

alliance whose mission was to put down the Boxer Rebellion. The vast majority of those killed by the rebels of the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fist – known to Europeans as the Boxers – were Chinese Christians. However, European newspapers focused on the violent deaths of a small number of Europeans. The German justification for joining the international coalition was that during the initial rebellion the German legation had been stormed and the envoy, Klemens von Ketterler, had been killed. The Kaiser interpreted von Ketterler's death as a personal affront, and in one of his characteristic fits of rage demanded, 'Peking must be razed to the ground.'¹

On the morning of 27 July 1900 the German contingent of the international force was assembled in neat lines at the harbour side in Bremerhaven ready to embark for China. On a specially built podium the Kaiser, for once out of the reach of his minders and advisers, was free to speak his own mind. Possibly improvising or deviating from a prepared speech, Wilhelm issued a command to his troops which so shocked his advisers that they immediately arrested all reporters present and confiscated their notebooks. A lone correspondent, who had been sitting on a rooftop alongside his photographer, was able to slip away and report the Kaiser's speech.

Wilhelm began by warning his soldiers of the brutality of the Boxer rebels, but then went on to instruct them to ignore all the standard conventions of warfare: 'When you come before the enemy, let him be struck down; there will be no mercy, prisoners will not be taken. Just as the Huns one thousand years ago . . . made a name for themselves in which their greatness still resounds, so let the name of Germany be known in China in such a way that a Chinese will never dare even to look askance at a German.'²

When the German contingent under the command of Alfred von Waldersee (a close friend of the Kaiser) arrived in October 1900, the Chinese Empress Dowager had already been captured and a siege of the Forbidden City brought to an end. Undaunted and determined to grab the headlines, Waldersee organised a

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King of the Huns

By the start of the twentieth century the old vision of colonialism, built on the notion of the 'white man's burden' and a belief in the moral duty to spread the Gospel, had, in certain circles, come to be regarded as unscientific, sentimental and inexcusably old-fashioned. Although there had always been disagreement as to how far the dark races of the world might be 'raised up', most colonialists had agreed that as long as the 'natives' accepted their subordination passively, they had a critical role to play in the colonial project. This was a world view steeped in a form of eighteenth-century racial paternalism that had emerged from the latter stages of the great political struggle over transatlantic slavery. In opposing slavery the abolitionist movements had asserted that black Africans – and by implication all other native races – were possessed of divine souls and were therefore both 'men and brothers'.

A palpable shift away from these views had begun in the 1850s, and by the time Africa was subdivided among the powers of Europe in the 1880s the old racism was being severely challenged by a biological view of race. The clinical clarity of the new 'biological racism' was used to explain away as inevitable (and even desirable) genocidal episodes – such as the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines by British colonists in the 1820s and 1830s – that only decades earlier had been considered lamentable tragedies.

It was an event in Asia, rather than Africa, that most graphically demonstrated how deeply the notion of 'racial war' had seeped into the mindset of Wilhelminian Germany and the views of Kaiser Wilhelm II himself. In 1900 the Kaiser dispatched a force of German soldiers to China, as part of an eight-nation

series of punitive expeditions. Although never seriously opposed, the Germans massacred thousands of innocent Chinese peasants. When the letters of soldiers serving in China were leaked to left-wing newspapers, the brutality of the German raids was reported in the German press. One soldier wrote to his family: 'You cannot imagine what is going on here [in China] . . . everything that stands in our way is destroyed: men, women, children. Oh, how the women scream. But, the Kaiser's orders were: no pardon will be granted. We have sworn to uphold our oath.'³

The reputation the German army acquired in China in 1900, and the Kaiser's ridiculous speech at Bremerhaven, gave rise to the derogatory term 'Hun' for the Germans during World War I. In 1900 Kaiser Wilhelm clearly had little difficulty envisaging the conflict in China as a racial war in which the normal rules of war did not apply. Five years later, writing to US President Theodore Roosevelt, Wilhelm revealed his deep conviction that a Darwinian confrontation between Europeans and the Chinese race was inevitable: 'I foresee in the future a fight for life and death between the "White" and the Yellow for their sheer existence. The sooner therefore the Nations belonging to the "White Race" understand this and join in common defence against the coming danger, the better.'⁴

Wilhelm was not alone in allowing these sorts of overarching racial suppositions to influence his world view. Before World War I the German General Staff had begun to use the term 'yellow peril' in its official publications on China and Germany's small colonial possessions there. The term was also applied to the Japanese, a people whose rulers were extremely pro-German and whose political structures and sense of racial mission had been partly inspired by the example of Wilhelmian Germany. Wilhelm still despised them.

