God's Children without a Nation: German Missionaries, Settlers, and Africans in Southwest Africa, 1915-1960

Jason Michael Wolfe
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, wolfe1871@gmail.com

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GOD’S CHILDREN WITHOUT A NATION: GERMAN MISSIONARIES, SETTLERS, AND AFRICANS IN SOUTHWEST AFRICA, 1915-1960

A Dissertation,

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

the Department of History

by

Jason Michael Wolfe
B.A. Lee University, 2001
M.A. Loyola University, Chicago, 2005
May 2016
For Albert Earl Wolfe,  
the only one not here to read it.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

*God’s Children Without a Nation: German Missionaries, Settlers, and Africans in Southwest Africa, 1915 – 1960*, examines the fate of one of the last regions in Africa to be colonized by Europeans and the final one to gain independence in 1990. In 1884, Germany claimed Southwest Africa (now Namibia) as a colony along with Togo, the Cameroons, and German East Africa, only to be divested of overseas possessions after World War One. At that point, Southwest Africa was placed under South African control as a mandate under the newly-formed League of Nations – however, some German settlers and missionaries were permitted to stay. Although most current historical scholarship on this region focuses on the period before 1914, this work begins with the First World War and moves forward to the 1960s, tracing relations between Germans and Africans. It examines these interactions through the eventful interwar and Nazi eras with emphasis on how continental European events and ideas impacted Southern Africa. This project explains the process of cultural development that occurred after the German colonial period ended, yet was still influenced by Germans, especially evangelists from the Rhenish Missionary Society. While much existing work suggests that German missionaries in Southwest Africa were an integral part of the colonial machine, my own research indicates that missionaries – who were at work both well before 1884 and after 1915 – do not need to be understood exclusively as sycophants of the colonial state. Missionaries frequently espoused doctrines and pursued interests separate from, or even in contradiction to, those of the state. Both before 1915 and afterwards, Africans themselves played a role in this history; some chose to adopt western ideas, and some did not. Colonial rule may have been imposed on those in Southwest Africa, but Christian conversion was never compulsory. This episode is part of a transnational story that has not been fully appreciated, but is now detailed in this dissertation.
INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, European powers divided up colonial territories among themselves to create trade markets, extract natural resources, and at times establish settlements—all this justified under the auspices of the “civilizing mission.” Christian missionaries from across Europe rallied to support this cause. Rudyard Kipling embodied this concept in his 1899 poem “The White Man’s Burden” highlighting what he saw as Western Civilization’s imperative to spread its culture, including Christianity, to the benighted peoples of the world in an attempt to elevate the lives of the less fortunate. The impact of this activity in Africa left marked changes on all of those involved, with some scars still visible today as well as some benefits.

Representatives from the Rhenish Missionary Society (Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft) arrived in Southern Africa in the early part of the nineteenth century, expanding into Southwest Africa by 1844. Forty years later, Germany entered the colonial foray, claiming territory in East Africa, Togo, the Cameroons, and Southwest Africa—each region being administered somewhat differently, with the last representing a brutal extreme. The adventure was short-lived and after the First World War, Germany lost these colonial possessions with Southwest Africa becoming a mandate under the newly-formed League of Nations. Some ethnic Germans, including Lutheran missionaries, were permitted to stay in the region after the Union of South Africa assumed administrative control. This dissertation examines the fate of this territory through the complex relationships between its many ethnic groups; namely, Germans, Herero, Nama, Ovambo, Afrikaners, and the English. Although most historical scholarship on this region focuses on the period before 1914, my work begins with the Great War and moves forward, tracing relationships between Germans and Africans, detailing the ways in which the mutual contact of these groups shaped modern Namibia’s culture and society. I analyze these interactions through
the eventful interwar and Nazi eras, concluding with the ways post-colonial developments defined both Namibian and German history. This story is part of the transnational history of colonialism’s afterlife that until now has not been fully appreciated, but deserves much wider understanding.

My aim in this project is to explain the process of cultural, political, and religious development after the German colonial period formally ended and a new structure of control emerged under the auspices of the mandate system. Existing work suggests that German missionaries from the Rhenish Mission Society were an integral part of an oppressive governmental machine. I, however, argue that missionaries do not need to be understood exclusively as lackeys of the state, be it German or South African. Evangelists commonly espoused doctrines and pursued interests separate from, or even in contradiction with, those of the mandate administration – at times sacrificing their well being in this process. These missionaries, then, existed in a complicated position between the state and the Africans they wished to help. It is wrong to place them in a binary categorization as their influences and existence in Southwest Africa was complex and layered.

There were limits, however, to the influence missionaries had on their charges as Africans themselves played an active role in this history, some choosing to adopt western ideas or convert to Christianity, and some not.¹ Colonial rule may have been imposed on those in

¹ The term “conversion” is contentious to say the least. See Brigit Meyer’s Translating the Devil (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999). Meyer argues that it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain what an individual truly believes or thinks in regard to religion so that any measure of religious conversion must rely on taking individuals at their word. Also, brief attention is given to those who willingly chose to not convert to Christianity as a means of comparison. For the purpose of this work, I borrow J.D.Y. Peel’s definition of conversion: “…the process by which people come to regard themselves, and be regarded by others, as Christians.” J.D.Y. Peel, Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 216.
Southwest Africa, but religious conversion itself was never compulsory nor were Southwest Africans necessarily made into “little Germans.” The spread of racial ideology associated with Nazism, as well as the aberration known as German Christianity, also created many problems for missionaries in the field, at times threatening their endeavors altogether. Concurrently, Herero, Nama, and Ovambo leaders demonstrated growing agency in the creation of a Namibian Christian identity. This process occurred as theology evolved in the 1950s and 1960s and moved towards doctrines more open to political resistance to apartheid; it was this intertwined political, cultural, and spiritual confidence in the self, in the context of the receding economic and cultural influence of the western powers, which would ultimately help to secure independence. Much like other instances of African colonial struggles, the language of resistance was rooted in that of the colonial power. The discourse of liberation, then, was framed in Western thought and articulated in English, Afrikaans, and German more than in Nama, Herero, or Ovambo based on published materials and official correspondence. This story is a complicated one, because in the middle of trying to evangelize Africans and deal with being foreign nationals under the mandate system, German missionaries also had to cope with the impact of racism from ethnic Germans as settlers moved to Southwest Africa. This dissertation focuses on missionaries and their interlocutors mainly; but I also integrate a discussion of the role these German settlers played in influencing the transformations in African identity, especially considering that many saw themselves as Christians while treating even converted Africans as the “other.” Also of significance was the role the South African government played in the restriction and control of missionary endeavors, and more importantly, the limits placed on African lives.

2 For the experience of being acculturated by a colonial power, but never allowed to fully cross over into true acceptance see Franz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
Colonialism and missions have often gone together in the history of Western expansion. Recently, in the realm of post-colonial studies, scholars have brought the intent and reception of evangelicals under a more rigorous gaze. Those active in Southwest Africa were German missionaries initially invited by the London Missionary Society, then soon after sponsored by the Barmen, Germany-based Rhenish Missionary Society, a mostly Lutheran group devoted to ecumenical missions work. Although the missionaries in the region were ethnic Germans, that fact did not mean that they elevated nationalism or state allegiance above what they saw as their “calling” to spread the Gospel. Therefore, it is crucial to disentangle the relationship between German missionaries in Southwest Africa and the state from the standard narrative of colonialism. Much existing work argues, even if in passing, that German missionaries in Southwest Africa were an intricate part of the colonial machine as “colonizers of


4 The terms “post-colonial” and “postcolonial” are problematic when discussing Africa, especially considering that many countries were still strongly influenced by external governments even after independence. See Sugirtharajah, R.S., *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2 ff. See also, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, ed. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
I agree that missionaries aided colonial forces at times, but show that the intent was less nefarious than often portrayed – especially in light of their initial impetus to enter the field, their stated goals, applied practices, and overall impact.

In sum, my research revolves around one central question: “What role did German missionaries play in the construction of a Namibian Christian identity?” Four subsidiary questions will also be examined:

- How did German settlers, who generally identified themselves as Christians, factor into this equation?
- How did German missionaries respond to political and theological shifts in the 1930s and 1940s?
- To what extent did Germans in Southwest Africa influence the spread and adoption of liberation theology among black religious leaders?
- To what degree did African agency play in the adoption and grounding of Christianity in the region, particularly the Lutheranism relayed by the Rhenish Mission?

By answering these questions, my dissertation digs deeply into the interaction between German missionaries and the peoples of Southwest Africa, something most of the current scholarship fails to do. It also offers a corrective to those who merely present missionaries as pawns in the hands of colonial forces, negating their personal agency and that of the Africans who chose to convert. Current scholarship tends to reinforce a narrative of victimization for Africans, whereas I argue that many converts were able to use resources and alternative avenues of power in their struggle for political agency, demonstrating the role German missionaries played in this process.

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5 Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 242. The Comaroffs employed the phrase when discussing missionaries working among the Tswana, but other scholars have since embraced it as representing the paradigm of all missions in the colonial environment. The idea of “colonization of consciousness” does apply in Southwest Africa, but the evidence indicates that African agency defined, adopted, or rejected the incoming colonial culture based on a wide variety of reasons – indicating that the experience was more akin to the label “cross-cultural exchange.” See also, Kaire Mbuende, *Namibia: the Broken Shield, Anatomy of Imperialism and Revolution* (Malmö, Sweden: Liber, 1986).
This project employs David Lindenfeld’s “Working Typology of Responses to Christian Missionaries,” especially the last two forms in his categorization, “selective incorporation” and “acceptance and commitment.” The idea of selective incorporation applies when a group identifies with a portion of foreign culture and adopts it for whatever benefits they may obtain; such as Western education as a means to better participate in commerce or certain religious concepts that help better explained their world. “Acceptance and commitment” is at the end of Lindenfeld’s spectrum and applies to groups who wholeheartedly convert to Christianity as presented by their respective missionaries to the extent that they maintain their new conviction in light of persecution or go on to evangelize others in hopes of sharing this new faith. In Southwest Africa, one sees a progression through these categories into the 1950s.

The methodology applied in my research benefits also from the work of several scholars who have demonstrated the value of a multi-disciplinary approach. Three key academics have influenced my outlook going into this project. George Steinmetz, a sociologist who examined the development of colonial concepts of the “other” in Germany’s colonies, is the first

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6 These specific categories will be used because the process in which the Herero and Nama adopted Christianity is a bit more complex than the rubric of “syncretism” allows, hence the phrase “selective incorporation” will be used as defined by David Lindenfeld, “Concentration of Spirituality: The Taiping and the Aladura Compared,” Beyond Conversion and Syncretism: Indigenous Encounters with Missionary Christianity, 1800-2000 (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 202. In this work, Lindenfeld uses the phrase “selective inculcation,” but has since modified the last term to “incorporation” to avoid confusion with Roman Catholic use of the former. The full spectrum of Lindenfeld’s categories is as follows from total rejection to total embracement: Resistance; Selective Incorporation; Concentration of Spirituality; Conservation of Form; Vernacular Translation; Dual Participation; Selective Acculturation; and, Acceptance and Commitment. Another typology is found in Stephen Kaplan’s Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity (New York: New York University Press, 1995), it is useful though not as nuanced as Lindenfeld’s.
inspiration. His work is, in part, a discursive examination of popular literature and images that created a definition of the “other” among Germans. I apply his framework to the post-1915 period to aid in understanding perception and construction of identities. Second is J.D.Y. Peel, whose work on the Yoruba provides an excellent demonstration of the usefulness of mission archives to demonstrate both internal and external agency in the creation of a Yoruba religious identity. He balances an examination of missionary accounts with field reports by African converts, giving him access to perspectives of non-Europeans working within the church framework. I too have been able to extract African voices from mission archives. The final scholar with a strong influence on my methodological approach is Birgit Meyer. Her work on the Ewe in Ghana shows that through the evangelizing process, the need to translate the Bible and theological terms into another language placed indigenous populations in a position to negotiate the meaning of scripture in their own words, essentially absorbing and modifying concepts into their cognitive framework. She also helps elucidate the dimensions of religious interaction as cosmologies change in the face of external influences. Both of her contributions apply to this study of Southwest Africa, especially in regards to the translation of Old Testament scriptures and the overarching adoption of many Western ideals outside the realm of religion. In a less direct manner, I also make use of Okot p’Bitek’s African Religions in Western Scholarship and Robin Horton’s Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West to help establish a general understanding of the problems encountered when approaching African religions from a Western

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8 J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*.

Each helps address the difficulties in examining African theology and cosmology from a Western perspective. It is important to keep in mind that there are not always direct correlations between the two worldviews. Thus, by using a multi-faceted approach in this dissertation, I hope to explore the full impact of German missionaries on the Christianization of Southwest Africa without negating the agency of Africans themselves, or confining my scope to a purely Western perspective.

Research for this project has spanned archives on three continents. I visited the United Evangelical Mission in Wuppertal, Germany in July and August of 2013. This location is the main repository for the Rhenish Mission Society. I examined official and private documents that gave insight into the operations of the organization and their work in Southwest Africa. I also found correspondence between African converts and missionaries, expressing their hopes and concerns with developments in the region. Most of the original material incorporated into my dissertation derives from this hugely successful research trip. I also visited Emory University to examine its special collections on Southern Africa, and culled a wealth of information from the publications of The German Church League in South- and Southwest Africa. Its monthly newsletter *Heimat* and annual diary *Afrikanischer Heimatkalender* each offering details on the inner workings of the predominately white churches in Southwest Africa and their interactions with fellow Christians in the region despite increasing levels of segregation imposed by the Union of South Africa government.

I ventured to South Africa and Namibia in May and June 2015. The Western Cape Archives and Records Service in Cape Town provided details on ethnic Germans in Southern

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Africa as a whole from 1915-1960. I came across material that clarified the relationship between
the South African government and these Germans living in the region, confirming similar
treatment of those in Southern Africa. Much of this information will be used for future projects:
one concerning German language education in the first half of the twentieth century; and, one
comparing mission education of Africans in Southwest Africa to that experienced in the Cape Province. The Namibian National Archives in Windhoek gave insight to the Union of South
Africa’s management of the region. I was particularly interested in how the government treated
ethnic Germans in general and Rhenish missionaries in particular. Materials not used in the
dissertation will be incorporated in the intended monograph form of this project. I also plan to
use some of my findings for an article about internment camps during the World Wars in South
Africa.

Much existing scholarship fails to examine the undercurrents behind the conversion of
Africans to Christianity in Southwest Africa. Many of the authors themselves have strong ties
either to the Rhenish Mission, the former colonial government, South African politics, or the
struggle for Namibian independence – making it essential to take potential biases into account
when analyzing this secondary material. Most of the work on Germans in the region emphasizes
the early nineteenth century until 1915, the pre-colonial and colonial periods of the region.¹¹

Few historians have addressed the post-1915 period with respect to the German populations who

¹¹ Several important works discuss the Herero genocide: Jon Bridgeman, *The Revolt of
the Herero* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika
unter Deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961); later translated and edited
Herero: A History of their Psychosocial Disintegration and Survival* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen
Press, 1985); Jan Bart Gewald’s *Herero Heroes* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); and,
Helmut Bley, *South-west Africa under German Rule, 1894-1914* (Evanston: Northwestern
remained behind. Other works that examine this epoch tend to trace the impact of the South
African government on the region and the rise of apartheid. Current scholarship on Southwest
Africa/Namibia and the independence movement tends to discuss the role of Africans from the
1950’s onwards. What my research adds to the field is how Germans specifically impacted the
creation of “Namibian Christianity” despite their homeland losing control of the colony. It
should be noted that, by the time of Namibian political independence, citizens were from a wide
array of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, among them ethnic Germans who participated in the
creation of Namibia as a state, though obviously to a lesser degree than African activists.

One scholar who is particularly critical of the role of missionaries in Southwest Africa is
Kaire Mbuende. His *Namibia: The Broken Shield* (1986) argues that missionary work was
crucial in setting the stage for colonialism, in such a fashion that the two are linked as specific
stages in asserting capitalism in Southwest Africa as a means of control and destroying local
cultural legacies. This line of thinking may have been influenced by Walter Rodney’s *How
Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, which rightly exposes the economic manipulation and control
that European nations exacted on many African nations, who were kept in a pre-industrial phase
to serve as markets for cheap consumer goods and sources of raw materials. Mbuende’s essay
in *Church and Liberation in Namibia* further critiques missionaries in the nineteenth century as a
product of capitalism, arguing “commercial and imperial expansion” created the conditions that

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12 A synopsis of Mbuende’s argument is also found in Julia Besten, et al, *Sisters from
Two Worlds: The Impact of the Missionary World on the Role and the Life of Women in
Namibian Church and Society* (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2008), 26.

“made [Africans] accept Christianity.” This line of thinking fails to consider the intent of those missionaries in the field even if there were socio-economic forces at play from the political realm. It also disavows African agency in this process of conversion, Mbuende only identifying productive agency in his later works when discussing SWAPO’s (South West African People’s Organization) armed resistance. While colonialism and evangelicalism in the nineteenth century have often been paired, there is no evidence of forced conversions in Southwest Africa, though some historians make the case that conditions were made so deplorable that there was no alternative other than conversion. This contention too is a bit of a stretch because the Rhenish Missionary Society ministered to Africans regardless of their religious declarations. Mbuende’s argument also fails to take into account the impact of rinderpest, an epizootic virus that destroyed a majority of the Nama and Herero herds as an external economic factor. The economic devastation caused by the loss of so many cattle created a cycle of economic dependence on Europeans, as Herero and Nama indebted themselves to merchants who in turn began to confiscate African territory as repayment. This series of events led to an alarming abuse of credit on the part of both lenders and borrowers, which in turn erupted in 1903 as the Herero economy collapsed.


15 Helmut Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule, 1894-1914 (London: Heinemann, 1971), 124. The loss of cattle was indirectly caused by the oxen trade carried out by Trek Boers who were crossing into SWA illegally from South Africa. Some historians claim that the vaccines used to inoculate cattle against the virus were withheld from Africans until it was too late for them to salvage their herds. This interpretation probably goes too far, though there is clear evidence that the German colonial government aided German settlers first before turning their attention to Herero and Nama needs.
Mbuende goes on to critique the early missionaries in a way that belies the evidence at hand and the chronology of events. He argues:

… for the missionaries, Namibia’s new status as a colony meant the fulfillment of their long-held wish to have a white government in Namibia that would help protect them from the ‘wild natives’ who constituted a threat to their mission work.16

This accusation that missionaries pined for a white-dominated government is unjust in its intent, though it is accurate that missionaries called for a “white government” to help protect the territory – not merely to protect themselves, but to end the fighting between Herero and Nama nations.17 Rhenish officials needed a third party to broker peace because siding with either the Herero or the Nama nations would have potentially alienated the other group and destroyed any hopes of advancing a Christian mission. Yet again, intentions are distorted to paint a negative image of missionaries who were trying to encourage an environment of peace to better facilitate proselytization.

Mbuende criticizes missionaries in the early twentieth century who instructed their converts to obey the government due to their German nationalism/patriotism – here is the crux of the misunderstanding regarding the role of missionaries and the state. Mbuende either fails to understand or simply refuses to acknowledge the theological basis for obeying the state in the Lutheran tradition. Ever since the Peasants’ Revolt in 1524, Luther and the churches that issued from his reformation was bound by scriptural interpretation to obey the civil government on

16 Katjavivi, Church and Liberation, 31.

17 Carl J. Hellberg, Mission, Colonialism and Liberation: the Lutheran Church in Namibia 1840-1966 (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997), 10. Hellberg argues that there was no “inter-tribal” warfare in the nineteenth century, but that it was constructed by Heinrich Vedder as a means of justifying missionary actions in the region and legitimizing German annexation. The extent of the conflict may have been exaggerated, but to assert that it was artificially created as a ploy to justify colonial rule belies facts and narratives from both Herero and Nama sources.
stately matters and adhere to God regarding spiritual ones, known as the Two Kingdoms doctrine.\textsuperscript{18} The missionaries, especially those trying to negotiate peace during the conflicts of 1904-07, were merely operating from within the framework they knew best and were not necessarily “unequivocally allied with the politics of colonialism” as Mbuende asserts.\textsuperscript{19} There also existed the precedent of the German Pulpit Law of 1871 that prohibited religious figures from making political statements while standing in the function of church official. Although it was not revoked until 1953, it is presently unclear how or if it was enforced in the colonies, but at the very least it was a state regulation that reinforced the Two Kingdom doctrine.\textsuperscript{20} Overall, theology played a role in both governmental compliance and resistance, shifting over time from the one to the other, adjusting for new biblical understandings and fighting against state-sponsored prejudice using religious arguments and a common Christian identity.

Outside of missionaries, there were Germans who also settled in Southwest Africa, mostly to become cattle ranchers. Daniel Walther is one of the few historians to examine those German settlers who remained in Southwest Africa after Germany lost it as a colony. He examines the experience of German settlers who remained in Southwest Africa and the shift of


\textsuperscript{19} Mbuende, \textit{Church and Liberation}, 31; David Soggot, \textit{Namibia: The Violent Heritage}. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 6, 13. Soggot argues that German colonialism itself was the ultimate destructive factor with Governor Theodor Leutwein setting the stage for apartheid. He further maintains that missionaries were working lock-step with German imperial forces as political actors in South West Africa in this process.

\textsuperscript{20} The Pulpit Law was initially part of Bismarck’s \textit{Kulturkampf} as a means to curtail political agency by priests due to their influential positions as heads of congregations. It was Article 130a in the \textit{Strafgesetzbuch} (German Penal Code).
their identity from Germans to German Southwest Africans (Südwest). I examine these same settlers, but do so in relation to how they functioned in the nexus between white evangelists and the African population. Settlers numbered just over 2,000 after 1918, as some individuals chose to return to Germany. Today there are roughly 20,000 Namibians who can trace their genealogy to those settlers (out of a total population of approximately two million). It can be assumed that the change in national allegiance had some parallel development among missionaries. Politically, many ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa hoped for a reunion with Germany after World War I, but by the time of Nazi defeat in 1945, hopes of the region returning to German possession were finally squelched. It is my contention that the Rhenish Missionary Society was German in identity, but not necessarily driven by nationalistic fervor as argued by others. Thus, between 1939 and 1945, the Rhenish Mission refused to adopt German Christianity, which modified Christian theology to fit within the framework of Nazi racial theory and accepted the notion of an Aryan Jesus. Instead it allied with the Confessing Church, which refused to change church doctrines to garner favor with Hitler’s government. Walther argues that the German Lutheran churches in Southwest Africa were in fact bastions of nationalism, stating that “… churches cultivated both their souls and nationalism; they provided and emphasized the white, Christian, and German character of the settlers.”21 What I intend to clarify is that “nationalism,” or even love of German Kultur, did not always equate to National Socialism as there are examples of German Nationalists in the region who fought against fascist political parties.

Jan-Bart Gewald is one of the few historians to address the role of missionaries in Southwest Africa after its transfer from Germany to South Africa. He argues that as the Union

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of South Africa consolidated power and control in the region, many of the functions previously serviced by missionaries were taken over by the state; therefore there was less of a need among Africans to associate with the church.⁴² Gewald argued there was a pulling away from Christianity and German missionaries, especially among the Herero who reignited an interest in their past collective identity after the funeral celebrations of Samuel Herero in 1923.⁴³ I argue that this emphasis on moving away is overstated. In this vein, there was a general trend allowing autonomous control of churches as they were turned over to African religious leaders starting in the 1950s. My research is critical of Gewald’s claims, as the RMS tended to grow despite a few schisms and loss of key African leaders in the 1940s and 1950s. Ultimately, the Rhenish Mission Society was a success despite the many roadblocks it faced in the twentieth century.

The largest and most influential churches in Southwest Africa were Lutheran; two were rooted in the work of the Rhenish Missionary Society and one under the Finnish Missionary Society. From the end of the genocidal destruction levied by German colonial forces to the 1960s, the church as an institution and Christianity as a social framework were cornerstones of stability. African leaders later negotiated avenues of power to petition for political independence and protest racial prejudice by capitalizing upon the benefits offered by missionaries and the religion they offered.

This dissertation contains six chapters. The first chapter, “Missionaries, colonial occupation, genocide and the loss of the colony (1821-1915),” offers a general background to the German entrance in Southwest Africa and what became of the colony by the end of the First

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⁴² Jan Bart Gewald, “We Thought We Would be Free... ” (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2000), 27.

⁴³ Gewald, “We Thought We Would be Free,” 29.
World War, with a special emphasis on the work of German missionaries and the limits of their religious work in the political realm. Since much of this period has already received copious attention, the chapter summarizes the historiography and establishes the context for the remainder of the dissertation. Of special importance is the destruction of traditional Africa cultural and economic networks by the colonial enterprise. Chapter Two, “German missions within the framework of South African institutions (1915-1930s),” examines the role of Rhenish missions in Southwest Africa after control was assumed by South Africa. It looks at tensions between the praxis of evangelization and the demands of the state government, which often stymied the work of these missionaries. In many ways, it is the inter-war years that are absent from the current historical narrative. As such, Chapter Three, “Southwest Africa in a Time of Want (1930-1950s),” continues the narrative of the prior chapter, picking up after the Great Depression and moves through the Second World War. Here, issues such as education are discussed as missionaries and the South African government held different goals regarding the future of Africans in the region. The fourth chapter, “Rhenish Mission Society and Africans – Conversion and Cultural Changes,” surveys the role of German missionaries in the shaping of African identities among the Herero, Nama, and Ovambo nations through the process of Christianization and the adoption of Western culture. Each group had its own cosmology before contact with Europeans, yet most scholars discuss their conversion to Christianity as inevitable. My dissertation, however, addresses various issues of religious conversion and African agency in the selective adoption of Western culture taking into account the reflexivity inherent in this

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process and correcting the victimization narrative that tends to present the colonized as passive entities. It explains the ebb and flow of African responses ranging from resistance, to conversion, partial reversion to “traditional” religion, and then a final reconversion/adoptions of Christianity. Chapter Five, “Missionaries under National Socialism (1925-1945),” examines the operations of the Rhenish Mission during Nazi rule and the latter’s impact on the practical side of missionary work. I analyze theological shifts during this period, especially in light of the German Christian movement, which advocated an Aryan Jesus, and the Confessing Church, which opposed National Socialist involvement in the church. The final chapter, “Missions and the creation of independent African churches (1940s-1960s),” details the relationship between missionaries and the formation of independent African churches. It examines the interaction between German missionaries and African religious leaders as the Herero, Nama, and Ovambo peoples developed a specific Namibian Christian identity, motivated by theological shifts to doctrines which could be adapted to oppose the apartheid system imposed by South Africa. I re-evaluate the role of the Rhenish Mission in this process as well as the influence of German missionaries in the spread and adoption of Liberation theology in Southwest Africa. These changes to doctrine were critical to the Namibian independence movement because they allowed the Lutheran churches to critique the political realm in an official capacity. Approximately 90% of Namibians profess Christianity today, with half of the population identifying as Lutheran. My project illuminates how the Rhenish Mission helped this region become one of the most

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“Christian” in Africa, thereby demonstrating the impact these Germans had outside of their national borders through their influence on the development of an African Christianity.
1.1. Land and People

Southwest Africa, modern Namibia, has experienced a long and troubled history. Human habitation in the region dates back at least a couple of thousand years, with migrations of San (Bushmen) and Bantu peoples. The sixteenth century experienced visitors from Portugal and by the nineteenth century other European nationalities, as scientists and adventurers explored the region, interacting with its residents. In addition to these exchanges, missionaries also took an interest in Southwest Africa, beginning their work in the mid-eighteenth century. Once Europeans established a foothold in the territory, they soon colonized and took direct control of the land and its inhabitants. The region did not experience political autonomy until 1990, the last African region to obtain colonial independence.

The geography of Southwest Africa covers an area of approximately 825,000 square kilometers, twice as large as modern Germany. It borders the Atlantic Ocean to the west and shares the Kalahari Desert with Botswana to the east. To the north, it is bordered by the People’s Republic of Angola and below lies South Africa. Southwest Africa is divided into three distinct geographic districts; the Namib Desert on the coast, the Central Plateau, and the aforementioned Kalahari Desert. The Namib Desert stretches for the entire coastline of Southwest Africa and the width of it ranges between 80 and 130 kilometers; the desolate and uninviting part of this region is also known as the Skeleton Coast. Although the area can be inhospitable to habitation, it proved to be the first part of Southwest Africa that drew European interest due to potential mineral deposits and the availability of seaports. Moving inward, the Central Plateau composes about half of Southwest Africa and is the only region in the territory conducive to habitation. This aspect of the region became an attractive place for German settlers seeking to expand living
space.¹ The southern boundary of the Central Plateau is defined by the Orange River. The north is demarcated by the Kunene River in the northwest and its sister river, the Okavango in the northeast. The mountain ranges in the plateau proved to hold rich mineral deposits though most were not discovered until after Germany’s colonial tenure. The Kalahari on the eastern perimeter is best described as semi-arid. The northern part of the desert floods during the rainy season and can be used for limited cultivation, but the southern section only offers limited waterholes and exists in a perpetual state of inhospitality. Traversing the Kalahari at the turn of the twentieth century was often a fatal journey.

At the time of European interaction in the early 1800s, indigenous Africans divided the area into three political regions; Ovamboland, Hereroland, and Namaland.² The Ovambo lived in the northern region and were mostly unaffected by the German occupation due to a geographical separation from the central and southern parts of Southwest Africa, which were the main areas of German occupation and colonization. Hereroland was in the central section of the territory. The Herero were a Bantu-speaking group, divided into two main nations, the Mbandjeru and Tjimba. At the beginning of the German occupation there were approximately 80,000 Herero in Hereroland. Their name is derived from the Bantu word herera, meaning

¹Chapter Five discusses the history and use of the term Lebensraum in more detail in the context of modern connotations.

²The use of the term “indigenous” is somewhat of a misnomer, as mentioned before human occupation of Southwest Africa was a relatively new phenomenon with respect to human history. Also, for this work the terms “tribe,” “chief,” “indigenous,” et al… will be used in a limited capacity due to the often pejorative connotation associated at the time and in early historiography. Certain uses like “Supreme Chief” are titles used contemporaneously by colonial officials and leaders of African nations responding to German Colonial rule, so they will appear. A better word for many of the African leaders in Southwest Africa is “captain.”
“joyful people.” The Nama, a Khoisan-speaking group, a !Click language, lived in the southern part of Southwest Africa. They numbered approximately 20,000 souls at the time of Germany’s entrance. The Nama and the Herero tribes shared a long history of alternating dominance, a situation that was drastically changed by the arrival of Europeans. Outside of these three main groups, there were the San (also known as Bushmen), Damara, and Basters.

Regional formations before German occupation of Southwest Africa can be divided initially into two large groups, the Northern Zone and the Southern Zone. Each of these zones can then be divided into subgroups that contain various tribal nations. The Northern Zone is divided into three areas; Ovamboland, the Okavango, and the Caprivi Strip (named after German Chancellor Leo von Caprivi). Ovamboland held eight tribal divisions; the Uukwanyama, Ondonga, Uukwambi, Ongandjera, Uukwaludhi, and Eunda. The Okavango held five tribal divisions; the Mbukushu, Kwangari, Bunja, Sambiu, and Djiriku. Most of the people in the Okavango were settled agriculturalists. There were six social groups in the Caprivi Strip; the Masubia, Mafue, Mayeyi, Matotela, Mashi, and Mbukushu. As noted previously, the Africans in the Northern Zone did not have much interaction with the Germans outside of missionaries. Ovamboland remained mostly external to the German colonial experience, though the area was considered to be part of what became Südwestafrika.

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German dealings with Africans were most pronounced in the Southern Zone. There were four main groups in the southern region, each subdivided into tribal groups. The San People were nomadic hunters and gatherers, who often traveled in small groups, with each band consisting of thirty or so members. The Damara were a smaller group who lived scattered throughout Herero territories and were primarily traders, specializing in copper rings and tobacco.

The Herero people were divided into five great nations; the Okahandja, Otjimbingue, Omaruru, Otjozondjupa, and Okandjoze. The Okahandja had reached a semi-supreme status over the other nations by the 1870s in matters concerning external affairs. This position does not mean that the Okahandja leader held autocratic authority over the other Herero captains; it simply means that most group decisions regarding external affairs were deferred to him. In fact, the “supreme chief” did not necessarily have control over his own people, as authority was generally given to heads of households. One characteristic of Herero culture at that time was the communal ownership of land. This lack of Western notions of property ownership would later be a point of contention when German colonial officials peddled protection treaties (Schutzverträge) and purchased land. Germans misunderstood or chose to ignore Herero culture and political structures, something that caused tension later.

The Nama lived in the southern region of Southwest Africa. Their territory stretched from the Orange River in the south to the area around Windhoek. They were divided into two major groups; the Orlam and Namaqua, each of which was further subdivided. The Orlam consisted of the Afrikaners, the Witboois, Khauas, Berseba, and Bethany. Unlike the Herero, each was an autonomous social group.⁶ The Namaqua group held seven sub-divisions; the Red

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⁶ Mbuende, *Namibia, the Broken Shield*, 33; Vedder, *South West Africa in Early Times*, 173.
Similar to the Orlam group, each sub-division was its own autonomous social formation.

1.2. Early missionary activity, 1806-1884

Missionaries were first sent to the region by the London Missionary Society (LMS), an evangelical group from the United Kingdom founded in 1795 on the principle of non-denominational ministry. Representatives from the organization arrived in Southwest Africa in January 1806, establishing a mission at Warmbad, in the south near the border with the Cape Colony. They founded a second station near Bethanie, approximately 260km to the northeast in 1814. Their home base, as it were, was in the Cape Colony. These early missionaries often acted as interpreters for scientists and explorers who came through the region and thus became important mediators between Europeans and Africans early on in their relationship. The London Missionary Society had extremely limited success among the locals in terms of conversions, though they developed a strong rapport with many Africans. They were received with great admiration upon their initial arrival, especially because Africans received dry goods and textiles from the mission stations. As their own importance grew, the evangelists involved themselves in political endeavors of the area groups – often at the behest of local headmen. The London Missionary Society not only used British subjects to minister to the Africans, but also employed missionaries from sister organizations like the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS) in Germany. The Rhenish Missionary Society (Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft) was founded in Elberfeld in

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7 Mbuende, *Namibia, the Broken Shield*, 33; Vedder, *South West Africa in Early Times*, 126-8.

8 Mbuende, *Namibia, the Broken Shield*, 36. The later mission was taken over by the Rhenish Missionary Society in 1842.
1799 as an ecumenical organization, composed mostly of Lutheran and Reformed members. The first missionaries from the RMS were sent to South Africa in 1828.9

In 1850, British scientist Sir Francis Galton came to the region for botanical research, accompanied by Swedish explorer Charles John Anderson. Galton later used his findings to promote his theories of eugenics thereby influencing racial theorists for nearly a century.10 Anderson remained in the region after Galton returned home and went on to have a major influence in tribal relations in Southwest Africa. He and missionaries helped establish the Peace of Kupferberg in 1855, settling five years of fighting among Herero and Nama in the area. This truce lasted until 9 January 1858 with renewed hostility at Hoachanas in lower Southwest Africa.11 This treaty was one of the first examples of Europeans acting as intermediaries between warring nations in Southwest Africa, a practice that would continue with the expanded presence of missionaries and settlers. One reason Anderson was so influential among the African leaders was because he was a vital source for obtaining firearms – so, there was some irony in the fact that an arms dealer was also a broker of peace.12 Anderson’s prominence was later illustrated by his role in the election of Kamaherero as the “Supreme Chief” of the Herero

9 Horst Drechsler attacked missionaries as the greatest evil in the German/Herero situation. He argued that their attempts to “civilize” Africans led to the destruction of their traditional culture. Horst Drechslers, Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966), 20 ff. This work was later published in English as Horst Drechslers, Let us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism, 1884-1915 (London: Zed Press, 1980).

10 For a detailed discussion on Galton and racial theories that were popular at the turn of the twentieth century see: George L. Mosse, Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), 73-81.

11 Israel Goldblatt, History of South West Africa: From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century (Cape Town: Juta, 1971), 27.

12 Goldblatt, History of South West Africa, 32.
in 1864, a position not found within traditional Herero society, demonstrating the future trend of Europeans interfering with African politics. An example of the immediate impact of modern weapons in the area is best seen in the acquisition of arms by the Nama which allowed them to overpower the numerically superior Herero for a short time, but also perpetuated long-standing animosity.

After Galton’s scientific expeditions, William Coats Palgrave explored Southern Africa in the 1860s for the British Crown, also employing Charles Anderson as a guide. During his adventures, Palgrave realized that it would be beneficial to have an English port in Southwest Africa as a stopping point before the Cape Colony and also as a future hub for any trade in the region. He sought support to annex a portion of territory on the Southwest African coast that would occupy the shoreline and a small part the interior. London acquiesced after some initial hesitation and secured protection treaties from locals rather than outright annexation. Palgrave obtained said treaties in April 1876, though the process was tenuous at best, only being successful with some leaders near the coast. With these treaties acquired, the British built an outpost at Walvis Bay on the northwestern coast of Southwest Africa in 1878, which was administered by the Cape Colony in South Africa. At that time, the British were uninterested in controlling the interior, only wanting a port as a stopping point before Cape Town. Palgrave’s

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14 Poewe argued that Vedder exaggerated this aggression in his writings to justify the call for German military protection and strengthen the argument that missionaries were benevolent intercessors. Glenn Ryland also echoes this thesis in his dissertation, “Translating Africa for Germans: The Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa, 1829-1936” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2013), claiming that Vedder consciously rewrote Herero history specifically to make missionaries appear to be harbingers of civilization and stability.
failure to secure additional treaties directly impacted the decision to refrain from annexing more of the interior.

German Missionaries in the area were somewhat troubled at the prospect of being asked to leave their homesteads if the British Crown took the territory, prompting them to petition their home country to claim Southwest Africa. During the 1860’s, when Palgrave petitioned Great Britain to colonize the region, the Rhenish missionaries considered their “German-ness” at risk once they perceived that Palgrave would seek the outright annexation of the region for the British.\textsuperscript{15} They feared that British annexation would hamper their efforts to evangelize Africans and preferred to have a German state in control because they assumed there would be more autonomy under German rule. This was not necessarily a sparkle of nationalistic fervor in the colonies on the missionaries’ part, but more of a realization that the British government might have removed non-English missionaries from the colony – something without much precedent. Regardless, Rhenish missionaries petitioned the home office in Barmen to send more staff in order to secure a stronger presence in the region.

The Nama were suspicious of Palgrave, especially because he set territorial demarcations without first consulting them – a practice not uncommon in the history of European imperialism. Ultimately, this \textit{faux pas} made Palgrave unsuccessful in arranging a treaty with Nama groups. Palgrave’s protection agreements were also considered useless by the Herero, resulting in Kamaherero’s refusal to relinquish any authority to the British Government. Although later, Kamaherero, who was one of the most influential Herero leaders in the region, sought aid from the British Cape government to help ensure protection from the migrating Boers, Dutch-South

\footnote{Goldblatt, \textit{History of South West Africa}, 72; Mbuende, \textit{Namibia, the Broken Shield}, 48.}
Africans, who were pressing in on their territory. In early 1879, the Nama also sought British protection, due to the recent acquisition of additional arms by the Herero from Charles Anderson. The purchase of armaments by the Herero emboldened them and created a policy of revenge for earlier mistreatment by Nama leaders.

An outbreak of violence between the Nama and Herero in the 1880s led the London Missionary Society to fear for the safety of white missionaries in the region. The British officials who promised protection were reluctant to send any military force into the interior, and without any concrete defense, the London Missionary Society decided to leave Southwest Africa. This egress opened the opportunity for German missionaries to take over all LMS operations in Southwest Africa entirely. They assumed all existing mission stations, and by the late 1880s the Rhenish Missionary Society had grown to eighteen outposts, eleven among the Nama, seven with the Herero. These were established to promote a centralized network of communication and exchange for the missionaries. Thanks in part to this communication system, missionaries negotiated peace between the Herero and Nama in November 1892, ending nearly a decade of conflict. This diplomatic success demonstrated clearly that the Rhenish missionaries had created a foothold in Southwest Africa – a position they tried to ensure would not wane.

Missionaries held political sway back in Germany too. Friedrich Fabri, the head of the Rhenish Missionary Society from 1857-1884 and arch-advocate for colonial acquisition, voiced the interests of Rhenish missionaries in 1868 when he sought counsel with the King of Prussia in

16 Drechsler, Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft, 19.


18 This conflict is known to Namibian scholars as the Fourth Herero-Nama War.
an attempt to convince the monarch to annex Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{19} Although initially unsuccessful in this task, Fabri later authored \textit{Bedarf Deutschland der Kolonien?}, which became the most recognized treatise arguing for German colonization. Fabri claimed that the emigration problem caused by Germany’s sagging economy after unification could be remedied with the establishment of colonies. He contended that overseas agrarian settlements would provide an outlet for Germany’s overpopulation and also create an environment beneficial to Germany’s economic needs.\textsuperscript{20} Fabri’s proposal also incorporated a combination of industry to promote trade – including mining, railway construction, and land speculation.\textsuperscript{21} In his mind, the colonial project would mesh with the overall civilizing mission of the RMS, which sought to introduce Western notions of time and labor to Africans, but the ultimate thrust of his argument was not religious. Other forces were at play in the push for German colonies as well. Ultimately these arguments were unfounded, but that did not change the popular opinion that great nations were also colonial powers.

Although Rhenish missionaries were well received in Southwest Africa as guests, their overall success in religious conversion was mixed. They were seen by many Africans as \textit{Omuhona}, which means chief or master.\textsuperscript{22} Despite this high level of respect, it was fifteen years before the Rhenish evangelists received their first convert, a task the London missionaries never

\textsuperscript{19} Goldblatt, \textit{History of South West Africa}, 72.

\textsuperscript{20} Friedrich Fabri, \textit{Bedarf Deutschland der Kolonien?} (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perles, 1879).


achieved.\textsuperscript{23} In spite of their success in establishing a presence in the territory, relations were not always smooth between Africans and missionaries. One such example is when missionary Carl Hugo Hahn angered a group of Nama after destroying batches of the \textit{dagga} plant, a hemp-related narcotic, believing that he was doing them a favor by demolishing what he considered vice.\textsuperscript{24} Hahn’s attitude brought him into conflict with Nama chief Jonker Afrikaner on more than one occasion as his paternalism challenged Afrikaner’s authority. Jonker was also frustrated that some of his people abandoned traditional lifestyles for a sedentary one near the mission station.\textsuperscript{25} The missionaries themselves were appalled at the way Jonker treated his enemies and when Hahn rebuked the Nama captain, the latter forced the Rhenish missionaries to leave his territory upon threat of violence.\textsuperscript{26} Due to a lack of a centralized authority in the region, the Rhenish missionaries went so far as to arm tribes opposed to the Nama to ensure some protection if Jonker decided to attack one of the missions.\textsuperscript{27}

Hahn convinced the Rhenish Missionary Society to establish formal trade with local Africans in 1864, believing that by creating an environment where the Africans could learn skills and employ manual labor they would be more receptive to the Christian way of life.\textsuperscript{28} This

\textsuperscript{23} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 15.

\textsuperscript{24} Carl Hugo Hahn, L. Fourie, and Heinrich Vedder, \textit{The Native Tribes of South West Africa} (Cape Town: Cape Times Limited, 192; reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 129; and, also Goldblatt, \textit{History of South West Africa}, 16.

\textsuperscript{25} Throughout the region there was a general trend for Africans to move away from traditional lifestyles and practices as more relocated near mission stations to access education and trade.

\textsuperscript{26} Hahn, \textit{The Native Tribes of South West Africa}, 191.

\textsuperscript{27} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 18.

\textsuperscript{28} Goldblatt, \textit{History of South West Africa}, 35.
process also introduced wage labor to Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{29} The Rhenish Missionary Society purchased an established business rather than building from the ground up, acquiring Charles Anderson’s trade outpost for 550 Pounds Sterling on 26 September 1864.\textsuperscript{30} Because of the Christian pretext for this trade, the missionaries’ operation did not sell alcohol like some of the other merchants in the region, limiting their initial success due to the omission of one of the most popular commodities.\textsuperscript{31} Many Africans began to prefer brandy to their traditional honey beer, and alcohol itself became a favorite trade item, becoming even a dominant form of patronage after the cattle economy collapsed.\textsuperscript{32}

Shortly after trade was flowing, Hahn was concerned that the business aspects of the commerce were interfering with evangelizing – so he sought to separate the two practices. In 1870, the Missions Handels Aktiengesellschaft was founded by the Rhenish Missionary Society as a separate corporation, which one historian argued specialized in “the import of weapons and ammunition.”\textsuperscript{33} The purpose for creating a corporation was to separate the mission from the trade, while continuing to retain the “civilizing” benefits of commerce.\textsuperscript{34} Increased trade amplified the mission’s influence, allowing missionaries more sway in African politics, as

\textsuperscript{29} This process is discussed in later chapters with sections dedicated to the shift from pastoral economies to proletarianization.

\textsuperscript{30} Goldblatt, History of South West Africa, 36.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Hahn, The Native Tribes of South West Africa, 129. See the discussion later in this chapter regarding rinderpest outbreak in 1892.

\textsuperscript{33} Drechsler, Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft, 19. Drechsler did not clarify in his work, but said firearms were not traded or sold in the traditional sense, they were often used as partial payment for land acquisition.

\textsuperscript{34} Goldblatt, History of South West Africa, 38.
evidenced by leaders often asking a missionary to be present when dealing with German officials. At these meetings, evangelists offered council to the Africans, interjecting what they thought would be best in a paternalistic sense. However, in the long run, such interfering in the political realm tarnished the missionaries’ overall influence as they seemed to side with whites more times than not.35

The Rhenish missionaries were committed to evangelizing Africans, and to their proselytizing they added training in European culture to civilize those they saw as heathens. This meant primarily German Kultur through the transmission of Bildung. To this end, the missionaries set up educational facilities in Southwest Africa and brought up African youth in a German manner, teaching them German etiquette and dressing them in German fashions, hiding the nakedness of Africans they saw as barbaric. Several children of area leaders were even sent to Berlin for education, with the expectation that they would return to Southwest Africa and assist in the civilizing mission of the Rhenish Missionary Society. Two of these were the sons of future captain Samuel Maharero, one of whom complained later in life that there was no true education while overseas, only being exhibited as exotic curiosities.36

As missionaries expanded their base of operations in Southwest Africa, they saw the need for protection against bandits and potentially hostile Africans, especially with the threats levied by Jonker Afrikaner. After unification in 1871, the Rhenish Missionary Society formally requested a military force from Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to ensure its safety. The German government’s response to these pleas in the 1870’s can best be described as cold. Bismarck at

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35 The role of missionaries in the nexus of political and religious affairs is discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

36 Traugott Maharero, Samuel Maharero’s second eldest son, made these complaints in the 1930s. See Chapter Four.
the time was not interested in Southwest Africa, nor was he ready to supply the funds necessary
to have a standing military force in the region. The Chancellor feared that sending troops to the
area would alarm other European countries who had possessions nearby, namely Britain to the
south and Portugal and Belgium (under the auspices of the Congo Free State) to the north.

Therefore Bismarck denied military protection either because he did not want colonies for
Germany, as traditionally held by historians, or because he did not feel it was the appropriate
time to enter into the colonial foray. Nevertheless, for whatever reasons, Bismarck denied the
protection for missionaries only later to appease merchants and those political groups in
Germany calling for colonial empire.

1.3. German colonization, 1884-1895

The pro-colonial movement within Germany impacted Bismarck’s decision to acquire
colonies eventually. Emigration from Germany had become a problem in the eyes of the
government, with many German citizens leaving for the Americas to look for better opportunities.
The flight from Germany was largely due to an economic depression that hit shortly after
Unification in 1871. Colonial proponents argued that the creation of German colonies would
help to remedy both the loss of citizens and the ailing economy. With the establishment of
colonies, citizens would not have to emigrate to look for better economic opportunities because
settlers would retain their German citizenship. Colonies would also create monopolistic
consumer markets from which Germany, as a nation, would benefit.37

Another aspect of the pro-colonial argument was established by the popular press that saw the creation of colonies as a

37 Helmuth Stoecker, ed. German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the
Second World War (London: C.Hurst & Co., 1986), 21. This work was originally published in
German as Helmuth Stoecker, ed., Drang nach Afrika (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977).
safety valve against possible (socialist) revolution amongst the distressed working classes upset at the dearth of employment opportunities.\(^{38}\)

The excitement created by the Rhenish Missionary Society concerning Southwest Africa and the potential of Germany acquiring the region as a colony led some German entrepreneurs to explore the economic viability of the region. The first businessman to develop major designs for Southwest Africa was Bremen merchant Adolf Lüderitz. Perhaps with visions of wealth similar to that found in the Congo, Lüderitz sought to extract the mineral assets of the territory. He arrived in Southwest Africa in late 1882. After assessing the situation, he sent Bismarck a letter on 16 November 1882 asking for military protection if factories were built in Southwest Africa. Bismarck’s reply was cautious and placed the onus of organization on Lüderitz. The Chancellor requested that Lüderitz show that the territory was unclaimed by any other European nation and acquire appropriate rights to the land from respective African leaders. With this news, Lüderitz set out to purchase land in the coastal area of Southwest Africa. His concern was obtaining a viable port location to ensure that proper transportation channels would be open for his industrial endeavors because the ideal port at Walvish Bay was already claimed by the British. For this project he turned to Nama leader Joseph Fredericks, who made available the purchase of Angra Pequena (later renamed Lüderitzbucht) on the southern coast of Southwest Africa and the surrounding five miles on 1 May 1883.\(^{39}\) This acquisition marked Lüderitz’s foothold in the

\(^{38}\) Stoecker, *German Imperialism in Africa*, 22.

\(^{39}\) Paul Rohrbach, *Dernburg und die Südwestafrikaner* (Berlin: Deutscher Kolonialverlag, 1911), 46. The definition of these five miles is debatable. Some historians argue that Lüderitz knew that the chief’s concept of “mile” was much shorter than the German standard. Horst Drechsler even passes blame onto the missionaries for their role in the “deception” of not defining terms more clearly. See Goldblatt, *History of South West Africa*, 81; see also, Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft*, 23.
region. His next major purchase was later on the 25th of August, when he obtained the area south of the Orange River and twenty miles stretching inward.

Where men of God failed to obtain military protection from Germany men of capital succeeded. Once Lüderitz had satisfied Bismarck’s initial demands he again asked for military protection. His pleas for support were answered, albeit reluctantly, in a telegram sent by Bismarck on 24 April 1884. Bismarck’s message declared Southwest Africa under German rule – thus transforming it into Deutsche Südwestafrika. The German Chancellor agreed to establish such colonies in part as a means to please merchants’ demands. Prior to annexation, Bismarck sent his own son, Count Herbert Bismarck, to London to inquire about the true extent of British control in Southwest Africa. When England failed to respond to the inquiry directly, Bismarck saw it as a sign that Britain held no real claim to the region and the Chancellor took action. Lüderitz’s land purchases were the first step in the legitimization of German control of Southwest Africa, and once industry was started in the region it was only a matter of time before it was declared an official colony.

The potential loss of German citizens was the primary reason that Bismarck was initially against Germany becoming a colonial power, though he was losing some people to America regardless. Bismarck’s agenda changed as pressure from those like Fabri called for Germany to expand. The Chancellor agreed to colonization because he thought it would help build the

40 Through the paper I will used the term Südwestafrika to identify Southwest Africa under German rule.


economy, making it more competitive with France and England. Bismarck made clear that he did not want to shoulder the costs of administering colonies and he expected the companies operating in those regions to finance most of the burden. He explained his reasoning for acquiring colonies:

Our intention is not to create provinces but finally to acquire for ourselves commercial enterprises… and as such to bring these commercial enterprises under the protection of the German Reich, to protect their unrestricted development both from the attacks of natives and from oppression and damage on the part of other European powers.

Ultimately Bismarck’s reservations against colonial development changed as he hoped that colonial expansion would improve Germany’s economy. The expectations that these colonies would create markets for German manufactures that in turn would be guaranteed export trade – similar to British colonial economic models. They did not.

The promise of riches in Africa led to a scramble by European nations to carve up territories for economic gain. The larger countries had some land staked out in Africa already, but few had international acknowledgement of these possessions in the mid-1880’s. A meeting of European nations was organized by Bismarck to help settle the African colonial question. The conference met in Berlin in November 1884 and lasted through February 1885, contemporaneous with territorial acquisition already happening through third parties in Africa. In attendance were representatives from Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Portugal, the United States, Denmark, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, and the Ottoman Empire. The treaty derived from this meeting was the Berlin Act of 1885 that divided Africa into specific spheres of influence for each attending country and established free trade zones,

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43 Bismarck, Ausgewählte Reden des Fürsten von Bismarck, 302.


45 Förster, Bismarck, Europe, and Africa, 156.
specifically in the Congo River basin. Limiting slavery and the liquor trade among Africans were also addressed in an effort to give the appearance of furthering the civilizing mission. It was agreed in the treaty that both practices should be made illegal and all attending parties agreed to their abolition, at least on paper. In the treaty, there was also the stipulation that the European powers must agree to respect the natives within their territories. Article VI of the treaty stated that colonial powers had to “watch over the preservation of the native tribes” and also “Christian missionaries, scientists, and explorers…” The agreement to “watch over” the people of Africa was in letter only as few of the colonial powers ever elevated native welfare to a matter of primacy. In effect, the Berlin Act failed as a humanitarian instrument as slavery was replaced with forced labor and spirits were often openly bootlegged.

The Congress of Berlin made Südwestafrika an “official” possession of Germany in the eyes of other European powers, though the task of notifying the local Africans of this status was already underway. Doctor Gustav Nachtigal, Imperial Consul General and also Commissioner for the West Coast of Africa, journeyed to Südwestafrika to expedite the establishment of treaties with African leaders. He secured protection treaties by November 1884 with Chief Josef Fredericks of Bethanie and the Captain of the Topnaar, Piet Haibib. The “Treaties of Protection and Friendship” (Schutzverträge) stated that the German government would hold suzerainty over the territory, but assured the individual nations that they and their culture would be respected as long as they honored the treaty and did not try to subvert German authority. These treaties

46 Congress of Berlin, Treaty of Berlin (Berlin, 1885).

47 Förster, Bismarck, Europe, and Africa, 333.

48 Similar processes were underway in Togoland, the Cameroons, and German East Africa (modern Tanganyika) – although in the case of the latter, the territory was claimed by the slightly mad Carl Peters without initial consent from Bismarck.
offered an image of permanence and created the impression of Germany’s legitimacy over the territory while also promising to provide the benefits of European interaction. This sentiment was evidenced in the future colonial governor Theodor Leutwein’s comments on the Africans’ perception of the treaties: “One does not need to sit around and believe that the chieftains sat around like German students studying the body of laws and protection contracts, they accepted them to benefit their own interests.” Leutwein believed that both sides profited from the relationships established and did not see a problem with the balance of power. Governor Nachtigal also visited the Rehoboth Basters and secured a request for protection from their leader, Hermanus van Wyk in October 1884, which was later converted into a formal protection treaty. With these initial treaties acquired, the next step was to make the colony a worthwhile endeavor—a task that proved difficult.

Hopes for economic prosperity did not bode well, leading to disappointment. Lüderitz was unable to gain quick returns on his investments and grew leery of his overseas projects. Lüderitz’s financial concerns, coupled with his inability to continue the funding for various exploits, led the businessman to sell off all of his holdings in Southwest Africa. On 3 April 1885, his businesses, including what he believed were his “sovereign” rights, were sold for 500,000 Marks to the Deutsche Kolonial Gesellschaft für Südwestafrika (German Colonial Company of Southwest Africa). This corporation was headed by several important German businessmen

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49 Russell Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire, Colonial Discourse in German Culture* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 14. Berman’s use of permanence is employed to describe an instance where the use of “official” documents legitimized actual policy.


who solicited economic investment in the colony from prospective clients in Europe. In line with Bismarck’s wishes, a mining company funded the first protection force, therefore the initial Schutztruppe (colonial force) was not paid for by the German government.52

Almost a year after Nachtigal acquired the first protection treaties, Dr. Heinrich Ernst Göring was sent to arrange agreements with the remaining groups in Südwestafrika.53 He arrived in October 1885, accompanied by Chancellor Louis Nels and Police Chief Hugo von Goldammer. Göring’s first task was to get the main Herero nation to accept German suzerainty. When he approached the Herero, they knew that the Germans could not protect them against the Nama due to the lack of an actual military presence in Südwestafrika, thus they refused to sign any treaties. Göring recommended military intervention when he encountered this resistance from the Herero. In response to this request, a new and formal Schutztruppe was formed on 25 June 1889, funded fully by the German government. It consisted of twenty-one men under the leadership of Hauptman Curt von François with the directive to keep arms from entering the region. The troops traveled to Südwestafrika under the guise of explorers, so as to not alarm the British with a German military buildup in the territory despite the small size of the group. François first moved to Otjimbingwe in an attempt to create a base of operations, but found that it could not be properly fortified. He then set his sights on Tsaobis where he relocated on 8 August 1889, and erected the garrison Wilhelmsfeste. François eventually felt the need for a more central location and relocated his military headquarters to Windhoek in October of 1890, with the civil administration moving there two years afterward. This was an ideal location since Windhoek

52 Ibid., 109.

53 Heinrich Göring was also the father of Nazi Reichsfeldmarschall Hermann Göring, which became one of the tenuous strings that some scholars used to forward their continuity thesis between the colonial empire and the Holocaust.
was geographically in the middle of Südwestafrika and at the time it was free of African inhabitants.\textsuperscript{54}

François turned his attention to securing protection treaties once he established his Windhoek headquarters. Many of the African leaders in Südwestafrika were still hesitant to come under Germany’s protection. He had limited success, usually getting signatures from smaller groups while the larger, more independent tribes refused. The two most prominent examples of this failure were François’ unsuccessful attempts with Hendrik Witbooi’s band of Nama and Samuel Maharero’s Okahandja Herero. Maharero’s reluctance to sign a treaty later changed, however, as he manipulated the incoming Germans to support him as Paramount Chief of the Okahandja Herero after the 1890 death of his father Kamaherero Tjamuaha. This allowed Maharero to circumvent his Oruzo (paternal) and Ejanda (maternal) birthrights which were a part of the traditional Herero inheritance system and would have opened the door to another successor.\textsuperscript{55} Germans assumed that African leaders practiced a system of primogeniture similar to that found in Europe, so it was only natural that they catered to the eldest son of the former leader. They also considered all territory the property of the captain, which was not the case, as most physical territory was considered communal. These cultural misconceptions were the root of hostilities between German forces and the African people – first with the Herero, then later the Nama. German colonial officials believed Maharero would be cooperative with their occupation and were eager to work with him. Because of this opportunity, Maharero entered into a treaty with the Germans to ensure (or at least he hoped) some protection against the Nama. The

\textsuperscript{54} Windhoek has been the capital ever since.

\textsuperscript{55} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 29. Maharero’s agency in this exchange was quite impressive as he was able to elevate his political power in what he hoped was going to be a symbiotic relationship.
The election of Maharero demonstrated that the German colonial government was willing to work with Africans as long as they followed the overarching will of Europeans.

The Nama were less concerned with the presence of Germans initially. Hendrik Witbooi refused to sign the German protection treaty and continued fighting the Herero for supremacy in the region as if the German presence did not matter. Witbooi’s main argument for not signing a treaty was his fear that by granting German suzerainty he, as a captain, would no longer be the head of his people. Witbooi made his shrewd opinion known in an eloquent letter to Samuel Maharero in 1896 which proved to be prophetic:

This dry land is known by two names only, Hereroland and Namaland. Hereroland belongs to the Herero nation, and is an autonomous realm. And Namaland belongs to all the Red nations, and these too are autonomous realms… But what have you done now, surrendering yourself over to government by another, by White people, thinking it wisely planned… I doubt that you have well considered, or fully grasp what it means to surrender to German Protection. I doubt that you and your Herero nation will understand the rules and laws and methods of that government…

…Whoever stands above is paramount; whoever stands below is subordinate, because he stands under another.56

The Nama leader also wrote a letter to Curt von François relaying his position.57 Once the German government took root and began enforcing its policies, Witbooi became even more troubled by the fate of his people and other Africans in Südwestafrika. His concerns were evident in a letter written to the British magistrate at Walvis Bay:

It now appears the German himself is that man who he said was of another nation, and is doing exactly what he said we would be protected from. He rules us autocratically, enforcing his government laws. Right and truth do not interest


57 Witbooi, *Nama/Namibia*, 86.
him; he does not consult the country’s chiefs; for he himself makes the laws for our country, following only his own judgment.\textsuperscript{58} Witbooi’s apprehension extended beyond the loss of supremacy for African headmen, he was also troubled by new laws that were imposed upon those who fell under the Germany’s rule. Justice was often dispersed by German officials without consulting African leaders, a process in violation of legal agreements. When discussing von François in a letter, Witbooi stated that the colonial governor employed excessive treatment and treated Africans as animals, so much so that he should not be tolerated.\textsuperscript{59} Conversely, German officials warned Witbooi that if he was not willing to cooperate with German rule he would be forcibly brought under control.

While the political relationships developed among German Colonial representatives, Rhenish missionaries continued their evangelism in the region, with more success among the Nama than Herero. Missionaries sensed the tension inherent in the situation between the Nama leader and German officials. They tried to convince Witbooi to accept German protection, and since the chief was a converted Christian, the missionaries thought he could be persuaded. They were not successful, however, and in a move of paternalistic hubris, attempted to force Witbooi’s compliance. The mission in Witbooi’s capital of Gibeon was closed in 1887, imposing an excommunication of sorts on Witbooi and his followers, but this plan backfired, as the Nama captain simply eschewed the Rhenish Missionaries and established his own church. This incident ushered in a marked decline in the missionaries’ influence among the Nama for approximately two decades. Missionaries also began to lose the respect of the Herero because the former’s increased dealings with the German colonial government.\textsuperscript{60} These events marked

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 98.

\textsuperscript{59} Witbooi, \textit{Nama/Namibia}, 98.

\textsuperscript{60} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 32.
an overall turning point in the level of influence the missionaries had in political matters and their ability to negotiate between the Africans and Germans. Missionary political importance waned as colonists poured into the area and their voices became the main concern of the colonial administration.

The excitement over potential wealth in the new colony escalated in 1887 when a “gold rush” hit Südwestafrika. The apparent gold find by British explorer Robert Lewis at Anawood, near the banks of the Swakop River, induced a small influx of German settlement. The news about the discovery was later found to be a hoax, but not until after settlers came to the region looking to strike it rich with quick gold finds. It is possible that Lewis initiated the deception in an attempt to instigate renewed British interest in the area and push out the Germans though there is no indication that would have happened. Göring, who was back in Germany, was able to parlay the situation to Germany’s advantage by promoting German settlement. Between this time and the turn of the century there was a slow influx of settlers and more missionaries.

Behind the scenes, the colonial government was maneuvering to ensure German hegemony.

François was ordered by the home government not to harm Africans in his endeavors but these orders were not obeyed for long. The governor had little patience with African leaders who did not sign protection treaties, especially Hendrik Witbooi who continued making cattle raids against the Herero. François blamed the uneasy situation in Südwestafrika on lax treatment: “Europeans have failed to give the black man the right kind of treatment, they have made too many concessions…” These concessions were soon to come to an end as François prepared to tighten control over Südwestafrika. The general change in the official German mood

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61 Drechsler, Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft, 35.

