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Research Network Military, War and Gender/Diversity (MKGD)

Bundeswehr Centre for Military History and Social Studies (ZMSBW)

First international MKGD-ZMSBW Conference

Gender and Violence in Colonial Wars, Colonial Rule and Anti-colonial Liberation Struggles

Abstract and Bios of the Presenters

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Geschichte

Panel 1: Gender in Early Modern Colonialism

Chechesh Kudachinova (Free University of Berlin)

The Construction of Colonial Masculinities and Agency in 17th Century Siberia

Abstract:

This paper aims to question early Siberian historical masculinities. The period of expansion accommodated between two discrete forms of colonial masculinities, Indigenous and settlers', that did not exist in isolation but violently reinforced each other. By challenging the 'gender-blind' settler historiography, it seeks to contribute to a larger project of decolonization of Siberian history. The paper focuses on different patterns of colonial manhoods in one published source (1634) that allows us to highlight the making of colonial masculinities and agency in a particular setting. Not only does it provide important empirical data on the human costs of conquest; it also sheds light on the link between masculinity and violence.

Bio:

[Chechesh Kudachinova](#) is a guest researcher at the Institute of East European Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. She obtained the degree of Dr. phil. at Humboldt University for the thesis Mapping the Altai in the Russian Geographical Imagination. She is interested in Siberian ethnohistory and Indigenous studies. Her most recent peer-reviewed article "Scenes of Starvation and Survival Cannibalism: Colonial Food Security and Violence in Seventeenth Century Siberia" will appear in Food and History journal in 2025.

Marion Philip and Elodie Bascoul (University of Geneva)

Studying Masculinities, Violence and Colonial Rule in the 18th Century French Caribbean: Sources and Approaches

Abstract:

This paper presents the SNFS project "*Masculinités esclavagistes*", which examines the tensions between violence, masculinity, and colonial rule in the French Caribbean during the 18th century. It focuses on how the pervasive violence in Caribbean colonial societies reshaped European masculine norms, introducing new legal and racial criteria due to slavery. The study is structured around three key themes: the legitimacy and tolerance of violence between men, analyzed through conflicts brought to court; the reformulation of metropolitan gender norms among dominant whites, such as married planters and royal officers; and the ambiguous role of "petits blancs" within the hierarchy of enslavers. The project will be based on two main sets of sources: a substantial corpus of *lettres de rémission* and *lettres de grâce* sent to metropolitan France by the colonists, and a collection of private correspondence. The core of the project is the critical edition and online publication of these original archives. The presentation will also address the methodological and technical issues involved in this digital humanities work.

Bios:

[Marion Philip](#) is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Geneva on the SNFS project *Masculinités esclavagistes: Gender and Violence in the French Caribbean in the Eighteenth Century*, supervised by Professor Marie Houllémare. She completed her PhD at Sorbonne University in 2022, examining male heterosexuality in Paris (1600-1750) through court records. Her current research extends this focus to

men's sexuality in the eighteenth-century French Caribbean, using judicial sources to explore dynamics of masculinity, violence and male domination.

[Elodie Bascoul](#) is a doctoral student in the SNSF project "Masculinités esclavagistes: Gender and violence in the French Caribbean in the 18th century", under the supervision of Prof. Marie Houllémare. She is currently preparing a thesis on the ambiguous social position of soldiers in the service of the French Empire in the Caribbean (18th century). She intends to pay particular attention to soldiers's mobility and the troubled relationships to masculinity and honor of these actors in a colonial society. To do this, she will observe, among other things, attempted desertions and their motivations, regarding the history of masculinities, as well as social, imperial, colonial and military history.

Panel 2: Women in the Imperial and (Anti)Colonial Project

Carla Andreas Bauzá (Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona)

Enslaved and Free Women of African Descent in the Ten Years' War in Cuba (1868-1878)

Abstract:

This paper argues that African and Afro-descendant women's activities within the Ten Years' War or the first independence war in Cuba against Spain (1868–1878) shaped anticolonial insurgency in complex and radical ways. While the race and gender dynamics of Cuba's slave society violently limited their paths to freedom, their experiences were crucial for pushing towards slavery abolition. By securing food, producing supplies, and engaging in care work, they created a sense of community based on race and gender solidarities. In so doing, women of African descent, free or enslaved, displayed gendered strategies for survival and resistance in the face of increased multidimensional violence and forced labor.

