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Fall 2000

## Policing the New Order: Nazi Genocide in a Postcolonial Context

November 1939, district Hohensalza in the newly created *Warthegau*: 433 policemen of the *Gendarmerie*, the rural police force of the Order Police (Orpo), had to maintain order in a hostile territory composed of 103,500 Poles, 10,000 Jews, and only 5,500 Germans. Jews and many Catholic Poles had to be “resettled,” to be replaced by ethnic Germans; the racial dominance of Germans over Slavs had to be enforced. Policing this colonial world was no easy task: it required the brutal activism for which German policemen became legendary in the occupied territories of the “East.”

The question that underlies my research is that of other historians of the Orpo, such as Christopher Browning, Edward Westermann, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus: why did the “ordinary men” do what they did, how did they cross the line to genocide? For the most part the debate has crystallized into one between ideology and situational, psychological, and behavioral factors. My approach attempts to transcend this dichotomy by casting the world of the “East” as a colonial world, the Nazi resettlement effort as a colonial project, and the Order Policemen as colonial policemen reminiscent of George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*. If the German attempt to reorder the “East” was a variation of colonialism, then it is a valid object for the insights of postcolonial theory and models of colonial policing.

Before models of colonial policing can be applied to the Order Police, it is necessary to prove that they operated in a colonial environment. My first task is to establish that German discourse vis-à-vis Poland and other Slavic territories was colonial and “Orientalizing.” When individual Germans encountered the “East,” they saw physical evidence of the superiority of German “discipline, orderliness, and cleanliness” over Slavic laziness, disorderliness, and filthiness. Such concrete knowledge of the Other enabled the colonizers to see the value of Germanizing “long lost” territory in Poland, and bring German order to the other areas. That the war of colonial conquest soon escalated into a war of national existence does not negate its roots in colonial discourse. Rather, it accentuated the need to don the racial “mask” in order to survive in a racially Manichaean world of Aryan overlords and Slavic *Untermenschen*. The methodology for this component of my project is to find and read letters “from the East” that have found their way into the Bundesarchiv, with postcolonial theory in mind, then to seek comparisons with prior and later discourse about the East.

From having a vague colonial mission to ruling a colonial territory is a long way, and that path begins with the collection and objectification of the knowledge needed to rule it. This process is not only necessary, but requires innovation. The creation of this scientific-colonial “discursive formation” is the work of cartographers, geographers, historians, anthropologists, and policemen. Crime in the colonial context must be defined before it can be policed. One effect was to legitimate and make socially acceptable the old stereotypes of the Others described above by

lending the imprimatur of science to that which was previously vulgar, especially anti-Semitism. Evidence of this process of colonial knowledge creation exists in the work of Götz Aly and Michael Burleigh, and helps to establish a bridge between the realms of discourse and reality. Although the production of colonial knowledge took place both within and outside of Berlin, a suitable base of documents emanating from the various resettlement agencies and institutes resides there.

Once the “East” is established as a colonial space inhabited by dangerous, alien Others, and the practical knowledge of ruling worked out from that, it is possible to focus specifically on the policemen. The modern police institution generates a distinctive subculture that, according to George Browder, also infused German police agencies. There is an inherent “Us” versus “Them” outlook that the colonial situation only exaggerates, so that a Manichaeian worldview would have to be invented if it did not already exist. Police situation reports and postwar testimony are excellent sources for police attitudes, particularly when approached from the postcolonial perspective. These are available between the Bundesarchiv, the Zentralstelle für Landesjustizverwaltung in Ludwigsburg, and the Main Commission for War Crimes in Warsaw.

My research plan is to spend February and March in Berlin doing exploratory work in the archives there, and honing my language skills. Then I will be prepared by August to come to Berlin for archival research during the 2000-2001 academic year. I have already contacted Dr. Götz Aly of the Free University in Berlin; he has expressed interest in my use of colonialism as it relates to the police. Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Benz of the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung at the Technical University in Berlin has also expressed interest, and has invited me to the Zentrum to continue my research. A DAAD scholarship would make it possible to carry out my research plan, and hopefully to make a contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust.