



THE  
**THIRD REICH**  
IN HISTORY  
AND MEMORY

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Published by Little, Brown

ISBN: 978-1-4087-0643-5

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Little, Brown  
Little, Brown Book Group  
100 Victoria Embankment  
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## PREFACE

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Over the past fifteen years or so, since the end of the twentieth century, our understanding of Nazi Germany has been transformed in a variety of ways. This collection of previously published essays offers both a report on this transformation and a critical commentary on it. There have been several major changes in perspective that have informed research and writing. The first of these is the 'global turn' in historical studies that has accompanied the globalisation processes in society, culture and the economy since the late twentieth century. Often seen against the long-term background of modern German history since the era of Bismarck's unification of the country in the nineteenth century, the Third Reich is now increasingly also viewed in a broader international, even global context, as part of the age of imperialism, its drive for domination building on a broader tradition of the German quest for empire. The neglected role of food supplies and food shortages in the Second World War can only be understood on a global level. Nazi policies in Eastern Europe drew heavily on Hitler's image of the American colonisation of the Great Plains. Companies like Krupp and Volkswagen were not merely owned at times mainly German enterprises, they operated on a global scale. Several of the essays in this volume look at the dividends this new perspective has brought, and point up, too, some of its limitations.

This is linked to a shift of perception in historical studies that has increasingly placed the nation-state in a broader, transnational context, looking not only at how it related to other nation-states but also how it was affected by wider developments. Nazism, for example, appears in recent work as an ideology drawing on sources from many countries from Russia to France, Italy to Turkey, rather than being the culmination of exclusively German intellectual traditions, as used to be the case. Increasingly, historians have come to see the Nazi extermination of the Jews not as a unique historic event but as a genocide with parallels and similarities in other countries and at other times. Here again, a change of perspective has brought dividends, but it is also increasingly running up against problems of interpretation that some of the essays in this book seek to identify.

This applies even more to a third area of recent research, the work carried out on Nazi society. Over the past decade and a half, Nazi Germany has come to appear to growing numbers of historians as a political system that rested not on police terror and coercion but on popular approval and consensus. Several of the essays in this book take stock of this work and argue that for all the advances in understanding it has brought, the time has come to remember that Nazi Germany actually was a dictatorship in which civil rights and freedoms were suppressed and opponents of the regime were not tolerated. Repression was carried out not just against social outsiders but also against huge swathes of the working classes and their political representatives. Prominent Jews in the Weimar Republic, notably Walther Rathenau, were not despised, marginal figures but enjoyed huge popular support and admiration, expressed in the national outpouring of grief on his death. Nazism, it should not be forgotten, was a tiny fringe movement until the very end of the 1920s. The regime had to work hard to get popular support once it came to power in 1933, and violence played as important a role as propaganda. Hitler and the propagation of his image to the German people were vital in winning the people over, but recent research has advanced considerably our knowledge of the man behind the image, and this, too, is an essential part of understanding the Third Reich.

Perhaps the most remarkable change that has come about in historical work on Nazi Germany since

the late twentieth century, however, has been the increasing intertwining of history and memory. It is now almost impossible to write about the Third Reich in the years of its existence, 1933–45, without also thinking about how its memory survived, often in complex and surprising ways, in the postwar years. The essays in this book examine how prominent industrial firms and individual businessmen who became involved, sometimes very heavily indeed, in the crimes of Nazism, tried to suppress the memory of their involvement after the war. Often the transformation of memory took on strange forms, as in the appropriation by Mexicans of the Volkswagen Beetle, originally the Nazi ‘Strength through-Joy Car’, as a national icon in the late twentieth century. Sometimes, however, the growing need to confront the misdeeds of Nazism and expose the complicity and guilt of those who participated in them has led to crude and sweeping condemnation where historians should be making careful distinctions. The discovery of a wealthy businessman’s concealment of his activities in the Third Reich has led to massive exaggerations about his implication in the worst crimes of the regime; the revelation, after decades of careful cover-ups, of the role professional diplomats played in the development of Nazi foreign policy has led to unsupported accusations that they actually drove on the extermination of the Jews rather than merely facilitating it (bad enough in itself, but not the same thing, and a thesis that implicitly lets the real guilty parties off the hook).

Nazi Germany found its climax and fulfilment and also experienced its eventual downfall in the Second World War, and here, too, there has been a change of perspective since the late twentieth century. The war’s global scope and connections have now been recognised; there were not two separate wars, in East and West, but, rather, one war with multiple connections between the various theatres. Military history, as this volume shows, can be illuminating in itself, but also needs to be situated in a larger economic and cultural context. Wherever we look, whether at decision-making at the top, or at the inventiveness and enterprise of second-rank figures, wider contextual factors remained vital.

Finally, in recent years research has focused increasingly on postwar Germany, where the subterranean continuities with the Nazi era have become steadily more apparent. The ‘ethnic cleansing’ of millions of undesirable citizens did not end with the Nazis but continued well into the years after the fall of the Third Reich, though this time directed against Germans rather than being perpetrated by them. Urban planners developed utopias that found expression in the Nazis’ idea of the de-urbanised city but also shared many of their assumptions with visions of the city in other parts of the world. And the growing campaign for the restitution of artworks looted by the Nazis or stolen from their original, often Jewish owners, addresses a problem that did not begin with the Third Reich and did not end with its demise. Here again, the long-term perspective helps us understand the problem on its own hand, which is also a problem of global dimensions. The extension of historical research into the postwar era has further strengthened the close mutual relations between history and memory. The essays collected here show, among other things, that memory needs to be subjected to the close scrutiny of history if it is to stand up, while history’s implications for the collective cultural memory of Nazism in the present need to be spelled out with precision as well as with passion.

The following chapters, all written in the last fifteen years, reflect these major shifts in perception of Nazi Germany, a fact that prompted me to bring them together in a single volume, that, it is to be hoped, adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Most of them are extended book reviews that use a new study of one or other aspect of the Third Reich as a starting point for wider reflections, and for this reason there is inevitably a certain amount of overlap and repetition; I have tried to reduce it to a minimum, but sometimes it has been impossible to avoid. Only where some original research was involved, as in [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#), or where the article originally appeared in an academic journal, as

[Chapter 17](#), have I provided endnote references; in three of the chapters – [14](#), [17](#) and [24](#) – I have added a brief Afterword responding to points made by critics on the chapter's first publication, or pointing the reader to further literature discussed in the text. For permission to reprint, I am grateful to the editors of the journals and magazines where these essays first appeared; full details are provided in the Acknowledgements on [page 441](#). And I am especially indebted to Victoria Harris for assembling the chapters from very disparate sources, and to Christine L. Corton for reading the proofs with a professional eye.

