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HYBRID IDENTITIES IN THE COLONIES². THE HISTORY OF THE DENK FAMILY FROM THE GERMAN EMPIRE TO THE THIRD REICH AND THE PARADOX OF GERMANY'S COLONIAL IDEOLOGY

■ INTRODUCTION

Over time and with more and more research on identity formation, overlapping and shifting identities done, it has become clear that even national and ethnic identities can be fluid, blurred, fuzzy and flexible: people can identify with several groups at the same time and shift their affiliations from group to group. Research about such developments usually concentrates on the margins of such groups: on outcasts, dissidents, the inhabitants of borderlands and people who resisted top-down coercion to affiliate themselves with a specific group³. Sometimes it deals

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³ G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987; F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1969; O.J. Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994; R. Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989; P. Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; P. Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Frontier*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000; T.M. Wilson, D. Hastings (eds.), *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; R.R. Alvarez, Jr., *The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands*, „Annual Review of Anthropology”, 24 (1995), p. 447–470; M. Baud, W. van Schendel, *Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands*, „Journal of World History”, 8, no. 2 (1997), p. 211–242.

with the offspring from mixed marriages, refugees and migrants. In the context of research about colonialism, hybrid identities often are seen as the result of resistance to colonial oppression, forced migration or assimilation: hybrid identity formation takes place when a member of a ruling group from a colony travels to the colonial center and adopts colonial customs and habits, when he becomes an „évolué” (there were hardly ever women among them), when children are adopted and assimilated into the colonial center’s society or when groups resisting to colonial advance merge with other oppressed groups to fight their oppressors⁴. Often, such research also focusses on diaspora communities, dual citizenship and transnational mobility⁵.

Hardly ever is the focus on representatives of the colonial power, white, European travelers, traders, farmers, officers and clerks that develop hybrid identities⁶. The very concept of assimilation assumes that it is a top-down process, a coercive development which forces indigenous people (whom the colonizer regards as inferior) to adopt new customs, habits, values, norms and a new behavior (which the colonizer regards as more valuable). However, there are also cases that challenge this assumption – people from Europe, who adopted customs and habits of their indigenous environment or were excluded from the group to which they belonged due to bureaucratic procedures. The following article traces one such example which is very extreme: the life of a German nationalist, active and fervent supporter of Germany’s colonial project, who later even became a convinced National

⁴ The notion of *évolué* stems mostly from the Belgian Congo and describes the members of the indigenous elites who underwent education in the Belgian system. It is less used in other Belgian colonies (like Rwanda and Burundi) and does not exist in the German context. R. Lemarchand, *Political Awakening in the Belgian Congo*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964; J.-M. Mutamba Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant, 1940–1960: Émergence des ‘évolués’ et genèse du nationalisme*, Kinshasa: IFEP, 1998; G. Brausch, *The Problem of Elites in the Belgian Congo*, „International Social Science Bulletin”, 8, no. 3 (1956), p. 452–457; M.D. Markowitz, *The Missions and Political Development in the Congo*, „Africa”, 40, no. 3 (1970), p. 234–247; B. Ryelandt, *L’évolution du statut des Congolais évolués dans les villes du Congo belge (1945–1960)*, „Revue belge d’histoire contemporaine”, 35, no. 2-3 (2005), p. 313–348.

⁵ L. Basch, N. Glick-Schiller, C. Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994; U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, London: Routledge, 1996; A. Portes, L.E. Guarnizo, P. Landolt, *The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field*, „Ethnic and Racial Studies”, vol. 22, no. 2 (1999), p. 217–237.

⁶ If at all, research then concentrates on the emergence of mixed race groups like the Griqua in South Africa and the Baster in Namibia whose members settled there and became indigenous groups with their own distinct ethnic identity. An exception is Angola, due to the relative leniency with which the Portuguese authorities tolerated mixed marriages and the emergence of mixed race groups. L.M. Heywood, *Portuguese into African: The Eighteenth-Century Central African Background to Atlantic Creole Cultures*, in: L.M. Heywood (ed.), *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 91–113.

Socialist but left behind a trace of hybrid identities in his family. The article also describes the wider context: how German bureaucratic racism and the colonial administration first supported the creation of such identities and then sanctioned the consequences of their own policy. It starts with the ideological foundations of the colonial project, its inherent contradictions and how these factors played out, complicating the lives of those, who supported it.

The article is based on extensive archival research in German, South African and Namibian archives. It relies on the earlier works about the Denk family in South West Africa, undertaken by Cornelia Limprecht and Martin Eberhard and the increasing bulk of literature on German colonialism, especially regarding what is today Namibia (and back then was German Southwest Africa and then the South African mandate of that territory). It aims to deliver a contribution to it, but also to the debate on transnationalism⁷ and identity formation, especially regarding racial, national and ethnic identities.

■ THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE COLONIAL PROJECT

Conservative and progressive movements are divided by their relationship to innovation. While conservatives are usually open to technological progress and experimentation with technology, progressive, left-wing movements are mostly skeptical. When it comes to social innovation, the opposite is usually true: leftists believe in progress, while conservatives are extremely cautious. This paradox also runs through German history and the relationship between political movements and social and technological progress. Today, no party is as well positioned in the digital world as the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which rejects women's emancipation, more rights for sexual minorities and migration. Left-wing and left-liberal movements have no problem with these issues; instead, they are united by a great skepticism toward digitalization, artificial intelligence, and big data.

This dichotomy is by no means new. It also existed in the German Empire and later in the Weimar Republic, and can be traced back to two rival conservative movements: colonialism and National Socialism. Both were driven by a longing for a return to (and a freeze of) traditional values, norms, and behaviors, although the National Socialists were far more open to technological progress than the supporters of the colonial movement. What they had in common, however, was

⁷ A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; P. Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; A. Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999; M.P. Smith, L.E. Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from below*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998; S. Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, London: Routledge, 2009; R. Waldinger, *The Cross-Border Connection: Immigrants, Emigrants, and their Homelands*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

an enormous skepticism toward an innovation that had reached Germany late (compared to other European countries such as Great Britain or Belgium) and triggered great social tensions: industrialization.

Skepticism toward capitalism, industrialization, and mass migration from rural areas to big (industrial) cities was the real reason for a political program shared by the colonial movement and National Socialism that was geared toward geopolitical expansion. The logic behind this can be easily reconstructed from the writings of leading conservatives and colonial policy activists such as Paul Rohrbach, who influenced political decisions in Berlin at the intersections of foreign policy, colonial policy, administration, and journalism⁸.

