

Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Decolonization

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IN the past two decades, colonial studies, the postcolonial turn, the new imperial history, as well as world and global history have made serious strides toward revising key elements of German history.¹ Instead of insisting that German modernity was a fundamentally unique, insular affair that incubated authoritarian social tendencies, scholars working in these fields have done much to reinsert Germany into the broader logic of nineteenth-century global history, in which the thalassocratic empires of Europe pursued the project of globalizing their economies, populations, and politics.² During this period, settler colonies, including German South West Africa, were established and consolidated by European states at the expense of displaced, helotized, or murdered indigenous populations.³ Complementing these settler colonies were mercantile entrepôts and plantation colonies, which sprouted up as part of a systematic, global attempt to reorient non-European economies, work patterns, and epistemological frameworks along European lines. Although more modestly than some of its European collaborators and competitors, Germany joined Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States in a largely liberal project of global maritime imperialism.⁴

¹For a sample of the work on German colonialism, see Nina Berman, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Alain Patrice Nganang, eds., *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2003); George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Ulrike Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen: Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika, 1880–1914* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2011); Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley, eds., *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal, *Germany's Colonial Pasts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Daniel J. Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002); Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). For its intersection with transnational and global history, see Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt, 1871–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); idem, “Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 4 (2013): 545.

²Volker Berghahn has recently attempted to revive interest in the *Sonderweg* thesis in his recent overview of the literature in this field; see “German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler,” *German Studies Review* 40, no. 1 (2017): 147–62.

³Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

⁴On the liberal nature of nineteenth-century European imperialism, see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*

Not that the Habsburg Empire was entirely absent from this process. Although the new imperial history of the Habsburg Empire has remained largely focused on the imperial dynamics of Central Europe, there have been some important reminders that Austria, too, was outward looking and not disconnected from the processes of imperial globalization.⁵ Historians of Germany have made it abundantly clear, however, that Germany played an important and extended role in the processes of Europe's global conquest, both inside and outside formal state colony settings. Alongside the establishment of a settler colony in Africa, German anthropology, German naval power and shipping, German commerce, German missionaries, German civil society associations, and German military power all played an important role in opening up the globe to European domination.⁶

Thanks to an enormously productive surge of research since the mid-1990s, the importance of empire is now well established.⁷ In the process of researching the different aspects German imperialism, some important new lines of debate have been firmly established, while some older concerns have found new empirical and theoretical terrain upon which to be tested. It is unsurprising, given the teleology of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German history, that the role of race as a category of rule in German imperial settings has been closely studied. For some, researching race and racialized violence in empire has

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Steven Press, *Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europe's Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Liberal Imperialism in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For the German case specifically, see Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany: Expansionism and Nationalism, 1848–1884* (New York: Berghahn, 2008); Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States, 1776–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵Alison Frank, "Continental and Maritime Empires in an Age of Global Commerce," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 4 (2011): 779–84; Clemens Ruthner, "Central Europe Goes Post-Colonial: New Approaches to the Habsburg Empire around 1900," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 6 (2002): 877–83. Also see the special issue edited by Jon Hughes and Florian Krobb: "Colonial Austria: Austria and the Overseas," *Austrian Studies* 20 (2012); Bradley Naranch, "Made in China: Austro-Prussian Overseas Rivalry and the Global Unification of the German Nation," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 56, no. 3 (2010): 366–80; David G. L. Weiss and Gerd Schilddorfer, *Novara: Österreichs Traum von der Weltmacht* (Vienna: Amalthea Signum, 2010); Renate Ritter-Basch, *Die Weltumsegelung der Novara, 1857–1859: Österreich auf allen Meeren* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 2008).

