

**German Colonialism in West Africa:
Implications for German-West African
Partnership in Development**

Veranstalter: Bea Lundt, Universität Flensburg; in cooperation with Samuel Ntewusu Aniegye and Wazi Apoh, University of Ghana, Legon

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Bericht von: Jan-Bart Gewald, African Studies Centre, Leiden, Netherlands

An international conference that dealt explicitly with the long-term consequences of German colonial rule for developments in contemporary West Africa was held at the University of Education (UEW) Winneba/Ghana, Thursday 29 September to Saturday 1 October 2011. Approximately 50 people attended the conference, where participants from North America, Cameroon, Germany, Ghana, and Holland presented papers, drawn from a wide variety of disciplines ranging from history and politics, to archaeology and linguistics. The conference was organised by Bea Lundt, (Flensburg/UEW), in cooperation with Samuel Ntewusu Aniegye and Wazi Apoh (both Legon). The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as the University of Flensburg funded the conference.

In the last decade the long-term consequences of German colonial rule in Africa and the world as a whole have been becoming evermore apparent. Following on from the early work of historians like Horst Drechsler and Helmuth Bley in the early 1970s, a whole host of historians has sought to deal with the horrors of German colonial rule in the former German South West Africa (present day Namibia) in particular.¹ This work in southern Africa has recently culminated in the publication of David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen's,² a publication that has broken through to popular history and is currently to be found on sale in the airport departure lounges of airports around the globe, from Berlin to Cape Town, and from Amsterdam to New York. In a sense, the genocides perpetrated by the forces of Imperial Germany in Namibia have become mainstream, and General Lothar von Trotha's 'Vernichtungsbefehl' (extermination

order) a further uncontested example of humankind's seemingly limitless ability to inflict pain and suffering upon fellow humans. In short, Germany's imperial past in Namibia is now comparatively well known. In addition, a fair number of people may be aware of the fact that Imperial Germany had a colonial role to play in the history of contemporary Tanzania, Togo, and Cameroon. However, it remains the case that in contrast to Namibia, the history of German colonial involvement on the West African coast is still comparatively understudied.

Luis Gann and Duignan devoted a considerable amount of their time seeking to detail the intricacies and bureaucratic niceties of German colonial rule in Africa, yet in so doing they lost sight of the impact and consequences of German colonial rule for Africa and its inhabitants.³ In contrast, Ulrich van der Heyden has drawn attention to the long-standing relationship that exists between Germany - Prussia and Brandenburg in particular - and the West African coast, specifically contemporary Ghana and Togo.⁴ Fellow historian Peter Sebald has spent a lifetime of work detailing the history of German involvement in Togo. However, the fact that a substantial portion of contemporary Ghana was administered by Imperial Germany remains an unknown and unconsidered aspect of history. Similarly the fact that contemporary Cameroon is now split between an Anglophone and a Francophone sphere of administration is a long-term consequence of German colonial rule and generally not known.

The meeting was formally opened by a number of speakers in an opening session that was introduced and chaired by SAMUEL NTEWUSU ANIEGYE (Legon). Aniegye noted that there was a renewed interest in

¹ Horst Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884 – 1915)* (London 1980) & Bley, Helmut, *Namibia under German rule, 1894 – 1914* (London 1971)

² David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen's, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's forgotten genocide and the colonial roots of Nazism*, London 2010.

³ L.H. Gann, *The rulers of German Africa: 1884-1914*, Stanford 1977.

⁴ U. van der Heyden, *Rote Adler an Afrikas Küste: die brandenburgisch-preußische Kolonie Großfriedrichsburg in Westafrika*, 2. Aufl., Berlin 2001.

German colonial rule in Africa and drew attention to a similar conference organised and held in Tamale, Ghana in December 2010. ROBERT SOBOTTA, Director of the Goethe Institute in Accra, mentioned the long-standing links – since Ghanaian independence in 1957 – that existed between Germany and Ghana on a cultural level. Sobotta emphasized the role that the institute played in seeking to propagate the teaching of the German language to Ghanaian students, and to facilitate the possible study of these students at academic institutions in Germany.