Some authors have attempted to link German colonialism with globalization by describing it as a specific form of imperialist peak, which they see at the end of the 19th century⁹. In their view, German colonialism was an early form of globalization, driven by an increase in trade, advances in transportation and communications, and growing rivalry between the major European powers. The argument sounds convincing from a globalization-critical perspective, but it hardly stands up to a closer scrutiny: all these seemingly globalizing tendencies were accompanied by protectionism, the establishment and monitoring of borders, and the creation of new, invisible dividing lines in law, culture, social habits, and customs that fragmented the world even more than before. The argument also neglects an extremely important feature of colonial ideology and propaganda. Behind the need to open up new markets and primary resources, there was a strong mistrust and a deep-rooted fear of capitalism seen as industrialization, urbanization, and the expansion of trade and finance within Germany. The German culture and the understanding of German identity propagated by the colonial lobby and its protagonists in their pamphlets, reports, memoirs, and policy papers were deeply pre-capitalist and regarding their normative part, even anti-capitalist. They conveyed an image of Germany without corporations, stock exchanges, transnational corporations, and opaque transactions between anonymous companies; a Germany without a working class,

⁸ P. Rohrbach, *Kolonialwirtschaft 1, Berlin: Buchverlag der Hilfe, 1907*; Bieber (Horst) Paul Rohrbach. *Ein konservativer Publizist und Kritiker der Weimarer Republik*, München: Verlag Dokumentation; W. Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das „Größere Deutschland“*. *Ethischer Imperialismus im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kulturprotestantismus*, München: Goldmann, 1972.

⁹ U. Lindner, *Transimperial Orientation and Knowledge Transfer. German Colonialism in an International Context*, in: *German Colonialism, Fragments of its History and Present. Published by the German Historical Museum*, (Catalog accompanying the exhibition at the German Historical Museum Berlin in spring 2017), 16–29. Also Horst Drechsler, a Marxist historian specializing in colonialism in the German Democratic Republic, who interprets the history of the German colonies in an anti-capitalist (rather than globalist) framework sees it as an element of capitalist expansion (although both, colonized and colonizers refused to be integrated into the world economy). H. Drechsler, *„Let us die fighting“: The struggle of the Herero and Nama against German imperialism (1884–1915)*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966.

without a proletariat, without social democracy and other left-wing parties, where hard and honest physical labor was dominated by ethnic Germans who relied on the strength of their family ties, old traditions, and discipline. It was a Germany of small, clean, and tidy villages with clear hierarchies in the society and within the family, with an economy dominated by hard-working farmers. That world was long gone. Germany's colonial dream was the dream of a country without large, sinful, anonymous cities, supposedly full of beggars, prostitutes, bandits, without huge, anonymous corporations and revolutionary or subversive movements that challenged the existing social and political order and questioned the old and beloved customs and habits to which people who had moved from the countryside to the big cities were exposed. German colonialism created more problems than it ever solved; it was an irrational dream of a glorified and idealized world, contrasted with a disturbing, incomprehensible, and unpredictable vision of a modernizing, industrializing country with its diverse and overlapping social, economic, and political conflicts. German colonialism was an attempt to escape from a threatening present into the idealized world of yesterday¹⁰. The reality looked different. Between 1871 and 1905, the German population had grown from 41.1 to 60.6 million. This was not a problem in itself and could have been a source of national pride rather than concern about the future. The main problem that proponents of colonialism saw in these figures was the imbalance between population and land area, or, in other words, the decline in available land per capita. The population surplus was absorbed by the large cities and the rapid development of industry, which in turn could be seen as an advantage, as Germany lagged behind its main competitor, Great Britain, in terms of industrialization. But the colonial lobby saw things differently. Its proponents viewed this as a threat to the traditional German culture and the way of life and as a danger to the development of agriculture. They rightly saw industrialization as a driving force behind the spread of social democracy, but they confused cause and effect when it came to industrialization. According to the pamphlets of colonial interest groups, it was not the development of new factories that had forced farmers to seek work in industry, but the other way around. People had fled the countryside for unknown reasons, and their exodus had driven up industrial production.

The trade dynamics were even more favorable for Germany. Once an exporter of agricultural products (with low added value) and an importer of industrial products (with high added value), Germany had become one of the largest exporters of industrial products and a net importer of food. But instead of looking at the value added and of praising the modernization of the German economy, colonial activists saw this development as a factor that made Germany dependent on other countries

¹⁰ Daniel Joseph Walther puts forward this thesis throughout his book. D.J. Walther, *Creating Germans abroad. Cultural Policies and national identity in Namibia*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002.

for food production. „Food security” became an obsession, which the colonial lobby later shared with the National Socialists. The only real threat to the political interests of the predominantly monarchist and conservative colonial lobby was the rise of the Social Democrats, who marched from one election victory to the next, hampered only slightly by Bismarck’s laws on social transfers, the electoral system (which disadvantaged the Social Democrats), and anti-socialist legislation. But the conquest of colonies was no remedy for the rise of socialism and the need to export the surpluses of the booming industrial sector. The German colonies did not contribute to solving these problems, and when Germany acquired them, it was predictable that they never would. By the end of the 19th century, Germany had established trading posts, secured by armed forces and internationally recognized through a series of agreements with neighboring colonial powers (primarily France and Great Britain), in the territories that later became Togo, Cameroon, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and Namibia¹¹. These were not the only German colonies; Germany also maintained intensive trade relations with the Pacific islands of Polynesia (Samoa, Tonga) and New Guinea, as well as with Kiautschou (China), based on agreements with local chiefs, secured by military force, and later recognized by the other colonial powers. The latter area in particular was more promising than the African possessions, at least in terms of the labor force that could be recruited for German manufacturing and the potential demand for German trade surpluses. German South West Africa became the first German colony in Africa and remained an exception for many reasons compared to Cameroon, German East Africa, and Togo, which were later placed under German protection. The first and most important reason, which is still relevant today, was the relatively strong presence of German settlers. In all other German colonies, settlers were the exception rather than the rule of German presence, and local power structures were used to maintain control over the country. In German South West Africa, control was exercised by settler colonies, the military (the so-called Schutztruppe), and the Rhenish Mission. The strong German presence led to tensions with the indigenous ethnic groups (mainly the Damara, Nama, and Herero) over land, trade, taxes, and security. The expansion of German settlements threatened the indigenous, mostly nomadic ethnic groups with marginalization and even starvation, as more and more areas were occupied by settlers, depriving the locals of grazing land for their livestock and access to water. The infertility of the land was the source of a paradoxical tension: since a settler needed a relatively large area (compared to European agriculture) to make a living, a relatively small number of settlers were enough to take away the pastures and waterholes of the indigenous cattle herders. In a way, this

¹¹ The most recent works on German colonialism: I. Osayimwese, D.A. Barnstone, T.O. Haakenson, *German Colonialism in Africa and its Legacies: Architecture, Art, Urbanism, and Visual Culture* (Visual Cultures and German Contexts), Bloomsbury Academic, 2024; K. Bachmann (ed.), *German Colonialism in Africa*, Peter Lang Verlag, 2023; R.E. Kirey, *Memories of German Colonialism in Tanzania*, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023.

explains the different perceptions of the indigenous groups and the German public regarding the importance of German South West Africa as a colony: compared to the total German population, only a few Germans resided in German South West Africa, and their voice was hardly ever heard in Berlin. For the indigenous groups in the colony, however, the German settlements became increasingly oppressive.