Bio:

[Carla Andrés Bauzá](#) is a PhD candidate at the Pompeu Fabra University, in Barcelona. She graduated in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and obtained her M.A. in World History at the Pompeu Fabra University. She is currently a doctoral fellow at the Leibniz-Institute für Europäische Geschichte in Mainz. Her research focuses on the roles of African and Afro-descendant women in the Ten Years' War in Cuba (1868–1878) and how they took part in slavery abolition.

Kristy Campbell (University of the Bundeswehr Munich)

More than just Kulturträgerin: The Role of German Women Settlers in the Colonial Violence in German South-west Africa (1884-1915)

Abstract

This study explores the under-examined role of German women settlers in German Southwest Africa (GSWA) (1884–1915), highlighting their participation in colonial violence through discursive, private, and state violence. Employing feminist International Relations theory, this research reframes these women not only as "Kulturträgerin" but as active agents in racialised boundary-making and colonial

violence. Through memoir analysis and archival research, I illustrate the ways women upheld and policed racialised boundaries, navigated intersectional hierarchies of difference, and legitimised state violence. This framework challenges static views of colonial rule, proposing a broader, intersectional approach to colonial violence across the German colonial period.

Bio:

[Kirsty Campbell](#) is a doctoral candidate at the University of the Bundeswehr Munich. Her PhD research focuses on the role of German women in colonial violence in German South-West Africa from 1884-1915. Previously, she worked on various projects at the Institute of political science at the Universität der Bundeswehr München and Universität Leipzig. She holds an M.Sc. in War Studies from the University of Glasgow and a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and History from the same university.

Swati Guha (Institute of Language Studies and Research, Kolkata)

Reformer or Perpetrator of Gender Crimes? British Colonial Rule in India and the Woman Question

Abstract:

Addressing forgotten archives of gender violence during British colonial rule of India, this paper argues that while British colonial rule contributed in the abolition of horrendous indigenous patriarchal practices in India, initiating measures for women's education and female autonomy, this perception of a benevolent and reformist colonial regime offers only one side of the history of colonial rule in India. It elides the highly under-researched and discomfoting records of state coercion of colonized women. This paper locates uncharted histories, testifying sexual subjugation of Indian women in colonial prisons, in different princely states and in North-East India during the first and second World Wars.

Bio:

[Swati Guha](#), an award-winning Bengali litterateur, is currently, Director, Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata, India. Previously, she was, Director of Nazrul Centre for Social and Cultural Studies, Kazi Nazrul University, India. Her fictional world is animated by her academic-administrative field works, involving subalternised women and issues of development. She also focuses on the intersection of gendered narratives and social power dynamics in urban India. Currently, she is working on female reproductive health, midwifery and nineteenth century social responses in Bengal.

Panel 3: Men in the Imperial and (Anti)Colonial Project

Marie Muschalek (University of Basel)

Martial Violence, 'Caring' Violence: Colonial Masculinities in the Mounted Police of German South-West Africa, 1905-1915

Abstract:

At the beginning of the 20th century (1904-1907), the German *Schutztruppe* waged a particularly brutal war of extermination of German South-West Africa (now Namibia) against the Herero and

Nama, two African population groups living on that territory. The paper focuses on the aftermath of this genocidal war. It traces the practices of the so-called Mounted National Police (*Landespolizei*) in post-genocidal everyday life in the colony. Most of the 600 or so German and African men in the national police force had taken part in the war. They had been disciplined and socialized as soldiers. When they joined the police force, they were now given civilian tasks in a supposed peace order. The paper looks at the culture of police violence that was part of their daily business. It shows that both black and white policemen developed paternal and caring concepts of masculinity in addition to their military ones, and that these endowed the violence they exercised with different meanings and connotations.