MARIA TEKUELVE (Accra), Counsellor, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, represented the German Ambassador. Intriguingly, in her speech, Tekuelle suggested that Germany was lucky to have lost its colonies early in the 20th Century, as this made it easier for contemporary Germany to cooperate on a more equal basis with developing countries in the present. Indeed, the horrors perpetrated by British and French soldiers during Mau Mau and Algiers are still part of living memory. In contrast, the horrors perpetrated by German great grandfathers in German colonial Africa have largely passed from living memory. However, the mere fact that many German diplomats in the present may not be fully aware of the activities of German government representatives in Africa a century ago, need not exculpate German government representatives in the present. The activities of German colonial forces in West Africa may have passed from living memory, yet, as the conference clearly showed, they continue to exist in the songs and histories of people formerly subject to German colonial rule in West Africa.

ALEXANDRA NEHMER and HANNAH LAMPRECHT, two young students from Berlin, presented some results of their work. As participants of the ASA-programme during three months they were actively involved in tracing, collecting, and documenting the legacy of German colonial rule in Ghana. Through their activities, coordinated in conjunction with Wazi Apoh (Legon) they seek to raise the awareness of Germany's colonial past, when collecting and documenting colonial artefacts as well as oral histories. The most impressive of these artefacts are of

course the buildings originally erected by the Germans.

BEA LUNDT (Flensburg), the conference convenor, drew attention to the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, and noted that she drew deep inspiration from his work, particularly in his attempt to counter and reverse the usual flow of academic discourse, i.e. from the North to the South, the metropole to the periphery and so forth.⁵ It was with this in mind specifically that she had sought to organise the conference in Africa, with guests drawn from Africa.

The keynote address to the conference was provided by DIVINE AMENUNMEY, (Legon). He listed a whole series of as yet under-researched topics and questions relating to German colonial rule, yet unfortunately his presentation failed to deal in any way with the social or cultural consequences of German colonial rule. His speech focussed solely on the political history of Germany's presence in Africa. That the German colonial state has its direct descendents, in a manner of speaking, in the people currently living in West Africa who are the biological descendents of German men and African women, was a matter that was not touched upon by Amenumey. The focus on political history obscured the fact that, although German colonial rule may have ended, its legacy remained in the culture of the societies affected as well as in the veins of descendents.

Following a general introduction to German colonialism in West Africa by ISAAC BRAKO (Winneba), KOFI DARVLO, (Legon) presented a paper that looked at and contextualized the presence of German missionaries, traders, and officials in Eweland. Based on personal experience, Dordvlo presented a nuanced history in which the contributions of German linguists to the standardisation of the Ewe language were noted, as well as the fact that in the eyes of the local inhabitants, the children that had been redeemed from slavers by the missionaries, were considered to be the

⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton 2000) dt: *Europa als Provinz. Perspektiven postkolonialer Geschichtsschreibung*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2010; „Invitation to a Dialogue.“ *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and society*. Reprint. Vol.IV.Ed. Guha, Ranajit, New Delhi 2007.

slaves of the missionaries.

KODZO GAVUA (Legon) also showed that the introduction of Christianity and related activities to the area by agents of the North German Missionary Society was a key factor in the success of the short-lived German rule in the area. Christianity presented an alternative way of life, which fomented a breakdown in established social networks to the advantage of German administrators.

In contrast to many of the presentations, which dealt largely with the physical aspects and traces of German colonial rule, EDEM ADOTEY (Legon), dealt with the more ephemeral but equally lasting legacy of German rule, specifically in the construction and establishment of a pan-Ewe identity. Similar as Darvlo he argued that the unintended consequence of the German colonial project in Togoland was Ewe ethnic nationalism.

WALTER GAM NKWI (Buea/Cameroon), presented a paper about the attempts by British authorities to „de-Germanise“ those parts of western Cameroon that fell under British jurisdiction following World War One. Based on archival research Nkwi noted that the drive to rid Cameroon of its German legacy led to a loss of efficiency in the manner in which communication was conducted in western Cameroon. Thus, Nkwi quoted British officials lamenting the end of the *flag post mail relay runner system*, which had been established by the Germans and was capable of covering 100km in an hour as opposed to the British system that could only cover 25km in an hour. Nkwi noted that whereas Germany had tried to establish a unitary Cameroon, the British consciously sought to purge the western Cameroons of its German legacy, as well as ensure a separation from the remainder of French administered Cameroon. However, for all of its attempts at erasing all traces of Imperial Germany, the British administration never succeeded, even if only because all the buildings used by the British administration in Western Cameroon, were those that had been built and established by Imperial Germany.