RICHARD J. EVANS  
*Cambridge*  
*March 2011*



REPUBLIC AND REICH

# 1. BLUEPRINT FOR GENOCIDE?

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Dotted around the world there are still a few reminders of the fact that, between the 1880s and the First World War, Germany, like other major European powers, possessed an overseas colonial empire. If you go to Windhoek in Namibia, you can still pick up a copy of the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, a newspaper which caters for the remaining German-speaking residents of the town. If you fancy a trip to the Namibian seaside you can go to the coastal town of Lüderitz, passing ruined railway stations with their names still in Gothic letters, and spend time on Agate Beach enjoying the surf and keeping an eye out for penguins. In Tanzania, you can stay in the lakeside town of Wiedhafen. If you're a businessman wanting to bulk-buy palm oil in Cameroon, the Woermann plantations are still the place to go. In eastern Ghana, German-style buildings that once belonged to the colony of Togo are now advertised as a tourist attraction.

Similarly, in the Pacific you can sail round the Bismarck Archipelago and visit Ritter Island (though there's not much left: a volcanic eruption blew most of it to bits in 1888). Further east, if you visit a bookshop in Samoa you can pick up the works of the leading local poet, Momoe von Reiche. In Chinese restaurants almost anywhere in the world you can order a German-style Tsingtao beer, first produced in China in 1903 by the Germania brewery in the German-run town of the same name (now transliterated as Qingdao). In Qingdao itself you may come across the imposing Romanesque-revival edifice of St Michael's Cathedral, which looks as if it belongs in a city somewhere in north Germany a century or so ago. In a sense, it does.

All in all, it's not much compared to the extensive remains, physical, cultural and political, left by the larger and longer-lasting European overseas empires, which together covered most of the world's land surface at one time or another. The German empire lasted a mere three decades and was broken up at the end of the First World War, its constituent parts redistributed among Britain, France, Belgium, Australia and South Africa. Small in surface area compared to the British, ephemeral in duration, the former empire still attracted attention in the interwar years, when colonial propagandists lobbied to get it back, but even the Nazis paid it little serious attention, preferring to go for conquests in Europe instead, at least to begin with.

For many years, such historical writing as there was on the subject – the work of the Anglo-German economic historian William Otto Henderson was the outstanding instance – tended to focus on refuting the allegations of violence and brutality that had led to the empire's dismantling and redistribution at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. By the 1960s these arguments were no longer very relevant. However, the situation was transformed by the work of Helmut Bley, who in *South-West Africa under German Rule 1894–1914* (1968) reconstructed the horrifying story of the German war against the Herero and Nama tribes in Namibia in 1904–7.

The story told by Bley isn't complicated. The mounting pace of land seizures by the colonial government in the early 1900s led to attacks on German farmers, resulting in around 150 settler deaths and the dispatch of 14,000 troops from Berlin under General Lothar von Trotha, a hard-line Prussian army officer with previous colonial experience. 'I know,' he said, 'that African tribes yield only to violence. To exercise this violence with crass terrorism and even with gruesomeness was and is my policy.' After defeating a Herero force at Waterberg, he announced that any Herero 'found inside the German frontier, with or without a gun or cattle' would be executed. Herero cattle herders caught

the action were killed on the spot; women and children were driven into the desert and left to starve. The Chief of the General Staff in Berlin, Alfred von Schlieffen, in thrall, like all Prussian officers, to the supposedly Clausewitzian doctrine that the aim of a war must be the total annihilation of the enemy force, praised Trotha's campaign as 'brilliant', especially his use of the desert to complete what the General Staff's official publication, *Der Kampf*, called, approvingly, 'the extermination of the Herero nation'.

But voices were raised in criticism, too; Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow described the action disapprovingly as un-Christian and warned it would damage Germany's reputation abroad. Social Democratic and Catholic Centre Party politicians were outspoken in their condemnation. The civilian governor of the colony, Theodor Leutwein, elbowed aside by the military because of his policy of compromise with the Hereros, protested about the action to Bülow and declared the extermination a 'grave mistake'. He was dismissed for his pains, but his view that the Hereros should instead be recruited as labourers won sufficient adherents to bring about the arrest of the remainder of the tribe, mostly women and children, along with the members of the Nama, and their incarceration in 'concentration camps' (the first official German use of the term).

Here, however, their fate was no better. At the worst of the camps, on the rocky terrain of Shark Island off the Namibian coast, the prisoners were used as forced labour, fed on minimal rations, exposed to bitter winds without adequate clothing and beaten with leather whips if they failed to work hard enough. Every day, bodies were taken to the beach and left for the tide to carry them out into the shark-infested waters. Even the South African press complained about the 'horrible cruelty' of the camp regime. The camps also became sites of scientific investigation, as the anthropologist Eugen Fischer, later a leading 'racial hygienist' under the Third Reich, descended on the town of Rehoboth to study its mixed-race inhabitants (he called them the 'Rehoboth bastards'). He and his colleagues obtained skulls for craniometric studies of different races; up to three hundred of them eventually found their way to Germany.

Fischer concluded that mixed-race offspring (of Boers or German settlers and black Africans) were inferior to the former but superior to the latter, and decided they were suitable as a kind of non-commissioned officer class in the police, postal service and other arms of the state. As a useful inferior race, they should be protected, unlike the Herero and the Nama. The law, however, followed Trotha's belief that Africans were subhuman and his almost pathological fear that racial mixing would spread disease. In 1905, racial intermarriage was banned by law, and two years later all existing marriages between Germans and Africans were annulled. These measures introduced the term *Rassenschande*, or 'racial defilement', into German legal terminology – it was to resurface thirty years later, in the Nuremberg Laws. The official status ascribed to the German settlers was different from that of the rest of the population, allowing Herero men to be conscripted for forced labour and compelling them to wear identification tags (another measure later applied by the Nazis).

The Herero population, estimated to be 80,000 before the war, was reduced to 15,000 by the end, while up to 10,000 out of a total of 20,000 Nama were exterminated. Of some 17,000 Africans incarcerated in the concentration camps, only half survived. Given Trotha's racial beliefs, there can be no doubt that this was what would later come to be called a genocide. Its exposure by Bley raised in urgent form the question of continuity between the Kaiser's Germany and Hitler's. Other colonial regimes were brutal, most notably Belgian rule in the Congo, and did not hesitate to use mass murder to suppress uprisings or establish control, from the French in Algeria in the 1870s to the Italians in Ethiopia in the 1930s. Racial discrimination, expropriation and labour conscription were far from uniquely German.