62 As quoted in Drechsler, Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft, 43.
towards those who did not sign protection treaties was evidenced in March 1893 as plans were made to raid Hornkranz (southwest of Windhoek), the main encampment of Hendrik Witbooi. François designed to stop Witbooi’s troublesome behavior and to use the Nama captain as an example to all who entertained thoughts of non-compliance with German rule. On the evening of 12 April 1893, François and his men attacked Hornkranz. The attack was largely unsuccessful, with Germans killing women and children mostly before burning the settlement to the ground. The nighttime attack managed to kill only ten of Witbooi’s men. Witbooi and his soldiers were able to escape the foray, embarrassing the German forces. After the attack, Witbooi stole forty German horses and an additional one hundred twenty from a nearby merchant, giving the Nama leader nearly three hundred mounts compared to Germany’s now reduced seventy.\footnote{Drechsler, \textit{Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft}, 71-2.}

François’s attempts to capture or kill Witbooi were futile, and the conflict between with the Nama hampered German trade in \textit{Südwestafrika} as Witbooi expanded his raids. Efforts were made in Germany to recall the lieutenant from his post, “not because he had deliberately provoked a war against the Witboois with his raid on Hornkranz, but because he appeared incapable of winning the war.”\footnote{Ibid., 73.} It was during this time that the first calls were made to establish reservations as a means to control native movement and regulate their territory, as Africans were seen more as needing regulation instead of the German colonial subjects.\footnote{Hanns Lessing, “‘The concentration camps should be built near these watering holes’: a theological reconstruction of the role of the Rhenish Mission Society during the colonial war in Namibia (1904-1908),” \textit{The German Protestant Church in Colonial Southern Africa: The Impact of Overseas Work from the Beginnings Until the 1920s}, eds. Hanns Lessing, Julia Besten, Tilman Dedering, Christian Hohmann, and Lize Kriel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 449-70.}
François’s inability to eliminate the Witbooi problem led to his replacement by Major Theodor Leutwein. In a letter to the new governor, Witbooi questioned the reasons for Germany’s attack on Hornkranz. Leutwein replied that by not complying with German protection, Witbooi was considered a threat to German authority and therefore must be dealt with to ensure the safety of those who did sign treaties. Leutwein coldly commented to Witbooi:

It is futile to further discuss this matter now. Now it is our duty to discuss what is to happen, and it is to this point that I cannot fully understand your reply. I have tried to convince you of the fact that you have no other choice. Unconditional submission to the will of his Majesty the German Emperor or war until annihilation.\footnote{Witbooi,\textit{Nama/Namibia}, 106; Isabel Hull,\textit{Absolute Destruction} (Ithica, NY: Cornell, 2005), 28 for a full discussion of the terms destruction and annihilation.}

This statement is in agreement with Leutwein’s vision of protection treaties, that they were intended "to accustom the natives gradually to the existing condition" of German occupation.\footnote{Leutwein,\textit{Elfe Jahre Gouverneur in deutsch-Südwestafrika}, 242.}

The new colonial governor brought a different approach to the colony as he was able to combine force and diplomacy to reduce African resistance in Südwestafrika. Soon after his arrival, Leutwein had the chance to demonstrate that he was not afraid to use force against what he saw as insubordinate Africans when he easily put down skirmishes from the Tjetjo Herero and Grootfontein Basters. Franzmannschen Hottentots leader Simon Kopper, whose people had always resisted German rule, and Orlam Nama captain Andreas Lambert continued to defy German rule, even after the moderate Leutwein took the reins of Südwestafrika – each of the leaders proving reluctant to cooperate. Leutwein once stated: “In all colonial wars there are only two ways to deal with a worthy opponent. You must either destroy him or come to terms with
him.”68 The new governor’s victories demonstrated that he intended to be firm, yet fair in his dealings with Africans, and in the eyes of some it garnered him respect. Hendrik Witbooi was impressed with how Leutwein approached his position and finally agreed to cooperate with the German colonial government. Leutwein was able to sign a peace treaty with Witbooi in 1895, which showed much promise in his potential as a governor and diplomat. One significant stipulation of this treaty was that Witbooi formed a military alliance with the colonial government and promised to aid them in times of war – a clause employed just after the turn of the century. Politically speaking, it appeared that Leutwein had created a successful working relationship with Africans under his jurisdiction; however, this system, based largely upon his charisma and cunning, while temporarily effective, did not have long-term success.69 It has been argued that to state Leutwein was the dominant figure in German-Herero politics negated the active roles that Herero and Nama leaders played.70 Nevertheless, Leutwein’s political outlook meshed perfectly with the official colonial policy back in the homeland which was to employ the proven “divide and rule” method and manage issues with the least amount of force possible.

Germany’s commitment to retaining its colonies strengthened after Bismarck was dismissed by the neurotic Wilhelm II in 1890.71 Bismarck’s replacement as Chancellor, Leo von Caprivi, demonstrated in a speech to the Reichstag in March of 1893 his policy towards colonies,
“Now it [Southwest Africa] is ours, German territory, and it must remain so.”72 A more famous example of this position was expressed in Kaiser Wilhelm II’s “Place in the Sun” speech to the Northern German Regatta Association in 1901. The main purpose of the speech was to promote the development of a German navy, but within the speech Wilhelm gave insight to the German position on colonialism. Wilhelm remarked, “we [Germany] have conquered for ourselves a place in the sun [which] shall remain our undisputed possession… for our future lies upon the water.”73 The Kaiser’s commitment to ensuring that colonies “remain our undisputed possession[s]” demonstrated that he was willing to do whatever it took to guarantee that Germany remained master over its colonies. He later commented that his goal to expand the navy was to ensure peace and “to protect and advance commerce and trade.” Governor Leutwein shared the Kaiser and Chancellor’s outlook.

In a meeting in June 1894, a deal between Leutwein and Samuel Maharero was made which effectively placed all of Hereroland under German rule without a fight.74 With German backing, Maharero was able to extend his power over all Herero nations. By using the threat of German military action he expanded his domain from the Okahandja nation to all of Hereroland – showing that his policy of cooperation with Germans was working, at least initially.75 Overall, Leutwein proved effective in dealing with native resistance up until the German-Herero War of 1904. In 1895 there was a minor uprising among the Bondelswartz. Leutwein negotiated a

72 As quoted in Stoecker, *German Imperialism in Africa*, 43.


74 Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft*, 84.

peace with their leader, Wilhelm Christian, with a balance of force and diplomacy. The Nama leader drew much criticism from his people for cooperating with the Germans, later evolving into another conflict that opened the door for the Herero War. Because of this unrest among Africans, the first calls from settlers for the annihilation of the indigenous population in Südwesstafrika were documented as early as October 1895.76

1.4. Rebellion, Genocide, and the creation of Lebensraum, 1895-1914

The arrival of German settlers in the 1880’s marked the most critical change in the landscape of Südwesstafrika. With the coming of German colonizers popular opinion was added to the official German colonial position. The establishment of a popular press in the region came as soon as settlers began to populate in the area. The editorials were quick to voice a hatred of Africans. The expression of national identity in the popular press led to the separation of the “other” from what was defined as “German.” Settler opinion proved to dictate German colonial policy. The hatred of the African by new German settlers can be found readily in the newspaper articles published in the colony. When discussing the African population one writer commented in the Deutsche Südwestafrikanische Zeitung:

This mass [the Herero people] forms a constant threat to security, because an unrestrained hate lives in the hearts of all of these people against the whites, a hate, which no amount of education will make disappear, as long as they carry a lust for wine and white skin.77

This quote demonstrated that the settlers’ vision for Südwestafrika had no harmonious place for whom they considered savage.

Two more revolts that were more significant than the Bondelswartz’s were from the Mbandjeru Herero and the Khaua Nama nations who rose against the Germans in March of 1896.

76 Gewald, Herero Heroes, 88.

77 Deutsch Südwestafrikanische Zeitung, 8 March 1904.
Leutwein quickly and forcefully put down those rebellions. Prisoner-of-war camps were established and used as punishment for the revolts and soon became normal tools implemented by the Germans as mechanisms of control. On 5 July 1897, the Afrikaner Nama rose up in revolt and were likewise defeated. These rebellions indicated that significant portions of the population wished Germany would leave Southwest Africa as the realities of colonial rule and protection proved to destroy more autonomy than originally believed to be sacrificed.

There were several events that increased the Africans’ disapproval of their German overlords as evidenced by the amplified level of dissention at the end of the nineteenth century. First, there was a tremendous loss of cattle by the Herero. The entrepreneurs, German government, and settlers started the process of dispossessing cattle from African natives shortly after their arrival in Southwest Africa. This depletion of cattle was accelerated due to an epidemic that struck the region, decimating an economy rooted in a herding culture. Secondly, the practice of extending credit was abused as the traditional African economy collapsed. Lenders would often resort to unfair demands of repayment, usually leaving Africans without legal recourse. Thirdly, the loss of native lands increased rapidly as lenders often took tracts of land as repayment for debt. Lastly, the establishment of reserves alarmed Africans who saw them as an end to their traditional culture. The great irony was that those concerned with the destructive potential of this practice of dispossession, mostly missionaries, called for these reserve systems so that aspects of the African cattle herding society could be saved. All of these things combined together created a sense of hopelessness among Africans in Südwestafrika.

One of the major stressors that helped break down Leutwein’s diplomatic web was an epidemic of the livestock disease rinderpest. This virus caused an ulceration of the digestive tract that resulted in severe diarrhea and ultimately death for infected cattle. It is estimated that
the Herero lost between 90% and 95% of their cattle due to the outbreak. German settlers also suffered high losses, but were able to stave off most of the destruction by inoculating many of their herds before the epizootic destruction. It is probable that rinderpest was introduced into Südwestafrika by the illegal oxen trade from the neighboring regions of Bechuanaland and the Cape Colony. These oxen were smuggled into the German colony, which in itself could explain the extent of infection, as German officials did not monitor them closely. The long incubation period of rinderpest allowed infection to go undetected for several weeks, enabling it to spread rapidly, and increasing its destructiveness. Inoculations for rinderpest were reserved for German farmers first at the expense of Herero herdsmen; those Herero who received the vaccination often had to trade fertile grazing land to German settlers. Nevertheless, the speed at which the rinderpest spread prevented the necessary medicine from being properly dispersed throughout the Herero herds after German herds were protected. The German policy in dealing with rinderpest converged with the dynamics of the disease to choke Herero self-sufficiency and make them dependent upon German creditors. Losing so many cattle ultimately crippled Herero economic viability, forcing them to seek other means of income. The first attempt to find a solution to their financial problems was the selling of their remaining territorial possessions, an act that would ultimately be devastating to the Herero’s chances of recovering economically.

Another method was reliance on credit to buy necessary goods. The extension of credit to Africans in Südwestafrika was a long-established practice, and until the economic disaster caused by rinderpest, it worked effectively as Africans were generally able to repay their debts in a timely manner. The overuse of credit at the turn of the century, however, led Governor

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78 Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule, 125.

79 Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule, 124. These traders were mostly Boers who had fled South Africa after their war with British colonial forces.
Leutwein to institute legislation regarding the collection of debts in an effort to limit the negative impact on Africans. On 23 July 1903, Leutwein issued a proclamation that stated that all outstanding debts would become null and void if they were not collected within a year’s time from the effective date of the order. This policy went into effect on 1 November 1903, making November 1904 the deadline for collecting said debts. Despite its good intentions, this practice ignited a frenzy among European traders in Südwesstafrika who attempted to collect all debts as soon as possible. Leutwein’s credit policies put land purchases out of the reach of many hopeful settlers as well, as the combination of credit policies and establishment of protected reserves limited prospects in the colony.\textsuperscript{80} Local herdsmen, still reeling from the dramatic loss of cattle, were of course unable to repay their debts. Traders, fearing lack of repayment, began confiscating Africans’ material possessions and their surviving cattle. The traders would define for themselves what was owed and take compensation without the consent of the individual in question and often without even considering if the items seized actually belonged to the debtor.

The transfer of African territorial processions to European hands in Südwesstafrika began with Lüderitz and accelerated until ultimately Africans owned virtually no land. The loss of native land ownership became critical when the selling-off increased exponentially after the collapse of their cattle-based economy. Companies such as the \textit{Otavi-Minen und Eisenbahngesellschaft}’s, based to the north of Windhoek, land purchases for building railroads left little suitable grazing land that compounded the Africans’ problems. The \textit{Otva}i railway took a twenty-kilometer strip on both sides of their track, to which they retained all mineral and water rights. Once the rail lines were in place, Africans were forbidden by the colonial government to use the once familiar territory for grazing their herds. The rapid loss of land did not trouble the

\textsuperscript{80} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 144.
settlers and traders in Südwestafrika, as they were the primary benefactors from these Africans’ losses. Missionaries in Südwestafrika were concerned about the loss of African land ownership and sought a way to limit the destructive impact of this chain of events. One recommendation Rhenish Missionaries furthered was the establishment of specific reserves to guarantee that the Herero would not be totally dispossessed from their lands and aspects of their culture could be preserved, especially in regards to livelihood. Missionaries recognized that the selling off of native property by the Herero limited their future potential to re-establish herds. If Africans were unable to have economic stability, they would not be open to religious conversion. Many settlers who were willing to buy Herero property and take advantage of their dilemma attacked the reserve idea; others found it a welcome policy as it would move Africans from their view.

Governor Leutwein was aware of the increasing animosity between European occupants of Südwestafrika and Africans. In 1903, he tried to better the odds of a German military victory in case of an insurrection, but hoped to deter such an uprising from occurring by confiscating the Africans’ weapons. A troop of German soldiers would go to an African settlement and demand that their headman turn over the firearms in his possession. This action understandably fostered unrest among the African population. Also in 1903, German colonial economist Paul Rohrbach was appointed Settlement Commissioner (Siedlungkommissar) of Südwestafrika and given a 300,000 Mark budget to encourage its settlement. This program was further incentive to create more living space for Germans at the cost of Africans. Südwestafrika was changing into a German living space. The newer settlers, who were not accustomed to interaction with Africans,

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81 Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule*, 126; Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 120.
called for a preemptive war against the Hereros to ensure German dominion of the colony.\textsuperscript{82} The older settlers who had learned to cooperate with Africans and developed productive relationships opposed this newer generation harshly.\textsuperscript{83}

The combination of losing cattle, land, and autonomy led many Africans, both in Hereroland and Namaland, to become disaffected with German colonial forces and settlers. Samuel Maharero came under pressure from the Herero nations, who were concerned with the expanding control that German colonial forces were exerting in Südwestafrika. Those who questioned Maharero’s leadership were primarily the surviving ex-rivals for his captainship.

A second uprising in southern Südwestafrika among the Nama Bondelswartz and led by Joseph Morenga began on 25 October 1903. Witbooi and some of his men helped the Germans against Morenga in this fight per their treaty. The rebellion was not resolved until the Peace of Kalkfontein was signed on 27 January 1904. The Bondelswartz were forced to give up their land, armaments, and freedom when they were relocated to a reservation due south of Windhoek.

While Leutwein and the bulk of German forces were in the southern area of Südwestafrika dealing with the Bondelswartz rebellion, his administrative staff was in command of the northern districts. In late 1903, District Chief Lieutenant Ralf Zürn called the Herero leaders together in Okahandja to discuss plans for creating a reservation. Several important Herero leaders, including Maharero, were unable to attend this meeting in which Zürn alone defined what would be the their new home. In the absence of these Herero figureheads, Zürn

\textsuperscript{82} The relative lack of concern for the Nama specifically may have been due to their lower population, or possibly that the territory they lived on was less desirable to incoming white settlers.

\textsuperscript{83} Bley, \textit{South-West Africa under German Rule}, 79-80.
simply forged their signatures to make the ordinance appear legitimate.\textsuperscript{84} African leaders in attendance argued that the proposed reservations would be too small, too arid, and overall insufficient to support their traditional lifestyle. Zürn replied that he did not need African approval to enforce German policies.\textsuperscript{85} This attitude from a colonial official combined with the recent economic disasters led many to further question their relationship with Germany. Two months before the German-Herero War, reserves were created near Otjimbingwe, alarming the Herero as to their future fate. These reserves were tracts of land, often undesirable, on which the Herero were to reside and maintain their few remaining herds. They were required for the most part to stay on their designated reserve.

The German-Herero War resulted from a series of misunderstandings. Herero leaders were gathering near Okahandja to discuss the inheritance of recently deceased Chief Kambazembi. Whites mistook this gathering as a mobilization of Herero military forces. Settler Conrad Rust [no direct relation to the missionary] noted that there was a deep paranoia present among the newer arrivals to \textit{Südwestafrika}.\textsuperscript{86} He was also sure of an impending revolt and tried to get his Herero servants to divulge their secret plans. The reason Rust was unsuccessful in his

\textsuperscript{84} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 149.

\textsuperscript{85} Bley, \textit{South-West Africa under German Rule}, 128.

interrogations was that there were no such plans. Hostilities began in early 1904 and German settlers soon became casualties, prompting calls in the press for the destruction of the African population. Articles repeated requests for the extermination of natives so that those Germans who died in the uprising would be avenged “to ensure that their blood did not flow in vain…” The spilling of German blood became the Herero’s unpardonable sin, though these settlers had no problems with the loss of life among the African population. Another article suggested that the Germans should have eliminated the native population, or at least crippled it severely, from the very beginning of occupation. The author stated, “Therefore a power, as soon as it begins to really settle an area, must carry with them a military force to ensure that they can conquer those already there and eliminate the possibility of the other revolting.” This sentiment was supported by another hawkish article that chastised the German government for even attempting to negotiate with African leaders. The author suggested that the entire procedure of protection treaties was a waste and gave unneeded authority to African leaders:

> With the present treaties... the power of the German government decreased continuously and gradually, and the political, economic, and personal predominance of the colored races grew in each relationship and in all the regions. So the possession of the country for German was only illusory, a rough self-deception.

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87 An interesting note about the power of myth and mythmaking: Into the 1950s and 1960s, many Herero believed that they did, in fact, initiate the war as a means of colonial resistance. It was reported that Leutwein had died and the military was going to take over the colony, so Maharero raised an army to prevent the subjugation of his people. See the discussion in Chapter Six. Found in Israel Goldblatt, Dag Henrichsen, Naomi Jacobson, and Karen Marshall, Building Bridges: Namibian Nationalists Clemens Kapuuo, Hosea Kutako, Brenden Simbwaye, and Samuel Witbooi (Basel, Switzerland: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010), 86.

88 Kolonial Zeitschrift, 22 March 1904.

89 Kolonial Zeitschrift, 5 April 1904.

90 Kolonial Zeitschrift, 22 June 1905.
These and other passages clearly demonstrated that settler sentiment was against cohabitation with the native population.\(^{91}\) They argued for a German living space, for Germans alone. Settlers offered a resounding answer to the question of what to do with the Africans in \textit{Südwestafrika} – eliminate them.

Despite the fact that these fears were not rooted in political or economic realities, Lieutenant Zürn agreed with settlers’ outlook and in January 1904 he ordered all whites in the area to move into fortified locations as he increased military patrols. This flux in German military activity coupled with the movement of settlers into the forts greatly concerned the Herero. Maharero was off attending to his longtime assistant Assa Riaruu who had fallen ill when Zürn started maneuvering for war. The leader distanced himself from the bulk of the gathered Herero because he feared Zürn was trying to kill him. The presence of so many Herero men in one place fueled German paranoia, which ultimately ignited the bloodiest conflict in German colonial history. It was the Germans who fired the first shots of the German-Herero War. Small groups of Herero near the fort at Okahandja were fired upon by settlers within the garrison. It is interesting to note that the settlers and German military also fired upon the nearby mission, fearing that the missionaries themselves were sponsoring the rebellion.\(^{92}\) This particular aspect in the tripartite relationship of missionaries, Africans, and the colonial government is important to this study because it proves that there were layers between the three that extended well into the twentieth century as South Africa replaced Germany as the hegemon in Southwest Africa. Zürn was removed from his post for instigating this war. Court-martial proceedings

\(^{91}\) For more on the development and impact of racism in Europe and how it applied to German worldviews, see Chapter Five.

\(^{92}\) Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 154.
were started once he was back in Germany, but ended without resolution.\textsuperscript{93} Zürn’s chastisement by German officials gives credence to the argument that the Herero did not initiate the conflict, but did not impact the general narrative that the Herero rebelled against the legitimacy of German colonial rule.

Samuel Maharero, who upon hearing about the German aggression regrouped with his forces and retaliated against the colonial army and settlers on 12 January 1904. The Herero leader explicitly issued orders to his troops that all non-combatants were to be spared; specifically missionaries, the British, and Boers in the region, all of whom were believed faultless by Maharero in this conflict. This order included protection for women and children, further showing that Maharero was only interested in attacking male German soldiers and farmers, those whom he felt had transgressed against the Herero people. Maharero’s request was honored as evidenced by the fact that only three white women were killed during the war, and these by accident.\textsuperscript{94} The specific military objective of the Herero was to force Germans to abandon the colony. Because Maharero limited the aggression towards German males only, it indicated that the revolt was not a racial war waged by the Herero, though the same cannot be said for the Germans.

Maharero sent out letters to other influential chiefs asking for their assistance in throwing off the German yoke. The paramount chief invited long-time rival Hendrik Witbooi to join the war in January 1904 via a letter that was entrusted to Rehoboth Bastard leader, Hermanus Van

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 156.

\textsuperscript{94} Drechsler, \textit{Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft}, 150.
These letters seeking a unified front against the Schutztruppe were turned over to German officials by Van Wyk, who felt that he would be safer on the side of the colonial government. At the time the letters were intercepted, Leutwein and most of the German forces were still in the southern part of Südwestafrika addressing the uprising among the Bondelswartz. Maharero wrote:

Rather let us die together and not die as the result of ill-treatment, prisons, or all the other ways. Furthermore let all the other chiefs down there know so that they may rise and work. I close my letter with hearty greetings and the confidence that the chief will comply with my wishes. Send me four of your men that we may discuss matters. Also obstruct the operations of the Governor so that he will be unable to pass. And make haste that we may storm Winhuk [sic] then we shall have ammunition. Furthermore I am not fighting alone, we are all fighting together.

The contents of Maharero’s letters did not surprise Leutwein, who was confident that he could be able to diffuse the situation diplomatically as he had often done in earlier altercations. Unfortunately for Leutwein, his assumptions about Maharero’s actions and his own power as governor would prove wrong, causing him to lose his post.

Herero forces were initially quite successful against their German rivals. Their methods were influenced by the German military as evidenced by the wearing of German uniforms and

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95 Ibid., 143. One of these letters was dated 11 January 1904 and signed with the name Samuel Maharero, but it was not the signature of the Herero chief as Governor Leutwein himself attested. It is more likely that the letter in question was written closer to 21 January 1904 after the successful Herero attacks on railroads in the region.

96 Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia – An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book (Leiden, Brill, 2003), 102. This passage also demonstrated that the Herero knew that Leutwein was still alive and that the “death myth” must have been created sometime after the subsequent genocide – in my opinion, as a coping method to justify such loss in the face of colonial oppression.
mimicking of Prussian military tactics.\cite{Dedering1999} When the war started, Herero forces were able to blockade the two major German settlements at Okahandja and Windhoek effectively by systematically destroying railway tracks and communication lines, thereby hindering the German capacity to respond to the fighting.\cite{Dedering1999} One of their better strikes was the destruction of a key railroad bridge near Osona, slightly south of Okahandja, that prevented railcars carrying supplies and troops from reinforcing the besieged. Despite these initial successes and maintaining an advantage over German troops, the Herero refrained from making direct attacks on towns, choosing instead to wait for a diplomatic resolution over military victory. As such, the Herero were able to keep German forces at bay until the German military increased numbers and adopted a more aggressive stance. This temporary success was no doubt due to their greater knowledge of terrain and the destruction of German logistics. The inability of the *Schutztruppe* to quash the revolt rapidly led to questions regarding Leutwein’s effectiveness, a scenario seen before in German colonial politics. Despite calls for his removal, Leutwein was dedicated to arriving at a diplomatic resolution to the German-Herero war, and as such, there were not many battles during the interim period from the beginning of the conflict to his replacement. Most Herero withdrew from the Onjati Hills to the Waterberg Plateau in the north during this time of muted conflict. Maharero wrote to Leutwein at this time to complain about “Zürn’s war”:

> The outbreak of this war was not initiated by me in this year [1904], rather it was begun by the whites… This is how the war began. It was initiated by the traders and Leutnant [sic] Zürn. I indicate how the war started, it is not mine. Question the traders and

\cite{Dedering1999}

\cite{Dedering1999} Similar fighting tactics were employed by the Boers in their war against the British. It is plausible, but not documented, that stories of the Boer Wars were passed into Southwest Africa.
Leutnant [sic] Zürn as to their war, when they have told you then we can talk about it. The present war is that of Zürn. These are my words; I am the chief Samuel Maharero.  

This refrain further indicated that the Herero did not want to continue the war, but at minimum, a return to the status quo.

Reactions to these events in *Südwestafrika* from Germany’s *Reichstag* were harsh. The German Colonial Office called for a decisive victory against what it saw as rebellious subjects. Officials were angered when it was discovered that Leutwein was negotiating peace with factions of the Herero; they wanted a decisive military victory. The colonial governor inferred the intentions of the German Colonial Office’s suggestion of “total victory” and argued against eradication in *Südwestafrika*, suggesting that he had the means to stop the revolt and restore order.  

Leutwein further posited that 60,000 to 70,000 people are not easy to annihilate and the loss of this population would not be economically viable for the colony due to the deficit of available labor.  

By this time in the colony’s development, the chances for economic advancement were slim, and if German businesses were going to be successful, then they would need a supply of cheap labor. The *Reichstag* was not convinced by Leutwein and decided that military control of *Südwestafrika* should be transferred to someone with more experience in colonial wars and the nerve to shed more blood. In May 1904, Leutwein was stripped of military command, though allowed to remain governor briefly. Humiliated, he returned to Germany on the 10th of November 1904.  

General Alfred von Schlieffen was placed in charge of the

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military operations, though he never left Germany for the colony.\textsuperscript{103} Leutwein’s direct replacement as military commander was Lieutenant Lothar Von Trotha, a veteran of the Boxer Rebellion and several colonial skirmishes in German East Africa. He was given carte blanche and answered only to Schlieffen.

Many of the Reichstag representatives agreed with the attitude Von Trotha displayed. Although some of the more liberal members, such as Reichstag member and Social Democratic Party co-founder August Bebel, protested the German position in Südwestafrika.\textsuperscript{104} Bebel gave a speech to the Reichstag that was later published in one of the colonial papers in which he argued that Germans came to share culture with Africans, not brutalize them.\textsuperscript{105} Bebel complained of the harsh treatment that violated international laws and demanded an explanation for the lynching of Africans by settlers.\textsuperscript{106} Leutwein admitted that Bebel’s argument was valid, as he also thought the actions in the colony were out of hand. Though Bebel spoke against the elimination of Africans, he did vote to send troops to the area for the protection of German settlers.\textsuperscript{107} Imperial Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow also came to the Africans’ defense, at least in the sense that he vehemently attacked the German military’s handling of the situation.\textsuperscript{108} This was also the same time that there were tensions behind the scenes in the Imperial government as

\textsuperscript{103} Bley, \textit{South-West Africa under German Rule}, 155.

\textsuperscript{104} For more details on Bebel’s arguments see Drechsler, \textit{Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft}, 151.

\textsuperscript{105} Deutsch Südwestafrikanische Zeitung (3 May 1904).

\textsuperscript{106} Drechsler, \textit{Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft}, 151.

\textsuperscript{107} Dedering, “A Certain Rigorous Treatment,” 207.

\textsuperscript{108} Goldblatt, \textit{History of South West Africa}, 132.
the War Cabinet held an inordinate amount of sway over the Kaiser, who increasingly disavowed advice from the Chancellor.\footnote{For a full discussion of this see Isabel Hull, \textit{The Entourage of Wilhelm II}.}

When Von Trotha arrived in \textit{Südwestafrika} in June of 1904, he promised to annihilate the Herero with “rivers of blood and rivers of gold” – a strange play on the blood and treasure idiom.\footnote{As quoted in Bridgman, \textit{The Revolt of the Hereros}, 112.} Von Trotha’s language from the very beginning of his dealings in \textit{Südwestafrika} demonstrated the intent of extermination. He was not afraid to speak of the elimination of the Herero as the primary military objective. This attitude is best evidenced in his “extermination order” issued after the Battle of Waterberg:

I, the great general of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Herero nation. The Hereros are no longer German subjects. They have murdered and robbed, they have cut off the ears and noses and privy parts of wounded soldiers, and they are now too cowardly to fight. I say to the nation: Any person who delivers one of the Herero captains as a captive to a military post will receive 1,000 Marks. The one who hands over Samuel will receive 5,000 Marks. All Herero must leave the country. If they do not, I will force them with cannons to do so. Within the German frontier every Herero, with or without a rifle, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will not take over any more women and children, but I will either drive them back to your people or have them fired on. These are my words to the nation of the Hereros. The great General of the Mighty Emperor, von Trotha.\footnote{Wildried Westohal, \textit{Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien} (Berlin: Ullstein, 1987), 176. Also of note that there is little to no mention in the historical record of actual mutilations performed by Herero soldiers, indicating Von Trotha was mixing some fear mongering in his propaganda – possibly to justify some of the atrocities committed by his own troops.}

This letter demonstrated that Von Trotha had decided the fate for the Herero people.

Although there were a few who spoke out against the brutality imposed on Africans, the resounding tone in the German Government was that the military must be successful at all costs. The Imperial Colonial Office is full of records that called for the annihilation of the Herero as a
means of victory.\textsuperscript{112} Von Trotha understood what his superiors desired, and was ready to meet their expectations. The general’s use of \textit{Vernichtung} (annihilation) is thought by some scholars to infer only military victory – using it as a rhetorical tool as Leutwein had before, but even if that was the original intent, the result was a full-blown genocide.\textsuperscript{113} The bulk of Herero congregated together at the Waterberg Plateau served as a tactical advantage for Von Trotha, who used the situation to expedite his military goals.\textsuperscript{114} 

The majority of the Herero retreated together at Waterberg to better care for their few remaining cattle and to protect their families. It is estimated that there were between 50,000 and 80,000 Herero gathered at Waterberg.\textsuperscript{115} Von Trotha used this gathering point as a primary military target in an effort to deal with the \textit{Herero Frage} – the Herero Question. He organized a strategy of encirclement at the plateau to choke the Herero in a fashion that would result in the “total victory” for which the \textit{Reichstag} had called. The colonial environment allowed von Trotha to experiment with new tactics and technologies, including telegraphs, heliographs, 

\begin{itemize}
\item[Drechsler, \textit{Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft}, 145.]
\item[Dedering, “A Certain Rigorous Treatment,” 209.]
\item[It was only after the battle at Waterberg that the killing of Herero by the Germans became genocide. The victory Von Trotha achieved at this battle was decisive. Despite the calls for an armistice from the broken spirited Herero, Von Trotha continued his attack. Therefore, when the killing of the Herero became a one-sided event perpetuated by the Germans the colonial war transformed into a policy of genocide.
\item[One scholar that has contested the numbers of Herero lost in the battle or actually present on the plateau is Karla Poewe. Her argument was that there would not have been enough of a water supply to sustain such a large amount of people and the Herero numbers must be inflated. Those Herero who were allowed to escape into the sandveld were ultimately condemned to death due to the lack of food and water resources available. Poewe, \textit{The Namibian Herero}, 59-62.]
\end{itemize}
Maxim guns, and mobile artillery.\textsuperscript{116} There was a weak spot strategically placed in the German line from which the Herero’s only means of escape would be the forbidding Omakeke desert, the western part of the Kalahari. Governor Leutwein noticed this weakness in the lines when he reviewed the plans and suggested that Von Trotha should strengthen it. The general rebuked Leutwein and reminded him that he was no longer military commander in \textit{Südwestafrika}. Von Trotha proceeded to carry out his plan as it was, giving credence to arguments that he intended to force the bulk of Herero into the desert to die. One explanation is that Von Trotha planned to employ exposure in the desert as a means of destruction in order to save costly ammunition.\textsuperscript{117} This policy is evidenced also by the General calling for all the waterholes to be poisoned – a move not only detrimental to human life, but for the area’s diverse wildlife too.

Von Trotha ordered that any Africans who attempted to leave the desert were to be shot or bayoneted to death, including women and children. He further ordered that no prisoners be taken, in effect finalizing his extermination order. He also went out of his way to ensure that all of his subordinates adhered to his policies. When Major Ludwig von Estorff suggested that Von Trotha enter negotiations with the Herero in September 1904, the General became livid. Estorff recorded that “he [Von Trotha] wanted their total extermination.”\textsuperscript{118} Von Trotha went on to revoke the status of German subject from the Herero nation in October of 1904. Von Trotha wrote: “I believe that the [Herero] nation as such should be annihilated… My intimate knowledge of many central African tribes (Bantu and others) has everywhere convinced me of

\textsuperscript{116} Horne, \textit{German Atrocities}, 169.

\textsuperscript{117} Bley, \textit{South-West Africa under German Rule}, 163-64.

the necessity that the Negro does not respect treaties but only brute force...”\textsuperscript{119} He was ordered by the Kaiser in December 1904 to negotiate Herero surrender with missionaries as mediators, though Von Trotha and Schlieffen did what they could to ignore this policy.\textsuperscript{120} Regardless of the motivation behind Von Trotha’s actions, the severity of the German treatment of the Herero led other groups to question their relationship with all Germans, even missionaries.

During the German-Herero War, Hendrik Witbooi sent Nama men to function as guides and scouts for the German forces per their treaty. Once these men saw the brutal treatment of the Herero, they reported back to Witbooi. The Nama leader and others saw German attempts at extermination as a threat to their livelihood. They decided to no longer assist the Germans militarily, fearing they would be next in line to succumb to the colonial army’s wrath. The Nama Revolt ensued on 1 October 1904 once the tribesmen realized the Germans were not going to allow any Africans to possess political power after the destruction of their long-time rival neighbors. The Nama were concerned with the strong probability that the Germans were going to disarm them fully, much like what happened to other tribal nations in Südwestafrika, most recently the forced disarmament of the Bondelswarts in 1903. At the onset of the rebellion the Nama killed about 40 settlers. Witbooi’s men were unable to face German forces in a traditional battle because of their limited numbers, but counteracted their numerical disadvantage by instituting guerilla warfare. This tactic consisted of various raids and hit-and-run attacks where Nama troops would ambush a German column and snipe troops only to retreat before the Germans could retaliate effectively.


\textsuperscript{120} Hull, \textit{Absolute Destruction}, 64.
Von Trotha’s 15,000 men were unable to respond to the 1,000 or so Nama guerilla fighters. It was only a stroke of luck for the Germans that brought the downfall of Witbooi. In October 1905, the Nama chief led a raid on a German encampment near Fahlgras, just northeast of Keetmanshoop. During the attack, Witbooi was wounded by gunfire, his otherwise treatable wounds proving fatal due to the lack of medical care available. The Nama hero died a few days later. The death of Witbooi demoralized the remaining Witbooi Nama forces who surrendered to the Germans three months later.

The loss of Witbooi may have marked a shift in Nama resistance to Germans, but at the same time it promoted other groups to rise up against their colonial overlords. A band of Nama led by Jakob Morenga, who was half Herero and half Nama, supported disrupting German forces since they first entered the region. The Nama captain was one of the leaders of the 1903 Bondelswartz rebellion. Eleven men supported him originally but this number soon expanded to nearly four hundred as he mounted attacks against the Germans. Morenga and his men led a series of guerilla strikes on German units and outposts, and had surprisingly high success much like the initial Herero attacks. This series of losses, of course, upset Germans who were weary of colonial losses. The inability of Von Trotha to deal with either Witbooi or Morenga quickly brought calls for his replacement, consistent with earlier trends in Südwestafrica. The general was to be the last German warlord in Südwestafrica as an era of uneasy quiet settled in after the massacre of tens of thousands of Africans. Longtime Leutwein assistant Friedrich von

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121 Drechsler, Südwestafrica unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft, 186.
Lindequist soon replaced him.\textsuperscript{122} Von Trotha returned to Germany in November 1905. He was never rebuked for his activities in \textit{Südwestafrika} officially; in fact, he was promoted to “General of the Infantry” in 1910. Later in the 1933, National Socialists named a street after him in Munich.\textsuperscript{123} Africans in \textit{Südwestafrika} were subjected to a technological fury against which only an industrialized nation had a chance to survive. Only about 16,000 Herero, including the few who escaped with Samuel Maharero to Bechuanaland to the east, survived the war by the signing of the 20 December 1905 armistice ending the German-Herero War.\textsuperscript{124} Despite this number, many died after the battle or en route to the concentration camps set up by the German government.\textsuperscript{125}

Conflict with the Nama came to an official end in late 1906 with the Peace of Ukamas. This concord was only made possible by the return to sanity in the colony when Friedrich von Lindquist replaced the draconian Von Trotha. With the change of leadership came a change in policy. Lindquist issued forth a call for all remaining Herero and Nama to surrender. Part of the new governor’s proposal promised jobs and personal safety for those who willingly turned themselves in to authorities. Rhenish missionaries agreed to help Lindequist in hopes to stave off the death of their African flock. Missionary August Kuhlmann was able to encourage those

\textsuperscript{122} Friedrich von Lindequist, \textit{Deutsch-Ostafrika als Siedlungsgebiet für Europäer, unter Berücksichtigung Britisch-Ostafrikas und Nysassalands} (Münich: Duncker and Humblot, 1912). Lindequist’s experiences in Southwest Africa led him to promote the settlement of German East Africa as well, taking also into account other European models.

\textsuperscript{123} This street was renamed by the city council in 2006 to \textit{Hererostraße} in a gesture acknowledging guilt for colonial atrocities.

\textsuperscript{124} Bley, \textit{South-West Africa under German Rule}, 150.

\textsuperscript{125} Great Britain, \textit{Report on the Natives of South West Africa and their Treatment be Germany} (London: HMSO, August, 1918), 172.
around Otjimbingque to surrender. Although, Missionary Eduard Dannert noted when discussing the military leaders in SWA that “… one would rather let the Herero die and rot, than save them from the colony.”\textsuperscript{126} The state of war ended officially on 31 March 1907, though some smaller skirmishes occurred. Morenga’s raids were brought to an end when he was shot in September 1907 by British police forces on the border with the Cape Colony. Simon Kopper, who led a small band of raiders, was the only Nama leader to survive the war. His resistance ended when German officials agreed to pay him an annuity to end his attacks – a far cry from von Trotha’s approaches.

Peace was achieved in \textit{Südwestafrika} only after much bloodshed and violence, and for the Africans involved peace did not mean liberty. The years between the German-Herero War and the German loss of the colony were marked by an experiment in extreme authoritarianism – what would later be considered totalitarianism, with Germany having total control over the African body.\textsuperscript{127} Mechanisms were created to dictate the lives of Africans and to gear their existence to the benefit of the state and its economy. As such, it was during this time the state became the limiting factor in the daily existence of black-African lives. The various native insurrections allowed for the establishment of prisoner-of-war camps, which also functioned as labor camps to supply the basic labor needs of German industry in the region. The mortality rate in these camps...

\textsuperscript{126} Hull, \textit{Absolute Destruction}, 71. Hull also quoted Missions Inspector Gottlieb Haussleiter who tried to explain the actions of German soldiers who took time to shift their perspective of Herero as enemies to seeing them as noncombatants.

\textsuperscript{127} This is congruent with Hannah Arendt’s argument that the origins of totalitarianism are tied to imperialism in Africa. See Hannah Arendt, \textit{Totalitarianism} (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966), 201. This being said, I do not wish to overemphasize the continuity thesis associated with this and Hull’s work \textit{Absolute Destruction}, despite my earlier work with a similar argument prior to her 2005 publication.
was 60% or higher.\textsuperscript{128} Those Africans who were not placed in concentration camps still fell under the gaze of the German colonial government. During the war, those Herero who surrendered to German troops after Von Trotha’s dismissal were typically not killed, but were instead branded with the letters GH (\textit{Gefangene Herero}, caught Herero).\textsuperscript{129} After putting down remaining revolts, Lindequist required the registration of all African peoples in the colony. This regulation went on to require that all African males aged eight and over, even those of mixed descent, wear identification badges, which were basically metal collars, at all times.\textsuperscript{130} Another effort to clearly delineate between German and African was the banning of mixed-marriages in 1906. Up until the German-Herero War, inter-racial marriage was tolerated in the region as the ration of German men to women was disproportional, though the children of such unions were always classified as African. This system of government thereby established laws to ensure that Africans could not pass over into the category of “German.” This prevented any child from a mixed marriage from obtaining the benefits of German citizenship. Anyone deemed an African was also prohibited from owning property. Through all these mechanisms, the German Colonial authorities were able to exact complete control over African bodies as a means to further developed \textit{Südwestafrika} into a German \textit{Lebensraum}.

During the German-Herero War and subsequent Nama Rebellion, evangelists from the Rhenish Missionary Society found themselves in an awkward position of being mistrusted by both ethnic Germans and the Africans under the mission’s care. In the early months of the war, many missionaries stayed at their stations like August Kuhlmann. They did so to ensure the care

\textsuperscript{128} Silvester, \textit{Words Cannot Be Found}, 171.

\textsuperscript{129} Bridgman, \textit{The Revolt of the Hereros}, 131.

\textsuperscript{130} Bley, \textit{South-West Africa under German Rule}, 173.
of women and children who tended to seek shelter with them, though there was not much active combat between February and the beginning of June 1904. Samuel Maharero’s proclamation to only attack German soldiers and farmers was also fairly well distributed in early 1904, possibly reassuring missionaries they were not targets and they were included in the list of protected individuals. Once Von Trotha accelerated hostilities, most Herero fled to the Waterberg Plateau, thus abandoning mission stations. This exodus left the missionaries without a flock momentarily. During times of actual combat, there was not much that missionaries could do, other than quarter troops and supply provisions when requested by the military. After the initial round of altercations, missionaries began to address rumors in the settler-backed press that the conflict actually started from a mission station with the implication that the Rhenish Mission was supporting the insurrection. Criticism soon grew in Germany itself as Chancellor von Bülow accused the evangelists of betraying their nation by taking the side of the Herero. Missionary Kriele responded to these accusations with a letter writing campaign, defending the mission’s attempt to remain neutral and their responsibility as caregivers, while also ultimately promising respect for the government and its legitimacy according to the Two Kingdoms Doctrine.¹³¹

1.5. Peace of the Graveyard

The massive loss of African life led to a dearth of laborers in the colony. Colonial companies and farmers were left without workers immediately after the war that caused economic hardship. The German Colonial Office’s solution to this was to implement forced labor policies using prisoners-of-war. Africans were divvied out to the colonies’ farms and to companies in need of manual labor, such as mines and railroads. Prisoners were also compelled to build public works projects. All of their efforts went unpaid save for the meager food and

¹³¹ Menzel, Die Rheinische Mission, 241-249.
clothing provided to them.\textsuperscript{132} There were five main concentration camps established to control the African population in \textit{Südwestafrika}.\textsuperscript{133} The first three were at Windhoek, Okahandja and Swakopmund, with two others created a year later in 1905, after the Nama uprising, at Karibib and near Lüderitz Bay. The first camps were created with the understanding that missionaries were to be responsible for taking care of the accommodations, including paying for them.\textsuperscript{134} The camp at Lüderitz Bay was placed on Shark Island, a cold and inhospitable location. Shark Island proved to be the worst of the camps with only 193 of the 3,500 prisoners surviving the experience.\textsuperscript{135} Missionary Kuhlmann visited the island in July 1905, finding the conditions deplorable. He even tried to donate blankets to help those interned combat the cold nights, but his efforts were denied by the camp overseers. Missionary Thomas Fenschel pressed later for the prison camp to be closed in late 1906 after exposing the deplorable treatment of women and children. His request was approved by German military command, but control of the facility was shifted to the civilian government before it could be closed and it argued for its continued existence until the entire indigenous population was “subdued.”\textsuperscript{136} The atrocities found at these concentration camps are well documented in the British \textit{Report on the Natives of South West}

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\textsuperscript{132} Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 187.
\textsuperscript{133} Concentration camps were first used by the British to handle the excess fugitives from the Boer Wars after British generals practiced a scorched earth policy.
\textsuperscript{134} Hull, \textit{Absolute Destruction}, 73.
\textsuperscript{135} Silvester, \textit{Words Cannot be Found}, 173.
\textsuperscript{136} Hull, \textit{Absolute Destruction}, 86.
\end{flushright}
Africa and their Treatment by Germany (1918). The accounts recorded in this report were based on the testimony of Africans, missionaries, German officials, and other eyewitnesses. The living conditions and rations at these locations were tantamount to a death sentence. Rape was also common in the camps and there were instances of German troops taking young African women as concubines. The concentration camps were officially disbanded in 1908 because with the state of war in the colony ended there was no further justification for their existence.

The deportation of prisoners-of-war was also practiced in Südwestafrika. Once caught, many of the Nama warriors and a few Herero were deported to Cameroon or Togo in an effort to prevent any resurgence of resistance. Those sent from Südwestafrika to other colonies rarely returned home. There was one particular instance where 80 prisoners were sent to Togo and only eleven arrived healthy. Another example of the high mortality rate experienced in the deportation of prisoners was when only 44 arrived in Cameroon out of an original 119. The

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137 Great Britain, Report on the Natives of South West Africa and their Treatment by Germany (London: HMSO, August, 1918). This original report has since been republished and annotated. See Silvester, Words Cannot Be Found above. It should also be noted that this “Blue Book” was rescinded and copies collected and destroyed as part of a negotiation between the British government and German diplomats to encourage German settlers to stay in Southwest Africa and prop up the white European population there. This process is discussed in further detail in the next Chapter.

138 This work has been called propaganda by some earlier German historians, but has since been accepted as fact. The first vocal critic was former governor of East Africa, Heinrich Schnee. See, Heinrich Schnee, Afrika für Europa: die koloniale Schuldüge (Berlin: Sachers and Kuschel, 1924), 69-71.

139 Silvester, Words Cannot Be Found, 172-5.

140 Drechsler, Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft, 185.

141 Ibid., 186.
deportation of Africans demonstrated that the removal of Africans from their homeland effectively neutralized them as a threat.

An official German census in 1911 found that there were 15,130 Herero out of an original 80,000 and 9,781 Nama out of an original 20,000 in Südwestafrika.\textsuperscript{142} The losses were a direct result of the German-Herero War, the Nama Rebellion, and the concentration camp system. These numbers show that 80\% of the Herero population had perished along with approximately 50\% of the Nama. This rate is more striking when compared to the 60-65\% of the European Jewish population who perished during the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{143} The events that occurred and policies that developed in Germany’s colony give credence to Hannah Arendt’s comment that: “African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite.”\textsuperscript{144} Much debate on the seeds of totalitarianism has occurred in the past three decades, but the consensus is that similarities and tenuous links do not always necessitate continuity.

As discussed previously, a reserve system in Africa was going to be established to ensure that Africans would not lose all of their territory. In truth, the government would own this land. The enclosure of African living space separated them from Germans and also made it easier for officials to monitor and control the African population.\textsuperscript{145} The “Imperial Decree of 26 December

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 214.


\textsuperscript{144} Arendt, Totalitarianism, 268.

\textsuperscript{145} Stoecker, German Imperialism in Africa, 50.
1905 Pertaining to the Sequestration of Property of Natives in the Protectorate of South West Africa” dictated that all Herero land became crown land. This legislation marked the pinnacle of the divestment of African property rights. By 1907, all Africans in Südwestafrika were forbidden to own property or cattle, with the exception of the Ovambo in the north. This legislation simply legalized the existing situation. The loss of property served two ends for German colonists. First, it made more land available for Lebensraum. With Africans out of the way, more Germans could come in and start farms or other businesses. Secondly, now that the Herero and Nama were divested of property and cattle, German ranchers had less competition – thus making them more successful economically. After the genocide, traditional economic systems were destroyed and there was no turning back for Herero and Nama communities.

The dramatic difference in actions between Südwestafrika and other German colonies existed for several reasons. The primary reason for the extensive violence in Südwestafrika, which resulted in genocide, was that it was the only German colony which was seriously pursued as a living space. Lebensraum necessitated that room be made for Germans to live in the colony and establish their own property. In order for this to occur, Africans had to be dispossessed of their territorial rights and relocated or eliminated to make room for the incoming Germans. The displacement of Africans in Südwestafrika is evidenced by population data for the Germans, Herero, and Nama. The German settler population in 1903, before the German-Herero War, was 3,701.\textsuperscript{146} This number did not include the thousand or so German military personnel of the Schutztruppe, a force that grew to 15,000 during the war. The pre-war population of Africans in

\textsuperscript{146} Stoecker, \textit{German Imperialism in Africa}, 144.
Südwestafrika was an estimated 200,000.\textsuperscript{147} This approximation included the Herero (42%), Nama (10%), Damara (17%), Ovambo (30%), and Basters (1%). Violence occurred in other German colonial possessions – most notably the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1905-1907. The death tolls from combat were approximately 10,000 African rebels, “15 Europeans, 73 askari, and 316 auxiliaries,” but up to a quarter of a million individuals, or one-third total population, perished due to the famines associated with the event.\textsuperscript{148}

To better understand the significance of population changes in Südwestafrika, it is necessary to compare the colony with the other German possessions. Togo, Germany’s smallest African colony at 87,200 sq km, had an estimated 1.5 million Africans in 1904.\textsuperscript{149} This number dwarfed the 179 Germans living there. By 1914, there were no significant changes in these numbers. Cameroon’s nearly 500,000 sq km contained 3.5 million Africans and 612 Germans.\textsuperscript{150} Much like Togo, there were no noteworthy adjustments in the population statistics. German East Africa’s 995,000 sq km was 20% larger than Südwestafrika and was inhabited by approximately 7 million Africans.\textsuperscript{151} By 1914 the total European population in East Africa reached 5,336, with about 80% of these Germans.\textsuperscript{152} This created an African to German ratio of roughly 1273:1. This census data gives great insight into understanding German colonial

\textsuperscript{147} Deutsche Kolonial-Atlas mit Jahrbuch (Berlin: Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft, 1905), 11.


\textsuperscript{149} Deutsche Kolonial-Atlas mit Jahrbuch, 6.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{152} Stoecker, German Imperialism in Africa, 159.
policies. The data for 1913 showed a marked difference in the settler population in Southwest Africa that had quadrupled to 14,840.\textsuperscript{153} German increases in population contrasted the decline of African numbers starkly. The Herero had decreased 80% to 15,130 and the Nama 50% to 9,781.\textsuperscript{154} In addition to these losses, the Damara were reduced by approximately one-third due to the German inability to distinguish these non-combatants from the Herero and Nama.\textsuperscript{155} Overall these totals showed the African population in \textit{Südwestafrika} to be approximately 50,000, excluding the Ovambo to the north. Therefore, the ratio of African to German had decreased between 1903’s 40:1 ratio to 1913’s proportion of 2:1. The change in population proved that the region was being transformed into a German living space.

\subsection*{1.6. Conclusion}

Overall, Germany failed in its colonial activities. The colonies were supposed to make Germany more competitive with England and France. They were to also symbolize the prominence of Germany as the country rose in stature among its European neighbors.\textsuperscript{156} From the onset, Germany’s colonies were not economically viable.\textsuperscript{157} Investors were unwilling to devote the amount of capital necessary to properly industrialize the colonies to maximize profits from mining and other activities. Ultimately, the attempts to create a German living space also failed because Germany lost all of its colonies after the First World War. Germany’s most striking legacy in Africa was perpetrating the twentieth century’s first genocide. Therefore, it is

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 144.

\textsuperscript{154} Drechsler, \textit{Südwestafrika unter deutschen Kolonialherrschaft}, 214.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 214.

\textsuperscript{156} Förster, \textit{Bismarck, Europe, and Africa}, 109.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 106-7.
important to distinguish the behavior and actions of German colonial forces from that of other Germans in Southwest Africa, namely the missionaries.

Missionaries at the turn of the century dealt with the arduous task of converting different ethnic groups in a world different than Germany. They vacillated between being collaborators with the state, mediators for Africans, and critics of the colonial government. By 1906, the Lindequist administration tried to push missionaries outside of the scope of military and civilian government. Critics were found back in Germany as well. Chancellor Bülow considered missionaries traitors during the German-Herero War for not backing Germany fully.\textsuperscript{158} Therefore, for a time, Rhenish missionaries were alienated from both their countrymen and their religious charges, something they fought hard to remedy.

\textsuperscript{158} Bülow’s letter to the Rhenish Missionary Society was publicly printed in “Aus Inland und Ausland” \textit{Berliner Lokalanzeiger}, no. 308 (4 July 1904), 1.
2.1. Herman Gehlmann

In 1918, the South African government informed Hermann Gehlmann that he and his family were to be sent back to Germany, threatening to tear him away from his life’s work in Southwest Africa. Gehlmann was born in 1881 in Dornstedt, Germany (lower Saxony), and after completing seminary studies, he became an evangelist for the Rhenish Missionary Society. He was commissioned to Africa in 1909 and worked in Ovamboland until 1918 when the Union of South Africa government sought to expel him from the region. Gehlmann was targeted by the state due to his critical stance on how it treated Africans after the territorial takeover from Germany in the wake of the First World War. He and his family’s removal was political in nature as the Union of South Africa maneuvered to assert indirect rule in the northern parts of Southwest Africa by propping up “traditional” culture with leaders of its choosing. Missions Inspector Wilhelm Eich, who had recently been promoted to this position due to his predecessor’s exile, helped convince South African authorities to allow Gehlmann to remain in the region by promising the latter would leave Ovamboland and focus his efforts elsewhere, eventually moving with his wife Helena and their children to Tsumeb in the northernmost section of the Police Zone. From this new location, Gehlmann resumed evangelical work, but never forgot those from his former congregation. He took joy in ministering to the Ovambo laborers who came to work at the Otvai mines near Tsumeb. In 1920, he defied government wishes and returned to Ovamboland to visit former parishioners, now under the care of the Finnish

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Missionary Society, during a jubilee festival. Gehlmann was welcomed by his Ovambo friends, and he promised to visit as often as possible. He was able to return at least three more times before leaving Africa forever. 2

Gehlmann’s character continued to manifest itself even after he departed Africa upon retirement from the Rhenish Mission Society in 1920. Despite ending that aspect of his career, he did not leave the service of the Lutheran church, becoming the pastor of a church in Schönhausen, Germany. While there he joined the Confessing Church, which opposed German Christianity and its manipulation of Christian doctrine based on racial ideology. 3 He was also critical of National Socialism, speaking out against Adolf Hitler’s eugenics program in the 1930s unlike many evangelicals in Germany. At the end of the Second World War, Schönhausen was occupied by Soviet troops and Gehlmann took it upon himself to turn the parsonage into a soup kitchen for the community, often entertaining children with stories from his experiences in Africa. It was clear that part of his heart remained with the Ovambo. So beloved was he among his German congregation that the descendants of Otto von Bismarck entrusted the Gehlmann family to care for the former Chancellor’s two favorite chairs, which now reside in the Bismarck Museum of Schönhausen (founded in 1998) with the distinction of being the only two items that

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2 VEMA / RMG 1.684, “Herman Gehlmann (1881-1952).” Information on Gehlmann can be found in the Bibliothek und Schriftarchiv der Vereinte Evangelische Mission (hereafter VEMA) that holds the Archiv der Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG). This file includes correspondence, internment records, and Gehlmann’s official obituary.

3 See Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion of German Christianity and the Confessing Church. See also Doris Bergen, Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
never left Bismarck’s hometown despite two world wars and a communist state hostile to icons of Prussian militarism. Gehlmann became ill in 1952 and passed away later that year.

Hermann Gehlmann’s service as a missionary in Africa, and later as a pastor in Germany, demonstrated the work of a compassionate and dedicated individual who sought to spread Christianity while setting an example of humility and self-sacrifice. His career as a Rhenish missionary serves as an example of compassion and service often found among those who work overseas to convert others to Christianity. He was not a rabid nationalist, not an exploiter of African labor, nor a political agitator against the Union of South Africa. He was, however, quick to speak out in defense of his “children.” In this regard his is a positive example of the paternalism often found among Rhenish Mission Society workers, even if others were not as magnanimous as he. Gehlmann had a history of questioning German colonial policies regarding the treatment of Africans and he likewise maintained a critical stance towards the Union of South Africa. In no way was he a servant of the government; in fact, his paternalistic concern for the Ovambo people caused his expulsion from the region. Due to his position concerning the state, the new régime sought his subsequent expulsion and return to Germany. As mentioned earlier, Missions Inspector Eich, as well as representatives from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, intervened on Gehlmann’s behalf, allowing him to stay in the territory, though he was prohibited from working in Ovamboland any longer and all four Rhenish Mission stations there were ordered closed. This ordeal marked the end of Rhenish Mission activity in the north, demonstrating that South Africa was not afraid to assert its authority, but also knew where to compromise or pursue a more nuanced policy regarding the treatment of those in the captured

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It also further elucidates the complicated nexus of interactions in this region between church, government, Africans, and settlers of European descent.\footnote{The term “African” will be used to represent Herero, Nama, and Ovambo collectively, as “indigenous” or “native” is not entirely accurate to describe any of the aforementioned nations or individuals, also there were some white settlers by this point in time asserting their “African” identities as well, a trend that grew after the Second World War. In fact, groups other than the San (also known as “Bushmen”) only entered Southwest Africa between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, which overlapped with the Dutch entrance to South Africa in the seventeenth century by much different means – an argument sometimes abused by white racists to legitimate land claims in Southern Africa. Therefore, in the history of human migration and displacement, the terms indigenous or native are often times difficult to justify in light of the longue durée.}

This chapter examines the political realities faced by German missionaries in light of régime change in Southwest Africa. Their virtual hegemony in the realm of religious evangelization was broken as Germany lost the colony and a new power opened the door for other groups to enter the territory, namely Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and American Methodists. The Rhenish Mission Society had to overcome the challenges of existing under this new government, as well cope with disruptions caused by World War One and the Great Depression, and the need to redefine its role in Southwest Africa in general. How it navigated these political and economic waters impacted its mission work directly, at times jeopardizing evangelization endeavors entirely. By the 1930s, it was obvious to most within the organization that major internal changes had to occur to remain viable in the region. The interaction between missionaries and others in the province encouraged them to adopt several different roles, often with inherent contradictions. This chapter examines the events of the First World War as Germany lost the territory of Southwest Africa to the Union of South Africa and discusses the impact of this change on the missionaries, Africans, and ethnic German settlers within that region.
2.2. The First World War in Southwest Africa

In 1914 global realities changed with the outbreak of World War I.\(^6\) Death and destruction were not limited to the Western Front, but extended to many areas around the globe due to the colonial possessions of European powers and the ability to recruit from these holdings. In the case of Southwest Africa, the war made its mark in early 1915. German colonial forces faced invasion from the Union of South Africa, whose soldiers outnumbered the Germans by roughly twelve to one. Fighting in the region was not prolonged, lasting from January to July 1915, when colonial Governor Theodor Seitz surrendered to General Louis Botha. The advancement of these troops ended German colonial control, but this victory did not mean the outright removal German of citizens.

The call for war by the British, and subsequent order for the newly formed Union of South Africa to invade Southwest Africa was met with resistance from many Afrikaners in the

region. During their struggles against the British in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, Afrikaners received much support, both material and moral, from Germany and Germans in Southwest Africa; therefore, it was problematic for some Boers to turn their backs on those who had helped them a mere decade prior in this and other struggles. It was also possible that Afrikaners were sympathetic to Germans, due to the Low German heritage of these Dutch descendants. To further complicate this scenario, almost half of the military command in South Africa was Boer, including several high-ranking officials such as Prime Minister General Louis Botha and Supreme Commander General Christian Frederick Beyers. Both were hesitant to invade Southwest Africa after the outbreak of the First World War due to this prevailing pro-German stance of many Boers.

This sentiment was coupled with other discontent as well – so much so that a small civil war broke out in the region, known as the Maritz Rebellion. Boers in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal also supported this general uprising. The namesake of the rebellion was Captain Manie Maritz, who headed commando forces on the Southwest African border. He took

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7 Afrikaners are Southern Africans originating from seventeenth-century Dutch heritage, of which the Boers are a subset. They had a long-standing animosity with the British after being pushed out of what they considered their territory. For the purposes of this essay, the two terms are used interchangeably.

8 German support for the Boers in the Transvaal in 1896 led to the international “Kruger Telegram” scandal as Kaiser Wilhelm II congratulated S.J.P. Kruger on his defeat of British forces.


the initiative and sided with German Southwest Africa against the British. He was joined by Brigadier-General Beyers, former President of the Orange Free State Christiaan de Wet, and General Jan Kemp. Together they raised approximately 12,000 soldiers. Botha and Jan Christiaan Smuts, who were supported by 40,000 troops of their own, settled this conflict quickly. A compromise was made after the rebellion that handed Boers increased political representation in exchange for compliance with British rule, thus saving the Union. De Wet, as the main instigator of the Maritz Rebellion, promised to refrain from the public sphere.\textsuperscript{11} Also at that time, an anti-British contingent developed under the leadership of General J.B.M. Hertzog, who formed the Nationalist Party and took an anti-imperialist stance politically, arguing that they should not be expected to fight England’s war. Hertzog refused to join in the rebellion however and remained neutral throughout.

Once these internal conflicts were assuaged, the South African military invaded Southwest Africa. The Union army mustered just fewer than 70,000 troops - 43,000 of which were used in the push into Southwest Africa, giving them a sizeable advantage over the 3,500 German colonial forces and settler militia. The \textit{Schutztruppe} achieved a few initial victories to its credit, namely securing Walvis Bay, a British port enclave, taken to prevent naval reinforcements from Great Britain. This small accomplishment did not last for long, however, as South African forces pressed in with near impunity, taking town by town in their march north. The German capital of Southwest Africa was relocated twice to account for the encroachment of the South African military. German resistance in this theater of war, at least, was futile and General Botha proved victorious, forcing surrender at Khorab on 5 July 1915.

\textsuperscript{11} Marquand, \textit{The People and Policies of South Africa}, 15-30.
During the war, German civilians were temporarily interned in camps within the Union; this included missionaries, who were likewise removed from their homes. Almost all non-combatants were allowed to return to their residences after the surrender in July. In many ways life, then, returned to the status quo, except for civilian fixation on the news about the war in Europe. Germans in other parts of the region also came under the gaze of the South African government, though in the case of missionaries, their work was not directly hindered. The same was true for those Germans working in South Africa, as the Rhenish Mission Society had operations in the Cape Province as well. Evangelists Gustav Schmolke and Willy Strassberger were allowed to continue their work throughout the First World War.\(^\text{12}\) The fact that missionaries were permitted to keep ministering is consistent with prior British policies to let Dutch Reformed Church clergymen operate in the concentration camps during the Boer Wars.\(^\text{13}\)

The terms of the surrender in Southwest Africa were extremely gracious, especially in light of the horrors of war faced by compatriots in Europe. At the time, there was no guarantee of a German defeat in 1915, which may also explain why South Africa was so conservative in its treatment of those in Southwest Africa.\(^\text{14}\) German officers were allowed to keep their weapons though without ammunition, and lived under house arrest until terms of peace were achieved in the broader conflict. What the German defeat meant for other ethnic Germans in the colony –


\(^{14}\) The fighting in in German East Africa was much more fierce than Southwest Africa where approximately 14,000 German troops held 300,000 British forces at bay for the duration of the war. The fighting took several years and cost many more lives despite the fact that Smuts and German General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck were on friendly terms. See also Marquand, *The People and Policies of South Africa*, 22.
like settlers and missionaries – was nevertheless somewhat unclear at the time. Those ranchers and farmers who participated in the war as German militia were allowed to go back to their homesteads. More remarkably, Southwest Africa, even in the face of military defeat, operated for several months after the capitulation with German colonial officials still in place under South African observation, keeping most German laws and policies. Despite the initial retention of some German personnel, military rule was eventually established under General P.S. Beves. He was later replaced by a civil administrator, Hugho Gorges on 30 October 1915, though the region operated under the auspices of military dictatorship until 1 January 1921. By September 1919, Smuts took over as South African Prime Minister from Botha after the latter passed away. Smuts advocated for mandate statuses for what he considered “backward” areas such as Africa and Asia and expressed as much during his participation in the Versailles peace talks. Attributable to his influence Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles made Southwest Africa a class “C” mandate under the authority of the League of Nations, with South Africa becoming one of these mandated powers.\textsuperscript{15}

2.3. Church and State after 1915

The war’s outbreak appeared to have surprised the Rhenish Mission Society’s home operations as it was in the process of constructing a new headquarters in Barmen, Germany to account for the growth experienced before the onset of the First World War, with their groundbreaking set for 29 July 1914.\textsuperscript{16} So when hostilities broke out, missionaries reacted in a

\textsuperscript{15} Susan Pedersen, \textit{The Guardians: the League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). There were three types of mandates defined by the League of Nations after the First World War. The “C” designation indicated than an outside power would oversee the stability and edification of a territory to the benefit of its inhabitants.

similar fashion to other German citizens. The *Barmen Missionsblätter* from September 1914 reflected such thoughts:

> Now terrible things have occurred, which have been in the air for many years, and what one would have liked to believe could never have happened: the world of fire is here, a terrible, terrible world war, and yet no one can say what the end will be! Woe to those who bear the responsibility, such a terrible responsibility, before history and before God! Our rich German fatherland, that we are fond of as Christians with all the ardor of our hearts, has been forced in an unprecedented way to take up the sword in order to defend its honor and fight for its existence. Enemies on every side! … We have but a good and clear conscience before the World. This is not the place to speculate about the origins of the war. We could only repeat what we all know and what we have read consistently in all the newspapers these days hundredfold. But we must say that even England, the proud, free, Protestant England, is in alliance with murderous Serbia, with Russian despotism and barbarism, with atheistic France and Belgium (think of the Congo abomination!). We feel as Christians and as a people with a mission that a historical monstrosity has revealed a shameful inner lie, one we would not have thought possible. The time has come to recognize the shame of the English!\(^{17}\)

This passage demonstrated a common stance found in Germany. Of note was the sense of betrayal concerning the British entry into the war. What is most important is the perception of other European nations in relation to Germany, with Serbia and Russia seen as the main instigators and the French and Belgians as agitators.\(^{18}\) The letter showed an understanding of the pre-war tension, and disbelief that the world was set aflame. For the Rhenish Mission, in particular, the circular also indicated that it believed Germany was taking the sword in accordance with God’s will. Despite the nationalistic fervor, the mission’s letter goes on to make exceptions for English missionaries in the field in light of the complications of war – due

\(^{17}\) *Barmen Missionsblätter*, September 1914.

\(^{18}\) The historiography for the First World War is quite diverse and at times has been controversial – especially when looking at the *Sonderweg* thesis. The most recent work to reevaluate the outbreak of the war (and spread the blame around) is Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers*. 