Another aspect of Germany's continued colonial presence is to be found in the horticultural changes that the Germans sought to bring about in West Africa. In a intriguing

paper appropriately entitled „Eat Mangos, Plant Cotton and be Industrious“ CLETUS KWAKU MBOWURA (Legon) in seeking to reconstruct German colonial rule in the Nawuri area of Northern Ghana, spoke about the lasting legacy of German rule in the form of Mango and other trees planted prior to 1914. In the short discussion that followed, attention was drawn to the presence of avenues of trees planted by Germans in all of their administrative centres in what is now eastern Ghana. Clearly the inheritance of German colonial rule in the form of its horticultural legacy is an issue that needs to be, and clearly can be, fruitfully explored further.

Outstanding in terms of its research, presentation and detail was the joint paper presented by JONATHAN OTTO POHL and FELIX LONGI, both of Legon. They looked at the attempt by Imperial Germany to transform Togo into a major cotton producer, which it was hoped would make Germany less reliant on Indian and American cotton production. Although Germany was able to increase cotton production in Togo by a staggering 3.500 % between 1901 – 1909, it was not sufficient to lessen German dependence on cotton drawn from areas beyond Germany's control. Sadly absent though from the paper was an analysis of the manner in which Germany had been able to bring about this incredible increase in production.

Certainly the most visually entertaining and accessible presentation of the conference was that of Wazi Apoh, who introduced the archaeological search for traces of Germany's presence in what is today Kpando in eastern Ghana. In the 1890's Germany took control of the area and established an administrative centre, the remains of which formed the field-work site for Apoh. In collaboration with German ASA students and Ghanaian students, Apoh has successfully twinned his archaeological research results with the oral histories and relics collected by the students. Thus, whilst Apoh has sifted through the kitchen remains of a generation of German administrators, the students have located and documented material relics and oral histories that relate to these German administrators. As Apoh noted, when displaying photographic slides of kitchen mortars, it was in the kitchen

that the social boundary between white and black was broken down. As such the rubbish tip brought forth sawn meat bones which were clearly imported, and large amounts of indigenous palm nut kernels. In addition, a baobab planted next to the administrative buildings, still bore the scars of German target practice, the bullet casings of which were found in the excavation. Clearly the mix of archaeological and historical research as carried out by Apoh in eastern Ghana bears a lot of promise, and is certain to result in a series of fascinating publications.

Equally entertaining was the fascinating musical performance and presentation of ALHAJI SULEMANA ALHASSAN (Yendi). Whereas Apoh noted that the boundary between black and white was transcended in the kitchen, he could also have said that this boundary was broken, albeit surreptitiously in the bedroom. In December 2010, Alhaji, whose grandmother was married to a German, guided a group of academics to German descendants in Yendi as well as the battlefield at Adibo where German soldiers defeated Dagbon forces in 1896. As a traditional musician and fiddle player, Alhaji has collected numerous songs relating to the German period. As such he presented two songs before analysing them in terms of the history of Germany's presence.

The topic of SAMUEL NTEWUSU ANIEGYE (Legon) was the convoluted history of Kete and Krachi, two Guan towns that have fused and are now a single metropolis in the eastern region. In particular Aniegye detailed and sketched the origin and legacy of German presence in the area, as well as the existence of the Dente shrine. Central to this was the sacking of Salaga and the introduction of a German banking system in Kete-Krachi. A development that suited Hausa traders who transferred themselves and their households to German territory. At the same time the Dente shrine remained, and remains to this day, central to Kete-Krachi.

In the final paper JAN-BART GEWALD (Leiden), postulated that the consecutive series of outbreaks of extreme violence that have wracked north eastern Ghana at every election since 1966, may be directly related to the legacy of German colonial rule. He ar-

gues that the devastation of the established order, the deposition of established chiefs and the wholesale deportation of established populations by German military authorities between 1890 and 1914, in the areas of Togo that have now become part of Ghana, laid the seeds for the current tension that exists in the area. In the wake of the established order that was torn down by German colonial rule, chiefs were appointed by the German administration irrespective of ethnicity. These chiefs, who owed their allegiance to Germany, were deposed in 1919 following British occupation of part of Togoland in 1914. In their stead, Britain attempted to appoint chiefs whom they believed were legitimate. Following the imposition of indirect rule in the early 1920s this situation was compounded by the appointment of anthropologists who sought to provide the British colonial administrators with a manner of insight into centralised (thus allegedly more developed societies), and acephalous (thus allegedly less developed societies). It are these developments, in a political dispensation that ascribes an inordinate amount of power to chiefs, that have led to a never-ending series of claims and counter-claims that raise their head at every election since the fall of Nkrumah and with disastrous results.