■ GERMAN IDENTITY OUTSIDE GERMANY

This story is permeated by another paradox: although the colonial movement and the conservatives of the German Empire sought a solution to what they saw as the problem of overpopulation, they did not find this solution where it was obvious and had been observed to work, but rather where it was completely unrealistic. Most Germans who left the German Empire before World War I went to North America and, to a lesser extent, to South America. However, this migration was a thorn in the side of conservatives, who feared that the emigrants would lose or give up their German identity there and become Americans in the American „melting pot” of immigrant society. They were convinced that Germans who moved to German-controlled colonies in Africa would not only retain their national identity there, but would even return to their pre-capitalist roots as an agrarian, traditional settler community. The opposite was the case, due to a combination of demographic and climatic factors. Because of the latter (and the virtual absence of dangerous diseases), the only German colony in Africa that was suitable as a settler colony was German South West Africa. However, only extensive agriculture could be practiced there on huge farms, which is why it was not at all suitable for absorbing a large part of the postulated population surplus. In addition, the journey there was long and arduous, and the conditions on site were harsh and unfamiliar. As a result, the colony became a refuge for adventurers, for people who had nothing to lose, and for soldiers of fortune. And they all came without women, as a rule. From the outset, immigration to the South West African colony suffered from an enormous shortage of women, despite special programs that allowed women willing to marry to travel to the colony at the state’s expense. The result was predictable: in order to keep men in the colony and expand the settlement, the German authorities initially tolerated mixed marriages, especially between Germans and Baster girls, but also beyond the Baster group¹². Until 1905, marriages between Germans and women from the Baster group were even encouraged by the administration; the children

¹² The Basters were a mixed-race group that had emerged from relations of (white protestant) settlers from the Oostindische Compagnie around Cape Town, who (also in shortage of white protestant women) had lived and procreated with local (black) women and girls. At the end of the 19th century they already formed a separate ethnic group (like the Griqua) and emigrated to the North, where they finally settled in Nama territory south of today’s Windhoek. More about the Baster (the word is the Afrikaans synonym for bastards) later in this article.

were entitled to inherit and became German citizens (unlike the other indigenous women in the colony who were not married to Germans). Thus, contrary to the concept of the colonial movement, a „mixed-race” society slowly emerged in the colony, with descendants who could no longer be clearly assigned to any particular group or skin color¹³. Many of these people had hybrid identities, and some still do today, as can be observed when Namibians say they are proud to have a German father or grandfather, even though according to official Namibian historical policy, this ancestor must have been a colonialist (civil servant, officer in the colonial army, or farmer) who participated in the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples¹⁴.

It was also this demographic factor that drove the most important ideological wedge between the colonial movement and the National Socialists. The latter were aware that German colonies in Africa could only exist if they were settler colonies, and that the latter would inevitably lead to the dissolution of their racial policy ideas. They wanted colonies, but they wanted them in Eastern Europe, not in Africa. That was the more rational concept. Eastern Europe and the Asian territories of Russia seemed easier to conquer and settle with Germans than most of the former German colonies. The climate was harsher than in Germany, but the soil was fertile, allowing for intensive agriculture, and there were no dangerous diseases awaiting the settlers, unlike in Togo, Cameroon, East Africa, Rwanda, and Burundi. Even against the claims of rival colonial powers, land grabs in Eastern Europe were easier to defend than remote, accessible overseas colonies, which could be threatened at any time by the superior British navy. Until the end of World War II, Hitler used colonial demands only as a bargaining chip with Great Britain on European issues; unlike the colonial movement (which had already been crushed and brought into line in the 1930s), which really wanted „its colonies” back. There was only one problem: the NSDAP and the German state (which were increasingly merging with each other) still wanted to retain influence over German and pro-German minorities in their former colonies. To do this, they had to provide money, send emissaries, spread propaganda, and use diplomacy and the foreign organization of the NSADP (AO). However, its members and officials usually encountered a far more complicated reality on the ground that could not be squeezed into the ideological framework with which they had left Germany. Soon, not only settlers but also emissaries from Germany developed hybrid identities. Could a NSDAP member legally and without fear of sanctions marry an African woman in Germany? Of course

¹³ F. Becker (ed.), *Rassenmischehen – Mischlinge – Rassentrennung. Zur Politik der Rasse im deutschen Kolonialreich*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004; B. Kundrus, (2003): *Von Windhoek nach Nürnberg? Koloniale Mischehenverbote und die nationalsozialistische Rassengesetzgebung*, in: B. Kundrus (ed.), *Phantasiereiche: Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*, Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2003, p. 110–131.

¹⁴ More such examples about pride concerning German ancestors and the colonial past among today's Namibians can be found in K. Bachmann, *Genocidal Empires. German Colonialism in Africa and the Third Reich*, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019, p. 325–341.

not. But in the German colony in South West Africa it was not only possible, but happened frequently. The emergence and (often dramatic) effects of such hybrid identities can be traced very well in the history of the Denk family. It is only partially documented and described in a very fragmented way, mostly in works dealing with other topics, and spans from the end of the 19th century to the end of the German occupation of Poland. At the same time, it constitutes one of the few elements of elite continuity between colonial and National Socialist elites and an argument in the debate about whether (and possibly how) the National Socialists learned from colonialism¹⁵. In fact, the history of colonialism and National Socialism is one of ruptures, interruptions, and mutual rejection¹⁶ – but the example of Hans Denk and his family is an exception to the rule: Denk was a settler, a National Socialist, a dedicated secret agent and a cog in the machinery of the German occupation of Eastern Europe who left a trail of relatives with hybrid identities in his wake.

■ HANS DENK, SETTLER AND FARMER IN GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA

Hans Denk arrived in the South West African colony at the relatively young age of 16¹⁷. The Berliner settled in Rehoboth, the center of the Baster settlement area, about 100 km south of Windhoek. There, in 1905, he became engaged to Cornelia Sophia Beukes. That would not have been unusual in itself, had Cornelia not been a Baster girl and thus not a German citizen.

