control, one-seventh of the area reserved for white settlement had been sold and there were 917 German farms, along with roughly one hundred

97 Ibid., 630.
non-German white settlers. Most settlers, such as Helene von Falkenhausen, came to German Southwest Africa for land and stayed for nothing else.

Despite their successes in procuring native lands and cattle, German settlers were never able to establish themselves in Southwest Africa. They were a transient group and encountered numerous disruptions that stunted immigration from Germany and quickened emigration out of Southwest Africa. The Herero and Nama Uprisings killed over one hundred German settlers, mostly men, and displaced many families as well. It transformed settlement patterns by bringing immigration to a standstill. The uprisings also drove some to return to Germany, such as Helene von Falkenhausen and her family. The statistics regarding emigration in German Southwest Africa during the wars are unavailable since the uprisings disturbed the ability of the colonial state to conduct a census. There were undoubtedly many who were in the same situation as Helene von Falkenhausen and decided to return home during the uprisings. In spite of decreasing immigration from Germany and increasing emigration during the uprisings, there is still a significant jump in the German settler population between the start of the uprisings in 1904 and their conclusion in 1907. Guido Weigend explains this discrepancy through the soldiers that arrived to put down the uprisings and were later offered large tracts of land at a cheap price after being discharged from service.

After seven years of substantial growth in the post-uprising years, the German population, which had reached over 12,000 individuals, came to a halt in 1915 when the colony transferred to South African control. Shortly thereafter, around 6,500 German settlers, soldiers, and government officials were deported. In a bizarre

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 163.
twist, the Union of South Africa, which was a British dominion at the time, began to colonize Southwest Africa through large-scale Afrikaner migrations. In a matter of years, Germans shifted from a majority to a minority among whites. By 1921, Germans numbered under 8,000 and comprised only 40% of the 20,000 whites in Southwest Africa.  

In addition to settler impermanence, the problem of replacing native African labor dissuaded German colonialists from ethnically cleansing the countryside. Helene von Falkenhausen and other German settlers relied upon native Africans to preform farming and household tasks. The efficiency of the von Falkenhausen farm, and all other German farms in Southwest Africa, would have been greatly diminished if the native Africans suddenly disappeared. Moreover, the native Africans provided a market for the goods that the von Falkenhausen family and other Germans produced. Despite the serious abuses perpetrated by Germans in Southwest Africa—which included frequent instances of ruthless beatings, unpunished murders and rapes, and racism—settlers still depended on African labor.  

The demographic statistics of German Southwest Africa support this point as well. In 1903, there were fewer than 3,000 Germans in Southwest Africa or .015% of the colony’s total population. In its thirty-one year history, the number of Germans in Southwest Africa never reached more than 13,000 individuals or roughly .06% of the colony’s total population. Running the colony without African labor would have been virtually impossible. African labor was cheap and plentiful. Since the number of Germans in the colony never became substantial, liquidating Africans and creating a pre-industrial society made up entirely of Germans would have been impractical. German settlers had little

104 Guido G. Weigend, “German Settlement Patterns in Namibia,” 160.
to no problems acquiring native lands and cattle through treatises and purchases. Waging a war to expand German *Lebensraum* would have been costly in terms of military expenses and, more importantly, in terms of its damage to the native workforce.

Perhaps the largest barrier to realizing Ratzel’s *Lebensraum* in the colony was the geography of Southwest Africa. Although Ratzel was a member of the German colonial movement of the late 1800s and he did advocate for the establishment of German settlement colonies overseas, Southwest Africa’s geography and the limitations this placed upon the development of its economy did not fit into his model. Ratzel wanted Germany to found colonies and expand German *Lebensraum* in temperate zones that would support small-scale farmers, traders and artisans.\(^{105}\) The German colonization of Southwest Africa was nowhere near what Ratzel envisioned. The climate of Southwest Africa—which was predominately arid and semi-arid—was unviable for European pre-industrial farming. Attempts in the early 1890s by German colonial officials to settle peasant farmers around Windhoek were an economic catastrophe.\(^{106}\) Southwest Africa could only sustain the cattle industry, which became dominated by a small number of affluent German settlers. The German administration in Southwest Africa discouraged small German holdings that were not orientated towards the free market and backed the build-up of more profitable modern European cattle enterprises.\(^{107}\) Governor Leutwein’s aim, after all, was to make Southwest


