

Colonialism, Oral History, and the Role of Missionary Literature in the Twentieth Century in Relation to
Unsere Schwarzen Landsleute in Deutsch-Südwestafrika (1911)

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Goal/Purpose: In Namibia, Africa, oral history plays an important role in remembering pre-colonial and colonial times. Namibia's official written history did not begin until 1883, with the arrival of German speaking colonists and missionaries. Although Herero-speaking Namibians have an extensive repertoire of oral traditions at their disposal, scholarly attention has in general focused solely on literature written by German colonists, who typically viewed themselves as superior to the native Namibians. (Knappert, 1981) This has left two significant resources virtually ignored by the scholarly community: Namibian oral history, and colonial-era mission literature. In our project, we will use these previously unexamined resources to analyze the scope, style, and theme of the mission text *Unsere Schwarzen Landsleute in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (*Our Black Compatriots in German South West Africa, 1911*) and observe the differences between and similarities to the oral histories of the Namibians about their experiences with German missionaries. By understanding the Namibian's attitudes and views towards German missionaries, we can make significant mission literature more visible within a scholarly discourse.

Importance of Project: Along with my mentor, Professor Cindy Brewer, I will be entering into the international dialogue about German-language colonial literature. The cutting-edge research that we will perform will help open a new field of study that sheds new light on the relationships between the missionaries and native Namibians, so that more scholarly effort may be devoted to this field. In addition, this project will give voice to the very Africans whose history this literature tells, helping to form a more complete picture of Herero and Namibian history and culture. It will be a step in the direction of creating a history of Namibia that is more true to its people than to its conquerors.

Main proposal Body: In September of 1995, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl probably expected a pleasant and uneventful visit to Namibia. Formerly the German colony of South West Africa, the nation of Namibia is visibly proud of its German heritage, evident everywhere in its capital at Windhoek, in stoutly built brick and stone colonial buildings. Germany, in turn, is Namibia's largest provider of foreign aid and is equally proud of its role in Namibian development. However, while Kohl was visiting Namibia, around three-hundred members of the Herero tribe led by Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako stormed the German embassy in Windhoek, carrying a petition for Kohl. The petition was a demand for reparations resulting from the near extermination of the Herero by the German Army, during the Herero War of 1904-07. The war, although not well known in a world of far more deadly wars, was among the twentieth century's bloodiest colonial wars and the first genocide of the twentieth century, killing at least sixty thousand of the eighty thousand Herero and resulting in the German seizure of all Herero lands. (Harring, 2002)

The events of the Herero War and its aftermath are well documented in several texts, including *Unsere Schwarzen Landsleute in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*. This text gives a fascinating account of the time period immediately following the Herero War, written by German missionary Hedwig Irle, an outspoken critic of the genocidal campaign (Dierks, 2004). Unlike many writings by German colonists from the same time period, Irle's writings show compassion towards the Herero and acknowledge their views of the events that transpired. Although her writings offer us a more humanistic view than the standard colonial fare (which often displays blatant racist sentiment), scholarly inquiries into German-language missionary writings such as hers, are so rare that they are virtually non-existent. "Published by religious presses, mission literature falls within the suspect realm of 'gray literature' often excluded from scholarly investigations" (Brewer, 2007). As my mentor has pointed out, by neglecting mission literature scholars have left rich, untapped resources that are critical to the understanding of colonial literature and Herero culture. "A study of colonial literature that fails to consider missionary texts remains incomplete" (Brewer, 2007). There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that German missionary texts like *Unsere Schwarzen Landsleute in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* may offer us a more accurate and less biased portrayal of the native Herero than does traditional colonial literature, although a formal scholarly exploration is needed to support this theory. With the help of my 2007 ORCA Mentored Research Grant, I will join with my mentor, Professor Cindy Brewer, as she gathers information about Hedwig Irle and other German missionaries, in various archives in Namibia. Since much of Herero history remains preserved solely through oral

