

Willeke Sandler  
Assistant Professor of History  
Loyola University Maryland

### **Unofficial Empire: Germans between Germany and Tanganyika, 1925-1945**

In October 1933, the Retraining Workshop for Settlers and Emigrants (*Umschulungswerkstätte für Siedler und Auswanderer*, USA) in Bitterfeld, Germany celebrated its first anniversary. The USA newsletter, circulated to graduates living in East Africa, recorded the USA director's toast at the celebrations honoring the close ties between the "USA folks" at home and abroad. "Our ears rang," the newsletter's author remarked, "as he told us that at that moment surely the ears of our comrades over there in Africa must be ringing from all of the thoughts and all of the memories of lands and seas far away." Listening to the director speak, the newsletter's author continued, "we saw you comrades in Africa making your way to the meeting place by foot and by bicycle, yes even a few of you by automobile. Every one of you came alive for us, this one with his particular manner and that one with his particular path of life. It was at times as though we sat among you!" Germany had become a "post-colonial" nation through the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, but this reality did not prevent colonialists in the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich from fantasizing about a future reclaimed empire. From its founding in 1932, the *Umschulungswerkstätte für Siedler und Auswanderer* created concrete and contemporary connections between Germany and former German East Africa, now the British Mandate of Tanganyika.

This obstinate form of "colonialism without colonies" ignored, or rather restructured, both the reality of Germany's position in Africa as well as the Nazi regime's ambivalent attitude towards overseas colonialism. Institutions such as the USA, as well as the German Foreign Office in Berlin and the German Consulate in Nairobi, Kenya, colonialist groups such as the German Colonial Society and the Reich Colonial League, and Nazi organizations such as the Nazi Party's Foreign Organization actively fostered the settlement of Germans in this territory. In doing so, they helped to establish an unofficial German colony within Tanganyika.

The NEH Summer Stipend will enable me to conduct research in Berlin in the summer of 2018 as part of a book project that investigates the movement of Germans between Germany and its former

colony of German East Africa from the mid-1920s through the early 1940s. *Unofficial Empire: Germans between Germany and Tanganyika, 1925-1945* sits at the intersection of three fields of study: analyses of German overseas colonialism, the growing field of *Auslandsdeutschen* (Germans abroad), and the study of (re)settlement, empire, and expansionism under National Socialism. As such, it provides a new perspective from which to view the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich: that of Germans living in a former overseas German territory (which held contemporary irredentist value and was under the control of Germany's imperial competitor, Britain), who observed, commented on, were affected by, and participated in changes to German society from afar. As indicated by the title of this project, my focus will be on the linkages between Germany and Tanganyika in the interwar period, embodied through the movement of people (in either direction) and information (through press and correspondence), as well as the transplantation after 1933 of the social structures of the "new Germany" to Tanganyika.

By examining the movement of Germans between metropole and former colony during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, my project expands the existing scholarship on "post-colonial" Germany. Many of the studies on overseas colonialism in the Third Reich focus on the preparations and planning for a *future* German African empire. Others have raised questions of continuity between German colonialism overseas and the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe and the Holocaust. *Unofficial Empire* draws our attention to a different form of continuity, that of the German presence and colonial practice *in Africa*. While organizations and ministries such as the Nazi Party's Colonial Policy Office began to discuss what a future empire would look like, a number of Germans created and maintained a colonial presence in Africa in the present.

During the First World War and in its aftermath, many Germans were deported from the now former German colonies. The British Mandate authorities in Tanganyika restricted German immigration until 1925, when the Ex-Enemies Restrictions Ordinance lapsed and Germans were once again allowed to settle and own property in the Mandate. Between 1929 and 1933, an average of 250 Germans settled in Tanganyika a year (compared with an average of 298 British settlers), making them the second largest

European community after the British. By 1939, there were 2,729 Germans in Tanganyika compared to 2,100 Britons (outside of government officials). Tanganyika in the interwar period was a space of overlapping imperial claims, offering a window into Anglo-German imperial competition. The Germans who came to Tanganyika in this period were both returning and new colonists, and congregated in certain areas such as the southern highlands, creating German enclaves. Through this targeted settlement (which received some German governmental support), Germans sought to maintain influence in their former colony. As the German Consul in Nairobi wrote to the Reich Finance Minister in 1930, “if it is possible to transplant to Tanganyika a numerically strong and rooted German community, devoted to the *Heimat*, then in a manner of time we will be able to influence the administration of the territory in our favor.” Those who built this unofficial empire fostered hopes that it would one day become the basis of a reclaimed German colony.

While not imagined as a place of mass European settlement (by either the Germans or the British), Tanganyika was a potentially lucrative colony, with settlers cultivating coffee, tea, and pyrethrum (used as an insecticide). The state-supported nature of these German settlements (including the German Consulate in Nairobi’s active involvement in monitoring the status of these Germans) provide insights into the construction of this community and its relationship with the changing political regime back in Germany. By contrast with the former German colony of Southwest Africa, where the Nazi Party was outlawed in 1934, organizations of the Nazi Party continued to function in Tanganyika until at least 1939.