Africa into “a cattle-raising country able to compete on the world market” and not a pre-industrial agricultural society modeled after Ratzel’s vision of Lebensraum.108

**Fear and Anger in the Wake of the Uprising**

Now that patterns of settlement in Southwest Africa have been thoroughly explored, the following sections turn to a discussion of violence during the Herero and Nama Wars between 1904 and 1907. The Herero Uprising of 1904 was sudden, unexpected, and devastating for many German settlers. In the end its consequences were far more devastating for the rebelling Hereros themselves. Through revisiting the memoir of German settler Helene von Falkenhausen once again and also drawing on secondary source materials from David Olusoga’s and Casper Erichsen’s book, this section analyzes the intentions and motivations behind early violence against native Africans in the wake of the uprising.

The image of Hereros rampaging and murdering in the countryside was burned into the memory of settlers and officials. For Germans in Southwest Africa, fear of Hereros quickly transformed into contempt, so much so that it drove those in the colonies to seek revenge within weeks of its beginning. This transformation from distress to rage is evident in Helene von Falkenhausen’s memoir. As detailed in the brief overview of resistance and violence in the first chapter, Helene’s house was broken into and looted by Hereros. She herself was injured by two Herero men who forcefully entered her home. Helene was also approached by a group of Herero women armed with clubs. The ringleader of the group, who Helene was well acquainted with, pushed down on Helene’s wounds to inflict pain. With an evil look on their faces, the women then proceeded to steal a blanket off Helene’s body and call

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her a “dumb animal”. Helene claimed to be haunted by dreams of the hideousness in women’s eyes for the rest of her life.\textsuperscript{109} Whether or not Helene provides a truthful account of the uprising is insignificant. Helene was shaken by the rebellion. She watched horrified as her home was ransacked and her life was threatened. Helene was traumatized by this experience and her fear was quite real.

Nevertheless, this fear quickly turned to rage. After learning of her husband’s death at the hands of six Herero rebels, anger overtook Helene. It was unbearable for her to see Hereros every day at the mission’s home where she stayed. To even interact with the same people who had killed so many white men like her husband was unthinkable. She refused to even look at the “beasts” as she now called them. She assumed that they were all murderers.\textsuperscript{110} In a matter of days, Helene’s feelings had changed drastically. Her view of Hereros had transformed from horrified to enraged. This transition from terror to anger caused many German colonialists to perpetrate atrocities against Hereros just weeks after the uprising began. David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen detail this change in their book. After recuperating from the shock of the uprising, German settlers, with assistance from the Schutztruppe, lynched and attacked Hereros. Many of those impacted by this violence had nothing to do with the rebellion. In Windhoek, gallows were erected and the public hangings of Hereros became a regular event.\textsuperscript{111}

At home in Germany, panic and anger about the blow the uprising dealt to German power and prestige caused the Kaiser to mobilize his forces. Olusoga and Erichsen also discuss this development. The deaths of Germans and the frequent publication of causality lists made the Herero Uprising into a scandal. The conflict

\textsuperscript{109} Helene von Falkenhausen, \textit{Ansiedlerschicksale, Elf Jahre in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1893-1904} (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1907), 211-212.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}, 217-218.

\textsuperscript{111} David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen, \textit{The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism} (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 129.
was considered by the German public and government to be a “national emergency and a blow to German national pride”. In response, Kaiser Wilhelm II began to dispatch German soldiers to Southwest Africa in February. Their deployment provided Germany with an opportunity “to showcase her military might and underline her status as a colonial power.”\textsuperscript{112} And showcase it they did.