⁶On these various aspects, see Dirk Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age: Naval Ambitions in Germany and the United States before World War I* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Jan Rüger, *Heligoland: Britain, Germany, and the Struggle for the North Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Susanne Kuss, *German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence*, trans. Andrew Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Felicitas Becker and Jigal Beez, eds., *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg gegen die deutsche Kolonialherrschaft in Tanzania, 1905–08* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2005); H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, eds., *Worldly Provincialism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Ulrich van der Heyden and Jürgen Becher, eds., *Mission und Gewalt: Der Umgang christlicher Missionen mit Gewalt und die Ausbreitung des Christentums in Afrika und Asien in der Zeit von 1792 bis 1918/19* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000); Nils Ole Oermann, *Mission, Church and State Relations in South West Africa under German Rule, 1884–1915* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999); David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁷Influential in sparking this wave were Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop, eds., *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

amounted to a search for the origins of Nazi race laws and, ultimately, the Holocaust.⁸ This has proven to be a controversial line of inquiry, however—one that inadvertently reinscribes a Eurocentric teleology onto the experiences of the colonized by narrating radical European violence against Africans as gaining deeper significance as the prelude to a future period of radical European violence against Europeans.⁹ Investigations of the function of race in Germany's colonies have, more satisfactorily, offered a means of understanding how non-Nazi racial politics have functioned, and the extent to which German colonial concepts of race overlapped with those of other European powers.¹⁰

Often intersecting with these questions of race, the operation of gender in empire has also been closely scrutinized: not only to write women into the history of empire, but also to uncover how the structures of patriarchy replicated themselves away from Europe (as, for example, in colonial citizenship laws).¹¹ The operation of class politics with regard to empire has also been carefully explored, demonstrating that, while German workers were interested in the wider colonial world and its artefacts, the SPD could hardly be said to have been a pro-colonial party.¹² Environmental historians and historians of colonial biopolitics have also tracked the histories of the ecological and health dimensions of Germany's empire.¹³

It is fair to say that the historiographical coverage of Germany's different colonies has been uneven. Clearly, German East Africa, Cameroon, and Togo have not attracted the same

⁸See, e.g., Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011); Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005): 429–64.

⁹For more detailed critiques of the "Africa to Auschwitz" thesis, see Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, "Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz," *Central European History (CEH)* 42, no. 2 (2009): 279–300; Birthe Kundrus, "Kontinuitäten, Parallelen, Rezeptionen. Überlegungen zur 'Kolonialisierung' des Nationalsozialismus," *Werkstatt Geschichte* 43 (2006): 45–62; Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, "The Pre-History of the Holocaust? The *Sonderweg* and *Historikerstreit* Debates and the Abject Colonial Past," *CEH* 41, no. 3 (2008): 477–503.

¹⁰Pascal Grosse, *Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1850–1918* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2000); Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama, eds., *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹¹Following in the footsteps of Lora Wildenthal's *German Women for Empire*, see Livia Loosen, *Deutsche Frauen in den Südsee-Kolonien des Kaiserreichs. Alltag und Beziehungen zur indigenen Bevölkerung, 1884–1919*, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014); Birthe Kundrus, "Weiblicher Kulturimperialismus. Die imperialistischen Frauenverbände des Kaiserreichs," in Conrad and Osterhammel, *Das Kaiserreich transnational*, 213–35; Anette Dietrich, *Weißer Weiblichkeit: Konstruktionen von "Rasse" und Geschlecht im deutschen Kolonialismus* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007).

¹²John Phillip Short, *Magic Lantern Empire: Colonialism and Society in Germany*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Jens-Uwe Guettel, "The Myth of the Pro-Colonialist SPD: German Social Democracy and Imperialism before the First World War," *CEH* 45, no. 34 (2012); Andrew Bonnell, "Social Democrats and Germany's War in South-West Africa, 1904–1907: The View of the Socialist Press," in *Savage Worlds: German Encounters Abroad, 1815–1918*, ed. Matthew P Fitzpatrick and Peter Monteath (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 206–29.

¹³Berhard Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016); Manuela Bauche, *Medizin und Herrschaft: Malariaabekämpfung in Kamerun, Ostafrika und Ostfriesland, 1890–1919* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2017); Daniel J. Walther, *Sex and Control: Venereal Disease, Colonial Physicians, and Indigenous Agency in German Colonialism, 1884–1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

attention as the settler colony of German South West Africa.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the important fact that German imperialism extended well beyond that colony (and, indeed, included the desire for an “inner colonization” of the Polish East) is also well understood.¹⁵ Even histories of the German Pacific, for a long time left to specialists of Pacific history, are slowly gaining traction.¹⁶