Similar to the Griqua, the Baster were a mixed-race ethnic group from the Cape Colony who, in 1868, under the leadership of their captain Hermanus van Wyk and the Protestant missionary Friedrich Heidmann, left their settlement area of De Tuin south of the Orange River and headed north to settle in central Namibia in the Nama settlement area after two years¹⁸. They were mainly descendants of white Dutch settlers and Khoi women who had been marginalized in the Cape

¹⁵ The idea about the allegedly colonial roots of National Socialism and the Nazis „having learnt” from colonialism for their own colonial project in Eastern Europe stems from the writings of Jürgen Zimmerer. Zimmerer, Jürgen. *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011. He still recycles it time and again, despite the harsh and detailed criticism of other researchers (see in the following footnote).

¹⁶ J. Zollmann, *From Windhuk to Auschwitz-old wine in new bottles?*, „Journal of Namibian Studies”, 14 (2013); K. Bachmann, *Genocidal Empires. German Colonialism in Africa and the Third Reich*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2019, p. 181–220.

¹⁷ NSDAP party documents contain his date of birth as March 26, 1883. Denk came to German South West Africa in 1899, so he was indeed 16 years old at the time. BArch Berlin Document Center (BDC, former inventory designation OPG) R 9361-II, archive signature 9137, reading film number OPG C 043, files of the Supreme Party Court of the NSDAP concerning Hans Denk, membership number 3398917.

¹⁸ C. Limpricht, H. Lang, *Der Trek der Rehobother Baster*, „Archäologische Informationen”, 20.1 (1997), p. 49–59.

Colony because of their dark skin color. Raised in a Dutch-speaking environment and christianized by the Rhenish Mission, the Baster lived from cattle breeding, horticulture, and hunting and quickly adapted to their new surroundings. When the first German colonial officials arrived in Namibia, the Baster spoke Afrikaans and Khoekhoegowab, the language of the Nama, most of them could read, and they had established a well-functioning self-government¹⁹. The white inhabitants of the country considered them relatively European and cultured²⁰. In 1904, the Herero uprising broke out, triggering collective hysteria in Germany and fundamentally changing the stereotype of the „black man” overnight. Until then, Africans had been regarded as tall, harmless, naive, lazy children living for the moment, who had to be educated, trained, and set on the right path by white people. As a consequence of the Herero (and later the Nama) uprising, the allegedly big but harmless child became an unpredictable monster with an exuberant sex drive, a constant danger lurking on white people, which could only be suppressed with extreme brutality. Whites and non-whites were now increasingly separated from each other, not only spatially (through the establishment of reservations for the Herero) and criminally (through different legal systems for locals and Germans), but also in civil and public law²¹. And so, in September 1905, Vice Governor Hans Tecklenburg issued a decree prohibiting registrars in German South West Africa from registering mixed marriages. As a result, the offspring of such marriages were no longer recognized by the state and were treated as illegitimate children, without the right to citizenship or inheritance. This was a severe blow to many mixed families, who often sent their children to Germany for education. In 1909, this regulation was tightened even further: German men who lived with or were married to locals lost their right to vote. Four years later, the regulation was repealed. However, local women with mixed-race children were still required to report their births to the district offices, whereupon the mothers were often treated like prostitutes²². This regulation was also softened due to the influence of the government in Berlin. Time and again, Windhoek attempted to enforce more radical regulations than the law in the Reich allowed. This included the definition of what was to be considered native. The German administration increasingly applied the „one drop rule”: if even the slightest „black” influence (for example, a Baster grandmother) could be proven in the ancestry of a white person, that person was considered black – with all the legal consequences and regardless of their actual appearance, behavior, and self-image.

¹⁹ G.J.J. Oosthuizen, *Die hantering van minderheidsgroepe in Duits-Suidwes-Afrika: Die Rehoboth-Basters, 1884–1915*, „African Historical Review”, 28.1 (1996), p. 99–119.

²⁰ R.G. Britz, C. Limpricht, H. Lang, *Kurze Geschichte der Rehobother Baster bis 1900 (A Brief History of the Rehoboth Basters until 1900)*, Göttingen, Windhoek: Klaus Hess Verlag, 1999.

²¹ F.O. Sobich, „Schwarze Bestien, rote Gefahr”. *Rassismus und Antisozialismus im deutschen Kaiserreich*, Frankfurt/M.–New York: Campus, 2004, p. 72–86.

²² C. Limpricht (ed.), *Rehoboth, Namibia: Past and Present*, Windhoek: Solitaire Press, 2012, p. 164–174.

The case of Ludwig Baumann, a German farmer who was declared black by the administration after officials discovered that his wife's mother had been a Baster, caused a sensation²³.

There was a way to circumvent these restrictions for mixed-race families. Germany was obliged by international agreements to recognize marriages concluded abroad. Since German law did not differentiate between people of different skin colors, a mixed-race marriage concluded abroad had to be recognized in Germany – and thus also in German South West Africa. This applied to German farmers who married British or Dutch women at the Cape, as well as to German farmers who traveled to Walvis Bay or the Cape to marry a Baster girl. This is exactly what Hans Denk and Cornelia Beukes did in 1906, after Tecklenburg's ban on registering such marriages. After returning from Walvis Bay, they were married in a church ceremony at the Rhenish Mission in Rehoboth. Two years later, their marriage produced a daughter, Pauline, whereupon Hans Denk asked the Rehoboth registrar Hölscher to register her. Hölscher refused, saying it was unnecessary: Pauline was the product of a mixed-race, and therefore invalid, marriage and was therefore considered a native. Hans Denk did not leave it at that. He hired a lawyer in Berlin who threatened to sue the governor if he refused to register Pauline as a German citizen. Her father was German and had married legally under German law, so his daughter from this legal marriage was German. The case was controversial among the authorities: the district administration in Rehoboth felt that the couple lived a completely European lifestyle and that Denk was very concerned about the „good upbringing of mother and daughter”²⁴. An exception should be made, they argued, as the marriage had only been concluded because Denk had become engaged before Tecklenburg's decree and had then done everything in his power to keep his marriage vows. Since the mother was a Baster, the child was also a Baster, Windhoek ruled impassively. Denk even intervened personally in Berlin with his lawyer. By then, Pauline was already two years old. Denk's journey did not end well for the small family – he met another woman in Göttingen and became engaged to her. Now he wanted to use the decisions of the authorities in Windhoek to his advantage, separated from his wife, but did not file for divorce because he now assumed that the marriage was invalid anyway. He only filed a lawsuit in Windhoek after his return from Germany to have his marriage to Cornelia declared invalid – but now the court ruled against him: the marriage was valid because it had been concluded in Walvis Bay. In 1911, Cornelia then filed a lawsuit before the next instance in Windhoek, but there too the judges found that the marriage was valid.