In expressing his views on the people of Asia to President Roosevelt in 1905, the Kaiser was preaching to the converted. Between 1889 and 1896, before he took office, Theodore Roosevelt had written an epic, four-volume history of the American frontier. *The Winning of the West* was, at the time,

considered a major contribution to American history. Roosevelt argued that wars between the lower races and the white race, although characterised by extremes of violence, were ultimately necessary:

The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him. American and Indian, Boer and Zulu, Cossack and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori, - in each case the victor, horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people. The consequences of struggles for territory between civilized nations seem small by comparison. Looked at from the standpoint of the ages, it is of little moment whether Lorraine is part of Germany or of France, whether the northern Adriatic cities pay homage to Austrian Kaiser or Italian King; but it is of incalculable importance that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races.⁵

Theodore Roosevelt, like his friend the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, believed that the wars of the frontier had been part of a grand historical process that had created the American character. By the very act of becoming frontier people, the whites of America had evolved into a stronger, more virile and resourceful people. The American character, so different from that of Europeans, Roosevelt and Turner claimed, was essentially a product of the frontier, and the new freedoms it afforded those who settled there. Far from the constraints of authority and the taming influences of bourgeois society, life on the western edge of white dominion had created a race of rugged individualists. They were naturally distrustful of government, quick to violence and adapted in innumerable ways to an untrammelled life amid wide-open spaces.

Although the age of the American frontier had, by the 1890s, effectively come to an end, its myth still exerted enormous influence over the German imagination, in part thanks to German popular fiction.⁶ The most successful author of German 'Western' novels was Karl May. May had been writing since the

mid-1870s, but it was in the 1890s that his books began to attract a mass audience. Karl May, like his most of his readers, had never set foot on the American frontier, yet in a series of hugely popular pulp novels he portrayed an American frontier populated by German 'Westmen' who found within themselves an innate predisposition for life on the frontier. May's most successful hero, 'Old Shatterhand', although of average build and height and with no experience of the outdoor life, quickly became a master of the frontier and more than a match for the 'Yankees', the perpetual villains in May's books. May portrayed the American 'West' almost as if it were a German colony. His characters drink German beer and sing traditional German folk songs around their campfires.

Karl May's Western novels reflected and perhaps contributed to a growing fascination with notions of national and racial expansion and the frontier. May achieved what the colonial societies had been struggling to do since the 1870s, by convincing millions of ordinary Germans that they were naturally a frontier people.⁷

In seeing the answers to Germany's problems – both demographic and spiritual – as lying on the colonial frontier, May was not a lone voice. With the American experience as their example, a swathe of the nation's philosophers, geographers and politicians, along with the *Völkisch* mystics, promoted their firm belief not only that Germany's colonies could save the *Volk Ohne Raum* from the misery of the industrial cities, but that the colonial frontier might become a new arena in which the German spirit could undergo a revitalisation, in terms similar to those which they believed had forged the rugged character of white America.