That colonial warfare in German South West Africa was genocidal is now accepted by many scholars—in stark contrast to the first time the East German historian Horst Drechsler levelled the charge in 1966.¹⁷ This acceptance is largely a result of both Jürgen Zimmerer’s 2002 work on German South West Africa and the growth of the field of comparative genocide studies, which has facilitated scholarly discussions of colonial genocides worldwide.¹⁸ By contrast, the argument that German settlers were somehow more sympathetic toward indigenous peoples (or particular subsets of indigenous peoples) than other colonists has been strongly contested.¹⁹ The recent macro- and micro-level studies of German colonial violence have collectively shed significant light on the mechanics of Germany’s use of force in colonial settings around the world,

¹⁴There is nevertheless a burgeoning literature here as well. See, e.g., Rebekka Habermas, *Skandal in Togo. Ein Kapitel deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 2016); Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); Michael Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft in Deutsch-Ostafrika. Expedition, Militär und Verwaltung seit 1880* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2005); James Leonard Giblin and Jamie Monson, eds., *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Dotsé Yigbe, “Is Togo a Permanent Model Colony?,” in *The Cultural Legacy of German Colonial Rule*, ed. Klaus Mühlhahn (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2017), 97–112; Sebastian Gottschalk, *Kolonialismus und Islam: Deutsche und britische Herrschaft in Westafrika, 1900–1914* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2016); Germain Nyada, “The Germans Cannot Master Our Language!,” in *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences*, ed. Nina Berman, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Patrice Nganang (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 50–70.

¹⁵Kristin Kopp, *Germany’s Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Robert L. Nelson, ed., *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East, 1850 Through the Present* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

¹⁶See Gabriele Förderer, *Koloniale Grüße aus Samoa: Eine Diskursanalyse von deutschen, englischen und US-amerikanischen Reisebeschreibungen aus Samoa von 1860–1916* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017); Steinmetz, *Devil’s Handwriting*; Loosen, *Deutsche Frauen*; Thomas Morlang, *Rebellion in der Südsee: Der Aufstand auf Ponape gegen die deutschen Kolonialherren 1910/11* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2010). These studies join works by earlier specialists on the Pacific, including Hermann J. Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995); Peter J. Hemenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978); Stewart Firth, *New Guinea under the Germans* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1983).

¹⁷Christiane Bürger, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte(n): Der Genozid in Namibia und die Geschichtsschreibung der DDR und BRD* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017).

¹⁸Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002). For skepticism about the ever broader use of the term *genocide*, see Birthe Kundrus and Henning Strotbek, “‘Genozid’. Grenzen und Möglichkeiten eines Forschungsbegriffs—ein Literaturbericht,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 51, no. 2/3 (2006): 397–423.

¹⁹Russell Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and American Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Jens-Uwe Guettel, “From the Frontier to German South-West Africa: German Colonialism, Indians, and American Westward Expansion,” *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 523–52.

positioning German colonial violence squarely alongside the violence employed by other European imperial powers in their colonies.²⁰

Having been forced to decolonize by the victorious Entente powers after World War I, Germany's formal colonial period ended far earlier than that of many other European states (and certainly far earlier than in British, Iberian, and French settler colonial successor states). At one time, this was seen as evidence that Germany's colonial past was an unimportant dead-end; yet, new imperial histories, as well as transnational and global histories of Weimar Germany, have unsettled these misconceptions about the supposedly slight impact of Germany's colonial entanglements after 1918—and even 1945—by looking at the after-effects of Germany's forced decolonization and at German attempts to return to a global role via the routes of trade and international diplomacy.²¹

This turn to postwar and contemporary history has ultimately led to the question of what remains of German colonialism today. In answering that question, some historians have recently embraced the contemporary push to “decolonize” German history, a term that admittedly means different things to different people (as discussed later). Dissatisfied with the increasingly diminishing returns of textual hermeneutics alone, the recent challenge to “decolonize” German history has focused on a reckoning with German complicity in Europe's nineteenth-century division of the globe. Some early forays into this arena remained predominantly theoretical, updating “postcolonial” approaches with a new adjectival descriptor—an approach that, while theoretically productive, perhaps missed the full extent of the material challenge posed by the demand to decolonize.²² This is not to say that there are not important theoretical questions to be asked of Germany's imperial history, but this intellectual labor may not in itself constitute a decolonizing approach—something that requires the foregrounding of the voices, priorities, and epistemic frameworks of colonized peoples.²³

