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German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence

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German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence. By Susanne Kuss. Translated by Andrew Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. 400 pp., \$45.00, hardback, ISBN 978-0-6749-7063-2.

“I will no longer give shelter to women and children,” Lothar von Trotha declared in 1904 as the commander of the colonial troops in the Herero War in German Southwest Africa. This oft-cited quote is part of the evidence used by a group of scholars of the German colonial empire to uncover connections between the violence in the overseas territories and the Nazi genocide—to draw a direct line from Windhoek to Auschwitz. Expanding on Hannah Arendt’s arguments in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), scholars like Jürgen Zimmerer and Isabel Hull have more recently provided detailed accounts of bureaucratic and ideological continuities between the conduct of German colonial troops stationed overseas during the Wilhelmine Empire and the Wehrmacht operating on the Eastern Front during World War II. Debates over the extent and the validity of the search for links between the German overseas empire and the Third Reich have been one of the most dominant strands in German colonial historiography.

With her book *German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence*, Susanne Kuss provides the most far-reaching and most thoroughly researched criticism of the continuity thesis to date. Based in large part on the German version of the book published in 2010, *Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen: Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Kuss argues that the development of extreme violence in the German colonies was neither due to a premeditated strategy of genocide, nor a pervasive militaristic culture in the Wilhelmine Empire, but rather due to the specific socio-political, economic, geographic, and environmental conditions of each colonial war zone. Kuss uses the term of *Kriegsschauplatz*, or theater of war, as an analytical category: it encompasses the many factors that influenced the particular shape and development of violence, such as the social background of soldiers, their training and armament, the local economy, the social structure of the African population, prevalent diseases, and the climatic and geographical features of the colony. The circumstances in each case did not follow an inherent genocidal logic so central to Nazi strategies forty years later.

In Part One, Kuss gives a short overview of the three major colonial campaigns of the German military in the twentieth century—the suppression of the Boxer Uprising in China, the Herero and Nama War in German Southwest Africa from 1904 to 1907, and the Maji Maji War in German East Af-

rica from 1905 to 1908. These brief summaries already reveal the stark structural differences between the three wars. Part Two deepens this comparison through the analytical lens of the *Kriegsschauplatz*, detailing the historically and locally specific conditions of each conflict. In the colonial context, violence was not only a feature of everyday life in the relations between colonizers and colonized, but also tended to take particularly extreme forms during military encounters, as European conventions about the conduct of war did not hold sway overseas. This, however, was not a specifically German characteristic, but rather a general feature of European imperialism that played out in particular ways all across the globe.

The specific conditions of each theater of war led to both different war aims and strategies. In China, the German troops participated in a number of punitive expeditions, having arrived too late to put down the revolt. Economic greed, propaganda, and competition with the other colonial powers involved in the war fueled the extreme violence of these expeditions. The atrocities, however, never took the form of systematic, let alone genocidal, violence. In East Africa, the German colonial troops, made up in large part of African soldiers, systematically destroyed settlements, fields, and livestock in a policy of scorched earth, deployed to force the Maji Maji guerillas to surrender. Lastly, in the settler colony of Southwest Africa, the missteps of the German colonial army in the early months of the war and the particularly harsh environmental conditions led to a spiral of violence that ended in the German army pushing the Hereros into the desert, where they were shot or left to perish. Kuss convincingly shows that any attempt to generalize German military conduct from the three colonial wars misses the mark. The last part of the book directly confronts the question of continuities. Kuss examines the supposed personal and ideological links from the colonial period to the interwar period and the Third Reich, revealing how tenuous these connections were.

With an impressive array of both archival and printed sources and a clear and robust argument, Kuss's study is an indispensable book for anyone interested in the German colonial period, colonial violence, or genocide studies. With seven years between the publication of the original German version and the revised English translation, the bibliography could have benefited from more thorough updating, particularly with the addition of literature on violence in the German colonies and new work on the environmental history of warfare that has come out in the meantime. Notwithstanding, Kuss's study will serve as the standard work on German colonial wars for the foreseeable future and will hopefully allow for more studies on German colonial history

and German colonial violence that go beyond the now somewhat tired arguments over the alleged lines from Windhoek to Auschwitz.

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Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c. 1870 to 2000. By Corinna Treitel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 402 pp., \$120.00, hardback, ISBN 978-1-2091-8802-0.

Eating Nature in Modern Germany begins with a question: why was Hitler a vegetarian? Rather than dismiss this fact as a trivial biographical detail, the author uses it as a springboard to examine the role of the “natural diet” in German society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The result is a compelling look at the evolution of the natural diet debate among German nutrition experts, which reflected the broader socio-political transformation of Germany from the Second Reich through the Berlin Republic. Treitel’s work builds on existing scholarship that examines the central role “biopolitics” played in German history, but also challenges readers to look beyond the role of the state in biopolitical discourse to include a broader network of social actors. *Eating Nature in Modern Germany* acknowledges the role of the state in establishing “biopolitical regimes,” but also demonstrates that medical and scientific researchers were essential in shaping these regimes. One of Treitel’s central arguments is that these experts, eager to align society to their findings, used their research to manipulate public opinion and influence public policy.

The book is arranged chronologically, starting with the emergence of the natural diet debate in the decades prior to German unification, and ending with a discussion of this debate in Germany after reunification. This organization allows Treitel to provide a comprehensive look at the transformation of biopolitics in Germany. Considering the initial question that opens this study, it is not surprising that meat consumption was central to the natural diet debate from the start. Treitel successfully demonstrates that discussions surrounding the role of meat in the German diet reflected larger concerns about Germany’s transformation into a modern industrial power. In the mid-nineteenth century, many liberal reformers considered the merits of dietary reforms, convinced there was link between individual and political health. While medical leaders assumed that a meat-based diet was a sign of prosperity, emerging “natural diet” reformers, like Eduard Balzer, challenged this collective wisdom and advocated for a vegetarian diet. This view often

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