Bio:

[Marie Muschalek](#) is Assistant Professor in the History Department at University of Basel. She joined the Department in April 2024 with a SNSF Starting Grant für a project titled “Killing to Keep: Violent Field Practices and Imperial Natural History in the Long Nineteenth-Century.” She studied Modern and Contemporary History, German Literature and Political and Social Sciences in Hamburg and at the Institut d’Études Politiques in Paris (Sciences-Po). In 2014, she completed her Ph.D. at Cornell University (Ithaca, USA). It was published as *Violence as Usual. Policing and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa* (Cornell University Press 2019). The study of everyday violence, especially historical anthropologies but also sociological approaches, is one of her main specializations.

Susie Protschky (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Race and Soldiering Masculinities in Modern Dutch Colonial Wars in Indonesia

Abstract:

This paper analyses Dutch associations between military violence and soldiering masculinities among Indonesian combatants in the multi-ethnic colonial army (KNIL, *Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger*). I examine two case studies captured by Dutch photographers during the largest Dutch colonial wars in Indonesia: the first, a massacre committed during the Aceh War in 1904, the second, an attempted coup in 1950, only weeks after the formal cessation of hostilities (1945–9) that resulted in Indonesian independence from Dutch rule. I argue that war photographers made a spectacle of Indonesian soldiers’ brutality while positioning European soldiers as observers, with repercussions for a racialised politics of memory in the Netherlands today.

Bio:

[Susie Protschky](#) is Professor of Global Political History specialising in Dutch colonialism at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She is the author of *Photographic Subjects: Monarchy and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia* (Manchester University Press 2019) and *Images of the Tropics: Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia* (Brill 2011). Her current book project, contracted to Cornell University Press, is *Seeing Like a Soldier: Photography and Colonial Violence in Dutch Indonesia*.

Carl Deußen (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Sexuality and Sexual Violence in Imperial Ethnographic Collecting: The Case of German Anthropologist Wilhelm Joest

Abstract:

Imperial anthropology was an inherently gendered enterprise, concerned with the structure of gender in the societies it studied and conducted from the implicitly male, White perspective of the researcher-explorer. One aspect of this gendered character that has received little scholarly attention, however, is the way in which imperial anthropology was also defined by sexuality and sexual violence. Therefore, my presentation will focus on the intersection of race, gender, and ethnographic practice to argue for the intimate connection between the collection of ethnographic artefacts, the sexualisation of women of colour, and the functioning of empire.

Bio:

[Carl Deußen](#) studied Liberal Arts at the University of Freiburg and Museum Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He is currently working on his PhD entitled “The Affects of Imperial Collecting” at the Amsterdam School of Historical Studies. His research focuses on the politics of affect in imperial anthropology and decolonisation processes in the contemporary ethnographic museum.

Rachel McElroy White (University of Groningen)

Soldier-Photographers’ Images of Violence during the Algerian War through the Lens of Military Masculinities

Abstract:

During the Algerian War, torture and other forms of violence against the Algerian population were institutionalized practices within the French Army. My paper examines a series of photographs taken by a Jesuit seminarian soldier who opposed the practice of torture in the Army in order to explore the ways his anti-torture views are visible in the photographic choices he made. I also adopt a gender-informed perspective to analyze how his function within the Army as a schoolteacher – an occupation characterized as “feminine” – can illuminate the intersection of military masculinities and (opposition to) extreme violence.

Bio:

[Rachel McElroy White](#) is Assistant Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Groningen. She holds a PhD in History from Yale University. She is a specialist on the history of France and the French empire, Christianity and politics, war, and human rights, as well as the uses of photographs as historical sources. Her current project, funded by the Dutch NWO, looks at photographs of war atrocities and violence taken by soldiers during the Algerian War for independence from France.