It is encouraging, however, that the push in Germany to decolonize German history has made its way out of the universities and into public debates. Here Germany's postwar civic tradition of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been revived and German institutions have been pressed into responding to calls for them to decolonize. At the grass-roots level, this has seen debate flourish in numerous cities over the fate of long overlooked colonial memorials and street names dating from the colonial period.²⁴ The recent exhibition in the *Deutsches*

²⁰Marie Muschalek, “Violence as Usual: Everyday Police Work and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa,” in *Rethinking the Colonial State: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Soren Rud and Soren Ivarsson (Bingley: Emerald, 2017), 129–50; Kuss, *German Colonial Wars*; Stefan Rinke, “‘No Alternative to Extermination’: Germans and Their ‘Savages’ in Southern Brazil at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” in Fitzpatrick and Monteath, *Savage Worlds*, 21–41.

²¹Mühlhahn, *Cultural Legacy*; Sean Wempe, “Lost at Locarno? Colonial Germans and the Redefinition of ‘Imperial’ Germany, 1919–1933” (PhD thesis, Emory University, 2015)—a revised version will appear as *Revenants of the German Empire: Colonial Germans, the League of Nations, and the Redefinition of Imperialism, 1919–1933* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

²²Along these lines, see the special edition of *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): “Decolonizing German Theory,” edited by George Steinmetz. More generally, see George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

²³Beyond German history, researchers around the world are beginning to ask what a truly decolonizing research praxis might actually look like. See, e.g., the special issue on decolonizing research practices, edited by Debbie Hohaia, Lisa Hall, and Nia Emmanouil, in *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts* 22 (2017).

²⁴Berliner Entwicklungspolitischer Ratschlag, *Stadt neu lesen. Koloniale und rassistische Straßennamen in Berlin* (Berlin: BER Publikationen, 2016).

Historisches Museum devoted to reassessing the legacy of colonialism was an institutional response to the same urgings—notwithstanding the flaws and faults that prompted protests at its opening.²⁵

Clusters of scholars, who are reaching beyond the academy and into the public sphere, are also seeking to realize the goal of decolonizing more than just the mind. For example, Zimmerer has frequently spoken out publicly on colonial issues, ranging from supporting the cause of legal compensation for the genocide in colonial Namibia to advocating a critical public engagement with the legacies of Germany's imperial past in the new Humboldt Forum in Berlin.²⁶ In Potsdam, Anja Schwarz and Lars Eckstein are at the center of a group of emerging scholars (including Yann Le Gall and Sarah Fründt) working on the question of repatriating human remains to former colonial sites of German anthropological research.²⁷ Recently, the *Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz* also began cooperating with scholars to repatriate the many hundreds of colonial-era skulls still found in its collection.²⁸

Such important work is attempting both to understand and shape the afterlives of German colonialism in order to move toward something resembling a reckoning with the colonial past. Assisted by a public culture of (imperfectly) tackling uncomfortable elements of the national past head on, German historians have been quick to embrace decolonization as both a method and a program. Yet, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have made clear in their defining call for decolonization, these projects do not exhaust the possibilities for decolonization, given that they do not deal with the issues they (and many other indigenous scholars) see as central to the project—namely, land and sovereignty. For them, “decolonization is not a metaphor.” It is a material project.²⁹ Tuck and Yang's maximalist critique (which owes much to Frantz Fanon) goes far beyond a desire for colonial reconciliation, which they see as a project aimed at neutralizing the political difficulties associated with the settler colonial past. They stoutly refute the Gramscian optimism of even the most committed anti-colonial Western intellectual by forthrightly describing the desire of non-indigenous scholars to demonstrate their status as allies with indigenous movements as “settler

²⁵Deutsches Historisches Museum, *German Colonialism: Fragments Past and Present* (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2016). For a criticism of the lack of African involvement in the planning and opening of the exhibition, see Peter Schraeder, “Wie eine neue Ausstellung den Kolonialismus aufarbeiten will,” *Vonwärts*, Oct. 14, 2016 (<https://www.vorwaerts.de/artikel/neue-ausstellung-kolonialismus-aufarbeiten-will>).