But only the Germans introduced concentration camps, named them as such and deliberately created conditions so harsh that their purpose was clearly as much to exterminate their inmates as was to force them to work. (It would be left to the Nazis to devise the chilling term ‘extermination through labour’, but the effect was the same.) Only the Germans mounted an explicit attempt to exterminate an entire colonised people on racial grounds. Only the Germans legally banned racial intermarriage in their colonies, as they did not only in South-West Africa but also in East Africa (1906) and Samoa (1912). Only the Germans subsequently mounted a campaign of racial extermination on a global scale which encompassed not only Europe’s Jews but also, potentially, the Jewish inhabitants of the rest of the world. Was there a connection between the two?

For decades after the publication of Bley’s book, this question remained, perhaps surprisingly unaddressed. The critical historians of the 1970s and 1980s who turned their attention to continuities between Imperial Germany and the Third Reich concentrated on the domestic roots of Nazism, on Hitler’s rule in Germany and on the Holocaust. The anti-imperialism of the left, fuelled by the Vietnam War, and perhaps part of the background to Bley’s work, subsided as American troops left and Europe’s remaining colonies were given their independence. In West Germany the legacy of colonialism in everyday life began to vanish with growing economic modernity. Even the grocery shops selling *Kolonialwaren* – coffee, tea, spices, rice and similar dry goods from overseas – that could still be seen in German towns in the early 1970s were now largely renamed or disguised; few who buy their coffee at an Edeka store today, for example, realise that the name stands for *Einkaufsgenossenschaft der Kolonialwarenhändler* (consumer cooperative of colonial goods traders). After the 1970s, Germany’s former colonies seemed an irrelevance and were largely forgotten.

In the 1990s interest began to revive with the emergence of post-colonial studies. As historians now put racism and racial ideology instead of totalitarianism and class exploitation at the centre of their explanations of National Socialism, the history of the German colonising experience no longer seemed so very irrelevant. The renewal of interest was signalled by the publication in 1996 of a revised, English-language edition of Bley’s now classic work, as *Namibia under German Rule*. Monographs and articles began to appear on colonialist discourse in Germany, on the colonial origins of racial science and on representations of colonial subjects in literature. The growing interest in cultural memory led to studies of postcolonial memories and commemorations in Germany. Sebastian Conrad’s *German Colonialism: A Short History* (2012) sums up this new literature and places it in the context of globalisation, which has led to a revival of interest in the empire. With its many excellent illustrations and maps, its annotated critical bibliography and its acute awareness of historiographic trends, it is a model of its kind, providing an essential guide to the subject and intelligent pointers for further research.

The origins of German colonialism, as Conrad notes, lay partly in German history, where colonial dreams and fantasies served as a blank screen on to which nationalists could project an image of German unity before it was finally achieved. As the composer Richard Wagner declared in 1848, ‘we will sail in ships across the sea and here and there set up a new Germany ... We will do better than the Spanish, for whom the New World became a cleric-ridden slaughterhouse, and differently from the English, for whom it became a treasure-trove. We will do it in a wonderful, German way.’ Far more important, however, was the global context of German capitalism, centred on autonomous trading states like Hamburg. Leading Hamburg merchants in the 1870s were said to have visited ‘every town on the Mississippi’ and to have stayed ‘twenty times in London’ but never once been to Berlin. Building on the rapid growth of German industry and economic power, Hamburg’s merchants traded in many coastal areas of Africa and other uncolonised parts of the globe, and maintained 27

consulates in cities across the world. German scientists, explorers and missionaries, such as Gerhard Rohlfs, the first European to traverse Africa from north to south (often wearing Muslim dress), won popular following back at home for their exploits.

Bismarck was unenthusiastic ('As long as I remain chancellor,' he said in 1881, 'we will not become involved in colonialism'), but in 1884 he triggered the 'scramble for Africa' by declaring protectorates over a number of areas in which German economic interests were involved, backing similar moves by the French in an attempt to divert their energies from avenging their loss of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War. Perhaps he also wanted to placate mercantile interests represented by the powerful National Liberal Party, whose support he needed in forthcoming national elections. A scramble for territory had in any case become almost inevitable after Anglo-French rivalry in North Africa reached a critical point in 1881–2. Whatever the reason, as the scramble extended from Africa across the globe, Germany amassed an empire that eventually became the fourth largest after the British, French and Dutch.

The eclectic group of territories claimed by the Germans included the sparsely populated arid region of present-day Namibia, where German cattle ranchers quickly established themselves, and where the mining of copper and diamonds from 1907 onwards brought some profit to private enterprise; the malarial coastal areas of Cameroon, where the mercantile interests of the Woermann family from Hamburg were dominant (rubber and palm oil were produced by German-run plantations inland); Togo, where trade, again in palm oil, was controlled largely by local Afro-Brazilian elites on the coast; the populous colony of German East Africa (present-day Tanzania minus Zanzibar, but including Rwanda and Burundi), where German settlers established cotton and sisal plantations; New Guinea and Samoa and associated Pacific islands, where German settlers were few and mercantile interests prevailed; and the Chinese treaty port of Jiaozhou, leased for ninety-nine years in 1897 and run by the German naval ministry, which adopted an energetic policy of modernisation and improvement, providing the town of Qingdao with electric streetlights and a university at which Chinese students could imbibe German science and scholarship.

Bismarck's vision of protectorates run by private enterprise without the involvement of the state along the lines of the old East India Company's administration of the subcontinent, did not last long. Violent clashes with African societies resisting growing exploitation by German merchants and settlers soon brought in formal rule by German bureaucrats, backed by military force. This only made things worse, as the state began to use violence to protect planters and settlers who had clashed with indigenous farmers and traders, provoking resistance on a larger scale. The genocidal war in South-West Africa was the most dramatic instance, but violence was a constant feature of German rule. In East Africa, for instance, continual military clashes, many of them triggered by the unscrupulous colonial adventurer Carl Peters, drew the imperial government in Berlin to take over the colony's administration in 1891; but armed conflict continued, with sixty-one major 'penal expeditions' launched in the following six years. In 1905, conflict over land seizures, tax rises and forced labour requirements led to the Maji-Maji uprising, in which some 80,000 Africans died at the hands of the military. In contrast to the situation in South-West Africa, this was not seen as a racial war by the Germans, and indeed many of the casualties were inflicted by African troops in German uniform, but the death toll was immense, with more than 200,000 Africans perishing from the famine caused by the destruction of rebel fields and villages.