Keynote: Gender in Anticolonial Conflicts: The Example of the Algerian War

Natalya Benkhaled-Vince (Oxford University)

Abstract:

Like all wars, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) was highly gendered, and like all anti-colonial conflicts it was highly racialised, too. As part of their ‘hearts and minds’ strategy, the French army – and particularly women auxiliaries in the French army – sought to win over Algerian women by

‘emancipating’ them to become ‘modern’ French housewives. The sexualised violence of the ‘other’ was publicised by both sides as evidence of their enemy’s perverted masculinity. Those Algerian women who joined the rural guerrilla or planted bombs in urban areas prompted bemusement in the French and colonial press as they shattered Orientalist assumptions about Muslim women in public space and veiling practices. The debate about whether wars bring about shifts in hierarchies, power relations and the roles attributed to women and men - or not - is well established. In societies emerging from colonial wars, such questions were brought into even sharper focus. In this paper, I will revisit these discussions from the perspective of how the experience of participating in the War of Independence led to Algerian women recodifying ideas about male and female spaces, the ways in which citizenship was gendered and how they dealt with the fact that good nationalists could also be misogynist men.

Bio:

[Natalya Benkhaled-Vince](#) is Associate Professor in the History of France and the Francophone World at the University of Oxford and Sanderson Tutorial Fellow in Modern History at University College, Oxford. She is the author of *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954-2012* (Manchester University Press, 2015) and *The Algerian War, The Algerian Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). She is also co-producer of the film shorts series ‘Generation Independence’ on YouTube, which is part of a larger project she is currently working on about post-independence state- and nation-building in Algeria.

Panel 4: Gender, Violence, and Resistance against Colonial Rule I

Michael Rösser (University of Bamberg)

Gender, War and Violence –Revisiting the Maji Maji War in German East Africa 1905-1908

Abstract:

Reinvestigating central sources of the Maji Maji War (ca. 1905-08) provide for genuine female voices. As contemporary witnesses, women reported their memories of the Maji Maji War not only in English, but also in Swahili. Reinvestigating these testimonies in general, but of female provenance in particular, sheds new light on the interrelationship between colonial warfare, forced labour and sexualised violence. The sources under investigation further address the probable existence of colonial concentration camps and raise disturbing questions about the history of human remains and their connections to gender, war and violence exerted during the Maji Maji War.

Bio:

[Michael Rösser](#) is research assistant at the History Department of the University of Bamberg. He conducted research on colonial labour regimes in East Africa using a global historical approach. He is member of the DFG-funded network “(Post-)Colonial Business History” (PCBH) and also specializes in (post-)colonial topographies of memory and the global history of the interwar period. In 2023, the “European Network in Universal and Global History” (ENIUGH) awarded his book *Prisms of Work – Labour, Recruitment and Command in German East Africa* (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023) as ‘honorary distinction’.

Maria Tumiotto (University of Manchester)

Bengali Women Activists In Revolutionary Nationalism (1930s): Practices and Narratives

Abstract:

This paper analyses the contemporary narratives recounting revolutionary, violent acts perpetrated by Bengali nationalist women in the early 1930s. Both colonial and anti-colonial narratives understood female revolutionaries as unsettling exceptions to traditional Indian womanhood, which portrayed Indian women as passive and meek. Revolutionary women deeply unsettled such depiction; however, in their own writings, they widely deployed tropes ascribable to the said narratives. Whereas historiography has read this as a strategy to rewrite women's violent acts into the traditional discourse on womanhood, this paper contends that female activists deployed gendered tropes to recover the full agency of their acts.

Bio:

[Maria Tumiotto](#) is a historian of nationalism and activism specialized in late colonial Bengal. She has recently been awarded the PhD in history at the University of Manchester, with a dissertation on Bengali middle-class 'gentlewomen' and political activism. Her research interests include intellectual history, gender and women's studies, students' movements, and international relations and ideologies in the 20th century.

Paula Dahl (University of Hamburg)

Women as Anticolonial Freedom Fighters in Algeria, 1940s-1960s

Abstract:

With their participation in the struggle for national independence, Algerian women continuously challenged established gender roles and hierarchies within the colonized society as well as in contact with the colonizer. In Algerian women activist's first-person narratives, body politics crystalize out to be a particularly important area in the fight against colonialism but also within the colonial system. On the one hand, women's bodies were targeted by the colonizers, for instance through violence, torture and public unveiling ceremonies. Yet I will examine how women, at the same time, used their bodies in diverse ways for political participation.