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to such challenges, they all were obligated even more so to encourage the building of God’s Kingdom around the world.19

Missionaries from the Rhenish Mission Society, not unlike Germans in general, saw the war in the early months as Germany’s moral duty. There was a sense of national pride in the early part of the First World War from other Protestant organizations too as evidenced in a collective letter drafted by a group of church leaders entitled “To the Evangelical Christians Abroad”:

We realize that our world is in arms and it is clear that we have to defend our existence, our individuality, our culture and our honor. No considerations hold back our enemies … by participating in our destruction they gain an economic advantage or an increase in power by tearing away a piece of our motherland, our colonial possessions, or our trade. We have to rely on the holy, righteous God against this raging of the nations. Just because this war has done us violence and is forced upon our people, He meets us as a united people, in which the differences of groups, parties and denominations are gone. We are all unanimously and joyfully prepared to employ our last for our country and our freedom, not shying from struggle and death, looking up to God in holy enthusiasm.20

Despite this letter, not all German missionaries were as optimistic about the English or the war. Johannes Spiecker, Director of the Rhenish Mission Society from 1908-1918, remained critical of England and maintained his belief in Germany’s righteousness in the war, emphasizing the fact that German nationalism was artificially heightened only due to the outbreak of conflict. In a response to a public letter issued by forty-two English Church leaders that condemned Germans, Spiecker responded to their allegations of “militarism”:

We Germans certainly have a good conscience before the world in this war and because we are fighting for a just cause, have the solid confidence that God, as before, will give us the victory and not let the evil plan of our enemies to destroy

19 *Barmen Missionsblätter*, September 1914.

20 *Berichte der Rheinischen Mission*, 1914, 216.
our country and people succeed. Yes, we hope against hope that internally, a newly strengthened German people will emerge from this murderous war, and a beautiful and blessed future arises.\textsuperscript{21}

Spiecker later lamented the war’s impact on mission work in general, believing that evangelical unity fostered at the World Mission Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 was now destroyed:

\begin{quote}
All of these expectations that we built on a common work of evangelical Christianity are broken indefinitely due to the outbreak of the war. The evangelical mission has suffered a great defeat at the cost of all humanity.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

The tone of this letter may have been hyperbolic, but it revealed that there were clear setbacks to missions work abroad.

War itself took a toll on the personnel of the Rhenish Mission Society as potential missionaries were taken away from the field. Sixty-five students were enrolled in seminary at the beginning of the war; most of them went into service for the war effort – some as military chaplains, others as combatants. During the First World War, there were approximately 1,000 Protestant chaplains, with some Lutheran groups recording up to ten percent of their pastors joining the effort.\textsuperscript{23} This number does not include one hundred and two sons of Rhenish missionaries who also entered the war, undoubtedly some of whom would have followed in their fathers’ footsteps. The war also had a definitive impact on the medical missions carried out in Southwest Africa as forty-six of the medical students who were part of the medical mission

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\textsuperscript{21} Berichte der Rheinischen Mission, 1915, 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Berichte der Rheinischen Mission, 1916, 2.
\textsuperscript{23} Hartman Lehmann, “In the Service of Two Kings,” The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century, ed. Doris Bergen (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 132.
\end{flushright}
service training died in the war.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, much as a generation was lost to Europe in general, the reaper’s scythe also took away part of the next generation of workers in the mission field.

As the conflict drew closer to an end, it became clearer that Germany would not be in a position to keep colonies. The Armistice of November 1918 brought repatriation agreements into play and the South African government sent 4,941 Germans back to their ethnic homeland.\textsuperscript{25} A document entitled “Circular Letter 1 April 1919 from the Secretary of the Protectorate to all Magistrates, Re: Repatriation of Enemy Subjects” listed who should be removed based upon four general provisions in the ceasefire: 1) those guilty of breaking liquor laws; 2) those guilty of ill-treatment of black servants; 3) those who demonstrated “bad character”; and, 4) those who constantly exhibited hostility towards British rule.\textsuperscript{26} During the implementation of these rules, some tension arose between the new administration and the German government, prompting negotiations on how to handle those Germans who remained in Southwest Africa (as discussed later in the section on citizenship). With the formation of the League of Nations mandate under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the region came under the formal protection and governance of the Union of South Africa in October 1920.

As with German nationals, the lives of Rhenish Mission workers were impacted by the régime change in Southwest Africa. For all practical purposes, the South African government

\textsuperscript{24} Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 258.

\textsuperscript{25} Walther, \textit{Creating Germans Abroad}, 113.

\textsuperscript{26} National Archives Namibian, Windhoek (NAN), General file marked “Matters relating to Missionaries 1919-”; as quoted in Carl-J Hellberg, \textit{Mission, Colonialism, and Liberation: the Lutheran Church in Namibia, 1840-1966} (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997), 152; Walther, \textit{Creating Germans Abroad}, 111 ff; Archives of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa, KAB 1/CT, 15/8, 439/14, “Enemy Subjects: Internment of Austrian and German reservists.” This file also includes a copy of Circular 42 of 1915 which defines “enemy subjects” as including foreign missionaries.
wanted Southwest Africa to be a white colony, seeking to annex it as the fifth province of the Union of South Africa.\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, it encouraged many German settlers to remain in the region as long as they were deemed economically viable for the territory. The impact of this policy on missionaries played out a bit differently, however. The South African government polled the remaining African population in Southwest Africa, asking if they wanted to allow Rhenish Missionaries to stay in the region. A majority opted to keep missionaries in Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{28} Most simply put, missionaries, despite often siding with government authorities, were the only avenue of kindness and support during and after the genocidal onslaught wrought by von Trotha in 1904. There was, however, a group of Ovaherero based near Windhoek who petitioned for missionary removal, believing the evangelists to be part of the reason for their downfall in conjunction with an overall anti-European sentiment.\textsuperscript{29} The explanation for this decision is significant, especially in light of the criticism levied against the Rhenish Mission Society by later historians who argued that missionaries operated as direct agents of colonial oppression.\textsuperscript{30} A more complex explanation as to why some wanted missionaries to stay in the territory and others

\textsuperscript{27} See Peter Katjavivi, \textit{Church and Liberation in Namibia} (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 12ff. See also, Walther, \textit{Creating Germans Abroad}, 112.

\textsuperscript{28} Hellberg, \textit{Mission, Colonialism, and Liberation}, 153. Hellberg goes into more details on the Union of South Africa’s poll to keep missionaries in Southwest Africa.

\textsuperscript{29} See opening vignette for Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{30} See Jan-Bart Gewald, “\textit{We thought We would be Free}”: \textit{Socio-Cultural Aspects of Herero History in Namibia, 1915-1940} (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2000); Kaire Mbuende, \textit{Namibia, the Broken Shield: Anatomy of Imperialism and Revolution} (Malmö, Sweden: Liber, 1986). Many historians of Namibia are critical of the role missionaries played in the development of Southwest Africa, often considering them agents of colonialism. One of the most extreme examples comes from Marxist historian Kaire Mbuende, who argues that the Rhenish Missionary Society as an institution was a conscious and active participant in the capitalistic exploitation of Africans in Southwest Africa. Other critics of missionaries often served in the political struggle for Namibian independence prior to their careers as historians.
did not require an analysis of African desires for intercessors between themselves and their new colonial masters as well as maintaining access to Western education.

Union of South Africa authorities decided to make a gesture to those Africans wishing to expel missionaries and removed four evangelists from the region in addition to its political and military purges. Three of these were from the Rhenish Mission Society and the other was a Catholic priest working in the north.\textsuperscript{31} The aforementioned poll to remove missionaries named Heinrich Vedder as one of those the Ovaherero wanted to see removed most. To this end, Vedder was expelled from the region on charges of working against the South African government. He was accused of hiding documents for German Colonial Governor Seitz during the war, though the missionary denied these accusations. Johannes Olpp, Jr. was removed, in part, because he was the Inspector General of the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa. The official reasoning for his ejection was due to an incident over German disarmament efforts among a group of Rehoboth Basters in May 1915, during which missionary Adolf Blecher assisted German forces in confiscating firearms to prevent Africans from joining South African forces. Olpp defended Blecher’s actions and chastised the Basters for “rebellion against authority.” Overall, the situation seemed to indicate Olpp’s firm allegiance to the German government, though his actions were not inconsistent with doctrines calling for obedience to the state. Missionary Johannes “Hans” Hansenkamp was expelled because he was critical of South African governmental policies after it assumed control of Southwest Africa. He returned to Germany in 1920 and served as a pastor until 1932 in Neudorf (Duisburg). The fourth missionary removed was a Roman Catholic priest who entered the region from Angola.\textsuperscript{32} His removal was not for

\textsuperscript{31} NAN ADM 260, 000, “Repatriation of German Missionaries.”

\textsuperscript{32} Hellberg, \textit{Mission, Colonialism, and Liberation}, 155.
any subversive reasons; apparently he had entered the territory illegally without proper
documentation. Removing him also helped prevent any possible political agitation among the
Ovambo, though there is no evidence that was ever part of his intent. It could be argued that
these three Rhenish Mission Society officials were removed initially to serve as a warning for
others that if they did not fall in line with South African policies, they would be forced to leave
the territory. Whether intentional or not, the message was clear to Rhenish Mission Society
workers that non-cooperation with the state would destroy the whole of their ministry.

One instance where a missionary was slated for expulsion but acquired a reprieve was the
aforementioned case of Hermann Gehlmann. In the northern portion of Southwest Africa, the
Rhenish Mission Society had four stations among the Ovambo. Gehlmann was one of the key
missionaries in this territory. He was critical of the South African administration and their plans
to institute a region-wide “no whites” reservation for the Ovambo nation in conjunction with a
policy of indirect rule. Gehlmann realized that the removal of whites, especially from mission
stations, would destroy evangelical work in the region. His actions provoked the ire of the
newly instated mandate power and it ordered Gehlmann exiled from Southwest Africa. Before
the sentence could be enforced, Wilhelm Eich – the new Missions Inspector replacing the
banished Olpp – convinced government officials to allow Gehlmann to stay if he relocated closer
to Windhoek.

South African officials knew that asserting rigid control in the northern regions of
Southwest Africa would be difficult due to the numerically superior Ovambo population of

\[33\] For more on this situation, see the section on education later. Evidence demonstrates
that the Union of South Africa was more concerned with western education among the Ovambo
than the spread of Christianity.
approximately 100,000. The Ovambo were fairly well organized as a nation and operated fluidly along the Angolan border. They were accustomed to a high level of autonomy under German rule, so it was plausible that they would not have responded well if the new régime were too domineering. Therefore, to limit potential problems in the north, the Union government decided it would be easiest to force German missionaries out of the region on fears they might incite the Ovambo to rise against the new territorial masters. As a consequence of this situation, the Rhenish Mission Society was forced to abandon activity in Ovamboland. In addition to Gehlmann, missionaries Albert Hochstrate at Namakunde, August Wulfhorst at Omupanda, and Heinrich Welsch at Omateembe were also removed from their respective stations. One of the unfortunate notes in this exchange was that Missionary Welsch died only a couple of years after being removed from his post; nonetheless he was allowed to minister among members of the Ovambo nation operating as migrant workers in the rest of Southwest Africa. The former administrative regions were transferred from the Rhenish Mission over to the Finnish Missionary Society, a process initiated in 1920 and finalized on 8 October 1923. This expulsion of missionaries marked the end of Rhenish Mission Society hegemony in the former German colony; as a corollary to South African control new groups were allowed to proselytize in the region.

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35 Menzel, *Die Rheinische Mission*, 272. The Finnish Missionary Society was later allowed into Ovamboland under strict regulations. See the section on education in Chapter Three for a discussion of the limitations imposed.

36 This event will be mentioned again later in this chapter and discussed in Chapter Four in regards to conversion.
From the outset of South African control of Southwest Africa, the colonial government made clear that it expected loyalty to the state from any German remaining behind. This message was obvious to missionaries in particular once Vedder, Olpp, and Hansenkamp were expelled, though the Rhenish Mission did not hesitate to appeal the expulsions. It pressed to have its members reinstated, pledging to show the same level of loyalty to the new government as was shown to Germany. Representatives pled with South African officials for the return of their exiled brethren, arguing that though the missionaries were German citizens, their primary goal and function was the spread of Christianity among African peoples. Promises were made that mission workers would not interfere with the government in accordance with the Two Kingdoms doctrine – engrained in Lutheranism since Martin Luther himself took the side of nobles during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1524 – 1525 and later codified in a sermon from 1528.37

The Two Kingdoms doctrine is essential when examining the role of Rhenish Mission workers because it helps explain their stance on church and state relations. The doctrine is rooted in a passage from the Book of Romans that states there is a spiritual kingdom ruled by God, and a temporal kingdom here on earth ruled by humans who may or may not be Christians themselves, but play a role in God’s overall design.38 Due to this dichotomy, the church believed it best to focus on the spiritual realm and advocated that its members avoid meddling in the political one. In fact, on several occasions, Rhenish Mission Society general meetings reinforced the limits of political roles that missionaries and officials could play, though there were often


38 See Romans, Chapter 8; J. Lukas De Vries, *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978), 56 ff. De Vries details the role the Two Kingdoms doctrine played within the Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa. His is an authoritative perspective due to his role as Präses of one of the independent churches that derived from the mission church.
gaps between these ideals and reality. For the most part however, church leaders stayed within their sphere of influence during the first half of the twentieth century.  

The role of the Two Kingdoms doctrine was important from early on in German mission activity in Africa. In a short tract written in 1885, August Wilhelm Schreiber described the position of missionaries in light of colonialism. The future director of the Deutsche Evangelische Missionshilfe stated:

So this is our basic understanding: colonialism has very different starting points and objectives than missions. Because the mission rests on the idea that Christianity is to be the religion of all mankind, to preach to all nations in accord with the command of Christ, and so has the sole purpose and goal to spread the rule of Him who said: ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’ In contrast, colonization is something quite different, namely the spread of Germany or any other state’s power and trade.

This passage shows that, at least on the theoretical level, there should be some division between missions and the colonial state. A reason for this separation was that missionaries saw themselves as protectors against colonial abuses and dangers from Western excesses like alcohol. The early intent was to “respect the rights of natives and ensure their just and equitable treatment” in the face of German colonization.

As far as the relationship between the Union of South Africa and the Rhenish Mission Society, the missionaries were more than willing to avoid conflict with the state to ensure the

39 The Two Kingdoms doctrine received major revisions in the 1960s due to the fact that human rights violations in South and Southwest Africa proved to hinder the spiritual work of the Rhenish Missionary Society church through forced segregation and other restrictions, a process that will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

40 August Wilhelm Schreiber, Mission und Kolonisation (Kiel: Schmidt, 1885), 16.

41 Schreiber, Mission und Kolonisation, 18.

42 Berichte der Rheinische Mission, 1885, 215.
continued existence of their evangelical work. On 3 September 1920, the head of the Rhenish Mission in Germany issued a letter calling for workers in Southwest Africa to adjust to their new political realities, in accordance with their sacred duty to obey the government. In light of this letter, Eich petitioned Prime Minister Smuts stating that “the Rhenish missionaries will perform their missionary work with equal loyalty to the new government as the previous one.” After this exchange, the exiled missionaries were allowed to return to the region in February 1921, though it was January of the next year before Olpp and Vedder were able to return. By keeping the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa, the South African government was able to use them to provide for the care and welfare of the African population, especially in the realms of education and medicine, thus reducing the state’s financial burdens.

Other factors also helped ensure that the Rhenish Mission Society was allowed to operate in Southwest Africa. Of note is the role the Dutch Reformed Church played in petitioning for the return of Olpp, Vedder, and others. This sister organization in South Africa worked closely with the Rhenish Mission Society in the overarching mission of evangelism in Southern Africa as a whole. Ties between the two in Africa were fairly strong; one of the leading members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was even the son of a former Rhenish Mission Society missionary. In addition to that, there were cases of Dutch Reformed Members attending Rhenish

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Mission seminaries for pastoral training. Their cooperation continued through the Second World War and into the 1960s, but eventually eroded over the issue of racial segregation.44

2.4. The Question of German Citizenship under South African Rule

Once the issue of which ethnic Germans – including missionaries – were allowed to stay in the colony, the conversation turned to what legal and political status they would have as residents. It was clear that Smuts wanted to increase the white population in the region, but beyond that the situation became more complicated. A subsequent struggle that ensued in the first years of mandate control by the Union of South Africa was that of ensuring the loyalty of Germans remaining in the territory. German nationals were reluctant to give up their national identity and expected to maintain political agency. Smuts saw all German settlers who remained as individuals without citizenship. He wanted the German-speaking minority to seek British citizenship through South Africa. This process would have strengthened the argument that South Africa be allowed to annex the territory outright instead of managing it as a mandate. Nicolaas Jacobus de Wet, Minister of Justice under the Smuts government, developed an “automatic” citizenship plan that would have provided blanket citizenship to all Germans remaining in Southwest Africa. Not everyone was pleased with this proposal and it was ultimately rejected.

44 Menzel, Die Rheinische Mission, 273. A small note on the “ecumenical” nature of missions in Southwest Africa: The RMS entered the region at the behest and under the direction of the LMS (See Chapter One). At that time there was a general ecumenical spirit in the mission field among most Protestant European groups. By the early twentieth century however, there was only an ecumenical spirit in the overarching purpose of Christian missions. Most mission groups became fairly territorial once they established a large enough presence in a particular region. This territorialism was clearly present among the Rhenish Missionary Society members in Southwest Africa when other groups attempted to compete for attention among Africans in the region (See ‘Denominational Incursion’ in Chapter Three). Also of note is the Dutch Reformed Church’s full support for the segregationist policy that became known as apartheid. This backing of state policy exacerbated differences between religious sects in the region, especially in the 1950s and 1960s as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.
The issue was eventually put to rest by 1923 when South African representatives and the German Colonial Office under Johannes Gerstmeyer negotiated an agreement allowing Germans to stay in Southwest Africa even if they refused to become British nationals – the compromise being that any who retained their German citizenship would be barred from political activity. One of the main stipulations of this agreement was that German be retained as an official language in the territory. For some 5,500 ethnic Germans this compromise was sufficient – only about 300 individuals filed objections to naturalization. Those Germans who rejected citizenship created the Verein der Reichsdeutschen (VdR) in 1935 to compensate for their lack of political agency.

The issue raised great debate in both the German and English speaking newspapers in the region.

The situation concerned some missionaries who were reluctant to give up their German citizenship, though the home office for the Rhenish Mission Society soon made clear that missions work should trump nationalism. Many evangelists refused to give up their German citizenship, though there were differing opinions on why to do so, demonstrating that missionaries were not a monolithic entity. Missionary Friedrich Rust commented on the significance of his citizenship in relation to his role as an evangelist, arguing that both aspects were important to his identity, and he would ultimately go back to Germany if forced to become an English subject. In January 1919, soon after Rust voiced his concerns on compulsory partition into the British Empire, senior missionary Johannes Olpp issued a letter asking

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45 NAN KGL 0002, “Duitse Taalregte.” [German Language Rights]; Walther, Creating Germans Abroad, 111.


47 Walther, Creating Germans Abroad, 123.

48 Hellberg, Mission, Colonialism, and Liberation, 152-3.
missionaries to disregard their nationality in an effort to further the “Kingdom of God”. Rust refuted this stance, stating that he believed being born German a God-given gift, though he acknowledged and cited the significance of Romans 13:1 commanding Christians to be obedient to the state. The relationship between missionaries and the government was thus problematic under South African occupation, but became even more so during the mandate period thanks to the added complication that most missionaries were German nationals. In Rust’s case, he later became a naturalized citizen, realizing that it would help secure his position in Southwest Africa to ensure the continuance of his evangelical efforts.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Rhenish Mission Society missionaries also started to serve as pastors for congregations of German settlers. During the colonial period, the missionaries struggled with a dual alliance – torn between their calling to minister to Africans and their patriotism. The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod for Southwest Africa (Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Synode) was formed in 1926 to provide a church structure for German settlers in Southwest Africa that was linked to church organization in Germany and later came under the influence of the Nazi régime. The Synod originally brought in pastors from Germany, but found it difficult to maintain these posts, soon forcing missionaries to fill the positions, thus further complicating the role of missionaries and creating another layer in their respective roles and identities. As pastors, missionaries had to serve as spiritual leaders for a group that tended to have anti-African political and economic goals. This position contradicted the initial role of missionaries as protectors and educators for the Herero, Nama, and other Africans in the region – often forcing missionaries to choose sides when conflicts arose between the state, ethnic German

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49 The idea of national origin as “God given” is discussed in full detail in Chapter Five.

50 VEMA RMG 1.669a, 4-6.
settlers, and their African congregations. At times, Rhenish Mission Society representatives took the most conservative route and adhered to the wishes of the South African government for fear of expulsion as troublemakers. This practice tended to create a rift between missionaries and their converts, as the latter perceived the German missionaries to be on the side of the oppressive state rather than looking out for their best interests, further complicating the evangelical work of the missionaries.  

Another issue the South African government addressed in conjunction with this discussion of citizenship was the controversy over the British *Blue Book* released in 1918 that portrayed the German colonial administration as destructive and violent. The British issued this work as a means to win over the indigenous population, as South African officials were concerned about hostility from them, but also wanted to look morally superior to Germany. Thus, the publication served as a tool to help justify divesting Germany of its colonies. But after the armistice, many German settlers previously banished from Southwest Africa were encouraged to return by the South African government which had lost interest in depicting them as “brutal and vicious.” The *Blue Book* was officially revoked on 29 July 1926 and it was

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51 The issue of citizenship was evidently not fully settled; there was a controversy in 1926 when one of the missionaries stationed in Swakopmund on the coast of Southwest Africa issued a pamphlet designed to be given to new German immigrants stating: “Beware racial dishonor. You have Germanic blood in your veins… Remember that you are Christian! Remember that you are White! Remember that you are German!” This incident will be discussed in full in Chapter Five.
ordered for all copies to be collected and destroyed, though they were never completely eradicated.\(^{52}\)

### 2.5. Financial Troubles for the Rhenish Mission

New geopolitical realities also ushered in financial struggles for evangelical operations in Southwest Africa. The outbreak of the First World War and rapid capitulation of German forces in Southwest Africa cut Rhenish missionaries in the region off from direct funding from Barmen. To maintain its operations the Rhenish Mission had to rely on income from farms, support from international and ecumenical Protestant organizations, as well as loans from the Union of South Africa. In addition to these issues, the Rhenish Mission Society had to institute a series of austerity measures that included: cutting some insurance programs, closing seminaries, and shutting down special schools. After the war and the troubled 1920s, the Rhenish Mission Society also had to deal with the impact of the Great Depression. Through all of these difficulties, it was able to stay afloat through donations, diverse monetary holdings, loans, and the selling of church property – one way or another the annual budgets ended up avoiding bankruptcy.

Historically, the Rhenish Mission stations in Southwest Africa tried to be as self-reliant as possible. This attempt was one of the reasons that the *Missions Handelsgesellschaft* was created in the 1890s. When there were shortfalls from this business or in the production on mission farms, missionaries in Southwest Africa had to rely on outside donations to make ends

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meet – a practice fairly universal among mission groups. Before and after the First World War, the Rhenish Mission Society was accustomed to receiving donations from generous individuals, often in the form of anonymous contributions. These would come in at various amounts from a few to thousands of marks, sometimes arriving with a note saying, “A debtor wants to help erase debts.”

Actions like these reflect the altruism that underlies most evangelical work; each member is expected to give (in whatever form) according to what he or she has been blessed with in his or her own lives. After the war broke out, donations continued for the Rhenish Mission Society, with notes stating simply “missionary work is thanks for Golgotha.”

Monetary aid was also offered by English mission circles within the first few months of the war. The Rhenish Mission Society, however, summarily rejected these donations owing to the disappointment and frustration that England had joined the war against Germany.

Missionary Eduard Kriele, Missions Inspector of the Rhenish Mission Society at the outbreak of the war, noted in the *Barmen Mission Journal* that: “Our strong sense of bitter injustice over what England has done to our country makes us all recognize, to the letter itself, that we should be taken aback by faithful remembrance of the fact that it is impossible to take even one penny from the English side.”

Such anti-English sentiment eventually died down as the bruised nationalism of Rhenish officials healed in the face of realities that their overseas missions would be shut down without financial help. Nonetheless, despite spurning initial offers of aid, the

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53 *Berichte der Rheinischen Mission*, 1907, 151. The debtor here refers to someone in debt to Christ for the gift of salvation, and the debt can be assumed to mean the operational costs of evangelization.

54 *Berichte der Rheinischen Mission*, 1937, 184. According to the New Testament, Golgotha, also known as Calvary, was the hill on which Jesus was crucified per the New Testament.

55 *Barmer Missionsblätter*, 1914, 80.
Society accepted donations from a variety of donors. Due to the diverse nature of their mission operations, funds came in the form of marks, guilders, pounds sterling, and even Chinese currency. The assortment of money and geographic locations of Rhenish operations helped them to also weather the storm of hyperinflation better than would have been possible if their financial activity had been limited to the Weimar economy which in 1923 witnessed nearly one trillion percent inflation.

It should not be assumed that donations alone were able to keep Rhenish Mission Society activities afloat. It had to implement several austerity measures to ensure that budgets were balanced and staff provided for sufficiently. Due to the nature of the war in regards to missionary mobility, one of the first austerity measures employed by the Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa was reducing the number of mission festivals held each year. These gatherings were important in congregating Africans together as potential converts, providing an opportunity for evangelization. Budget cuts hindered the religious work of the Rhenish Mission Society, but the corollary to the decline in festivals was decreased need to feed the large numbers of people who attended said gatherings. By 1917, however, the mission was able to begin reintroducing these events as well as to rehire the thirty-eight native pastors used to help spread Christianity during these meetings.

Another austerity measure was the closing of educational resources in Southwest Africa. The “Assistants Seminary” opened by Heinrich Vedder near Gaub in 1911 was one of the first programs closed down after the start of the war. This school was important in the religious education of indigenous pastors and possibly one of the important stepping-stones towards


ordination of African pastors.\footnote{VEMA 2.628, 24-25. I say this about ordination with some reservation because Vedder was the missionary in charge of the school and he made evident his belief that Africans were not yet ready to be ordained or climb too high within the church hierarchy, something he maintained well into the 1950s. One of the early calls for an independent African church came from Missionary Spellmeyer in September 1934. This topic is discussed at length in following chapters.} Another educational resource that was defunded, reluctantly, was a school for “half white children” at Okahandja in conjunction with the Augustineum. This school served as an orphanage for children born of mixed relationships.\footnote{VEMA 2.690, 180-187. Orphanages were one of the concerns of the Missionary Conference in 1926.} It was important because these children were often outcasts in society, lacking the cohesion of the Rehoboth Basters, and thus needed care as wards of the church. The Rhenish Mission hoped to recruit and train teachers from this group, better equipping it to evangelize the rest of Southwest Africa through African representatives.\footnote{\textit{Ein Jahresbericht der Rheinischen Mission}, vol. 91 (1920), 17.}

One of the other important cuts made was one that had a direct impact on the well-being of the black population in Southwest Africa. The Rhenish Mission Society was forced to cut some of its medical services made available through its missions due to the restrictions brought on by the war. In this particular case, however, the cut was less about monetary hardship than the reality that personnel capable of continuing the operation were caught up in the war itself. As mentioned earlier, many of those training for medical missions work joined the war effort, some of them perishing within the first months of the conflict.\footnote{\textit{Ein Jahresbericht der Rheinischen Mission}, vol. 91 (1920), 20.} For most of the Africans in Southwest Africa, this loss was noticeable as their access to western medicine was directly linked to the mission, not the state.
Despite the combination of donations and cuts, the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa had to rely further on loans from the state to ensure balanced budgets. The Union of South Africa made it a policy to allow religious groups to borrow money during the war in an effort to keep church life and the social services they provided uninterrupted if possible. The government acted not merely to protect success for the African population, but also to serve whites in Southern Africa as well. The Rhenish Mission Society borrowed money from the government, even mortgaging some of their land as security against the debt. Concerns over these debts applied to other mission organizations as well and during the Annual General Meeting in June 1917, the Westphalian General Superintendent proposed a plan to spread the negative balances among the represented mission groups and organizations in an effort to pay them off even before the war’s end. In many ways, this plan was too optimistic, and the mission, not unlike other institutions, carried its debts beyond the war. The Rhenish Mission overall in Southern Africa had taken on a total debt of 15,000 pounds sterling by the time Southwest Africa was turned over to South Africa as a mandate. This debt was settled after 1921 by selling some mission farms, transferring some property directly to the new government, and by promising to make the area around Otkimbingue a native reserve – a process completed by 1924. The Rhenish Mission Society was compelled to sell off even more property during


63 *Ein Jahresbericht der Rheinischen Mission*, vol. 91 (1920), 17.

the hyper-inflationary period of the 1920s just to survive.\textsuperscript{65} This process angered some in its congregations, who had donated the land for the specific purpose of supporting the mission’s work among local Africans. As the global economy collapsed and business firms in Southwest Africa started to go bankrupt, Missionary Olpp expressed his fears in a letter to the home office in Barmen, stating that he feared the situation would become desperate.\textsuperscript{66}

By way of local comparison, Rhenish Mission Society activities in the Cape Colony also had to rely on outside assistance, which was provided by the Boer-backed Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. In part for its generosity, the Rhenish Church at Kapgemeinden was transferred to the Reformed Church in 1931 – in fact, later all Rhenish Mission activity in the Cape was given over to the Dutch Reformed Church and the Moravian Church. Also of note is the fact that the Dutch Reformed Church guaranteed the salaries of Olpp and Vedder as part of the negotiations with the government to have them returned; this idea was pivotal in getting them reinstated. The plan was conceived by Dr. G.B.A. Gerdener, the son of a former missionary in the Cape Province and later an influential professor and politician. He collected the necessary funds from Reformed Church communities to assist these Rhenish Mission Society congregations.\textsuperscript{67}

In the 1930s, the relationship between the Rhenish Mission Society and the South African state reached a level of calm, as the latter was no longer terribly interested in the former. Part of this cooling between the two may have been due to the global crisis surrounding the Great

\textsuperscript{65} VEMA RMG 2.618, Protokoll der Präsidesconferenz gehalten in Windhuk am 39 September und 1 October 1920; RMG 2.619, Missonar Konferenzen im Hereroland: Protokolle (und Vorstandssitzungen), Protokoll der Vorstandssitzung in Karibib vom 5-8 Februar 1924.

\textsuperscript{66} VEMA RMG 2.693e, Letter from Olpp to Barmen, 31 Dec 1932, 17-18.

\textsuperscript{67} Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 271.
Depression. There were, of course, economic difficulties in the region, as the global depression impacted all in various ways. Evidence indicates that the economic impact of the Depression did not hinder Rhenish Mission activities in Southern Africa as much as the war; businesses in Wupperthal (Cape Colony), for example, weathered the storm of economic crisis. In fact, the shoe factory and leather tannery there were prosperous during the Depression. 68 Overall, the economic impact of the First World War and, later, the Great Depression had broader implications in Southwest Africa than the aforementioned problems for the Rhenish Mission Society. There were clear complications for settlers and Africans as well, not just due to the economic changes, but also to the political shift in power and changes in “native policy.” These created a crisis for some and what promised to be opportunities for others.

2.6. Reserve Systems, Resettlement and its Issues

After the South African occupation of Southwest Africa during the First World War, settlers – both German and Boer alike – noticed the trend of Herero and Nama groups squatting on farms and rebuilding their cattle herds. For settlers, this process was troubling because they found their well-being to be threatened by a more mobile African population, which would at times trespass on ranches to graze their cattle. White settlers also increasingly feared cattle theft. This scenario created a problem for the Union of South Africa because it felt obligated to appease both parties. The solution then was a modified continuation of German-established reserves in the form of new Native Reserves away from white settlers and ranchers. For the Rhenish Mission Society, these new reserves created a problem of proximity to their target audience; whereas the older settlements for Herero, Nama, and others under German colonial rule were near mission stations and farms, the new ones would be further away. To complicate

this problem, the Union of South Africa made the new reserves “black only” under the guise of protecting “traditional culture.” This policy prevented missionaries from relocating their homesteads to the new locations. There is irony in the fact that during the colonial era missionaries had advocated similar reservation systems.\textsuperscript{69} The difference was that missionaries wanted the African nations to maintain control of and access to “traditional” territory, all the while saving them from abuses in the colonial system.\textsuperscript{70} The new reserves were employed by the state to regulate the African population, which in turn served as a pool of cheap labor. In the end, these new reserves turned out to be deleterious for their residents, as they were pushed further away from urban centers and occupied the borders of Southwest Africa’s notoriously scarce deserts, though at first they offered some promise for increase autonomy in the region.

Conditions for Africans in Southwest Africa seemed to improve immediately after the Union of South Africa took control of the territory. South African policies towards natives were initially relaxed compared to German rule. One such example was the repeal of the German ban regarding cattle and property ownership for the Herero. As early as late 1915, Southwest Africa witnessed Herero trying to reclaim traditional lands and re-establish cattle herding, much in line with pre-colonial days. This practice led to an increasing number of cases of squatters taking possession of abandoned or unused farms. Intermingled with the benefits of property ownership was the hope of Africans that all of their former territory taken by the German state would be returned to them by South Africa. This of course was not to be the case, though hopes were high and the prospect of increased agency prompted a noticeable change in the demeanor of many

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{69} In the years before the 1904-07 Herero Revolt/Massacre, some missionaries even advocated reserves for Africans as a means to preserve portions of their traditional land. It was obvious to RMS officials that their charges were being taken advantage of by the state and unfair credit practices. See Chapter One for more details on these early reserves.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{70} Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 221.
Africans. White settlers began to complain about workers, formerly compelled to toil under a type of indentured servitude during German colonial rule, leaving settler farms and abandoning their work. They also complained of increased cases of trespassing and cattle theft.

Most missionaries believed that the government’s increased leniency promoted an unhealthy level of independence and lethargy among Africans. They disapproved of these more relaxed measures because they distracted from missionary desires to inculcate a western work ethic among their parishioners. Johannes Olpp, recently readmitted to the region after his expulsion and usually seen as highly concerned with native well-being, spoke out about the South African government’s revisions in native policy, arguing that it awakened a rebellious spirit via the “intoxications of freedom.”

This concern reflected the paternalism indicative of German missionaries at this time. The new spirit of insubordination was something they, and white settlers, wanted the South African government to quell. The missionaries saw what they

\[\text{Lothar Engel, } Kolonialismus und Nationalismus im deutschen Protestantismus in Namibia 1907 bis 1945: Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen evangelischen Mission und Kirche im ehemaligen Kolonial- und Mandatsgebiet Südwestafrika (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1976), 131.\]
believed to be an erosion of the progress made to instill Western values. This process has been discussed extensively by scholars addressing the notion of *Erziehung zur Arbeit*.

German farmers were also perturbed by the changes in policy as they impacted the regulations on native labor, thus reducing the numbers who were able to be employed or compelled to work on settler ranches and farms, not to mention mines or other physically demanding jobs. These concerns did not last long however, as the South African government too was troubled at the prospect of “idle hands.” In many ways once South African authorities established themselves, they were more controlling of Africans than under German occupation – with the exceptions of Von Trotha’s massacres. It was under this increased governmental power that the role of missionaries in the territory diminished, as the state itself relied on them less and less. The reservation system, then, served as a means to remove blacks from white society, give the appearance of concessions to African demands, and open the door to exploit wage labor from the able bodied, all part of a precursor to what became known as apartheid.

The path to creating Native Reserves in Southwest Africa was rooted in the 1913 Native Lands Act, also known as the Bantu Land Act, passed in South Africa. This legislation, Act Number 27 of 1913, proved to be the foundation of formalized *apartheid*, stating that those of

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72 This notion of raising up through work is tied to the civilizing mission in general, but was also found among missionaries who believed that introducing Africans to the full message of Christianity would only be possible if they were fully “caught up” to Western progress. This meant that they would have to be moved through the various stages of history (Hegelian in nature). See Klaus J. Bade, ed., *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission: Kaiserliches Deutschland und koloniales Imperium* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982) – especially the essays by Horst Gründer and Arthur J. Knoll. See also, Ulrich van der Heyden, “Christian Missionary Societies in the German Colonies, 1884/85 – 1914/15,” eds. Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama, *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany* (New York: Columbia, 2011), 215-53; Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (New York: Cambridge, 2010), 77 ff; Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, 1776-1945* (New York: Cambridge, 2012), 12-13; and, Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2010), 10 ff.
African descent could legally own only certain portions of the country. The territory allocated for black ownership amounted to only a small portion of the land in the Union of South Africa. When the Union of South Africa invaded Southwest Africa during World War I, it did not immediately impose existing South African legislation in the territory, nor did it do so when the mandate was officially established in 1920 by the League of Nations. Administrator Edmond Gorges and others wanted to ensure friendly treatment of Africans in Southwest Africa to help ensure that efforts to annex the regions were successful in the eyes of world opinion, building on the intent of the aforementioned “Blue Book.”\(^73\) So when white settlers and farmers began to complain about squatters and trespassers in 1915 and 1916, the Native Administration sought to appease both sides by establishing grazing reserves in 1916. These territories were allocated from property seized from the former German colonial state and, on a few occasions, former Rhenish Mission holdings. They were designed to allow sufficient cattle grazing areas to keep black herdsmen from transgressing on white farms.

This plan did not remove tension from the region, as many of the grazing lands proved too close for comfort for many whites. One such case was that of one Paul Ahnert who ended up killing some goats after they repeatedly trespassed on his property.\(^74\) The preponderance of similar events and continued allegations of cattle theft and trespassing forced the Native Affairs office to devise a more long-term solution to settler and African tensions. “Kaffir farming,” the process of subleasing property to African herdsmen and creating a chain of absentee white ranchers, further agitated the situation – defeating the purpose of the settler ranches in the eyes of the state. Poor German and Boer ranchers alike felt threatened and cheated by this practice as

\(^73\) Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 245.

\(^74\) Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 238.
they were forced to compete with ranches operating at cheaper overheads. Serious discussions on how to deal with the native problem concerned Administrator Gorges, who did not want to disrupt the stability of the native population, especially among the Herero.\footnote{See letter cited in Gewald, \textit{Herero Heroes}, 246-7.}

Opposition to Native Reserves within the South African administration was sparse, and in late 1919 and the beginning of 1920 discussions on how and where to create these spaces began. A page was taken from prior legislation to create Proclamations 13 and 54 of 1920 that allowed for the creation of Native Reserves through the allocation of crown lands. The reasoning behind the creation of these reserves was to preserve the “old untamed Africa” and traditional culture of the indigenous nations. But as magnanimous as this process may have sounded it should be noted that government officials did not intend for able-bodied African men to reside on the reserves. Labor exemption certificates were only given to herdsmen with more than fifty head of small stock or ten head of cattle. One of the reserves was created with input from Herero headmen at Otjohorongo, northwest of Karibib. The territory was physically removed from most white settlers and was considered to have a good water supply. Another reserve was at Otjimbingwe, south of Karibib, the territory acquired by the Union of South Africa from the Rhenish Mission during the time of the latter’s economic trouble. Many Herero turned to these new reservations with a sense of optimism. Unfortunately they were too successful in repopulating their herds, soon outstripping the capacity of their new lands.

Other reserves were planned to help move Herero populations away from urban centers, especially Windhoek. Expeditions to the east and west sought suitable tracts of land for these relocation areas. In 1921, Mr. Van Niekerk was sent east to examine the feasibility of creating a
reserve at Epukiro, east-northeast of Windhoek, on the border of Bechuanaland. An interesting component of his survey contract was that he would only be paid for his services if he approved the territory for Herero settlement. Once established, Van Niekerk was appointed as the Reserve Superintendent for eighteen months, and then transferred to the next reserve to the south at Aminuis.

Contemporaneous with the creation of these reserves were plans to remove the Herero population living among the Rehoboth Basters in the “Rehoboth-Gebiet” south of Windhoek – a territory allotted to the Basters in an effort to pacify them after the South African invasion of Southwest Africa. The Basters themselves proved problematic for the mandate administration because they demanded more autonomy than the Union of South Africa was willing to allow. Military force was used in 1925 to quell a small rebellion; the South Africans even employed aerial bombardments as a show of force. The use of this type of bombing attack occurred later as well to “encourage” Herero to move towards designated reservations. Missionary Kuhlmann noted these fear tactics in the *Halbjahresbericht* for Omruru in 1925, remarking on his alarm at such a show of military power and intimidation.

Force was not always necessary to encourage relocation to reserves. The move to Otjohorongo was mostly consensual and the main impetus for Herero to move to Epukiro and Aminuis in 1923 actually came from Herero leaders such as Nikanor Hoveka and Hosea Kutako. They believed that they would be allowed a new and greater level of autonomy – not realizing

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76 Van Niekerk’s first name proved elusive in archival and secondary materials.

77 Gewald, *“We Thought we would be Free,”* 40-41.

78 VEMA RMG 2.514a, Omaruru, Band 1, August Kuhlmann, *Halbjahresbericht*, 30 August 1925.
fully that the allotted reserves would not support a return to traditional economic systems.\textsuperscript{79} Officials within the South African Administration even recognized this fact, but their warnings were secondary to overall state desires to segregate African populations to the periphery of the territory. The Reserve Superintendent for Aminuis noted as early as 1921 that the area was only useful for cattle farming during the rainy season.\textsuperscript{80} Despite warnings such as these, the reserves soon proved false hope to their inhabitants.\textsuperscript{81} Ultimately, the reserves created for African use were comprised of inferior lands and unfit for cattle herding – they resulted in over grazing, which combined with a lack of water, fostered diseases in the cattle stock and resulted in food shortages for the people. There were severe cases of problems with the Herero herds, including pica developed as a side effect from malnutrition. This condition promoted outbreaks of botulism and anthrax in Herero cattle.

It did not take long for missionaries also to recognize these problems with the newly formed reservations. August Kuhlmann observed on his trip to the Otjohrongo Reservation in 1923 that it held horrible conditions for cattle ranching. He also complained that the people were spread around in disparate settlements: “separated at 30, 40, 60, indeed 70 kilometers from one another.”\textsuperscript{82} Kuhlmann clearly identified two problems regarding the Native Reserves: 1) the well-being of Southwest Africa’s indigenous populations was in jeopardy despite their re-entrance to property and cattle ownership; and, 2) indigenous populations were now spread out

\textsuperscript{79} Gewald, “\textit{We thought We would be Free},” 36.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{81} Werner, \textit{No One Will Become Rich} gives an in-depth discussion of the problems drilling for water.

\textsuperscript{82} VEMA RMG 2.514, Kuhlmann, Omaruru, 13 March 1923.
in such a fashion that it posed difficulty for the evangelization process. Jakob Irle’s visit to Aminuis in 1926 held similar observations, noting that the conditions were so bad that malnourished Herero were begging for flour to mix with the little milk they had from cattle and goats, and at times they even resorted to eating their dead cattle.\footnote{VEMA RMG 2.501, Irle, \textit{Halbjahrbericht}, Gobias, Oktober 1925 – Mai 1926.} Lack of water available on the reserves contributed greatly to the poor conditions of herds, a problem compounded by insufficient grazing lands.

The South African colonial administration’s response to these travesties was that they were the fault of the African herdsmen themselves. One official even questioned if the Herero would have fed their cattle bone meal, necessary to provide phosphates that would help combat anthrax breakouts, even if it were provided to them for free. Regardless of such hypotheticals, that merely revealed that state officials believed Africans to be lazy to the point of self-destruction. The cost of bone meal and transport was prohibitive for both Herero herdsmen and the state. In addition to nutritional problems, Van Niekerk noticed that the Herero were not burying infected cattle after they died, which allowed other animals to feed on the carcasses, thus perpetuating problems. He proposed appointing a group of young men to tour the reserve and bury dead animals, but this plan never came to fruition because all able-bodied men were already employed as contract labor elsewhere.\footnote{Gewald,\textit{"We thought We would be Free,"} 48.} Other problems on reservations were similarly disavowed.

\section*{2.7. Conclusion}

This chapter has examined Southwest Africa from the First World War until the 1930s. Hermann Gehlmann’s story exemplifies the level to which state governments could limit
missionary activity and exert pressure on evangelical societies, generally ensuring compliance with overarching policies in the colonial sphere. Gehlmann also reflected the attachment missionaries often felt to their converts, acting at times as a “spiritual father.” Although he was allowed to remain in Southwest Africa until his retirement, others were not as lucky. The First World War introduced a host of political and economic challenges for the Rhenish Mission Society as it had to negotiate new measures to keep stations in SWA afloat. As the evangelists themselves were German citizens, they and other ethnic German settlers in the territory were in a unique position as enemy subjects. Despite this, the Union of South Africa valued most ethnic Germans due to the reinforcement of white settlement in what they hoped would be annexed as their fifth province. The German settlers that remained in SWA became problematic for some missionaries, as the evangelists were asked to split their duties between being missionaries and pastors for whites-only congregations. This dual appointment accepted by some missionaries caused much tension as white and black congregations were often divided by deep-seated racial mistrust. Rhenish missionaries also had to grapple with the new realities of the reservation systems that often pushed African populations to the periphery of the territory, making visits and regular services arduous. Complicating matters was the fact that promoting an indigenous, independent church in the region met with several roadblocks due to the war and state limitations – barriers not truly overcome until after the Second World War.
3.1. Friedrich Pönnighaus

The complex number of relationships in a colonial environment and the entanglement that they created for German missionaries are exemplified in the life of Friedrich Pönnighaus. Pönnighaus was born in 1885 in Germany. He joined the Rhenish Mission Society in 1921, and then moved to Southwest Africa. He studied local languages for a year in Karibib before being assigned as pastor to Windhoek’s Nama congregation where he worked for nearly a decade. In 1933, Pönnighaus returned to Germany for a visit, and during his stay he finished a 163-page botany treatise. In another published work he set forth arguments for expediting the creation of an independent church in Southwest Africa. Pönnighaus was one of the leading figures advocating for the ordination of African pastors from Southwest African congregations. The seasoned missionary Christiaan Spellmeyer and Missions Inspector Gustav Menzel joined him in this endeavor. Because of his passion for education, Pönnighaus was appointed as the principal of the Paulinum Theological Seminary, founded in Karibib in 1938. Classes opened and Pönnighaus led the path to ordination of over a dozen enthusiastic students, representing a spectrum of Herero, Nama, and Baster peoples.

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland and within a year the world was embroiled in bloody conflict. For Pönnighaus, the geopolitical turmoil placed him in a precarious position as the Union of South Africa considered him a dual threat: an enemy subject, and an advocate for the

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1 VEMA 1.704a-c, “Pönnighaus, Dr. theol. h.c. Friedrich.”

2 Friedrich Pönnighaus, Die Akazien unserer Landes: Vortrag gehalten vor der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Südwestafrika (Publisher Unknown, 1932).

upward mobility of Africans in the region. The missionary was arrested and placed in a series of internment camps, ending up in the main camp at Andalusia. For the state, the internment of Pönnighaus served two purposes. First, the arrest acted as a control mechanism, intending to demonstrate to the Rhenish Mission that as ethnic Germans, they were beholden to the good graces of the government to continue their evangelical work in SWA. Secondly, the internment of Pönnighaus forced the closure of the Paulinum, thus derailing the advanced education of several promising African leaders.

While in captivity, the missionary and teacher remained productive. He wrote a year’s worth of sermons to be employed as a series, developed a complete set of Sunday School catechisms, and began a complete translation of the Bible, including the Old Testament, into the Nama language. Despite the war ending in 1945, prisoners were not allowed to reintegrate into civilian life until 1947. Upon his return, Pönnighaus resumed classes at the seminar and was able to graduate a set of students soon thereafter who had their coursework disrupted by the war. He retired in 1953, serving as the sole lecturer at the Paulinum until that time. Therefore, Pönnighaus was the most influential missionary in the theological education of indigenous pastors coming out of the Rhenish Mission.

Another aspect of Pönnighaus’s character was that he was one of the vocal critics of National Socialism in Southwest Africa. After returning from Germany in 1933, he sought to curtail the influence of Nazi political ideology in the region, especially among his colleagues. This stance did not endear him to Prässec Heinrich Vedder, who was a Nazi party member and

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4 See the discussion later in this chapter and Chapter Six.

favored by the South African government. The ideological differences between the two may explain why Pönnighaus did not resume his service as a pastor after the war, choosing instead to channel all of his energies to the advancement of seminary students with the goal of ordaining a significant number of African pastors to support an independent church. After retirement in 1958, Pönnighaus returned to Germany. His influence in Southwest Africa continued, however, as he completed his translation project, being awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Bonn for the task.

He also left behind an active legacy in the person of his daughter. Ursula Pönnighaus shared her father’s passion for evangelical work among the African population in Southwest Africa. She began her work within the church by assisting her father at the Paulinum in 1953. Due to her efforts within the organization, she served on the Board of the Rhenish Mission Society starting in 1963 and was given charge of the mission at Okombahe in 1964. In 1968, she was transferred to Karibib and also edited the church magazine Immanuel. While in Karibib, the younger Pönnighaus served with the white German Evangelical Lutheran Church, but was eventually forced out of the church due to her active criticism of apartheid. From the early 1980s to her retirement in 1983, she worked with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, the independent church her father helped create.

Overall, the Pönnighaus family demonstrated the precarious position German missionaries found themselves in while working in Southwest Africa – at times experiencing

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6 Namibian National Archives (NNA), 331. The arrest and internment records of Rhenish Missionaries document Vedder’s interaction with the state, at times petitioning the release of his favorites but never pressing for Pönnighaus’s freedom.


tension with the state government, mistrust from their charges, and pressure from ethnic Germans in the region. This chapter addresses the complicated nexus of relationships reflected in Pönnighaus’s experience from the 1930s to 1950. First, it deals with the issue of education in Southwest Africa, where missionaries were initially responsible for the education of Africans and ethnic Germans. Next, it discusses the issue of alcohol in the territory, as the church had to cope with government restrictions regarding African access to spirits. Thirdly, external agents competed with the Rhenish Mission for souls in the region as the Union of South Africa allowed and encouraged the entrance of other religious denominations into Southwest Africa. Finally, the chapter examines the difficulties presented during the Second World War. Much like the First World War, this conflict found missionaries labeled as “Enemy Subjects,” introduced financial problems, and disrupted the road to creating independent churches among Africans within the mission church.

3.2. Education

An area where the Union of South Africa pressured the RMS was in the realm of native education. Similar to Paul Rohrbach’s stance during the first decade of the twentieth century under German rule, the South African government wanted to limit the extent of education for Africans to keep them “serviceable” as laborers. To this end, it did not want missionaries teaching literacy, much less anything beyond basic education, but at the same time knew it unwise to disrupt the established system too much at once. Rhenish Missionaries were opposed

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on the whole to new restrictions on education and continued providing opportunities for their African parishioners because their experience taught them that education worked in tandem with acceptance of Christianity. Also, much like the German policy, the Union of South Africa government eventually took steps to influence the education of whites in the colony by controlling the languages allowed in schools. That being said, there was a general indifference on the state’s part as to what missionaries did regarding African schooling; the habit of keeping the education of Africans as the responsibility of missionaries continued under the Union of South Africa administration well into the 1940s. In fact, virtually no effort was made by the government to provide financial resources to educate their black population in the early days of South African rule. Thus, education of Africans begun under the authority of missionaries before German colonial rule and remained so thereafter for several decades after the South African takeover of the region.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite the wishes of the state governments, during the periods of both German and South African control, Rhenish Mission members consistently refrained from adhering to government wishes regarding African learning. They believed that their congregations should be given access to basic education, even if most of the males would later be employed as laborers on ranches or in mines. This incongruity was loosely connected to the Mission’s desire to further the civilizing mission, though a particularly German one – despite the fact that missionaries themselves differed on how effective education was in elevating Africans to the

\textsuperscript{10} See the earlier discussion of Missionaries and education mentioned in Chapter One.
same level of Europeans.\textsuperscript{11} Heinrich Vedder, especially, believed it would take several generations of exposure to western civilization before the peoples of Southwest Africa could be brought up to the level of white culture. The concept of “the education of the Negro to work” (\textit{die Erziehung des Negers zur Arbeit}) was considered by many as part of a “Christian sense of duty” and it was missionaries, more so than state governments who believed that Africans were able to elevate their status through exposure to western culture by making them \textit{Kulturfähig} (capable of culture).\textsuperscript{12} From this general perspective, missionaries themselves developed a two-pronged approach to education in Southwest Africa. The first avenue was via mission schools. Here children were taught to read and write along with basic lessons in math and science, with a curriculum based in four stages. Standards I and II were on the primary level and Standards III and IV were secondary.\textsuperscript{13} At first, the Native Affairs Department limited Africans to primary education, which means only Standards I and II. There was also a gender divide in expectations,

\textsuperscript{11} Sebastian Conrad, \textit{Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany} (New York: Cambridge, 2010), 81 ff. There were a full spectrum of opinions regarding the potential in Africans for civilization dating back to the early days of German colonialism, ranging from full confidence that hard work and Westernization would help modernize Africans, to skepticism that anyone from Africa could attain civilization before several generations of exposure. Examples date back as far as Count von Schlieffen’s observations regarding Southwest Africans which believed Africans were incapable of civilization to others who believed they were fully capable of reaching cultural and intellectual levels of Europeans. On the other side of the spectrum, thinkers such as Rudolf Virchow were actually skeptical that Germans could adapt to either African or tropical climates altogether, leading some to believe that African would be the only means of labor in such environments.


\textsuperscript{13} The number of “Standards” increased in the early twentieth century, eventually resembling the grade system familiar in the United States where each grade (or standard) is equivalent to an academic year of schooling.
so it should be no surprise that missionaries shaped the paths of boys towards physical labor and that of girls towards domestic tasks in line with European concepts of propriety.\(^{14}\)

The second approach included vocational education as older adolescents and adult Africans were given the chance to learn trade skills and agricultural practices. This process too fit with the *Erziehung zur Arbeit* ideology. Early mission stations employed small farms, where individual workers were provided life necessities in exchange for labor. Later, programs were instituted to teach trade skills like leatherworking and blacksmithing.\(^{15}\) Africans themselves sought access to western education as a means of improving their prospects in life, especially after the 1904-07 massacres; paradoxically this resulted in increased settler fears that an educated class among Africans would rise up to challenge them. By 1912, there were approximately 5,500 Herero and Nama enrolled in schools.\(^{16}\) The political shift in power after the First World War and the eventual creation of new native reserves on the periphery of the territory severed many of these adult education programs. This process was in accord with state wishes to keep blacks as unskilled laborers. Overall, for Africans in Southwest Africa, the Rhenish Mission Society remained the main source for basic education, but this too did not escape governmental

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\(^{14}\) KAB PAE, E589, Z456, “Study of Domestic Economy in South Africa.” Gendered education was not uncommon in non-colonial settings either.

\(^{15}\) In fact, the primary reason for founding the *Missions-Handelsgesellschaft* in 1869 was to promote trade skills among African parishioners. It just so happened that there was some early commercial success with the organization, with the profits going directly to the mission. That processes caused alarm at the time in the view of Missionary Carl Hugo Hahn, who resigned from his post in protest. The profitability of the HMG also helped serve as fodder for Marxists historians who argued missionaries were intentionally exploitative in Southwest Africa. See Chapter One for more on this issue. See also J. Lukas De Vries, *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978), 123-4.

interference. The Union of South Africa attempted to break the influence of missionaries over Herero, Ovambo, and Nama peoples beginning in a 1923 meeting where restrictions were imposed on any missionary-led schools to Standard II.\(^\text{17}\) Little did state officials realize that for many Africans in the 1920s and 1930s, there was already a distancing from the Rhenish Mission regardless of the state’s attempts to segregate blacks on reserves and prevent missionaries from living in “black only” regions.

The case of Ovamboland demonstrated the gap between state desires and compromises on the ground. In areas where missionary influence was in decline, thanks in part to the aforementioned expulsion of Rhenish Missionaries, an outcropping of “bush schools” developed. These were informal sessions run by educated (or semi-educated) Africans who spread western education among different groupings of people within the reserve areas, outside the purview of whites. Among the Ovambo at least, there was the ability to teach literacy thanks to a primer published by the Finnish Missionary Society in 1896. The South African government feared that these self-taught sessions would lead to mis-education and possibly political antagonism. Therefore the Native Affairs Administration gave its support to missionaries reluctantly, based on the understanding that they provided a stable core education. By 1924, there were 4,689 Africans enrolled in the northern region of Southwest Africa.\(^\text{18}\) By 1932 however, the Native Affairs Administration believed that missionaries were having too much influence over the Ovambo and were destroying their traditional culture. They issued Proclamation no. 31 that year


to restrict mission sites and the location of school.\textsuperscript{19} Native Commissioner Major Carl Hahn even noted that despite his mistrust of missionaries, he did feel they did a good job educating Africans considering the resources at hand, even if that might cause potential problems later on as the civil administration desired to keep the Ovambo rooted in tribal traditions in its attempts at indirect rule.\textsuperscript{20} Yet, Hahn acted to curtail the missionary influence, closing 84 of 164 schools in Ovamboland after an inspection tour of the region in 1936. Most of these small schools reopened, however, when the Native Administration returned to the central office.\textsuperscript{21}

As mentioned earlier, due to the new reserves, missionaries were put in a proximal disadvantage for educating and ministering to Africans. Most mission schools were attached to churches or mission stations, therefore after the 1920s, these became less central in the lives of the native population as they moved away. Africans, however, still desired access to western education. The immediate result was an increase in the number of children attending mission schools, though not always including older children who often had to help with tasks at home. Missionary Meier observed that despite the shift to reserves, the number of students at schools (specifically Okahandja) climbed from seven to seventy in less than a decade. He opined that: “Who has the youth, also has the people.”\textsuperscript{22} Regardless, one of the greatest complaints from Africans with respect to education at this time was over-emphasis on religious studies.

\textsuperscript{19} Gerhard Tötemeyer, \textit{Namibia Old and New: Traditional and Modern Leaders in Ovamboland} (London: C. Hurst, 1978), 27.

\textsuperscript{20} Tötemeyer, \textit{Namibia Old and New}, 26-7. There is a long-standing tradition in colonial and post-colonial environments of limiting access to education and technology among subordinate groups as a means to reinforce control.

\textsuperscript{21} Ellis, \textit{Education, Repression, & Liberation}, 19.

\textsuperscript{22} VEMA, 2.533b, Okahandja (1927), 28.
In the 1930s, some state-operated schools opened on reserves which allowed for education based on curriculum up to Standard II, but without religious teaching included. The first of these was the school established on the Aminius Reserve in 1935. This development prompted some parents to send their children to these newer schools instead of those controlled by missionaries. Rhenish influence over education declined further in 1943 when the Augustineum Teacher Training School in Okahandja was taken over by the state.23 This Rhenish Mission-run institution, originally founded as a seminary in 1866, had traditionally provided the best means for African Christians to access advanced education. During the Second World War however, many in Southern Africa were disconcerted that Germans ran the region’s most prestigious educational institution. The Union of South Africa nationalized the school, being generous enough to remunerate the Rhenish Mission 4,500£ for the property.

Despite the tension between church- and state-controlled education, enrollment in schools continued to climb – there were 19,167 Africans enrolled in schools in Southwest Africa by 1945.24 Access to secondary education for Africans was limited until the 1950s and 1960s. By then, however, Standard III was opened up for study, though even then the number of individuals allowed to advance was restricted by the state.25 The Union of South Africa’s full takeover of African education in 1952 under the auspices of the Bantu Administration accelerated the decline of educational influence by the Rhenish Missionary Society.

Allowing access to education was in part a means to placate to the directives of the League of Nations mandate to improve the “well being of indigenous populations.” The


philosophy of “Bantu Education” dictated how the Union of South Africa treated the education of Africans for over three decades, first only in South Africa but later as the policy was applied in Southwest Africa as well. This concept acknowledged that blacks held equal intellectual potential to whites as the Eiselen Commission claimed in 1951, a clear departure from the racist perspectives of decades prior.\textsuperscript{26} The commission, appointed by the South African government to justify segregation based on pedagogical concerns, advised that in an effort to control the black population, their access to education should be limited to giving the white population an advantage – harmonious with the policy of apartheid.\textsuperscript{27} Dr. Hendrik F. Verwoerd, the primary architect of apartheid as the Minister of Native Affairs and later Prime Minister of South Africa, argued that Africans should “be taught from childhood to realise [sic] that equality with Europeans is not for them… People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for natives.”\textsuperscript{28} The culmination of this line of thinking led to the creation of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 that created segregated education tracts based on “tribal” divisions in South Africa.\textsuperscript{29} Here Verwoerd argued that:

\begin{quote}
There is no place for… [The African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour [sic]. … Education [will be] in sub-standards A and B, and probably up to Standard II, including reading, writing, and arithmetic through mother-tongue instruction, as well as a knowledge of English and Afrikaans, and the cardinal principles of the Christian religion.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

\footnote{26}{The Eiselen Commission is also known as The Commission on Native Education.}

\footnote{27}{Ellis, \textit{Education, Repression, \& Liberation}, 23.}

\footnote{28}{Melber, \textit{Schule und Kolonialismus}, 68 ff.}

\footnote{29}{Nancy L. Clark and William Worger, eds., \textit{South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid} (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 48 ff.}

\footnote{30}{As quoted in Katjavivi, \textit{History of Resistance in Namibia}, 28.}
These policies were initially intended for application in South Africa, but after the Van Zyl Commission’s recommendation in 1958 to apply the policy in Southwest Africa, it was imposed there as well. Another aspect of the Van Zyl plan was for the state to take education out of the hands of missionaries for two reasons: 1) neither the Rhenish Mission Society nor the other parochial schools in the territory would be able to afford the expansion plans recommend as part of Bantu education; and, 2) the state did not trust missionaries to impose the new syllabus with the emphasis necessary to indoctrinate apartheid among black youth.\(^{31}\)

During most of their tenure in Southwest Africa, Rhenish missionaries were responsible for the education of whites as well. Under German colonial rule, a policy was adopted in 1894 to bring Afrikaner populations under German-language education in an effort to assimilate them into *Deutschtum*. The government strengthened this policy in the 1906 Education Act (*Schulgesetz*).\(^{32}\) Schools for settler children run by missionaries were fairly common in the colonial field, and the practice continued after South Africa took control of the region, with some important if gradual changes. The importance of English and Afrikaans languages increased as political power shifted after World War I, much of the earlier education having been in German. This linguistic change resulted in a loss for German missionaries as educators losing some influence over young minds in the territory. An official break occurred in 1921 when the state government assumed control of white education overall and moved to allow only English and

\(^{31}\) Ellis, Education, Repression, & Liberation, 25; Melber, Schule und Kolonialismus, 87-88.

\(^{32}\) Daniel Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Athens: Ohio State University, 2002), 66-69. *Deutschtum* is defined as a specific German culture and character, within the broader spectrum of Western European civilization. Included in this idea is also the concept of *Bildung* which is a common education and cultural literacy assumed to be shared by educated Germans.
Afrikaans in state schools. That same year, Proclamation 55 of 1921 made education compulsory for white children ages seven to seventeen.\(^{33}\) The move to compulsory education served to correct the problem of settler children staying home to work on farms and ranches rather than going to school. Among the ethnic German population, the number of school-age children attending class at that time was approximately 20%.\(^{34}\) This change left the mission schools in a difficult position, though they were not required to close immediately. There was a struggle over acceptable language use in schools, with many ethnic Germans choosing to go to private school instead of those run by the state. To counteract this trend, the government passed legislation that allowed education beyond the secondary level only in South African schools, forcing whites from Southwest Africa to leave the territory if they wanted specialized education or training, and extending the necessity for English or Afrikaans if one were to pursue a professional education.\(^{35}\) Policies relaxed a bit after the Second World War as the German language was allowed in state schools again by the 1950s in an effort to unify settler populations.\(^{36}\)

Overall, in the realm of education, the German missionaries served as the primary vehicle of Westernization and the civilizing mission for much of the twentieth century, but despite the many obstacles that the Union of South Africa increasingly put in their way. By the 1950s and

\(^{33}\) As a point of comparison, compulsory education was adopted in the United States between 1852 (Massachusetts) and 1917 (Mississippi), the United Kingdom in 1880, France in 1881, Germany in 1763 (Prussia initially, but extended to Germany after unification), and Russia in 1919.

\(^{34}\) Ellis, *Education, Repression, & Liberation*, 2; Melber, *Schule und Kolonialismus*, 18 ff, 41.


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 21.
1960s, missionaries were primarily relegated to religious education. The literacy and other tidbits of curriculum that came with Sunday schools still existed, but for the most part the minds of Southwest Africa’s youth were in the hands of the state. The state’s negligible spending on African education reflected whites’ long-standing desires that the former remain merely a pool of unskilled laborers. In some ways the Rhenish Missionary Society seemed by the 1950s not only to have lost the minds of Africans in Southwest Africa, but also their hearts. The paternal nature of most missionaries was wearing thin on some of their flock. The duality of white versus black opportunities in education was even mirrored in the church, which became too much to bear as political issues became religious problems in a place where spiritual matters were supposed to be the focus – as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

3.3. The Case of Alcohol

The Rhenish Mission Society’s work was hindered by many other factors than limits on education. However, this scenario should not lead one to believe that the Rhenish Mission Society and Union of South Africa consistently disagreed over “native policy.” The two cooperated on some issues, especially on the prohibition of alcohol use among African populations. The concern over liquor dates back to the earliest European/African interactions in the nineteenth century, with settlers expressing worries that merchants had corrupted the lives of Africans through the gun and spirits trade. Then, missionaries wanted at least to limit the influx of brandy into the territory – brought in mostly by British traders – as they saw it as detrimental.