Violence, including public beatings of Africans, was a part of everyday life in the German colonies: the officially recorded number of beatings in Cameroon, certainly an underestimate, rose from 315 in 1900 to 4,800 in 1913. African chiefs in Cameroon took their case to the Reichstag, but

the governor's subsequent dismissal had more to do with the objections of traders and missionaries than with his policy of granting big land concessions to the planters than with his undoubted brutality. The situation reached a crisis point near the end of German rule, when a former paramount chief was publicly executed for objecting to racial segregation measures in Douala, the main town. The continuing fragility of German control was evident. Given their small numbers in comparison to the Africans – fewer than two thousand settlers and officials in Cameroon – the Germans could hope to establish only 'islands of power' in their colonies. Nowhere did Africans wholly accept German sovereignty. Their effective exclusion from the political and public spheres of the colonies doomed German rule to appear alien to them.

Indeed, it frequently prompted Africans to combine in resistance; after the Maji-Maji uprising, the governor of East Africa conceded that what began as a locally limited rebellion by a few 'half-savage tribes' eventually turned 'into a kind of national struggle against foreign rule'. Sometimes German policies could create new identities, as in Rwanda, where colonial officers armed with ethnographic manuals turned loose social differentiations between Hutu and Tutsi into fixed racial identities that then became the basis for legal distinctions. The result was what some historians have described as an 'ethnogenesis' that laid the foundations for the genocidal massacres in 1994.

It was also possible for scientific experiments to be carried out in the colonies that would have been impossible in Germany. The Nobel Prize-winning bacteriologist Robert Koch had no difficulty injecting a thousand East Africans suffering from sleeping sickness with dangerously high doses of arsenic every day in the search for a cure, with predictably high death rates among the subjects. Indeed, ideas of racial differentiation and hereditary 'inferiority' were given a huge boost by eugenics investigations by scientists such as Eugen Fischer and helped generate and popularise the racial ideas later put into practice by the Nazis. Shows like the Berlin Colonial Exhibition of 1896, alongside the presentation of an African village in Hagenbeck's Tierpark, a privately run zoo in Hamburg, played their part in building a popular sense of racial superiority among Germans.

Some saw the colonies as laboratories of modernity, where new towns and cities could be built without regard to the rights of existing landowners, where racial science could be employed to create a new social order in place of outmoded European hierarchies of status, and where new modern communities could be founded on the traditional patriarchal principles currently being undermined by an increasingly vociferous feminist movement back home. The vocabulary and purposes of colonial missionary work were re-imported into Germany as the Protestant 'Inner Mission' set out to rescue the destitute and 'work-shy' from the 'dark continent' of poverty and ignorance in the slums of major cities. In 1913, a new law defining German citizenship on the basis of ethnic descent rather than residence (as was usual in the rest of Europe) drew directly on racial doctrines hammered out in the colonies. German nationalists began to think of Poles and 'Slavs' as racially inferior, and to abandon talk of Germany's 'civilising mission' in Eastern Europe, as the belief that Poles could be turned into useful Germans began to give way to the conviction that their racial character, like that of the Africans, put them beyond redemption.

Does all this mean that there was a direct line from the colonial empire to the Holocaust? For all the obvious similarities between the Herero and Nama genocide and the extermination of European Jews less than forty years later, there were also significant differences. Although there undoubtedly were concentration camps in South-West Africa, they were not like Treblinka, devoted solely to killing members of a racial minority. The Jews appeared to the Nazis as a global threat; Africans, like Slavs, were a local obstacle to be subjugated or removed to make way for German settlers. Colonial experience, particularly in the field of race, infused the ideology of National Socialism, but the

personal continuities were few, despite the examples of Hermann Göring's father, the first governor of South-West Africa, or Franz Ritter von Epp, who served with Trotha in the Herero war and later became Nazi governor of Bavaria, or Viktor Boettcher, deputy governor of Cameroon and later the senior state official in a Nazi-occupied part of Poland.

Trotha's genocidal war was an exception in German colonial history, and it owed more to the military and racial doctrines of its author than to the wider characteristics of German colonialism. There was no equivalent in Eastern Europe between 1939 and 1945 of the self-proclaimed mission of modernisation and civilisation enshrined in the educational, economic and religious policies adopted in the final phase of German colonial rule. It took the brutalising influence of the First World War – itself part of colonialism's impact on Europe – to make political violence an endemic feature of life in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s and to turn men like Boettcher into Nazis. German colonialism does seem to have been more systematically racist in conception and more brutally violent in operation than that of other European nations, but this does not mean it inspired the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, the Herero war, far more than any other aspect of colonialism, has entered the public memory of present-day Germany as a significant parallel to and precursor of the Holocaust. It has led to impassioned debates about how best it should be commemorated. Nowhere have such arguments been more keenly debated than in the trading port of Bremen, where, in a small park behind the main railway station, there is a ten-metre-high brick elephant; commuters and tourists walk past it every day. Put up towards the end of the Weimar Republic, the stylised monument was conceived as a memorial to and a reminder of the history of German colonialism. Terracotta tiles were set into the plinth, each bearing the name of one of the former colonies. Speeches delivered to vast crowds gathered in the park for the statue's inauguration on 6 July 1932 celebrated the achievements of colonialism and demanded the restoration of the lost colonies.

Improbably, the elephant survived the Second World War unscathed, although the various inscriptions around the plinth were quickly removed after 1945. By the fiftieth anniversary of its construction in 1982, it had become an embarrassment, especially in view of the continuing rule of the South African apartheid regime over Namibia. In 1988, the local youth wing of the trade union IGB put up a sign next to the plinth: 'For Human Rights, Against Apartheid'. Two years later, the elephant was officially declared an 'anti-colonial monument' in defiance of its original purpose, obvious though that was. When Namibia gained its independence, Bremen's mayor staged an official celebration around the elephant, and in 1996 Sam Nujoma, the Namibian president, unveiled a new plaque inscribed 'In Memory of the Victims of German Colonial Rule in Namibia 1884–1914' on his state visit to Germany. The elephant is now cared for by an officially recognised society dedicated to tolerance, creativity and multiculturalism. A bronze plaque reminds visitors of the monument's past and nearby a small memorial to the Herero and Nama has been built as a kind of 'anti-monument'.

## 2. IMAGINING EMPIRE

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A few decades ago, historians searching for the longer-term roots of Nazism's theory and practice looked to the ruptures and discontinuities in German history: the failed revolution of 1848; the blockage of democratic politics after unification in 1871; the continued dominance of aristocratic elites over a socially and politically supine middle class; the entrenched power of the traditional authoritarian and belligerent Prussian military tradition – in short, everything, they argued, that had come by the outbreak of the First World War to distinguish Germany from other major European powers and set it on a 'special path' to modernity that ended not in the creation of a democratic political system and open society to go with an industrial economy, but in the rise and triumph of the Third Reich.