Bio:

[Paula Dahl](#) has been a research assistant in Global History at the University of Hamburg since June 2022. In her dissertation titled "Women as anticolonial freedom fighters in Algeria, 1940s-1960s", she examines the Algerian War of Independence from a gender historical perspective. She studied history and English at the University of Hamburg and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research interest lies in topics related to gender, violence, body and space.

Panel 5: Gender, Violence, and Resistance against Colonial Rule II

Jonathan Verwey (University of Leiden)

The Dutch Military Leadership's Approach to Intimate Encounters and Sexual Violence by Dutch Soldiers during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949)

Abstract:

During the Indonesian War of Independence, the Dutch military employed some 220,000 Indonesian and Dutch troops. Tens of thousands of them at one point or another, had sexual contact with someone. This paper looks at how the Dutch military leadership wrestled with these intimate sexual encounters: the non-violent ones and the violent ones. It analyses the intercultural dynamics of the military policies and how notions about race, class and gender shaped them. It focuses on the cultural and sexual education the army provided for the troops, the policies it adopted regarding marriage and intimate contact and how it dealt with sexual violence.

Bio:

[Jonathan Verwey](#) is a colonial historian and has almost completed his PhD at Leiden University on the sexual culture in the Dutch military during the Indonesian War of Independence. From 2016 to 2024, he was the Head of the Knowledge Centre of Museum Bronbeek in Arnhem. From 2013 to 2015, he worked at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies as a researcher and research fellow, where he co-authored *Soldier in Indonesia. A war on the wrong side of history* (2015).

Niels Boender (University of Edinburgh)

Insurgent Masculinities and the Return of Anti-Colonial Mau Mau Fighters in Kenya since 1956

Abstract:

The Mau Mau Uprising was shaped by gendered dynamics. Men fought over conceptions of masculinity rooted in pre-colonial tradition, as well as colonial visions of family life. Restoring control over women seemingly lost to the churn of modernisation was a recurrent trope. This paper explores the after-effects of this element of the revolt, as both the colonial state and male African elites sought to reconsolidate their hold on power. I suggest that conservative, ethnic masculinity was a tool to reconcile former fighters and their opponents at the expense of green shoots of female emancipation, which emerged during the Uprising.

Bio:

[Niels Boender](#) is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, School of History, Classics, and Archaeology. He is a scholar of African global history, with a specialisation in the political and intellectual history of East African decolonisation. Currently, he is part of the AHRC-funded GLOSOC project, which is exploring the global history of socio-economic rights in relation to work in the period after the Second World War. Before coming to Edinburgh he completed his doctorate at the University of Warwick on the legacies of the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya, especially as it related to the politics of reconciliation. He is also working with the Imperial War Museum on their forthcoming *Empire and Conflict* exhibit. His work has been published in the *Journal of Social History* and the *Journal*

of *Imperial and Commonwealth History*, with a forthcoming edited collection on post-conflict homecoming with Routledge (February 2025).

Sandra Lourenço (Universidade de Lisboa)

Struggle, Resistance and Guerrilla: The case of East Timor under Indonesian Neo-colonial Rule in a Gender Perspective (1975-1999)

Abstract:

The process of decolonization of East Timor is unique in global history and, in particular, in Portuguese colonial history. After five centuries under Portuguese colonial power, East Timor was invaded by Indonesia in 1975, with a view to territorial expansion and subsequent integration. This paper will analyse two organizations of women called Organização Popular de Mulheres Timorenses-OPMT (Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women), created in 1974, to raise political consciousness for East Timor independence, and the Organização de Mulheres Timorenses-OMT (Organisation of East Timorese Women), created in 1985, a clandestine association of the resistance movement.

Bio:

Sandra Lourenço is a cultural historian and curator. Sandra obtained her PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London, funded by Foundation for Science and Technology. Sandra is a researcher at Universidade de Lisboa, and a researcher of COST TRACTS: Traces as Research Agenda for Climate Change, Technological Studies, and Social Justice. Her research focuses on artistic and historical narratives in relation to collective memory and trauma of former Portuguese colonies, namely Goa and East Timor, and their relationship with the Portuguese context.