Some of the most important of these ideas appeared in the writing of a now forgotten figure, Friedrich Ratzel. As a young journalist in the 1870s, Ratzel had travelled extensively around the United States writing articles for the *Kölnische Zeitung*. At that point in his career Ratzel had been particularly impressed by America's burgeoning cities and had managed to avoid

romanticising life on the frontier, as so many later writers were prone to do. After returning to Germany he embarked on an academic career, and this led him to reassess the importance of the frontier in the development of culture.⁸

Although his early studies had been in zoology, Ratzel's later work was in the new discipline of geography, and by the 1880s he had emerged as one of Germany's foremost geographers. The theories that Ratzel developed as a geographer were heavily influenced by concepts drawn from his zoological background and the work of his original mentor, Ernst Haeckel. Ratzel's interest in the anatomical sciences remained strong for much of his life. One of his many friends, with whom he maintained a healthy correspondence, was the racial anthropologist Felix von Luschan.⁹

It was in the late 1890s that Ratzel began to fuse ideas inspired by Social Darwinism with the theories about space and migration being developed in geography. Specifically he applied the notion of the 'struggle for existence' to the study of migration, both animal and human. To Ratzel the invasion and colonisation of the world outside Europe by the white race, and the displacement of indigenous peoples, was all part of the 'struggle for existence', motivated above all by the search for 'living space'. Darwin had shown that when animals moved to new environments, over time they adapted and evolved to those new conditions. From this Ratzel concluded that when human races migrated they adapted their cultures to the new environment.

If a race was successful in adapting to the conditions of a different territory their culture advanced and their population increased. These two factors naturally motivated adaptable races to migrate. Human history, in Ratzel's view, was driven forward by a constant series of migrations, each inspiring new adaptations to new environments and each adaptation advancing the culture and increasing the population of the migrating race. Ratzel even speculated as to whether the drive to migrate was, in itself, a feature of a virile and vigorous race.

termed 'inferior races'.¹⁰ Their land was required by a stronger race who quite naturally took it by force.

Importantly, given the role his ideas (and innumerable distortions of them) were to play in the story of German colonialism, Ratzel felt that wars of extermination were an inevitable aspect in the search for *Lebensraum*. To capture space, the vigorous nations of the earth would have no choice but to fight wars against the indigenous peoples in a 'struggle for space'. When looking for examples of the sorts of conflict that had been effective in 'quickly and completely' displacing indigenous races he listed those fought during the nineteenth century in North America, southern Brazil, Tasmania and New Zealand.¹¹ These wars, that Ratzel viewed as models for future colonialism, were wars of extermination; some were genocides.

The man who most forcefully promoted and distorted Social Darwinian theories such as *Lebensraum* in German South-West Africa was not Governor Theodor Leutwein – who disliked theoretical justifications for colonialism – but the Commissioner for Settlement, Dr Paul Rohrbach.

Rohrbach was sent to South-West Africa in 1903 by the Colonial Department, to evaluate the colony's potential for large-scale farming and mass settlement, and to carry out a comparative study of the colonial methods used by the British in South Africa and those deployed in German South-West Africa. Specifically, he aimed to determine if the system of forced expropriation of land, used successfully by the British, might be applied in the German colony.

Rohrbach's mission was part of a larger, government-backed scheme, aimed at increasing the pace of German settlement. Although by 1903 the pace of settlement was greater than it had ever been, migration to the German colonies was as nothing when compared with the continuing flood of emigrants to the United States. Even some of those who had migrated and settled

Migration, Ratzel argued, was essential for long-term survival of a race. Each people had no choice but to increase the amount of space it occupied. To stop migrating and adapting to new environments was, in Ratzel's conception, to stop advancing and risk being overtaken by other races better fitted for survival.

It was crude Social Darwinism, partly inspired by nationalism and colonialism and scribbled on a map. In 1897 Ratzel published his influential book *Politische Geographie* and named his new theory *Lebensraum* – living space. Friedrich Ratzel's academic theories were, at times, intertwined with his political support for colonialism. During the first wave of colonial enthusiasm that swept over Germany in the 1880s, he helped found the right-wing and expansionist German Colonial Society. He became committed to the idea that any colonies Germany was able to grab hold of during the 'scramble for Africa' needed to be settled by German farmers, rather than just exploited by industry or traders. Ratzel claimed that territories used only as a source of raw materials or as markets for trade goods were not true colonies. Colonisation took place only when a conquered territory was farmed, and even then, only if the land was placed in the hands of small peasant farmers rather than large land companies. When discussing Germany's empire, Ratzel specified German South-West Africa as one potential source of *Lebensraum* for the German people.