Such arguments were discredited by the 1990s, as it became clear that imperial Germany's middle classes had been far from supine, its political culture was active and engaged, and its aristocratic elite had lost most of their power by the outbreak of the First World War. The 1848 revolution was shown to have transformed German political culture, not to have restored the old regime. Comparisons with other countries revealed similar deficits of social mobility and openness in Britain, tendencies to authoritarianism in France, military domination in Austria and more besides. But if there was no domestic 'special path' from unification to the rise of the Third Reich, where should historians look instead?

Over the last few years, the answer, it has become increasingly clear, can be found only by expanding our vision and viewing German history not in a domestic context or even a European one, but in the context of global and above all colonial developments in the Victorian era and after. This new view of German history is perhaps possible only at a time when we have become acutely aware of globalisation as a contemporary phenomenon, but it has thrown up many vital new interpretations and generated a growing quantity of significant research that links Germany's relation to the world in the nineteenth century with its attempt under the Nazis to dominate it. Now this research has been brought together in *Nazi Empire* (2010), a powerful and persuasive new synthesis by Shelley Baranowski, previously known for more specialised studies, notably an excellent book on the Nazi leisure organisation 'Strength through Joy'.

Baranowski's story begins in the mid-1880s, when Bismarck reluctantly agreed to the establishment of colonial protectorates in order to win the support of National Liberals and Free Conservatives in the Reichstag. Bismarck was wary of the financial and political commitments involved in full colonisation, but he was soon outflanked by imperialist enthusiasts, merchants and adventurers, and by 1890, when he was forced out of office, Germany had a fully fledged overseas empire. It was, admittedly, not much to write home about. The 'scramble for Africa' had left the Reich with little more than leftovers after the British and the French had taken their share: Namibia, Cameroon, Tanganyika, Togo; elsewhere in the world, New Guinea and assorted Pacific islands such as Nauru and the Bismarck Archipelago. A younger generation of nationalists, who did not share Bismarck's sense of the precariousness of the newly created Reich, complained it was an empire on the level of the (late nineteenth-century) Spanish or Portuguese empires, hardly worthy of a major European power.

Moreover, the colonies Germany did possess proved in more than one instance peculiarly difficult



to run. The colonial regime responded with policies of extreme harshness. Prussian military doctrine held that the complete destruction of enemy forces was the prime objective of war, but in the colonies this became enmeshed with racism and a fear of guerrilla attacks to create a genocidal mentality that responded to unrest and uprisings with a policy of total annihilation, by methods that included deliberate starvation through the destruction of crops and villages, leading to more than 200,000 deaths in the German colony of Tanganyika during the Maji-Maji uprising. Even more notoriously, in Namibia, the Hereros and Nama were driven into the desert without supplies, their waterholes poisoned, their cattle sequestered; they died of disease and malnutrition. Victory was followed by an apartheid regime with laws and regulations forbidding racial mixing and reducing the Africans to the status of poorly paid labourers.

Already, however, German policy had begun to move towards the acquisition of new colonies. Where were they to come from? With Kaiser Wilhelm II's assumption of a leading role in policy making, Germany began the construction of a large battle fleet in 1898. By focusing on heavy battleships rather than light, mobile cruisers, the navy's creator, Admiral von Tirpitz, was adopting the high-risk strategy of working towards, or at least threatening, a Trafalgar-style confrontation in the North Sea that would defeat or cripple the British, whose domination of the seas was regarded as the major obstacle to German imperial glory, and force them to agree to an expansion of the German overseas empire. Germany now adopted an aggressive 'world policy', aiming to boost the status of its empire and gain a 'place in the sun' comparable to that of other European powers. Soon uncontrollable imperialist enthusiasms were bubbling up from the steamy undergrowth of pressure group politics.

These focused on Europe as much as overseas. A large chunk of Poland, annexed in the eighteenth century, belonged to Germany, and the government began to encourage ethnic Germans to settle in areas dominated by Polish-speakers, but although 130,000 moved there in the imperial period, this was by no means enough to replace the 940,000 ethnic Germans who migrated west between 1886 and 1905 in search of a better life. Dissatisfied with this situation, radical nationalists began to demand war in the east that would conquer the Slavs and rescue the millions of imperilled German-speakers who lived in Eastern Europe from 'Russification' or 'Magyarisation' by incorporating them into the hugely expanded Reich. The influential Pan-German League went even further, pressing the government to contemplate the annexation of Holland, Flanders, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Romania and the Habsburg Empire, all of which they thought of as 'German' lands, and to couple this with the removal of civil rights from Germany's tiny Jewish minority. Once German domination of Europe had been achieved, the expansion of the overseas empire would inevitably follow.

Under such influences, Social Darwinism gained increasing currency in government circles, propagating a view of international relations as determined by a struggle between races – Germanic, Slavic, Latin – for survival and ultimately domination. A large colonial empire was obviously Germany's due. Nevertheless, colonial ideology continued to be opposed by the two largest political parties, the Marxist-oriented Social Democrats and the Catholic Centre, who vehemently condemned German colonial atrocities in 1905–6. In 1913, these parties, together with left-wing liberals, managed to block the introduction of anti-miscegenation measures in Germany on grounds of the sanctity of marriage (for the Catholics) and the universality of human rights (for the socialists and liberals). Even so, the resulting Citizenship Law, uniquely among European nations, defined citizenship not by residence but by 'community of descent'.

When war threatened in 1914, the pressure from the Pan-Germans made it (at the very least) easier for the government to get involved, while the Social Darwinist convictions of some of the major

actors weakened the will to find a peaceful way out of the crisis. Once war had broken out, the government formulated a secret programme that aimed for major territorial acquisitions and the economic and military subjugation of most of Europe, as well as the seizure of the French and Portuguese possessions in sub-Saharan Africa. These aims went far beyond those of the British and French; hardliners in the leadership, driven by the military stalemate in the west, Allied control of the seas and growing food shortages at home, demanded even more far-reaching annexations.

Meanwhile, German rule in the occupied areas of Europe became ever harsher at the same time as the military tightened its grip on Germany itself. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the effective capitulation of the Russians at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, more than a million square miles and fifty million people, together with most of Russia's coal, iron and oil deposits and half its industry, were lost to Germany and its Turkish ally. A million German troops helped impose a ruthless military dictatorship in the occupied areas, which stretched from Estonia in the north through huge swathes of Belarus and Ukraine to the north-eastern hinterland of the Black Sea in the south. Along with economic exploitation and the brutal suppression of nationalist movements came the imposition of a new racial order in which the inhabitants of the region were explicitly treated as second-class citizens, foreshadowing the regime that would be imposed by the Nazis a quarter of a century later.