\textbf{The Herero and Nama Genocide as Communicative}

The Herero and Nama Genocide lasted from 1904 until 1907, although the overwhelming majority of violence against native peoples took place in late 1904 and 1905. Colonial Governor Leutwein struggled to defeat the Herero in early 1904 and was replaced by General Lothar von Trotha in May of 1904.\textsuperscript{113} After Governor Leutwein’s replacement in mid-1904, German colonial authorities in Southwest Africa used a campaign of brutal violence and genocide to repress resistance and send a clear message to those rebelling. This stands in sharp contrast to the Holocaust in which the use of violence and genocide was an end unto itself. Violence and genocide perpetrated by Germans in Southwest Africa was first and foremost communicative. This desire to use extreme violence to communicate with those rebelling is apparent in the proclamations, letters, and journal entries of General Lothar von Trotha. Before the genocide began in Southwest Africa, General von Trotha remarked, “[The Africans] are all alike. They only respond to force. It was and is my policy to use force with terrorism and even brutality. I shall annihilate the revolting tribes with streams of blood and streams of gold. Only after a complete uprooting will something

\textsuperscript{112} David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen, \textit{The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism} (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 130-131.
new emerge.” For General von Trotha, the practical application of force was a way to make himself understood. He sought to use violent force as a means to elicit a response from those rebelling and end resistance in the colony. It was force, and force alone, which General von Trotha viewed as effective in getting across his message and quelling the rebellion.

In the eyes of the Kaiser, Governor Leutwein’s diplomatic tactics had failed and it was the task of General von Trotha to correct his mistakes straightaway. It is important to note that General von Trotha was appointed to Southwest Africa with instructions from Kaiser Wilhelm II to crush the rebellion “with any means necessary.” However, no mention of extermination ever appeared in the letters sent from the Kaiser or from other individuals at the center. In fact, almost all officials in Germany and in the colony worked to stop the atrocities once they learned of them and were successful in canceling some of the more brutal measures. Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow called General von Trotha’s tactics “contrary to the principles of Christianity and humanity” and determined that they “will demolish Germany’s reputation among the civilized nations and feed foreign agitation against us.”

Explicit instructions to exterminate the Herero and Nama peoples did not originate with German officials at home or abroad. Extermination, as a policy, was cultivated in the war itself.

Although General von Trotha spoke of brutality against native people months before the liquidation of Hereros began, large-scale violence and genocide was not put into practice immediately. Rather, the genocide of Herero and Nama peoples

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occurred within the context of a long, drawn-out conflict and mounting stress on General von Trotha and his soldiers to end the revolt. For General von Trotha, the pressure to defeat the Herero in a decisive battle and end the uprising, which had begun months before General von Trotha arrived, was present straightaway. The willingness to embrace even more brutal tactics later on to achieve this goal is evident in General von Trotha’s infamous Extermination Order. In October of 1904, General von Trotha declared:

I, the great general of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Hereros. The Hereros are German subjects no longer. They have murdered and stolen, cut off the ears and other parts of the body of wounded soldiers and now, because of cowardice, do not want to fight. I say to the people: whoever delivers me one of the captains to my station as a prisoner shall receive 1,000 marks. Whoever brings Samuel Maherero will get 5,000 marks. The Herero nation must now leave the country. If the people refuse, I shall compel it to do so with the “long tube” (canon). Any Herero found inside the German frontier, with or without a gun or cattle, will be executed. I will no longer take women and children. I shall give the order to drive them away and fire on them. Those are my words to the Herero people.

The Great General of the Mighty Kaiser

He specifies that:

This proclamation is to be read to the troops at roll-call with the addition that even if a trooper catches a captain he will receive the reward, and that the shooting at women and children is to be understood as shooting above their heads to force them to run away. I absolutely mean that this proclamation will result in taking no more male prisoners, but it should not degenerate into atrocities against women and children. The latter will run away if one shoots over them a couple of times. The troops will remain conscious of the good reputation of German soldiers.¹¹₈

There are a number of critical aspects to this proclamation. First, it sanctions the systematic murder of Herero men and attests to the genocidal impulse of the German command. Second, it is addressed directly to the Hereros and is meant to communicate a message to them. Third, there is a large difference between how the