Panel 6: Recollecting and Presenting Colonial Rule and Anticolonial Resistance

Silvan Niedermeier (University of Erfurt):

Gender, Imperial Violence and Family Memory in Private Photo Albums of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902)

Abstract:

This presentation examines the visual staging of gender roles and imperial violence in private photo albums from the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) and the associated family memories. The focus is on the album of Lieutenant Howard M. Koontz, a white US officer who was killed in the Philippine-American War. As I show on the basis of the album, photographs of imperial violence were an integral part of white male imperial self-staging in the war in the Philippines. I also show that this self-staging was closely linked to patriarchal-heteronormative gender roles in US-American society at the turn of the 20th century. Lieutenant Howard M. Koontz's album thus draws attention to the close links between imperial violence and spaces of the private and the family in turn-of-the-century United States. It shows how the violence perpetrated and experienced in the Philippine-American War found its way into family memory and shaped it long after the war.

Bio:

[Silvan Niedermeier](#) is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Erfurt, Germany. His research fields include US imperial history, visual history, gender history, and the history of racism in the United States. He is the author of *The Color of the Third Degree. Racism, Police Torture, and Civil Rights in the American South, 1930–1955* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019). His recently finished habilitation thesis is entitled: „Expanding the Kodak Zone: Vernacular Photography, Imperialism, and the Philippine-American War“.

Claudia Siebrecht (University of Sussex):

The Testimony of Maria III: Sexual Violence and the Archival Grain, German South West Africa, 1906

Abstract:

This paper is framed around an extraordinary trial for rape and assault in a concentration camp in German South-West Africa. Based on testimonies, it foregrounds experiences of subjugation in the doubly oppressive context of colonialism and concentration camp imprisonment during the Herero Nama War between 1904-1908. Tracing voices of the imprisoned, this research probes the nature, use and politics of the German colonial archive, offers new perspectives on the personhood of the imprisoned and reappraises agency within the gendered and racial violence systemic in colonial rule.

Bio:

[Claudia Siebrecht](#) is Associate Professor at the University of Sussex. She is a cultural historian of war and her research focuses on Germany's colonial past and the First World War with particular interests in the history of emotions, memory and the nature of the archival record of war and colonialism. Her first monograph was entitled *The Aesthetics of Loss: German Women's Art of the First World War*, she has co-edited *Total War: An Emotional History* and her current book is on *Concentration Camp Imprisonment in German South-West Africa, Agency and the Archival Gaze*.

Carmen Letz (Université de Limoges / Pilecki Institut, Warszawa/Berlin):

Women in German Southwest Africa: The Theme of Violence against Women in Historical Novels and Films

Abstract:

German South West Africa, now Namibia, was under German colonial rule as a "protectorate" from 1884 to 1915, which culminates in 1904 with the execution of Lothar von Trotha's extermination order against the indigenous Herero and Nama ethnic groups, officially recognised as genocide by the Federal Republic of Germany in 2021. The reappraisal of Germany's colonial past is gaining a greater public attention. But little interest was paid to women's experiences of violence, be it those of African women or of German women. However, the first testimonies published as early as 1918 in the Report on the natives of South-West Africa and their treatment by Germany, also known as the Bluebook, remained largely without resonance. Although the authors of historical novels and film-makers have abundant source material at their disposal, women's fates occupy a little space in their works. To close the gap of this "narrative omission" by analysing some significant examples is the aim of our paper

Bio:

[Carmen Letz](#) is Professeure agrégée, teacher of German language, in St.Junien (France) and associate researcher at the University of Limoges. She works in the fields of German Studies and Educational

Sciences. She got her PhD at the universities of Limoges (France) and Erlangen (Germany) with a thesis on "Education to become a global citizen in elite schools in Germany, France and Switzerland: Schule Schloss Salem, Ecole des Roches and Ecole d'Humanité." Her current research, which is supported by the Pilecki Institut, Warszawa/Berlin, focusses on forms of representation of German colonialism in German South West Africa (now Namibia) in contemporary literature, film and current discourse on the colonial past.