Lebensraum theory also dismissed the current notion that the races who came into contact with European colonialists suffered some form of inexplicable extinction. Ratzel felt no need to deny the true cause. Colonial peoples disappeared because they were persecuted, enslaved and exterminated. This was done by colonialists, traders and soldiers. There was little mystery. He hedged his bets somewhat by arguing that perhaps the inner cultural weakness of the native races of Africa, America and Asia made them passive, and therefore incapable of withstanding the European assault. However, he was clear that the means of their destruction was the gun and the gallows. All this was acceptable because the people Europeans were destroying were what he

in German South-West Africa clearly harboured ambitions to leave for America eventually, as they registered their new farms under names such as Dixie, Alabama and Georgia.

To help lure more settlers to the colony, Rohrbach had been granted a budget of 300,000 marks and given a special mandate. He was to report directly to the Colonial Department in Berlin, an arrangement that, in theory, made him the most senior official in the colony after Governor Leutwein.¹² Rohrbach was well suited to this role. He was highly able, and resilient enough to withstand the hardships of travel in the deserts; above all, he was utterly dedicated to the colonial mission and an advocate of the Social Darwinian and racial theories that underpinned it.

In his book *Der Deutsche Gedanke in der Welt* (German World Policies), written in 1912, Rohrbach described, with breathtaking frankness, the principles that he had come to believe should govern the colonisation of Africa:

It is not right either among nations or among individuals that people who can create nothing should have a claim to preservation. No false philanthropy or race-theory can prove to reasonable people that the preservation of any tribe of nomadic South African Kafirs . . . is more important for the future of mankind than the expansion of the great European nations, or the white race as a whole. Should the German people renounce the chance of growing stronger and of securing elbow room for their sons and daughters, because . . . some tribe of Negroes . . . has lived its useless existence on a strip of land where ten thousand German families may have a flourishing existence and thus strengthen the very sap of our people?¹³

In 1903 Rohrbach, like Governor Theodor Leutwein, understood that the Africans, once disinherited and pacified, could become a considerable economic resource. However, the experience he gained in South-West Africa later led him to conclude that whole African nations could be legitimately exterminated. In 1907, he published *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft* (German Colonial Commerce), in which he stated: 'In order to secure the peaceful White settlement against the bad, culturally inept and

predatory native tribe, it is possible that its actual eradication may become necessary under certain conditions.'¹⁴

During his time in South West Africa, Paul Rohrbach was most preoccupied with what opportunities colonialism might offer his own people, not with what it would mean for the indigenous races. The destruction or enslavement of the lower races – whichever it had to be – was merely an effect of colonialism, rather than its aim. Pushing aside notions that had been used to justify colonialism in the early nineteenth century – racial paternalism, the spread of the Gospel and the suppression of the slave trade – Rohrbach saw its sole function as the spread and the advancement of the white race. This stood in marked contrast to the more pragmatic stance of Governor Leutwein, who saw his role as balancing the opposing interests of both black and white, until the Africans could be forced to accept their lowly position.

Rohrbach imagined that during the twentieth century Germany might settle 2 million of its sons and daughters on African soil. From those pioneers, subject as they would be to the unique conditions of a frontier society, would evolve a new variant of the German character. Rohrbach saw the colonies as the crucible from which a more virulent strain of 'German-ness' would emerge and slowly be transfused into the body of the Reich:

The colonial type is . . . a source of great inner wealth for any nation which develops it successfully. It is not that the lazy and timid, but the active and determined men of a nation find their way across the seas, which explains much in the American character . . . In view of our very large numbers it is of no consequence if several thousand people leave home annually, even if they are ever so strong and capable. Across the ocean, however, the selection gradually produces a race of special qualities . . . It is . . . better accustomed to living on a big scale both without and within.¹⁵

With these notions at the forefront of his mind, Rohrbach surveyed the farmland of German South-West Africa and

sought to determine by which methods it might be made most productive.