²⁶Jürgen Zimmerer, “Der Kolonialismus ist kein Spiel,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Aug. 9, 2017 (<http://plus.faz.net/feuilleton/2017-08-09/der-kolonialismus-ist-kein-spiel/40725.html>).

²⁷Lars Eckstein, “Recollecting Bones: The Remains of German-Australian Colonial Entanglements,” *Postcolonial Studies* (forthcoming, 2018); Yann Le Gall, “The Return of Human Remains to the Pacific: The Resurgence of Ancestors and the Emergence of Postcolonial Memory Practices,” in *Postcolonial Justice: Reassessing the Fair Go*, ed. Gigi Adair and Anja Schwarz (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2016), 45–60; Wiebke Ahmndt, “Zum Umgang mit menschlichen Überresten in deutschen Museen und Sammlungen—Die Empfehlung des Deutschen Museumsbundes,” in *Sammeln, Erforschen, Zurückgeben?*, ed. Holger Stoecker, Thomas Schnalke, and Andreas Winkelmann (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2013), 314–22. Also see “Forum: Human Remains in Museums and Collections: A Critical Engagement with the ‘Recommendations’ of the German Museums Association (2013)” (<https://www.hsozkult.de/text/id/texte-4037>).

²⁸“SPK erforscht Herkunft von menschlichen Überresten aus Ost-Afrika—Gerda Henkel Stiftung fördert das Projekt” (<https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/pressemitteilung/news/2017/08/02/spk-erforscht-herkunft-von-menschlichen-ueberresten-aus-ost-afrika-gerda-henkel-stiftung-foerdert-da.html>).

²⁹Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

moves to innocence ... an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land.”³⁰ Following Tuck and Yang, shifting toward decolonization as an analytical paradigm cannot—for nonindigenous researchers critically engaging with the colonial past while living in the Americas, New Zealand, Israel, and Australia (territories where indigenous people have been dispossessed)—merely be a theoretical position adopted when dealing with the history of Germany a century ago. Rather, it also entails a far more demanding commitment to recognize and reject the historical legacies of settler colonialism and its normalization by successor states as fundamentally illegitimate.

Like Münchhausen attempting to lift himself up by his own hair, nonindigenous scholars in settler colonial successor states face a profound dilemma when working on historical questions (such as those related to German colonialism) within the emerging paradigm of decolonization because they are, according to Tuck and Yang, effectively coterminous with that which is to be problematized, namely, “settler colonial futurity.”³¹ Their disavowal of colonialism is complicated by the fact that the dispossession they criticize never ended in their parts of the world. To be sure, Tuck and Yang’s position on decolonization is a maximalist one, offering little room for differentiation between sites of colonialism and the different ways in which different indigenous peoples might choose to engage with historians and other scholars working on the legacies of empire. Nevertheless, as Evelyn Araluen has recently written, it is worth bearing in mind that decolonization is more than just a set of discursive practices:

Most literary approaches to, or co-options of, decolonial theory are premised upon one version or another of Lyn Hejinian’s argument that purely discursive resistance implies the material political resistance of hegemony. The critical equivalent of this becomes the argument that “liberated” or resistant readings of colonial texts in scholarly, critical or pedagogic contexts are sufficiently influential to justify an invocation of the decolonial project. ... We run the risk of foreclosing decolonisation to an academic elite by coding it purely within poetics and academic practice.³²

As the public interventions of German scholars in the field are demonstrating, the shift to “decolonization” is not merely a synonym for postcolonial hermeneutics, or transnational, global, or new imperial histories. Each of these approaches has value, but they are not the same thing. Accordingly, for scholars working in German colonial history, decolonization cannot simply become a new theoretical position for dealing with a comparatively distant German colonial past. To treat it as such—even to answer difficult questions about the nature of empire and colonialism—arguably threatens to defang its material orientation toward the colonized in the interests of making it suit the needs of the academy and existing theoretical traditions—a settler colonial *trahison des clers*.

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³⁰Ibid., 11, 19.

³¹Ibid., 35.

³²Evelyn Araluen, “Resisting the Institution,” *Overland* 227 (<https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-227/feature-evelyn-araluen/>).