²³ F. El-Tayeb, „Black Germans”. *The Discourse on „Race” and National Identity in 1933*, Frankfurt/M.: Campus Verlag, 2001, p. 101–103.

²⁴ The history of the Denk family in Rehoboth – for the period up to the outbreak of war – has been researched by Cornelia Limpricht and is included in her book *Rehoboth, Namibia, past and present*, Windhoek: Solitaire Press, 2012, p. 171–174.

In the meantime, Cornelia had given birth to a boy, Adolf Adrian Denk. Denk and Cornelia then jointly filed for divorce in the Windhoek District Court (which only had jurisdiction over white people), where Denk was found guilty and had to pay the court costs. Cornelia later married a Baster from Rehoboth, Petrus Diergaardt. Denk took Pauline with him to Germany, where she later made a living as a singer. It is unclear whether he was deported to Germany after the colony was conquered by South African troops or whether he had already traveled to Germany before that. The only thing that is certain is that he returned in the early 1920s, at a time when German South West Africa had already become South West Africa, administered by South Africa. The administration was now South African and thus Afrikaans-speaking, dominated by officials from the Union of South Africa. More and more South African settlers flocked to the area, and German farmers became a minority even among the white population. Many of them had been deported to Germany after the conquest by Union troops, but some managed to return after 1919. In 1923, the Weimar Republic concluded the very pragmatic London Agreement with Great Britain, which allowed German farmers who had previously settled in the mandate territory to return and automatically granted them South African citizenship without forcing them to renounce their German citizenship. In return, Germany recognized the country's affiliation with South Africa. German was not given equal status with Dutch and English, but it was intended to allow Germans to communicate with the authorities in South West Africa in writing and orally in German²⁵.

This meant that, unless he expressly opposed it (and thereby jeopardized his property in South West Africa), Hans Denk was not only a German citizen after his return, but also a South African citizen. This was important in that it gave him the right to become politically and socially involved in the mandate territory. And Hans Denk soon did just that.

The former German colony was integrated into the economic and legal system of the Union, but was given more autonomy than it had ever had under the German rule: its own administration, an elected parliament – only now this was no longer within the framework of a German colony, where ultimately the Kaiser (de facto the Reich government) had the final say, but rather the administrator appointed by South Africa and the parliament in Cape Town²⁶.

The First World War had also further advanced the ethnic restructuring of the country. A terrible famine and the destruction of traditional forms of Ovambo rule by the Portuguese in Angola had weakened the Ovambo areas in northern South

²⁵ The wording regarding Germany's recognition that „the future” of the area „currently” depended on South Africa gave rise to controversy in the German public. It was later disputed that this meant a formal renunciation of the colony. W. Bertelsmann, *Die deutsche Sprachgruppe Südwestafrikas in Politik und Recht seit 1915*, Windhoek: John Meinert, 1979, p. 29–37.

²⁶ W. Bertelsmann, op. cit., p. 29–35.

West Africa, and famine refugees had migrated south in search of food and work. Added to this was the flu pandemic that ravaged the area in 1918. South Africa seized the opportunity and established posts in the Ovambo area. Until then, the Ovambo settlement areas south of the Okavango Delta had been left to their own devices [?]. During the Herero uprising, an Ovambo commando had attacked the Namutoni fort, but otherwise the Germans and the Ovambo had avoided each other. The end of the war brought a certain degree of freedom: the Nama and Herero took over abandoned German farms, and workers were able to migrate freely. This ended when South Africa took control, restricting the freedom of movement of non-white workers and increasingly curtailing the autonomy of the Ovambo ruling structures in the north²⁷.

South Africa's (and Britain's) treatment of the German population in the former German colony may seem inclusive from today's perspective, but it nevertheless provoked discontent, protest, and resistance among the German population in South West Africa. Despite the London Agreement of 1923, German had not become the official language in the mandate territory, and many Germans had accepted naturalization as the lesser evil in the hope of reunification with Germany or greater autonomy. Immigration from South Africa fueled fears of a slow but inevitable „Burization” of the Germans, who saw themselves less as South African citizens than as members of a German ethnic group. Statistically speaking, these fears were not unfounded. Between 1921 and 1936, the proportion of Germans in the total „white” population of the Mandate had fallen from 41 percent to 31 percent, while the proportion of the Boer population had risen from 43 to 59 percent²⁸.

For ethnic Germans who had taken South African citizenship before the London Agreement or had not opposed their naturalization afterwards, South Africa was therefore always the more important reference point for their lives and work than Germany. Germany was far away and could do little for them, while South Africa was close by and had a direct influence on the administration and their everyday lives. For many farmers, it was their sales and labor market. The only exception was farmers and traders who were economically dependent on Germany, although even then South African customs, trade, and labor market regulations were at least as important to them as German law. After 1933, this dependence on South Africa was only offset by the pressure that the Third Reich was able to exert on the relatives of ethnic German farmers in South West Africa who had remained in Germany or returned there. Only for Reich Germans who did not have a South African passport was the situation clear: they could not break with Germany without becoming stateless.

²⁷ M. Wallace, J. Kinahan, *A History of Namibia*, London: Hurst and Company, 2011, p. 205–221.

²⁸ D.J. Walther, *Creating Germans abroad. Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002, p. 115.

■ HANS DENK, THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST

This conflict also characterized Hans Denk's life, at least until the outbreak of war, which forced him to take a clear side. Unlike many of his fellow farmers, who felt marginalized and disadvantaged after South Africa took over the German colony, he managed to make a career for himself under both German and South African rule. There is no clear evidence for this, but it is likely that he succeeded precisely because of his first marriage, which had brought him into an Afrikaans-speaking environment. During the German era, German farmers did not need to know Dutch or Afrikaans; the administration was German, and even on trips to Walvis Bay or Cape Town, English or German sufficed. After 1916, the South African government expelled German officials from the country; unlike traders and farmers, they were not allowed to return even after the Treaty of Versailles, as they were no longer needed. Although German farmers were allowed to communicate with the South African authorities verbally and in writing after the London Agreement, German was no longer the official language. At least during the 1920s, Hans Denk seems to have accepted South African supremacy. He had been a South African citizen since 1925, so he had probably been automatically naturalized under the London Agreement.