retellings, we will work together with the Digital Namibian Archive Project to record oral histories on the subject of colonists and missionaries. Utah Valley State College (UVSC) is in its third year in a four year fully-funded program to send students of African Studies to Namibia. Working with the Namibian government and the University of Namibia, UVSC students will assist in gathering and chronicling oral histories for the creation of a central Namibian Cultural Library. Professor Brewer and I will add our records to those collected by UVSC, helping to contribute to this historic movement in Namibian history. By actually examining both colonial and missionary literature in relation to Namibian oral history, we will provide the factual data necessary to empirically acknowledge the significance of Unsere Schwarzen Landsleute in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. This research will help place missionary literature as a whole in its proper context, and help to better understand the history and culture of the Herero people.

Anticipated Academic Outcome: Professor Brewer and I are scheduled to present our preliminary findings on this subject March 13-15, 2008 at the annual conference for the Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, as part of a panel on colonial and mission texts. After completing a review of what little scholarly literature exists surrounding Hedwig Irlé, missionary literature, and the Herero people, I will then, with my mentor, co-author a 10-12 page conference-length paper that will attempt to answer the following questions:

- In what ways has missionary literature escaped the racial biases generally evident in colonial literature?
- What can we learn about German missionary literature by comparing it with the Herero oral histories?
- How do the voices of the Herero compare to the accounts written by German missionaries and colonists?

This paper will be submitted to the Sophie Digital Library of Works by German Speaking Women for publication, and submitted for presentation at the Women in German conference, German Studies Association conference, and the Annual BYU Humanities Symposium. I will then enroll in German 415, to develop this paper into a capstone paper, necessary for graduation.

Qualifications: I am uniquely qualified to complete this project because of my prior experience in examining German-language literary works. I am a Junior majoring in German Literature, and work closely with German Section Head Professor Michelle James as a student researcher, contributing to a digital online library of German-language women's literature. My duties include transcription, glossing, and proofreading texts by various German-language authors, as well as researching historical background for those authors. Aside from having taken numerous upper division German literature courses offered by the university, I am currently enrolled in German Colonial Mission Literature 442, a class focusing specifically on the subject at hand, and taught by Professor Cindy Brewer. Professor Brewer is an expert on the subject of German-language colonial literature. She has been widely published, with two articles on missionary literature published in first tier academic journals. Most recently she presented a paper on the subject of colonial and missionary literature at the 2007 conference of the German Studies Association, an internationally recognized conference in German-language studies. Professor Brewer and I have also been working closely with University of Massachusetts Amherst Professor Sara Lennox, who has provided Professor Brewer and I with contact information for various persons living in Namibia, on which we may rely for further scholarly assistance. These people include professors and archival professionals, which will be of great assistance in our archival explorations.

Project Timetable:

October 2007 --December 2007 Complete German Colonial Mission Literature 442 and complete reading of relevant primary texts.

January 2008 Complete Final Draft of preliminary findings

March 2008 Present on panel with Mentor at the annual conference for the Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery.

April 2008 Complete textual analysis of themes in Unsere Schwarzen Landsleute in Deutsch-

May 2008 Begin Field Studies and collection of Oral History in area surrounding Windhoek.

May 16, 2008 Submit Oral History recordings to University of Namibia and Digital Namibian Archive Project.

June 2008 Submit rough draft to Professors.

July 2008 Complete final draft of findings. Submit paper for peer review.

August 2008 Submit co-authored, peer reviewed paper for publication and presentation at

aforementioned conferences and publications.

Scholarly Sources:

Brewer, Cindy. "Proselyting Among the Primitive: Race, Religion and Colonial Ambition as Represented in German Language Missionary Literature (1890-1922)" (2007). (unpublished manuscript)

Dierks, Klaus. "Namibia Library of Dr. Klaus Dierks." May 2004. <http://www.klausdierks.com/>

Harring, Sidney. "German Reparations to the Herero Nation: an Assertion of Herero Nationhood in the Path of Namibian Development?" West Virginia Law Review 104 (2002): 393-394.

Knappert, Jan. "Namibia Land and Peoples, Myths, and Fables" International Journal of African Studies 21 (1981): 95-98.