In the peace settlement that followed defeat in 1918, Germany lost all its overseas colonies, 13 per cent of its territory in Europe (including Alsace-Lorraine to France, and industrial areas in the east to the newly created state of Poland), and almost all its military equipment. Its armed forces were restricted to 100,000 men, and the government had to agree to the payment over subsequent decades of large sums of money in reparations for the economic damage caused by the war. These terms caused general disbelief and then outrage; after all, the war had ended while German troops were still on foreign soil, and military defeat had been far from total. Moreover – a fact often overlooked by historians – British and French troops occupied the Rhineland for most of the 1920s, providing a constant reminder of Germany's subjugation to foreign powers. In 1923, when the Germans fell behind with reparation payments, the French sent an expeditionary force into the industrial region of the Ruhr to seize key resources, causing further resentment.

Yet did this amount, as Baranowski claims, to the 'colonisation' of Germany by the Allies? German propaganda attacks on the occupation of the Ruhr focused heavily on the racial defilement symbolised by France's use of troops from its African colonies. But by the mid-1920s the violent clashes between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces that had brought machine guns and tanks on to the streets of Germany's major cities in the immediate aftermath of the war had subsided and the economy had stabilised. The negotiating skills of Gustav Stresemann, the long-serving Foreign Minister, brought readmission into the international community, the renegotiation of reparations and the removal of the occupying troops. There is little evidence of any widespread feeling among Germans that the country had been 'colonised'; only among extreme antisemites was there a conviction that the Weimar Republic was controlled by an international Jewish conspiracy, but even here the language of colonisation can rarely be found, and it must also be remembered that the National Party did so poorly in the elections of 1928, winning less than 3 per cent of the vote, that it soon pedalled its violent antisemitism in subsequent elections. The anti-Jewish disturbances of the postwar years were both less widespread and less representative of public opinion than Baranowski implies.

Only once the Depression of the early 1930s had bankrupted banks and businesses and put more than a third of the workforce out of a job did the Nazis win mass support; and only when they were brought into power as the conservative elites' coalition partners – the elites were seeking popular legitimacy for their plans to destroy Weimar democracy – did they unveil their visceral antisemitism.

once more and begin to implement it in a series of decrees and laws backed by stormtrooper violence against Nazism's opponents, above all on the left. By this time, the idea of a German empire had come to be dominated not by overseas colonies, which had been the concern only of small and impotent minority pressure groups during the Weimar years, but by the vision of a European empire, one that was built on the experiences of the First World War but went far beyond them.

Still, memory of Germany's overseas empire remained and was even revived by the Nazis. How far did the colonial experience influence the policy of extermination under Hitler? Baranowski addresses this central question in a subtle and balanced way, avoiding some of the excesses of the more vehement historical exponents of the continuity thesis but retaining some of its central elements even so. In the first half of 1933 the Nazis set up hundreds of concentration camps, into which they drove more than 100,000 of their political opponents, using them for forced labour and treating them as brutally that many hundreds died. But these bore little resemblance to the camps in which the Herero had been starved to death in Namibia, and in any case the idea of concentrating civilian populations in prison camps was by no means a German invention: it dated back at least as far as US campaigns against Native Americans in the 1830s.

The Nazis did see their camps as a kind of counter-insurgency tool, but their primary purpose was to intimidate and 're-educate' opponents of the regime, who were brutalised until they agreed not to mount any further resistance. Almost all the inmates had been released by 1934, by which time the task of repression had been turned over to the regular police, the courts and the state prison system. If there was a colonial precedent, then, as Baranowski remarks, it had been totally transformed and owed far more to the political polarisation of Europe after the Bolshevik Revolution – at roughly the same time, similar institutions emerged in the Soviet Union, owing nothing at all to colonial precedents.

There was no parallel in the Soviet Union, however, to the racial policies adopted by the Nazis. How much did the Nazis' imposition of 'racial hygiene', the laws against intermarriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews, and the forcible sterilisation of up to 400,000 'hereditarily inferior' Germans, owe to Germany's colonial experience? As Baranowski persuasively argues, they were striking precedents in the anti-miscegenation laws passed in pre-1914 Namibia, the segregationist response to colonial insurrection and the more extreme policies advocated by the Pan-Germans during the debates over the Citizenship Law of 1913. 'Imperialism,' she remarks, 'linked the two bourgeois phobias of socialism and racial mixing, in which workers were imagined much like "natives".' Germany's decolonisation in 1919 eliminated the previous distinction between colonial and domestic law and boosted fears of 'alien races' such as Jews and Gypsies polluting the German race at home. The concepts were the same; only the practice was radicalised.

There were personal continuities, too, in many different areas, including medicine, eugenics and racial anthropology – the anthropologist Eugen Fischer used his research on mixed-race groups in German South-West Africa before the First World War to argue against racial mixing during the Third Reich, when medical scientists who had trained in his institute, such as the Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele, played a major role in implementing eugenic policies. Yet in the end these continuities were less important than the discontinuities that Baranowski enumerates. Arguing persuasively against the trend of much recent historical opinion, she insists repeatedly on the centrality of terror and violence to the Nazi seizure and practice of power, which marked a crucial rupture with Weimar administration of welfare and policing. The crushing of the labour movement, the arrest or exile of Jewish and liberal public health and welfare officials, and, she might have added, the destruction of the free press and news media, removed the major obstacles to the deployment of eugenicist policies by the state, while the rapid growth of the racially obsessed SS under Himmler pushed on the centre

implementation of policies such as the mass sterilisation of the allegedly mentally ill and handicapped on a scale unrivalled in any other country. Uniquely, too, this policy, coupled with the exclusion of Jews from economic and social life on racial grounds, was designed to pave the way for a war of imperialist expansion in the east, and during the war itself was transformed into a campaign of mass murder in which 200,000 mentally ill and disabled Germans were killed by Nazi doctors.

The symbiosis of racial policy and war became even clearer from 1939 onwards. Building on recent scholarship, Baranowski shows in detail how the invasion of Poland was designed from the outset to destroy the Polish nation, executing Poles and Jews in scores of thousands, displacing them from their homes, expropriating their property or – in the case of the Poles – shipping them off to Germany as forced labour. The Germans all but eliminated any distinction between combatants and civilians, abandoning any attempt to follow the laws and conventions of war to which – with rare exceptions – they adhered in the west. SS and army troops alike regarded the Poles as savages, the Jews as a lower species of being. All this was repeated on a larger scale following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, reflecting not only prejudices against Slavs and ‘eastern Jews’ widespread even in the working class before 1914 but also the practices common among European conquerors of colonial territories since the Spanish invasion of the Americas in the sixteenth century.