After the NSDAP came to power in Germany, Denk became an enthusiastic Nazi and joined the party in 1934, but he continued to see the German-friendly Afrikaner nationalists as potential allies against English influence in South Africa – the more they radicalized, railed against South Africa's entry into the war and for a „new order”²⁹, National Socialist ideology, and against Jewish immigration, the better allies they seemed to him. As the founder and the chairman of the „Agricultural Chamber of South West Africa”, he sought to represent the interests of all white farmers, with the ulterior motive of bringing the Boers in the country closer to Germany by forging closer ties between the mandate territory and Germany³⁰. Denk was a farmer, but his activities were guided by a clear political agenda. He wanted to promote German interests, not those of German or South African farmers in the mandate territory. That is why he almost always concealed his political intentions in South West Africa behind a veil of economic arguments. It sounded very different when Denk spoke without witnesses to Nazi diplomats such as

²⁹ The „new order” was a term used to describe fascism and National Socialism and their departure from parliamentary democracy. In South Africa, Oswald Pirow, a politician who was friendly toward Germany (and served as a minister in the Hertzog and Smuts governments on multiple occasions), had a movement called Nuwe Orde within the United National Party.

³⁰ M. Eberhardt, *Zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Apartheid: die deutsche Bevölkerungsgruppe Südwestafrikas 1915–1965*, vol. 10, LIT Verlag Münster, 2007, p. 396. Since, as described below, Denk was still working on establishing this chamber at the end of 1938 and encountered considerable resistance from the South African administration, it is doubtful whether the chamber mentioned by Eberhardt ever actually came into being.

the German consul in Windhoek, Hans von Oelhafen. Then he stated clearly and unequivocally that in South Africa, „major political goals could only be achieved through the economy” His stated goal was to win South African farmers over to the German cause by opening up Germany and German-friendly countries as markets for products for which there were no buyers in South Africa³¹.

The rise of NSDAP in Germany had been observed in South Africa, where many African intellectuals saw Hitler’s party as a potential ally against the British and adopted the nationalist and anti-Semitic thrust of its ideology. It was also followed by the German population in South West Africa, albeit with less enthusiasm. Most contemporary observers agreed that although the older generation of German settlers looked back nostalgically on the German Empire and were unimpressed by the Weimar Republic, they did not share the revolutionary enthusiasm and totalitarian radicalism of the Nazi movement in Germany. As citizens of the Union, their main focus was on South Africa and not on Germany, which had less opportunity to influence their lives. In the early 1930s, a generational conflict emerged among the German population: the older generation, which wanted to preserve what it had built and preserved in the country’s painful past, viewed the rise of the new radical movement in German politics with suspicion. The emissaries of the National Socialist movement found more receptive ears and obedience among the younger generation, which had less to lose.

The NSDAP and the Hitler Youth (HJ) had already established their own structures in the Mandate in 1932, even before Hitler was appointed the Reich Chancellor. In August 1933, a few months after the seizure of power, the African-dominated legislative assembly banned the NSDAP and the Hitler Youth, driving them underground. The leaders, Hans Weigel and Erich von Lossnitzer, were deported to Germany. The German members of the council resigned in protest, even though they did not belong to the NSDAP. During the raids against the NSDAP and the HJ, the police also seized a number of documents that later served as the basis for the so-called van Zyl Commission’s assessment of relations between the two races, as it used to call them: the Boers and the Germans³². After analyzing the correspondence they had seized, the authors of the report came to a clear conclusion: „The suppression of the Nazi movement in South West Africa has not changed things significantly; it has only channeled Nazi energy into the German League”³³. In fact, the Nazi emissaries had resorted to a different strategy. Instead of openly founding Nazi organizations, they exerted pressure on the leaders of

³¹ A. Hagemann, *Südafrika und das „Dritte Reich“: rassenpolitische Affinität und machtpolitische Rivalität*, Frankfurt/M: Campus, 1989, p. 105–106.

³² Hendrik Stephanus van Zyl was a respected senior judge from Cape Town who headed the commission tasked with deliberating on the future of the mandate territory.

³³ Special Collections (Afrikana) of the Gericke Library of the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, *Verlag van die Suidwesafrika-Kommissie*, Pretoria 1938, 63, par. 288.

German institutions to employ reliable NSDAP members in key positions. It is very difficult to assess the extent to which German-speaking South West Africans adopted Nazi attitudes or merely pretended to do so in order to protect their interests vis-à-vis the Third Reich.

The AO never found a way to overcome the contradictions that arose from this situation. If the South West Germans were to influence the politics of the mandate territory, they had to take South African citizenship, participate in elections, and fight for their interests within the political system of South West Africa, the framework of which had been determined by the Union and Great Britain. The Weimar Republic had made peace with these conditions in the 1923 agreement. It provided for Germans to retain their most important property rights if they became loyal South African citizens in return. The Third Reich expected Germans abroad to be loyal only to Germany, even if this contradicted their economic and political interests. If the Germans in the mandate territory expressed their loyalty to the Third Reich as the AO expected them to do, they would lose their influence in the mandate territory and damage their economic interests.

When the government in Pretoria issued its official statement on the conclusions of the van Zyl Commission in December, it strongly condemned the subversive activities of Nazi organizations in the Mandate Territory and emphasized the fact „that the current leader of the League is not even a South African citizen” as an example of how disloyal part of the German population had become³⁴. In future, foreigners would no longer be able to become members of organizations in the mandate territory, and naturalization would not be facilitated as long as there were Germans living in the mandate territory who were eligible for naturalization but had not applied. The government also rejected the demands of the Boer population in South West Africa for annexation of the mandate territory and made it clear that it had no intention of ceding the mandate to another power. This part of the statement was intended to appease both German hopes and African fears of an impending „colonial compromise between Germany and Great Britain”. The message was that the status quo should be maintained for a long time to come.

In the heated atmosphere of the last few months before the outbreak of the war, Hans Denk had considerable difficulty realizing his plan to bring German farmers and Boers into a pro-German camp. At the end of 1938, he traveled from event to event, promoting his chamber of commerce as a vehicle for increasing sales for all farmers through better trade conditions with Germany. He made every effort to avoid party political statements and, as far as can be ascertained from the

³⁴ The findings of the van Zyl Commission on Nazi activities in South West Africa were later summarized in a separate report entitled „Nazi Activities in South West Africa”. The report was distributed by the London-based organization „Friends of Europe”, for which Lord Lugard wrote a foreword (hereinafter: Lugard Report). The report is archived in the special Africana collection of the University of Stellenbosch Library.

sources, also concealed the fact that he had been a member of the NSDAP since 1934 (and thus a member of an organization that had since become illegal in South West Africa). Denk was not alone in his charm offensive: Ben Swart, apparently his partner in a trading company called Denk & Swart, accompanied him, but remained rather taciturn and, as a police officer wrote in his report on a meeting in Keetmanshoop, „was unlikely to have noticed that he was being exploited by Nazi agents”. Three-quarters of the participants in Keetmanshoop were German, only one-third were Boers, and the police were skeptical about the chamber’s appeal to Boers. In fact, Denk was never able to achieve his goal of winning over 45 percent of South African farmers for his chamber before the outbreak of war³⁵. Denk tried, the police inspector later wrote, to stir up discontent with the administration, to convince Afrikaners that only Germany as a sales market was in a position to secure them higher incomes, and to ensure that in the event of a referendum on the future of South West Africa, as high a proportion of Boers as possible would vote for a return to Germany. At the time, it was widely believed among Germans and South Africans that there would soon be a plebiscite on the return of the mandate territory to Germany³⁶. But the propaganda had little effect on the Boers. When Denk and Swart appeared in Rehoboth, not a single Afrikaner showed up. It was quite clear to them that Denk’s lecture tour was nothing more than „cleverly thought-out propaganda for Germany”, wrote the police officer who was present later in Afrikaans³⁷.