¹¹₈ Horst Drechsler, Südwestafrica unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft: Der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), 184.
order is represented to the Hereros in the first section of order and how it is supposed to be carried out by German soldiers in the second section, particularly regarding women and children. General von Trotha is explicit in the second part that Herero women and children should not be killed. However, this is left somewhat ambiguous in the part of the order that was addressed to the Herero. This threatening rhetoric against women and children was thus designed to intimidate the Hereros and bring about their surrender. Finally, nothing in the order points to Lebensraum or exterminations to clear land for German settlements. It is quite clear that these brutal tactics, which do include the extermination of all Herero men, are intended to bring an end to the rebellion. They are a means to disable the Herero ability to resist any further.

Isabel Hull’s research on the topic lends support to the claim that the Herero and Nama Genocide was not the result of a premeditated plan, but rather developed in Southwest Africa over time due to the German inability to achieve its objective of a pure victory. Hull argues that General von Trotha expected a decisive victory at Waterberg. After the German mission at the Battle of Waterberg failed and the Herero escaped into the Kalahari Desert, the Germans engaged in a pursuit of the Herero. It was during this pursuit that the war against the Herero, Hull claims, quickly transformed into genocide. She points out that the German pursuit was not genocidal initially, but later resorted to ruthless, genocidal tactics as General von Trotha and the Germans became desperate to realize the pure victory against the Herero they so desired.\textsuperscript{119} She argues that the tireless quest for military victory “under conditions in which it was impossible to achieve” during the pursuit of the Herero in the Kalahari resulted in the genocide of the Herero people. The exterminatory nature of German

\textsuperscript{119} Isabel V. Hull, \textit{Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 51.
warfare evolved from standard military practices and doctrine, and the genocide arose due to the German failure to secure a decisive defeat of the Herero and their readiness to use more brutal strategies.\textsuperscript{120}

**Comparative Examples**

The example of colonial Rhodesia proves that settlement patterns in Southwest Africa were unexceptional in relation to other European colonies in Africa. Rhodesia, like Southwest Africa, was originally a colony of exploitation with Englishman Cecil Rhodes seeking to exploit mineral resources. Over time, immigration of settlers from Europe increased as the White Rhodesia Company sought to make Rhodesia into a “British White man’s country” by enforcing discriminatory laws that dispossessed native Africans of their land, and made them into providers of cheap manual labor and consumers of European goods.\textsuperscript{121} By 1911, the white population in Rhodesia numbered 23,606, an 87% increase over seven years.\textsuperscript{122} However, the white population from 1890 to 1940 in Rhodesia was transient and made up of predominately immigrants. Much like Southwest Africa, colonial authorities in Rhodesia never fully succeeded in establishing the “British White man’s country” that was envisioned by its founders.

The Herero and Nama Genocide itself is also not as unique as the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis alleges. The use of violence and genocide as an expressive means to stifle native resistance and affirm imperial dominance by the means of the sword was common to many European colonial conflicts. There are a


\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 126.
number of striking similarities between the genocide in Southwest Africa and the genocide in the Congo Free State. Beginning in the 1890s, King Leopold’s large monetary investment in the Congo began to pay off. The rubber trade was booming and Leopold’s business in the Congo earned many more times what he initially invested. Leopold quickly discovered that widespread atrocities and abuses were leading to depopulation throughout the Congo Free State. Similar to Southwest Africa, mounting pressure to succeed and make Leopold’s private holdings profitable drove company officials in the Congo to institute a harsh system of forced labor and perpetrate genocide against native populations.\textsuperscript{123} Leopold’s company men in the Congo employed force—which consisted of mutilating and massacring those who did not meet their rubber quotas—as a means to assert their dominance and to obtain native compliance.\textsuperscript{124} The one significant difference between genocide Southwest Africa and genocide in the Congo is transparency. In Southwest Africa, philanthropy was not used a veil to cover up atrocities. The Herero and Nama Genocide was—like the Philippine-American War, British massacres of aborigines in Australia, and American conflicts with Native Americans before it—blatantly genocidal. As historian Adam Hochschild confirms, “What happened in the Congo was indeed mass murder on a vast scale, but the sad truth is that men who carried it out for Leopold were no more murderous than many Europeans then at work or at war elsewhere in Africa. Conrad said it best: “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.”\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.}, 599-600.
Conclusions