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37 South African spending on black education in Southwest Africa was less than 1/10th of that for whites.
to the lives of those unfamiliar with high-proof drinks.\textsuperscript{38} Later, the government imposed some restriction on alcohol sales to Africans; this policy became stricter under South African control.\textsuperscript{39}

Early on, missionaries were not wholly opposed to the consumption of alcohol in moderation among their charges, especially traditional drinks and communion wine. Prior to European settlement, there were a couple of alcoholic beverages popular among the Herero and Nama, most notably a grain beer (\textit{Khari}), which was quite nutritious and low in alcoholic content during the pre-prohibition days. Casual and ceremonial use rarely, if ever, resulted in intoxication. Even in the concentration camps established after the Herero Revolt of 1904, some missionaries petitioned to allow women to continue brewing this beverage to help combat malnutrition in the camps.\textsuperscript{40} Regardless of these early concessions, the Rhenish Mission eventually sided with the government once official legislation was passed on the matter – behavior consistent with obedience to the state.

By the time of South African rule, Rhenish pastors almost universally adhered to government policies concerning the prohibition of alcohol even in the case of communion. This ceremony traditionally involved wine and unleavened bread, serving as one of the central rituals of Christianity. The actual theological doctrines behind communion differ with each

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{38} See note 78 in “Education”; Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 219. One of the avenues that the Rhenish Missionary Society pursued to meet the ends of limiting the alcohol trade was to establish their own trading company to allow access to European goods and wares under the auspices of the \textit{Missions Handelsgesellschaft}. Much criticism has been levied, often times anachronistically, against the fact that missionaries themselves entered into business.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{39} Gewald, \textit{“We thought We would be Free”}, 87. Gewald argues that by prohibiting alcohol, the state inadvertently promoted the growth of the illicit production and distribution of spirits. He further posits that the state did so to undercut “the newly emerged economic and political elite of the Herero.”}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 86 ff.}
\end{footnotesize}
denomination – historically only the priesthood received sacraments in both kinds, but this changed after Luther’s Reformation. The state treated all liquor in a monolithic fashion despite the religious function of this particular use of alcohol. The Native Proclamation no. 34 of 1923 listed many measures to restrict Africans in Southern Africa – including the manufacture, distribution, or consumption of alcohol. Rhenish Mission Society pastors and evangelists withheld actual communion wine from black congregations in light of these legal prohibitions, using instead some other beverage that resembled wine.\(^{41}\) In their capacity as pastors in white churches, regular communion wine was still used as part of the sacraments.

One of the main reasons that Rhenish leaders complied with state wishes regarding prohibition was that, after 1915, they witnessed an increased number of men (mostly among the Herero) who attended church while intoxicated. There were several potential reasons for this influx of drunkenness on Sundays. The most established explanation links alcohol consumption among Herero males with the development of the Ortruppe, or Truppenspiele, a paramilitaristic organization that mimicked the uniforms and conduct of German Schutztruppe.\(^{42}\) Associated in this movement was a redefinition of masculinity among Africans, which incorporated heavy consumption of alcohol as part of manliness.\(^{43}\) Another possible explanation is simply that because some African men had only weekends free to themselves, as more of them moved into

\(^{41}\) Gewald, *“We thought We would be Free”*, 92.

\(^{42}\) For a much more detailed discussion on the Ortruppe (or Truppenspiele) see Werner’s *No One Will Become Rich*, which arguably informed Gewald’s later work *Herero Heroes* and *“We Thought We Would be Free.”* A more recent discussion of this phenomenon is found in Molly McCullers, “The ‘Truppenspieler Show’,” *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences*, Nina Berman, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Patrice Nganang, eds. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 228 ff.

\(^{43}\) Gewald, *“We thought We would be Free”*, 92-3.
positions of unskilled labor, they intensified their use of alcohol as a form of relaxation – something also witnessed in Europe as it industrialized over a century earlier.\textsuperscript{44} A less likely, but more entertaining, reason was the increased influence of western sports among Africans in Southwest Africa during the 1920s and 1930s. As recreational time was relegated to weekends, reports are found among missionaries complaining of male parishioners skipping church in favor of soccer matches.\textsuperscript{45} Regardless of why there was such an influx in intoxication during church services, the situation provided missionaries and pastors with a quandary. Church attendance declined in the mid-1920s among male parishioners, so rebuking those who attended risked depleting numbers even more drastically. On the other hand, there were numerous occasions when intoxicated members were disruptive during the service, especially when the congregation was singing hymns, which clearly detracted from the seriousness of ceremonies.

Rhenish Mission officials tended to support the temperance movement in Southwest Africa, even if it was only applied to Africans and not all inhabitants. In the \textit{Halbjahresbericht} for 12 November 1927, Missionary Meier noted:

\begin{quote}
Another very gratifying improvement is that the terrible drinking has subsided. The police are strongly behind [the prohibition] and have collected fines only among workers at the shipyard. As one can imagine… that this previously mentioned situation is related to the better church attendance witnessed. Hopefully, the police continue to fight against this evil that keeps the people from their Lord, for only when they are with Him will our natives again be a productive people.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} Gewald, \textit{“We thought We would be Free”}, 89. Gewald argues that Herero would get drunk on Saturdays, and then use Sunday to recover for the upcoming week. This idea is supported in the archival records with accounts from Missionary Werner, VEMA 2.510 Letter dated May 1924; Missionary Kuhlmann’s complaints regarding orgies; VEMA 2.514b \textit{Halbsjahrebericht} for Omaruru (1921), 180 ff.

\textsuperscript{45} VEMA 2.528a, 172.

\textsuperscript{46} VEMA 2.533b, 28.
This passage shows that Meier believed there was an inverse correlation between drunkenness and church attendance; therefore, he was pleased when efforts were successful to decrease alcohol abuse in his district. In the 1930s, a “war” on sugar beer increased throughout the territory also, as indicated in the Mission conference reports. Of note in conjunction with state attacks on the production of alcohol were the zealous accounts of police raids scattered through Missionary Meier’s reports. In the region as a whole, however, it was not until the 1940s that alcohol abuse fell to a record low, possibly due to the rise of a new, educated elite among Africans who sought political and economic power in the territory. The diminished use of alcohol may seem paradoxical as Africans adhered to missionary-backed policies increasingly despite a falling away of some congregations [specifically Herero] in the 1920s and 1930s. Overall, the success of the war on alcohol can be attributed directly to the state’s willingness to pursue and prosecute offenders.

Prohibition impacted those within the church hierarchy as well as the congregation. In 1932, Rhenish Mission pastors acted as intercessors on at least one occasion when Pastor Salomo was arrested for carrying and distributing communion wine. The missionaries defended their Mitarbeiter, arguing that black evangelists only carried non-alcoholic wine for communion services. This incident showed that, on the local level, African pastors served communion in

47 VEMA 1.660 Konferenzverhandlungen, 7-23 Dezember, 1930.

48 VEMA 2.533.

49 Gewald, “We thought We would be Free”, 95. Gewald uses observations regarding the commemoration festivals honoring Maharero to reinforce his claims. Missionary reports in 1925 indicate much drinking and festivities, but by 1937 the presence of alcohol in the ceremonies ceased to be a factor.

50 VEMA, 2.710a, Olpp, Swakopmund 26.2.1932.
both kinds. One can only speculate if Salomo (or others) ever used actual wine or not in the
ceremony, but what is clear is that black Christians themselves were not proponents of an ersatz
communion service.

There is further evidence that missionaries did not always respond to alcohol in a
draconian fashion, especially when considering their own evangelists. In a letter from October
1954, missionary Friedrich Pönnighaus wrote to then Präses Hans Karl Diehl regarding a
conundrum involving evangelist Jeremiah Kahuika and the administration of communion.
Kahuika was temporarily suspended from serving sacraments because of personal struggles with
alcohol consumption, specifically sugar beer (Zukerbeir). Missionary Mayer initiated the
suspension, but Pönnighaus argued that if the errant behavior was resolved, it was in the best
interest of the mission to allow Kahuika to return to full service.\footnote{VEMA 1.704c, 19 Oktober 1954, 39.} Despite these overtures to
defend and support black evangelists, the willingness of the Rhenish Mission to extend only
“half-legitimate” sacraments to black members was not lost upon them as it reflected different
treatment between black and white congregations, thus prompting some Africans to seek
religious identity and community outside of white care.

Missionaries risked appearing hypocritical the longer they supported prohibition among
black congregates, yet continued to serve wine to whites during the Lord’s Supper. By denying
the communion wine that was served in white churches, missionaries reinforced the existence of
a two-tiered church, with Africans realizing their separate treatment. There were occasions when
groups of Herero Christians boycotted communion altogether because of this segregation.\footnote{Berichte der Rheinische Mission, (1924), 116.}

There were other instances where church members refused communion, but Missionary Eich
believed these situations to be because people were unable or reluctant to pay their church
Tithes.\textsuperscript{53} Other instances involving boycotts of religious services were due to Herero refusal to
share worship time with other groups like the Ovambo and Nama.\textsuperscript{54} The inability, or lack of
trying, to have the government make an exception for alcohol in the case of communion
demonstrated another critical wedge between Rhenish missionaries and their African members.

3.4. Denominational Incursion

Another issue that the Rhenish Mission Society faced after the First World War was
increased competition for religious influence among Africans in Southwest Africa. The Rhenish
Mission’s religious hegemony in the region was challenged by the fact that the Union of South
Africa explicitly opened the door for other confessional evangelists to enter the area once it
became a mandate. A possible motive for this access was to break the influence of German
missionaries in the province, and at the same time preserve the appearance of supporting a
version of the civilizing mission in line with maintaining the League of Nations stipulation to
promote the well-being of native inhabitants. Despite welcoming other religious groups to the
territory, the South African Government made known their expectations to these new
missionaries. These demands were later formalized specifically for activity in Ovamboland in
1923 as missionaries had to promise the government that they would:

(a) confine themselves to the area allocated to them;
(b) conclude their own agreements with the headmen; and,
(c) promise in writing to:
   (1) support and promote government policy,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{53} VEMA 2.528a, 171. Due to the tough financial times, Rhenish Missionary Society
officials required members to be current on their tithes in order to receive communion, though
they did not prohibit church attendance in general. This double-edged sword of tough-love and
shaming will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three as part of the explanation as to why
church membership grew exponentially, though attendance dropped precipitously.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} VEMA 2.528a, 171-2.
(2) encourage the Ovambos to work in the south, 
(3) teach their members loyalty towards the administration, 
(4) confirm the authority of the headmen and leaders in their territory, and 
(5) emphasise [sic] practical education and only introduce new syllabuses 
into their schools after discussion with the Director of Education.  

As mentioned earlier in the section on education, the South African administration was skeptical 
of missionaries and saw them as subversive to government policies of indirect rule – which 
explains the hefty list of prerequisites for religious groups wishing to work in the territory.  Once 
the gates were open, German missionaries faced competition from Catholics, Anglicans, the 
Dutch Reformed Church, American Methodists, and others.  Of these, the archival record 
suggest that the entrance of Catholics seemed to perturb Rhenish Missionaries the most, though 
in reality the African Methodist Episcopal Church had the greater impact in promoting African 
Christians to leave Rhenish congregations.  

The Finnish Missionary Society was the only other major Lutheran group in the region, 
dividing Southwest Africa into spheres of influence with the Rhenish Mission.  It had operated in 
Ovamboland since July 1870 at the behest of the Rhenish Mission Society, which realized its 
resources were not sufficient to expand that far north into Southwest Africa.  It too was a 
Lutheran organization, with worldviews similar to that of the Rhenish Mission.  The Finnish 
Mission was not necessarily competition for the Rhenish Missionary Society then, and until the 
expulsions of Germans between 1916 and 1919, the two had cooperated in Ovamboland. Much 
like Rhenish Mission efforts among the Nama and Herero, Finnish Mission workers made 
limited progress in terms of conversions early on in its work:

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55 Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old and New*, 23.  Also listed in Ellis, *Namibia: The Last Colony* 
but not cited in any fashion.

56 The influence of the AMEC in Southwest Africa is discussed in further detail in 
Chapter Six.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>2,018 [out of ~100,000 in Ovamboland]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>7,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>23,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>35,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>63,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>118,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>194,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>213,796 [out of 350,000 total Ovamboland population]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Finnish Mission established a teacher training college at Oniipa in 1913 with the expressed intent of fostering African evangelists and educators for Ovamboland—similar to what the Rhenish Mission established at Okahandja in 1896 but more proactive on the issue of ordination. Formal education of pastors with the intent to ordain them began in 1923. This step is important because it was critical for the eventual establishment of an independent church run by local Africans and helps to explain the increased conversions between the 1920s and 1930s. As an example of their success, by 1972 only four of the total ninety-seven ministers in Ovamboland were white. Also of note are special avenues of advancement for women in Ovamboland through the Finnish Mission. The Finns founded a girls’ school in the early 1920s that focused, among other things, on rudimentary medical education in an effort to train and produce more nurses in the region to aid the mission’s medical work. The presence of the Finns in northern Southwest Africa was also important because, here as in other areas in the region, political liberation movements came from within the church.

In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, its missionaries were not strangers to the region before South African control. The particular order active in the area was the Marienberg

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Oblates (Salerians or Hünfeld Oblates). They came to Southwest Africa as early as 1910; however their primary role was ministering to Schutztruppe and German Catholic settlers. Catholic evangelists made limited attempts early in the twentieth century to evangelize Ovamboland, from the Portuguese-controlled Angolan side in that nebulous region where the border was much less fixed than one finds among defined nation-states. There were approximately ninety Catholic missionaries and priests by 1914. Despite this unusually high number, there were extremely few converts among Africans, approximately 2,000. After 1915, but more so by 1921, Catholics were welcomed to proselytize in Southwest Africa at the request of the Union of South Africa. The Roman Catholic Church took advantage of the new opportunity and sent missionaries. They made plans to build a cathedral in Windhoek later consecrated in 1932. The first group that Catholics worked with in an extended fashion was the Kwanyamas, a subset of the Ovambo people, who agreed to allow the building of a mission station in 1923. Much like other mission societies, the Catholics provided education and medical care. By 1927, Missionary Pönnighaus noted that sixty-six branch schools had cropped up in the north thanks to the Catholics and Anglicans. He attributed any success that they had among locals to the groundwork laid by the Finns, noting that the newcomers were “participating in the harvest without having sown the fields.”

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60 Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old and New*, 23.

Roman Catholicism did not gain much traction among black Southwest Africans, possibly due to a lack of native catechists early on in its work.

For the Rhenish Mission Society, the influx of Catholic evangelists caused much trepidation, and their internal reports are flush with complaints regarding the impending Catholic threat. Despite their fears however, Roman Catholicism made little headway in the region. Missionary Kuhlmann noted in 1938 that: “The Catholic Mission is almost entirely devoted to the pastoral care of the whites, because their success is not significant among the natives.” Two years later he quipped, “About Roman work, I have nothing to write in this year’s reporting and can only repeat what has been said the years before.” The lack of “progress” may have been due to Catholicism’s own form of paternalism that prevented the elevation of indigenous clergy within Southwest Africa, making few overtures to incorporate Africans into church leadership. This exclusion was especially apparent in terms of religious training leading to ordination, where the Roman Catholic Church required all novices to go through the same training, pushing that option well outside of the grasp for most Africans. The first black priest in Southwest Africa was not ordained until 1967. The Roman Church, however, attempted to accommodate local beliefs within Christianity, which was unique among missionaries in the region of Southwest Africa. By 1972, Catholics numbered between 30,000 and 35,000 (8-10% of the population).

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62 For just a sampling: VEMA 2.514b S.2, 50 ff Catholic push near Omaruru; VEMA 1.704a S.31 report on Catholic infiltration; VEMA 2.501a S.133 ff; Catholics at Gobabis.

63 VEMA 2.514b Jahrbericht, 1938, 9.

64 VEMA 2.514b Jahresbericht für Omaruru, 1940, 4.

65 Tötemeyer, Namibia Old and New, 23.

of total population) in Southwest Africa – and these were mostly in Ovamboland.\textsuperscript{67} These numbers may seem impressive, and they surely were not insignificant, but compared to the time invested in the region and percentage of converts, the Lutherans held much more influence.\textsuperscript{68}

The next significant group was the Anglicans. Rhenish Mission concerns about Anglicans are noticeably absent from the historical record unlike those regarding Catholics, further emphasizing a Protestant/Catholic discord among German Lutherans. Original plans to evangelize the area by the Anglican Church were made in the late nineteenth century, but Rhenish Mission operations (backed by the German government), thwarted any real start to Anglican missions in the region. Thus, when the Union of South Africa assumed control, limitations were relaxed. As with Catholics, Anglicans made their first headway with the Kwanyama, with whom they started working in 1924. Their first outpost was erected in 1925 as the St. Mary Mission. They made modest attempts to convert Africans, and like the Catholics found limited success, further demonstrating the difficulty for a new group of Christians to enter the region and supersede the influence of the Rhenish Mission. By 1972, the Anglicans had outpaced the Catholics, amassing approximately 40,000 converts in Southwest Africa, again, mostly among the Ovambo.\textsuperscript{69} Of note is the fact that during that time, there were no indigenous persons in positions of leadership within the Anglican Church. The Anglicans also faced internal problems as political movements among congregations led to a split within the church in 1971

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Tötemeyer, \textit{Namibia Old and New}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Today, Roman Catholics make up only a small percentage of Christians in Namibia, approximately 246,000 members, representing 13.7\% of the population – roughly even percentage-wise with their numbers in the 1970s. “Roman Catholic Church Namibia,” \url{http://www.rcchurch.na}.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Tötemeyer, \textit{Namibia Old and New}, 24.
\end{itemize}
under the leadership of Reverend Peter Kalangula. His disagreements with Bishop Colin Winter, the Anglican Archbishop of Damaraland, about the direction of the church among the Ovambo prompted the split.  

The Dutch Reformed Church entered the field later, despite being active in other parts of Southern Africa. As the main religious group in South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church eventually had limited activity in Ovamboland. Originally it financed and gave political aid to the Rhenish Missionary Society and Finnish Missionary Society after the First World War. The relationship between the three organizations was formalized in 1947 under the Triangular Agreement (*Driehoek*), designed to acknowledge their respective spheres of influence in Southern Africa. By 1955, the Dutch Reformed Church also decided to enter missionary work in the northern region of Southwest Africa. It began in Kaokoland, which had at that point encountered limited activity from other mission groups, and later spread to the Kavango, bringing them into closer competition with other religious societies like the Finnish Mission and Anglicans. In the 1960s, tension grew between the Dutch Reformed Church and other denominations as the Triangular Agreement fell apart over the issue of apartheid. Theological shifts concerning how the church should respond to the state led to disagreements between church leaders as Lutheran organizations protested the practice of apartheid and the Dutch Reformed Church stood behind the government’s policy. The Union of South Africa government promoted the Dutch Reformed Church due to its political support of apartheid. By this time, there was a stark contrast between Dutch Reformed Calvinism and the Lutheranism of the Germans and Finns.

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70 This process is discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

Methodists were the last group of evangelical interlopers to the area. The particular branch of Methodism is what makes this group so significant. American representatives from the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) came to Southwest Africa in the 1930s. African-American pastors represented this denomination, entering the region with an expectation for early and abundant success. They assumed that on the basis of ethnic heritage alone and a shared experience of discrimination and oppression, they would be able to connect with Africans better than white Europeans. Initially, AMEC workers were rebuffed because pastors demonstrated the same level of paternalism found among Rhenish Mission officials and other evangelists. Africans were looking for avenues of improvement and agency, not another group to tell them what to do. When AMEC missionaries realized that they were seen, not as black brothers, but also as western Europeans, they adjusted strategies and offerings to potential converts. Of note is the fact that the AMEC was converting individuals who already considered themselves Christians, initially Nama Christians near coastal towns. One of the critical adaptations was the ordination of indigenous pastors, which led to successes. In the 1950s two of the leading black evangelists for the Rhenish Mission Society transferred to the African Methodist Episcopal Church due to the frustrations associated with limited mobility within the Rhenish Mission as an institution. Decades of being treated differently by German pastors helped drive away the population of black evangelists that the Rhenish Mission Society hoped would ensure greater care and conversion among Africans in Southwest Africa. The framework of the AMEC offered a greater system of autonomy for black evangelicals and offered the legitimacy of an organized institution. In a letter dated 19 October 1954, Pönnighaus commented to Praises Diehl that they were losing members to the AMEC because that church

72 See Chapter Six.
serves communion to anyone. While there may be some truth behind this assumption, the reason black Christians moved to the AMEC was much more complicated as detailed in the next chapter.

Despite being faced with these denominational incursions, the Rhenish Mission redoubled its efforts towards the edification and conversion of Southwest Africans. At the Evangelist Conference of 1948, a group of six Rhenish missionaries and forty-nine black evangelists met to discuss the future of the church organization and how to strengthen the church. They talked about building up stronger congregations, using construction metaphors about bricks and stone. Missionary Lind emphasized the importance of moving forward with “love and patience,” but most importantly the necessity to live life as a positive example of the model Christian. All were in agreement with these ideas and plans; but some of the black evangelists posited a question on the lack of cooperation with other denominations in the region. The committee responded:

The whole committee sees only one way, which is not to meet them [AMEC, Catholics, etc…] with hatred and an unfriendly demeanor, but instead we must try to find a common path. In love and peace, we must meet them. Only in this way may we return one or the other to our church.

Despite this passage, Lind sidestepped the main concern of the black evangelists about ecumenical collaboration and espoused other issues of humility and personal responsibility. Overall, the conference served to highlight that the missionaries saw the Rhenish Mission as the best vehicle for Southwest Africa’s salvation.

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73 VEMA 1.704c, 39.

74 VEMA 2.642, S. 59.

75 VEMA 2.642, S. 60.
3.5. **The Problem of the Second World War**

Other problems for the Rhenish Mission Society became manifest in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, only to be compounded once those hostilities broke out. The social and political dynamics in Southwest Africa had changed much since 1919. There was no Boer outcry of support for Germany – however some South Africans were sympathetic to fascism and National Socialist racial ideology. At the outbreak of aggression in Europe in 1939, South Africa wasted no time declaring war on Germany, despite no direct threat to its territory. The rush to ally against the Axis Powers may have been due to South Africa’s commonwealth status in Great Britain, or more likely, it was seen as a means to increase control and legitimacy in Southwest Africa. Regardless, by the time the Second World War started, the question of what to do with ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa was clear – most were rounded up and placed in internment camps as a means of security and control, even missionaries. It was apparent that this was a different world from the cease-fire days of 1915.

On the eve of the war the sentiment expressed by the Rhenish Mission home office echoed that found in the early days of the First World War, though its enthusiasm died within the first few weeks. Political events in Germany are barely mentioned between the election of Hitler in 1933 and the start of World War II. In an effort to prepare for potential problems the German Evangelical Mission and International Missionary Council held a meeting in July 1939 in Holland. The nationalism that had showed up so strongly in official church documents released in the early days of the First World War stood in contrast to the tone that was much more cautious this time. Overseer Berner of the Berlin Mission Society issued an extended statement calling for peace and cessation of hostility with in the first month after Hitler’s forces invaded Poland. He noted:
Of course with everything we are and have, let it be delivered to our beloved German people as we have to our God. Of course, we want ourselves to surpass anyone in loyalty and sacrifice, as did the previous generation twenty-five years ago had done. The heroes’ memorial plaque in the lobby is testimony to this. I do not know where else expresses a plaque in Germany that half of the ‘Fully Decorated’ have remained [dead] on the field of honor. But what especially worries and crowds around our hearts these days, is only too understandable. We worry about our sons and brothers who were drafted to arms, often without the ability to even say goodbye. We worry about our people, who though stand well equipped, have so little sincere friends in the world. We worry about our church that they will have quite few occasions to spread the Word of God effectively to the people of the world, like twenty-five years ago. So much of our worries come in light of our mission fields, of which we are already cut off, more or less - What will happen to our brothers and sisters? How is the work outside of Germany to be done? How will the native communities be available for work in the coming months? 

The Rhenish Mission echoed this general concern of German missionary organizations itself, and despite hopes and concerns otherwise, missionaries were wrapped up in the political and diplomatic struggles of the Second World War.

One of the larger problems facing not just missionaries, but all ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa was the issue of National Socialism in the colony. Beginning in the 1920s, a faction of Germans in Southwest Africa favored the rise of National Socialism for political reasons, if not for its racial ideology as well. There were hopes that a reinvigorated Germany would be able to reclaim some of its colonial territories, including Southwest Africa. Many of the pro-German groups in Southwest Africa were eventually banned by the Union of South Africa due to fears of political upheaval. Even a faction of the Hitler Youth was outlawed in 1936. It should be noted that Germans in the territory with hopes of renewed German colonial power were not always Nazis, nor were Germans steeped in radical racial worldviews always party members. Disconnects were also found within the Rhenish Mission, where despite prohibitions on political activity, there were some missionaries and pastors affiliated with the National Socialist Party. From the perspective of the Union of South Africa, anyone with an

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76 Berichte der Rheinischen Mission (1939), 257.
allegiance to a German nationalist party posed a threat to security and stability in the region. In 1942, Prime Minister Smuts even rescinded the British citizenship of ethnic Germans in Southern Africa, save for those few who volunteered to serve in the military. The removal of citizenship extended to all ethnic Germans, including women, children, and widows – regardless of their status before marriage. Smuts went even further to alienate the German population and force full assimilation by closing all German schools in 1945, despite being allowed to operate without incident during the war. German language instruction at South African schools was halted.  

With Germany in ruins, it is possible that Smuts did not feel the need to placate to ethnic Germans as a means to retain their residency while simultaneously increasing control over the education system to help reinforce South African ties and claims to Southwest Africa as a fifth province.

At the outbreak of the war there were only thirty-seven Rhenish Mission employees at work in Southern Africa. Of these, one was arrested and sent to an internment camp at the onset of the war due to his membership in a National Socialist organization. Five others were sent to the Transvaal shortly thereafter, with six more sent to “local camps” the following months. Almost one-third of the Rhenish Mission Society staff was interned during the Second World War, most being held for the duration of the conflict – a stark contrast to the First World War. Also of note is the fact that some missionaries were not allowed to return home for up to a year and a half after the end of hostilities. In total, 1,200 Germans were prisoners at some point

77 Walther, Creating Germans Abroad, 180.

78 NAN SWAA 2596, A820/1/5. A letter from the Director of Education mentioned he was seeking avenues to replace all alien teachers with British nationals.

79 Menzel, Die Rheinische Mission, 356.
during the war out of the approximately 10,000 ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa. In 1946 the Union of South Africa established a commission to determine which Germans should be expelled from the Union and the mandate. It reviewed 5,283 cases and recommended the deportation of 254 individuals, 197 of whom were from Southwest Africa.\[^{80}\] The delays in enforcement of this decision worked in the favor of those condemned, as the National Party revoked the expulsion decrees after its assumption of power in 1948. It also reopened pathways to regain citizenship for ethnic Germans interested in doing so.

It is interesting to note which Rhenish officials were interned or deported and those who were not, as the Union of South Africa failed to apply a systematic policy. Pönnighaus was arrested and interned in the first few months of the war, despite being anti-Nazi and a member of the Confessing Church.\[^{81}\] His internment posed somewhat of a conundrum because it was inconsistent with how the Union of South Africa treated other important Germans in the region. At the outbreak of the war most of the ethnic Germans who were vocally pro-Nazi were expelled from the territory; even Probst Höflich of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod was removed. Why one opposed to the Nazi regime should be punished is a matter of conjecture, but it may have to do more with his position as head of the Augustineum than anything else, considering the state’s stance on missionary education and its desire for the nationalization of schools. Heinrich Vedder was neither interned nor expelled, despite being an actual Nazi party member. Motives to keep him in place most likely involve his support of the South African government’s evolving policy

\[^{80}\] Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad*, 180-1.

\[^{81}\] In Southwest Africa, at least, there was a mix of opinions among missionaries and local pastors. Most outspoken missionaries were affiliated with the Confessing Church and, not surprisingly, pastors of white congregations had Nazi sympathies politically. See Chapter Five.
of apartheid, not to mention that the government considered him an expert on native affairs due
to his anthropological and linguistic background.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite the fact that the Union of South Africa placed so many German missionaries into
camps, the church in Southwest Africa flourished during the war. Membership grew from
62,000 to 84,000 between 1939 and 1945.\textsuperscript{83} Much of this success during troubled times can be
attributed to the fact that just prior to the war, Missionary Pönnighaus had graduated fourteen
African evangelists from the seminaries at the Augustineum and Paulinum. These pastors
carried on the lion’s share of the ministerial work while German officials were away. As
mentioned previously in the education section, the state took over the Augustineum in 1943,
shortly after Pönnighaus’s replacement arrived in the territory. The Paulinum itself was placed
on hiatus during the war and students were allowed to resume their studies after the end of the
war and the return of Pönnighaus. Missionary wives and Rhenish nurses also played a key role
during this time in the daily running of Mission operations.

The problem of internment was not the only one that affected the Rhenish Mission
Society. Much as during the First World War, financial difficulties had to be dealt with. Firstly,
the Rhenish Mission tried to address a shortfall of income by reducing staff salaries across the
board, though it was able to increase them slightly by 1943.\textsuperscript{84} Missionaries were accustomed to
near pauperism as it was and saw it as part of their burden to spread the Gospel. Inspector
Warneck noted in 1932 that for missionaries:

\textsuperscript{82} See detailed discussion of Vedder in Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{83} Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 356.

\textsuperscript{84} Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 357.
...it is necessary that they prove to be frugal, humble, ready for service without a murmur, and obedient. This much is required, but certainly not more than what behooves every disciple of Jesus, a sacrifice, regardless of location or circumstances, is required of every servant of Christ the Lord.\(^{85}\)

Despite the reduction in pay, the move was not sufficient in itself, and the institution had to resort to selling off additional land holdings, a process which angered many black Christians after the First World War owing to the reasons said property was donated to the mission in the first place, given to the Rhenish Society as a means to promote their work. It also increased the taxes on ranchers subletting church property. Several communities, like Rehoboth and Gibeon, did what they could to supplement the salaries of local missionaries and pastors. In 1942, the South African government even allowed for a general collection to be taken up among the German community in the region to celebrate the centennial of Rhenish Mission activity in Southwest Africa, and approximately 3,000 pounds sterling was raised to fund the festivities.\(^{86}\)

Also important during this trying financial time was the role played by the Dutch Reformed Church in Southern Africa. As with the First World War, the Reformed Church did what they could to help supplement the budget shortfalls of the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa. It helped pay the pensions for pastors and widows in the Cape. During this time, too, some Rhenish areas were transferred over to the Dutch Reformed Church. In the Cape, the communities at Saaron, Sarepta, Wupperthal, and Matroosfontein remained affiliated with the Rhenish Mission at the end of the war. Saaron was later transferred to the Reformed Church in late 1945. Sarepta was also transferred the next year, and Pastor Reuter remained with the

\(^{85}\) Berichte Rheinischen Mission (1932), 105.

\(^{86}\) Menzel, Die Rheinische Mission, 356-7.
congregation.\textsuperscript{87} It could be argued that the Dutch Reformed Church’s assistance to the Rhenish Mission was not entirely selfless, but the reality is that it was mutually beneficial to shift stations on the periphery of Southwest Africa to Dutch oversight.

There was also an avenue for the larger RMS to funnel some funds into the region and circumvent the restrictions on monetary transfer between Germany and Southwest Africa. The process began before the war, especially the result of the Third Reich’s reluctance to allow churches to fund foreign missions. A proxy organization was created in New York City that worked in conjunction with the International Missionary Council. Johan Roggenkamp served as the treasurer for the Rhenish Mission from this exiled position until 1947.\textsuperscript{88} It operated in conjunction with other international organizations to help ensure some funding remained available for a variety of missions world-wide, including those backed by German organizations. This collaborative situation gave credence to the ecumenical support to missions work in times of need, though that cooperation tended to fall to the wayside during times of abundance.

At the end of the war, Vedder commented that it was a miracle that the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa survived the economic hardship of the war. Vedder retired after a sense of normalcy was restored. Heinrich K. Diehl replaced him as \textit{Präses} of the territory. Just prior to this changing of the guard, rumors spread throughout Southern Africa in the local press as early as December 1945 that German church holdings in Namaland were also being transferred to the Dutch Reformed Church.\textsuperscript{89} Part of this propaganda was undoubtedly due to the idea that Germans should be dispossessed of any authority or influence in the region. The fact of

\textsuperscript{87} Menzel, \textit{Die Rheinische Mission}, 354.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 357.

\textsuperscript{89} Hellberg, \textit{Mission, Colonialism, and Liberation}, 150.
the matter was that some parishes were moved to the Dutch Reformed Church, as the Rhenish Mission Society abandoned stations and spheres of influence outside of Southwest Africa. But there were still German Lutherans in Southwest Africa, and the Rhenish Mission Society was not willing to write off the entire region as a loss.

After the war, ethnic Germans were released from internment and in some ways life returned to normal. Pönninghaus declined to return to service as a pastor, but he did agree to continue teaching at the Paulinum for the benefit of these students whose education had been placed on hold due to the war. His reluctance to commit to pastoral care may have been due to his political reservations regarding the internment, especially considering his anti-Nazi stance. There is some evidence that he was embittered by the favoritism shown by the South African state towards the actual Nazi Vedder. 90 This scenario speaks much about Afrikaner sympathies for National Socialism, and the correlating racial ideologies that tended to go along with it. In 1948, the Afrikaner-dominated Nationalist Party won control of the South African government. They went on to appoint Vedder as the Senate representative of the “native” population of Southwest Africa in 1950. This appointment infuriated many black Christians in the region, as Vedder’s paternalism and racism was then officially reinforced by the state. Approximately 2,000 members left the Rhenish church at that time and formed an independent church. The breaking away of congregations and the loss of key indigenous pastors prompted the Rhenish Mission Society to re-evaluate their polices. Nearly bankrupt and defeated, the organization’s internal questions regarding its mission to spread God’s word helped to encourage changes to theology and praxis. This re-evaluation led to a new era in Southwest Africa in which religion and politics were no longer separate spheres.

90 VEMA, 1.704c, 105 ff. “Pönninghaus internment camp letters.”

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3.6. Conclusion

This chapter spans nearly twenty years of Southwest African history. The political, economic, and social changes during this period were numerous. Through these changes the Rhenish Mission Society was faced at times with bankruptcy, loss of congregations, loss of educational dominance, and competition from other Christian evangelical groups. As an organization, it endured pressure from the state, which no longer defended them caused by nationalistic or ethnic differences. In fact, the Union of South Africa itself as a government underwent many changes. By the 1950s, the National Party was entrenched in power, imposing the policy of apartheid on South Africa and Southwest Africa alike. The reactions to this extreme segregation are discussed further in Chapters Six. In short, the formal imposition of apartheid created tensions within many congregations and prompted resistance from within the religious sphere. Despite these struggles, the Rhenish Mission Society was able to survive and maintained an influence in the region as inhabitants moved towards independence from South African control. Efforts of missionaries like Friedrich Pönnighaus embodied the rather difficult and complicated nature of evangelical work in Southwest Africa, but proved that mission efforts could be successful with persistence and willing colleagues among African converts.
CHAPTER FOUR: RHENISH MISSIONARY SOCIETY AND AFRICANS – CONVERSION AND CULTURAL CHANGES, c.1900 – 1930s

4.1. Hosea Kutako

German defeat in the First World War offered some promise of a post-colonial era in Southwest Africa. For many Africans, this event elevated hopes for a return to political independence; within these desires, the foundations of new national identities were formed. For many, this national identity eventually included Christianity. One of the key individuals responsible for this construction in Herero society specifically was Hosea Kutako, the subsequent Supreme Chief of the Herero in Southwest Africa. As a Christian convert and political leader, he was a prominent figure in the inter-war years, acting as the mediator between the Herero and Western influences – namely, church and state. Considering his conversion to Christianity, it seems paradoxical that he associated with a group of Herero headmen who unsuccessfully petitioned the South African government in 1920 to exile the Rhenish Mission Society from the region – i.e., the very organization instrumental in exposing Southwest Africa to Christianity in the first place.¹ This request was rooted in a sense of betrayal, dating back to the beginning of the century with the German-Herero War, and a conflation of German missionaries with German colonial forces altogether.²


² In defense of this linkage, Lukas de Vries has argued: “The atrocities of colonialism overshadow its good deeds to such an extent that one finds it quite impossible to see the good through the dark glass of the embittered past.” Lukas de Vries, Mission and Colonialism in Namibia (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978), 50. See also, V.Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 45-7. Mudimbe argues that missionaries are “the best symbol of the colonial enterprise” due to their entanglement with “cultural propaganda, patriotic motivations, and commercial interests.”
Kutako’s relationship with the Rhenish Mission Society from Southwest Africa is noteworthy due to his interaction with the organization over the course of his long life. He was born in 1870 at Okahurimehi between Etjo and Ozohungo (present day Kalkveld) in the Okahandja region. Kutako went to school at Omburo, being baptized there under the evangelical efforts of the Rhenish Mission Society at the end of the nineteenth century. His father, Mutanga Kutako, was an evangelist for the Rhenish Mission Society at Omburo. This association shows an early connection with the church. In 1904, Kutako participated in the German-Herero War, setting him against the German government; fighting in several separate battles and being wounded twice – once in the leg, the other in the cheek. Missionary actions during and after the war were problematic for the Herero leader, as he saw them siding with the German state rather than looking out for Herero well being. One such incident that was etched into Herero collective consciousness was the role missionaries played in the collection of Herero after the massacre on the Waterberg Plateau in which German forces imprisoned groups of people who had sought refuge in the church at Ombakaha. Recounting the war decades later, Kutako commented:

Missionaries [kept themselves] on the side of German Govt. [They] Were always found among the German troops. They supplied the troops with information… [I] never saw or heard of missionaries helping [the Herero].

Kutako himself was placed in a concentration camp at Omaruru, but was eventually released and placed in charge of tending the German soldiers’ horses. Rumors soon spread that officials

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3 Israel Goldblatt, Dag Henrichsen, Naomi Jacobson, and Karen Marshall, Building Bridges: Namibian Nationalists Clemens Kapuuo, Hosea Kutako, Brenden Simbwaye, and Samuel Witbooi (Basel, Switzerland: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010), 33 ff. This work is one of the few biographical resources for Hosea Kutako. See also, Jan-Bart Gewald, “Chief Hosea Kutako: a Herero royal and Namibian nationalist’s life against confinement, 1870-1970,” Strength Beyond Structure: Social and Historical Trajectories of Agency in Africa, eds. Mirjam de Bruijn, Rijk van Dijk, and Jan-Bart Gewald (Leiden: Brill, 2007). The passage is telling, because it reflects the importance of memory when examining the historical narrative as archival and other anecdotal evidence contradict the story presented.
discovered Kutako’s role as an active combatant in the war and some of the soldiers were planning on killing him while tending the horses. Fearing for his life, Kutako fled to the mountains for a time, thus escaping the camps. As these camps were gradually abolished and what could be considered a sense of normalcy restored, he was appointed as a teacher at the mission school in Omaruru in 1907 where he stayed for two years. After this, he moved to Tsumeb to work in a copper mine, possibly to be closer to his older brother who was an evangelist there. His time in the mines was cut short when new rumors arose that he was to be arrested for his role in the war. Kutako again went on the lam, picking up work on the railroads, and eventually settling near Windhoek. In 1916, a scandal erupted concerning Gerhard Kamaheke, the Herero headman at Windhoek, who opposed the return of Supreme Chief Samuel Maharero from exile. In a vote of no-confidence, Herero elders ousted Kamaheke and elevated Kutako as regent until Maharero could return from Bechuanaland. This political position made him an important contact regarding relations with the Rhenish Mission.

Despite what appeared to be animosity between Kutako and the mission, the two worked together in an uneasy alliance for most of the Herero chief’s life. This relationship highlighted the overall character of the Herero as a Christian people, but also, as a unique “nation” seeking political agency. Kutako, as an individual, exemplified the multifaceted nature of Southwest African identity, especially one of the colonized seeking to gain autonomy from the colonizer. His political and religious identities were often enmeshed, which was not surprising considering his position within Herero society. Kutako became increasingly politically active over the years. In the 1920s, he became affiliated with the United Negro Improvement Associations’ branch

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4 *Afrikanischer Heimatkalender* (Windhoek, Namibia: Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Namibia, 2005), 70.

office in Windhoek, connecting him with Marcus Garvey’s transnational and pan-African society. This group advocated increased political agency by Africans with the end goal of an “Africa for Africans.” In 1923, the death of Samuel Maharero acted as a unifying event for Herero nationalism, but also reinforced the Christian affiliation of the Herero people. This identity, however, was not universal despite Maharero’s last letter urging his people to stay within the church. Although Kutako was a Christian, he and other leaders sought during the inter-war years to reclaim Herero cultural traditions in the wake of Maharero’s funeral with a few rekindling traditional religious practices. Kutako sought to synthesize Christianity with the Herero past.

Kutako’s dual role as a Christian and political leader played out until his death in 1970. In 1945, he was instrumental in petitioning the United Nations for Southwest African independence, using an Anglican priest as the messenger after being denied travel visas by the South African government and not finding strong support from Rhenish Mission leaders. Five years later, Kutako held frank discussions with the Rhenish Mission Society, requesting the formation of an independent church, complaining of a lack of progress in the elevation and inclusion of blacks in church hierarchy. Despite steps taken in that direction, Kutako spearheaded a breakaway church known as Oruuano in 1955. In 1963, a bronze bust of Kutako was placed at the Rhenish Mission School in Windhoek to celebrate the many contributions of the chief, with the then Präses H.K. Diehl and his family as some of the guests of honor. Today, the international airport outside of Windhoek is named in Kutako’s honor as well. Overall, the

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6 See section 4.6 “Return to Traditional Practices.”

7 See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion of the Oruuano Church.

8 Goldblatt, 28. The sculptor was actually Israel Goldblatt’s daughter, Naomi Jacobson. The bust is now in the Namibian National Museum.
life of Hosea Kutako was reflective of the process of Christian conversion and appropriation in a colonial environment – at times demonstrating a level of agency that proved that Westernization and Christian conversion were neither inevitable nor passive. Although he was Herero, his story is in many ways representative of all African Christians in Southwest Africa.

This chapter examines the interaction between Rhenish Missionaries and the African population of Southwest Africa during the interwar period. It is especially concerned with the process of religious conversion and the development of a Christian identity in what is now Namibia. There was a period of mass conversion immediately after the Herero and Nama genocides in the first part of the century as many turned to the church for some sense of stability and security. However, in the 1920s, there was a noticeable pulling away from the mission church by African elites, especially among the Herero – at times even marked occurrences of religious reclamation of traditional forms of worship. Some of the independence demonstrated by African leaders may have been influenced by external groups like Marcus Garvey’s UNIA that established a presence in Southwest Africa after the First World War and promoted black self-sufficiency. The increased assertion of political and religious agency on all fronts took some missionaries by surprise, and the Rhenish Mission Society set out to ensure what it considered orthodox practice by its converts and spiritual charges. Ultimately, the chapter’s focus shifts to the failure of the egalitarian aspect of Christianity to take hold in the region as capable Africans were not elevated to positions within the clergy. The slow path to creating an indigenous clergy,

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9 An aspect of Jean and John Comaroff’s concept of “colonization of consciousness” states that there is an unavoidable consequence of cultural interaction in colonial power dynamics where the colonized will adopt or absorb aspects of the dominant culture due to the nature of the power differential. This implies a level of inevitability that was not universal across all cases of European|African interaction, especially in the mission field. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, On Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 243-251.
and the much longer road to founding an independent church, led to a series of schisms within the organization as well as the development of some groups outside of the Rhenish Mission’s purview (as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six). African members had to decide to stay under the umbrella of the Rhenish Mission or set out on their own – in the end, a majority stayed within the RMS church. Finally, the chapter briefly compares the Christianization of Southwest Africa with other cases in Africa and/or under German influence. By doing so, the social, political, and religious implications of conversion in Southwest Africa can be seen in the greater transnational picture – fitting into similar patterns found elsewhere, but not diminishing the roles played by both German missionaries and Africans in the process.

4.2. Status of religious confession after the Herero-Nama Genocide

Without question, the genocidal actions implemented by the German colonial régime after the Herero Revolt of 1904 led to a marked decimation of both the Herero and Nama peoples – roughly by 80% and 50% respectively. The policies of General Lothar von Trotha destroyed the African population in Southwest Africa. His strong-arm attempt at German colonial control was harsh, but eventually censured by Kaiser Wilhelm II after the colonial governor and political groups in Germany exerted pressure. Trotha’s “extermination order” was rescinded in November 1905, but that itself did not end the suffering of the Herero or Nama people as their lives, social order, and economy were destroyed. Even though the policy of elimination was ended, the colonial state did little to provide for the care and shelter of Africans after the military onslaught – that responsibility fell to missionaries, who as white Germans were in a peculiar position between their converts and the state.

\[10\] See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of the historiographical debates concerning population and death tolls, though a quick summary is found in Isabel Hull’s *Absolute Destruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 89-90.
After German colonial forces had been ordered to change tactics regarding native policy, they turned to collection and management. Concentration camps were created to relocate and control the African population, though Ovamboland to the north was mostly exempted from this turmoil. Missionaries played a significant role in the gathering and care of Africans in this process of relocation and internment. At the beginning of the internment process, missionaries were encouraged by the German colonial government to help collect Africans and bring them under the control of the state. The conundrum for Herero and Nama individuals was that if they spurned food and shelter offered by mission stations, their chances of survival in the veld, expansive grasslands in Southern Africa, were slim. The Rhenish Mission turned out to be one of the two viable havens for Herero and Nama – the other being the Roman Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{11} This situation was especially complicated by the fact that if military patrols captured them, treatment was expected to be harsh if not fatal.\textsuperscript{12} For many, the network of concentration camps created more of a living nightmare than a viable living situation.

In this complicated relationship, Africans often found that missionaries were one of the only sources of refuge within camps as evangelists provided the little food, clothing, and medical care that existed. Missionaries, too, were some of the only voices critical of the harsh treatment of the native population. Rhenish missionaries August Kuhlmann and Wilhelm Eich were at first reluctant to aid in this process of collection, requesting the government to promise better

\textsuperscript{11} In the concentration camps and in the case of orphans, the German colonial state split obligations between the Rhenish Mission and the Roman Catholic Church, the latter having a presence in the region due to Catholic members of the \textit{Schutztruppe}. It should be noted that the Catholics lagged behind the RMS in personnel and materials in Southwest Africa at that time. I am unaware of any work that specifically focuses on the Roman Catholic Church at this time.

\textsuperscript{12} See Chapter One for more on the treatment of Africans by the state and white farmer populations immediately following the German-Herero War.
treatment for any Herero or Nama who turned themselves in to the state authority.\textsuperscript{13} Assurances were made, but turned out to be false promises once in the camps. The most egregious of these was on Shark Island, where the mortality rate was atrociously high – up to 80\%.\textsuperscript{14} It was here that medical experiments were carried out by anthropologist Eugen Fischer, especially on children and mulattos.\textsuperscript{15} Other atrocities occurred as well on Shark Island, including sexual assaults on Herero and Nama women. In 1908 the camps were closed as the military turned over control of the colony to the civilian government – if for no other reason than if the camps stayed open any longer, it would have bled Southwest Africa’s pool of potential labor.\textsuperscript{16}

During this phase of colonialism, Herero and Nama peoples were systematically stripped of most of their livelihood and social stability. Life under the German colonial government for Africans became increasingly regulated. Reservations, discussed before the Herero Revolt as a means of preserving African livelihood and traditional lands, were now employed as a means of controlling the population spatially. Trust in the German state had dissolved by this point.

\textsuperscript{13} For more on missionary objections, but eventual cooperation see J Lukas De Vries, Namibia, Mission, und Politik (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 183.

\textsuperscript{14} See also Chapter One, the aforementioned Hull citation, and one of the better discussions of the hardships of camp life; Gewald, Herero Heroes, 192 \textit{ff.} Shark Island today is no longer an island, as land reclamation projects have connected it with the mainland.

\textsuperscript{15} Paul Weindling, Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 143, 188, 237. Eugen Fischer went on to have an influential position within German medical science and anthropology as proponent of eugenics.

Protection treaties signed at the onset of German colonialism were proven hollow. Missionaries, too, saw trust in them eroded as they supported the legitimacy of the German colonial government rather than backing political demands of their black parishioners. Some Herero and Nama even saw missionaries as direct collaborators with the government’s efforts to restrict and control their lives. Through the culmination of these sentiments, it could be argued that the brutality of the German colonial government destroyed much of the groundwork established by the Rhenish Mission over the previous decades. After the dissolution of the labor and concentration camps, missionaries found their duties difficult to perform in the new circumstances. As populations were relocated, the existing mission stations turned out to be geographically disadvantaged. Nine mission stations were closed as unviable. Six new ones were opened, closer to where black populations were allowed to live. It should be noted that the missionaries were not allowed to cohabitate on the reserves themselves as permanent residents.

Regarding religion, a paradox ensued as a wave of conversions occurred – Africans in large numbers adopting the religion of their oppressors. Many scholars have argued that this was due mostly to the previously mentioned destruction of social structures and cultural traditions. Church membership and participation in Southwest Africa spiked greatly after hostilities ended. In 1903, the numbers of those who regularly attended services for the southern half of the region were 13,909. The year after hostilities started in 1904, attendance had dropped to 9,112. By 1908, the year after the end of formal combat, the numbers grew to 12,749. These figures nearly

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doubled in four years, climbing to 21,150 in 1912.\textsuperscript{19} Keep in mind that these statistics represent a higher percentage of total population due to the huge loss of life between 1904-1907.

One contributing event to this increase was that this period of Southwest African history experienced a second phase of the Augustineum’s life. This teacher training school reopened in 1910 under the guidance of Heinrich Vedder. It admitted twenty-nine students across a representative spectrum of Herero, Nama, Damara, and Baster. This school embodied the basis of later trans-ethnic Namibian identity that can be traced to these interactions under the Rhenish Mission.\textsuperscript{20} The institution provided teacher training and also religious instruction with the intent of developing African evangelists to assist missionaries in the spiritual nourishment of the region. The first batch of students graduated in April 1914, which was fortuitous as many of these graduates were able to serve in leadership roles during the First World War. The Great War’s impact on Southwest Africa forced the school to close, and it was not reopened until 1922 when Vedder was allowed back into the region after his expulsion.\textsuperscript{21}

4.3. Material relationships with missionaries and the alienation of labor

When the First World War broke out, South Africa’s invasion of German \textit{Südwestafrika} offered Africans in the region a false hope that the tyranny of colonialism would soon be broken. Lord Buxton, the General Governor of the Union of South Africa, heightened these expectations as he toured Southwest Africa in 1916, making promises throughout his travels that original

\textsuperscript{19} Buys, 66.

\textsuperscript{20} One of the key factors of this trans-ethnic cooperation is not merely the shared experience of the Christian religion, but also the German language shared to communicate in mixed classrooms and outside of school. Instruction language eventually shifted to English due to state regulations with some groups refusing Afrikaans.

\textsuperscript{21} Discussed in Chapter Two and momentarily.
lands would be returned to the Herero and Nama nations.\textsuperscript{22} Adding to the optimistic spirit was the fact that equality under the law was put into place per British policies – in stark contrast to bifurcated German law that treated white Europeans and Africans differently. Union of South Africa officials, aware that the potential for rebellion was real, were thus willing to relax many of the restrictions placed upon Africans by the German government – most notably, the prohibitions on land and cattle ownership. With the new political realities at play, Herero and Nama leaders hoped for a return of territorial control along lines similar to those found before European domination. They realized that the protection treaties under German rule were null and void, and, therefore, anticipated that the Union of South Africa would return lands back to them and expel German settlers.

For the Herero, reopening the door to traditional economic practices was promising. Many moved to areas that once belonged to their respective clans, acquired cattle, and attempted to piece together an independent life as detached from European power as possible, sometimes even from the influence of the Rhenish Mission. Some scholars link this process to a wholesale rejection of modernism.\textsuperscript{23} To support their re-acquired herds, Herero ranchers needed grazing lands. Some squatted on abandoned German homesteads of those who had either fled to urban areas or were exiled; others were fairly nomadic, causing uneasiness among white settlers who, in turn, petitioned the government to devise a containment policy. Among the Nama, there was a similar process as many also left urban areas and tried to reestablish pre-1904 lifestyles. A counter-example was the community at Warmbad, under Missionary Hermann Nyhof, which held its own, demonstrating slow growth into the 1930s despite losing some of their

\textsuperscript{22} Buys, 110.

\textsuperscript{23} Gewald, “\textit{We Thought We’d be Free…”}, 30.
congregation to the Catholic parish. Missionary Wilhelm Peter’s community at Bethanie also held consistent growth in the inter-war period. The Damara, a more marginalized group once enslaved at times by both the Herero and the Nama, were less revolutionary and maintained the status quo in Southwest Africa. For this reason, they proved to be a successful group for the Rhenish Mission in the period, as the Damara often found stability and sanctuary within the church.  

Several Herero and Nama leaders recognized that any gains should be taken advantage of if possible, agreeing to cooperate with government plans for relocation, somewhat based on territories owned before German colonialism. Complicating matters in the 1920s when the Mandate System was finalized by the League of Nations, Southwest Africa witnessed an increase in white settlement. Many Germans were allowed to stay and Union of South Africa officials encouraged poorer Afrikaners (mostly from the Transvaal and Angola) to move into the territory. The Native Lands Act of 1913 from South Africa was eventually imposed in Southwest Africa, reinforcing the existence of reserves and solidifying segregation in the region along color lines to the benefit of white settlers. Proclamations 13 and 54 of 1920 allowed for the creation of additional reservations by allocating crown lands seized from the German state. By 1921, virtually all Herero and Nama lived on reserves. More reserves were created for Africans to redistribute territory and segregate populations along ethnic lines, but on the mandate

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24 Buys, 85-90. Trends concerning marginalized groups adopting Christianity were also found in Tanganyika (former German East Africa), and are discussed later in this chapter.

25 See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion on the reservation system and institutionalized segregation.

government’s terms for the benefit of white residents. The hope that pre-colonial possessions would be restored was thus short-lived. Furthermore, it did not take long to realize that most white inhabitants were staying in Southwest Africa. By 1922, it was obvious that things in the region would not improve drastically for Africans – colonial subjugation resumed after a mere respite, just under new masters.

German missionaries became concerned during this transitional period because they saw a change in African behavior. Missionary Johannes Olpp was against the extension of the political “freedoms” that occurred during the power shift from Germany to the Union of South Africa. The Präses cautioned in 1919:

> British propaganda on the subject of liberating nations from the German yoke immediately awakened in many of them [Africans] (very many in fact) a veritable intoxication of freedom… From all over the country one heard reports of insubordination, rebelliousness and indolence. The Africans who had been so docile under German rule, had become unrecognizable. Where they had once meekly let themselves be guided by the missionaries, they were now behaving in such an ‘arrogant’ manner, that many missionaries feared for their safety… A deep rift suddenly developed between the missionaries and their congregations… The missionaries anxiously hoped for a strong regime, capable of restoring the old order…

Missionary Spellmeyer, too, was concerned with this newfound “intoxication of freedom.” He worried that it would lead to more unrest in the region, but noted that as long as there was open talk about dissatisfaction, then not much would come of it. Past experiences indicated that

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27 As quoted in Buys, 110. The same English translation is found in Lothar Engel, *Kolonialismus und Nationalismus im deutschen Protestantismus in Namibia 1907 bis 1945: Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen evangelischen Mission und Kirche im ehemaligen Kolonial- und Mandatsgebiet Südwestafrika* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1976), 131.

28 One reason that “intoxication” may be used could be attributed to the great fear of many missionaries that the introduction of alcohol in the region was destructive to African lives. See Chapters One and Three for more on the perils missionaries associated with alcohol abuse.

29 Engel, 131.
silence was a key sign of some impending rebellion as just prior to the German-Herero War, all talk of rebellion ceased.\textsuperscript{30} Inherent here were traces of the missionaries’ paternalism that associated subservience and docility as necessary to guide their African charges to salvation. Also present was an underlying assumption by the missionary that Africans were not yet able to govern themselves politically.

In reality, there was never a threat for wholesale violence in the territory on the part of Africans at this time, and though there were a couple of occurrences, these were isolated events met with swift brutality. In May 1922, there was a revolt among the Bondelswarts who were angered at increased limitations imposed by the mandate government and the imposition of a dog tax in 1917. South African forces crushed the uprising rather quickly, responding with aerial bombardment – a harsh retaliation, possibly meant more as a deterrent to other groups than merely policing a rebellious pocket of society. Approximately one-quarter of the 400 participants were killed, including some women and children. The event prompted the Union of South Africa to demand further restrictions on missionaries, who, in a turn of irony, the state believed contributed to this “independent spirit” exhibited by the usurpers.\textsuperscript{31} This exchange highlighted the fact that missionaries were often caught in the middle of tensions between their congregations and the state.

The most significant case of unrest in the years following the First World War, however, was the Rehoboth Baster Rebellion of 1925. The Basters had been accustomed to a high level of independence during German colonial rule, and as the Mandate government restricted this


autonomy and failed to return lands confiscated by the Germans, members of the community rejected South African measures to limit their political sovereignty. During this altercation (which also employed bombers), the Rhenish Mission Society supported the state’s authority and right to maintain order – with reservations regarding the extent of force used.\textsuperscript{32} This siding with the government estranged the missionaries from more of the African population because it reinforced fears that white missionaries would always support the white government against blacks.\textsuperscript{33} Racial biases were thus reinforced by political actions, but most likely the missionaries’ siding with the state had more to do with the Lutheran Two Kingdoms Doctrine.\textsuperscript{34}

These concerns of racial divides between white missionaries and Africans were deep-rooted. Well before the German-Herero War, in 1888 Samuel Maharero commented that “the missionaries were good for teaching the children when they first arrived, but that [sic] they became bad when they entered the service of their colonial masters.”\textsuperscript{35} One Nama leader noted in 1924 that, “The children learn nothing in the school; by staying with the mission we have remained dumb.”\textsuperscript{36} What both failed to address was that there were no other avenues for

\textsuperscript{32} The archival material for the RMS concerning this event shows that those in Southwest Africa were quite concerned about the use of planes and machine guns against a few hundred lightly armed Africans.

\textsuperscript{33} Hellberg, 182 ff. See also, Buys, 67. Missionaries typically considered colonial government as legitimate rule, whether it was German or British/South African. This was the case until the re-evaluation of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine after the Second World War as discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{34} See Lukas de Vries, \textit{Mission and Colonialism}. See also Chapter Two’s extended discussion on the Two Kingdoms and Chapter Six’s examination of when that doctrine changed, thus allowing for the church to critique the state’s actions.

\textsuperscript{35} As quoted in Buys, 89.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Berichte der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft} (1924), 116.
education outside of the mission at the time. The Union of South Africa was far more concerned with Africans as a pool of available labor, thus limited their access to education in mission schools to Standard II. Missionary Meier noted in the “Annual Yearbook for the Herero Community at Windhoek” in 1924 the concerns of one of his former converts who blamed missionaries for the loss of land, cattle, and political rights:

You missionaries are guilty of our present defeat. You have not only made us property-less, you have also taken away our rights. For us God’s word has been a calamity. In the past we were the owners, and today it is the whites. To whom does the land now belong, and where are the huge herds that our fathers once owned? It has been like this everywhere where God’s word has arrived: from South Africa all the way to Togo. If only our fathers had not become Christians, then matters would have been very different.37

Here, a strong linkage of missionary and colonial action was present. So much of the mistrust among the Herero of the RMS stemmed from the German atrocities between 1904 and 1915. Even at that time Missionary Kuhlmann, who stayed with his parishioners during the first months of the German-Herero War, noted that the Herero believed that missionaries were in league with German troops in an effort to kill them. He was, in reality, one of the vocal critics of the colonial government and believed the official RMS rebuke against what was seen as a rebellion was too harsh.38 Kuhlmann further commented: “Now I have discovered for myself what they think of the war and their leaders. One said that the teachers were apparently more sympathetic to the soldiers, that we were after all also whites…”39 This passage reinforced the existence of racial fears and divisions. Yet again, missionary allegiance to the state government


38 Gewald, “*We Thought We would be Free…*” 158 ff.

39 As quoted in De Vries, 177.
was most likely linked to adherence with the Two Kingdoms Doctrine. That is not to say that some missionaries were not latent racists, only that there were a multitude of factors that played into the organization’s overarching behavior. Many of the Rhenish missionaries were quite aware of racial prejudices in Southwest Africa. Missionary Friedrich Rust attempted to address the problem of racism in 1926 at a pastors’ conference. His efforts to bring up the issue saw others in the group shift the conversation to the need to warn incoming settlers against racial defilement.40

Living conditions for Africans soon moved in the direction of European-style labor practices, which often required able-bodied men to live away from their families (who were on the reserves) to urban centers or mining camps.41 “Forced proletarianization” had already occurred by 1907 as the German colonial government pressed Africans into wage labor and instituted taxes that required monetary payments.42 As such, the reserves were not intended for able-bodied natives – or “productive labor.”43 Exceptions were made for individuals who had established themselves with a specific number of cattle or other livestock, thus able to justify traditional lifestyles. Certificates were issued for Herero men who had over fifty head of small stock or ten cattle. More importantly, as part of this process, South African labor policies were enacted, bringing with it pass laws and other restrictions. Contract recruiting agencies were

40 VEMA 2.688ab, 10 ff. See also the opening vignette for Chapter Five.

41 Hosea Kutako even worked at one of these mines for a period of time.

42 This issue is discussed in detail by Buys, 68; Mbuende, Namibia, the Broken Shield; and, Gewald, “We Thought we Would be Free...”.

43 Gewald, “We Thought we Would be Free…” , 239.
formed as early as 1925, seeking men to work in the various mines (mostly along the coast). The contract labor system separated most men from women and children for months at a time. Further complicating matters in the religious realm was the fact that many white farmers refused to allow missionaries to work among the black laborers on their lands, possibly acknowledging that missionary interaction leads to education and upward mobility. In short, the proletarianization of Herero (as well as Nama, Ovambo, Damara, etc…) labor helped limit RMS access to male parishioners and potential converts. This situation required about a decade for missionaries to adjust their evangelical strategies.

For missionaries, these new spatial realities posed some logistical issues. The Rhenish Mission Society found itself less involved in the daily lives of their parishioners. Creation of new grazing lands and reservations for Herero, Nama, and Basters made most mission stations obsolete, similar to what happened when the Germans created labor camps. Proximity was key to a successful mission. Mission stations served as centers for evangelical activity, education, and medical care – in essence, beacons of European civilization. As discussed in Chapter Two, access to the Ovambo was severed when the Union of South Africa removed Rhenish Missionaries out of the region to foster a “no whites zone.” The new reserves were fairly inaccessible and populations proved to be much more spread out than before, rather than congregated near mission stations. Visitation now became a chore. One of the best examples of this was during Missionary Jakob Irle’s first visit to Animus, east of Windhoek, which caused him to remark on the green pastures encountered en route to the location, but once he arrived, the actual reserve was barren land. Furthermore, Irle noted that there was self-imposed segregation

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44 Katjavivi, Resistance, 15. The Southern Recruiting Organization focused on diamond mines, while the Northern Labor Organization specialized in recruiting for the copper mines at Tsumeb. These two eventually merged in 1943 as the South West Africa Native Labor Association (SWANLA).
in the reservation itself between those who returned to traditional practices and those aligned with the mission church.\textsuperscript{45}

The process of evangelizing was further complicated by the increased distrust of missionaries discussed earlier, as they were seen by more and more aligned with the state government rather than with Africans. Because missionaries saw German colonial government as the legitimate form of state power, it then is not implausible to assume that they turned to the Union of South Africa as a “real” state as opposed to supporting indigenous autonomy. Furthermore, backing indigenous autonomy was inconceivable at the time due to a Eurocentric Weltanschauung, not to mention the resistance of some missionaries to turn over spiritual authority to an Afican clergy. Despite having a supportive home office and three strong advocates in the field in the persons of Pönnighaus, Rust, and Spellmeyer there were clear hurdles to the process of local ordination. Therefore there were inherent steps underlying the mission’s approach to Africans, demonstrating that political concerns were not on the horizon until spiritual matters were secured.

One area of continuity between the missionaries and their congregations was that of medical care. Missionaries remained the primary avenue for healthcare, especially for children. Mission stations typically had a trained nurse on staff to see to the needs of Africans. The Rhenish station at Keetmanshoop even had a designated medical mission, staffed by several nurses. Schools were still run by the RMS, but increasingly older, male children were kept at home to help support family homesteads and manage small livestock. This left female students, who were then given a curriculum rooted in vocational training for the service industry.\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item VEMA 2.501, *Halbjahresbericht*, Gobabis (Okt 1925 – Mai 1926).
\item I plan to expand this section for the manuscript version of the project.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
4.4. Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association in the 1920s

As the relationship between the Rhenish Mission Society and Africans became strained due to both perceived and real racial tensions, another organization began courting favor in Southwest Africa. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born political leader seeking to free subaltern blacks from Western dominance, founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in August 1914. It was one of the main political organizations promoting the idea of “Africa for Africans.” The group grew quickly around its leader’s charisma and unifying message. Although Garvey and the UNIA were later met with criticism and experienced internal problems, the legacy of the group proved to spark black agency among African-Americans and then among others marginalized by Western powers.