In the same years, Governor Leutwein set about constructing the infrastructure needed to realise large-scale settlement of German South-West Africa. While the principle of divide and rule, by which he had subdued the Nama and Herero, had been borrowed from the British, the governor and his allies in the Colonial Department now looked to the American West for inspiration. On the American frontier, white settlement had been accelerated by two critical policies: the rapid construction of the railways and the creation of native reserves. Angelo Golinelli, the official in charge of South-West African affairs at the German Colonial Department, wrote that railways in the colonies 'are built as a prelude to subjugation and pacification'.¹⁶ As in the United States, the train would transport cattle to market, take supplies and labour to the white settlers and allow for the rapid deployment of the army, should the 'natives' resist the other element of Golinelli's policy - their gradual confinement in reserves. Governor Leutwein believed the development of the railways was so critical that in 1897 he travelled to Berlin and made a personal appeal to the Reichstag for the necessary funds.¹⁷

By 1902 a line connecting Windhoek with the rapidly developing port of Swakopmund had already been completed. In 1903 work commenced on a second railway project, linking Swakopmund to the copper mines at Otavi - the colony's only industrial venture of any real consequence. As the Otavi line began slowly to inch its way across the desert, the various ways the Africans might be forced to make way for German settlers were being debated among the missionaries and colonial administrators. In 1903 Leutwein agreed, albeit halfheartedly, to an official policy of reserves, and two were established, a Witbooi reserve in Rietmont and a Herero reserve at Otjimbingwe.

The Herero and Nama were perfectly able to see that the coming of the railways and the establishment of reserves were the

first moves in the gradual annexation of South-West Africa. Above all, they feared being forced into areas that were too small or infertile for them to practise their traditional pastoral lifestyles. When the Herero chiefs were asked to agree to the establishment of a second reserve near Okahandja, they rejected the German proposals. But in 1903 neither the Herero nor the Nama leadership regarded any of these developments as cause to rise up and rebel against German rule.

For all their losses of land and independence, the Herero and Nama still had economic power over central and southern parts of the colony. They had sold land and cattle, the latter in vast quantities. Some had slipped into debt to the traders and others had lost land in unfair treaties, but most of the tribes remained masters of much of what they surveyed. According to Paul Rohrbach's own figures, by 1903 only 10 percent of the farmland owned by the Africans, which the settlers might be able to exploit profitably, had been purchased.¹⁸ The situation was less favourable for some of the smaller southern Nama clans. The Bondelswarts and the Veldschoendragers had lost considerable amounts of their land to private settlers and land companies, but the largest tribes, including the Herero, had retained the greater part of their ancestral land.

The sale of land by Nama *Kapiteins* had given the German settlers a firm foothold in the south of the colony, but it had also enriched the Nama elite. Hendrik Witbooi, now in his early seventies, rather than being disinherited by the colonial process, was growing steadily richer by selling plots of land. One farm sold to the settler Dr Kämpfer brought Witbooi seven annual payments of 1,000 Reichmarks - in itself a small fortune. Kämpfer, whose son became a celebrated writer of colonial fiction under the Nazis, was no doubt making a point when he named his farm *Deutsche Erde* - German Soil.¹⁹ Other settlers, unable to persuade the chiefs to sell them a plot, were forced into an even more unpalatable relationship. In a deeply resented inversion of the customary colonial relationship, they were forced to lease land from the Nama or Herero.

While the land sales brought the chiefs large fortunes, they still counted their real wealth in cattle. Both the Herero and Nama had recovered from the disastrous *Rinderpest* epidemic of the late 1890s. By 1903 the Herero herd stood at around fifty thousand, while the Nama owned perhaps as many as twenty-five thousand cattle. As the average price of a head of cattle in southern Africa was around 150 Reichmarks, Samuel Maharero, who, like many of the other chiefs, owned thousands of cattle, was in effect a millionaire.