Denk’s campaign came under fire from two sides. In 1937, long-established settlers had founded the German South West Union after the dissolution of the German Confederation, much to the annoyance of the AO and the German consul in Windhoek. They wanted a facade for the AO, while the founders wanted a cross-party umbrella organization independent of the party, as the German Confederation had been before it was taken over by the NSDAP. But Denk also faced competition from the Afrikaner side: the Verenigde Nasionale Suidwes Party, the South West African branch of Hertzog’s party, turned against him. A joint chamber of agriculture was superfluous, the party leadership decided in early December, because German farmers and Boers were already represented in the provincial council and therefore did not need any additional representation outside the legislature. Denk polemicized against this in the Swakopmund newspapers, but failed to reach the Boers he wanted to address, as they did not usually read the German-language paper (which had since been brought into line by the AO), but rather the „Suidwes

³⁵ A. Hagemann, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³⁶ Sub-Inspector, District Commander Keetmanshoop to Commissioner Windhoek, October 14, 1938, in National Archive of Namibia NAN SWAA 1356.

³⁷ Police report dated September 1939 (stamped in October) in: National Archive of Namibia NAN SWAA 1356.

Afrikaner”³⁸. Following the call by the Verenigde Nasionale Suidwes Party, around 400 Afrikaner farmers left Denk’s chamber. This initiative to infiltrate Afrikaner nationalists in South West Africa had thus also failed. Denk was so focused on his attempts at infiltration that he did not even notice when he himself was being infiltrated.

This background also explains why the mandate territory remained so completely calm when the war finally broke out. Instead of attempting an uprising, the non-naturalized Germans in the mandate territory were eager to leave as quickly as possible. As police reports from the period between the outbreak of the war and the start of internments show, many Reich Germans quit their jobs, packed their bags, and booked passages on German and Italian steamers back to Europe. „All Reich Germans are firmly convinced that they will be interned within the next week”, a police sergeant from Walvis Bay reported to the district commander in Omaruru³⁹. But they remained passive. After the outbreak of the war, the pre-war strategy of the AO and the AA to concentrate the actual power of the German organizations in the consulate backfired when the South African authorities expelled all German diplomats. Within a few days, their entire secretive network of front organizations and supposedly apolitical committees, which was in fact controlled from Berlin, lay in ruins. The leaders were arrested and deported, the cadres fled on ships flying friendly flags to return to Germany, and the ordinary members packed their bags for internment.

Most of the naturalized Germans who had remained in the mandate territory during the war were now in limbo. In 1939, the German consul in Windhoek had agreed to exempt naturalized Germans from the order to report Germans abroad for military service. After the outbreak of the war, the Union of South Africa declared that it would not recruit mandate citizens with the nationality of another country unless they voluntarily joined the Union Army. This vacuum could have put the South West Germans in a comfortable position, without having to fight or be forced to send their sons to one army or the other. However, the Union government prepared a different scenario. In South Africa, the arrests of Germans began as early as September 4. The prisoners were taken to a camp in Salisbury. In Windhoek, the German consul and, two days later, the German members of the Legislative Council, Hans Hirsekorn and John Meinert, as well as the (new) chairman of the German South West Union, Ernst Dressel, called on the German population to remain calm, avoid political demonstrations, and continue working as before. All three had held talks with the administrator. In the weeks that followed

³⁸ „Swakopmunder Zeitung”, December 31, 1938, Archive of the Sam Cohen Library, Swakopmund.

³⁹ National Archives of Namibia, SWAA 1756, mostly records from September 1938; and National Archives of Namibia, SWAA 1757, confidential report on Nazi activities by station commander Walvis Bay to district commander Omaruru, confidential, September 8, 1939.

and until the end of 1940, 1,338 Germans were interned. More than 300 others were placed under supervision⁴⁰. Soon the internment camp near Windhoek became too small and the prisoners were transferred to the Andalusia camp near Kimberley.

Even during the war, the South African authorities revoked the automatic naturalizations of the 1920s and treated only naturalized Germans who had joined the army as full British subjects. After the war, there was another wave of forced repatriations⁴¹.

The files do not reveal exactly when Hans Denk left South West Africa. When former German diplomat Otto von Strahl, who had defected to South Africa in 1939, wrote his reports on Nazi influences on the Union of South Africa, he assumed that Denk was in Berlin. Von Strahl wrote that Denk was working „in an important capacity for the return of South West Africa to Germany” and was in contact with the South West African Landsmannschaft, „maintaining friendly relations with Ribbentrop and Göring”. He was, von Strahl wrote, „a dangerous Nazi”⁴².

■ HANS DENK, THE AGENT

In all likelihood, Denk was either interned and taken to South Africa, or he was already there and was interned there, fleeing across the border to Mozambique. In any case, in January 1940, he became the co-organizer of a bizarre secret service mission that ran through the Consulate General in Lourenco Marquez. Denk was acting on behalf of Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop⁴³. As part of this operation, his second wife, who was German and not threatened with internment in the Union, crossed the border and traveled across South Africa to Cape Town, where she delivered a message from the German government to Daniel F. Malan, the leader of the National Afrikaners. Mrs. Denk informed Malan that Germany wanted South Africa to become neutral and independent. If Germany won the war, it would work to ensure that an independent South Africa consisted of the four parts of the Union (Cape, Natal, Transvaal, and Free State) as well as the British protectorates, and would have no objection if South Africa also annexed Southern Rhodesia. However, Germany wanted South West Africa back. After the war, Malan admitted that Mrs. Denk had also offered to establish a permanent channel

⁴⁰ South African Press Agency, September 5, 1939; Deutscher Beobachter, September 7, 1939; W. Bertelsmann, op. cit., p. 66–70.

⁴¹ M. Eberhardt, op. cit., p. 243–245.

⁴² University of Cape Town, Jagger Library, H. G. Lawrence Collection, BC 640 E5.44.2, Von Strahl, Otto: Nazi Activities in the Union of South Africa from the year 1933 until the outbreak of the war, 1939, vol. 3, entry H. Denk.