The message of the UNIA was first spread abroad by its publication The Negro World, founded in August 1918 and disseminated from New York City. Copies of this paper reached Cape Town by 1919, followed thereafter by envoys from the UNIA itself. Representatives passed out pamphlets and made speeches in the Cape and other parts of Southern Africa, gaining support among local Africans who were drawn to the group’s Pan-African ideology. In foreign affairs, the group proved itself dedicated to black liberation from European colonial control. A UNIA delegation visited the Versailles peace talks after the First World War, petitioning for all former German colonies to be made into independent countries. The group later implored the

47 “Africa for Africans” was itself rooted in the work of religious radical leaders Joseph Booth and John Chilembwe. The phrase was coined in 1897. The two wanted an independent African-American Christianity that would in turn evangelize Africa and bring it “Christian civilization” and ultimately see the independence from Western authority. See Ewing, Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 46-47.

48 Hellberg, 172.
League of Nations in 1922 to turn over Southwest Africa to the “Negro race” for self-government. Both pleas were ignored as Wilsonian self-determination proved to apply only to Western Europeans.

The UNIA’s entrance into Southwest Africa was in December 1920 through migrants working in the shipyards. The Lüderitz chapter of the group was founded by Fritz Herbert Headly (from the West Indies) and John de Clue (from West Africa). These two focused their efforts on dockworkers at first – composed of black Southwest Africans and also those living in the region who had been previously deported from former German colonies like the Cameroons. One of the main attractions to the UNIA for these individuals was that it supported the creation of a self-reliant community, yet was non-confrontational towards the state (at least initially).

Education programs and insurance plans were created, political groups formed, and a hospital proposed – all to be funded by annual dues. This support structure offered Africans a social framework outside of the mission and the state, promising a larger degree of empowerment and opportunity. As other UNIA chapters formed, those in leadership positions tended to be individuals who once held high political and social statuses prior to the German-Herero War of


50 See Pederson, *Guardians*, 109, 191-3 for issues concerning self-determination and the mandate system.

51 Ewing, 92; Hellberg, 172.

52 Ewing, 194. Ewing states that the Lüderitz chapter specifically was pacifistic, but clearly the ideology of the UNIA was antithetical to long-term collaboration with the South Africa Union government.
1904. Therefore, the UNIA offered a venue to reinforce older social structures, while also creating an independent, community support system.53

Headly stated the group’s platform for a German-speaking audience in a letter to the Allgemeine Zeitung, a German-based newspaper:

The object of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League shall be to establish a Universal Confraternity among the race: to promote the spirit of pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to administer to the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to assist in the development of Independent Negro Nations and Communities or Agencies in the principal countries and cities of the world; for the representation and protection of all Negroes irrespective of nationality; to promote a conscientious worship among the natives of Africa: to establish Universities, Colleges, Academics and Schools for the racial education and culture of the people; to conduct a world wide commercial and industrial intercourse for the good of the people; to work for better conditions in all Negro communities.54

Note that much of the language used was co-opted from earlier European goals associated with the civilizing mission. The content of the text implied that white attempts had failed and it was time for a collaborative effort led by blacks to succeed. Members donned a red, black, and green tricolor brocade to indicate their membership – thus linking them to a wider network of the Pan-African movement.55

Initially, the organization chapters in Lüderitz and Swakopmund gained some popularity, especially among the Nama. Eventually a branch was opened in Windhoek in October 1921 that


54 Allgemeine Zeitung (9 March 1924). This paragraph is verbatim Article 1, Section 3 of the UNIA’s 1918 Constitution and Book of Laws.

55 These colors were formally adopted by the UNIA in 1920 as part of their “Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World” and was soon adopted by groups aligned or sympathetic with the pan-African movement.
included more Herero representatives. By December of that year, there were a total of 311 members on the UNIA rosters. That number climbed into the thousands over the next year, but the rapid growth would not be sustained as tensions arose among group expectations and the leadership. There was an internal rift between the Lüderitz and Windhoek chapters in 1922, as locals resisted “foreigners” like Headly in the organization. Hosea Kutako and Nikanor Hoveka were key leaders involved within the UNIA branch at Windhoek. Kutako’s brother, John Mugunda, became the President of the Windhoek chapter and set the tone for the group. Mugunda summed up the dominant position of many Herero: “the society [UNIA] has been formed through American ideas, but Americans only explained it but will not do the work – we must do that.” By the end of 1922, “almost all Hereros” had joined the UNIA according to one historian. The reality was that their respective leaders mostly likely joined the group and placed their entire communities on the rosters, thus overstating active participation. The move against non-Southwest Africans pointed to a fear that an alternative power structure with “Americans” in control under Garvey in Liberia would be the end result of UNIA policies.

The UNIA is credited for providing a semi-autonomous political and social structure outside of religious institutions, but its success in Southwest Africa (and elsewhere) was short-lived. In 1921, there was much excitement around Garvey and the Black Star Line, a shipping line designed to provide transport for Africans abroad back to Africa, as plans were announced to create a Pan-African state with Garvey at its helm in an effort to liberate Africa from white

56 Werner, 124.

57 Hellberg, 173.

58 As quoted in Ewing, 195.

59 Engel, 199.
control. In Southwest Africa funds were raised to support the venture – approximately £2,000. No doubt the Rhenish Mission Society was frustrated by these donations as its own tithe collections had suffered following World War One.\footnote{The situation with tithing is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.} There were even rumors of an armed insurrection in the making to help usher in Garvey’s voyage to Africa. This anticipation of violence was encouraged, in part, by some of Garvey’s speeches. He once intimated in June 1922 that planes should be sent to help the Bondelswarts, evening the playing field with South Africa.\footnote{Werner, 122.} Euphoria regarding Garvey’s planned visit resulted in a devastating blow when the UNIA leader never showed. The UNIA thus declined in popularity as dues collected resulted in neither apparent benefits nor political changes. Much like the Herero did with church tithes when they saw diminishing returns, they too stopped paying membership fees to the UNIA.\footnote{Ibid., 131.} Garvey was later indicted for criminal activities in 1924 and the organization’s support in Southwest Africa collapsed entirely. He was found guilty of embezzlement and mail fraud in 1925 by a US court and was incarcerated in federal prison for about two years. Funds raised specifically for Garvey’s visit and other programs in Southwest Africa vanished, leaving UNIA supporters jaded and feeling betrayed by yet another group of outsiders. Thus, hopes of an overarching unity based upon a common African heritage were not achieved.

Throughout this interaction with the UNIA, members did not necessarily see their association with the group as exclusive from membership in the Christian church, though the lack of upward mobility within the Rhenish Mission church may help to explain why the UNIA was so attractive. For whatever reasons, the official leadership of the RMS did not understand or
acknowledge the political frustrations of Africans in Southwest Africa, especially between 1919 and 1922 when hopes for increased autonomy were raised, then dashed. While Garvey’s organization did not pose an overt challenge to Christianity, the RMS clergy saw the UNIA as a clear threat to its evangelical efforts and stability in the region. Rhenish leadership believed the group to be responsible for political agitation and feared it would lead to some form of insurgency. They warned against the “Ethiopianism” inherent in the movement as well as the independent spirit it may promote. The “Ethiopians” here refers to the general movement which called for Africans to be in charge of their religious and political destinies. Missionary Heinrich Pardey noted that, “Almost the entire Herero congregation dissociated itself from us, and its behavior towards us is negative… This is the work of the Ethiopians.”

One could argue that missionaries wanted their congregations to be apolitical in accordance with the Two Kingdoms doctrine, but the reality, of course, was more complicated. Missionary Otto Meier was concerned about the UNIA’s political agitation, which he (rightly) saw as wanting to remove white government and white missionaries from the region. He was not far off in his perception of the group, because many Africans had expectations that Garvey would usher in political liberation, some even speaking of armed rebellion as mentioned before. As a corollary, Heinrich

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64 Halbjahresbucht Grootfontein 17.4.1923, as quoted in Werner, *No One Will Become Rich*, 123-4.

65 Werner, 126.
Vedder – arguably the key figure obstructing black ordination – tried to get a group of Africans appointed to the Legislative Assembly in the 1930s for some political representation in the government.\textsuperscript{66} Therefore, in the opinion of missionaries, it was not that Africans were not allowed to have a political voice, but that they should not identify with a political group that was deemed so subversive.

One lesson learned from the experience with the UNIA was that black South Africans remained wary of outside groups promising answers to their problems. In a way, however, the collapse of the UNIA was not necessarily a failure as it promoted political activism within Southwest Africa and offered, even if temporarily, evidence that viable alternative political and social structures existed. Proof of this was increased defiance against the state and resistance to taxes. The UNIA promoted a stronger ethnic consciousness among the Herero specifically, though it is unclear if the same was true for the Nama and Damara members. For the Herero, this influence was soon overshadowed by a more powerful unifying event – the death of exiled leader Samuel Maharero.

### 4.5. Receding interest in Christianity and the funeral of Samuel Maharero (1923)

More than any other group in Southwest Africa, the Herero had sufficient cause to distrust Germans, including missionaries. In the early 1920s, this cynicism helped feed into a pulling away by Herero men from the influence of the Rhenish Mission Society and its paternalism.\textsuperscript{67} Moving away from the German evangelists was made easier, too, by the change

\textsuperscript{66} Buys, 96.

\textsuperscript{67} For a discussion on women and the changes in society see Julia Besten, Gesine Kloeden-Freudenberg, et al, \textit{Sisters from Two Worlds: The Impact of the Missionary Work on the Role and the Life of Women in Namibian Church and Society} (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2008). See also, Gewald, \textit{“We Thought We would be Free...,”} 165-86.
in proximity to mission stations already mentioned, and also due to the state’s desire to segregate
the region into whites and blacks. Herero leaders came to believe that neither the state nor the
church were looking out for their best interests, and, accordingly, some decided to go their own
way. This process entailed an evaluation of what had gone wrong for the Herero people in the
preceding decades. For many, especially those who were old enough to remember, or had heard
oral accounts of the past, they rightly identified the shift in Herero fortunes to the first encounters
with white Europeans. This insight, then, prompted some to seek avenues to re-embrace the past.
All of this done while Paramount Chief Samuel Maharero lived in exile in Bechuanaland
(modern Botswana).

The 1920 request to allow Maharero’s return to Southwest Africa mentioned in the
opening vignette was denied by the Union of South Africa, to which some Herero leaders
responded by asking General Smuts to eject the Rhenish Mission from the region. Maharero
appointed Hosea Kutako as de facto leader of the Ovaherero at Animus; and, his younger son
Traugott Maharero was placed in charge of those at Epikuro. His oldest son, Frederick, lived
with him in exile. The actual petition was precipitated in early 1920 by a visit from Frederick
Maharero, coming to Southwest Africa on behalf of his father to access the post-war political
environment and seek permission from the Union of South Africa for the chief’s return. During
this visit two important events occurred. First, Frederick appointed Hosea Kutako as the acting
Paramount Chief for the Herero on behalf of his father. Three years prior, Kutako was appointed
‘chief’ of the Ovaherero by the Union of South Africa following their occupation of the region,
after being previously declared regent by Ovaherero elders. This earlier appointment was not
without controversy, as some other headmen laid claim to that political authority, but the further

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68 Hellberg, 186.
validation provided by Samuel Maharero ensured a stronger sense of legitimacy for Kutako’s position, symbolized by Frederick laying hands on Kutako to transfer the father’s blessing in absentia. The second agenda associated with Frederick Maharero’s visit was the request to allow Samuel Maharero to return to SWA from his exile in Bechuanaland. In conjunction with this, Frederik attempted to raise funds to purchase land for his father’s homestead. Apparently, someone from the Rhenish Mission commented on this aspect of the trip to a government official, which caused some alarm – even if that was not the intent. The Union of South Africa, fearing potential political agitation and organization if Samuel Maharero returned, refused the petition to allow his return. This denial of re-admittance was blamed, in part, on a belief that German missionaries influenced the Union of South Africa’s decision. This “betrayal,” coupled with a degree of mistrust of all Germans led Kutako and a few other Herero leaders to petition Smuts for the organization’s expulsion. The general policy of the SAU was to disrupt SWA as little as possible, so they refused this petition. Smuts removed four missionaries from the territory as a concession. It is arguable whether this action was for the government’s benefit or to appease the Herero. What is known was that a significant group of Herero leaders were displeased with their situation in Southwest Africa.

The frustrations and changes in attitudes did not go unnoticed by the Rhenish Mission Society. Martin Werner, one of the missionaries stationed at Okahandja, lamented the transformations he noticed among Africans in the 1920s. He saw the main problem as rooted in government interest in industrial development rather than poor relief. The poverty that infected the region was leading, Werner believed, to marked changes among his parishioners, especially

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69 Werner, 105 ff.

70 See Chapter Two.
in terms of being able to pay tithes. Some missionaries complicated these matters by denying congregants communion if delinquent on church dues, thereby essentially barring converts from one of the essential rites of Christianity. Inability to pay tithes bruised the pride of some Herero, and denial of communion only made matters worse. Speaking about finances, disappointment, and failure in a 1923 report, Werner reflected that change in Southwest Africa for all inhabitants had been too rapid and traumatic:

> It is no wonder that many in our country's population have taken possession of a spiritual laxness that is almost impossible to control. Some say: 'Life is a treacherous game of chance,' others answer: 'Life is robbery!' - You can run it just as it is running, regardless of whether the changing movement leads upward or downward. Much of this delicate situation is discussed in the press and in public; it scans and searches for a way out, sets new principles and written resolutions, but everything just seems to pass the time. As long as the political and economic objectives pursued by the provincial administration [mandate government] are irreconcilable elements to each other, there can be no improvement in our situation. The impoverishment of the country and its inhabitants goes inexorably forward, because what the Government is proposing in response to the cry for 'relief' of their severely affected subjects is just money, and business remains the first interest of those in power. Port construction, production of frozen meat plants, railway construction, etc. have been placed in the hands of foreign financial groups that seek to reap their profits from their appalling extortion of our economic life.\(^71\)

Werner further noted that everyone was poor in Southwest Africa irrespective of nationality, race, or creed. Complaints about not having money were echoed during an Epikiuro reserve visit in 1928 to which Missionary Rethesmeyer responded, “Keep your money! What is important is participating with the church.”\(^72\) He worked to disentangle the issue of tithing and church participation – furthermore, offering communion to whomever wished to participate. Regardless, tithing and church participation were linked throughout the region. The issue harkened back to

\(^71\) VEMA 2.510a, Werner, *Halbjahresbericht der Missionsstation Okahandja* (25.6.23), 130.

\(^72\) VEMA 2.501a, *Halbjahresbericht Gobabis* (June 30 1935), 82.
the government’s imposition of taxes that had to be paid in cash, part of the overall process of proletarianization of the area. The mission church therefore had a host of interconnected problems in relation to its operations among the Herero. It relied on funds from congregations for operational costs; white parishioners would not pay said costs; and the government did not seem concerned to improve the economic well being of Africans in Southwest Africa.

The mix of economic hardship and jadedness led to decreased participation in religious services held by the Rhenish Mission Society. This falling away was most apparent in communion service attendance, but was also noticed via a general decline in biblical knowledge:

This is particularly evident in the Lord's Supper Celebration whose participants are steadily disappearing. [...] It has become most noticeable in the Herero community that has had hardly any new male confirmations. The little Christian and biblical knowledge that was once taught to children at school, then goes back and is so often completely lost – so much so that one often only has baptized pagans before him… The extent of religious deafness has gotten out of hand, it may be seen that heathen customs and habits are ever increasing.  

Werner then spoke frankly about his view of Southwest Africa’s black population in a fashion that echoed prior concerns about the government stance on native affairs immediately after Germany was dispossessed of its colonies:

Here, too, seems to be the principle of 'Let it run, see how it goes!' The decisions taken by the League of Nations mandate provisions: "protection of minorities," "No compulsion to work for natives," etc. aim entirely towards the effeminacy and exhaustion of the native peoples. And how sensitive this has become already in only the first few years of the new regiment. The growing national irritability, insubordination, unwillingness to work, wickedness, and pride among the Herero are just byproducts of the general melancholic condition of the southwest natives. 

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73 VEMA 2.510a, 131.

74 VEMA 2.510a, 131.
Despite these feelings, Werner was able to analyze the situation from a broader standpoint and took into account a greater scope of events. Notwithstanding an extensive series of droughts, floods, and plagues that impacted almost everyone in Southwest Africa, the Herero considered these tribulations as divine judgment against whites in the region. Werner then reflected on the overall nature of Christian conversion in Southwest Africa:

It almost seems as if they [the Herero] saw in the Christian community more of a substitute for the then diminished Herero nation – with the loss of their national independence, ethnic identity, and political unity – than they were able to appreciate the importance of proper church organization and right practice. At least Brother Vedder and I here in Okahandja are under this impression.75

This observation has been upheld by most contemporary scholars, who view the embrace of Christianity as a form of social cohesion rather than purely religious conversion.76 Thus, some missionaries feared that conversions were in name only, using the church for its material and social benefits. The reality was that it was both. The term “conversion” is problematic in general because it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the internal conviction of an individual. Therefore, for the purposes of this study J.D.Y. Peel’s definition is used: “…conversion is the process by which people come to regard themselves, and be regarded by others, as Christians.”77

All of Werner’s musings resulted in a moment of dismay and questioning rarely found published in official correspondence, usually reserved for private letters:

So it may have been as Isaiah felt when he spoke with the words: "Who hath believed our preaching? - And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

75 VEMA 2.510a, 131.
76 Gewald, Herero Heroes, 192-195.
77 J.D.Y. Peel, Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 216-217. See the expanded note in the Introduction concerning “conversion.”
– Our elders could have held that very conversation itself. A holy fortitude has to keep those whose ask the Lord to be patient with our natives! Isaiah 1:4 ff says everything about what bitterness a missionary must so often feel about his work and community.78

Despite Werner’s doubt, there is no question that Christianity made a mark among the Herero – even if it was not always in the form the German missionaries preferred. August Rethesmeyer, a missionary based in Warmbad, noted on his travels to Herero reserves in the 1920s and 1930s that even where specific leaders pulled away from Christianity altogether, or held hybrid forms of belief and practice, there were always pockets among the people that maintained a strong interest in interacting with the Rhenish Mission. Missionary Rethesmeyer travels during this same period offered similar findings. He encountered some hostility in a visit to Traugott’s reserve, but found that several Herero were still practicing Christians. He was even hosted by a Herero woman known as Christine, who asked him to stay and host a small Bible study while he was on the reserve.79 The strong pockets of Christianity on even antagonistic reserves could be, in part, due to the fact that the greatest Herero hero, Samuel Maharero, was a professed Christian.

The most formative social and cultural event in the Herero world happened on 23rd March 1923 when Samuel Maharero passed away while exiled in Bechuanaland. About a week before he passed, he wrote an open letter to the Herero people that acted as his last will and testament. In it he requested a Christian burial, called for unity among the Herero, and named his older son

78 VEMA 2.510a, 132. The Bible passage found in Isaiah refers to a sinful and “backward” nation, references Sodom and Gomorrah, calls for repentance, and beseeches the devout to be steadfast in their efforts.

79 VEMA 2.501a, 82.
Frederick as his successor. Maharero was concerned that the Herero were losing their cultural identity, but at the same time did not want them to abandon Christianity. He yearned most of all for a return of their political sovereignty. Leaders Hosea Kutako and Traugott Maharero in Southwest Africa pleaded with the Union of South Africa to allow Maharero to be buried alongside his ancestors and this permission was eventually granted. An envoy traveled from Serowe, Bechuanaland to Okahandja with the Herero Captain’s funeral taking place on 26 August 1923. The funeral itself proved to be an elaborate affair – a combination of traditional Herero custom and Christian ceremony.

Upon news of Maharero’s death, Traugott asked Missionary Werner to hold a memorial service in honor of the Paramount Chief at the church in Okahandja. Werner agreed, but qualified that he would speak to Maharero’s character as a Christian, not a Herero. The concern was undoubtedly about emphasizing the religious aspect of his personality over his political and military legacy – some Germans still associated Maharero with “rebellion.” Traugott balked at Werner’s bluntness and asked a series of questions regarding the nature of “the church” – who owned it, who built it, who composed its body. The idea of church ownership was echoed later

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80 Berichte der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft (1923), 119. That actual government documents are found in the Namibian National Archives, NAN A200, “Report: Burial of late chief Samuel Maharero,” which was removed from availability during my time in Namibia due to a digitization program. The exchange is discussed in Dag Henrichsen, “‘We have been captives long enough, we want to be free:’ Uniforms and Politics in the history of the Herero interwar period,” Namibia Under South African Rule (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1998), 149-74. After the funeral, Kutako was pressured into promising obedience to the South African government in exchange for its recognition of him over Frederick Maharero’s legal claim to the chieftaincy. This was despite Frederick earlier promising in January 1923 to renounce said claims if he would be allowed to at least repatriate to Southwest Africa, a request that was summarily denied. NAN SWAA 2945, CC4, “Frederick Maharero.”

81 See Werner, 117 ff for one of the more detailed discussions of the funeral procession.

82 VEMA 2.510a, 132.
in Nama concerns as well. The conversation was significant because Traugott was one of the Herero leaders in the vanguard of the push to restore traditional practices. An uneasy truce was agreed upon between Werner and Traugott, so Maharero’s memorial went forward. Werner documented the following observations:

Sunday came and in the afternoon the bells of the church called 4 o’clock to me. There was a great silence around the House of God that struck me at once as being so different from usual. Let me suggest that the Herero must have decided to act so differently intentionally, because neither chatting groups of people nor those still straggling in late could be found on the way to the church. But I was surprised when outside of the building before the doors were opened were so many silent, people huddled all around dressed in black. There was no movement, as was usual when I’d arrive – no greeting, no sound! I went inside. There was a profound silence despite the room being so full of people that I could hardly find the altar. The twelve candles of the chandelier were inflamed, as were the altar candles. I was even in a solemn mood. The music began, but not as usual, instead more like a dull, low hum. Almost all of them [the Herero congregation] had wanted to make it possible to appear in black clothing and those who did not own any, or had not been able to borrow some, wore striking black markings on their clothes.  

Here, Werner described dress and behavior that embodied a clear European influence. The congregation emulated the exact funerary customs that a traditional German Lutheran would expect for such an occasion. Werner then detailed the order of service:

The sermon on 2 Cor. 5:1-11 was open only to the community and the feeling came over me that I was subject to a sharp, silent criticism on my every word, because all eyes were constantly focused on my lips. With my "Amen" the whole church rose and while standing heard the news of his [Maharero’s] death to which I added, at the expressed request of the elders, Samuel’s desire to make the last words of the sermon following: Ondjuuo jandje length i tume = "Let me put my house in order." Followed by the song “Who knows how near my end may be?” [“Wer weiß, wie nahe mir mein Ende”]. I heard myself sing almost alone. There was a general prayer, then a prayer for the Herero people, during which all knelt down on their own accord. Then we all recited the "Our Father" [Lord’s Prayer]

83 Ibid.

84 This particular passage is about focusing on eternal life, not the sufferings of terrestrial life. The last verse reinforces the evangelical call and asks listeners to honor their consciences.
together, but afterwards no one had risen, so I talked about the blessing [of salvation] to the dark mass of people. The church had still not risen so I did not ask for a final song, as I would have had to sing alone for sure. I walked through the church among the kneeling Herero. During the recession of worship the deepest silence was maintained, and as I learned afterwards, earlier that day the request had been issued that from the start of the procession to the churchyard on until the return of everyone to their house no word should be spoken. The organized silence made a deep impression on all who attended the church services or met traveling churchgoers along their way. […] The development of the above-mentioned worship shows that our natives can express a strong will, and that this will can be applied and executed by many when it is organized. I look forward to the time to come for our Herero when they organize their will to do good by asking: "Thy will be done."85

Werner’s observations demonstrated much more than he realized at the time. The silence experienced in the service was contradictory to German stereotypes regarding traditional Herero culture and even behavior of converted Herero at funerals. Missionaries Pönnighaus, Kuhlmann, and others had witnessed and chastised Africans for over-emotional responses during funeral services in the years prior. This memorial service then was both a conscious display of reverence for Samuel Maharero and a show of Herero unity in the face of Western traditions.

By August 1923, when the actual burial occurred, Missionary Werner was again asked to officiate at Maharero’s funeral ceremony but refused to do so this time in protest of the “heathen practices” surrounding the whole process. By then, there had been several marches and observances promoted by Traugott and Hosea Kutako, each wanting aspects of traditional Herero practice mixed into the service. This rejection by Werner caused a slight problem for the Rhenish Mission Society because Maharero was a baptized and practicing Christian within the overarching community of faith – not to mention the most influential convert on their rosters. Maharero himself had called for the Christian burial. Those venerating him were the ones reverting to traditional practices, not the deceased Paramount Chief. Traugott then changed his

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85 VEMA 2.510a, 131-133.
mind on Werner’s invitation, arguing the German was no longer needed as they had *okuruo* (traditional Herero holy fire).\(^{86}\) Heinrich Vedder stepped in and offered a compromise allowing for a service within the church, followed by a more traditional graveside ceremony.\(^{87}\) Vedder further offered to lead the church sermon himself, giving the impression of him as mediator. The funeral went forward as planned – a moment of Herero cultural and religious hybridity. Interestingly, the casket was draped in a Union Jack flag, which some historians have taken to imply anti-German sentiment.\(^{88}\)

Maharero’s funeral activities demonstrated a key development in overall Herero identity – one aspect of which was the adoption of western Christian traditions, and the other trying to reclaim a past unique to the Herero nation. German uniforms were even present by those members of the *Ortruppe* (also known by the pejorative term *Truppenspiele*). This was one of the paramilitary groups co-founded by Hosea Kutako, promoting the preservation of Herero culture and social structure via military pageantry. The first formed was the Green Flag Society in 1920. This body later split into the Red Flag Society (sometimes also called Red Band, *Otjiserandu*) after Maharero’s funeral and still exists today, being linked with the Ovaherero based in Okahandja; and, the Green Flag Society which is tied to the Mbanderu in Eastern

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\(^{86}\) VEMA 2.510a, 133.

\(^{87}\) Hellberg, 187.

\(^{88}\) Werner, 133; and, Engel, 225. Werner and Engel each over-play the significance of the flag in my opinion. They believe that the British flag was a snub to the German colonial legacy, but I think it was more proper protocol in an effort to respect the overarching government that allowed Maharero to be buried by his ancestors despite exile. There were plenty of German influences in and around the funeral ceremonies in the form of military dress, hymns, and marches.
Namibia. Both remained linked to the overarching Ortruppe movement which was much more focused on military pageantry and discipline. These groups created concern for territory police at times, who worried that the paramilitary groups were planning an insurgency.

4.6. Return to Traditional Practices

What happened in the months after Maharero’s funeral resulted in a return to the ways of their Herero ancestors, or as one scholar has put it, a turning away from all things “modern.”

One of the problems faced during this process was that many of the functionaries who held Herero sacerdotal knowledge were lost either to time or violence. Thus, decades of exposure to Christianity and colonial control resulted in a loss of traditional culture. Despite that, attempts were made by some to reinstitute holy fires, polygamy, circumcision, and dental mutilation.

One of the first ways sought in the reclamation of Herero identity was relighting the holy fire, Okuruo [sometimes Okuruwo], which were extinguished during the Herero War when the German military forced conditions necessitating its abolishment. These ceremonial flames

89 Katjavivi, Resistance, 26.

90 The Ortruppe is interesting to me because of the contemporary development of paramilitary organizations in Europe like the Fascists in Italy and the Sturmabteilung in Germany. I am in no way claiming that Kutako’s group were right-wing reactionaries, but they were nationalistic and seeking to reclaim political and economic prestige that they felt were robbed from them by outsiders.

91 NAN files document several complaints and investigations into the activities of these groups and concluded that they were relatively harmless. SWAA 432, A50/59, “Native Affairs” and “Drilling by Natives, Truppenspielers.”

92 Gewald, ‘We Thought We Would Be Free,’ 30.


94 Buys, 68, 89.
were to be kept burning at all times and played a meaningful part in many Herero rituals. They were especially important because they were seen as the conduit connecting living Herero to their ancestors on the spiritual plane. Flames were reintroduced to Southwest Africa by visiting Herero who had escaped to Bechuanaland during the war with the Germans. Therefore, in the early 1920s, missionaries saw the re-ignition and practice of the okuruo as a partial return to heathenism, which they equated with ancestor worship. For all practical purposes, however, in this stage of history, the holy fire served more as a political symbol than religious tool. Its re-adoption represented the embers of a Herero identity rooted in their history, despite much of their former practices dying out long before. Instances of rekindling the holy fires happened prior to Maharero’s funeral, but became more commonplace afterwards as Herero nationalism gained traction.

In addition to the resumption of the holy fire, groups within the Herero community adopted several other key practices. In limited degrees polygamy, circumcision, and dental mutilation were each re-introduced. Whereas most missionaries saw the re-embracing of such customs as a reversion to heathenism, most Herero still considered themselves Christians. Many scholars would consider this situation a textbook case of syncretism, but that term in itself is not sufficiently nuanced. The concept of selective incorporation better suits this particular phase in the religious development among Herero. Where as syncretism is a blanket term denoting any level of blending in religious or cultural practices, selective incorporation best explains the level of agency in selecting which aspects of Herero culture to re-adopt while maintaining a primarily

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Christian identity. Concepts of the Christian God were equated with Herero notions of a supreme being in the form of Mukuru. One new concept from Christianity, however, was the introduction of the figure of Satan. Through translating the Old and New Testaments, leaders found parallel examples in Christianity to traditional practices that helped define a unique Herero identity. Therefore, they saw no problem re-adopting them – for some as a protest to Western influence, for others because they believed it was fine to have both.

Of all the old practices resumed, the return to polygamy by some within the Herero community concerned Rhenish missionaries greatly as evidenced by reoccurrences in the archival record. Herero leaders Hosea Kutako and Nikanor Hoveka even entered into polygamous marriages while considering themselves full Christians. Their knowledge of the Old

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98 Gewald, “Free”, 165 ff. gives great detail on the practice of polygamy and its resurgence. I think that he overstates the frequency that it was actually practiced. The examples given were usually only those of regional leaders. The financial implications of having multiple wives was impractical for most at this time, not to mention the geographic complications due to shifts in labor and economic practices as discussed in earlier chapters.
Testament [which was not actually fully translated into written Herero until 1987!] reinforced their return to “offerings, circumcision, and polygamy” – thus paralleled traditional Herero practices. It was difficult for missionaries to chastise the practice of polygamy when the Old Testament was used to defend it, but they could attack cases where Christian marriages were dissolved to facilitate traditional, polygamous ones. Missionary Werner complained specifically about Traugott Maharero’s return to polygamy in 1935:

The pagan Under-Captain Traugott Maharero has lately taken up as his hereditary chief legal claim, to dissolve even church marriages of many years ago and to award other men the women affected according to his whim. He has allowed himself the freedom to seek pleasure, putting together a harem of "exquisite" women. What can the missionaries do about it if even competent governmental authorities fail against such happenings? – For months, the aggrieved husbands have protested and petitioned, but without being able to find their justice accordingly.100

Here we see Traugott using the issue of marriage to re-assert his power over Western norms and simultaneously increase his prestige. Of all the practices re-introduced, polygamy is the one that posed a challenge to missionary (and Western) notions of propriety in society. The accusation by whites was that the return of this practice was merely a means to justify illicit relationships.

There were also some practical reasons for the turn to polygamy as it was also a means to address declining birthrates among Herero owing to the imbalanced ratio of males to females.101 On an unfortunate note, traditional Herero cultural frameworks did not have a means to incorporate children who were products of rape into society due to the dual nature of their

99 Gewald, “We Thought We Would be Free…”, 171.

100 VEMA 2.510a, 131.

101 Gewald, “We Thought We Would be Free…”, 172. See Gewald for a detailed discussion of the impact of rape, STDs, and infertility issues among the Herero. I am unaware of any similar studies that address Nama or Ovambo populations in the same manner.
inheritance system. If patrilineal origins could not be determined, the child existed in a social limbo, and usually became a ward of the Rhenish Mission.\textsuperscript{102} This was problematic because funding for orphanages was hard to come by after the first few were closed during the First World War.

There was also a resistance to polygamy from women within the Herero community. Many of them saw the return of traditional practices as a means of sexual objectification due to the changes in the social and economic realities of the time. Previously, only wealthier individuals could take more than one wife. In this process there would be a bride price paid to the parents of the bride, which acted in some ways as financial compensation for the value removed from their familial economy.\textsuperscript{103} Inheritance systems involving cattle and goods also provided a form of insurance for women in cases of spousal death or abuse. These safeguards were largely destroyed in this new version of the old practice. Women also had more autonomy if they remained aligned with Western Christianity, where it was assumed they would have more protection and favor with the state. They also would then exist outside of Herero property ownership and inheritance framework. In the end, the reality was that few men could afford to enter polygamy. Therefore, it was most likely less of an issue than missionaries made it out to be.

The other two rituals were less concerning to the RMS. Missionaries were not directly opposed to circumcision or dental mutilation, but were concerned that those in relation to the collective process of embracing older practices opened doors to ancestor worship and “heathen” ceremonies.\textsuperscript{104} Circumcision, of course, had parallel practice in the Old Testament under Judaic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} See Chapter One for more on the dual nature of the Herero inheritance system.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Werner, 122.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Gewald, ‘\textit{We Thought We Would Be Free},’ 189.
\end{itemize}
covenants with God. Practice in Europe was mixed, even among Christian populations. In Southwest Africa, as part of the re-adoption of traditional practices, there was much social pressure placed on being circumcised based on anecdotal allusions to women only being willing to have sex with circumcised men.\textsuperscript{105} The practice was also linked to cleanliness and may have been likely tied to fears of STDs or a belief that those who had been clipped were less susceptible to acquiring or spreading venereal disease.\textsuperscript{106}

Dental mutilation was less common among Herero. It was, however, one of the more visible representations of a dedication to traditional culture and marked one clearly as “Herero.” The practice involved filling the front two teeth in a fashion that created an inverted “V” shape noticeable while smiling or talking. The Himba (OmuHimba) group of Herero continues this tradition today. Not much mention is found in the mission archives regarding this particular practice, though there was a case where parents were required to accompany their children to baptism classes if the teeth were filed.\textsuperscript{107}

The move towards a return to traditional customs and away from the mission was further encouraged by the phenomenon that surrounded the “Letter from Heaven” that purportedly instructed the black inhabitants of Southwest Africa to turn away from the mission church, but

\textsuperscript{105} Werner, 130.


\textsuperscript{107} VEMA 2.510a, 135.
stay within the scope of Christianity. This letter caused some concern for missionaries, as it was unclear where or who originated the text, but there was quite a stir surrounding it. It stated:

Herero, finally be happy again and rejoice, as you will be elevated again, you will not always be subjected to another nation. Leave the doctrines that have made you unhappy for so long (loss of [your] lands, first to the missionaries, then through the military). Fetch your waist belts into the open again, reintroduce polygamy and circumcision, throw away the your new clothes and return back to your former habits, let the holy fires blaze once again and return to soothsaying, lest you die.\(^{108}\)

Missionary Meier was concerned with the impact of this letter. In it there was a clear call to revert back to the way things were prior to European entanglement in the region.

Considering all of these factors, it becomes clear that native agency was present in the 1920s and 1930s as a move away from missionaries occurred from some groups of Africans, but not necessarily a turning away from Christianity. It must be noted, however, that not all Africans left the tutelage of the Rhenish church. Those who pushed away from the RMS and embraced a Herero-Christian identity were part of the *Ovapoke* movement that eventually lead to the formation of the Oruuano Church in 1955.\(^{109}\) Still, even with this group, the sinews of affiliation with the Rhenish Mission Church existed.

4.7. **Rhenish Mission Society fears of and responses to Synkretismus**

The Rhenish Mission responded to the trends witnessed among the Herero in the 1920s and 1930s slowly. It initially questioned the legitimacy of conversions among those who reverted back to traditional Herero cultural practices. The second response was a change in their stance on circumcision. Herero use of the Old Testament to defend the practice was sufficient to

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\(^{108}\) VEMA 2.533b, Meier, “Halbjahresbericht, zugleich Konferenzbericht” (Windhoek, 12 November 1927), 27-28.

\(^{109}\) The Oruuano Church is discussed specifically in Chapter Six.
win their case, though it can be argued that the missionaries were not against circumcision *per se*, merely the fact that it would act as a gateway to re-adopt other “pagan” practices. The third, and most important, response was to train more indigenous workers at the Paulinum, a religious institution opened at Otjimbingwe in 1938. This second educational facility was impressive, because between 1922 and 1943, the RMS had to limit the training of evangelists because of the forced adoption of governmental education standards. It was difficult to advance in seminary if most applicants were restricted to Standard II or III education (basic primary education). Therefore, one of the roadblocks to black ordination was state policy, not just reluctance within the RMS. It was an obstacle that was not always directly identified or criticized by African leaders. Silence on the issue points to misunderstandings and assumptions by all parties. But overall, it should be noted that German missionaries tried to engage with what they considered backsliding and apostasy in the region.

In 18 April 1928, Christiaan Spellmeyer issued an extended open letter to all members of the RMS entitled “What methods and what goal we must pursue in the education of our native assistants?” In it he warned of excessive paternalism and noted that other missionaries had witnessed a trend among German evangelists:

The words of Mission Director Boegener of the Paris Missionary Society, who works in our neighborhood in Basutoland and the Zambezi, won’t leave me. He wrote in the preface to his history of the Basutoland mission [modern Lesotho]: "Our mission must avoid trying what is know as the ‘German direction’ (tendency) to treat the natives as children and not give them the opportunity to

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110 The limits on education are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. See also Buys, 169. The most important complete study on the topic is Henning Melber, *Schule und Kolonialismus: das formale Erziehungswesen Namibias* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1979).

111 VEMA 2.628, 58-67.
develop structure and leadership for the community to participate in the church."¹¹²

In this same letter, he made critical comments on the limits placed on native education by the government, noting, “But we will not stop stimulating the development of our indigenous people through school and the community to remedy the Education Department’s error and draw attention to the placement of young people into the Augustineum: to show not what the child can do [in terms of labor], but especially what they can become…”¹¹³ Spellmeyer’s comments demonstrated the institutional frustration with the limits imposed by the state, especially considering that not much could be done to rectify the situation.

In 1934, Missionary Spellmeyer wrote an extensive treatise concerning the needs of RMS in Southwest Africa. In it he laid out a fairly blunt platform concerning the purpose of mission work:

It is not primarily the lack of European workers, or the desire for faster progress in the Christianization of Africa, which moves us to use more and more natives to participate in community service and evangelism, but the conviction that the message of Jesus must come from the mouth of the people. Entrance to the tribe is easier with them and makes a deeper impression than the words of a foreigner. It is so obvious that the aboriginal evangelist has great advantages ahead of him in the proclamation of the Word of God over a foreign missionary. He speaks his native language. His way of thinking is the same as that of his audience. He sums up his thoughts in a form understandable to the listeners. He knows their customs, their superstitions, all of the many fine and coarse threads with which they are bound to their ancestors’ immorality. So he can apply God's Word to their means more effectively than the European missionary. Above all, if indeed he is not only an avid witness of God's love, but also a faithful follower of Jesus, there is already a convincing proof of the redemptive power of the Gospel from the bonds of sin transforming his whole personality and way of life in the eyes of his countrymen.¹¹⁴

¹¹² VEMA 2.628, 59. By 1946, Spellmeyer admits to being guilty of these “sins.”

¹¹³ VEMA 2.628, 60.

¹¹⁴ VEMA 2.628, Spellmeyer, “Missionary Conferences in Namaqualand (1886-1934),” 3.
Spellmeyer called to start shifting authority to Africans. He later echoed a sentiment fundamental to the mission’s purpose:

The goal of all missionary work is supposed to be the foundation of independent churches. [...] In the African peoples lies the ability of self-leadership. If we fail to bring this germ to development, we sin against ourselves almost as much as to the people under which we work, and the end would be that we would one day become as useless tools simply pushed aside.\(^\text{115}\)

Spellmeyer’s language was direct and called for more to be done, sooner rather than later. His tract was also sent to the home office in Germany. Mission Director Warneck was sympathetic to Spellmeyer’s requests, commenting, “Our mission areas have to learn more than ever to work through and with native forces.”\(^\text{116}\)

In another letter later that year, Spellmeyer continued:

There are already in South Africa quite a number of indigenous preachers and helpers under all missionary societies (even here in Southwest Africa more than you think) who are certainly worthy representatives of clergy – whose grandfathers were still wild heathens. Is not such progress astonishing? Why does this not encourage us to fulfill the work of educating the natives to become self-confidant employees?\(^\text{117}\)

Spellmeyer further insisted that there must be a shift to indigenous leadership if the Christian mission in Southwest Africa had a chance at surviving. He also noted that any missionary endeavor had to put faith in God according to the scriptures.\(^\text{118}\) There were differences between

\(^{115}\) VEMA 2.628, 3.

\(^{116}\) VEMA 2.628, 4.

\(^{117}\) VEMA 2.628, 24.

\(^{118}\) 1 Cor. 2:4-5 – “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”
words and actions ultimately, as Spellmeyer failed to live up to his own standards when demands by black evangelists for more autonomy came in the mid-1940s.

Another key response was incorporating feedback from black evangelists. The 1920s and 1930s also saw a shift in how some Rhenish Missionaries translated the concept of “God” in the Herero language. For decades, the German missionaries translated the word Mukuru to mean God, or Supreme Being who bestows blessings. A few missionaries, through discussions with their black evangelists and catechists learned of the term Ndjambi Karunga, which was a secret name of the traditional Herero Supreme Being. One of the key missionaries responsible for making this transition was August Kuhlmann, who began doing so despite the home office in Barmen requesting time to evaluate the proper translation of “God.”

In the mid-1930s, the Rhenish Mission faced other obstacles as well regarding interaction with Africans. The South African government began to open secular schools on reserves, offering an alternative to mission schools. In a 1935 visit to Aminuis, Missionary Rethesemeyer lamented Hosea Kutako’s rejection of a new RMS school and nurse offered to the reserve. The Herero leader chose instead to support the first state school for Africans, which was founded at the Aminuis reserve in 1935, enrolling only 100 students. Education was held to the same limits imposed on the mission schools to Standard II, only improving to Standard III (five years of basic education) by the 1950s. By comparison, Tanganyika – former German East Africa – had access to Standard VIII by the 1930s. White settler opposition to black access to education is most likely one of the greatest obstacles to indigenous education.

\[119\] Gewald, ‘We Thought We Would Be Free,’ 203-5.

\[120\] VEMA 2.501a, 14.

\[121\] Katjavivi, Resistance; and, Wellington, 391.
4.8. **Comparative Examples of other African Experiences**

The interaction between missionaries and Africans in Southwest Africa was, in many ways, a parallel story to those seen in other parts of the continent and other global locations impacted by the colonial project. Much scholarship has already explored case studies involving Christian conversion and cultural adoption. For comparative uses, this section will briefly examine various groups in Tanganyika (former German East Africa, modern Tanzania) and the Yoruba in West Africa (mostly modern Nigeria). In all of these cases there were similar patterns of evangelicalization, but clearly unique contexts for each group. Comparing the events in Southwest Africa to these helps accentuate aspects of exchange between Rhenish missionaries and their charges.

John Iliffe’s *A Modern History of Tanganyika* devotes a chapter to the issue of religious conversion. In it he determined that a wide array of factors went into why various groups and individuals embraced Christianity – especially because they also encountered Islam around the same time. Iliffe explains this interaction among religions as being “best analyzed by distinguishing between the function of religion as a means of countering evil and its function as an intellectual system charting and explaining the world.”122 Iliffe roots this statement in the works of Robin Horton and Keith Thomas. Horton’s work on Christianity and its relation to general African cosmology went far to open the doors of understanding traditional religions in

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pre-literate Africa. Thomas is renowned as an early modern European scholar who examined how Europeans adapted their cognitive framework to the discoveries and advances of the scientific revolution to supplement “magic” with rationality. Using aspects of these respective theoretical frameworks, Iliffe examined how groups in Tanganyika engaged with the introduction of Christianity.

Iliffe argued that “Indigenous religions continued to offer remedies for ancient evils but were ill-equipped to explain or control the larger colonial world. Christianity was best able to explain the larger world, but mission Christianity was ill-equipped to combat misfortune.”

Due to this deficiency within mission Christianity, some Africans only adopted the portions of the religion they found useful, while others resisted it altogether. Iliffe identified a range of relationships between indigenous religions and colonial power. First was resistance. The most famous example of this was the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1905-1907 that saw indigenous groups turning to magical protection in their efforts to rebel against forced cotton cultivation. Tens of thousands died, believing traditional magic would protect them from German bullets. Secondly, the early twentieth century experienced some syncretism within indigenous religions as possession cults fused earlier practices of divination and herbalism. This phenomenon did not

123 Robin Horton, “African Conversion,” Africa, no.41, no.2 (April 1971), 85-108. Horton’s earlier work dealt with African religions in general, emphasizing that they were complex cosmologies regardless if the particular belief structure was animistic or had a concept of a supreme being. See Robin Horton, “Neo-Tylorianism: Sound Sense or Sinister Prejudice?,” Man: New Series, vol.3 no.4 (Dec 1968), 625-34. Horton’s examination of lesser spirits in comparison to a supreme being led to his theory of microcosm versus macrocosm in terms of religious conversion, where individuals tended to convert to Christianity (or Islam) the more they engaged with the larger world.


125 Iliffe, 203.
last long as Germans officials tended to punish witchcraft, and also prosecuted those indigenous leaders who employed anti-witch ordeals. An example of this was a man named Majio in Usambara in 1908 who attempted a witch eradication movement by giving medicine to entire villages to protect them from witchcraft, promising it would kill any witches who consumed it.\textsuperscript{126} He was arrested, despite trying to further the goal of witchcraft removal. The third religious innovation was a reformulation of beliefs with more emphasis on God’s intervention, taking existing concepts of the Supreme Being and expanding their significance more akin to Christian practice. Iliffe noted, “Such reformulation logically accompanied enlargement of scale, for subordinate spirits were less relevant than God to the larger world.”\textsuperscript{127} This idea is fully consistent with the work of Horton.\textsuperscript{128} Overall, Iliffe observed:

Tanganyika’s indigenous religions, like its societies, were exceptionally small in scale, while world religions were available with unusual ease. For those – and they were probably still a minority – who wished to understand and participate in the colonial world, to adapt indigenous religions was often less satisfying than to adopt elements of a new faith.\textsuperscript{129}

Therefore, conversion was necessary to remain viable in the new reality of colonial exchange. These responses listed by Iliffe that were not necessarily paralleled in Southwest Africa as part of its religious interaction. Most resistance to Western influence there was usually due to economic stress and loss of sovereignty.

In terms of education, there were vast differences between how Germans in each colony addressed schooling for Africans. German governor Julius von Soden opened the first secular

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 206-7.

\textsuperscript{127} Iliffe, 207.

\textsuperscript{128} Horton, “African Conversion,” 101-4.

\textsuperscript{129} Iliffe, 203-8.
school in Tanganyika in 1892, operating 83 schools by 1911, and training coastal residents to be trade mediators with the interior and “subordinate administrators.”\textsuperscript{130} These students were primarily taught in Swahili rather than German. The schools essentially created a territorial civil service, based mostly men from the Segeju or others of Arab descent. This practice blossomed into the \textit{akida} system which fostered upward mobility based on talent and civil servants who went on to supplant the Arab merchants and African chiefs who once served as intermediaries between colonial officials and those deeper in the territory (the hinterland).\textsuperscript{131} This process was much different from the approach in Southwest Africa where education was typically in the hands of missionaries, but limited by the colonial government to only an elementary education. Whereas officials in East Africa sought to promote tradesmen and merchants from the indigenous population, Southwest Africa was a settlement colony. This difference explains the drastic change in approach as one group was encouraged to advance themselves according to merit and the other was intentionally limited to help ensure the chances of prosperity for white settlers and merchants.

Another difference was in who performed the missionary work. Tanganyika had a very diverse set of Christian missionaries – various Protestant sects and Roman Catholic groups. Iliffe noted: “Yet by 1914 almost every society employed the same evangelistic approach, working in an extensive manner, building networks of schools and catechists, and encouraging converts to abandon old beliefs. For many societies this meant a reversal of policy.”\textsuperscript{132} Prior to the 1880s most European missions believed that Christianity must accompany socio-economic

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 208-9.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 209-10.
\textsuperscript{132} Iliffe, 217.
change – notions inherent in the “civilizing mission.” Iliffe further observed that in Tanganyika:

Instead, many feared that European training alienated African clergy from their flocks and bred unwelcome interdependence of mind… converted from top downwards as a unit. Increasingly fashionable racial theory suggested that every human group had a distinctive culture to which Christianity should be adapted.

This last part is best described by the term *Volksmission*. Gustav Warneck’s theory of *Volksmission*, the idea that each ethnic group had a special path of spiritual development, was critical to mission work in all parts of Africa, as “it attracted missionaries who, regardless of social origins, hoped to find in Africa the organic social unity which rapidly secularizing Europe had lost.” Because of this line of thinking, missionaries fostered a church that maintained an ethnic cohesiveness among their target group. Therefore, many missionaries in East Africa took care to not “Europeanize” their converts. The opposite was true in Southwest Africa where German missionaries held a near monopoly on evangelism until about 1920 and were keen on the nineteenth century “civilizing mission” as a collaborative effort of Westernization and Christianization. Any trace of *Volksmission* policies were essentially abandoned in Southwest Africa in 1937 when Heinrich Vedder redistricted the territory into four geographic zones rather


134 Iliffe, 218.

135 Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* (New York: Rlemming H. Revell, 1901). Warneck is regarded by some as the founder of Missiology as a discipline. His publications number over a hundred and most have been translated into English.

136 Iliffe, 218. Iliffe infers here that Catholic missionaries adopted this stance, but from my understanding this only applied to Protestant missions.

137 Ibid., 218-9.
than by ethnic groups.\footnote{Buys, 163.} Before this, however, there had always been instances of mixed congregations – especially near urban centers. The only semblance of a \textit{Volksmission} after this were sermons in the \textit{lingua franca} of a particular congregation. Therefore, missionaries in Southwest Africa approached evangelical work differently by grouping all African Christians together, which contradicted later South African imposition of \textit{apartheid} that wanted to maintain a strict division between ethnic groups.\footnote{See Chapter Six for a more detailed discussion on the role of \textit{apartheid} in Southwest Africa.} Iliffe argued that the \textit{Volksmission} approach failed in East Africa as “most Tanganyikian converts accepted Christianity chiefly for what was new and different about it,” thus moving away from traditional religion for conscious reasons.\footnote{Iliffe, 220.} Part of this failure, too, could have been due to the fact that there were dozens of ethnic groups, making it difficult to tailor different varieties. Some sought in Christianity “new solutions to old problems” – some adopting it as a supplement to their older cosmological views, others as substitute, but all eventually finding mission Christianity incompatible with the older religions.

Conversion happened for many reasons: access to Western education; doors opened by trade; protection with missionaries as arbitrators; and, subjected peoples saw it as liberating. In Tanganyika, first followers were generally from marginalized peoples (like the Matola and Nakaam), not leaders, demonstrating that top-down conversions did not work there.\footnote{Ibid., 216-221.} This was in stark contrast to Southwest Africa where kinship networks seemed to impact conversion when elites adopted the religion – Samuel Maharero (Herero) and Hendrik Witbooi (Nama) are great
examples. However, there is the example of the Damara, a minority group in Southwest Africa who converted to Christianity early on in their interaction with Rhenish missions as a means of protection. It should be noted that they also were resistant to the process of unifying congregations in the 1940s, maintaining distrust of the other ethnic groups that had a history of enslaving them.\textsuperscript{142} Social and physical mobility was another reason that attracted some to Christianity, one of the few professions open to talent with the bonus that teachers and pastors were usually allowed to travel more freely than other Africans. In this sense, pragmatism was a common reason for conversion in both East Africa and Southwest Africa. In the latter case, the Rhenish Mission offered to Africans the few avenues for upward mobility, but unlike the economic ones in East Africa these were limited to teachers and preachers.

When the Volksmission failed in Tanganyika, missionaries switched to a policy of focusing on youth. A more vigorous education program developed in East Africa due to competition between evangelical groups. Through education came literacy which “... gave Christianity authority, apparent rationality, and explanatory capacity which unwritten indigenous religions lacked.”\textsuperscript{143} Literacy, therefore, was tied to “rationality and reflective thought.”\textsuperscript{144} Iliffe concluded that:

Indigenous religions were markedly this-worldly. Mission Christianity, like orthodox Islam, was markedly otherworldly. As converts slowly grasped this, they entered a situation much like that which the Protestant reformers had created in sixteenth-century England when they had tried to take the magic out of religion and ordinary people had compelled to put it back.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} See Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{143} Iliffe, 233.

\textsuperscript{144} Horton, “African Conversion,” 92 ff.

\textsuperscript{145} Iliffe, 237; here again citing Thomas, 87. See also, Horton, “African Conversion,” 101 ff.
The result in Tanganyika was eclecticism in religion as converts adopted and adapted Christianity (or even Islam) to suit their needs. Southwest Africa had a more compatible cosmological foundation than East Africa as belief in a Supreme Being transferred over to the Christian concept of God. For most in Southwest Africa, past traditions were lost to the genocide and destruction of social and cultural practices soon thereafter by the German government. Despite this, some aspects of traditional religion were rekindled, but tended to serve more as cultural identifiers than hold religious meaning.146

Another important case study that offers valuable comparison is that of the Yoruba in West Africa. J.D.Y. Peel’s *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* offers some similarities to the groups in Southwest Africa, especially regarding initial contact with missionaries juxtaposed against a relatively late adoption of Christianity, with accelerated acceptance at or just after the turn of the century. Much like the Rhenish Missionaries in Southern Africa, the Church Mission Society (CMS) preceded the British in Yorubaland by about fifty years, entering in the first half of the nineteenth century. This meant the organization was working in the region a half-century before formal colonial control. During this time, Peel argues that the Yoruba saw in Christianity access to different avenues of political and economic power. Searching for this power was important in regards to religion for the Yoruba and there was an early linkage in the mind of the Yoruba that the “white man’s wonders must be attributed to his relationship with his God.”147 The Western Europeans they interacted with seemed more

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146 See earlier section 4.6.

advanced or, at least, to have some sort of providential advantage, mostly due to access to technology. This correlation and the willingness to embrace change opened a diffuse network of power along political, economic, and technological lines.

One critical aspect of conversion is the concept of choice in an arena of competing ideas. Christian missionaries in Yorubaland had also to deal with a growing Muslim minority. This nexus created a triangular network of interaction.\(^{148}\) Therefore, the indigenous population had the option to adopt more than one world religion, deciding over time that conversion to Christianity was beneficial, which is what many Yoruba eventually concluded – though a good portion remained Muslim.\(^{149}\) Here too, Peel’s findings are similar to Iliffe’s regarding the cosmological value of Christianity and Islam’s better explanations of the larger world. Another characteristic found in these two world religions that was attractive was the offering of rewards in the next life.\(^{150}\) Despite slow acceptance rates of Christianity West Africa saw a bump in conversion rates at the beginning of the twentieth century.\(^{151}\) This was paralleled in Southwest Africa, though in West Africa there was not the same trauma in the twentieth century as experienced by the Herero and Nama after the German-Herero War. That is not to say that those in Yorubaland were free from conflict as there were many competing ethnic groups, civil wars, not to mention instances of relocation to and from Sierra Leone earlier in the nineteenth century.

\(^{148}\) Peel, 215.

\(^{149}\) It should be noted that once there was a conversion/adoption of a monotheistic religion, there was not much conversion after that or between monotheisms. Horton, “African Conversion,” 104-7.

\(^{150}\) This was described as “this-worldly” and “other-worldly” in Peel, Aladura. Doing so brought Peel mild critique from Robin Horton as found in “African Conversion,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol.41, no.2 (April 1971), 85-108.

\(^{151}\) Peel, 229.
The difference between them being that there was more stability in Yorubaland in the twentieth century when that region experienced increased conversions.

Virtually all cases of Christian conversion in Yoruba society entailed an individual cost-benefit analysis. Peel noted that “the costs were mainly to do with the various kinds of social severance which becoming a Christian was likely to entail, or with the social sanctions – ranging from physical force through material deprivation to moral censure – which might be deployed to stop it happening.”¹⁵² Therefore peer pressure, and sometimes physical coercion, were control mechanisms that kept some out of the church in the first generations of interaction. The benefits included joining a transnational group of other believers, access to education (literacy) and medicine, and other intrinsic advantages. In the end, many decided to convert but did so on their own terms as to maintain a distinctive Yoruba identity, much like many Herero who converted.¹⁵³ In Southwest Africa, Christianity offered to fill the basic need of stability and social structure lost after a terrible period of destruction.

Peel argues that blending is a two-way process when two religious cultures mesh. People tend to adapt to their circumstances over time, but that does not necessarily mean there is a sense of inevitability. According to missionaries, an inward conversion would, in turn, lead to appropriate Christian behavior, but their converts were accustomed to external expressions of faith.¹⁵⁴ Peel gives an excellent account of the process of conversion by juxtaposing evangelicalism against traditional Yoruba religion, contrasting internal “heartfelt” convictions

¹⁵² Peel, 234.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 233-37.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 248-252.
with external expressions of faith and belief. Missionaries hoped that true internal conversion would produce observable behavior. This sense that the internal veracity of faith would produce outward actions was seen in Southwest Africa as well. Rhenish Missionaries wanted converts to exhibit similar external behavior as themselves, expecting them to adopt Lutheran habits and practices, as well as acquire biblical knowledge. This expectation was rooted in the Pietistic transition, one identified with muted emotional outpouring. Traditional Yoruba religion was the exact opposite of evangelical religion, emphasizing outward rather than inward conviction. In Yoruba Christianity, they placed more value in outward expressions of faith, like the “handing over of one’s idols or Ifa nuts to the pastor for their destruction…” A similar public exhibition of conversion occurred among the Herero, especially when a leader extinguished his holy fire and handed over ritual fire sticks to the missionaries. Changes over time saw Yoruba culture and Christianity merging. This process was, in part, a reaction to the shift in the knowledge paradigm as the scale of the Yoruba worldview expanded. Yoruba made Christianity their own on the level of “spirituality “ through distinctive interpretation of the concept of “spirit,” thus making an “Africanized” Christianity. Therefore, aspects of this process kept ties to past traditions with an emphasis on external behavior, but at the same time were “modernizing.”

Another theological concept (or manifestation) that was present in the process of Yoruba blending was the idea of Satan, who had an important role to play in the cognitive function of Yoruba Christianity. The concept/existence of the Devil offered an avenue for Yoruba converts

155 Ibid., 254-55.

156 See above section 4.5 regarding Samuel Maharero’s funeral.

157 Peel, 255-57.

158 VEMA, 2.533b, Meier, “Windhuk” (12 November 1927).
to maintain some of their old beliefs, especially those connected to the idea of *orisa* – lesser spirits that reflect manifestations of God. Peel noted that “the Devil stood for several things at once for Yoruba Christians: he was their grand enemy, the sum and source of all their particular enemies; he was those parts of their old belief system which the missionaries proscribed as idolatrous, essentially the *orisa*; and, he was the principle of Evil, present in all immoral and disorderly acts.”

There is mention of Satan by the Herero as well, though they did not have a prior parallel figure in their traditional cosmology, merely a trickster. One convert quipped to a missionary once that, “We knew of God before, but you have brought us the devil.”

Peel noted that conversion came with a certain ebb and flow. One of the practices most associated with falling away from Christian conversion was polygamy. Peel observed that the second generation of Yoruba Christians often returned to polygamy due to associated social statuses which were useful for trading networks (1840s – 1870s). For most missionaries, this was a sign of an insincere commitment to Christianity. The occurrence of “backsliding” and apostasy showed that the general process of conversion was not always smooth or directed forward. Peel further observed that many of those who relapsed into traditional religion coincided with their moving away from the Christian church community and to other social environments that still practiced local religions. He associates the idea of apostasy with syncretism, which he defined as: “the attempt to combine elements from two distinct cultural

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159 Peel, 264.

160 VEMA, 2.533, Meier, “Windhuk” (5 Mai 1924), 130.

161 Peel, 269.

162 Ibid., 275-76.
systems.” In fact, Peel argued, all Yoruba Christians were essentially in a constant processes of going back and forth, being labeled as “backsliders” when they practiced social or cultural elements outside the parameters of acceptability laid out by the mission. This was somewhat similar to the early twentieth century on some of the Herero reserves. For the Herero, at least, part of backsliding was associated with a reaction against Western Civilization, fed by nostalgia for better times before colonial oppression and dramatic loss of property.

Overall, common between all three regions was the fact that Western European missionaries were able to introduce Christianity to the various groups and those people generally embraced it. In this conversion process, there was a give and take relationship in the appropriation of the new religion. One of the greatest differences, however, is that unlike the other two territories, Southwest Africa experienced genocide as the result of white settlement. Colonial repression by both German and South African governments created an environment where all black inhabitants were marginalized socially, politically, and economically. Therefore, Christianity may have been seen by some as the only access to forms of power available to them. In later years, this would prove true as the church was one of the institutions the liberation movement worked through to fight for independence.

4.9. Conclusion

In the interwar years, Christian conversion among Africans increased in Southwest Africa but not without tension with the Rhenish Mission. This chapter has examined the process of religious, cultural, and social changes of Africans in Southwest Africa, especially regarding their relationship with the Rhenish Mission Society. Herero leader Hosea Kutako witnessed all of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{163}} \text{Ibid., 277.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{164}} \text{Peel, 277.}\]
these developments and played an active role in the process of shaping national identity. The inter-war years saw a general acceptance of Christianity under the tutelage of Rhenish missionaries with increasing reservations about the relationship between Africans and their white spiritual leaders. Some pulled away from the mission, yet retained their Christian faith; others re-adopted traditional practices – usually as a means of expression national identity. Missionaries responded to these “returns to heathenism” with a mix of concern and contempt by increasing educational efforts and attempting to accelerate the path to an independent church. In doing so, they faced setbacks from the geopolitical realities of the First World War and limitations imposed upon them by the Union of South Africa government. Special difficulties existed in Southwest Africa, also, due to the presence of white settlers, many of whom were all too often racist without shame – further hurting trust between Africans and white Missionaries. Contemporaneous with these religious developments were desires for social and political power among African communities. The germ of this is clearly seen in the early days of Kutako’s chiefdom and the fruition of which is discussed in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER FIVE: MISSIONARIES UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM, 1930-1945

5.1. Friedrich Rust

The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Southwest Africa held its inaugural meeting in Windhoek between 1 – 4 October 1926. On the second day, in the afternoon session, the group approved a measure that allowed for the distribution of a tract to incoming German settlers, warning them of the social situation they were encountering in the territory. Rhenish Missionary Heinrich Friedrich Rust from Keetmanshoop and Pastor Otto Meier from Lüderitzbucht headed the commission that guided the discussions leading to this publication. They were most concerned that incoming settlers be careful concerning racial defilement (*Rassenschändung*), and the pamphlets warned about maintaining racial purity along with German identity, stating:

Beware racial dishonor. You have German blood in your veins…
Remember that you are Christian!
Remember that you are white!
Remember that you are German!¹

In these few lines, the influences of nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial and nationalist ideology were manifest, demonstrating how enmeshed they were with one another. This tract, too, was indicative of one of the most perplexing paradoxes in Southern African missiology; namely, how could those who dedicated their lives to ministering to the spiritual and material needs of Africans also support strong racial and nationalistic ideologies in apparent contrast to

Christianity’s universal claims of salvation?\(^2\) The answer lies within the web of complex ideas and identities present in Southwest Africa and Germany in the first half of the twentieth century.

The afternoon session on 2\(^{nd}\) October began with Missionary Rust presenting an argument for increasing the interest in evangelical work among German Protestants in Southwest Africa. He further argued that there needed to be a more “equitable, Christian treatment of blacks by whites.”\(^3\) To foster this change, he advocated integration:

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\ldots \text{participation in particular religious ceremonies of the natives by representatives of the white community and the church; joint church-mission festivals, especially during Epiphany; the dissemination of missionary magazines, especially to mission institutions in the countryside; } \ldots \text{all to awaken a desire for Missions work.}\(^4\)
\]

One of the issues Rust noted as preventing support for mission work among ethnic German settlers was that these parishioners held a negative stigma towards those of other races. In dealing with Africans, missionaries themselves were not fully trusted by some of their ethnic German compatriots, noting the racism present among the settler community in general.\(^5\) This

\(^2\) Disconnects between good intentions and latent racism are found quite often in the historical narrative. Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese explore this idea in *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholder’s Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) where they find racism operating at the fundamental level of slave-owners’ worldviews – even among those considered benevolent masters. Similar quandaries are explored in in Africa in Andrew Porter’s *Religion versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 283-92.