The prosperity of the African elite, relative to that of most white settlers, was taken as further proof that Leutwein's system of gradual colonialism had failed disastrously. The settlers dismissed South-West Africa as a colony in which the whites were beholden to the blacks in ways that ran counter to the very principles of colonialism. Viewing the colony through the prism of late nineteenth-century racism, they sought not merely the rapid advancement of their interests and prosperity, but the immediate and utter subjugation of the Africans.

In the summer of 1900, members of the white population in South-West Africa had used an upcoming Reichstag debate on the use of corporal punishment in the colonies as an opportunity to let their opinions of the Herero and Nama be known in Berlin. In their address, forwarded to the Colonial Department, they wrote:

From Time immemorial our natives have been used to laziness, brutality and stupidity. The dirtier they are the more they feel at ease. Any white men who have lived among natives find it almost impossible to regard them as human beings at all in any European sense. They need centuries of training as human beings; with endless patience, strictness and justice.²⁰

The centre of opposition to the governor and the cauldron in which the settlers' racial hatreds fermented was Windhoek. By 1903 the capital had become a European enclave into which few Africans ventured. Although by European standards it was more a large village than a small town, it was just big enough

to become a fantasy-land. Beneath von François's fortress, the enormous disparities between the Africans and the settlers, in both numbers and military power, were rendered almost invisible. Convinced of their own strength and of the need to circumvent the governor, retired soldiers of the German *Schutztruppe* and the most extreme settlers came together in bars and taverns like the infamous Kasino Sylvester to vent their frustrations. There they condemned the supposed leniency of the governor, and denigrated the Africans as 'baboons' and the colony as 'Monkeyland'. Well aware of the discontent among the settlers, Theodor Leutwein described them as 'inclined, with the inborn feeling of belonging to a superior race, to appear as members of a conquering army, even though we had conquered nothing'.²¹

The racial contempt that both settlers and soldiers felt towards the Africans was compounded by their frustrations, impatience and greed. The result was a wave of violence and abuse, the records of which can be seen in the Namibian National Archives in Windhoek. Official reports of beatings, rapes and murders committed in the years up to 1904 speak of a colony slipping out of control, in which isolated settlers and *Schutztruppe* officers were able to act with almost complete impunity against ordinary Herero and Nama, and even members of the wealthy elite.

The most commonly reported incidents were beatings. Many of these attacks were viewed by their perpetrators as semi-official acts of corporal punishment. They were carried out with *sjamboks* – hippopotamus-skin whips – and were invoked by the smallest infraction or perceived lack of respect towards a white person. A mistake made while working for a settler, a minor theft, simple failure to respond to a question – all could be punished by whippings or beatings.

One case reported in 1902 involved a German baker named Schaeffer, who accused the ageing Herero under-chief, Assa Riarua, of insolence and attacked the old man. Dragging Riarua from his store and out into street, Schaeffer publicly flogged him 'until the blood ran'. The humiliating abuse of a prominent

Herero elder was such a serious – and potentially dangerous – event that Governor Leurwein personally intervened in the case, fearing the Herero might retaliate. Yet even this blatant case of abuse did not result in a custodial sentence. An out-of-court settlement was reached in which Schaeffer was ordered to pay a fine of 20 marks.²²

The case that most deeply damaged Herero relations with the Germans took place in the middle of 1903. Barmerias Zeraua, the son of Herero Chief Zacharias Zeraua, later recounted the events that led up to the death of his wife:

In 1903 my wife was expecting her first baby, so in accordance with the universal custom of the Hereros I sent her, by ox-wagon, to her mother's home . . . Before leaving Omaruru we met a German named Dietrich, who asked me whether he would be allowed to travel with us in my wagon to Karibib. I said I had no objection, so Dietrich came along with us . . . That evening we outspanned about 12 miles from Omaruru on the main road. We killed a sheep and had our evening meal which Dietrich shared with us. We gave him the fried sheep liver to eat [a delicacy]. Then two boys went to attend to the cattle and my wife went into the hood of the wagon with her baby to sleep . . . I said 'Good-night' to Dietrich and went to sleep . . . suddenly I was awakened by the report of a revolver. I jumped out of the tent of the wagon and saw Dietrich running away on the road to Omaruru . . . I went back to the wagon, the baby was crying and I shook my wife to wake her. As I touched her I felt something wet. I struck a match and saw that she was covered with blood and quite dead . . . I took up my baby and found that the bullet which killed my wife had gone through the fleshy part of its left leg just above the knee.²³

Dietrich was charged with manslaughter, not murder, and was at first acquitted. He was finally sentenced to three years' imprisonment, but later released and made a non-commissioned officer in the *Schutztruppe*.