⁴³ R. Karlowa, Note for the Reich Foreign Minister from Chief Advisor Karlowa (Ribbentrop Office), Berlin, March 29, 1940, in: *Files on German Foreign Policy*, Series D, vol. VIII, doc. 577, p. 36.

of communication with Berlin. According to Malan, he gave an evasive answer. However, the files paint a different picture. Denk's wife had traveled from Kroondal to Cape Town on January 15 and had already met with Malan for a detailed discussion on January 16⁴⁴. However, a summary of the conversation between Mrs. Denk and Malan was not transmitted until January 26 via the Consulate General in Lourenço Marquez, presumably because the message was brought across the border by a messenger. The report was sent from Lourenço Marquez to Berlin by telegram on the same day. Malan had „agreed to work in this direction [as hoped for by Mrs. Denk]”, Paul Trompke wrote to the Foreign Office⁴⁵. Based on the telegram, Rudolf Karlowa, Ribbentrop's chief advisor on colonial affairs, compiled a summary of the most important aspects. According to this, Malan was extremely grateful for the news and instructed Mrs. Denk to convey his thanks to Hans Denk. „He gave his assurance that he wanted to build and work entirely in line with our wishes”. He would talk to Hertzog and the other Afrikaner leaders in order to influence their parliamentary speeches in this way.

For Hans Denk and his wife, the Malan mission probably marked the end of his involvement in southern Africa. As Karlowa mentioned in his report, he wanted to return to Germany, and in the second half of 1940, he appears to have actually arrived in Berlin. He was now fighting against expulsion from the NSDAP party before the party authorities. His first marriage to Cornelia Sophia Beukes had become known within the party, possibly through denunciation. Now the Reich Genealogical Office was looking into the case and found that the Beukes and van Wyk families were „well-known Rehoboth bastard families” whose ancestors had married pure Hottentot women several times⁴⁶. Denk had asked not to be expelled from the party, and the responsible Gau leadership had approved this for two reasons. On the one hand, Denk's achievements in South Africa spoke in his favor, and on the other hand, he „no longer had any connection with his non-German daughter” and had „founded a German family with a German woman” in 1923. For these reasons, the Supreme Party Court did not oppose Denk's continued membership in the party. However, because the party bureaucracy delayed Denk's application and the decision on it, Denk did not receive the decision from the Reich Chancellery until 1944. In it, Hitler's deputy Martin Bormann pointed out that Denk's daughter⁴⁷ had just been appointed a state actress and that it was „impossible to

⁴⁴ This probably refers to the village of Kroondal near Rustenburg

⁴⁵ The Consul [Paul Trompke] in Lourenco Marques to the Foreign Office, January 26, 1940, 14:10, in: *Dokumente der deutschen Auswärtigen Politik*, Series D, vol. VIII, doc. 577, p. 559.

⁴⁶ BArch R-9361-II, files of the Supreme Party Court, letter dated March 22, 1942, to the Chancellery of the Führer of the NSDAP, Main Office for Pardons.

⁴⁷ Denks' second marriage produced two children, whose gender is not apparent from the files. However, one of them appears to have been a girl.

defame her by removing her «progenitor» from the party”⁴⁸. At that time, Denk was already back in Berlin. Hagemann learned after the war from Denk’s family members, that he had been „temporarily active as an economic leader in Ukraine and Crimea” after his return from Mozambique⁴⁹. What happened to him after the war remains unclear. How the daughter of a German Nazi and a Baster woman was able to become a state actress in Nazi Germany and enjoy Bormann’s protection, even though her father, an ardent Nazi, had disowned her, also remains a mystery, at least for now.

■ SUMMARY: THE PARADOX OF COLONIAL IDENTITY FORMATION

There was a fundamental contradiction in German colonial ideology: while the colonial movement sought to preserve traditional German identity and escape industrialization through overseas settlements, it created conditions that inevitably produced hybrid identities and racial mixing. German South West Africa, the only suitable settler colony due to climate and disease factors, suffered from severe gender imbalance, forcing German men to marry indigenous women, particularly from the Baster community. The German colonial administration initially encouraged mixed marriages (until 1905) but then implemented increasingly restrictive racial laws following the Herero uprising. Hans Denk’s legal battle over his daughter Pauline’s citizenship exemplifies this shift – despite his marriage being legally valid under international law, colonial authorities refused to recognize his mixed-race daughter as German, applying the „one drop rule” that classified anyone with any African ancestry as „native”. Perhaps the most striking finding concerns Denk’s daughter Pauline, who despite being classified as „non-Aryan” due to her Baster mother, became a state actress in Nazi Germany with a protection from Martin Bormann. This reveals the profound contradictions within Nazi racial policy when confronted with colonial realities – even as Denk faced potential expulsion from the Nazi Party for his mixed marriage, his daughter succeeded in the Third Reich’s cultural apparatus. Her story (and to some extent the entire Denk-family story) challenges conventional understandings of assimilation as a top-down process imposed by colonizers on the colonized and demonstrates how European colonizers themselves developed hybrid identities, adapting to local conditions while maintaining nationalist ideologies. The study also reveals how both German colonialism and National Socialism, despite their emphasis on racial purity and traditional values, created conditions that undermined their own ideological foundations.

⁴⁸ BArch, BArch R-9361-II, Files of the Supreme Party Court, Führerbau to the Supreme Party Court, October 30, 1944.

⁴⁹ A. Hagemann, op. cit., p. 113.

Klaus Bachmann

HYBRID IDENTITIES IN THE COLONIES. THE HISTORY OF THE DENK FAMILY FROM THE GERMAN EMPIRE TO THE THIRD REICH AND THE PARADOX OF GERMANY'S COLONIAL IDEOLOGY

This article examines the formation of hybrid identities in German colonial contexts through the case study of Hans Denk, a German settler who navigated complex racial, national, and political boundaries from German Southwest Africa to Nazi Germany. Drawing on extensive archival research from German, South African, and Namibian archives, the study traces how German bureaucratic racism and colonial administration first facilitated mixed marriages and hybrid identities, then later sanctioned their consequences. The paradox of German colonialism – seeking to preserve traditional German identity while creating conditions that inevitably led to racial mixing – is exemplified in Denk's biography: a fervent German nationalist and Nazi Party member who married a Baster woman, fought legal battles over his mixed-race daughter's citizenship, and ultimately became an agent for the Third Reich. The article demonstrates how colonial realities contradicted ideological frameworks, forcing even ardent supporters of racial purity to develop fluid, situational identities. Denk's story reveals the continuities between colonial and National Socialist elites while highlighting the fundamental contradictions in both movements' approaches to race, nationalism, and territorial expansion.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość; kolonializm; historia Niemiec; Namibia; RPA

Keywords: identity; colonialism; German history; Namibia; South Africa