The last day brought an excursion to Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle, where the group laid down funeral flowers in the slave dungeons. It is patently obvious that an analysis of the role of German colonial rule in West Africa has only just begun, and Bea Lundt and her fellow convenors are to be commended for having organised the conference, which clearly marks the beginning of what will be an ever-greater field of academic interest. Now that Ghana has successfully re-established its universities and rekindled the desire for knowledge, it is only a matter of time that Ghanaian students will be knocking on the doors of German archives, universities, museums, and libraries demanding to be let in to study and learn about their shared history with Germany.

Conference overview:

German Colonialism in West Africa. Implications for German-West African Partnership in

Development.

Opening Ceremony: Welcoming Statements/Introduction (Chair Dr. Ntewusu Aniegye)

a) Yaw Kwasigah (Dean of the Faculty of Social Science Education, UEW)

b) Maria Tekuelve (Counsellor German Embassy Accra)

c) Robert Sobotta (Director of the Goethe Institute Accra)

d) Alexandra Nehmer, Hannah Lamprecht (ASA-Programm, Berlin)

e) Bea Lundt, University of Flensburg/UEW (University Flensburg, visiting professor at the University of Education Winneba, Conference Convener)

Keynote Address by Divine Amenumey (Legon): German Colonialism in West Africa - an overview

Session 1: Construction of German Colonial Rule and Rooms

Chair: Kofi Darkwah (Department of Social Studies Education/University of Education, Winneba)/Bea Lundt (Flensburg/UEW)

Isaac Brako and Seth Peter Frempong (Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Education, Winneba): German Colonialism in West Africa: A Legacy of Mixed Results

Kofi Darvlo (Research Fellow Language Centre University of Ghana, Legon): The contribution of German Colonialism to the Development of Ghana and Togo

Cletus Kwaku Mbowura (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon): Eat Mangoes, sell Cotton and be Industrious: Reconstructing German Colonial Rule in the Nawuri Area of Northern Ghana, 1899 to 1914

Samuel Nana Abokyi (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon): Three Elephants in Anufoland: An Analysis of the Impact of German, British and French Presence in Anufoland

Session 2 : German Colonial Cognitive and Economic Legacies

Chair: Divine Amenumey (University of

Ghana, Legon)

Walter Gam Nkwi (Department of History, University of Buea, Cameroon): Colonial Hegemonies at Loggerheads: British De-Germanisation Policy in British Cameroons 1916-1961

Ntewusu Samuel Aniegye (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon): Kete-Krachi: A Socio-Religious and Economic History of a German Town In Ghana 1890 to 1994

Jonathan Otto Pohl (Visiting Scholar) and Felix Longi (History Department, University of Ghana, Legon): The Relative Failure of German Togoland as a Model Cotton Colony

Wazi Apoh (Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, University of Ghana Legon): An Archaeo-Historical Examination of German Colonial Relics at Kpando-Ghana. Repackaging Derelict Heritages for Sustainable Development

Session 3: Enduring Symbolic Systems and Actual Problems

Chair: Wazi Apoh (Legon)

Kodzo Gawua (Department of Archeology and Heritage Studies Legon): The Religious Factors in the Administration of German Togoland

Ahaji Sulemana Alhassan (Traditional Musician and District Administrator, Yendi, Northern Region, Ghana): Adebo Dalila: What of the Battle of Adibo? Interrogating German Rule in Dagbon

Edem Adotey (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon): The Paradox of Colonialism- The German Colonial Project. Pan-Ewe Identity and Consciousness 1884-1914

Flavius Mayo Mokake & Henry Kam Kah (Department of History, University of Buea, Cameroon): The Impact of German Colonial Policies on Public Health Initiatives in British Southern Cameroon 1884-1961

Jan-Bart Gewald (Institute for History and Humanities, University of Leiden Netherlands): Kaiser Chiefs: The Enduring Legacy and long term Consequences of German Colo-

nial Rule in North-Eastern Ghana

Excursion Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle

Tagungsbericht *German Colonialism in West Africa: Implications for German-West African Partnership in Development*. 29.09.2011–01.10.2011, Winneba/Ghana, in: H-Soz-Kult 24.11.2011.