The opening section of this chapter explored Friedrich Ratzel and his ideas regarding *Lebensraum*. Ratzel was an advocate for German colonialism overseas and viewed it as a way to solve the problem of German emigration to the United States and to expand German *Lebensraum*. Ratzel envisioned the acquisition of German colonies and the development of a pre-industrial agricultural society that consisted of small-scale farmers, traders, and artisans. In discussing settler colonialism and exploitation colonialism, this section also provided a brief outline of settler colonialism. Settler colonies concentrate on enticing migrants from the colonial power’s home country to settle permanently in order to replace native peoples as the majority group.

German Southwest Africa began as purely a colony of exploitation. Naturally, this changed after of thousands of German settlers, such as Helene von Falkenhausen, arrived in the colony in search of land for ranching in the country’s interior. Settlement patterns in German Southwest Africa were not revolutionary and followed the trend of other European powers of the time. In fact, German colonial officials in Southwest Africa sought to emulate other colonial projects in Africa.

Germans did not use Southwest Africa as a laboratory for *Lebensraum*. Disruptions in settlement patterns made German settlers a transient group that was predominately made up of new arrivals throughout the course of its existence under German control. The invasion and subsequent occupation by the Union of South Africa in 1915 ended any efforts at establishing a strong German settler presence in the colony. Immigration from Germany to Southwest Africa paled in comparison to full-fledged settler colonies such as the United States, Canada, or Australia. Although German settlers, like all other settler colonists, did aggressively seek native land, they continued to depend on native African labor and were invested in its preservation.
Furthermore, German settlement patterns did not align with what Ratzel’s *Lebensraum* imagined. German settlers in Southwest were not the pre-industrial farmers, traders, and artisans that he championed. The geography of Southwest Africa simply could not support them. Instead, German colonial officials in Southwest Africa sought to create a modern cattle industry—and not a pre-industrial agricultural society—controlled by German settler élites. In claiming that *Lebensraum* was an essential aspect of German colonization in Southwest Africa, the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis has misrepresented the colony. German Southwest Africa was indeed a modest attempt at creating a settler colony. However, it had absolutely no designs on realizing Ratzel’s vision of *Lebensraum*.

The second half of this chapter focused on violence in Southwest Africa between 1904 and 1907. The violence and genocide of German Southwest Africa was different than the Holocaust in its intentions and motivations. Fear of rebelling Hereros in the countryside quickly turned to anger. This drove German settlers and the small number of *Schutztruppe* in the colonies to commit spontaneous acts of violence against Hereros in the weeks following the beginning of the uprising. Panic and anger about the blow the uprising dealt to the power and prestige of the German Empire led the Kaiser to mobilize his military for action in the colony. The violence and genocide of the Herero and Nama Wars was a means to repress the revolts and assert German control of the colony. This is reflected in the communicative nature of the Herero and Nama Genocide. German colonial officials used violence to send a message to native peoples: any resistance would be met with violence and extermination. For military officials and soldiers, it was the desire, pressure, and inability to obtain a decisive victory in the war which caused Germans to perpetrate violence and genocide against the Herero and Nama people.
German Southwest Africa is rather unexceptional when compared to other colonial projects. The settlement patterns of Rhodesia were analogous to those of other European powers. Colonial authorities in Rhodesia also dispossessed native Africans of their lands and remade them into cheap wage laborers. The use of violence and genocide as a communicative means to end native resistance and affirm imperial dominance was also a European-wide phenomenon. Similar circumstances in the Congo Free State—such as pressure to succeed and native insubordination—resulted in the genocide of millions of Africans. Unlike the Holocaust, violence and genocide committed by Europeans in the African context was more about suppressing native revolts and reinforcing imperial authority than actually perpetrating genocide as an end unto itself. Both the settlement patterns and violence in Southwest Africa problematize the theory of a German colonial Sonderweg.
Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, those individuals advancing the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis have greatly overestimated the influence of Lebensraum on settlement patterns in Southwest Africa and on the Herero and Nama Genocide. The implications of this conclusion are substantial for the historiography. Like Grosse’s, Malinowski’s, and Gerwarth’s conclusions before it, this represents a challenge to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. Although Lebensraum is only one of many structural similarities, it remains one of the most neglected—but also most critical—pieces of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis.

The Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis has failed at revolutionizing the way historians approach German colonialism. Indirect evidence lacking historical context, deterministic structural similarities, and backwards projecting plague the works of the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis. In both Madley and Zimmerer, there is little to no attempt at constructing a cohesive historical narrative. Instead, they depend on picking and choosing anecdotal evidence and never fully develop a complete narrative. The use by Olusoga, Erichsen, Madley and Zimmerer of structural analyses leads to an overly rigid and deterministic explanation of Holocaust. Furthermore, all four are guilty of projecting Nazism and the Holocaust backwards unto Southwest Africa. Titles such as The Kaiser’s Holocaust, From Africa to Auschwitz, and From Windhoek to Auschwitz are just one example of this tendency.
At the center of this historiographical debate is of course the issue of memory. Both Namibians and Germans continue to grapple with how to commemorate and move forward from the genocide. In 2007, the descendants of General Lothar von Trotha travelled to Namibia to express regret and atone for the atrocities. For Namibians, the conflict is much more pressing. Although the German Federal Republic has formally apologized, it still today refuses Namibian requests for reparations similar to the so-called *Wiedergutmachungsgeld* offered to victims of the Holocaust. Instead, the German government provides general economic aid to Namibia. As of 2004, German aid totaled fourteen million dollars annually.

One crucial aspect that the *Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity Thesis* School fails to address is how settlers, officials, military officers, and soldiers in Southwest Africa viewed themselves. Contemporary individuals, such as Helene von Falkenhausen, did not view themselves as part of some larger mission to exterminate native peoples and expand German *Lebensraum* around the world. She was merely a settler like any other on the frontier trying to eke out an existence. Her story could just as easily been set in the bush of Australia or on the plains of Midwest in the United States. What happened in Southwest Africa is—unfortunately enough—an all-too-familiar tale. German settlers moved in and started snatching up native land and cattle through treatises and sales. The imposition of German socioeconomic values worsened conditions for native Africans and made sustaining their livelihood nearly impossible. Endemic racism and abuses by Germans as well as land and cattle displacement frustrated native Africans. After some time, they had had enough and rebelled against German authority. The murder of German settlers deeply disturbed the public in Southwest Africa and back home in Germany. Their fear of Hereros and

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anger over the uprisings was real, even if it was based on false premises. Imperial
troops were sent and the Germans engaged in war to quell the uprisings. The war
against the Herero spiraled out of control as the Germans struggled to obtain a
decisive victory. Mounting pressures on German officers and soldiers to succeed and
their willingness to employ brutal tactics led to genocide in Southwest Africa.

The motivations and intentions of the Holocaust were fundamentally different
from those of the Herero and Nama Genocide. From the moment they were herded
into ghettos until they met their end at Nazi camps in Eastern Europe, most Jewish
victims of the Holocaust were kept in the dark about the Final Solution. Millions of
ethnic Slavs were massacred under similar conditions. This was simply not the case in
Southwest Africa. In contrast to the Holocaust—which was an end unto itself—the
Herero and Nama Genocide was a means to suppress the Herero and Nama rebellions.
General von Trotha broadcasted the genocide for all to see. He wanted the Herero and
Nama to know of him and to fear him. He wanted them to see his destructive power.
Brutal violence was after all the only way he—and other European colonial powers
for that matter—understood crushing a rebellion and reaffirming European authority.


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