\(^3\) VEMA 2.688a, 177.

\(^4\) VEMA 2.688a, 177.

\(^5\) VEMA 2.688a, 178.
situation created a problem for those German congregations that were tended to by a missionary rather than a dedicated pastor.\(^6\)

Once Rust opened the door to discuss the issue of race, the conversation turned quickly from one of integration to that of preventing racial defilement (*Rassenschändung*). What was agreed upon by conference participants was that there was an “extraordinary great danger of racial shame which had the potential to destroy not only moral, but also physical life.”\(^7\) It was at this point that Rust and Meier were asked to form a special commission to develop “the appropriate means of explaining the dangers of racial desecration… and combat racial defilement, before the [Union] administration and other public authorities intervened and used force to combat it themselves.”\(^8\) This session lasted nearly two hours. The conference took Sunday off, resuming after 9am on Monday. By that time, Rust had prepared a draft of the leaflet to fight racial mixing. His wording was gently critiqued by Meier, who feared its contents would hurt the political progress Germans recently obtained in the National Southwest Council by sounding too nationalistic.\(^9\) Modifications were made and the key components noted in the opening paragraph of this chapter were highlighted. Once the decision was reached to publish the pamphlet, the conversation turned towards the education of German youth and the further

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\(^6\) For more on the German Evangelical Church’s difficulties maintaining German pastors in the region see Chapter Two.

\(^7\) VEMA 2.688a, 178.

\(^8\) VEMA 2.688a, 178.

\(^9\) VEMA 2.688a, 178. See also the discussion on citizenship in Chapter Two.
integration of evangelical messages into a specific curriculum designed to promote Deutschtum among these ethnic German children.\textsuperscript{10}

Deconstructing the apparent inconsistency concerning race and the church present in this situation revealed that missionaries themselves were complex individuals with layered identities and beliefs. Institutionally, too, the Rhenish Mission Society was complicated and varied. The pamphlet itself contained racist thought and nationalistic rhetoric, but it may well be that it was also an attempt to communicate political realities in a blunt and readily available fashion.\textsuperscript{11} This latter notion implies that the tract disseminated by missionaries and pastors to incoming settlers was not an overt attempt to instill racial ideology, but was more an effort to pursue a practical approach to the temperament found in Southwest Africa and to a government which, under mandate rule, advocated a fairly strict separation of ethnic groups. Taking into account Missionary Rust’s other activities and the other topics discussed at the conference, one concludes that this realist explanation is the correct one. Also, other archival evidence demonstrates that Rust did not hold these racial theories to be true, but merely published this tract as his duty to the synod dictated, representing their beliefs and concerns as a collective.

Rust’s hand is found throughout the conference documents and it is clear that he was an influential and vocal member of the community – even if his pastoral colleagues did not always agree with him or share his long-term goals of an independent, indigenous church among the African population. As rifts developed within the Rhenish Mission concerning political and ideological developments in Germany, Rust proved to be an unabashed opponent of National

\textsuperscript{10} VEMA 2.688a, 179-80. See also the discussion of education in Chapter Three as it pertained to ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa. The issue of African education was not discussed at this meeting as it was a synod specifically for the German Evangelical Church.

\textsuperscript{11} VEMA RMG 2.688a, S. 177.
Socialism. Although often rebuked by superiors for violating prohibitions on political involvement while acting as a representative of the church, he was never removed from his missionary post. Rust, the child of a missionary himself, was raised in Southwest Africa unlike many of his colleagues, possibly explaining his protective nature towards Africans and rejection of trends found in Germany.

Race was not the only topic discussed at this meeting. In fact, the first day was fairly mundane. The Conference Synod covered many of the administrative and practical matters one would expect to find in a church council meeting, discussing options for dealing with orphans, the acquisition of church property, promoting communal well-being, and adopting a unified set of hymnals and catechisms.\textsuperscript{12} The second session on the first day discussed the possibility of a unified German Church in all of Southern Africa but lamented that this was an unlikely reality due to conditions in the Union of South Africa promoting regional autonomy, noting however that most confessional synods worked well together, and there was close cooperation between the Transvaal, Cape, and the Southwest Synods in particular. There was a desire by some to maintain local autonomy as expressed by Pastor Schünemann from Windhoek, who wanted to keep German Lutherans independent from other confessions.\textsuperscript{13} This wish may have been also

\textsuperscript{12} VEMA 2.688a, 172-76.

\textsuperscript{13} VEMA 2.688a, 177.
due to the ecumenical cooling after the First World War as confessional identities became more pronounced.\(^\text{14}\)

This chapter discusses the relationship between the Rhenish Mission Society and National Socialism’s influence in Germany and abroad. It examines the seeming paradox of those Christian missionaries who adopted racist worldviews and also highlights those who confronted the politically dominant paradigm of National Socialism. The result was a spectrum of activity and internal division among missionaries regarding Nazism, racial ideology, and liberal theology as the geopolitical events in Germany and Southwest Africa after the First World War proved to promote differences within church ranks. Most of those among the Rhenish leadership in Barmen (later expanded and renamed Wuppertal in 1929) proved to be opposed to the Nazi regime, while others further away from direct influence of National Socialism in the former colonies tended to support Hitler’s rise to power – especially politically in hopes of a rebirth of German colonialism. Much scholarship has highlighted the pro-Nazi stance of

\(^\text{14}\) This process is discussed in greater detail earlier in Chapter Two; but, in short, where Anglicans, Lutherans, and the Dutch Reformed Church once worked in tandem by the first decades of the twentieth century they were somewhat more territorial in regards to their congregations. For a discussion on the fallout of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 and the dissolution of its spirit after World War On see: Ogbu Kalu, “Ethiopianism and the Roots of Modern African Christianity,” *World Christianities, c. 1815-c.1914*, eds. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol 8 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 576-8.
Rhenish missionaries and pastors, but a re-evaluation of the impact of those opposed to the regime is necessary to temper the historical narrative.¹⁵

5.2. Ideological and Theological Shifts in Germany leading into the 1920s

Before delving into the problem of National Socialism and Christian missions, it is necessary to establish the context for the paradox inherent in the opening vignette. Prior to the specter of Nazism, there were important ideological and theological shifts in Germany (and throughout Western Europe in general) concerning the relation of religion to nationalism which shaped a worldview rooted in racial understanding – creating an intellectual and religious ferment at the turn of the century in Germany (and among those German missionaries abroad) rich with transformation, while still rooted in certain traditions. Spiritually, the influence of Pietism was still evident among German Protestant missionaries – especially those within the Rhenish Mission, providing one of the points of continuity with Germany’s Reformation past. Other influences, however, were awash in intellectual currents of the day, especially nationalism and imperialism. Changes in theology were present in the nineteenth century as racial thought impacted Biblical understanding, leading to the fabrication of an Aryan Jesus. Aspects of this idea led to trends promoting the rise of a völkisch Christianity in Germany that began years before the political seizure of power by National Socialists. These variations were neither universally accepted nor entirely cohesive, but they were persuasive to some, and eventually fed into the movement known as German Christians (Deutsche Christen). These lines of continuity

¹⁵ Several scholars have generalized Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa as pro-Nazi. Among them are: Jan-Bart Gewald, Kaire Mbuende, Helmut Walser Smith, Henning Melber, Glen Ryland, and Carl-J. Hellberg. Specific citations are found throughout the dissertation. I believe this depiction of the mission is mostly due to the outspoken nature of Heinrich Vedder and the activities of the majority of German settlers who were enthusiastic about the future promised by National Socialist rhetoric in the 1930s. The reality is that there were counter-examples in the mission and without who were anti-Nazi or politically neutral. VEMA, 3.314b, 98. Pastor Schmidt criticizes NSDAP policies having influence in Southwest Africa.
and influence did not, however, mean that certain outcomes were inevitable in Germany, their former colonies, or Europe, and as the actions of various Rhenish Mission Society members showed there was a wide array of responses to the more radical ideologies present.\footnote{On issues of continuity and discontinuity see Roger Chickering, \textit{We Men Who Feel Most German: a Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914} (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 1; Helmut Walser Smith, \textit{The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and, David Blackburn and Geoff Eley, \textit{Peculiarities of German History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).}

5.2.1. Pietism

The deepest theological roots for the Rhenish Mission Society, other than obvious ties to the Reformation, are found in Pietism. This movement dates back to the seventeenth century and sought reform within Protestantism through an emphasis on personal spirituality. Also, characteristic of the movement were the dual facets of millenarianism and evangelicalism – the first being more evident at the beginning of the sect, the latter more so by the nineteenth century.\footnote{See Mary Fullbrook, \textit{Politics and Piety: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg and Prussia} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Douglas H. Shantz, \textit{An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); and, more recently a large four-volume set entitled Geschichte des Pietismus, specifically volumes 3 and 4, Gustav A. Benrath, et al., \textit{Geschichte des Pietismus, Band 3: Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), and Hartmut Lehmann, et al., \textit{Geschichte des Pietismus Band 4: Claubenswelt und Lebenswelten} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).} Millenarianism was not uncommon among groups within Christianity, and simply refers to the belief that in a relatively short time, the end days as discussed in the Book of Revelation would be upon humanity and usher in the Second Coming of Christ. Evangelicalism complemented this theological position by adding the belief that the church could hasten the Second Coming by fulfilling the biblical request to spread the Gospel. It was a God-given mandate to attempt the conversion of the world’s population; therefore, once all of mankind had
been exposed to the Gospel then the evangelical call would have been completed, prompting the return of Christ.\textsuperscript{18}

It has been argued that by the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the evangelical spirit found within Pietism had moved away from a concrete understanding of achieving one-on-one personal conversions, and instead towards a general exposure of a group of people to the Gospel.\textsuperscript{19} This shift occurred possibly attributable to the realization that mass personal conversions were more and more unlikely as efforts in the field provided limited results. Overall, Pietism was a secondary, yet significant identifier among the Lutheran-based Rhenish Mission Society.\textsuperscript{20} Its impact played less of a direct role in the twentieth century, especially as the RMS’ efforts became less ecumenical and more sectarian. Nonetheless, Pietism helps explain why German missionaries were in Southwest Africa and how they interacted with Africans – especially the desire to live by example.\textsuperscript{21} It was not enough to spread the Gospel; missionaries and pastors were expected to live their lives as paragons of good Christians, which if done properly also acted as a witness to potential converts.


\textsuperscript{19} Albert Wu, “Ernst Faber and the Consequences of Failure,” Central European History vol 47, no 3 (2014), 5-7. Wu examines the story of a Rhenish missionary to China during the end of the nineteenth century. His article is significant because it presents a case study where events in the field are often dictated by the individual missionary rather than organizational leaders back in Europe.

\textsuperscript{20} Gustav Warneck, Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time (New York: Rlemming H. Revell, 1901).

\textsuperscript{21} VEMA 2.688a.
5.2.2. Ideological Changes: Nationalism, Social Darwinism, Imperialism, and Racism

Rhenish missionaries were also influenced by the ideological timbre of the day – namely, the symbiotic relationship between nationalism and imperialism.\textsuperscript{22} Nationalism itself spread across Europe, especially in the wake of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, as ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups turned towards a primary national identifier, seeing the nation itself as being of paramount importance.\textsuperscript{23} The additional influence from thinkers such as Friedrich List and the acolytes of Charles Darwin allowed the idea of a nation to evolve into something more powerful, no longer just a geographic concept but an ideological entity serving as the altar of a secular religion. List’s economic writings, especially \emph{The National System of Political Economy} (\emph{Das Nationale System der Politischen Ökonomie}) in 1841, changed how nations were considered successful in light of the development of industrialized economies, promoting increased competition between national markets. Darwin’s corpus of work, beginning with \emph{The Origin of Species} (1859), gradually changed the understanding of biological

\textsuperscript{22} The two were connected, as Sebastian Conrad put it: “The spread of nationalism took place during the heyday of imperialism, from 1880 on. Although historians usually treated the two phenomena as separate, their synchronicity was not a coincidence but an expression of the colonial character of globality at that time.” Sebastian Conrad, \emph{Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 381.

\textsuperscript{23} The historiography on nationalism in the European context is voluminous to say the least. Carlton J.H. Hayes, \emph{A Generation of Materialism, 1871-1900} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941); George L. Mosse, \emph{The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars to the Third Reich} (New York: Fertig, 1975); Benedict Anderson, \emph{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism} (London: Verso, 1991); Celia Applegate, \emph{A Nation of Provincials: The German idea of Heimat} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and a legion of other monographs too numerous to list here.
development. His theories were quickly co-opted by those like sociologist Herbert Spencer, who saw civilizations as biological entities as well, locked in a struggle for survival. This mode of thought, known as Social Darwinism, considered conflict as a natural process with stronger nations, therefore, being the fittest.

Another critical thinker in the development of nationalism and social theory was the geographer Friedrich Ratzel – the man credited with the modern use of the German term Lebensraum (“living space”) so often associated with Hitler and Nazi expansionism. He argued that nations were organic communities that over time either expanded and migrated or were assimilated into stronger societies. Ratzel became the chairman of the German Colonial Society and, as such, his ideas were given a larger platform than merely his published works. He argued that as dominant cultures expanded then other, lesser civilizations would be eliminated. This concept was not firmly rooted in biological racism but rather in cultural elitism. He believed that the process of enculturation itself was rooted in conflict, destruction, and assimilation.

On the surface, his ideology seemed optimistic, as Ratzel believed the end stages of history would find all peoples coeval, but the path to get there was “assimilation, absorption, and ultimately annihilation” of less-developed peoples.

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24 Darwin’s own writings advanced the idea that biological differences between different groups of humans were embodied in “race,” but this came later in his The Descent of Man (1871).

25 Smith, Continuities, 184. See also, Woodruff Smith, Politics and Science, 140-61; and, Conrad, Globalisation, 60-1.

26 Smith, Continuities, 186.

27 Smith, Continuities, 187.
Thus, the impact of nationalism, emboldened by Social Darwinism, reinforced the imperialistic urge to expand and conquer other territories – as evidenced by the rise of European colonial acquisitions in the nineteenth century. The belief emerged that in the realm of competing nation-states, those that expand and spread their cultures would be the “fittest.” The new imperialism that grew from this intellectual ferment led many European powers to seek territories overseas, namely in Africa and South Asia. For a nation to prove itself as “strong,” there was an imperative to spread their culture and influence as far as possible. As with many ideologies, the reality was much different once it entered the realm of application. Germany’s decision to join the foray of colonial powers hinged on a volte face by Otto von Bismarck, who believed initially territories more of a liability than an asset (something he was correct about overall). The Chancellor’s reluctance to enter the colonial foray explains, in part, why Germany was “late to the game.”

One of the individuals who played an important role in Germany’s colonial experiment was Friedrich Fabri. His *Does Germany Need Colonies? (Bedarf Deutschland der Kolonien)?*, first published in 1879 but, more popular in its third edition of 1884, laid the foundational arguments for the German acquisition of colonies. In short, he believed territorial gains would act to stimulate the German economy and also serve as avenues to prevent the loss of German citizens to emigration. Fabri is important to this study because he was also the Director of the Rhenish Mission Society from 1857 to 1884. While still at the helm of this evangelical organization, he founded the West German Association for Colonization and Export in 1881. It was around this time that colonial organizations such as this became political in nature, exerting

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28 See Chapter One for more discussion on Germany’s bid for colonies, Bismarck’s reversal of his attitude towards obtaining them, as well as historiographical comments.
pressure on Bismarck to approve favorable policy changes.\textsuperscript{29} It should be no surprise that the businessman in Fabri left the Mission to pursue his colonial endeavors.

Racial ideology, as it developed in the nineteenth century, also goes far to explain the context for the opening vignette of this chapter. The contemporaneous development of racial thought had sweeping implications on how Europeans saw the world – usually with themselves atop the arbitrary hierarchy. The font of modern racial thinking was the work of French aristocrat Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau.\textsuperscript{30} His \textit{Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races} (c. 1855) marked the origin of scientific racism – the idea that differences in human groups could be examined biologically. Although based in France, his work was translated into many languages and his influence spread throughout Europe within a few decades. He became popular in Germany roughly forty years after the publication of \textit{Inequality}, thanks to the work of Ludwig Schemann, the bibliographer at Göttingen’s university library who popularized Gobineau for a German audience.\textsuperscript{31} Also important in exposing Germans to Gobineau was anthropologist Ludwig Woltmann, who infused the French theorist’s work with Darwinism at the turn of the century, arguing that racial-mixing led to the degeneration of a people.\textsuperscript{32} By this time, Friedrich Ratzel’s schemes were being simplified to justify myopic views of one’s cultural and ethnic superiority. As such, groups like the Pan-German League integrated anti-Semitism, now

\textsuperscript{29} Chickering, 31-4.


\textsuperscript{31} Mosse, \textit{Final Solution}, 56; and, Chickering, 238-39.

\textsuperscript{32} Mosse, \textit{Final Solution}, 55-6, 72; and, Chickering, 239.
buttressed by scientific racism, into their nationalism – seeing the German *Volk* as special among the races.

In the colonial sphere, administrators like Paul Rohrbach spread Continental racial thought. Rohrbach presents an early example of an advocate of imperial expansion – both on the continent in Eastern Europe, and overseas – also seeking to infuse the process with the Christian mission. Rohrbach was appointed settlement commissioner of Southwest Africa in 1903 and served in that post until 1906. While in Africa, he helped set the tone for German racial policy in the colonies. He believed Africans to be *Kulturunfähig*, unable to be elevated culturally to the level of Europeans. Therefore, he argued it was best to educate them to work instead – providing direct benefit to Europeans in the form of cheap labor and ultimately to Africans themselves as standards of living increased. It is without question that Rohrbach’s application of racial ideology led him to oppose the sharing of Western education with Africans, especially written languages – something that brought him into direct conflict with German missionaries in Southwest Africa.

5.2.3. Aryan Jesus

The next major movement that shaped the theological and ideological environment known to the Rhenish Mission Society was the strengthening anti-Semitism among some Christian theologians, especially those found in Western Europe. This anti-Judaism led to the

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33 Smith, *Continuities*, 193.

34 Smith, *Continuities*, 194.

35 For more on this conflict, see Chapter One’s discussion of the Rhenish Missionary Society disregarding Rohrbach’s limitations on African education. The concerns over issues of race were found in the VEMA archives as well, with multiple entries marked *Rassenfrage* between the 1920s and ‘50s.
concept of an “Aryan Jesus” which marked an intersect between latent anti-Semitism found in Europe and the growing popularity of racial science and theory. Here, theology and ideology combined to postulate that Jesus Christ was, in fact, Aryan, not Semitic (Jewish) as previously held and taught by Christian churches. The culmination of these ideas provided justification for racial biases and anti-Semitic behavior while maintaining the illusion of “good” Christians. The result was a dangerous heresy that became orthodoxy for those who chose to overlook the inherent contradictions within the rest of Christianity’s core doctrine. The need, per se, for this shift in theological interpretation was rooted in the idea that the message of Christianity was tainted by Jewishness, and therefore could not serve Germans. These changes later influenced völkisch traditions and helped pave the way for National Socialism’s acceptance among so many Germans.

For Christianity to be de-Judaized, Christ himself had to be reinterpreted to be non-Jew. In the end he was “aryanized” and made to embody the “heroic spirit” of the German Volk. This process therefore did not only seek to attack Judaism, but interjected racial discourse into European concepts of Christianity. The ramifications of these currents within a Germanized Christianity for mission work were clear, particularly that spreading the Gospel to non-Aryans (or those akin to the Aryan spirit) was a futile endeavor because they were considered unworthy of salvation. In fact, possibly due to this line of thinking, domestic funding of foreign missions work declined sharply by the 1930s. All of these changes were reinforced scientifically by

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37 Heschel, 28, 54.

linguistic studies arguing a “Volk was constituted not only by land and language, but by myth and ritual – that is, culture and religion.”\(^{39}\)

It is interesting to note that, much like Gobineau’s influence on Germany, a Frenchman propagated the idea of an “Aryan Jesus.” Ernst Renan was one of the first scholars to re-evaluate the Jewishness of Jesus. He was professor of Semitics at the Collège de France and argued that Jesus was born into a Jewish world, but emerged Aryan culturally. In Renan’s work “language, race, culture, and religion became interchangeable…”\(^{40}\) His novel, *Life of Jesus*, first published in 1863, brought race to the heart of Christian theology and the figure of Jesus. In it he also removed Jesus’s divinity, which made him no longer the “Son of God,” but the “son of man” who happened to be filled with God’s love, thus creating someone with the spiritual prowess to overcome Jewish oppressiveness.\(^{41}\) Others, such as Emile Burnouf (also a Frenchman), professor at the University of Nancy, believed that Christianity itself was an Aryan religion, not Semitic in nature. As this concept evolved near the turn of the century, Christianity thus transcended its Semitic foundations to become an Aryan religion, not one with South Asian origins, but specific Germanic ones. Therefore, theologians influenced by this racial theory re-evaluated Jesus as being separate from Judaism altogether due to the divergent nature of his religious teachings, which were reinterpreted as a critique of Judaism rather than its logical

\(^{39}\) Heschel, 31.

\(^{40}\) Heschel, 33-4.

\(^{41}\) Heschel, 33-4.
German philologist Paul de Lagarde added to this discussion when he argued that Jesus was never Jewish, but that Christianity itself had been coopted and Judaized by the Apostle Paul, further calling for a re-evaluation of the religion entirely to purge Jewish influences.43

All of these ideas filtered into popular consciousness at the turn of the century in one way or another. One of the most significant cultural figures to be enveloped in this new line of thinking was composer Richard Wagner. He publicly repudiated the Jewish lineage of Jesus and his anti-Semitism in general held much sway over his Bayreuth circle.44 One of the main concepts that gained traction was that of an Aryan link between Jesus, Christianity, and the German Volk – an idea further perpetuated by Wagnerian acolyte Houston Stewart Chamberlain. His popular work, The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century (1899) spread the idea of an Aryan Jesus to a mass audience. He latched on to earlier scholarship that questioned the ethnic origins of Jesus’s parents in light of prior Assyrian invasions, arguing that they were actually of Aryan descent, merely living as Jews culturally.45 Other works of literature arose to promulgate this idea, like Gustav Frenssen’s fictional Hilligenlei (1905) that depicted a Germanized Jesus from Schleswig-Holstein, creating an image in the popular consciousness that reinforced Aryan racial ideology. Ultimately however, Frenssen concluded that Jesus was “the move beautiful of

42 Heschel, 33. Also, as Heschel notes earlier in her work: “Theologians may have been far from the policy makers who set the agenda for the Nazi regime’s domestic and foreign affairs, but they were part of a larger German apparatus of intellectuals who translated the often inchoate meaning of Nazism into a substantive discourse of Christian ritual and theology, giving Nazism religious and moral authority.” Heschel, 16.


44 Heschel, 39.

45 Heschel, 42.
human kind’s offspring,” representing the author’s perpetuation of biblical Higher Criticism through the widely-read novel.46

Pastors exposed to these ideas, either through popular literature or their professors at university and seminary, sprinkled sermons with racial theology and völkisch rhetoric. One such example was Friedrich Anderson, a pastor from Schleswig-Holstein, who co-wrote “Ninety-Five Theses for Reshaping the Church” in 1917 with three colleagues. This tract argued that embracing an Aryan Jesus and de-Judaizing the church was the necessary and logical conclusion to the Reformation that Martin Luther started by breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church.47 He later co-founded the Bund für deutsche Kirche (Organization for a German Church) in 1921, which was the first formal church group to promote a specifically Germanic Christianity.

5.2.4. German Christianity

The popularized group that emerged from the Aryan Jesus ideology was that of German Christianity.48 This movement developed in the early twentieth century, consolidating in the 1920s, and becoming a formal organization in 1931. The association believed that fundamental aspects of Christianity had been distorted by Jewish influence. To remedy the weakening of the faith, the Old Testament needed to be eradicated from Christian doctrine entirely. A key aspect was the redefinition of Jesus as German, not Jewish, to reconcile contradictions readily apparent in traditional doctrine. German Christianity quickly supported the National Socialist rise to

46 Suzanne Marchand, German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 257-58.

47 Heschel, 44-5.

power, in hopes of garnering political support and thus legitimacy. Hitler was not impressed with the movement, nor its ideology, yet nonetheless was advised to support it in an effort to gain influence among self-identified Christians in Germany. Their leader, Ludwig Müller, was eventually appointed *Reichsbischof* (Church Bishop for Germany) and given charge of the German Evangelical Church (*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, DEK).

German Christians took advantage of their quasi-favored status under the Nazi regime and opened the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life on 6 May 1939. The goal of the establishment was to remove all aspects of Jewishness from organized Christianity, restoring it to what they argued was its proper form – one where Jesus was himself not a Jew, but one who sought to fight the corrupting nature of Judaism despite falling victim to that struggle. The Institute’s members were key theologians and professors, the academic director being Walter Grundmann, a professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Jena. Many of the other scholars involved were the one-time students of Tübingen professor Gerhad Kittel, who by that time was an entrenched Nazi party member and producer of anti-Semitic propaganda.49

5.3. The Failure of German Christianity: Heinrich Drießler’s Resignation

The influence of German Christianity was felt among those in the Rhenish Mission Society, so much so that they had their own church crisis (*Kirchenkrise*) regarding the movement. Between 1931 and 1934, debates took place among the upper echelons of the Rhenish Mission Society hierarchy over how involved the organization should be with the German Christian movement. The results of these talks were: the resignation of Mission Inspector Heinrich Drießler, who wanted closer ties to German Christianity and the German Evangelical Church

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structure; a general ban on political advocacy from the pulpit to hopefully prevent further imbroglios; and a rejection of the tenets of German Christianity. These events, however, were precipitated by general political turmoil within the organization, and internal stability was not achieved until after a wave of personnel changes in the 1930s.

In 1928, Rudolf Schmidt, the tenth Missions Director for the Rhenish Mission Society, left on what turned into a nine-month tour of overseas stations in China, Nias, and Sumatra, hoping to bring back insight into the organization’s work and facilitate discussion on how to make improvements and increase funding. One of his key concerns was encouraging established mission stations in transitioning to native-run churches.\textsuperscript{50} While in Asia, he was asked to visit a missionary conference in Australia to represent the Rhenish Mission, prolonging his trip but increasing the organization’s working relationship with other international groups. Schmidt’s reports upon his return were optimistic despite knowledge that funding issues loomed as a whole. As such, plans were discussed to release oversight of mission operations in New Guinea to American Lutheran missionaries, a process completed in early 1933.\textsuperscript{51} Schmidt never saw the fruition of this transfer as he died unexpectedly on 3 September 1929, causing alarm within the organization and raising questions regarding his succession.

\textsuperscript{50} The RMS station in Sumatra was one of the organization’s first successful transitions to an indigenous church among the Batak people which became autonomous in 1930. See P. Beyerhaus, \textit{Die Selbständigkeit der Jungen Kirchen als Missionarisches Problem} (Wuppertal-Barmen: Verlag der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft, 1956), 163ff. See also, Paul Pedersen, \textit{Batak Blood and Protestant Soul: The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970).

\textsuperscript{51} Christine Winter, \textit{Looking After One's Own: The Rise of Nationalism and the Politics of the Neuendettelsauer Mission in Australia, New Guinea and Germany (1921-1933)} (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012).
Schmidt’s eventual successor was Friedrich Keppler, a pastor from Heidenheim. He was the second person the mission board courted for the post after its first choice refused the job. Keppler took office in May 1930 and soon faced the difficult task of managing an organization composed of several strong, competing personalities. Shortly after assuming his position, Keppler found himself at odds with the director of seminaries, Paul Hannig. The two disagreed on how to best move the organization forward, though their dislike for each other was most likely based upon a clash of personalities and a lack of mutual trust. The overall structure of the RMS allowed much autonomy for the heads of each department, but without any unified plan of action, not much could be accomplished. Keppler was unable to establish a strong leadership, especially in light of allegations from Hannig that questioned the Director’s abilities and decision-making. The Annual General Meeting on 29 February 1932 held a special session to address the contention between Keppler and Hannig. A no-confidence vote to remove the Director was successful and Keppler was asked to resign due to his inability to create a collaborative environment. Hannig was also forced to resign for his aggressive role in the situation. Johannes Warneck, pioneering missionary to the Batak of Sumatra, was appointed director with hopes that he would be able to unite the differing factions within the RMS and steady the course of the organization.

Warneck took the helm of the RMS almost the same time that National Socialism gained political control of Germany. The Nazi seizure of power was even met with some excitement by Rhenish Mission leaders as indicated by the annual report for 1933:

With excited thanks and joy we have experienced the wonderful survey of our country. We were able to see a great time, but have also seen strange things. The plight of the past twenty years has helped our people reflect inwardly which now

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52 Menzel, 301 ff.
promotes renewal. Our mission must talk much more about the blessings from these difficult times, both the blessings received at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{53}

Churches in Wuppertal held services characterized with nationalism, Swastika flags on display and \textit{"Deutschland über alles"} being sung by parishioners.\textsuperscript{54} There was a general enthusiasm for the seeming upswing in German power associated with the National Socialist government, but this was checked by specific criticism of certain individual polices. Missionary Immanuel Genähr lamented the closing of certain Jewish businesses, especially those with which the organization had contracts. He also opposed the renaming of historic streets – specifically Friedrich-Ebert-Straße being renamed in honor of Hermann Göring.\textsuperscript{55} There were also instances where RMS officials refused to participate fully with the wave of nationalistic fervor that had enthralled much of Germany. There was a case where an anonymous tip was reported to the Gestapo against the organization for not displaying Nazi flags at a meeting, instead using the older Imperial Flag.\textsuperscript{56} Such were the varied responses to the regime by Rhenish officials in the early days of Nazi rule.

In reaction, Warneck wrote a circular that was highly optimistic and nationalistic regarding the early political reign of Adolf Hitler. At the same time, Warneck also knew he had a responsibility to act as a unifying power within his organization. He issued a newsletter designed to calm political divisions within the Rhenish Mission Society, and also prevent further trouble with authorities. Despite Warneck’s efforts, Genähr’s criticisms of the Nazi Party

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Jahresbereicht} (1933), 3.

\textsuperscript{54} Menzel, 302.

\textsuperscript{55} VEMA 2.708a, 77-81.

\textsuperscript{56} Menzel, 312.
continued and brought the Rhenish Mission some scrutiny from the Gestapo, especially in conjunction with debates concerning the German Christian movement. Genähr believed that the German Christian movement was only popular due to political and self-serving reasons. He commented in a letter dated 28 July 1933 that, “A real religious movement begins with repentance and humility before God and not with fanfare, drumrolls, and mass demonstrations…”57 Added to this was criticism over regional church elections which he claimed were skewed by bullying from pastors closely identified with Nazi politics. These statements prompted someone to turn Genähr in to the authorities. Subsequently there was pressure from one of the regional German Christian groups, acting as a subset of the Reichskirche, for the Rhenish Mission to issue a corrective declaration in order to prevent political ramifications from impacting the group. To this end, Warneck attempted to smooth the situation diplomatically and issued a short letter designed, not to refute Genähr who managed to avoid serious trouble, but to reinforce the idea that the individual missionary did not speak for the entire organization:

Dear brothers and sisters!

We, the leadership of Rhenish Mission regret that discussions of intra-German affairs are carried abroad by the last letter of our dear Brother Genähr. They have been misunderstood as meaning not all members of the Rhenish Missionary fully professed themselves to our God-given government. It is not true. All of us have heartfelt desires and prayer requests that the inner reorganization of our people by the National Socialists’ rise to power will have a beneficial effect on our dear fatherland and those abroad. Undeterred by the various ecclesiastical movements, we pray for the Church and people, whose honor is our honor and whose life is our life. Each of us is assigned by God at this point and we are working faithfully and with joy towards this high task. Even those of you brothers and sisters overseas can serve your country by the faithful performance of the duties due your posts. It's always been a concern to represent Germans abroad in a worthy manner. We expect this from you as you represent your country and church to those around you. This is urgently needed today.

57 As quoted by Menzel, 305.
Political and church-political conflicts are to be avoided from now on in the newsletters. One can easily misunderstand these even with the best of intentions. Our mission must not be suspected, as if we wanted to criticize the great events in the German people, while yet we wish that our beloved nation will stand united and strong outwardly and inwardly. Gladly we all want to work on our part in it. Above all, let us be faithful in intercession for the leadership of state and its paladins, that by God's hand it persevere and through it our people turn to salvation and prosperity.

All of you are greeted warmly and enjoined the preserving grace and blessing of our Heavenly Father.\(^{58}\)

Warneck’s calls to avoid discussion of church politics in newsletters went unheeded, as Drießler’s next two general letters buttressed his case for the Rhenish Mission Society to ally itself with German Christians.

By this time, German Christians were trying to incorporate all German mission activity within the imperial church. Inspector Drießler had joined the Nazi party and for all practical purposes acted as an agent for the German Christian movement within the Rhenish Mission Society. His activity with the German Christians caused tension within the Mission, as many members were uncomfortable with the political and theological stances inherent in the former group. Inspector Warneck and a majority of the Board of Deputies were against such plans. The implications for the German Evangelical Mission were tantamount considering the theological positions of German Christianity concerning non-Aryans. Despite this, there were those within the RMS framework who joined the Nazi Party and were sympathetic to the German Christian movement. There were even thirty seminary students who applied for membership with the SA (\textit{Sturmabteilung}) in the early 1930s.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\) VEMA 2.708a, 92. Warneck, \textit{Rundbrief}, (30 Sept 1933).

\(^{59}\) Menzel, 306.
A plan co-drafted by Drießler was submitted to the German Evangelical Mission, seeking to integrate all German missions under the Reich Church. At a meeting in Barmen from 18-20 October 1933, representatives discussed the proposal and other issues concerning the future of missionary activity. When the draft to unify German missions was introduced, most representatives from Barmen (RMS) & Basel Missions objected strongly. None trusted their work to the hands of Müller. The group ultimately rejected Drießler’s plan. The key reasons for opposing the plan were its insistence of the application of the Aryan paragraph to allow membership to “Aryans only,” thus alienating anyone with a Jewish heritage; and, the inclusion of all mission groups in the process of Gleichschaltung (bringing into the same line). Confessional autonomy was also an issue. Mission leaders, overall, felt strongly about maintaining independence from government oversight. They also opposed any limits on who could belong to the church regardless of biological lineage, believing that spiritual conversion to Christianity was sufficient for membership within the community.

Soon after this meeting, the German Christian movement was faced with something of a scandal. On 13 November 1933, there was a rally at the Sports Palace where keynote speaker Reinhold Krause, head of the German Christian movement in Berlin, espoused the radical plans of the German Christian movement to overhaul Christianity in an attempt to purge Jewish influence from its doctrine. Many across Germany disassociated themselves from the group after hearing such an open and honest expression of its core beliefs. The revelation and vitriolic nature in which it was espoused reminded some that German Christianity was not the same religion they were familiar with or believed in personally. The blow to membership did not however dislodge all German Christian leaders from positions of power. Drießler, frustrated by

\[60\] Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 17, 32.
his lack of achievement in bringing the Rhenish Mission under the German Christian umbrella, resigned from his post as Missions Inspector in mid-March of 1934 – but not before issuing a series of open letters defending his stance on the German Christian church.\textsuperscript{61} He went on to be a pastor in Cologne-Bayernatal, eventually breaking away from the German Christians himself. After doing so, he was made a representative of the Cologne Synod in 1937 for General Meetings.\textsuperscript{62}

Missionaries in Southwest Africa were well aware of the commotion unfolding back in Wuppertal. In a letter dated 22 January 1934, Drießler addressed those in the field in Southwest Africa, stating that “…the Church’s position is unclear to this day as fighting sways back and forth.” He was optimistic that events in Germany would win church leadership to his side, promising:

[…]

During the course of this week, far-reaching fundamental decisions are expected. A meeting between Adolf Hitler and all German church leaders under the advisement of the Reich Bishop will happen soon and put questions to rest.\textsuperscript{63}

The Missions Inspector’s optimism proved to betray him as no such consensus was achieved. As noted above, he decided it was best for him to leave the organization. News of Drießler’s resignation was met with shock by some and welcomed by others, though even Genähr was diplomatic about the situation, giving Drießler well wishes on his new occupation as a pastor.\textsuperscript{64} Heinrich Vedder also lamented the loss of Drießler, as the two held similar views concerning National Socialism. Missionaries Friedrich Rust and Friedrich Pönnighaus did not necessarily

\textsuperscript{61} VEMA 2.708a, S.82ff, 93ff.

\textsuperscript{62} VEMA 2.708a, 81.

\textsuperscript{63} VEMA 2.708a, 82.

\textsuperscript{64} VEMA 2.708a, 81.
vocalize their satisfaction at the Missions Inspector’s resignation, but they were vocal in their opposition regarding the German Christian Movement, especially after the coalition formed in opposition back in Germany.

5.4. Impact of the Confessing Church

By May 1934, a group of theologians came together and signed the Theological Declaration of Barmen (also known as the Barmen Declaration), a manifesto critical of aspects of National Socialism and espousing an outright rejection of German Christianity, which they considered heretical and dangerous.65 This faction became known as the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche) and it marked a split within Protestant ranks in Germany as those who agreed with the Barmen Declaration sat in opposition to the Reichskirche. It should be noted that the Confessing Church was not necessarily a political movement that rejected the government entirely. Many think of examples like Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, and Dietrich Bonheoffer, who each were outspoken against National Socialism and subsequently persecuted by the state – but they were only extreme examples from within the Confessing Church, whereas the majority of members were simply morally opposed to the attempts to Germanize Christian doctrine as a means to appease Nazi ideology but were not necessarily opponents to the entire regime.66

65 Most of the Barmen Declaration was written by the Reformed theologian Karl Barth, with some later modifications added after input from Lutheran pastors regarding the explicit inclusion of the Two Kingdoms doctrine. See J. Lukas De Vries, Mission and Colonialism in Namibia (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978) for a thorough discussion of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine from the perspective of the Rhenish Mission.

66 For more on the mix of complacency and activism within the Confessing Church, see Wolfgang Gerlach, And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Susannah Heschel argues that that some pastors and missionaries that aligned themselves with the Confessing Church were also members of the Nazi Party, and even more were not opposed to the anti-Semitic sentiment that hovered as a fog over Europe, seeking to remove Jewish influences from Christianity. See Heschel, 5-7.
The General Assembly of the Minden-Ravensburg Luther Synod, the over-arching organization with which the Rhenish Mission was affiliated, backed the Barmen Declaration and a statement was drawn up to reflect the position of the Rhenish Mission which simply stated, “without the intent to hurt the friends of our mission on the other side… we stand behind the Confessional Synod of the Rhineland and Westphalia [a sister regional synod].” The Rhenish deputation did not have unanimous consent on the statement, so it was never publically released, but filed away. The first sentences of the conclusion are telling, however, because they show up again in later documents of the Confessing Church, reading:

The Secularization of the Church is the death of the Mission. It [the Mission] prospers on under the Word, from which it is born and lives. Bound to this Word of God, it rejects each false teaching on the mission field and at home, as other religious or contemporary beliefs stand next to the Message of Christ as forms of divine revelation. As an act of faith in the Church of Jesus Christ, the Mission knows itself to be supported by the believing, praying, and confessing community – which has found its union with the Confessing Synod of the German Evangelical Church.

Warneck shared this letter with others at the 23 June 1934 meeting of the German Evangelical Mission Council, which subsequently published a statement entitled “Confessional Church and Mission.” The last part of this declaration echoed the unpublished memo drafted by Warneck, stating, “the secularization of the Church is the death of the mission. Therefore, the mission calls on all her friends to pray for the renewal of the German Evangelical Church in the struggle of the believing, Confessing Church.” Shortly after this statement, the Reich Minister of the Interior,

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67 Menzel, 309.

68 Menzel, 309.

69 Menzel, 310.
Wilhelm Frick, passed a motion preventing religious institutions from discussing political issues as matters of church policy.\footnote{Berichte der Rheinischen Mission (1935), 29. See also the discussion of Wilhelm Frick in Klaus Scholder, Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich. Band 1. Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen, 1918-1934 (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Ulstein, 1977), 186 ff.}

Even before government prohibitions, Warneck was always careful about making strong political statements, most likely to help ensure the stability of the Rhenish Mission Society. At the Annual General Meeting in July 1934, he spoke:

> The German Mission wishes with its heart, however, for more cooperation with the Church, for it must be a living Church. Because only from such a church can the Kingdom of God be built among the people of the world. The German Mission also wishes for non-integration or state organization of the church – such was desired by the German Christians, who would have thus placed it under the command and authority of the Reich Bishop. But we also do not wish full association with the Confessing Church either. According to God’s guidance, the Mission’s life in Germany has grown from the existence of free societies… We consider it a matter of importance to stay with this form of free association. Through intensive cooperation of church organs, parish priests, presbyters, and synods of the church all can work well together. The Church must see that the Mission is one of its vital functions. There is no church without a mission, just as no mission without a church.\footnote{Bericht für die Hauptversammlung vom 25.7.1935, 11 ff.}

Here, the Mission Director tried to argue that for mission societies and the Church to succeed, there needed to be a certain level of autonomy. Outwardly, he stated that the opposition to the German Christians was predominately due to their attempted incorporation of all Christian churches in Germany akin to \textit{Gleichschaltung}. The passage is unclear in its theological stance regarding Aryan Christianity, but it can be assumed that most of the controversial aspects of German Christianity were rejected on the basis of Warneck’s subsequent behavior and publications.
By October 1934 the tensions between church and state were increasing as evidenced by an unusually long newsletter issued by Warneck to all branches of the Rhenish Mission Society. Among concerns of funding and internal discussions regarding the organization’s allegiances, he relayed his concerns for the mission, while moving the organization as a whole closer to the Confessing Church. He cautioned:

We are in a transitional period, at the beginning of a new epoch of world history and the mission. What will be, no one knows – whether it will be a great time for the World Mission, as it has been until now; or a day of small things, with humility and limitations on all sides. […]

The Church’s position is more strained than ever after the events of the last few weeks. With deepest conviction, the Rhenish Mission stands on the side of the Confessing Church that sees Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and rejects every secularism introduced in the church. We welcome everyone who wants to participate in the work of the Gentile mission, and know that it is from such work that blessings flow. We may bring to bear the experience of the mission on the discussion of today’s catchwords and worldviews. We have something to say from the perspective of the mission field about the question of “species-specific” Christianity, about the meaning of “blood, soil and race” in the Christian community, etc… To the question of the nature and strength of the Church, we can testify as to what paganism is and what the gospel is – the former being godlessness, the latter being the rescue of a world that lies in wickedness, over there as over here. In this we want to be faithful witnesses and to do service, being true in love (Ephesians 4:15). Here lie the great tasks of the mission.72

Warneck now demonstrated outward support for the Confessing Church despite having been more reserved a few months prior, adding an innuendo that German Christianity was tantamount to paganism. What is important to note in this passage is that he attempts to be inclusive of anyone who is willing to participate in foreign mission work despite their affiliation, possibly in an effort to keep society members who were German Christians or those who refused to ally themselves with either camp. More interesting in this section of the newsletter is the first outward critique of German Christianity by the Missions Director, especially as Warneck

72 VEMA 2.708a, 69-70.
intimates there is a degree of “wickedness” in Germany that needs to be combated by the internal spread of the Gospel. He furthermore reinforces traditional Christian universalism by arguing that salvation is not something solely reserved for ethnic Germans.

Not all members of the Rhenish Mission Society aligned themselves with the Confessing Church, and as mentioned earlier the organization itself did not join formally despite strong support from its leadership. What is significant though is that after 1935, all students who graduated from the Rhenish Mission seminary were trained in theology by professors aligned with the Confessing Church, and these pupils eventually joined the group as individuals.\(^3\)

Despite Warneck’s attempts to keep the RMS out of the gaze of Nazi authorities, several minor incidents occurred prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. The first was Seminary instructor Pastor Paul Viering’s refusal to sing the national anthem and “Horst Wessel Song” at an inauguration ceremony. He was denounced to the Gestapo and a formal complaint was also filed with the Nazi Party. The RMS itself was attacked in the same complaint because tables were set with the older white, red, and black flag – not the swastika.\(^4\) Warneck downplayed the incident, stating that nationalism was subdued only because it was supposed to be a liturgical ceremony; and, furthermore, he was unaware who set the tables noting that whoever did so must not have received proper instructions.

One reason Warneck was so keen to keep the Rhenish Mission Society as publically non-controversial as possible was to ensure that the organization remained viable in its overseas missions work. Dealing with the Nazi government was difficult for any group that did not fully ally itself with its \textit{Weltanschauung}. Laws were issued as early as 1934 that prevented the

\(^{3}\) Menzel, 312.

\(^{4}\) Menzel, 314.
collection of donations for overseas missionary work (or any aid for that matter), considering it ill-fitting that funds should be taken away from those in need in the Fatherland. There was also a foreign currency exchange crisis (Devisennot) that plagued mission operations. That the Rhenish Mission was able to survive amid these trying times is in part due to the fact that a few among its leadership were actual Nazi party members, often acting as intercessors between the organization and the state. Managing Director Walter Kobusch was one such individual. It was due to his efforts that a special concession was acquired from the state, allowing the Rhenish Mission to send salaries to their employees overseas despite the general ban on aid funds from leaving the country. Kobusch and others like him were thus able to deflect some of the hardship of the mission under the Nazi regime.

5.5. Discord in the field, National Socialism Abroad

The events in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s impacted the work of missionaries in Southwest Africa, where Rhenish Missionary Society members faced a difficult balancing act as ethnic Germans. In 1926, The Lutheran Synod formed in Southwest Africa, where it functioned in part to appoint pastors for the various German communities. Most of these appointments failed, as the conditions in the field were not always environmentally hospitable for those accustomed to Germany’s climate or a general lack of desire to serve in a post so far from home. Therefore, the Synod was forced to turn to the Rhenish Mission Society to meet the spiritual needs of Germans in the region, thus creating a situation where certain missionaries

75 For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter Two. Warneck’s lamentations regarding the severing of funding are found in the aforementioned newsletter. See VEMA 2.708a, 65-70.

76 I am unsure which missionaries accepted British citizenship when naturalization was offered. Friedrich Rust in particular naturalized in 1926. For the most part, it should be assumed that Rhenish Missionary Society personnel in Southwest Africa maintained their German citizenship.
were forced to serve two roles. Those who were appointed to German congregations in addition to their missionary duties found the task onerous, especially in light of the changes facing the world. In H.K. Diehl’s annual report for Okahandja in 1938, he reflected on his reservations about missionaries serving as pastors of white congregations, stating:

The Mission has viewed from its outset a natural duty to turn down even their own countrymen in service to others. When we scroll back through the chronicles of our community, we find that a connection between missions and German communities arises the moment other German families happen to settle near the missionary. It would be disobedience to our God-given orders if we ignored our own countrymen and dedicated our service exclusively to indigenous groups in those cases where a priest can not be employed full-time.\(^\text{77}\)

Diehl recognized later that there was much work to be done among German settlers in the realm of pastoral care, accepting the dual role of missionaries and pastors, but only due to the lack of available pastors for the German communities.

As caretakers of ethnic Germans, the Synod Missionary conference of October 1926 discussed the importance of education for ethnic German children to preserve Germanness (Deutschum) and how to prevent corruption of this identity by adults. Präses Wandres argued that German identity was being diluted by mixed marriages.\(^\text{78}\) Wandres lamented that, “Unfortunately our language has already adopted some foreign words from the other languages of the surrounding white [Boer] and indigenous peoples.”\(^\text{79}\) To remedy this problem he specifically called for the encouragement of marital segregation, “What was needed was the

\(^{77}\) VEMA 2.690, 89.

\(^{78}\) The term Präses is a title similar to “President” or “Superintendent.” It is rooted in Latin for “to be placed at the head of” and was used for provincial/regional governors.

\(^{79}\) VEMA 2.688a, 180.
keeping of clean marriages and the attempt to prevent people from entering mixed marriages.”

Ultimately the answer of how to preserve Germanness was an emphasis on proper education. By preserving *Deutschtum* in the region, it was believed that ethnic Germans would be able to maintain some political and economic power in the face of an ever-expanding Boer presence. Heinrich Vedder, interestingly enough due to his later affiliation with National Socialism, argued that missionaries and educators should be careful not to over-emphasize the superiority of their Germanness as it could endanger the whole situation. This same meeting produced the tract discussed in the opening vignette.

Later, educational concerns were echoed by the Synod Report for 1st October 1928 to 30th September 1930 from the Community of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southwest Africa. It expanded the discussion over education for ethnic Germans outside of Southwest Africa, but still in southern Africa, especially those in Angola. In it, the group asks for more funding to spread the paper “Heimat.” Furthermore, it promoted cooperation with synods in the Cape and Transvaal provinces. Concerns over education are mentioned several times until the outbreak of the Second World War. Of note was the pamphlet of March 1937 raising awareness for the education for ethnic German children in Southern Africa.

The concern over the education and preservation of *Deutschtum* in Southern Africa was not solely that of religious officials. Many ethnic Germans in the region were convinced that in order to ensure political and economic stability, they had to stick together in Southwest Africa –

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80 VEMA 2.688a, 180.

81 VEMA 2.688a, 180.

82 VEMA 2.690, 132-33.

83 VEMA 2.690, 119. For more on settler education, see Chapter Two.
not just in matters affecting white settlers and the black population, but also in addressing the demands of Boers and organized African groups. Political and social groups were founded to promote cohesion among Germans. These groups stretched into all spectrums of life, like the Union of German Scouts in Southwest Africa (*Bund Deutscher Pfadfinder Südwestafrikas*) founded in 1928 as a social club for young, male Germans (it, like most scouting groups, was rooted in the movement founded by Robert Baden-Powell after his service in the British Army in South Africa). This group later merged with the *Hitlerjugend* in 1933. The Hitler Youth itself was outlawed by the Union of South Africa in 1934 due to fears of the political ramifications that such a group may eventually cause, so there was a reversion back to the Pathfinder name. That society too was eventually banned in 1939 due to the outbreak of the Second World War and South African fears that it was in reality a paramilitary group, training future German soldiers. The organization reformed in the 1960s and still exists.

A more important political group was the German Union for Southwest Africa (*Deutsche Bund für Südwestafrika*), founded in 1924 with the intent of protecting the interests of Germans living in Southwest Africa. Much of the ethos behind this political organization was awash in the sea of national and racial ideology found in Germany. Thus, the political appeal of National Socialism spread easily from Germany to ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa, and an official party was formed in 1932 in Windhoek distinct from the *Deutsche Bund*.84 In addition, propaganda issued by the *Deutsche Bund* on 8th November 1933 demonstrated Nazi ideology at play in Southwest Africa. The group sought racial cohesion among ethnic Germans, embracing the “new national spirit” found in Germany, and the creation of an extended German community

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84 See Chapter Two. See also Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad*.  

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under the leadership of the Third Reich. The flyer addressed to “German Men and Women of Southwest Africa” read:

The situation, as it has been designated in the Southwest shows clearly that the local Germans need greater coherence in their preservation and enforcement of racial issues. Therefore, a reorganization of the *Deutsche Bund* is required. The *Deutsche Bund* must include all Germans to the last man and it must simultaneously unite all Germans into a solid unit. […]

This development has gone in the same direction in the homeland [*Heimat*]. There is a huge reformation that will affect the whole, united German people as a new German philosophy has risen.

This new national spirit could not be confined to the homeland, and it has since transferred naturally with all of its effects and declared its support to all Germans outside the borders of the Empire.

[…]

Our hopes have been fulfilled today, as the longed for Third Reich stands before us. All the world now acknowledges the reputation of the Germans, as we integrate into a new, great German national community.⁸⁵

The tract went on to call for all Germans to work together in this new philosophical spirit, if for nothing else, working together would help answer demands for greater political equality in Southwest Africa in the face of increasing Boer populations as the Union of South Africa relocated poor whites from its other provinces to the mandate territory.

It should also be noted that there were Germans in Southwest Africa who were politically opposed to the NSDAP. Many of the “old timers,” that is long-established settlers who lived in the region prior to the German loss of the colony, were opposed to the jingoism of Nazism and saw the political group’s agitation and propaganda in the region as detrimental to what political voice existed for ethnic Germans. For them, dreams of reuniting the region with a greater German Empire were secondary to the realities of maintaining the political representation they

⁸⁵ VEMA 2.690, 81-82.
had acquired under the Union of South Africa’s mandate control. It is worth noting as a point of emphasis that not all those who promoted colonial ambitions were supporters of National Socialism, as even the overtly racist Paul Rohrbach, former colonial minister, campaigned for the Catholic Center Party in opposition to Nazis in the 1932 elections. Overall, there was much political activity among German Southwest Africans prior to the outbreak of World War II. As Hitler’s actions became more aggressive in Continental Europe, Union of South Africa officials became more concerned about the presence of these Nazis in Southern Africa.

As far as the Rhenish Mission Society was concerned, the specter of Nazism in Southwest Africa was not supposed to be an issue, due to a tradition of separation of church and state in accordance to the Two Kingdoms doctrine. To further reinforce this idea, in 1934 Präses Johannes Olpp issued a letter calling for political neutrality and restraint from the pulpit. Despite these official prohibitions, originally by Warneck in the home office and Olpp in the field, political matters and religion mixed on many occasions – especially in venues outside of the full control of the Rhenish Mission Society. The Missions Conference held in Windhoek in October 1935 even had German General-Consul Hans Oelhafen von Schöllenbach, veteran of the Schutztruppe during World War One, as a guest speaker. He spoke on the Christian responsibility of all Germans to support the political events in Germany, i.e. support Hitler’s regime. Many historians argue that the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa was

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87 For more on German settlers and National Socialism, see Chapter Two.

88 VEMA 2.693e, 23.

89 Hellberg, 204.
favorable to National Socialism when citing this conference, but what they fail to mention is that this gathering also had several opponents to National Socialism. In fact, as the influence of National Socialism grew in Southwest Africa so, too, did the degree to which opponents of the movement spoke out. Of particular interest are missionaries Friedrich Rust and Friedrich Pönnighaus as they came into conflict with Andreas Wackwitz, the leading Nazi church official in the region.

5.6. Wackwitz: Politics, the Church, and Resistance

Andreas Wackwitz, Landesprobst for the German Evangelical Synod of Southwest Africa, began his tenure in 1933 by sharing a prepared speech from Reichsbischof Müller, the leader of German Christianity. Wackwitz was a Nazi Party member and German Christian who expected those under his jurisdiction in the Lutheran Synod to respect his position, not to mention comply with church policy. Once in Southwest Africa, he set forth to exert his influence on religious life in the region. In a letter dated 14th March 1935, Wackwitz wrote to Präsies Olpp calling for the joining of the missionary conference (controlled by the Rhenish Mission) to the pastors’ conference (controlled by the DEK). Wackwitz argued, “we full-time pastors would have great pleasure if we were able to sit in on the missionary conference and would surely have much to gain if allowed to participate as guests.”

By suggesting the union of the conferences, or at least overlapping participation, Wackwitz was seeking to gain influence within the Rhenish Mission itself, thereby increasing his overall power in the region over church affairs. He proved later in the letter that he differentiated between pastors of white communities and those who only served African communities; therefore, Wackwitz admitted to a hierarchy in

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90 VEMA 1.704b, 49.
91 VEMA 2.690, 131.
the region of whites-only pastors, missionaries who have African parishioners and also serve as pastor of a white church, and missionaries that only serve African congregations. Some scholars have suggested that this hierarchy reflected different levels of prestige among missionaries and pastors, but the archival material indicates that if there was some merit to this idea, it was mainly in the eyes of the beholder. Missionaries like H.K. Diehl and Pönnighaus lamented the need for missionaries to serve on two fronts, instead wanting to embrace the indigenous mission according to their original calling.

Later in the year, on 22nd November 1935 Heinrich Vedder wrote to Wackwitz, agreeing with the latter’s plans to bring missionary and pastor interactions closer together. Vedder wrote:

… I thank you not only for the greeting, but especially for the fact that you are very dear to me Mr. Provost, expressing it by word and deed, that you do everything to promote and maintain a resolute cohesion between pastors and missionaries with all of your powers. 92

Vedder also mentioned a “deep” conversation he had with Bishop Theodore Heckel, the head of foreign relations for the German Evangelical Church, “with whom he agrees with wholeheartedly.” 93 He stated briefly at the end of the letter that there was a complaint about Missionary Rust from a parishioner, but emphasized that Wackwitz should not worry too much about him because his was a good man:

Enclosed you will receive a letter I’m releasing to you because these are matters of the German community. It is probably not very important to resolve, but for the record I’m sending it anyway. In the case of Missionary Rust particularly, I have hitherto always had the impression that he would give away his last to help beleaguered people in need. From my superintendencey in Essen years ago, I

92 VEMA 2.690, 128.

93 From his position within the church Heckel was one of the individuals responsible for the internment and subsequent death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
know that, upon closer inspection, these letters of complaint are usually born out of envy, resentment, or the like.\(^{94}\)

The grievance about Rust was rooted in the missionary’s occasional outspoken reservations concerning National Socialism from the pulpit. It foreshadowed a much more pointed controversy in the region regarding church and state relations.

Vedder signed the aforementioned letter “\textit{Heil Hitler!”}\(^{95}\) By this time it was clear that Wackwitz and Vedder held similar political and ideological worldviews. As such, Wackwitz found in Vedder a kindred spirit with whom he hoped to govern the religious realm of ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa. Wackwitz then wrote to the German Evangelical Church home office, most likely to Bishop Heckel himself, on 17th February 1937 about Vedder’s future in Southwest Africa. Wackwitz wanted to ensure that Vedder was in full control of Rhenish Mission Society operations in the region. He also wanted to diminish Missionary and Pastor H.K. Diehl’s influence at the Augustineum.

It is precisely here that two needs can be reconciled: first the wish that Vedder obtains the position of School Inspector, and then the urgent request that he becomes the head of the mission in Southwest Africa in some form. I still have hope that these two wishes can unite, especially now as soon as young missionary Diehl is presented as vicar to Vedder. Of course, it will then be necessary for Vedder to gradually withdraw from teaching at the Augustineum, but surely the man who has all the land’s school matters under his eyes – traveling here and there – should be allowed the responsibility as the Head of the Mission at the same time. I would be extremely grateful if you could assist me in fulfilling this desire. Full strict confidentiality is needed; Vedder is to know nothing of this letter. Also, I have written Conradi [sic] an airmail letter asking him to somehow help bring about the combination of these desires.\(^{96}\)

\(^{94}\) VEMA 2.690, 128.

\(^{95}\) VEMA 2.690, 128.

\(^{96}\) VEMA 2.690, 120.
Mentioned in this letter is that Wackwitz had already written to Administrator David Gideon Conradie to do what he can as a South African official to help manipulate these personnel shifts, demonstrating Wackwitz’s inclination to use political contacts to achieve his will in religious matters.

An exchange of letters between 9 August 1937 and 22 October 1937 between Wackwitz and the home office of the German Evangelical Church discussed the future of Olpp and Pastor Kurt Thude. Pastor Thude was initially granted a vacation for the summer of 1938, but this was rescinded by the DEK as the health of Präses Olpp declined and the DEK wanted Thude to take over some of Olpp’s responsibilities as a pastor of white congregations. Owing to the links between the Rhenish Mission and the DEK in Southwest Africa, the Reichskirche was able to exert some influence over this situation.\(^97\) The poor health of Olpp opened the door for an opportune personnel change. Wackwitz wanted a pro-Nazi official in charge of Rhenish Mission operations in Southwest Africa – a wish granted as Vedder was elevated to Präses in 1937.

As Wackwitz maneuvered to increase his influence in church politics, everyday operations continued for Rhenish missionaries who had the difficult task of serving more than one congregation. Rust’s annual report for Lüderitzbucht for 1937 recognized that times were difficult for the Germans under his care in Southwest Africa, especially economically. He discussed the issue of citizenship for those who came to the region after the initial process of automatic naturalization, stating they must apply for citizenship to have any chance of

\(^{97}\) VEMA 2.690, 113, 118.
surviving. After mentioning these concerns, Rust reflected on the impact of the church crisis as it stood in Southwest Africa. He lamented:

The inner layer of Deutschum and its position within the church here has become a struggle for the message of Christ. But sometimes one has to say: the fight is clearly against the message of Christ. The Church does not complain when it is attacked because a clear, open struggle is better than sleep. [...] The assessment of the Church’s operations at home is so complicated that many are not up for the fight. It creates such a sense of aversion towards all things ecclesiastical, although members are not in agreement with the activities of church opponents. But active participation in church life is dwindling [here in Southwest Africa].

Despite this, the sermon is not retreating, which is the preacher’s requirement. After the Jubilee it has once again become quiet around the church, and one cannot get the youth to attend. The opposing side [Deutsche Christen] has worked so much against the Church. Rosenberg’s publication “Protestantische Rompilger” is widespread. Spreading the response published by the Protestant side here is impossible unfortunately, because tracts are seized in Germany and not replaced. This creates a situation where the Protestant Church and many of its leading representatives are guilty of the “betrayal of Luther” before readers’ eyes.

Rust then noted völkisch paganism at a funeral service he witnessed. Here it is obvious that Rust was well aware of the discourse concerning the Church and Germany. He was also frustrated by the censorship limiting the availability of literature countering this tract by Alfred Rosenberg, much less those who attacked his The Myth of the Twentieth Century (1930). This event prompted him to restate his concerns over the church struggle in a letter to Pönnighaus concerning doctrine. Rust’s outspoken nature among his fellow missionaries and pastors did not gain him any favor with Wackwitz.

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98 VEMA 2.690, 105-09. Here too Rust mentioned that being a South African citizen did not mean one betrayed their “Germanness.”

99 VEMA 2.690, 106. Alfred Rosenberg’s Protestantische Rompilger (1932) was a tract attacking the Christian church. His more famous work was The Myth of the Twentieth Century (1930), which outlined much of the racial ideology and völkisch mythology that helped to create the belief in a superior Aryan race.
In 1938 there was a breaking point in church relations in Southwest Africa between Wackwitz as representative of the DEK and Rhenish Missionaries serving as pastors of white congregations, especially Rust. A meeting in September of the German Evangelical Synod of Southwest Africa produced an enunciation of the church’s standpoint on where it stood in light of world events and changes in theological views. Despite voting to publish the text of the statement, Rust released a self-edited version in Lüderitzbucht, reading this modified edition from the pulpit as part of one of his sermons. In this process, Rust essentially stripped the enunciation of its nationalistic and racist overtones.

The pamphlet, entitled “Do we Germans in Southwest Africa need Christ’s Message?”, was printed on a on full-page flyer consisting of familiar Christian rhetoric coupled with an edification of the German race. Rust omitted the first and fifth paragraphs from his version. The original started:

The church stands in the midst of the people – its members, clergy and non-clergy, are comrades. As the people moved so do the members of the Church. The members of the German Evangelical Synod of Southwest Africa along with the entire German people [Volk] all over the world, clergy and non-clergy alike, confess to the present German revivalist movement. We consider it our duty to God and Volk, to contribute to the stronger cohesion of the German national community [Volksgemeinschaft] and to bear these sacrifices personally.

[...]

We humans are responsible to God for our lives as we are also therefore for what we call our ideals or what we refer to as the highest values of life. Blood, race, and nation [Blut, Rasse, und Volk] are now considered among us Germans as those maximum values, not only as gifts from God, in which He manifests Himself unto us through His creative power and order, but they also are demands from God on us. We are responsible to Him for this and we are therefore in debt to Him.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{100} VEMA 2.690, 59.
Modifying these two parts irritated the already tenuous relationship between Rust and Wackwitz as described below. The *Landesprobst* sought to do everything within his power to quell Rust’s voice in Southwest Africa, and in the process bring any other adversaries under control.

Wackwitz wrote a letter on 12th October 1938 to Mission Inspector Johannsen, head of RMS overseas operations, about the situation with Rust. In doing so he complained directly to the Barmen office before seeking council with Vedder, thus jumping the customary chain of command only later to come back to Vedder directly in an effort to convince him to also file a grievance. It is important to note that Wackwitz turned towards Johannsen, not Mission Director Warnecke who had already demonstrated his favor towards the Confessing Church. With Machiavellian flair, Wackwitz thanked Johannsen for his letter and kind words from prior correspondence on 5th September 1938, further stating that he and Vedder has been the only kind souls in his six-year tenure in Southwest Africa. With niceties aside, Wackwitz issued a litany of complaints about “trouble makers” in the community. Foremost, he is upset with Dr. Köhler, a farmer from Omaruru and Synod member. He complains that, “For years he [Köhler] has been trying to push through and win addendums in the Synod to define it light of the Confessing front back in the homeland.” He further complained:

He [Köhler] wants to ensure that the Synod writes public declarations of church policy based on the solidarity of council brothers, that we issue public protests, for example, against any statements or books by National Socialist politicians… This phenomenon occurred once already at a Pastors Conference in Okahandja in 1937, where he took part as a guest and a group danced to his tune (eg., Rust, Unterkötter, Decker, and Thude). At that time I was able to easily parlay the attacks and retain our neutral line…

He argued that Köhler, Rust, Alfred Unterkötter, Pastor Decker, and Pastor Kurt Thude were agitators in the region and needed to be dealt with before they caused permanent damage. Not

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101 VEMA 2.690, 76.
all of these men were affiliated with the Rhenish Mission, in fact only Rust and Unterkötter were. He placed the source of much of the current tension in a fight between Köhler and Bishop Heckel over an anti-Nazi magazine from Germany that Heckel prohibited being distributed in Southwest Africa. Wackwitz also claimed in this passage that he wanted to promote political neutrality in the church and furthermore wanted to prevent the church crisis experiences in Germany from being repeated in Southwest Africa – a bold lie, as he was rather politically active in his endeavors.