The outrage felt by the Africans at their treatment by settlers and soldiers was aggravated by a colonial legal system that made it nearly impossible for them to obtain justice under the law. Although the African elite had retained possession of their land, their legal rights had been silently stripped from them.

The courts were staffed by former soldiers or settlers, few of whom had even the most rudimentary legal training. In Leurwein's memoirs, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur* (Eleven Years as Governor), he noted that the evidence of one settler was deemed legally to outweigh that of up to seven Africans. When whites who had killed Africans were convicted, they were almost always sentenced to terms of imprisonment lasting just months. Africans found guilty of killing whites were hanged.

The racial bias of the German legal system was equally blatant in cases of rape. When accusations of rape by settlers were brought before the courts, it was not uncommon for the judges to rule against the victim and sentence them to be jailed or whipped for bearing 'false testimony'.

From Windhoek, Governor Leurwein was unable to dictate the verdicts of all the provincial courts, nor control the behaviour of the settlers. Out in the provinces, authority lay in the hands of the District Officers posted in a network of miniature fortresses and garrison houses with command over small units of soldiers. These officers, answerable to the governor, were responsible for maintaining the peace and upholding the terms of the protection treaties. As many *Schutztruppe* soldiers planned to settle in the colony at the end of their term of service, they were firm allies of the settlers and, like many of them, were dissatisfied with Leurwein's policies. Some were also prone to dealing with the Africans in an extremely aggressive and provocative manner. The excessive violence and even murders that characterised their responses to minor infractions or local disputes were in part a consequence of the very nature of the German forces in South-West Africa.

Unlike the other colonial powers, the Germans, upon staking claim to a colonial empire in 1884, had chosen not to form a regular colonial army. Instead they had formed small 'protective forces' – *Schutztruppe*. What marked out the *Schutztruppe* of South-West Africa from those stationed in Germany's other African colonies was that the entire force – both officers and men – were white. Black Africans were not conscripted into its

ranks, as was the case elsewhere. Under the protection treaties signed by both the Herero and Nama, the Africans were obliged to send men to fight alongside the Germans when requested and, on those occasions, the African fighters were given the desert-brown *Schutztruppe* uniforms and placed under the command of German officers. Yet no Africans were ever formally recruited. The *Schutztruppe* was a white man's army, and in South-West Africa it became a hothouse of ultra-nationalism and racial fanaticism.

The *Schutztruppe's* reputation for extremism was matched only by its record of indiscipline. They and the colonies in general were regarded by the regular army as a dumping ground into which disgraced officers could be placed. A disproportionate number of *Schutztruppe* officers in South-West Africa were men with a chequered past; some had only agreed to serve in the colonies in the hope of reviving their careers.

In the last years of the late 1890s and early years of the twentieth century, as levels of racial abuse in South-West Africa began to increase, a succession of junior *Schutztruppe* officers were implicated in murders, rapes and beatings of Africans. The tendency of such officers to adopt a disproportionately violent stance towards Africans was aggravated by the sheer isolation of their postings. Many units were stationed tens or even hundreds of miles from their commanding officers. From tiny garrison stations, they were responsible for vast areas but were for the most part unsupervised, unrestrained and often under-occupied. Those who committed the most grievous excesses were dismissed and their crimes explained away as cases of 'tropical frenzy'. Governor Leutwein's inability to exercise control over such officers provided the sparks that led to war and disaster in German South-West Africa.