Recent studies of Germans abroad have focused in large part on communities in Eastern Europe, the United States, and Latin America. The case of Tanganyika in the interwar years allows us to explore the (re)creation of such a community within the context of a territory that had once been German. Were the Germans in Tanganyika *Auslandsdeutsche* (Germans abroad) or *Kolonialdeutsche* (colonial Germans), and what difference might this distinction make? The changed political context in the metropole after 1933 also undoubtedly affected how Germans in Germany thought about Germans in

Tanganyika, and vice versa. The Nazi Party's Foreign Organization sought to mobilize overseas German communities, but not, ostensibly, as fifth columnists. Did such an activity take a different hue in a territory of irredentist value?

In my previous research, I established colonialists' tenacity in keeping the memory of the former overseas empire alive in public culture in the Third Reich, and asserting the centrality of overseas colonialism to a German national identity. For most of the two million Germans who had joined the Reich Colonial League by 1941, however, the empire remained largely an abstraction, despite the volume of educational material produced by colonialists. They may have supported the German demand to reclaim these territories and absorbed colonialists' arguments about the national, cultural, and economic importance of colonies, but they did not intend to settle there themselves. In fact, the Nazi regime made clear that mass settlement in the former (and imagined future) overseas colonies was not an option. For the Germans I will study in this project, however, their colonizing identity was not only a rhetorical point, but a lived reality. They would continue Germany's colonizing work in Africa both for their nation and for their own hoped-for prosperity.

*Unofficial Empire* will have three sections tracing the social and cultural history of German settlement in Tanganyika. It will begin with an overview of the political and economic conditions facilitating or hindering German settlement in Tanganyika starting in the mid-1920s. I will examine British Mandate authorities' policies towards German settlers as well as interest and support for settlement schemes in Germany fielded by the German Colonial Society and the German Foreign Office. British discussions of "Closer Union" between the British colonies of Kenya and Uganda, and Tanganyika in the late 1920s added a sense of urgency to German efforts to retain a foothold in the territory. The change in government in 1933 will also be considered to determine when and if British and/or German authorities shifted policy on these matters.

In the second section, I will examine the social, cultural, emotional, and organizational ties that bound Germans together in Tanganyika, as well as back to Germans in the metropole. Central to this

analysis will be the case study of the *Umschulungswerkstätte für Siedler und Auswanderer* (USA), established in 1932 by the German chemical and pharmaceutical industry conglomerate IG-Farben to retrain unemployed industrial workers for lives as colonial settlers in Africa. Before the start of the Second World War, eighty-two members of the “USA family” had emigrated overseas, the majority to Tanganyika. While the USA was founded to address the economic concerns of unemployed Germans (as well as those of IG-Farben), it also served to maintain a connection between Germany and its former colony. Newsletters and correspondence also document the maintenance of close emotional ties between USA graduates who had settled in Tanganyika, their former colleagues, and the school in Bitterfeld.

German settlers in Tanganyika maintained a close connection with Germany, as did colonialist advocates in Germany with these settlers. Children were sent to and cared for in Germany for example, and, after the reinstatement of conscription in Nazi Germany in 1935, male settlers remained liable for military service. Economic support from settlement organizations, colonialist organizations, and the Foreign Office kept the German community afloat, as it sought to strengthen its presence vis-à-vis British and Indian settlers as well as the British Mandate administration. Simultaneously, Germans in Tanganyika navigated the increasing presence of the Nazi Party through the political and communal support (and requirements) from organizations such as the Nazi Party’s Foreign Organization, the Hitler Youth, and the German Labor Front. In the late 1930s, British discussions of settling German and Austrian Jewish refugees in Kenya and Tanganyika also drew German settlers and consular officials into the Nazi regime’s racial politics.

The maintenance of these ties back to Germany prompted British officials to intern and deport many of these Germans at the start of the Second World War, which I will discuss in the third section. These ties also aided settlers’ repatriation into Nazi Germany. As a final stage of these traveling Germans’ journey, I will also seek to follow the traces of a few former settlers, who, after being deported back to Germany, made their way to the new colonial territory of Nazi-occupied Poland. Here their colonial experience were seen as of value for Nazi Germanization plans.

I have already collected research materials from the German Federal Archives in Berlin, the Berlin State Library, and the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt, and from the records of the German Consulate in Nairobi held in the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office. With the support of the NEH Summer Research Grant, I will return to Berlin in the summer of 2018 to conduct further research in the Federal Archives. In particular, the collections of the Reich Finance Ministry will help me establish the sources of financial support for German settlers and investment in Tanganyika. Furthermore, the collections of the German Colonial Society and the Nazi Party's Foreign Organization will allow me to trace metropolitan support for settlement schemes, as well as reports on the status of the German community in Tanganyika. Finally, the German Labor Front clippings collections will provide information on discussions of these East African settlements, and settlers' internment and repatriation at the start of the Second World War in the German press. I will be on research leave in 2018-2019, during which I will begin to write *Unofficial Empire* based on these collected materials, and will also conduct additional research in the Colonial Office records in the National Archives in London and in the East African collections (in particular newspapers) held at Syracuse University.

*Unofficial Empire* will be of interest to scholars of German and British imperialism, as well as of Nazism and of German diasporas. A space of overlapping imperial claims, of German pasts and hoped-for futures, and of individual Germans' economic goals, Tanganyika in the interwar period offers a window into the continued importance of the African continent to the German nation and state.