Turning back to the individual most under the scope of Johanssen’s control, Wackwitz critiqued Rust’s theological competence. He stated:

Rust is a good man, but hopelessly unrealistic and without any knowledge of human nature. I think it is such a misfortune that he is an academic theologian. He means well, but he must demonstrate that he is up to date on theological and scientific knowledge.  

He mentioned a *Fronde* against him for the prior three years between Köhler, Rust, and Thude. Wackwitz then ridiculed the “Confessing Church,” arguing that it as a movement was at the root of all of these problems in Southwest Africa.  

The letter of complaint then turned into one of warning as Wackwitz cautioned Johanssen that Rust’s attacks against the Nazi state will hurt the mission in the long run. He implored the Mission Inspector to rein in Rust before the latter’s actions were irreparable, stating:

If you could write Rust just once, I would greatly appreciate it if you remind him to treat me with greater respect and warn him strongly of any participation in a

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102 VEMA 2.690, 76a.
103 VEMA 2.690, 77.
104 VEMA 2.690, 76.
cabal against the home church. Each missionary that shows an open distrust of the home church and the Nazi government, as Rust does, damages the reputation of the mission! The Germans here will not have their confidence shaken or be tarnished.\textsuperscript{105}

At this point, Wackwitz levied a veiled threat that the Rhenish Mission Society would lose funding access if their missionaries’ political stances were not brought into line, noting that, “you have to be careful for the sake of foreign exchange allocation!”\textsuperscript{106} It is unclear whether this was an idle threat, but funding was a delicate subject for the Rhenish Mission since the outbreak of the First World War. It is plausible, then, that a complaint from Wackwitz to Heckel could have caused a chain of events that would have frozen assets from Germany to Southwest Africa.

Wackwitz moved from this position of strength and then interjected directly in mission politics. He praised Vedder as the calming force in this matter with the “troublemakers.”\textsuperscript{107} Wackwitz then made suggestions on personnel changes in the mission, stating, “Your missionary personnel in Southwest Africa are obsolete. The work here cries out for young, energetic people…”\textsuperscript{108} The \textit{Landesprobst} therefore used the Rust controversy to try and encourage the Rhenish Mission Society to send younger, more favorable missionaries to the region, taking a risk that new staff would be more malleable to his will:

> When working in an old place, you could achieve the same progress with two youths instead. I am well aware, of course, that I lack the great experience of elders, but I know very well from many conversations on farms that there are those among them who no longer understand right and reason, and because of

\textsuperscript{105} VEMA 2.690, 76.

\textsuperscript{106} VEMA 2.690, 76. See Chapter Two for more on the issue of the \textit{Devisionrot} and foreign funding of missions during the Nazi era.

\textsuperscript{107} VEMA 2.690, 77.

\textsuperscript{108} VEMA 2.690, 77.
other forms of backwardness, the mission is not particularly useful to the white public.\textsuperscript{109}

Here, Wackwitz argued that some of the missionaries in Southwest Africa were outmoded, going on to warn that the Catholic Mission was “more firmly in the saddle” – a false claim at best, but one rooted in Rhenish Mission fears during the first half of the twentieth century. He further tried to thwart the return of Missionary Heinrich Brockmann, known to be an “old timer” and anti-Nazi, to the region, stating, “Also, I hear that Brockmann is to come back, but it seems to me a mistake to have him return instead of two younger missionaries who can be employed for the same salary.”\textsuperscript{110} Here he touched on two problems faced by the mission: money and energy. Wackwitz continued by saying that if Johannsen did not send proper missionaries who respected the boundaries between blacks and whites, the reputation of Germans in the region would be damaged. He signs this letter with “Kind Regards,” not his usual “\textit{Heil Hitler},” possibly as a means to downplay his well-known political allegiance in juxtaposition to the aforementioned suggestion regarding Brockmann.\textsuperscript{111}

Wackwitz waited a week to bring his local campaign against Rust. In a letter to Rust dated 20th October 1938, he complained that Rust took an agreed-upon statement from the Synod and published an edited version in the paper in a duplicitous manner. Wackwitz questioned Rust’s belief in the current spiritual renewal of Germany and his dedication to its success. Wackwitz then issued a scathing reprimand:

But if you wanted to read the speeches from the pulpit, something for which a decision from your Parish Church Council is necessary, you had to wait until you

\textsuperscript{109} VEMA 2.690, 77.
\textsuperscript{110} VEMA 2.690, 77.
\textsuperscript{111} VEMA 2.690, 77.
were sent a copy of the official text from the Chairman of the Synod. A reading of an official statement of the Synod from a revised version that happens to come in your hand is absolutely inadmissible. Your behavior shows that you do not understand official procedures.

You have now made completely unauthorized modifications to the wording of the enunciation adopted by the Synod, therefore I have to call for this very harsh disciplinary action. And all the more so as you have yourself been advised with three other gentlemen of the Synod of the text, expressly agreed to it, and have as it was then submitted to the Synod and was adopted by it. It again shows your complete lack of understanding for official protocol, I might almost say, it shows that you have a lack of discernment between sincerity and insincerity. You use an excuse for your modifications the fact that you proposed changes for this or that in the preliminary discussions of the enunciation, but then returned to your views. Especially concerning this retreat of opinions, which you dropped but have now picked up again – I see as insincerity.

Objectively, I notice some of the following changes you made: The level of detail was necessary in order to facilitate the understanding of those who are to be reached. Passages can of course be shorter before theologians and church laymen, but we wanted to turn to one another and strengthen their understanding. You have deleted the sentence that said, “This Synod is committed to the German renewal movement of the present,” and you furthermore deleted the positive evaluation of the great values (Volk, Blut, Rasse) as gifts from God. By doing so you demonstrate your inner uncertainty on these matters.

Of note is Wackwitz’s mentioning that Rust declared his reservations on the wording in the earlier discussions about the enunciation, a fact absent from the complaint forwarded to Barmen.

Wackwitz noted that his “patience has come to an end” for Rust’s behavior and independent spirit. He warned Rust that a formal complaint would be sent to Vedder. At the end of the diatribe Wackwitz appeared to give some credence to Rust, but it did little to soften the tone of the letter. He stated, “Once again I emphasize: I do not doubt your good heart and your good will, but you are clumsy and inconsiderate, so much so that you give the impression of insincerity. Hopefully it is possible that the mission management will send more loyal

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112 VEMA 2.690, 80-80a.
employees to be the pastor of Lüderitzbucht and member of the Synod….” To add insult to injury, Wackwitz signs the letter “Heil Hitler!”\textsuperscript{113}

Wackwitz wrote the promised letter to Vedder immediately after the aforementioned one to Rust, calling Rust incompetent and untrustworthy and asking Vedder to forward this complaint to the home mission with Vedder’s own views of the situation, but withholding the fact that he had already personally contacted Johannsen. He railed:

… He has several times caused me the most painful situations, brought on through his clumsiness and ignorance. But you also know that I looked to him with the utmost patience and consideration, bearing with him and doing my best to win and convince him, yet I was always disappointed again and again. …

I therefore ask you to suggest to the home mission leadership that this is what has caused him to resign from the Synod Board, but at the same time let them recognize unequivocally that his present attitude should be subjected via a thorough revision to me. I stress again, that the decision to file such a complaint has not been easy for me, but just as you know how these operations work, you will understand. I have exhausted all means available at my disposal. There remains only one course of action for the Mission.\textsuperscript{114}

The last line can be inferred as Wackwitz asking Vedder to seek Rust’s dismissal from the Rhenish Mission.

Vedder proceeded as Wackwitz asked, but did not necessarily argue the case against Rust as strongly as the Landespropst would have liked. The letter from Vedder to Johannsen, dated 24th October 1938, explained the controversy between Rust and Wackwitz. He included in his correspondence a full record of events: Wackwitz’s original letter to him; a copy of the letter from Wackwitz to Rust; the original statement agreed upon by the Synod; and, lastly, Rust’s modified version. Vedder explained that Rust’s actions were influenced by Doctor Köhler,

\textsuperscript{113} VEMA 2.690, 80a.

\textsuperscript{114} VEMA 2.690, 79.
Pastor Decker, and Pastor Thude [who was pushed out of a position earlier and mentioned in a Nazi complaint later], not knowing of course about Wackwitz’s earlier correspondence with Barmen. In Vedder’s account to the Mission Inspector, he noted that:

The Synod chose a committee to advise on the creation of an enunciation. This consisted of Mister Graf von Lüttichau, Provost Wackwitz, Doctor Schmid, and Brother Rust. The text adopted by all four commissioners was then unanimously approved by the Synod, save for only Dr. Köhler who made objections and rejected them. After this Brother Rust went back to Lüderitzbucht and was determined to publish a modified version in Heimat, also sharing it from the pulpit as the official word of the Synod. The deletion of the first section is most serious. The other parts deleted and changed are evident from the two enclosures.115

Vedder indicated that he was most concerned that the paragraph pertaining to German national unity was omitted, but downplayed the deletion of racial ideology. He then turned to Rust’s future:

I’m concerned over all of these happenings. What can somehow be done in order ensure Brother Rust’s retention? I have probably asked him ten times orally or in writing to leave those types of things to the parish priests in the main office, to treat in his sermons, not with politics, but with the Word of God (I had complaints that parishioners had diminished desire to go to his sermons because of the political overtones of their remarks), and to devote more time to his school than complaining about the deficient state of government led actions (see my reports!).116

Vedder asked Johannsen to write Rust directly and implore him to leave politics out of his sermons. It is important to note that Vedder never suggested removing Rust from his missionary post, only questioned his viability serving as a pastor to the white church in Lüderitzbucht.

115 VEMA 2.690, 78.

During the imbroglio, Rust resigned as a member of the German Evangelical Church in Southwest Africa Synod, something he had threatened to do in protest several times before in years past. After this event Wackwitz wrote Rust on 2nd November 1938, apologizing that things came to this conclusion but hoping to start fresh now that the “storm has cleared the air.”117 He promised to write Barmen and withdraw the formal complaint in light of Rust’s resignation from the Synod. Wackwitz then asked Rust to continue organizing the upcoming synod meeting despite his no longer being a formal member of the group, especially considering that he had already done most of the preparation.118 Six days later, Wackwitz wrote to Johannsen, dropping his official complaint against Rust, most likely because his point had already been made. In this letter he addressed further the problem of politics in the church and mentioned that there were some others like Rust spreading anti-Nazi propaganda among farmers, thus abusing their position as influential religious leaders. He signed this letter to Johannsen with “Heil Hitler,” possibly feeling more confident about his position now that he won the conflict with Rust.119

For all practical purposes, the matter should have been resolved by Rust’s leaving the DEK Synod, but neither his conscience nor pride would not allow for silence. On the 12th November 1938, Rust attacked Wackwitz in the press with a letter published in the Swakopmund Zeitung. For the first time, the drama that was unfolding behind the scenes among church officials was exposed to the general public. It is difficult to gauge the public’s response to this situation, though there are some letters to the editor that support Rust – not just from ethnic

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117 VEMA 2.690, 65.

118 VEMA 2.690, 65.

119 VEMA 2.690, Wackwitz, “Letter n.793” (8 November 1938), 64.
Germans, but also from Boers in the region. Within a year’s time, however, the matter was moot as greater events overshadowed most issues in Southwest Africa.  

Wackwitz was replaced by Karl Friedrich Höflich in May 1939 as Landesprobst of the German Evangelical Church. He and his family planned on returning to Europe to pursue other adventures. Upon leaving the territory, many from the German community met them at the various train stations wishing Wackwitz and his family a safe voyage. Their return to Germany was met with a ten-year delay, however, as the steamer Adolf Woermann transporting him and his family towards Germany was intercepted by British naval forces on 22 November 1939. The German passengers on the ship were held as prisoners of war, first in England, then later in Canada, ironically saving Wackwitz’s seventeen-year-old son from service in the Wehrmacht.

During his time in Southwest Africa, Wackwitz proved to be a political agitator more than a spiritual leader. He meddled in church politics, courted favor among the Union of South Africa administrators to exert pressure on the Rhenish Mission Society to bend to his will, and most importantly, championed religious officials who were Nazis like himself to the detriment of those opposed to the political and ideological policies inherent in that movement. Some ethnic Germans outside of the missionaries who opposed him even petitioned the South African government to expel him in 1935 due to his political shenanigans. More than anyone else, Wackwitz pushed for the elevation of Heinrich Vedder in Southwest Africa, helping ensure that latter’s career lasted well after the Second World War was over and even after his retirement.

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120 This interaction with the settler community in Southwest Africa will be expanded for the article form of this section.


122 NAN, SWAA 2949, CC87, “German Political Attitudes in SWA.”
from church service. There were clear signs of friendship between the two as Vedder lamented Wackwitz’s retirement when announced.¹²³

5.7. Heinrich Vedder and World War II

The start of the Second World War in September 1939 brought new difficulties to ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa, especially hindering the work of missionaries as their personal liberty and financial means were limited. Even before the war, Prime Minister Smuts maneuvered to take advantage of the growing tension in Europe to place South Africa in a better position to annex Southwest Africa in case a conflict erupted among European powers. On 17 April of 1939, he sent 300 military police to Windhoek to buttress local authorities there.¹²⁴ In fact, one could argue that the South African declaration of war on Germany had more to do with territorial jockeying in Southern Africa than political or ideological animosities between the Union of South Africa and Germany. The economic and diplomatic relationship between Nazi Germany and Nationalists in the Union of South Africa was fairly amicable in the 1930s, especially among those who favored South Africa’s leaving the British Commonwealth. Diplomatic ties even fostered economic deals especially in the realm of air travel, as one of the first airlines to operate in South Africa used Lufthansa planes exclusively.¹²⁵

The formal declaration of war on Germany by South Africa occurred on 9 September 1939, soon after the government began interning ethnic Germans in the region, including missionaries in Southwest Africa – much as during the First World War. At the outbreak of the

¹²³ Menzel, 355 – see note 645.


¹²⁵ Citino, Germany and the Union of South Africa, 45 ff.
war, there were thirty-seven Rhenish Mission Society employees in Southwest Africa, of these only ten served in dual positions as pastors for the DEK. Landesprobst Höflich was interned too, creating a problem for the German Evangelical Church, which then allowed Heinrich Vedder to step in and act as the interim Landesprobst. This put Vedder in a position to be in charge of all pastors and missionaries in the region. At first only one missionary was arrested and detained, due to the fact that he led a pro-Nazi organization for professionals in Southwest Africa. When camps were completed in Andalusia (now named Jed Kempdorp) and the Transvaal, five more missionaries were taken, and then six additional ones were placed under house arrest. In light of roughly one-third of the male staff being placed in limited roles, the daily operation of local mission stations fell to the hands of women (mostly missionary wives and nurses), who maintained the evangelical, educational, and medical services for their respective congregations during the course of the war. The fact that National Socialists were interned seems logical, but those later detained did not fit any particular stereotype other than males of “military age.” In defense of the state government, the political views of most missionaries were most likely known only to friends and families of the missionaries themselves. Even by the Rhenish Mission Society’s own admission, very few missionaries in Southwest

126 Menzel, 355.

127 NAN, SWAA 2579 A813/5, “Deutsche Hilfsausschuss für SWA.” Correspondence on 15 August 1941 noted that Höflich and his wife were considered “dangerous Nazis” by the South African government.

128 SWAA 2596 A820/1/5. Police dossiers exist for virtually every ethnic German adult in Southwest Africa at the time of the Second World War. Some examples for missionaries of note: Friedrich Rust, “Strong Nazi”; Friedrich Pönnighaus, “Strongly suspected”; H.K. Diehl, “Suspected”; Christian Kühhirt, “Keen Nazi”; August Kuhlmann, “well known as Nazi”; and, Heinrich Brockman, “anti-Nazi.” NAN, SWAA 2690, A820/1859, “Rust, F.” It turned out later that Missionary Rust was mistaken for another Friedrich Rust who was a farmer near Karibib and also a vocal Nazi supporter, no relation.
Africa aligned themselves with the Confessing Church, allegiance to this group making them more likely to be anti-Nazis.\textsuperscript{129} It is also important to note that the internment/concentration camps in South Africa at this time were not like those used during the Boer Wars, or even like those found in Germany. Internees were allowed to work, hold currency, had access to education, and even received a stipend from the state to spend on commissary items.

The seemingly arbitrary selection of missionaries interned may be rooted in the special friendship between Vedder and Conradie. Some of those who were selected were “troublemakers” either in the eyes of the state, or within the Rhenish Mission administration. It is not impossible to suggest that Conradie needed to make an example out of a set number of leaders within the community and sought council with Vedder on whom to select. One of the more important individuals taken by the South African forces was Friedrich Pönnighaus, one of the most ardent opponents of National Socialism within the Rhenish Mission in the territory second only to Friedrich Rust. The police dossier for Pönninghaus specifically notes that he was “not in favor of Hitler’s policies,” yet was interned nonetheless.\textsuperscript{130} Therefore, state desires for a monopoly on education in the region may have factored into Pönnighaus’s arrest more than his political beliefs, for it allowed the justification to commandeer the Augustineum.\textsuperscript{131} In fact, the chilly relationship between Pönnighaus and Vedder after the war may reinforce this thesis.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{129} Menzel, 355.

\textsuperscript{130} NAN, SWAA 820/2474, “Pönnighaus, K.A.F., Missionary.”

\textsuperscript{131} The process of state control of education in the 1940s and 50s is discussed in the “Education” section of Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{132} VEMA RMG 1.704c “Pönnighaus, Dr. theol. h. c. Friedrich,” 105 ff. Pönnighaus’s correspondence with Vedder during and after internment are professional in tone, but far from friendly.
Vedder’s direct role in the South African administration’s machinations is unclear, and only circumstantial evidence demonstrates that he was shown favoritism by the mandate authority.\textsuperscript{133} During the First World War the precedent was set to intern the Rhenish Mission Präsès, but this time that did not happen. It is possible that Vedder was allowed to remain in his post because he was one of the few within the RMS to compartmentalize religious and political identities. Much like Olpp before him, Vedder was an advocate of enforcing the Two Kingdoms doctrine with few exceptions. During Vedder’s service as Präsès, there were no known conflicts between the mission leadership and the mandate government.\textsuperscript{134} Despite this, after the Second World War, Vedder and the Rhenish Mission had to “confess its sins” to the Union of South Africa as a concession to allow it to remain in the region. It had to further promise to fight nationalism and politicization among Africans in Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{135} That being said, there is no question that he was an ardent believer in National Socialism and its push to elevate German hegemony in geopolitics, seeing Hitler as a strong leader sent by God to rebuild the dignity of the German people.\textsuperscript{136} In 1936 Vedder even officiated a ceremony in Windhoek celebrating Hitler’s birthday. The fact that Vedder was outspoken regarding German Nationalism was not unusual among ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa, but it must be remembered that he was also once well-respected among many black congregations, having led the eulogy for Samuel Maharero in

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\textsuperscript{133} NAN, SWAA 2596, A820/1/15. Vedder was not arrest nor interned despite being considered a “strong Nazi” in his police report.

\textsuperscript{134} Menzel, 355-56.

\textsuperscript{135} Lothar Engel, Kolonialismus und Nationalismus im deutschen Protestantismus in Namibia 1907 bis 1945 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1976), 508.

\textsuperscript{136} Hellberg, 44-45.
\end{flushright}
1923. This, however, shows a sweeping change from the fresh-faced missionary helping Africans in the wake of the German-Herero War, to the pro-Nazi, paternalistic mission administrator.

In the two years leading up to 1939, Vedder worked to streamline the administrative structure of the Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa, making it more efficient. He instituted new districts and made aspects of missionary work less arduous, such as creating more direct visitation circuits. Vedder’s managerial skills may help explain why the Rhenish Mission Society congregation grew during the Second World War despite the fact that over one-third of missionary personnel was either interned or under house arrest. African church membership grew from 62,000 to 84,000 by the end of the war in 1945. Some of this credit, however, goes to the graduation of twelve indigenous pastors under the guidance of Pönnighaus before the outbreak of conflict.138

After the defeat of Nazi Germany there was a noticeable shift in the political aspirations of ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa – Vedder included. Hopes of Southwest Africa being politically reunited with Germany were dashed among all except the deluded. Ethnic Germans abandoned a dedication to a German-Southwest African identity and replaced it with that of a re-defined Südwester which was more willing to embrace new political realities and cooperate with the Boer population in Southwest Africa.139 Although racism by no means disappeared from Southwest Africa among the white communities (both German and Boer), what became muted was the perceived necessity to have pastors towing the German Evangelical Church line which

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137 Gewald, Herero Heroes, 187.

138 Menzel, 356.

139 Walther, 178-79.
was wedded to the German Christian movement for much of the duration of Nazi political
control. The outcome of the war surely influenced Vedder’s plans for his own future too as he
began toying with the idea of retirement.

For Vedder, the post-war years created a new set of problems for the Rhenish Mission
Society in Southwest Africa. Among the general issues were how to maintain missionary and
staff salaries in the region. In other regions of Rhenish Mission activity, there were examples of
turning over mission churches to indigenous leadership – the best example being the Batak
church in Indonesia back in the 1920s and 30s.\footnote{The creation of indigenous churches is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.} For places that the Rhenish Mission could not
afford to maintain an established mission for economic or political reasons, there were cases
where it transferred its mission stations to other groups, e.g. the Finnish Missionary Society in
Ovamboland at the turn of the twentieth century. Due to the Second World War, Vedder
discussed the prospect of transferring Rhenish Mission Society congregations to Dutch
Reformed Church control in South Africa in 1941. This too had precedent, where three mission
stations in the Cape Province were transferred to either the Dutch Reformed Church or the Berlin
Mission, and one community directly to an indigenous pastor.\footnote{Strassberger, 97-110.}

A Cape Town newspaper released a story after the war indicating that Rhenish Mission
congregations were going to be transferred to the Dutch Reformed Church. This article created
much controversy regardless of its veracity and the Rhenish Mission’s willingness to take that
course of action. African Christians from Rhenish churches felt frustration and anger, as they
were not consulted in these discussions. More so, they did not want to be associated with the
Dutch Reformed Church hierarchy, especially as it supported the racial segregation inherent in
what became formalized as *apartheid*. Two key black evangelists took the opportunity to break away from the Rhenish Mission Society and join the African Methodist Episcopal Church as pastors.142 Ultimately, by the end of Vedder’s term as *Präses*, missionary work was strained as many Africans felt they were merely assets to be transferred from one group to another, rather than being coeval religious partners. The event did not prompt a mass exodus of church members to the AMEC congregations, but did revitalize internal debates on the ordination of African pastors and hastening the transfer of church operations to them.

Vedder’s political views were bruised after World War Two. By backing National Socialism, Vedder was on the losing side. In Southwest Africa, as a religious leader, this brought him into conflict with and diminished his prestige among those ethnic Germans who opposed the Nazi regime. Therefore, in 1947, Vedder retired from the Rhenish Mission Society at 70 years of age, going on to live months away from his 96th birthday. Upon consultation with the Missionary Council, he was replaced by H.K. Diehl, an opponent of National Socialism well before the war. Diehl was not interested in transferring congregations to the Dutch Reformed Church, but much damage was already done thanks to the scandal prompted by media reports of Vedder’s proposal. Others who were once ostracized by Nazis in positions of church power were able to return to leadership positions within the church. Rust, for example, took over as Synod President for the Northwest region of the mandate in 1947, further marking the return of those who promoted indigenous leaders into positions of power. Pönnighaus also returned to teaching, but did not return to full service with the Rhenish Mission Society. Many of his letters while interned echoed a sense of betrayal by Vedder and possibly the Mission itself for not doing more to secure his and other missionaries’ release from captivity, though his friendship with

142 See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion of this break and the debates that ensued with Vedder and the Mission Synod.
Diehl continued well after release from their captivity. These individuals appeared less concerned with white congregations, and focused on their primary task of evangelization among the African population. It is an interesting coincidence that the release of interned missionaries coincided with Vedder’s retirement.

Vedder remained in South Africa after leaving the Rhenish Mission society and kept a degree of influence with the South African administration. In 1951, he was appointed as a representative to the South African Senate, to be the lone agent for Africans in Southwest Africa. At this point, many political and religious leaders among Africans were disillusioned with the possibility of gaining access to channels of power, especially considering that Vedder was a proponent of apartheid.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter has examined currents and trends in German history, specifically as they related to Southwest Africa. The inter-war years were a precarious time for most Europeans, including those who lived outside their national borders. The racial and nationalistic ideologies that were so prevalent on the European continent spread their influence to colonies and former colonies where ethnic German settlers remained, but this influence was neither uniform nor universal. On the surface, the opening vignette concerning Missionary Rust’s pamphlet warning against racial defilement appeared to reflect the racialized Weltanschauung found among so many Germans. Without deeper examination, one would easily infer that Rust’s personal beliefs aligned with those of National Socialism due to the blunt phrasing of the tract. Making the pamphlet for the German Evangelical Church [DEK] served as a specific warning for incoming

143 VEMA RMG 1.704c contains most of the correspondence to and from Pönnighaus during his internment in the Andalusia Internment Camp.

144 Menzel, 357.
ethnic Germans, who were entering an environment with rigid racial segregation. The reality, however, was that Rust disagreed with National Socialism as well as völkisch German Christianity. Instead, he proved to be one of the most vocal advocates of maintaining traditional Christian doctrine and theology, as well as being an advocate for the ordination of indigenous pastors in a move to create an independent African church in Southwest Africa. While it is doubtful that he promoted intermarriage, he was a strong proponent of intermingling between white and black Christians. His actions brought him into conflict with church officials like Andreas Wackwitz who pressed for compliance with Nazi and German Christian agendas, as well as those within the Mission Society like Vedder who were much more reserved in their plans for African converts, often due to racial biases in their personal and theological understandings. Emphasis on anti-Nazis such as Rust should not intimate that others were always on the same page, as an aspect of silence in the historical record could indicate complicity with National Socialism but also silent resistance against it. For Rust to be attacked by Wackwitz, however, meant that his behavior was abnormal on some level, inferring that normal was adherence to the DEK Synod’s wishes. Silent resistance is less likely to have been an issue in Southwest Africa as the Nazis did not have the same levels of political coercion in that region – one of the main reasons fear reigned in Germany under the Third Reich.

The vignette also highlights the relationship between church and state, during a time when the interaction was tenuous and amorphous. Religious leaders in positions of power often argued for the implementation of the Two Kingdoms doctrine, once adhered to almost instinctually, but more-and-more challenged during the interwar years as state policies threatened the church and wellbeing of congregations and mission work. Within the Rhenish Mission Society itself, most refrained from political activity while acting in their official capacity, with a
few notable exceptions. Rust was the anomaly who refused to remain quiet (either out of conviction or stubbornness) about issues he believed to be in the wrong or unjust. Wackwitz, on the other hand, advocated that religious officials should refrain from political meddling but did so himself, using his position as *Landespropst* of the German Evangelical Church to orchestrate changes in personnel for the Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa – even petitioning state officials to assist his machinations regarding church politics. Vedder represented a third path, one in which an individual held strong political ideals, yet did their best to compartmentalize their political and religious identities. After the end of the Second World War, the doctrine itself came under scrutiny due to church complicity during the Nazi regime and the implementation of ethnic cleansing and genocide in Europe. Theologians began to argue that the Two Kingdoms doctrine did not apply when the state’s actions threatened the efficacy or existence of the church. In Southern Africa, attention was focused on the policy of apartheid, state-imposed racial segregation eerily similar to ideology embraced by National Socialists in Germany – a policy that prevented the existence of a cohesive Christian community.
6.1. Petrus Jod

In early 1946, Nama evangelist Petrus Jod (b. 12 Oct 1888) read an article in the Cape Town newspaper *Die Burger* which he found quite troubling.\(^1\) The story in question detailed the transfer of Rhenish Mission churches in the southern half of Southwest Africa to the Dutch Reformed Church’s [DRC] Cape Synod. This process was not without historical precedence. In the financially lean times after the First World War, the care of several congregations in the Cape Province was transferred to the DRC. The community at Matroosfontein was even turned over to the care of black evangelist Gideon Thomas in 1935.\(^2\) Jod, however, was alarmed because, as one of the Nama evangelists who would be impacted by this handover, he had no prior knowledge that discussions were even afoot. The article also intimated that blacks were not capable of leading themselves within the church.\(^3\) Jod shared this news with fellow evangelists Zacheus Thomas (also his brother-in-law) and Markus Witbooi, each equally upset at their exclusion from discussions about the future of their church community. The result was calling together a meeting in Keetmanshoop of area religious leaders and teachers on the 12\(^{th}\) of January 1946. This group issued a formal complaint with the Rhenish Mission Society.

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\(^1\) Many scholars mention this Afrikaans-language newspaper from 31 October 1945, but no one actually quotes it specifically. I’m currently looking for ways to acquire a copy. The publication had a reputation for being pro-Apartheid at one time. G.L Buys & S.V. Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia, 1805-1990* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2003), 178-9; Marion Wallace, *A History of Namibia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 244.


\(^3\) The only mention of this aspect of the news article is found in Hendrik Rudolf Tjibeba’s unpublished theology dissertation, “The History of the Rhenish Mission Society in Namibia with Particular Reference to the African Methodist Episcopal Church Schism (1946-1990),” (dissertation, University of Durban-Westville, 2003), 73-74.
Jod is such an interesting figure because he grew up inside the church framework. He was adopted in his late teens by Missionary Christiaan Spellmeyer after Jod’s parents were killed in the violence associated with the Herero-Nama Revolts, 1904 – 1907. His formal education and religious training came directly at the hands of Spellmeyer. Although he did not receive the extensive preparation of those who attended the Augustineum (the Rhenish Mission teachers’ college), Jod was well respected among missionaries and the black Christian community for his service and Biblical knowledge. His connection to Spellmeyer is significant because the missionary knew him intimately as a household member and highly valued Jod’s contribution to the ministry.4 The missionary was one of the first in the region to advocate the ordination of black clergy. In a circular letter dated September 1934, Spellmeyer argued that it was well past time to ordain indigenous clergy in Southern Africa, noting that there were many examples of “worthy representatives” who should be allowed to serve as pastors, not merely Eingeborenen Mitarbeiter (indigenous helpers/evangelists). Spellmeyer also acknowledged what he saw as the greatest impediment to this process, stating, “There remain tensions of a spiritual nature, that exist simply because of a difference of race and nationality” – meaning that resistance to turning over the church was due to the fact that they were black and not German.5 For Spellmeyer and Jod, the 1920s and 1930s were decades of learning and growth, so that by the 1940s there were more than a handful of black evangelists with proven track records. Thus by 1946, a breaking point in the relationship between white missionaries and black catechists was reached due to a lack of opportunities for professional fruition among Africans within the church.


After decades of exposure to Western education and Christianity, African evangelists were more than ready to experience egalitarian treatment within the church hierarchy. Demands for greater involvement in the upper echelons of the church had been made for several years leading up to the 1940s. Jod, who was sanctioned as an evangelist in 1926, was one of the few black religious leaders at the forefront of this movement seeking equality within the mission church. He and two others, as emissaries from the Nama Teachers and Evangelists Association, petitioned the Rhenish Mission in early 1946 to address several concerns about segregation in recent RMS appointments. The 1946 Mission Synod Conference in Keetmanshoop was presented with an ultimatum from these black evangelists, requesting participation in church leadership and issuing forth other complaints about church operations. Most notably, they also protested the appointment of Pastor Wilhelm Neumiester to replace retiring missionary Friedrich Eisenberg at Keetmanshoop, arguing that the new appointee did not have the best interests of Africans in mind. Part of this frustration stemmed from Zachaeus Thomas’s expectations that he would finally be ordained in light of the opening as he was served as de facto pastor for that church community during the tumultuous years of the Second World War – a suggestion first posited by Spellmeyer.6

The Rhenish Mission administration, under the leadership of Heinrich Vedder, was not ready to turn over operations in Southwest Africa to its African charges or expand their inclusion. Ironically, Vedder had no formal plans to transfer the Nama congregations to the DRC, but merely asked if the sister organization would be willing to care for them if RMS finances

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6 Buys, 179. See also, Theo Sundermeier, *Wir aber suchten Gemeinschaft: Kirchwerdung und Kirchentrennung in Südwestafrika* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1973), 26-32. Vedder complains about the situation in a letter as well, see VEMA 2.688ab.
collapsed. Regardless of intent, the appeals from the Nama evangelists fell on seemingly deaf ears. Vedder refused to accept their demands and upheld the appointment of Neumeister for Keetmanshoop. He most likely believed that Africans were not yet ready to be released from the tutelage of the Rhenish Mission – a view not shared by all missionaries in the field. Elevation within the church hierarchy appeared stunted. Racial segregation limited advancement, even for educated Africans with proven experience in the field as spiritual leaders. These limits were promoted by the Union of South Africa, and the RMS leadership was reluctant to push against the government’s wishes. Possibly of note is that Vedder took into account the status of “pastor” in the minds of white clergy in the region who would have been offended according to their racial biases. Several of the pastors from the German Evangelical Church considered missionaries as second-rate clergy due to their work among Africans, whom they saw as inferior racially. One can imagine their disdain at the prospect of African pastors being elevated to equals with white Germans.

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7 The initial letter was written by Vedder in 1941 and taken under consideration for several years in light of the global conflict. One reason that Vedder wrote them directly without consulting Wuppertal/Barmen was due to the communication blockade between Southwest Africa and Germany at the time. By the end of the war, one congregation of the Rhenish Missionary Society in the Cape was released, but it voted to go along with the Bethel Mission instead of the DRC.

8 See VEMA RMG 2.688ab, S. 177, Minutes of DEK Synod, 2 Okt 1926; VEMA RMG 2.628, S.24 Spellmeyer, September 1934; and, VEMA RMG 2.708a, S. 67-8 Warneck, 15 October 1934.

9 See Chapter Three on the limits of power as imposed by the mandate government.

Due to the compounding nature of these frustrations, Petrus Jod and his compatriots decided that the wait for promotion was over. The Nama triumvirate decided to throw their lot with the African Methodist Episcopal Church [AMEC] in December 1946. The AMEC had been active in Southern Africa since 1897, but did not have much success in Southwest Africa until this imbroglio within the Rhenish Mission church occurred. In all, black congregations at Keetmanshoop, Gibeon, Hoachanas, Malahöhe, and Lüderitz took up the AMEC banner, falling under the governance of the organization’s 15th District. Jod was even considered by some to be the spiritual reincarnation of legendary Nama leader Hendrik Witbooi.11 Specifics on the development of the AMEC in Southwest Africa in relation to the RMS are discussed later in this chapter.

Although the news story in question consisted of leaked and erroneous information, the situation highlighted generations-worth of difficulty among African Christians in Southwest Africa. Leading missionaries Friedrich Rust, Christiaan Spellmeyer, Friedrich Pönnighaus, and others advocated increased training and participation for black evangelists as steps to move toward the ordination of pastors and the eventual creation of an independent church. This process was the natural course for mission work, for when the Gospel had taken root, the next logical step was to turn the church over to the people. The RMS had done this in other parts of the world – most recently in Sumatra.12 Jod and his colleagues were not ignorant of these advances elsewhere, especially those in neighboring South Africa where a small number of

11 Buys, 180. This association is peculiar considering that Jod’s compatriot Markus Witbooi was actually related to Hendrick. See Gustav Menzel, “Widerstand und Gottesfurcht”: Hendrik Witbooi – eine Biographie in zeitgenössischen Quellen (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2000) for more on Hendrik Witbooi who at one point declared himself “Moses.”

12 One of the best examples is the creation of the Batak Church in Sumatra. VEMA RMG 2.708a, S.67-68. Circular sent out by Warneck, 15 October 1934.
blacks were already ordained. Why was the process so stunted in Southwest Africa? The most problematic hurdle was clearly Heinrich Vedder, who held much authority as the Präses for the Rhenish Mission in Southwest Africa. His role as a missionary was complicated because he was also in charge of the white Lutheran congregations in the region after the internment of Landesprobst Karl Friedrich Höflich during World War Two. As such, he served dual roles among congregations of Christians who did not share a mutual respect for each other due to racial prejudices. Overall, the process of religious incorporation was too slow for many Africans in Southwest Africa who were frustrated politically, socially, and economically.

This chapter examines the interaction between Rhenish Missionaries and the African population of Southwest Africa. It is especially concerned with the process of religious conversion and the development of a Christian identity in what is now Namibia. Ultimately, the chapter’s focus shifts to the failure of the egalitarian aspect of Christianity to take hold in the region. The slow path to creating an indigenous clergy, much less an independent church, led to a series of schisms within the organization as well as the development of some groups outside of the Rhenish Mission’s purview. African members had to decide to stay under the umbrella of the Rhenish Mission or set out on their own. The latter course presented three major alternatives, mostly along ethnic lines. The first group, under Nama leadership, cast their lot with the American Methodist Episcopal Church. The Herero composed the second group, with a large cohort forming an independent church known as Orauno. The last main group consisted of the Ovambo in the north. As discussed in prior chapters, they were mostly under the influence of the Finnish Missionary Society, but maintained relations with the RMS due to common Lutheran

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13 Gideon Thomas was most notable in 1935 because he came out of the RMS system. Also ordained by the Luthersans was Friedrich Hein in the Cape. Africans were also making headway as clergy in other Christian denominations in South Africa.
denomination. Their independent church remained within the denomination as the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church in Namibia – later the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) – and played a significant role politically in the 1950s and 1960s. Overall, Southwest Africa proved to be relatively late in producing independent African churches, much like its delay in political liberation. Other scholars have discussed “how” this process happened – this chapter aims to better explain “why.”

6.2. African Methodist Episcopal Church in Southwest Africa

One North American group that garnered favor with Africans in Southwest Africa, where the UNIA failed, was the African Episcopal Methodist Church (AMEC).\(^{14}\) This church denomination was the result of Philadelphia, PA pastor Richard Allen’s frustration with limitations in his home church of St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church. Despite being ordained as a pastor, he and other black clergy were prohibited from ministering to a combined congregation, only having access to black church members. The church itself was also segregated. Allen broke away from the Methodist church in 1787 and formed his own with a handful of other black ministers, with the AMEC becoming a recognized denomination in 1816.

As the AMEC grew in the United States, its resources and outreach programs gained more support. One important aspect of the AMEC for this study was its interest in evangelism – especially sending missionaries to Africa. Bishop Henry McNeil Turner, who made it a goal to extend the AMEC’s reach to the African continent, promoted this project in the 1890s. He raised money to support a mission trip and even organized a grand tour of Africa, personally visiting Liberia and Sierra Leone. AMEC interaction in Southern Africa began in the second half of the

\(^{14}\) In the archival record, the African Episcopal Methodist Church is sometimes erroneously called the American Episcopal Methodist Church, no doubt due to the fact that is where the group was located geographically.
19th century, setting roots in Pretoria and Cape Town in 1898. It quickly found some affinity with the various Ethiopian movements in the region, though the relationships were often problematic. The “Ethiopian” churches were those that sought independence from European (or white) leadership, yet fully identified with Christianity. Bishop Turner formed working relationships with two key religious leaders in South Africa, Reverend Mangena Mokone and Minister James Mata Dwane. These two were important in the merger of African congregations with the AMEC and the creation of that organization’s 14th Bishopric. It, as an institution, gained decent support and became one of the voices opposed to racial segregation in Southern Africa.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that the AMEC made headway into Southwest Africa. The existence of the African-American-led church was not unknown to those in the territory prior to the formal activity of its missionaries and church representatives. The Herero Improvement Society, founded by a group of concerned Herero leaders in the 1920s, disseminated the biography of Bishop Richard Allen in its efforts to promote black empowerment and inspiration in the region. Despite this familiarity, there was only limited success regarding conversion to the AMEC in most of Southern Africa. This fact may be due to existing competition from more entrenched entities; or, as some historians have suggested, more to the reality that the government limited the extent to which the AMEC could evangelize larger

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portions of the population. Regardless, by the 1940s, a handful of AMEC ministers were operating in Southwest Africa. The establishment of the AMEC in what became Namibia, however, had less to do with the direct evangelism of these few pastors than with Nama discontent within the framework of the Rhenish Mission Church. Much like other instances of AMEC growth in Southern Africa, numbers grew mostly through absorbing existing Christian congregations rather than individual converts. This was true in Southwest Africa when a significant group of Nama evangelists broke away from the Rhenish Mission in 1946, later joining the AMEC where several evangelists were ordained as pastors. They were given a level of administrative autonomy not granted under “white” churches, especially being able to serve full communion to congregations. The language used in the discussions listed racial barriers as one of the primary grievances.

The concern and indignation sparked by the *Die Burger* article was the breaking point between many Nama leaders and the Rhenish Mission church. They felt they were being marginalized and the revelation of a proposed congregation transfer solidified fears that there was no future for them within the RMS. Under the leadership of Thomas, Witbooi, and Jod, the Nama Evangelists and Teachers Union drew a list of grievances and concerns to present to the RMS synod in January 1946. The open letter to the RMS was entitled “Agitation with white society” and written in Afrikaans. In it, the frustrations that had been simmering for decades finally came to a boil, as Nama leaders were offended that Heinrich Vedder proposed transferring their congregations to the Dutch Reformed Church based in the Cape. The group

17 See extended discussion of the introduction of other denominations in Chapter Two, as the Union of South Africa tended to map out regions where missionaries could work – giving preference to groups already established.

18 See prior discussion in Chapter Four.
was most troubled that such a plan was taken into consideration without any consultation whatsoever with members of the church. The report protested that the newspaper article spoke about Africans in a negative manner, most likely a purposeful exaggeration of Vedder’s words to create uproar among the Boer population to thwart any such merger, as it was known that many in the Afrikaner populate were overtly racist.

Nama leaders laid out a litany of concerns and observations. One of the first was a direct comparison to the Finnish Missionary Society among the Ovambo to the north. The Nama leaders noted that they as a people had been under the tutelage of the RMS for “more or less one hundred years” yet are “still regarded as incompetent, weak, and capricious [bodop] nations” per the article in Die Burger.19 By contrast, the Ovambo under the FMS had seen stronger incorporation of indigenous personnel and ordained pastors as early as 1925 – i.e. there was more trust in their ability and spiritual competence. The letter went on to state that they, as a group, did not wish to be placed under the guidance of any other European societies. There was a fear that spiritual needs were less important than any potential monetary value the congregations could provide in terms of tithes and donations. They noted the emphasis on financial concerns that appeared to supersede religious services – possibly a reference to the practice of sacraments being withheld from those who did not maintain tithing.20 There were doubts that this situation would change if under the care of another white-led religious order, like the proposed transfer to the DRC.

19 VEMA 2.606, 114.

20 VEMA 2.606, 114. See also the earlier section in Chapter Four on Herero complaints regarding tithes and the distribution of sacraments.
Falling under Dutch Reformed Church control held other problems for the Nama representatives as well, for most of that church was composed of Boers (Afrikaners) who had proven to the Nama to be more racist than the Germans. Race, of course, was a delicate issue, but one that lingered in the ferment of church relations in Southwest Africa. The Nama delegation was quick to state, “Although we do not want to be whites or stand equal with them… [we] as a people, through our immortal souls, are all the same in the next world.” They then indicated their sense of betrayal: “We look to the whites for help and guidance… yet all we get in return is contempt and humiliation.” Their recent treatment exacerbated the general distrust of the white community, and therefore, “everything in the way of surrendering our churches has filled us with suspicion.” Continuing down the same road without changes became untenable.

Once some of the grievances were aired, conditions (or demands) were laid out to discuss how the Nama congregations wanted to proceed within the framework of the RMS. The group noted:

…we refuse to go further together, unless the prior policies and management style are changed. In this situation we demand that the church and the church community is actually run by the congregation. That the power be vested in the community, i.e. the Church Council, and that there is not an all-ruling minister.

They asked that this council be composed of evangelists, elders, and church wardens [kosters] with the minister as the chairperson. If such revisions were made regarding church

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21 VEMA 2.606, 114.


23 VEMA 2.606, 114.
administration and there was an inclusion of Africans in these positions, then these Nama Christians would remain within the Rhenish Mission.

Much as in missionary conferences or other church synod meetings, the Nama kept a detailed transcript of the meeting that was more comprehensive than the actual letter to the RMS. In it, one learns that the meeting was opened with a prayer from Petrus Jod; then thirteen points were laid out, debated, and agreed upon by the attendees. Point Six explicitly explained the crux of Nama frustration:

> Once and for all, we do not want to be led by the DRC or some other church fellowship under white leadership, and reject such changes if we are to be transferred. For all of this has been done behind our backs as if we were sold as livestock for the slaughter. Neither the Church, or community, or black- or brown-skinned workers, who work with the missionaries among our people, have been provided information about this important decision that directly impacts our communities. We have been dealt with contemptuously and with disdain in these decisions regarding our community. If we do not put a stop to it this time, such treatment will never stop. But now we will not give into the hands of those who would take us down those same roads, and where now we see that in order for us to drive forward and ensure that we are treated as human beings, we must ourselves be allowed to take the lead.\(^24\)

Furthermore, the group went on to request that only missionaries who had worked among the Nama before should be allowed to remain in the field. They stipulated that as a group, the church should be consulted in conjunction with the appointment of any new missionary who was to work among them. This point was in direct reference to Missionary Neumiester at Keetmanshoop, whom the Nama generally regarded as a racist. For years, Zacheus Thomas served as the co-pastor, aiding Missionary Eisenberg in caring for the local congregation – especially while during the period of the latter’s house arrest during the Second World War. Thomas had proven his competency and dedication, so it was not unusual for him to expect that

\(^{24}\) VEMA 2.606, 112.
he would be appointed pastor at Keetmanshoop, rather than be pushed aside by the incoming Neumiester.

Questions of church property ownership were then presented: If there were a church transfer, who would actually own the building – The RMS or the community? And if the community did not technically own it, could they buy if there was a split with the Rhenish Church? They also requested that native language reading books be provided for students on Standard II, especially ones that detailed Nama, Herero, and Baster National histories.25 The group even recommended a few individuals who could serve as illustrators for these works. These last few points indicated that the meeting itself did not reflect an immediate desire to break with the Rhenish Mission Church, it merely laid out frustrations and explored avenues to improve the relationship.

Several months passed before the RMS replied to the Nama manifesto formally. In April 1946 a missionary conference was held at Keetmanshoop to address these Nama evangelists. Missionary Friedrich Rust was appointed as the moderator due to the fact that Präses Vedder’s actions precipitated the imbroglio. The biggest impasse at the conference was that the RMS leadership considered Nama actions as constituting a form of rebellion and there was no tolerance for what they saw as insubordination. This position was further complicated by the overt paternalism found among most missionaries – even though some like Rust and Spellmeyer had promoted many of the same demands issued by the Nama evangelists for decades. The conference did not resolve the tension between the Nama evangelists and the Rhenish Mission leadership, at least not in the short term. For Rust, the sticking point was what he saw as an

25 As a reminder, the South African Mandate government limited mission schools to Standard II at this time. See Chapter Three for more discussion on this matter. Also, important to note was that Nama representatives asked for other groups to also receive national histories as part of their curriculums.
over-concern for property ownership among the Nama evangelists. He would not concede that church property was communal property; therefore, if there were a congregational split, all real estate would remain under mission ownership. As for Vedder, he was offended by the “democratic” demands of the African congregants. He refused to restructure church polity in the face of what he saw as insubordination. He especially considered it offensive that the laity should be allowed to veto his appointment of clergy, a practice absent from existing church structure. The meeting’s deadlock reinforced Nama fears that they would never be respected as equals under the Rhenish umbrella. The result was that this group of Nama evangelists broke away, taking with them approximately 4,500 of their followers.

On the 16th of May 1946, Pastor Otto Mayer wrote a concerned, but supportive letter to Missionary Rust stating that the conference at Keetmanshoop with the Nama evangelists was starting to make waves among his congregation at the Gibeon church as well. Mayer tried to organize a meeting with Petrus Jod to discuss his grievances and calm matters, but the latter refused to do so, stating he had to attend to more important dealings. Mayer also tried to explain to Jod that the issue over the DRC was merely a misunderstanding at the hands of Vedder. Jod dismissed this and redirected the discussion to church property. The overall sentiment that emerged from the correspondence was that they were living in troubled times concerning the mission church. He called for yet another meeting among the senior staff, as Mayer believed that the disturbance was only among the leadership, not the communities themselves. He noted that his particular congregation was mostly quiet aside from Petrus Jod and Markus Witbooi. In his

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26 Hellberg, 242.

27 VEMA 2.606, 109.
conclusion, he linked the root of this recent discontent with Zacheaus Thomas at Keetmanshoop and the blamed the “boiling point” on Vedder’s “breach of trust” among the Nama population.  

In the following months the Rhenish Mission Society tried in vain to quell the storm prompted by Vedder’s interaction with the Dutch Reformed Church, though Vedder himself never seemed to indicate any remorse in his actions. Overall, from May to December there was not much activity other than an exchange of letters among involved parties. Petrus Jod wrote to Vedder on 1\textsuperscript{st} July 1946. The letter was respectful and direct, explaining why Jod felt the need to break away from the RMS – for the preservation of his human dignity. In this letter, Jod detailed his long history of service to the Nama community and Rhenish church. He observed that a life-long dedication: “still does not help, … if you’re not a white man, then nothing at all helps us, myself and others in service to the community, are not fully people. Yet we serve together with white men… and in the time that the Lord still gives me, I will stand together with men who have the same desire, and serve our people, despite my shortcomings, by His grace alone.” Here, Jod expressed his frustration at the lack of respect and promotion within the church, despite proven dedication and hard work. He also highlighted the frustrations associated with racial divisions within the church, yet maintained his dedication to continue seeing to his followers’ religious needs.

Jod then recounted an incident in 1921, when he asked to participate in a conference at Gibeon to which Vedder responded in the negative. Jod was rebuked by Vedder, who stated: “You’re an evangelist and standing in our service, and when you are asked, you must answer and do what is demanded of you. And here’s the Southern Synod, and you as an evangelist should

\[28\textsuperscript{VEMA 2.606, 109.}\]

\[29\textsuperscript{VEMA 2.606, 59.}\]
help to bring God’s flock together, but you only cause distraction, where you should help build up, you rip apart, taking the missionary away from his work, as an evangelist this should not be so.”

Jod commented that it would be difficult for him to stay within the church after such treatment. “If I continue to stay in the service of the Rhenish Mission after these words, I would be but, again concerned with any incident which could happen again with similar allegations or taken to task in such a fashion. Therefore, what hope do I have left?”

He continued:

I had, as far as lies in my power, wanted to do service to my community together, and I know that the same desire exists in my comrades. Our will is that we and our people move forward. But we have only promises in hand, and our hopes, all year long. So I wonder, with what joy I should still continue to do my work?

Jod then listed the broken promise that bothered him most. A job training school designed to give Africans vocational skills was assured during a 1939 evangelist conference, but it was closed before anyone could take full advantage of it. What made matters worse was that it was shut down without any discussion or warning to the community, after some had traveled at their own expense to attend, only to find locked doors. Jod lamented that his efforts to work within the church to help build up his people seemed to fall flat: “That is why I am now looking elsewhere for the things you promised me during my remaining lifetime, if the Lord gives me the time still, for me and my people…”

Jod ended the letter on a positive note; despite whatever resentment he may have held toward Vedder:

30 VEMA 2.606, 59.
31 VEMA 2.606, 59.
32 VEMA 2.606, 60.
33 VEMA 2.606, 60.
And so thanks for all the good work and what you have done for our people’s sake. May the Lord reward you all.

But we serve the Lord with all those who serve despite their faults. But I and all of us with all of our people have no enmity against you, as the Lord helps us.

He will not leave us if we do not depart from the faith; we’re only leaving the Rhenish Mission.34

Here, Jod attempted to reassure Vedder that he and other Nama Christians were thankful for all the Rhenish Mission had done for them over the years, but they were now at a point of spiritual maturity where they no longer needed them as an institution. He emphasized the Christian aspect of their identity to counter the accusations of apostasy leveled against them by some missionaries.

By December 1946, the Nama evangelists’ break with the RMS was solidified as the leaders and portions of their respective congregations joined the AMEC. Overall, between 4,500 and 5,000 individuals switched church affiliation in congregations from Keetmanshoop, Gibeon, Hoachanas, Maltahöhe, and Lüderitz. Secret negotiations over the course of 1946 fostered this move, as AMEC representatives simultaneously emboldened the Nama protest and offered them avenues to gain some of their demands. It should be noted however, that by joining the AMEC framework, these congregations were no longer fully independent, but beholden to the American church’s rules and structure.

6.3. Mending Fences and Increased Church Membership

Despite the declared switch to the AMEC, missionaries from the RMS made repeated attempts to rectify the schism. An emergency session was held in Swakopmund between 6-8 January 1947 to address the issue. The home office in Wuppertal-Barmen also weighed in on the situation, with Gustav Menzel, then the Missions Director of the Rhenish Mission, making the

34 VEMA 2.606, 61.
argument that the Nama evangelists were justified in seeking an independent church. Despite this, they lamented the union of their charges with the AMEC, which was considered an interloper. The results from this series of debates prompted Vedder to make a *volte face* regarding black evangelists serving sacraments, now allowing them to give communion in instances where missionaries were not able to administer the service. The criticism Vedder faced from his subordinates and the home office encouraged the long-standing missionary to retire in July 1947 at age 71. He was replaced by the slightly more liberal H.K. Diehl, who used his new role as *Präses* to foster changes within Southwest Africa in order to promote the shift to independent churches among Africans.

It should be noted that not all Nama evangelists left the Rhenish Mission, and Christiaan Spellmeyer did his best to maintain relationships with those who remained as well as attempting to bring his former charges back into the fold. His August 1947 letter to Hendrik Isaak gave insight into how Spellmeyer (and most other missionaries) saw the move of some to the AMEC—apostasy. He commented, “The struggle between truth and falsehood in this falling away will still continue. The false free will of those who broke away will still be preached.” Spellmeyer was afraid that the independent spirit would cause others to fall from the faith or stumble into heretical beliefs. In this letter he also emphasized that they were in the end times, and must keep up their vigilance to be Christ-like. The note of eschatology was striking, as such talk was usually absent from most other correspondence. This sentiment may have also been influenced by yet another German military defeat, not to mention the overall psychological impact felt as

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35 VEMA 2.606, 35.

36 See Chapter One for a discussion of eschatology, millenarianism, and evangelism.
news of the horrors of the Second World War made its way to Southern Africa through the international press.

On 15 September 1947, Spellmeyer wrote to Jod, calling him his “problem child” [Schmerzenkind]. The letter demonstrated the missionary’s paternalism toward a convert adopted into his own family. It should not be doubted that there was true compassion behind his motives, but it is illustrative that the letter was from a 77 year old man to his “son” who was about to turn 59. Spellmeyer questioned why Jod had yet to respond to his previous attempts to communicate, one correspondence as far back as 18 June 1946. He then pleaded for Jod to come back to the Rhenish Church, stating: “In view of God’s mercy, which is as great as I think is your repentance – no doubt, you should not only return to ‘our mother’ the Rhenish Mission, but above all to Jesus – because you have turned their backs [the Nama] to the Rhenish Mission, your Savior, who does not want you to get lost.” He believed that Jod had made a pact with the devil – literally, Satan – in the move away from the mission church, but reminded him that no sin was too large for God’s mercy. He also discussed anecdotal evidence from a conversation with a local businessman, where Jod allegedly said, “I know that my debt is so large that the Lord will not forgive it.” The gossip here implied that Jod believed that leaving the RMS was a grievous sin.

As the letter continued, it became clear that Spellmeyer considered Jod an apostate, calling him “a former minister of the gospel” and suggesting that Satan had deceived the

37 VEMA 2.606, 33.

38 VEMA 2.606, 33. It is unclear here if Spellmeyer meant Savior to refer to Jesus or the RMS.

39 VEMA 2.606, 33. This was one of several references to Satan in the exchange of letters after the Nama schism with the mission church.
evangelist much like Adam and Eve before “the Fall.” Spellmeyer then implored “it’s now or never” and emphasized the prospect of forgiveness not just for his own well-being, but that of his followers. He stated:

Consider the possibility that many want to come back into the community as well, but they do not come, they are waiting for their elders. They have been ushered into trouble during this strife; they are especially waiting for you, Petrus. You believe it to be true, yet you act against your convictions.

Spellmeyer then offers what ever help possible to bring Jod back to the RMS as his “father in Christ.” He also advised cutting ties with Zacheaus Thomas, whom he inferred may be Satan himself, or at least an anti-Christ under the devil’s influence.

Jod’s response to Spellmeyer came on 29 September 1947. In it, Jod reaffirmed his stance on his break with the RMS. He was also quick to point out his dissatisfaction with the tone of his mentor’s letter: “In your letter, you write to admonished me, sir [Mynheer], of my conversion to God and the Lord Jesus, and of my great sins and forgiveness of these sins. Also, you addressed me as ‘a former minister of the gospel.’” He was clearly bothered that his faith was being brought into question. Jod then clarified that he had not “fallen away from God or

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40 VEMA 2.606, 33.

41 VEAM 2.606, 34.

42 This letter also had an interesting postscript explaining that it was written in German because that was the language the church taught him back in 1908, and the one that would allow for better understanding between the two. Remember that the protest letter was written in Afrikaans, possibly as a means to use a state language, while distancing themselves from German.

43 The term Mynheer is an Afrikaans title meaning sir or mister, one supposed to show respect, but Jod believed that it was used towards blacks in Southwest Africa in a pejorative sense. He complains about its use by Vedder as this term of respect was intermingled with disrespectful comments.

44 VEMA 2.606, 32.
Jesus, but exited from the Rhenish Mission… In all the years not my God and my Savior, but only my church, I had the Rhenish Mission only as a mediator to God, but not worshiped it.”

Jod also corrected the gossip concerning the local businessman, noting that the two never discussed the break with the Rhenish Church, much less mentioned any potential remorse from said severance. Jod claimed his conversation was only about business, not church related. He then ended the letter abruptly, possibly indicating that the relationship with Spellmeyer was beyond saving:

1.) I have not made a pact with the devil...
2.) I have not been swept away by Zacheaus.
3.) I will not return back to the Rhenish Mission.
To my God and Savior of sinners Jesus, I will ask for forgiveness – but my Savior is not only found within the worship at the Rhenish Mission.

Jod, in this letter, took a stand against his adoptive father, asserted his understanding of theology, and defended his personal faith. It was one of their last exchanges.

The AMEC schism was in many ways a wakeup call to the RMS. It proved that African expectations were not being met, and also highlighted the fact that the Rhenish Missionaries had worked in the region for over a century without producing an independent church. Those Nama evangelists who broke away from the mission church noted poor education and lack of upward mobility as important points of contention. There was also frustration over the lack of power sharing within the church hierarchy. These complaints were legitimate, but have not always been treated fairly in the historiography. Scholars discuss the AMEC schism as a failure of the German mission and subsequent congregational breaks as a sign of the diminishing efficacy of the RMS – but, on the whole, the mission church actually grew until the final creation of an

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45 VEMA 2.606, 32.

46 VEMA 2.606, 32.
independent church in 1957. The reason for church growth, despite the existence of frustrations among the African leadership, was due to changes and accommodations made by the RMS missionaries remedying the roadblocks to ordination, as the first stepping-stone to an indigenous church. Also key was the retirement of Heinrich Vedder shortly after the AMEC imbroglio.

Access to education was one of the greatest complaints made by Nama and Herero critics of the Rhenish Mission. The mandate government limited the basic education in native schools to Standard II, moving up to Standard III by the 1950s. This created a situation in which school-going blacks and “coloureds” were only given a rudimentary education, enough to make them functionally literate and conversational in English and Afrikaans. Nama and Herero critiques held the missionaries responsible for this limitation because they were the educational providers. It seemed that funding issues were not taken into account, as the Rhenish schools were subsidized by the state and deviation from state policy by “over educating” would most likely have resulted in de-funding.

That being said, there were two important education opportunities for those who showed academic potential – the Augustineum and Paulinum. The first was predominately a teacher’s college, where Africans could be trained as primary education teachers. These educators were to be employed in mission or state schools to teach other Africans. The latter was a seminary, designed to provide the theological education necessary to ensure doctrinally sound evangelists and act as the pathway to ordination for African clergymen. Each of these institutions had difficulty maximizing their potential and impact due to the political and economic impacts of the Second World War. The Augustineum was eventually nationalized by the state in 1943, during the middle of the war as the mandate government slowly wrested black education from Rhenish schools in an effort to ensure greater control rather than any fear or suspicion of ethnic Germans.
running the institution. The Rhenish Mission was compensated for the property and distanced from its operation. It continued to host mission schools, however, for blacks and “coloureds” – but these were limited to a basic curriculum as discussed earlier. Because the government paid teacher salaries, thus they were obligated to operate within government guidelines. Many male children began to be kept at home by parents after they were old enough to be used as labor for home economies. Female students were often given vocational training at schools in addition to their primary education. Tasks such as cleaning and laundry were part of their learning regiment – skills to ensure they could participate in various service industries as domestic servants. This practice was mirrored in the Cape as well, some schools having a four-year curriculum for such training.47

Ordination delay was one of the most important grievances at the crux of the AMEC schism. This too was tied, in part, to education. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, the Paulinum was founded at Karibib in 1938 to help train promising individuals for ordination as pastors. Eighteen students were enrolled when the school opened. The curriculum was eighteen months of coursework, followed by at least a year practicum. Twelve graduated under the tutelage of Friedrich Pönnighaus before the school was closed due to complications during the Second World War.48 Those graduates were not immediately ordained because they had yet to complete their practicum as interim pastors. What was beneficial for Rhenish Mission stability and growth, however, was the ability of these black evangelists to help minister to congregations during the course of the war at a time when German missionaries were either interned in camps


48 Menzel, 356; Buys, 164.
or placed under house arrest. Most of those who were part of the first class at the Paulinum were ordained in 1949 after completing all training – one of them being Hendrik Isaak, the main Nama evangelist who stayed with the Rhenish Mission after the AMEC schism. The delay was rooted in Pönnighaus’ internment, not being allowed to return to work until 1948. When he did so, the Paulinum was reopened and a second class admitted. Thanks to Pönnighaus’ work at the seminary, the number of non-white pastors grew to fifteen by the end of 1957, representing a spectrum of Herero, Nama, Bergdama, and Coloured clergymen.49 This success demonstrated that once certain external limits were removed from the equation, the path to indigenous ordination accelerated and helped foster the creation of an independent Lutheran church, though it should be noted that all obstacles were not eradicated.

6.4. Apartheid

One of the largest problems that limited an independent church was the issue of institutionalized racism in Southern Africa. This ideology had religious and political implications and existed contemporaneously with the interactions between African Christians and the Rhenish Mission. Racial segregation and subalternity had existed in the region since the introduction of German colonialism and subsequent neo-colonialism of South Africa, but matters worsened after the Second World War. The National Party under Daniel François Malan won

49 G.L. Buys and J.J. Kritzinger, Salig die vredemakers: ‘n geskiedenis van die kerk in SWA/Namibie (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1989), 139.
key elections and took control of the government. One of their first significant acts was institutionalizing the policy of apartheid.\textsuperscript{50}

The term apartheid came from church language in the DRC sometime between 1929 and 1938.\textsuperscript{51} It means “apartness” in Afrikaans and is defined as: “… a policy to separate physically all races within South Africa in a hierarchy of power with whites at the top and Africans at the bottom.”\textsuperscript{52} The National Party adopted the policy of apartheid formally in 1944. The term became normal nomenclature in 1948 though the practice was much older.\textsuperscript{53} In the late-1950s and 1960s, Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd tried to put a positive spin on the practice by arguing Africans had autonomy in their respective “homelands.” In short, apartheid was institutionalized racism that promoted white supremacy in all aspects of South African life.

Theologian Allan Boesak defined racism in this context as follows:

… an ideology of racial domination that incorporates beliefs in a particular race’s cultural and/or inherent biological inferiority. It uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe unequal treatment of that group. In other words, racism is not merely attitudinal, it is structural. It is not merely a vague feeling of racial superiority, it is a system of domination, with structures of domination – social, political, and economic.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Copious amounts have been written about the South African practice of apartheid and the political and humanitarian fight against it. Key individuals known to most are Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, but many often forget the fight in Southwest Africa. See the introduction in Nancy L. Clark and William H Worger, \textit{South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed (New York: Routledge, 2013), xxii, 3, 10-33.


\textsuperscript{52} Clark and Worger, xxii, 10.

\textsuperscript{53} Buys, 302.

\textsuperscript{54} Allan Boesek, “He made us all, but…,” \textit{Apartheid is a Heresy}, eds. John W. DeGruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983), 3.
This definition of racism covers the practice of apartheid in Southern Africa and explains why there was such a fierce struggle to abolish it. One of the more troubling aspects of the practice of apartheid was that it was often defended using select passages from the Bible.