In 1903 the young officer Lieutenant Walter Jobst was stationed in Warmbad, a remote Nama settlement on the border with the

Cape Colony and 200 miles from the nearest town of any significance. Jobst had been a member of the German contingent that had carried out punitive raids in China in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion. By 1903 he had come to value African life as cheaply as he had Chinese life three years earlier.

The people of Warmbad, a Nama clan known as the Bondelswarts, were only about one thousand strong. Since Jobst's arrival, they had come to regard him with a mixture of fear and repugnance. In late October 1903, a dispute erupted between Jan Christian, the chief of the Bondelswarts, and a Herero woman on her way to the copper mines of the Cape. It concerned, of all things, the price of a goat. Although this minor incident had already been resolved by the time Lieutenant Jobst became involved, he still chose to summon Jan Christian to appear before him. Under the terms of the protection treaty between the Germans and the Bondelswarts, Jobst had no jurisdiction over affairs between Africans, and the chief ignored the summons. Jobst's response was to gather a group of his men and confront Jan Christian. A series of interviews recently conducted among the elders of the Nama community in Warmbad reveal how the event is remembered in the Nama's traditional oral history:

The two Germans went straight to the house of the Chief and entered his room where he was lying on the bed with a scarf on his head. The soldiers forced him out of the bedroom. In the meantime, the Lieutenant had also made his way to the Captain's house. He had a mongrel dog with him. When he saw the soldiers wrestling with the Chief, he shouted an order at his soldiers: 'Shoot him!' They pulled the trigger and shot the Chief dead. The only word that he could say before he collapsed was: 'Now the war starts.'²⁴

Within seconds Lieutenant Jobst, his sergeant and another soldier were gunned down by the Bondelswarts just yards from the dead chief's house.

Although lives had been lost, what had happened at Warmbad posed no real threat to the colony. Yet the reaction in both Windhoek and Berlin escalated wildly. Governor Leutwein privately condemned the behaviour of Lieutenant Jobst, but his

public response was to issue a blood-curdling declaration of war against the Bondelswarts. Anything less would have risked incurring the ire of the settlers, the German colonial societies and his superiors in the Colonial Department in Berlin. The Kaiser's reaction to a minor incident, in a one-horse town in the southern wastelands of an economically defunct colony, can only be described as hysterical. He demanded that military reinforcements be immediately dispatched, not just to South-West Africa, but to all German territories, 'lest we lose all our colonial possessions'.

In late November, a force of *Schutztruppe* began the long trek south from Windhoek to Warmbad, a journey of 500 miles. Governor Leurwein himself headed the column, personally taking command of the crushing of the Bondelswarts. He left much of northern Hereroland in the hands of Lieutenant Ralph Zürn, a young officer as belligerent and impetuous as the late Lieutenant Jobst.

'Rivers of Blood and Money'

By 1904, the European quarter of the town of Okahandja had developed into a thriving colonial outpost. A string of German stores and settler homesteads ran along the main street, and a fortress had been constructed to house the local garrison and defend German interests. Opposite the fortress stood the new railway station connecting Okahandja to Windhoek, just 50 miles to the south. Outside the town, in the fertile grasslands of Hereroland, large tracts of pasture had been bought up by settlers and Okahandja had become the central node in a network of German-owned farms.

The Herero section of Okahandja, just a few miles to the north, had grown into a large sprawling settlement, always teeming with life. Thousands of Herero also lived in the surrounding areas. They made a living from riverbed farming and, on the plains beyond the mountains, reared their prized long-horned cattle, coming to town for supplies, and to buy and sell their livestock. Other Herero travelled to Okahandja from all over Hereroland, as the town was home to their Paramount Chief, Samuel Maharero.

Samuel ran his court from a splendid villa, built in the fashion of the German settlers. With a vast personal fortune based on cattle and increasingly on the sale of land, his home, furnished with plush velvet sofas and heavy carpets, reflected his social position. Governor Leurwein described Samuel Maharero as 'a true ruler', a proud man of 'impressive appearance'. At home in Okahandja, among his own people, he was regarded as a 'family person', a ruler who devoted much of his time to his children and to grooming his son Friedrich Maharero for the Herero chieftaincy.¹