Yet, as Baranowski points out, ‘the mass expulsion or killing of native populations’ in the colonial setting of the nineteenth century ‘often followed frontier conflicts on the ground between European settlers and indigenous peoples over land and resources’. Administrations in the imperial metropole often tried to restrain settlers greedy for land and labour, though they generally ended up tolerating and eventually endorsing their rapacity. Even the genocidal decision in the Namibian war was taken locally, by a military commander who brushed aside the reservations of the colonial governor and his superiors in Berlin, and colonial atrocities frequently aroused fierce criticism at home. The Nazis, by contrast, launched their war of racial subjugation and extermination in the east without the slightest provocation and in the absence of any doubts or criticisms, except on the part of a handful of conservative army officers. Moreover, throughout the war they coordinated and directed operations from the centre, acting on directions from Hitler himself. This is not to deny that there were disputes within the Nazi elite over the implementation of ethnic cleansing and annihilation. But the basic direction of policy was clear, culminating in the General Plan for the East, the extermination by starvation and disease of at least thirty million and possibly as many as forty-five million Slavs and the resettlement of most of Eastern Europe by German colonists. Here indeed, as Baranowski puts it, was the ‘Nazi place in the sun’.

German plans for Africa, revived in the 1930s as Hitler took up once more the demand for the return of former colonies, envisaged no such policy of genocide; rather, they differed little in essence from conventional European paradigms of colonial development. The ‘natives’ were to be separated out from European settler society, to be sure, but German administrators were to educate, feed and improve the health of indigenous Africans, developing the colonial economies to aid the supply of raw materials and foodstuffs for the metropole. This was partly because the Nazis did not see African countries as a major source of German settlement, but also because their inhabitants posed no threat of the kind they imagined was constituted by the Slavs and, above all, the Jews. The destruction of the Slavs and Jews was linked in Nazi policy to the purification of the German race itself, as it was not in the colonial situation. Indeed, SS units even roamed Eastern Europe in search of ‘racially valuable’ blond, blue-eyed children, kidnapping tens of thousands of them and arranging their adoption by German parents under new identities – a policy unthinkable in colonial Africa. Finally, Nazi policy in Eastern Europe was driven at least in part by the immediate imperatives of ensuring an adequate food

supply for Germany itself, whose agriculture was in no way able to feed the Reich and its armies. Once more, therefore, the Nazis radicalised earlier imperialist practices or departed from them in significant respects, rather than simply continuing them.

How can the Nazi extermination of the Jews be fitted into the colonial paradigm? Certainly, pre-war radical nationalists incorporated antisemitism into their vision of international relations as a Darwinian struggle for survival and supremacy between races. The policies of segregation, deportation and expropriation to which Germany's and then Europe's Jews were subjected all had their precedent in the colonies. But the deliberate scouring of a whole continent and potentially – as suggested by the minutes of the conference held at Wannsee to discuss the implementation of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe' – the entire surface of the globe for Jews to be carried off to assembly-line extermination in gas chambers or killing pits had no precedent.

Baranowski sensibly calls into question the arguments of some historians that the mass murders committed by German colonial administrators and military commanders before 1914 were not only comparable to the later Nazi genocide, but even created a genocidal mentality that led directly to the 'Final Solution'. As she points out, other European powers engaged in similar policies, all of which, including those of the Germans, were designed above all to destroy the economic independence of conquered populations and turn them into a docile labour force or, in areas deemed suitable, clear them out to make way for settlement. Something like this was what the Nazis planned in Eastern Europe, and at some points in the process Nazi administrators did use Jewish labour for the war economy as well, but in the long run this was, as they put it, just a slower form of 'annihilation through labour', *Vernichtung durch Arbeit*. While the General Plan for the East undoubtedly envisaged the genocidal elimination of tens of millions of Slavs, it was driven by ideological imperatives fundamentally different from those of the 'Final Solution', which designated the Jews as 'the world enemy', the *Weltfeind*, not a regional obstacle posed by savages but a world conspiracy mounted by a cunning and ruthless enemy designed to destroy the German nation entirely.

These arguments will be discussed and debated for a long time to come. Although Baranowski set out to write a textbook, she has produced something much more important: a skilful and carefully nuanced synthesis of some of the most productive ideas to have emerged in the debate about the origins of Nazism and Nazi extremism in the past few years. Reflecting current concerns, these focus not so much on how or why the Nazis came to power, as on what they did once they had achieved it, above all during the war. From this point of view, they are addressing a rather different set of questions from those posed by the old 'special path' thesis. Baranowski's book nonetheless puts these clearly on the map, debates their pros and cons with subtlety and sophistication, and should be read by anyone interested in the calamitous and ultimately exterminatory path taken by German history in the twentieth century.

### 3. THE DEFEAT OF 1918

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In November 1918, after more than four years in the trenches, Adolf Hitler was in hospital away from the front, temporarily blinded by a gas attack. As he was recovering, he was told of Germany's surrender and the overthrow of the Kaiser. 'Again,' he later wrote, 'everything went black before my eyes.' He went on:

And so it had all been in vain. In vain all the sacrifices and privations; in vain the hunger and thirst of months which were often endless; in vain the hours in which, with mortal fear clutching at our hearts, we nevertheless did our duty; and in vain the death of two million ... Was it for this that these boys of 17 sank into the earth of Flanders? Was this the meaning of the sacrifice which the German mother made to the fatherland when with sore heart she let her best-loved boys march off, never to see them again?

Like many others in Germany, Hitler struggled to find an explanation for Germany's apparent sudden collapse. How could it all have gone so wrong, so quickly?

Defeat was all the more puzzling since only a few months before, in spring 1918, victory seemed within the Kaiser's grasp. After years of stalemate, the war took a sudden turn in Germany's favour. Early in 1917 the Germans decided to wage unrestricted submarine warfare – attacking civilian vessels – and U-boats were sinking a monthly average of more than half a million tons of shipping bringing supplies to Britain. The Americans had entered the war as a result, but it was taking a long time for them to mobilise. Allied troops were war-weary, and widespread mutinies in the French army, involving up to 40,000 men, were a stark reminder of the fragility of morale. In October 1918 German reinforcements enabled the Austro-Hungarian army to win a major victory at Caporetto. 265,000 Italians surrendered and 400,000 fled in confusion, while the pursuing forces advanced fifty miles in just over two days.

Most important of all, the October Revolution and the disintegration of the tsarist army took Russia out of the war. This enabled the Germans to redeploy huge numbers of troops – their forces on the Western Front increased from 3.25 million to more than four million men by April 1918. Paul von Hindenburg, a stolid general who effectively replaced the Kaiser as the figurehead of the German war effort after being brought out of retirement to win spectacular victories on the Eastern Front early in the war, and Quartermaster-General Erich Ludendorff, the real driving force behind those victories, decided to capitalise on Germany's strong position by launching a final, overwhelming attack on the Allied armies in the west.