Biblical justification of apartheid first came from the Dutch Reformed Church [Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk]. “Apartheid Theology” was officially introduced by the DRC in 1947, stating that God created separate races for a reason, and it was a Christian duty to respect those divisions. The development of racial segregation in Southern African churches was not inevitable, however. In the Reformed Church, the Synod of Dordrecht (1618) stipulated that slaves who converted to Christianity had to be freed and were allowed to participate in Communion with the general congregation. Some have argued that this stipulation for slavery is one of the reasons there was not much missionary activity in early Cape history – as whites did not want to worship with Africans. Cape Province Ordinance 50 of 1828 stipulated that all humans were to be treated equally, so from early on the state was legally opposed to racism in Southern Africa. In actuality, segregation began within churches in the eighteenth century – first in the location of seating in the church, then in the order communion was served. The Synod of 1857 set up a specific mission policy to create different space for “others.” Justification for this approach was to address members of the congregation that may have a “weakness of faith,”

55 Buys, 290, 303. Otto Milk links it earlier to the 1944 Synodal Commission of the Reformed Church of Transvaal. He quotes its report: “The vision of the Church is founded on the principles of Scripture, that teaches racial apartheid as the dominion of the whites over the natives.” VEMA RMG 3.313, 33.

56 Buys, 293. Note, too, that slaves in the Cape were often brought in from other geographic regions, not acquired locally in Southern Africa.

57 Buys, 291.
giving them a separate space to develop.\textsuperscript{58} This policy led to the formal creation of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1881 [\textit{Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk}].\textsuperscript{59} After that, the DRC planted separate churches for each distinct racial/ethnic group. Therefore, segregation became a congregational issue – much as in Southwest Africa between Rhenish mission churches and white, settler congregations. A slight contrast in the case of the RMS was a policy of integrating its congregations, though it should be noted that this policy was for Africans nations within the mission churches. Ethnic Germans were administered by a different entity, the German Evangelical Church. Missionaries like Friedrich Rust wanted increasing integration among all Lutherans but gained little support from white parishioners.

In the twentieth century, the DRC developed specific mission policies regarding apartheid. Between 1949 and 1954, the DRC Federal Council completed its stance on segregation within the church, though church sanction and practice of apartheid did not go unopposed in the global sphere.\textsuperscript{60} The World Council of Churches attacked it, as did Reformed groups outside of South Africa. It eventually became clear that the policy of apartheid was sanctioned by the DRC to reinforce racial biases among its predominately white, Afrikaans membership. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches suspended the DRC and NHK (Reformed church in the Transvaal) bodies from membership in 1961 after declaring apartheid a

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\textsuperscript{58} Milk was somewhat sympathetic to the idea of “weakness of faith,” something seen among many missionaries earlier in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, but he was also skeptical that the way apartheid was applied would lead to healthy development. RMG 3.313, 35.


\textsuperscript{60} Buys, 291. Clark and Worger, 56.
The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church recognized apartheid as “sin” in 1986, but refused to call it a heresy. The policy was not removed from church orders until the Rustenburg Conference in 1991. Unity in congregations seemed to be more of a Protestant problem as Catholic congregations tended to be more inclusive. This observation has been linked to Gustav Warneck’s influence on missiology and the fact that Pietism shifted religious emphasis onto the individual rather than the community; doing so rooted salvation in internal conviction and personal relationship with God rather than a dependence on the community. In accordance to this restructuring, one could argue that as long as individual spiritual needs were met, it did not matter if congregations were segregated into different groups – such was the argument for supporters of apartheid. Desmond Tutu called this form of apartheid “intrinsically evil.”

Apartheid was seen as a “political solution for South Africa’s cultural diversity.” This political history of apartheid in Southern Africa dates back to the first pass laws put into practice in 1894. In Southwest Africa, the German colonial government implemented pass laws in 1907 after the Herero and Nama Wars 1904-07. These required special identification papers and travel permissions for Africans that, in essence, controlled their movement and location. In South Africa, the Native Land Act (1913) created blacks-only reserves to help separate black,

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61 DeGruchy, xi.

62 Buys, 291.


64 Desmond Tutu, “Christianity and Apartheid,” Apartheid is a Heresy, eds. John W. DeGrundy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983), 40.

65 Buys, 296.
white and coloured populations. A similar process happened in SWA as the Germans sought to help “preserve” indigenous well-being. After the First World War, most policies that were passed in South Africa were imposed *de facto* in Southwest Africa under the auspices of the mandate system. The “Native Affairs Act No. 23 of 1920” allowed for local self-rule for African communities (*i.e.*, reserves) to thwart demands for parliamentary representation. Further attempts to restrict the location of Africans came in the “Native Urban Areas Act No 21 of 1923” which stated that Africans could only be in urban areas to meet the demands of the white population (service industry). Economic limitations were also enacted, such as the “Mines and Works Amendment Act No. 25 of 1926” (aka Colour Bar Bill) which limited skilled-labor jobs to whites, and unskilled positions to blacks. Social prohibitions were also instituted as a means to regulate inter-personal relationships. The Immorality Act No. 5 of 1927 forbade “extra-marital carnal intercourse… between whites and Africans. This law was further strengthened in 1950 to forbid any intercourse between whites and non-whites. The auspices of “equality under the law” were undermined by the “Native Administration Act No. 38 of 1927” that created the situation where Africans were under executive rule, rather than under parliamentary law. A clause of this legislation became known as the “hostility law,” noting that anyone who promoted any feelings of hostility between natives and Europeans were subject to imprisonment up to a year and/or a fine of 100£. One of the final pieces of legislation to cement racial segregation in Southern Africa before the official implementation of apartheid was the “Native Representation Act No. 12 of 1936,” which removed the general franchise from Africans.\footnote{Buys, 299. Clark, 48 ff.}

whites and blacks was reinforced through education as well, with African education limited extensively.\(^68\)

South Africa sought the annexation of Southwest Africa since the inception of the League of Nations mandate system after the First World War – in essence, itself now acting as a colonial power. The dissolution of the League of Nations and subsequent formation of the United Nations opened the door for the Union of South Africa to absorb the mandate effectively, believing that the new organization did not have the legal authority to preserve the mandate system. In 1948, the National Party [NP] under Malan was elected into power in South Africa. Malan had opposed entry into the Second World War and was not terribly interested in being a part of the rebuilding process afterward. The National Party’s platform was pro-Afrikaner to say the least, right-wing at most – ultimately, it sought to ensure control of political and economic power in Southern Africa by the white minority at the expense of Africans and Coloureds.

South African resistance to United Nations policies regarding Southwest Africa proved successful enough. It passed a law in 1948 allowing for the participation in South African national politics by whites in Southwest Africa, thereby treating the region as a fifth province. Southwest Africa was granted ten representatives: eight from the white community to be directly elected by white voters; and, two to represent Africans that would be appointed by the Governor-General – with no guarantees that these representatives themselves would actually be from the black community. The result of the first election that included SWA was that the NP strengthened its control on the South African government thanks to the white settler support of apartheid, seen as a means of economic and social protectionism.

\(^{68}\) See the detailed discussion in Chapter Three regarding education.
Although there is little question about the degree of white support for apartheid among Afrikaners and ethnic Germans in Southwest Africa, the stance of the Rhenish Mission on the policy has been somewhat skewed in the historiography. It has been argued that Missionary Otto Milk supported the policy, as well as former missionary and Präses Heinrich Vedder. The truth is that Vedder was an ardent advocate of “development along separate paths,” but Milk’s affiliation with apartheid has been taken entirely out of context. A reading of the special report prepared for the Rhenish Mission on the “problem” of apartheid clearly demonstrates that the organization was not supportive of the South African policy. Former missionary Heinrich Vedder was vocal in his support of apartheid after his election in 1950 as the representative for natives, even praising the policy for completing what German colonial law initiated. Major concerns were raised due to this stance, especially for many Herero who still associated Vedder with the Rhenish Mission despite his retirement in 1947 after ideological differences. Many scholars link Vedder’s appointment as the cause of a secession of Herero from the Rhenish Church, but as will be shown later that was less a cataclysmic event more part of a general culmination of frustrations.

The mission conference at Windhoek from 23 September to 1 October 1950 addressed the mission in the face of apartheid. At this meeting, Milk produced an extensive report, entitled “The problem of apartheid and its importance to our work,” reflecting the debate over apartheid from political and theological perspectives. In it, he gave a synopsis of perspectives that supported and attacked the policy, then reflected on the Mission’s stance. Milk linked the 1950 election success in Southwest Africa for the National Party directly to apartheid, calling it the

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69 VEMA RMG 3.313, 32-45; VEMA 2.633; VEMA 2.651b.
“battle cry” of the new ruling party. He then examined the different perspectives supporting the policy. He first addressed Malan’s justifications from a speech given to Parliament 31 May 1950 arguing for the need to maintain racial purity and prevent mixed marriages through separate living conditions. In this, Malan tied politics to the church and considered it a moral issue. Milk noted: “On the ecclesial level they tried to give the case of separate living conditions between coloured and whites a theological justification to suit political needs.” He further opined that “this close connection between religion and people [Volk] and between church and communities is characteristic of Africans [Afrikaners].” Milk then traced the development of the term through various South African church synods, which by October 1949 concluded that “the commission could not find anything in the letter or spirit of the Old Testament or New that would be at odds with the principle of special, self-like (afsonderlike, eiesoortige [separate, distinctive]) development towards [church] independence.” Milk followed with a synopsis of the April 1950 Conference at Bloemfontein which examined the principle of apartheid on the basis of “diversity and unity” and “calling and destiny.” The church council argued that temporal existence and spirituality were different and had separate purposes, furthermore using select biblical passages to support the idea of independent racial development was erroneous. Some at the conference saw Afrikaners as “children of the covenant,” thus needing to preserve their heritage and protect racial purity.

70 VEMA 3.313, 32.
71 VEMA 3.313, 33.
72 VEMA 3.313, 33.
73 VEMA 3.313, 34.
74 VEMA 3.313, 36.
After laying out the arguments that supported the existence of apartheid, Milk then introduced a series of challenges from those within the DRC, white theologians from other denominations, and African representatives. Professor B.B. Keet, a South African Reformed theologian, contested the aforementioned Synod’s use of scripture, arguing their stance was “untenable.” Keet critiqued the misuse of scripture by placing it back in its original context. He then commented: “It is questionable whether one can find a better example of scriptural interpretation that has been adapted to meet the demands of a ruling practice.” Keet furthermore argued, “In any case, there is no doubt that the Gospel does not know of a social apartheid.”

Milk then presented a defense of apartheid by University of Pretoria Professor P.V. Pistorius, who stated “Every rational person must realize that apartheid at this stage exists to benefit natives as well as whites as a requirement for the continued existence of Christian culture in this country.” He believed that the need for segregation “corresponds to various weaknesses in religious development” concerning scriptural knowledge and the moral fortitude to prevent backsliding. Milk critiqued this stance by highlighting the mistrust between Africans and whites as the real problem. Pistorius then justified what he saw as a humanitarian imperative within apartheid, remarking: “I have often seen [white] Africans treat the natives unnecessarily harsh.  

75 VEMA 3.313, 36.

76 VEMA 3.313, 36. Barend Bartholomeus Keet was one of the early Afrikaner theologians to attack apartheid. See also, B.B. Keet, Sadelike Vraagstukke (Cape Town: Suid-Afrikaanse Bybelvereniging, 1945); B.B. Keet, Die Kerk en die Verenigingslewe (Stellenbosch: Christen-Studentevereniging van Suid-Afrika, 1946); B.B. Keet, Die heilige Skrif en Apartheid (Stellenbosch: University Publishers and Booksellers, 1949); B.B. Keet, Suid-Afrika-Waheen? ’n Bydrae tot die Bespreking van ons Rasseprobleem (Stellenbosch: University Publishers and Booksellers, 1956).

77 VEMA 3.313, 37.

78 VEMA 3.313, 37. Notice the reoccurring theme of “weak religious development.”
We see the people who work our fields as tools and not as souls.”

Milk concluded the section on Afrikaner perspectives by arguing that “the view of the majority is facing considerable criticism from the minority” – so, anti-apartheid sentiment within the church was growing as scriptural exegesis proved it theologically unsound. He called this process the “better interpretation of scripture” indicating his agreement that apartheid is scripturally unfounded.

The second section in Milk’s report focused on the “English” opinion regarding apartheid. It centered on the Rosettenville Conference of the Christian Council of South Africa in July 1949. Here Milk focused on the commentary of E. Lynn Cragg, the Warden of Wesley House at the University College of Fort Hare, as he discussed the issue of race in South Africa:

Cragg starts from the idea of creation. The essential value of man lies in his nature as a human being, not in its races, class, or worldly position. Of course, there are differences among men, but the unity (oneness) of all people remains. Unity does not mean equality (sameness). In the deepest things and in God’s purposes for humanity, race and class are irrelevant.”

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79 VEMA 3.313, 37.

80 VEMA 3.313, 38.

81 VEMA 3.313, 38.


83 VEMA 3.313, 38.
Milk continued to give a synopsis of Cragg, stating, “no race or class has a monopoly on self preservation or on racial pride.” Cragg’s argument then turned to the nature of salvation and the relationship of individuals to the larger church community. “By the entry into the church, that is by sharing in the redemptive work of Jesus, the people come in a universal community which is above the racial and national. That does not mean racial differences cease to exist in the church, but in the church should be a unity that stands above race.”

Milk then addressed the question of racial segregation [Rassentrennung] according to Cragg who argued that it, in of itself, is not a religious issue as there are “no religious arguments against miscegenation.” The Methodist theologian then deferred such questions to anthropologist and sociologists. Milk then synthesized Cragg’s main argument:

Above loyalty to race and state is loyalty to God and righteousness. The Christian does not have the task or any claim to support any community group for their own material self-interest, but must try to promote the true welfare of all human beings as children of God. As such, the ideals of our political community must be inundated as much as possible with these characteristics: justice, humanity, and the right of all to development, respect for the personality, cooperation, community, and to value the spiritual before the material. […] A policy of apartheid that denies anyone the right to cooperate and serve in their community is un-Christian; likewise, any policy of obstruction and hostility is also un-Christian.

Milk then praised Cragg’s “progress in addressing the issue,” ultimately agreeing, “‘apartheid’ is not a biblical term.”

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84 VEMA 3.313, 38.
85 VEMA 3.313, 38.
86 VEMA 3.313, 39.
87 VEMA 3.313, 39.
88 VEMA 3.313, 40.
The third main section addressed the “native” perspective on apartheid. Milk first discussed Methodist Pastor Seth Mokitimi (later elected president of the South African Methodist Church), who had recently presented his arguments at a missionary conference in Toronto, noting that the issue of apartheid was quickly gaining global attention. Milk, too, pointed out that African clergy were the strongest opponents of apartheid. He quoted Mokitimi: “The non-European is regarded only as an economic asset, in the same way as cattle, sheep, and goats – but not as a fellow human being and citizen. A more unchristian-like institution could not be devised.” 89

The next African voice represented was Samuel Tona, a teacher from the Dutch Reformed Missions Church. Milk claimed that Tona’s was the only “positive” statement to be found from a “native” regarding the policy of apartheid, but even it was heavily qualified. Tona argued:

If apartheid means that whites and non-whites must remain particular peoples, each with their own ideals and yet the same opportunities to develop, then I cannot image that natives would have it otherwise. But if it means oppression and exploitation, then it is no wonder that the native is afraid. We are rooted in a bough of uncertainty. The native knows not whether apartheid will be to his advantage or not. 90

Milk did not directly comment on Tona’s qualification that apartheid may offer a path of independent development, though his final comments in the report give his opinion clearly.

The fourth section was dedicated to the Rhenish Mission Society in Southwest Africa’s stance on the political nature of apartheid. Here Milk was fairly blunt:

Apartheid is a political concept for us and must be judged as such. Assertions of a spiritual Apartheid deviate from scriptural truths. So we [RMS] must stand on

89 VEMA 3.313, 40.

90 VEMA 3.313, 41.
the side of the critics within the African Church [DRC], such as Keet and Pistorius. That is not an easy position, given the conviction of most [white] Africans. But we’ll have to take it if we are to serve the truth.91

Milk implored that religious institutions had to learn the lessons of the past and not elevate European culture higher than those of others, but at the same time not deprive Africans the benefits of developments from said culture.92 This passage is proof of the humility and perspective gained by Rhenish missionaries after the Second World War, but not in time to prevent various secession movements. Milk observed that the political advocates of apartheid were mostly afraid of losing power if Africans received the same voting rights as whites, as population trends in Southern Africa were estimated to put numbers in the year 2000 at 5 million whites compared to 22 million non-whites.93 Milk then conceded that one of the only valid political defenses of apartheid was protectionist in nature, rooted in the realization that whites were unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices in their own economic and political power to move towards general equality.94

The fifth, and final, section consisted of Milk’s personal observations – which he clearly indicated were his and not representative of the Rhenish Mission. He began, “First of all, contrary to the world propaganda, it should be noted that apartheid in itself does not mean

91 VEMA 3.313, 41. It should be noted that at the time Pistorius seemed to be an advocate of a “friendlier” apartheid, but historical perspective allows us to take him out of the “critic” camp and place him squarely in the “defender” one.

92 VEMA 3.313, 42.

93 VEMA 3.313, 42. The actual numbers were over double this 1950s estimate. South Africa had a population of approximately 44.8 million in 2000, with roughly 8.4% of that being “whites.” Namibia – included as part of Southern Africa – had an additional 1.9 million, with a 7% “white” population.

94 VEMA 3.313, 42.
oppression and exploitation of natives.”\textsuperscript{95} This sentence, taken out of context, is most likely the statement that sullied Milk’s reputation among black leaders. Milk followed this seeming defense, however, with the observation that the ardent defenders of apartheid historically treated Africans poorly. In this process a great debt was levied against the white population in Southern Africa, namely that: “through the clash of civilizations, the tribal system has been destroyed. And despite the cruel fact that this was necessary, it has yet to be replaced with any stability.”\textsuperscript{96} In this lack of development, Milk argued, white men have tended to exploit Africans. Within all the problems of apartheid, Milk agreed with Pastor Mokitimi’s argument of mistrust. Even if there were significant changes, apartheid could never be a beneficial system because the actions of Europeans towards non-Europeans led to a great fear of oppression and exploitation. Milk added to this sentiment: “So far, this mistrust is justified,” continuing, “no fruit can come from the principle of apartheid.”\textsuperscript{97} He concluded his observations by noting that mission work has only ever been successful in the region when blacks and whites worked together. Milk then acknowledged the sins of the mission’s past:

One can see clearly now the errors of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, in which the harmless missionary’s work and the spread of the European sphere of influence were interconnected. This is how the missionary’s name “Hound of Imperialism” came about. Missionary work can now be done only in the absence of any power politics \textit{[Machtpolitik]}\textsuperscript{98}

This last bit may have been idealistic, but Milk was trying to reaffirm that he and the Rhenish Mission were theologically opposed to the policy of apartheid, as it was unbiblical. That being

\textsuperscript{95} VEMA 3.313, 43.
\textsuperscript{96} VEMA 3.313, 44.
\textsuperscript{97} VEMA 3.313, 44.
\textsuperscript{98} VEMA 3.313, 45.
said, he further stipulated that the organization could not enter the political debate without damaging the work of the mission.

Overall, Milk’s report was decidedly anti-apartheid. Others within the organization were also vocal against the policy. One official who was praised for his work fighting apartheid was Günther Reeh. He also served the general-superintendent of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, thus the head of the ethnic German churches in the region. His outspoken criticism against the segregation policy got him into trouble with the state more than once, at one point being threatened with expulsion from the territory. Without question, the existence of state-sponsored racial discrimination added to the slower development of independent churches, much less an independent state. Religious opposition to the government from the mission did not strengthen until a revision of the Two Kingdoms doctrine changed understandings concerning obedience to the state. This process is discussed later in the chapter. Before the metamorphosis occurred there was a schism involving Herero parishioners, led by Hosea Kutako.

6.5. Oruuano Church – Politics and Religion

The road to independent churches was not without other obstacles as well. Eight years after the AMEC schism among Nama congregations, a group of Herero broke away from the Rhenish Mission Society, supposedly in protest of Heinrich Vedder’s 1950 Senate appointment. AMEC representatives approached Herero evangelist Andreas Kukuri in 1947 to lead a Herero faction of the group. Kukuri refused. These disaffected Herero refused to join the AMEC previously due to its predominately Nama leadership. As mentioned earlier, the Rhenish Mission Society took steps to address African dissatisfaction in the wake of the AMEC

99 Katjavivi, 32.

100 VEMA 2.607, 20; Buys, 181.
secession but for some these efforts were insufficient. The actual break occurred in 1955, led by RMS-ordained pastor Reverend Reinhard Ruzo and Herero Chief Hosea Kutako, known as the Oruuano (“Unity”) Church – often translated into English as the Protestant Unity Church. Kutako was the leading force for the Oruuano Church and had for several years searched for a religious leader among the Herero to help found an independent church. It should be noted that Kutako was not merely the chief of the Herero at Okahandja, he was also a product of Rhenish education and at one time was a Mitarbeiter. Much of the dissatisfaction with the Rhenish Mission was rooted in the myth that some Herero believed missionaries actively cooperated with the German military to capture and kill Herero men at Ombakaha in October 1904 as part of the Herero Genocide. Leaders such as Kutako and Hoveka participated in the 1904 Herero War and survived the subsequent genocide, memories of which still impacted African perspectives regarding whites. The interconnectedness of whites in Southwest Africa showed the entanglement of missionaries with colonial powers, especially in the eyes of Africans. There were also a series of Ethiopian prophets touring the region in 1946 and 1947 promoting “Africa for Africans.” These spiritualists were able to add a religious component that built upon existing UNIA political influence. Kukuri reported the situation to Diehl and the Rhenish Mission put together a fact-finding investigation, sending evangelist Urbanus Kanovengi along as well.

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101 Reinhard Ruzo is sometimes called “Leonard Ruzo” in secondary literature, possibly being confused with Leonard Aurula who was the first bishop of the Evangelical Church in Namibia (FMS).

102 Sundermeier, 90-111.

103 Buys, 181; Sundermeier, 90 ff; Gewald, Herero Heroes, 184; and, Gewald, “Free,” 106-9.
The evangelists’ tour proved enlightening and the findings were detailed in a report by Präsie Diehl to Mission Director Gustav Menzel. Contemporary complaints from Kutako were voiced in 1947 during a meeting between the chief and the two Rhenish Mission Society evangelists.\(^{104}\) They were similar to the initial complaints that preceded the Nama split in 1946. Kutako’s first grievance was the limited development of religious education.\(^{105}\) The Herero chief was rather critical, stating:

The Rhenish Mission Society has been at work here for over 100 years yet those [black] evangelists who work under the mission are considered “weak” and can not bear the responsibility of their own communities. Why is that so? Maybe they do not get enough instruction. Tell me, when will they be ready to lead the Herero people? Furthermore, I am sad. It would be nice to talk about these things with the missionaries themselves [rather than through middlemen]. Maybe these evangelists have not worked out well and are therefore still so weak. These evangelists remain employees, but should not always be servants to the mission.\(^{106}\)

Kutako then raised another issue he saw as a failure of the RMS, arguing there was insufficient charity being devoted to Herero widows and orphans.\(^{107}\) His final complaint pointed to the long-standing issue of limited primary education for children. Kutako did not rehash his entire argument, but intimated that he did not believe the excuse that “the mission [was] entirely dependent on the government.”\(^{108}\) The RMS was taking measures to address these criticisms, but enough time had not passed to remedy all of the issues. In this report, accounting the evangelists’ tour, Diehl agreed that the Präsie needed to visit all of the reserves and meet with local leaders


\(^{105}\) VEMA 2.607, 21a.

\(^{106}\) VEMA 2.607, 21a.

\(^{107}\) VEMA 2.607, 21a.

\(^{108}\) VEMA 2.607, 21a.
personally, thus improving communication but also demonstrating necessary respect among leaders.

Nikolas Hoveka, chief of the Ovambandero located in the Epukiro Reserve was also visited. There, the Rhenish evangelists discovered that talk of breaking away from the RMS had occurred, but Hoveka was less interested than Kutako. He was one of the founders of the Windhoek chapter of the UNIA, so like Kutako, Hoveka was interested in promoting African political agency in Southwest Africa. Unlike Kutako, the Ovambandero chief was not looking to cut ties with white organizations in order to achieve his goals. The chief emphasized his interest in increasing direct contact with missionaries in addition to the black evangelists who worked in the reserve.\textsuperscript{109} He concluded by thanking the mission for all its efforts among the Herero.

Included in this report were follow-up letters from Kutako and Hoveka, each offering a different stance on the future between the Herero people and the RMS. On 2 February 1948, Kutako wrote:

\begin{quote}
First, I greet you all with affection. Secondly, I let you know that your staff called to see me, I told them that I would like us meet and see each other face-to-face. I am pleased and happy that I have heard that some of them have been selected by you to attend the Evangelical School in Karibib, this is a positive step forward. So I am very grateful to the Lord that he has fulfilled your request. When they are done in Karibib, then I’ll see how far they have come, and what our next step will be.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

He then laments that both leading evangelists, Andreas Kukuri and Urbanus Kanovengi, had been sent to Karibib for further religious training at the Paulinum. The Herero chief asked that one of them be sent back to continue religious work until the other finished seminary as not to

\textsuperscript{109} VEMA 2.607, 21a.

\textsuperscript{110} VEMA 2.607, 22.
deprive his people of both evangelists simultaneously. The reopening of the Paulinum led to the ordination of five Herero pastors in 1948: Kukuri, Gottlob Mugunda, Bernard Kahiiko, Joshua Tjiurutue, and (Reinhard) Leonard Ruzo. The year was called *ombura jovahonga* in Herero – the “year of the pastors.”

Nikanor Hoveka’s letter on the 5th of February 1948 thanked the RMS for the evangelists’ visit and quickly apologized for any of his people who had fallen astray. Hoveka stated he was sure God’s grace would bring them back into the fold. He then paraphrased a quote from Proverbs: “We wish that out of our weakness, we develop a strong faith.” The Ovambandero chief then mentioned he was very ill, and questioned his time remaining on earth. Hoveka ended this letter with a cryptic passage: “I conclude with cordial greetings, as do all my people as well. We greet our old Dr. Vedder in particular with the Word of Luke 2:34-35.” This New Testament passage states that after trials and tribulations true intentions will be revealed, possibly indicating Herero disapproval and distrust of Vedder and his motivations. Both Herero leaders addressed their letters to Diehl as *Präses* and Vedder – Kutako calling the latter “our old man Dr. Vedder” and Hoveka calling him “our old Dr. Vedder.” By this time, each leader was surely aware that Vedder had retired from the Rhenish Mission, but may have not realized the

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111 VEMA 2.607, 22.

112 Buys, 170-81.

113 VEMA 2.607, 22.

114 VEMA 2.607, 22. Luke 2:34-35 reads: “And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through their own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.’”

115 VEMA 2.607, 22.
circumstances behind the former Präsé’s departure, finding himself at odds with others who were more in favor of accelerating the process toward an independent church. Regardless, it was apparent that Herero leadership identified Vedder with the mission, despite the retired missionary’s current affiliation. This connection was important in the political sphere as will be shown later.

Another frustration between the Herero and Rhenish Mission Society was the death of Gottlieb Murangi on 31 May 1948. Murangi was one of the key evangelist who worked to keep members within the Rhenish church after some began to leave in 1923. It was expected that the mission would provide a coffin for his funeral as a sign of respect, but failed to do so. This cultural slight was offensive to Herero leadership who saw it as disrespectful for someone who had dedicated his life’s work to evangelism.\textsuperscript{116} This neglect caused another breach of trust and more bruised feelings. Issues of mutual respect continued to haunt the relationship between Rhenish missionaries and African leaders. The RMS recognized many of its faults and was taking steps to correct them, all the while becoming more culturally sensitive.

One of the turning points was Gustav Menzel’s tour of Southwest Africa in 1950 during which plans were formulated and a timetable created to establish an independent, indigenous church. Other issues arose in 1950 while Menzel was in the region. There was a meeting between the four key Herero leaders and Rhenish missionaries including Kutako and Hoveka. This conference led to frustrations over tithes and property ownership – similar to the Nama in 1946.\textsuperscript{117} One of the suggestions that upset the Herero was a plan to encourage an increase in donations from parishioners to help pay for local needs. Within a year of this meeting, rumors

\textsuperscript{116} Buys, 181.

\textsuperscript{117} Sundermeier, 96; Buys, 182.
circulated that Herero members of the Rhenish church were planning on joining the AMEC. Diehl sent out missionaries to investigate the veracity of this hearsay, finding most of the talk to be unfounded. In a confidential report to Missions Director Menzel on 21 May 1952, Diehl addressed the relationship of the Herero to the AMEC and also reflected on the reasons his parishioners would want to cede from the church.

Diehl first noted that the AMEC has been petitioning Herero leaders to join their organization, disseminating propaganda and through talks by some of their evangelists, one a “coloured” Englishman from Rehoboth, another a Zulu.\(^\text{118}\) He noted that much of their message was political, not religious, echoing criticism levied against the AMEC since its appearance in Southern Africa.\(^\text{119}\) Diehl then reported that the actual number of Herero who joined the AMEC was relatively low. Approximately 46 members followed Chief Stefanus Hoveka, who replaced Nikanor a year earlier in 1951 after the long-standing chief passed away, when he left. Along with the younger Hoveka went evangelist Christof Kanguatjivi and elder Julius Ngupahua – Diehl was somewhat saddened in particular by the loss of these two as he believed that he had a good relationship with them. Diehl then noted that Hoveka began spreading AMEC propaganda to other areas, but was soon called into check by the Superintendent of Epukiro, who argued that doing so “was contrary to his [Hoveka’s] official powers…,” noting that, “the decision in the question of religious matters was up to individuals personally.”\(^\text{120}\) Here, we see a government official thwarting the attempts of a political leader, trying to coerce others to convert religious allegiance \textit{en masse} – something not uncommon in the history of religious conversion. At the

\(^{118}\) VEMA 2.607, 18.

\(^{119}\) Chirenje, 123

\(^{120}\) VEMA 2.607, 18.
same time, this situation was an instance in which the state clearly attempted to block the spread of AMEC influence among Southwest Africans, giving some credence to the argument that the limited success of the AMEC in southern Africa was due, in part, to state obstruction.\textsuperscript{121}

Diehl then mentioned a couple of other converts to the AMEC, qualifying that there were probably more who have joined, but remained quiet about their change of allegiance. To this he added that the faithful among elders and indigenous helpers have not crossed over, only those who had “not really been members of the [church] community for decades.”\textsuperscript{122} He then made a statement that was quite blunt and reflected some of his frustrations: “The question arises seriously for us: if we face such a cleansing process in the community do we attempt to prevent it; or rather, if it allowed by God’s own hand, we must then accept how things develop?”\textsuperscript{123} Here, Diehl noted that it may be okay to lose some members, especially if in the end, the truly faithful remained within the church. Interlaced in this concern was the question that haunted all missionaries: how does one know if another truly converted to Christianity?

The report then turned its attention to why the Herero found the AMEC attractive. Through frank discussions with Stefanus Hoveka, it became clear to Diehl that racial politics were the impetus for those leaving the Rhenish Mission to join the AMEC. Hoveka argued that all of those with “black skin” had to join together “in order to better compete with the whites, 

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Chirenje, 123.
\item VEMA 2.607, 18.
\item VEMA 2.607, 18.
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and to be on an equal footing with them and assimilated in all living conditions.”¹²⁴ Diehl then astutely summed up the political stance of the AMEC:

Because the whites do not want to be on the same level with natives socially or mentally, they inhibit the African community in every respect. This makes it necessary that the “black skinned” all come together more closely.¹²⁵ Diehl then turned to Hosea Kutako, who had refused to join the AMEC, but was threatening an independent secession from the Rhenish Mission due to long-standing issues. This time, Kutako listed three complaints seen before, with a slight variation: “lack of school funding; lack of charity for widows and orphans; and, lack of confidence in the missionaries.”¹²⁶ Diehl then confronted each point directly:

Again and again there are the same thoughts that are highlighted against us: “The Rhenish Mission schools are rejected because they have not operated the spiritual advancement of the indigenous children enough, but have limited education to Standard III, teaching only in the mother tongue and Afrikaans over English. The Mission today lacks the love that was once found among the missionaries… The confidence in the missionaries has vanished; because other people [Boers & the British] entered between the missionaries and the natives (meaning other whites, the same as the missionary and therefore a more closely related people).¹²⁷ Diehl commented on these complaints: “You could find in all these discussions… a more politically driven battle (between Black and White) being discharged on the floor of the church,

¹²⁴ VEMA 2.607, 18a. Here “assimilation” implied that Hoveka wanted a full adoption of Western Civilization, which was another contrast to Kutako who wanted to maintain aspects of Herero culture.

¹²⁵ VEMA 2.607, 18a.

¹²⁶ VEMA 2.607, 18a.

¹²⁷ VEMA 2.607, 18a. This last line reflected African fears that the racial divide impacted missionaries, probably reinforced by the fact that some missionaries were also pastors of white churches.
because the nature of that battlefield is more open and easier than on the political field itself.”

He then defended the education provided by the Rhenish Mission, noting that it was thanks to the English language education provided that Kutako and others were able to petition the United Nations in a common tongue and did not have to use others as translators. He further noted that when it came to education the Mission’s “hands were tied by the government, but [we] have tried to make progress.” Here, Diehl made a valid point, and could have also mentioned that in the prior decade, the Mission had gotten the government to agree to an increase in basic education from Standard II to Standard III for Africans under their care. On the issue of lack of charity, Diehl was equally blunt, noting that the care of widows and orphans was a local issue. Funds collected and distributed for the care of the needy in a community were supposed to come from tithes and donations from within the community itself. That being said, Diehl acknowledged that the Rhenish church would attempt to do more, but funds all over Southwest Africa were stretched thin as it was.

Diehl and the Board of Directors came up with a five-point plan of action to address these continued Herero concerns. The first was to create a program that would open access to Standard VI curriculum for all young people who showed promise. This would have to be funded by the mission itself and most likely operate outside of existing schools. Secondly, they promised to work more closely with local indigenous helpers regarding orphans and widows. The hope was that more communication and organization at the ground level would allow for better distribution of aid for those in need. Thirdly, to reinforce the second point, the Board

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128 VEMA 2.607, 18a.

129 VEMA 2.607, 18a.

130 State funding paid teacher salaries and building maintenance. The state was also unwilling to promote an indigenous educated class.
agreed to keep most funds collected locally to be spent in the community rather than bundled with the general fund. Doing so would prevent accusations that tithes from parishioners were going to pay retirement stipends for missionaries, hoping to assuage concerns that whites were being treated better than Africans. The fourth point was to make it a priority to have a missionary presence in the field again, on par with earlier days of the mission. On par with this point was the final goal, working much closer with local “elders, evangelists, pastors, and teachers…” in an effort to give more local agency in church matters – ironically, this was one of the main requests from the Nama protestors in 1946.\(^{131}\) The first plan to expand education access was thwarted by the government. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 dictated access and levels of education for Africans in all of South Africa and Southwest Africa, reducing the role missionaries played in native education. The other points were carried out for the most part, however, it was not a change sufficient to sway Kutako into remaining with the RMS. As Diehl astutely noted, much of the impetus for the Herero to leave the RMS was rooted in political motivations and a long-standing desire for a Herero national church.\(^{132}\)

Intertwined throughout the development of the Oruuano church movement was the theme of politics as well. After the Second World War and the creation of the United Nations, Hosea Kutako sought avenues to represent Africans from Southwest Africa at the global entity as a means of gaining support for Southwest African independence. In 1946, Kutako took steps with the United Nations, asking that they supervise a referendum among the entire population of Southwest Africa to determine the political future of the region – one he hoped gave political

\(^{131}\) VEMA 2.607, 19.

\(^{132}\) VEMA 2.519a, 133-35. Traugott Maharero used the phrase in August 1923: “We do not need the Rhenish church we have oruuano [unity].”

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autonomy to the indigenous black population. Kutako’s request was denied. This attempt was in response to Jan Smuts’ earlier “vote” among the population of Southwest Africa to determine if the region should be integrated as the fifth province of the Union of South Africa.\textsuperscript{133} It should be noted, that the questionable nature of Smuts’ referendum led to a rejection of his petition to the United Nations, with no nation voting to allow Southwest African incorporation into the Union of South Africa.\textsuperscript{134} Kutako later succeeded in 1947 to get UN permission to send four Namibian representatives to address a group of delegates in Paris, but the South African government denied passports and travel visas.

Kutako was forced to seek a more roundabout avenue to have the Herero voice heard. He wrote to the Herero leader in Bechuanaland (modern Botswana), Frederick Maharero, asking him to seek support with members of the African National Congress – the social democratic party in South Africa opposed to apartheid. The goal was to gain assistance from those already connected in global politics and more experienced in dealing with the obstructive nature of the South African government. Maharero forwarded this correspondence to Tshekedi Khama, regent of the Bamangwato and one of the main leaders in Botswana, who then invited Reverend Michael Scott into the discussion. An Anglican clergyman, Scott, was eventually introduced to Kutako and went on to play a key role in the Namibian independence movement.\textsuperscript{135}

The discussions led to a new petition for Namibian independence, which was signed 26 August 1947 by leading African representatives in Southwest Africa including Nama leader David Witbooi. Scott was appointed by Kutako as the Herero representative to the UN, later

\textsuperscript{133} Wellington, 327-8.

\textsuperscript{134} Wellington, 328; Buys, 225; Totenmeyer, 47 ff.

\textsuperscript{135} Hellberg, 225; Wallace, 245-7.
doing so ceremoniously on Herero Day (August 26th) in 1948.\textsuperscript{136} When the Scott departed to take Namibian petitions to the United Nations, Kutako sent him on his journey with an ecumenical Christian prayer. The Anglican Church was critical of Scott’s activism, which in turn led many Herero to consider him as a champion of human rights. Also of note is that Kutako and others did not approach the Rhenish Mission for this political intervention, realizing the traditionally conservative German missionaries would likely promote a policy of staying the course. However, the individual whom they did reach out to was also chastised from within his own professional institution. Due to his activism, Scott’s role in the early stages of the Namibian Independence movement led him to be banned from South Africa and Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{137} The petition made by him on behalf of black Southwest Africans was not granted due to questions on the legality of the delegates.

Operation within the framework of the United Nations soon became more difficult for Africans in Southwest Africa as the ruling powers shifted in the Union of South Africa. On 26 May 1948, the National Party (NP) won under the leadership of Daniel F. Malan, issuing in a ruling party that was isolationist and ultra-conservative. Within a year, the South African government stopped sending status reports to the United Nations – something that was tied to the old League of Nations’ mandate system and continued in the UN’s trusteeship policy. This act demonstrated that South Africa was no longer interested in placating to a global entity over a region that it considered a \textit{de facto} territory.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{136} Hellberg, 226-7; Buys, 181-2.

\textsuperscript{137} VEMA 2.510b, Okahandja, 86. Some Rhenish missionaries were critical of Scott’s cavalier nature.

\textsuperscript{138} Hellberg, 229; Wellington, 245; Totenberg, 48.
To reinforce political ties in southern Africa, the South African government passed the Southwest Africa Affairs Amendment Act No.23 of 1949 which changed the way political representation worked in SWA in relation to the Union of South Africa. All whites in SWA could now participate in Union of South Africa elections. There would be six seats allotted for the region in the House of Assembly, with only white residents electing these representatives. Two senators would then be appointed by these six representatives and the Southwest African Legislative Assembly. The Governor-General then appointed one representative for blacks and coloureds.\(^{139}\) Also associated with this political reshuffling, black Namibians fell under the Minister of Bantu Affairs – thereby extending all South African native policy to Southwest Africa.\(^{140}\) Local governments on reservations were dissolved. The election in 1950 further strengthened the National Party as whites from SWA backed Malan and the policy of apartheid, winning all six positions.\(^{141}\) It became clear that political agency would not be granted by the SAU, especially now that it was controlled by a political party defined by white supremacy.\(^{142}\) The representative appointed by the Governor-General to sit on the senate on behalf of Africans was Heinrich Vedder. In many ways he was a logical choice, having worked with Herero and Nama populations since the early twentieth century. He was also a respected linguist and anthropologist. In his acceptance speech, Vedder spoke positively towards the National Party and its policy of apartheid, praising them for completing what the German colonial government

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\(^{140}\) Hellberg, 232.

\(^{141}\) Marquard, 223.

\(^{142}\) Clark and Worger, 10 ff.
Not surprisingly Vedder’s vocal support of apartheid upset many Africans, causing uproar over the appointment. Kutako, who still linked the former Präsies to the Rhenish Mission, used the event to garner support for his efforts to cement Herero national identity, one that included Christianity as a primary identifier but distanced itself from white institutions.

The culmination of many political frustrations and those about slow development within the church prompted Kutako to strengthen his efforts to create an independent church. If 1950 was the breaking point, it still took several years for Kutako to find a religious leader willing to step away from the Rhenish Mission church. Multiple leaders turned down his pleas, becoming clear that there was a general lack of support from most Herero evangelists. He was not successful in finding a pastor to be the figurehead for a Herero National Church until 1954. Pastor Rehinhard Ruzo eventually accepted Kutako’s offer and he and Kutako set out plans for an independent church. Ruzo issued a circular on 1 January 1955 that a secession from the Rhenish Mission was going to happen, but gained little support from Herero parishioners. The two pressed forward anyway. Kutako appointed Ruzo as leader of the Herero church on 25 August 1955. Traveling prophet Alfeus Kanambunga of Ekoto was asked to become one of the founding leaders of the Oruuano Church. He was associated with the Ethiopian movement that began appearing more frequently in Southwest Africa in the mid-1940s. The few Herero who had previously joined AMEC congregations abandoned those and entered the Oruuano Church. This Herero national church maintained the Lutheran framework and theology, but

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143 Katjavivi, 32.
144 Buys, 182; Sundermeier, 100.
145 Buys, 186.
146 Katjavivi, 6-8.
also wanted to re-embrace some aspects of Herero culture – a theme common with Kutako’s efforts since the 1920s as discussed in Chapter Four. It is significant that many who joined this church eventually returned to the Rhenish Mission church by the time an independent church was established in 1957, most likely owing to stability and a stronger support network.

The Rhenish Mission’s official response to the Oruuano Church was muted. There was not much shock at the secession, as Kutako had been adversarial for decades – leaving once before in 1923 as part of the ovapoke movement. The Oruuano Church itself experienced several secession movements in the 1960s and 1970s – one of which was Ruzo severing ties with Kutako to lead his own church. The splintering of the Oruuano Church reinforced one of the fears of the more conservative Rhenish Mission leaders that an independent church was not quite ready. But at the same time, rapid fragmentation was found in other Protestant groups in Africa and globally. The religious sphere offered opportunity and upward advancement that was not found in the political realm. From this arena, resistance to government policies could be launched with a sense of moral legitimacy. Missionaries even commented on the fact of the increased politicization of the church, noting in 1956 that “the Oruuano here in Windhoek has increasingly become a political instrument of the Herero.”

6.6. The Two Kingdoms and International Organizations

The destruction of the Second World War and its aftermath sent reverberations among religious communities, especially in Germany, who questioned how the Church as an institution could have been so complicit in the destruction of human life. Parallel to political and local

\[147\] See the section on Maherero’s funeral in Chapter Four.

\[148\] Buys, 187-88. Also, along with some leadership squabbles there were multiple accusations of financial fraud intermingled with some of the secessions.

\[149\] VEMA 2.533d, 63.
religious developments were changes in the realm of Christian theology that had transnational implications – especially in matters of fighting for civil liberties or political agency. Events in Germany and elsewhere had direct implications for the churches in Southwest Africa, specifically as Africans sought avenues to fight against apartheid and push for political autonomy. The first major change was spearheaded by German theologians such as Karl Barth, who revolutionized how Lutherans saw their social responsibility in the political realm through re-examining the Two Kingdoms doctrine. Secondly, this newly focused attention on responsibility inspired the World Lutheran Federation, an international group founded in 1947, to take a stance on church and state relationships that allowed for criticism of the civil government. Thirdly, the World Council of Churches addressed the confluence of the Two Kingdom doctrine (primarily a Lutheran issue) and the South African policy of apartheid. This nexus brought the idea of social responsibility in the church to a global religious audience composed of many denominations. Finally, the application of these theological developments was embodied in the movement known as Liberation Theology, that originated in Latin America but quickly spread to many post-colonial regions. From each of these areas, one sees the transnational nature of the Namibian independence movement as it developed, which until now has usually been treated in scholarship as mostly an internal development.

The ramifications of the Second World War were profound and diffuse. In the realm of Christian theology, this was most apparent when theologians began questioning German Christian involvement in the rise of National Socialism and the issues surrounding Nazi rule about the Two Kingdoms Doctrine. This principle derived from Martin Luther’s interpretation of Romans 13:1. The passage states: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Starting in the 16th
century, the doctrine stated that there were two realms: the civil and spiritual. It further stated that Christians should be subject to the civil government, with the understanding that in the grand scheme of things, it existed in conjunction with God’s plan. What evolved over the centuries was an understanding that Christians should abstain from the political sphere as much as possible, instead focusing on the spiritual kingdom – something that was always more an ideal than reality in practice. Early re-evaluations of this doctrine began before World War Two during Nazi rule.

Theologian Thomas Wolf, one of the co-authors of the Barmen Declaration in 1934, drew attention to the misuses and misunderstanding of the Two Kingdoms doctrine by German Lutherans and members of the Reformed Church. Wolf argued that as it was, the doctrine created separate spheres that ultimately limited the lordship of Christ when taken to its logical conclusion.\(^{150}\)

Then things went dark as Germany invaded Poland and most of the world was embroiled in combat. Christians realized anew their responsibility globally, a responsibility that had to break through into the political sphere.\(^{151}\) The most important individual in this introspective process was Karl Barth. He was also a member of the Confessing Church during the Nazi régime. The death and destruction carried out by the German state proved to be a humanitarian catastrophe. Barth questioned how a nation, composed mostly of self-identified Christians, allowed for such an event to occur. Barth concluded that, without question, Christians had failed miserably to live up to their social responsibility. More specifically, he argued that an incorrect application of the Two Kingdoms doctrine was at the root of the problem. Barth reevaluated the


\(^{151}\) Ibid., 56-7.
application of the doctrine and argued that there was a positive relation between spiritual and temporal kingdoms. He used the terms Bürgergemeinde (civil community) and Christgemeinde (church community) with the emphasis that each were groups of human communities. In his examination, he argued that “[the] Christian community has a task which cannot be taken away from it by the civil community. It can also never achieve its aims by using the methods of the civil community.” Therefore, passively submitting to the state [i.e. civil society] has the potential of ignoring a Christian’s responsibility toward social justice. Barth then turned his attention to Luther’s translation of the Bible. He was especially critical of the phrase translated “subject to” which he argued connoted blind obedience to the government, therefore should be read as “submit to” in regards to the state denoting a co-responsibility between the two realms. By shifting the understanding of that passage ever so slightly, Barth was able to realign what he saw as a proper balance of citizenship with Christian duty.

The lack of attention to questioning this doctrine, Barth argued, caused German Lutheranism to forsake its calling. Furthermore, he blamed the rise of National Socialism on a “perversion” of the Two Kingdoms. This perversion was also apparent in the mission field; as we have seen, the mission often gave blind allegiance to the state. In Southwest Africa, that occurred first under German rule, then, after the First World War, under the Union of South

152 Ibid., 59.

153 De Vries, 59.

154 Paul Louis Metzger, The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 175.

155 De Vries, 64.
In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the passive existence of the Two Kingdoms doctrine was applied in the mission field in a fashion that stipulated that the mission could only be successful after the state established colonial control. There was a belief that peace had to be established by an external force (in the case of SWA, a European power) to allow enough stability for mission efforts to take root. This was problematic mostly because there was a false belief that church and state would work in harmony, rooted in the idea that the state in question should be European in origin.

The theological re-evaluation of the Two Kingdoms proved that the bifurcation of the spiritual kingdom and worldly one was erroneous. “True obedience is not found in slavish subjugation but often active resistance, which is often provoked by the state.” How is it that missionaries were both condemned as “hounds of imperialism” and praised for their role in “the development of the independent states of Africa”? The mission had to be in conflict with the ruling power. What is tragic is the fact that in the eyes of the colonized peoples, the missionary was a member of the ruling group. This point is emphasized even further when compared to other mission fields held by the RMS and even other Lutheran groups. The existence of a European-rooted government restricted the efficacy of the mission, especially in Southwest Africa where multiple political and social realities clashed.

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156 It should be noted that there were several other reasons that the RMS dealt with the SAU gingerly, most notably the threat of deportation loomed over anyone whom the government considered problematic.

157 De Vries, 64-5.

158 Ibid., 65-6.

159 Ibid., 74.

160 Ibid., 88.
The effectiveness of the mission, too, was compounded by the existence among some missionaries of latent racism, rooted in nineteenth-century pseudoscience.\textsuperscript{161} Rhenish Mission Director Gustav Menzel admitted that the mission “contributed to the development of the race problem” in Southern Africa.\textsuperscript{162} The discussion of the matter became an increasing concern as noted by the collection of articles entitled \textit{Rassenfrage} in the archival listings.\textsuperscript{163} Some in the mission linked the biblical Ham and Cushites as partial justification for apartheid.\textsuperscript{164} Apartheid was the key governmental policy that divided the RMS. What was clear was a general split between old and new missionaries in the region, with younger missionaries tending to be more sympathetic to independence movements and the fight against apartheid. The division was not resolved in Southwest Africa until a younger generation came into the organization, individuals with a reevaluated concept of the Two Kingdoms as part of their theological understanding.\textsuperscript{165}

The mission was too nationalistic before World War One. To quote DeVries, “their [white

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[161] See section on European Racism in Chapter Five.
\item[164] De Vries, 97.
\item[165] De Vries, 196; Siegfried Hertlein, \textit{Christentum und Mission im Urteil der neoafrikanischen Prosaliteratur} (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1962).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
German, Lutheran church] silence on socio-political matters showed their approval of the government, always under the good Lutheran motto ‘be subject to the authorities.’”

The World Lutheran Federation, created in 1947 to act as a unifying body for Lutheran synods globally, met in Whitby to address many issues. One topic was the clarification of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine. The result was an infusion of Barth’s theological re-evaluation, changing the general paradigm of the Two Kingdoms in Lutheran communities. The second topic was examining the status of missionary endeavors, thus having direct implications for Southwest Africa as the Rhenish Mission and Finnish Mission fell under its umbrella. The conference called for an expedited push for independent churches. This call was one of the reasons for Menzel’s 1950 visit to Southwest Africa to oversee the roadmap for an independent church. Therefore, in practice, the independent churches that developed from these Lutheran missions adopted this newer take on Romans 13 – especially considering its impact on civil rights and resistance to oppressive governments.

The idea of the church becoming politically involved was reinforced in the 1960s during a meeting of the World Council of Churches, an inter-church organization founded in 1948 to promote ecumenical cooperation among Protestant churches. Social Activism and responsibility were key concerns at the conferences in New Delhi, India (1961) and Uppsala, Sweden (1968). This group is important because the independent Lutheran churches that developed in Southwest Africa joined the World Council of Churches in the 1970s. Also important to the Namibian independence movement was the WCC’s “Program to Combat Racism.” This component of the

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166 De Vries, 202.
organization funded several groups that fought against oppressive governments, including funding for SWAPO’s fight against South African military forces.\textsuperscript{167}

This problem was not fully addressed in Southern Africa until the Umpumulo Memorandum of 1967 produced after a pastoral meeting hosted by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Southern Africa (FECSA).\textsuperscript{168} The delegates agreed that the two kingdoms were separate, but both belonged to God, therefore, could not be contradictory. In this sense, the church as an entity had to be active not just in social matters, but political as well. The memorandum stated: “we … reject the Policy of Separate Development.”\textsuperscript{169} Some of the German-speaking churches in Southern Africa maintained that churches should abstain from political matters, but eventually stances against policies like apartheid strengthened.

The final important aspect was a connection between church and state relationships that did not come from the Lutheran tradition, but was, ironically, an offshoot of Roman Catholicism – often seen as the Protestant missionaries’ nemesis in Southwest Africa. Liberation Theology was born in Latin America in conjunction with anti-colonial movements that sought political independence and social justice in the face of state-imposed economic and social oppression.\textsuperscript{170} The movement became important in Southwest Africa because many of the leaders that


\textsuperscript{169} As quoted in Richard Elphick, \textit{Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 190-94.

developed under the tutelage of the RMS (or FMS for that matter) went on to full both religious and political roles. Many of the key leaders in the Namibian independence movement were devout Christians. That does not mean that the various church synods were always antagonistic to the state government, but the doors were now open theologically by Barth, Lutheran reforms, and Liberation Theology to challenge the civil government when it threatened the life and well-being of the church and its social mission. In Southwest Africa, much of the frustration that Africans held against Lutheran missions dealt with the seemingly blind obedience to the state. Thus, African theologians in Southern Africa developed a “Black Theology,” rooted in principles of Liberation Theology that called for taking a stand against racial oppression. This resulted in a church-sanctioned theology that allowed for political protest when the civil government acted in an oppressive and limiting manner and/or limiting the potential of the church.

6.7. Independent Churches

The culmination of missionary efforts led to a series of independent churches in Southwest Africa, influenced by global events and developments within the Lutheran church. Not all of these churches remained affiliated with the Lutheran denomination, especially considering the plethora of denominations that evangelized the region after Germany was dispossessed of its colonies. The larger churches, however, were linked to the Rhenish Mission in the southern and central regions of SWA and the Finnish Mission in the north. The AMEC is not included here because it was still beholden to the church hierarchy and leadership in the United States. Another group that did not technically qualify as independent was the Roman Catholic Church, due to its international hierarchy tethered to Rome. Despite these caveats, the

year 1957 marked the existence of several independent, indigenous churches in Southwest Africa with black-African leadership. It has been called by some Namibian historians as “The Year of the Churches.”

The first truly independent indigenous church synod in Southwest Africa was a product of the Finnish efforts in Ovamboland. The Finns trained and ordained indigenous pastors as early as 1925. As such, African representation on the Finnish Mission board began that year, much earlier than other regional religious groups working in Southwest Africa. The first steps at an independent church were launched in 1954; however, this entity maintained friendly connections with the mission church. Amid fears that the Union of South Africa would be adversarial towards the new church, white missionary Birger Eriksson was elected as its first Moderator. A year later, these fears were legitimized as the South African government prevented two black pastors from traveling to Helsinki for further theological training. In 1956, a new constitution was formed that pressed the de facto independence of the church forward by prohibiting missionary or non-Namibian membership in the synod. This church was named The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ovambo-Kakoveld (ELOK/ELOC). It was officially recognized by the South African government in early 1957. The organization was later renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) in 1984. Its first African leader was Leonard Aulua, who was ordained as a pastor in the 1930s. Aulua was elected moderator in 1960, later becoming bishop in 1963. ELOK initial membership was approximately 85,000

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172 Buys, 211 ff.

173 Buys, 211.
congregates. Aulua was one of the most important religious leaders in the Namibian Independence movement. He and the Moderator of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South-West Africa (ELKSWA), Paulus Gowaseb, wrote an open letter in 1971 to the Prime Minister of South Africa rejecting that nation’s occupation of Southwest Africa and calling for its evacuation per the International Court of Justice’s decision that South Africa had failed in its function as a mandate power. This letter was read in “every church in Namibia” that year, rallying many religious leaders to stand against the state and its policy of apartheid.

The next indigenous-led church was the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South-West Africa. This church was the official culmination of RMS evangelical activity in Southwest Africa, dating back to the 1840s. The process of organizing the independent church was accelerated after Menzel’s visit in 1950, when a plan of action was created, including a fairly conservative ten-year roadmap. He stipulated that all six ethnic groups come under one church, something that was antithetical to apartheid ideology that called for compartmentalized development. By 1953, four African pastors were added as participating members of the missionary conference, offering significant input on the creation of this independent church. Some of the older missionaries disagreed with the Menzel’s intended structure, fearing that it would cause problems with the South African government. Instead, they proposed a compromise of a federalized system in which each ethnic group would have their own church but share a common church conference. The black pastors agreed with Menzel that the new church

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174 Buys, 117. Current membership is over 600,000 per http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/evangelical-lutheran-church-in-namibia; and, 706,664 per the Lutheran World Federation site - https://www.lutheranworld.org/country/namibia

175 Katjavivi, 12-13.
would need to be unified across ethnic boundaries if it were to be true to Christian principles. In 1956, the finishing touches were made on a church constitution, leading to official independence on 4 October 1957. The African congregation elected H.K. Diehl as its first Präs, thus maintaining some overlap with the mission but otherwise run and led by black clergy. Pastor Johannes Lukas de Vries was the first indigenous Präs of this synod following Diehl in 1972. He received an impressive scope of theological training – first at the Paulinum, then Port Elizabeth, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. At the time of its inception, the church membership was 95,530 – the largest African church in the region. The body was later named the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) to reflect Namibian national identity in 1990.

To further highlight the successful growth of the Rhenish Mission church as it adjusted and worked to evangelize Southwest Africa one simply has to look at the sustained growth from the start of World War II to the creation of these independent churches. In 1940, the Rhenish churches had an approximate membership of 72,000 – which included roughly 66% of the African population in the southern half of the region (i.e., excluding Ovamboland). By the end of the war, that membership had grown to 84,000. Before the finalization of the independent churches, but after the breakaway of the Oruuano Church, rosters were 95,530. As a point of comparison, the Lutheran mission churches to the north under the guidance of the FMS had a

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176 Buys, 211; Hellberg, 251-2.

177 Buys, 231-32.

total membership of 85,000 at the time they became an independent church – less than one-third of the total population of Ovamboland.\textsuperscript{179}

Also of note was a third independent church synod in 1957, but not one led by African pastors. This was the German Evangelical Church (DELK), which originally formed in October 1926, but became independent in 1957, severing some connections with the German Evangelical Church based in Germany. The white, German settler church had for decades been marked by racism and even showed support for National Socialism. It took several years for mindsets to change and for reconciliation between it and black-African congregations to begin. By 1990, the DELK joined a synod with the other Lutheran churches in the region, thereby bringing the Lutheran churches closer together in the region although still being in the shadow of its racist past. In 2007, ELCIN, ELCRN, and DELK joined under the United Church Council of Lutheran Churches in Namibia with the plan to become one church.\textsuperscript{180} Current membership of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church is approximately 5,200 members.\textsuperscript{181}

Two other church groups came from the German Lutheran line as well. Of note is a group of Rehoboth Basters who wanted to keep the “Rhenish” name after the 1957 independent church was created. They formed the Rhenish Church in Southwest Africa. Part of the desire to be a separate church was rooted in apartheid politics. In the racial hierarchy promoted by the Union of South Africa, Basters were “coloured” and considered more advanced than the

\textsuperscript{179} Jahresbericht der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft (1940), 86; Jahresbericht der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft (1945), 76-7; Buys, 211 ff.

\textsuperscript{180} Thorsten Schier, “Lutheran Churches of Namibia to Unite,” The Namibian (22 January 2007). During my trip to Namibia it became clear that this plan never came to fruition. The last decade has witnessed several economic and leadership scandals.

\textsuperscript{181} http://www.elcin-gelc.org/index.php/unsere-kirche/einblicke; membership was listed at 5,000 per the Lutheran World Federation site https://www.lutheranworld.org/country/namibia
“Bantu.”\textsuperscript{182} Due to this, those in Rehoboth feared that being under a church hierarchy led by an African would reduce their social standing in the eyes of the government. Another small group formed a church called the Evangelical Mission Church. The existence of both of these should indicate the work and legacy of the RMS was appreciated by many in Southwest Africa, even despite faults or sins of omission.

Many of the events in Southwest Africa concerning the development of Christian churches had parallels over the continent, especially in the first half of the century. But, as seen with the Oruuano Church, most of the groups that broke away from mission churches retained the liturgy and forms of worship found in the Rhenish church. In this sense, SWA was atypical when compared to the rest of Southern Africa in general which experienced an explosion of African Initialed Christian (AIC) churches in the twentieth century – up to 6,000 separate denominations by the year 2000. Most of these are defined by their “prophet healing” or “spiritual” characteristics.\textsuperscript{183} These are Pentecostal and charismatic churches that tend to emphasize spiritual power, sometimes with a renewed focus on the Holy Spirit that was often lacking in mission churches.\textsuperscript{184} Many of these congregations moved away from subdued forms of worship and re-adopted or created new traditions to make an African Christianity, often rooted in one particular ethnic group – new hymns were developed, dances choreographed, sometimes polygyny re-embraced, and certain taboos introduced (most commonly the avoidance of pork, possibly tied to Old Testament affinity).\textsuperscript{185} So whereas this multitude of church sects, falling

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{182} Sundermeier, 279-80; Hellberg, 252.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Allan Anderson, \textit{African Reformation} (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 93.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 19 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 103-08, 194-211.
\end{itemize}
under the full spectrum of the gregarious term “syncretism,” seemed to flourish in South Africa, the religious environment in Southwest Africa seemed more subdued and rooted in the mission church. Both areas were more racially charged due to white settlement than other parts of Africa, explaining the presence and appeal of Ethiopian movements. But, Southwest Africa only experienced a few cases of Pentecostal/Zionist churches in the twentieth century due to the influence and popularity of the Rhenish Mission.

6.8. Conclusion

Despite three schisms, economic hardships, government pressures, and other obstacles, the Rhenish Mission Church grew significantly between the outbreak of the Second World War and the creation of an independent Lutheran church in Southwest Africa. For that reason alone, it is difficult to argue that RMS efforts were a failure. Post-colonial scholars like Horst Drechsler have called the RMS tenure in Southwest Africa “over one hundred years of spiritual enslavement.” Jan-Bart Gewald identified the Rhenish missionaries with colonial oppression and maintained that it ultimately failed in the region due to its paternalism and German nationalism. Kaire Mbuende, too, argued that the mission was a failure. Overall, the complex interactions between these German missionaries and Africans in the region produced a number of independent churches run by indigenous clergy. The various schisms and reunions

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188 Gewald, Herero Heroes, 187.

189 Kaire Mbuende, “Church and Class Struggle in Namibia,” Church and Liberation in Namibia, 27-32.
that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s demonstrated native agency and a desire to identify as 
Christians, mostly doing so under the umbrella of the Rhenish Mission. So while the operation 
and path to independence may have not been ideal, casting the efforts of the Rhenish Mission 
Society in a purely negative light would be erroneous. The church offered one of the few avenues 
for education and personal advancement, a fact that even some critics acknowledge.\(^{190}\) Many 
who became important leaders in the independence movement credit their education and support 
to the Rhenish Mission. The organization was not perfect, but despite its struggles, made a 
positive impact on the lives of those in Southwest Africa in the face of oppressive colonial 
régimes, both German and South African. By the time of political independence, 97.7% of 
Namibia were self-professed Christians – over half of these Lutheran.\(^{191}\) The Rhenish Mission 
itself fulfilled one its last major tasks in the creation of an independent church in Southwest 
Africa. Its sister organizations, too, found that their large missions had been successful and the 
nature of mission work was changing. Financial and logistical reasons encouraged the Rhenish 
Mission to merge with the Bethel Mission to form the United Evangelical Mission in 1960. 
Today they do evangelical work in Africa, Asia, and in Europe (Germany).

\(^{190}\) Katjavivi, xv.

\(^{191}\) Katjavivi, xiv.
CONCLUSION

Overall, my work is a significant contribution to European and African history in that it discusses German postcoloniality under the shadow of the League of Nations’ mandate system, adding to the narrative of transnational studies by examining the impact of German missionaries in a region where another power held political control. It dovetails with Susan Pedersen’s monograph *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* – each of us noting with that mechanisms of control and oppression did not always cease with the end of colonialism. Under this form of governance, the Union of South Africa fostered a segregated society not overthrown until the 1990s. My work clarifies the historical narrative in this era by focusing on German missionary activity, especially in regards to their interaction across the spectrum of ethnic and national identities. The story is a complicated one because German missionaries had to grapple with the impact of German nationalism and racial ideologies in their own lives and those of white parishioners all while trying to evangelize Africans. Outside its obvious contributions to German history, this dissertation adds to the overall account of Southwest Africa, as missionary activity is not merely relegated to footnotes or made analogous with the apparatus of state power. It also demonstrates African agency in response to western European influences by showing how religion, fostered by these German evangelists, contributed to the fight against apartheid. Finally, this dissertation has examined the role that some German missionaries played in the push for Namibian independence, demonstrating further the impact Germans had outside of their national border.
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VITA

Jason Michael Wolfe was born in Natchez, Mississippi in 1978. He grew up in various places in the South, moving about the southeast as a nomad. Despite this rootlessness, one good set of grandparents provided an anchor, fostering a healthy curiosity that made an average intelligence seem clever. Wolfe earned a Bachelor’s of Arts from Lee University in 2001 and a Master’s of Arts from Loyola University, Chicago in 2005. He is expected to receive his Doctorate of Philosophy degree in History from Louisiana State University in 2016. He lives with his wife, Alice, and two majestic fur babies, Addey and Peri, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.