Operation Michael, as it was named, deployed new and highly effective artillery tactics: enemy guns and command posts were targeted before a 'creeping barrage' that moved ahead of the advancing infantry was laid down, forcing the defenders to stay under cover until the Germans were almost upon them. With a superiority of more than two to one in men and guns, the Germans launched their attack on 21 March, firing more than three million rounds in the first day. Allied command posts some thirty miles behind the front were badly hit, along with gun positions, in the largest artillery bombardment

of the war. As the German infantry swarmed over the Allied trenches, their advance concealed in number of places by thick fog, the British and French were forced back along a fifty-mile front. The losses on both sides were the heaviest of any single day in the war. On 9 April, a second major German attack further north was equally successful and was followed by an advance on Paris, creating panic in the city. In a relatively short space of time, the long stalemate on the Western Front had been broken. The Allied military leadership was traumatised, and by the end of June, Hindenburg and Ludendorff were celebrating a series of stunning victories. Yet little more than three months after that the German leaders were suing for peace. How did this happen?

A first explanation has to do with military intelligence. Both sides in 1914–18 used traditional methods: gathering intelligence from POWs and from captured documents and equipment, keeping a careful watch on the enemy front line and sending spies out to gather information behind it. They also employed aerial reconnaissance and intercepted telephone and, increasingly, radio messages, decrypting them if necessary. Though they had not anticipated the spring offensive, the Allies were well prepared for the final German attack on 15 July. But the Germans never established an effective espionage network behind Allied lines, could not decrypt Allied signals and easily fell prey to deceptions and feints.

Second, the war in the air was now being won by the Allies. It extended far beyond the front line. In 1916, anti-aircraft fire led the Germans to abandon Zeppelin raids on London, but they now developed large bombers such as the Gothas and, most remarkably, the Giant, a monster with a 130-foot wingspan which was so solidly built that none was ever shot down. These caused considerable damage in 1917, and forced up to a quarter of a million Londoners to take shelter in the Underground every night. In May 1918, forty-three German bombers attacked London; but this was their last major raid. The shortage of raw materials in Germany had become so serious that new planes could not be built in sufficient numbers, and those that were built were shoddily constructed and often broke down. By the summer the Allies were producing many more planes than the Germans: only eighteen of the costly Giants were ever built. Meanwhile, the British and French had begun to launch bombing raids on the Rhineland, though they were on too small a scale to be really effective, especially since the Germans organised effective countermeasures. In the last year of the war, the British dropped 665 tons of bombs, a high proportion of which missed their targets. The real importance of the air war was at the front, in Italy as well as France and Belgium. By mid-1918 the Allies' air superiority was preventing German reconnaissance planes from finding out very much about their preparations for attack, while they themselves were gaining accurate information about enemy dispositions.

There was also a shift in the balance of power where the gas war was concerned. Few of the statistics David Stevenson gives in *With Our Backs to the Wall* (London, 2011), his book about the conduct of the war in 1918, are as striking as those involving poison gas. The Germans released 52,000 tons of gas on the Western Front, twice as much as the French and three and a half times as much as the British, killing or wounding 300,000 soldiers with the loss of only 70,000 to gas attacks from the other side. In 1918, the Germans produced nearly twenty million gas shells: half or more of the shells fired in Operation Michael were chemical. By the late spring, however, the British had developed an effective gas mask, while their own new fast-acting Livens Projectors – a mortar-like weapon that launched large drums filled with chemicals – caused widespread fear among German troops, whose masks proved useless against them, and were in any case not being produced in sufficient numbers because of a shortage of rubber. The Allies were mass-manufacturing gas, and knowledge of this was one more factor in prompting the Germans to sue for peace.

By the summer of 1918 the Allies had also changed their offensive tactics, using artillery not

obliterate but to neutralise pinpointed enemy positions and cut barbed-wire entanglements, laying down a curtain of fire behind the front line to stop reinforcements and deploying mobile units to surprise and outflank enemy positions. By this time tanks were also being used in large numbers, but they could move only at walking pace and ran out of petrol after sixteen miles. Here the Germans were very far behind, failing to produce enough tanks till it was too late. Although tanks often broke down and could easily be destroyed by artillery fire, they caused panic among German troops; in 1918 Ludendorff gave the prospect of facing thousands of them as a major reason for having sought an armistice.

Economically, the Allies eventually proved stronger than the combined productive might of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and their allies Turkey and Bulgaria. The French produced huge quantities of armaments, supplying the American Expeditionary Force with most of what it needed, while the British could draw on the resources of the empire as well as on their own manufacturing base. It was the Americans, however, who had by far the largest economy, and US supplies of food, steel, munitions and equipment were crucial in keeping the Allies going in the final phase.

The best chance for the Germans lay in destroying American shipping in the Atlantic as it brought men and supplies to Europe. The British tried many methods of protecting shipping from U-boats, including arming merchant vessels or breaking up their outlines with geometrically patterned 'dazzle painting'. But the most effective by far was the convoy system: ships sailing in groups and accompanied by spotter-balloons and destroyers armed with depth charges were difficult to sink without incurring serious risk. U-boats in this period were not true submarines – they had no air supply and could remain below the surface only for quite short periods – and were relatively easy to spot and sink. In the end, there were simply not enough of them to win a decisive victory. Too many broke down or were damaged and had to limp back to port for repairs; nor were there enough trained personnel to man them. Plans for an enormous increase in construction came too late to make any difference.

The German government diverted as many resources as it could to arms and arms-related industries, neglecting agriculture and food supplies. The Allied blockade cut off essential agricultural imports, and by 1918 the death rate among women in Germany was nearly a quarter higher than its prewar level, with women weakened by poor nutrition succumbing to pneumonia and tuberculosis. Rations were below the minimum needed to survive, and a huge black market developed, while food riots led by women and children convulsed the major cities in the winter of 1915–16. The next winter, generally known in Germany as the 'turnip winter' because of the failure of the potato crop, was even worse. Malnourishment led to declining productivity in war-related industries. More than half a million German civilians are reckoned to have died from malnutrition and related diseases during the war.

Conditions were even worse in Austria-Hungary, where soldiers were not only weak from hunger when the Italians launched their final, successful attack in 1918, but arrived at the front in their underwear and had to take uniforms from the bodies of those killed in front of them. Bulgaria was in the worst situation of all, with mass starvation averted only by American grain deliveries after the armistice. It was this that caused Hitler to decide that conquest of Europe's 'bread basket' in Ukraine would be a central war aim for the Nazis. Germans did not starve in the Second World War as they had in the First: millions of Eastern Europeans were made to starve instead.

Malnutrition and disease affected the quality of new recruits in the final phase of the war. Hitler recalled that in August and September 1918, 'the reinforcements coming from home rapidly grew worse and worse, so that their arrival meant, not a reinforcement but a weakening of our fighting



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