

Introduction: African Studies and the Classification of Humanity

In June 1946, four South African scholars published a joint article that paid tribute to their intellectual mentor, Carl Meinhof. Meinhof was a German expert in African linguistics and former pastor, and he had died in February 1944. Communications from Germany had been interrupted during World War II, and news of Meinhof's death had just reached Africa's southern tip. His South African colleagues were very upset when they heard that he was dead, and their obituary praised him in effusive and at times almost maudlin terms. Anthropologist G. P. Lestrade commented that "in [Meinhof's] work as a teacher and guide of others interested in African languages and allied subjects, he gathered round him, both in his own school in Hamburg, and in places geographically far removed from that Mecca of the African linguist, an ever-growing band of pupils and collaborators, whom he inspired, stimulated, and in every way aided in the quest for knowledge of the African and his tongues."¹ Another of the essay's authors, Werner W. M. Eiselen—who would eventually become the first Secretary of Native Affairs under the apartheid government, and is sometimes referred to as the "intellectual architect" of that system²—added that, "with his splendid silver-white beard, prominent nose, and robust stature Meinhof cut an impressive figure. . . . He is no more, but his name and his work shall live on, also here in South Africa."³ The article's final two contributors, B. I. C. van Eeden and Walther Bourquin, were hardly less demonstrative, and all four agreed that Meinhof's contributions to the field of African linguistics in particular, and African studies in general, were practically unparalleled.

While Lestrade, Eiselen, van Eeden, and Bourquin saw Meinhof as a leader in the field of African linguistics and extolled his forays into anthropology, religious studies, and related disciplines, today Meinhof is not

well known outside of a few academic circles. This is unsurprising. Many of Meinhof's theories on language and ethnicity were uncompromisingly racist, including his contention that the lightest-skinned African "tribes" were usually the ones whose members spoke the most sophisticated languages,⁴ or his assertion that the more vowels a language had, the more primitive it was.⁵ Joseph Greenberg, an American expert in African languages who led postwar transformations in the field, chastised Meinhof for his racist ideas as early as the 1950s.⁶ Thereafter, Meinhof's importance to linguistics and African studies waned.⁷

The tale of Meinhof and his German colleagues, who shaped and founded the discipline of African language and culture studies—*Afrikanistik*—is nonetheless critical for understanding the history of racial thought in Germany and how that thought contributed to segregationist and apartheid ideology in South Africa.⁸ The particular strand of German race theory that Meinhof represented—and the one that became most influential in South Africa—was *culturally* or *linguistically* defined. Beginning in the nineteenth century, forms of that theory were propounded by Protestant missionaries and those who, like Meinhof, had close ties to the Protestant missionary establishment. In many ways, this cultural and linguistic racism was distinct from biological racism. The practitioners of biological racism assumed that certain physical traits were inherently superior to others, and that some of these physical characteristics were peculiar to specific human races. Consequently, some races were deemed naturally superior. But cultural and linguistic racism also played a significant role in drawing imaginary boundaries among peoples. Cultural and linguistic racism classified humanity according to grammatical, lexical, social, and religious criteria. Proponents of this kind of racism rejected the idea that members of different races were irrevocably distinct, and that those belonging to the "lesser" races would remain eternally inferior. Rather, they believed that the "civilization" and Christianity that Europeans brought to Africa and other parts of the colonized world might one day nullify racial differences. However, these differences would disappear very slowly, deferring the moment of racial equality so far into the future that no one alive in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries would ever witness it.

The argument that Africans could not attain equal status with whites unless they were first "civilized" legitimated European colonization.⁹ Further, while linguistic or cultural racism was different from its biological cousin, they also overlapped. Indeed, the similarities between cultural and biological racism grew increasingly apparent in the later nineteenth cen-

tury and only continued to multiply thereafter. Yet language always remained the central focus of the German missionaries, and it was primarily the German linguistic discourse that so intrigued South African scholars and policymakers. Moreover, the intellectual connection between Germany and South Africa did not start with Meinhof. Instead, its roots are located with figures such as the philologist W. H. I. Bleek or missionaries like Jakob Döhne, Karl Endemann, J. G. Krönlein, and Albert Kropf, who came to South Africa during the mid- to late nineteenth century and quickly busied themselves with learning, transcribing, and codifying African languages.

In the pages that follow, I trace the history of *Afrikanistik* from its pre-institutional beginnings on the mission field through its entrenchment in metropolitan academia during and after Germany's brief colonial period. Three specific strands weave their way through this history; they include the tale of the racialization of linguistics, the story of the professionalization of African studies, and lastly, at the end of the book, the account of how *Afrikanistik* influenced the thought of scholars and policymakers such as Eiselen and N. J. van Warmelo, who themselves contributed to segregationist and ultimately apartheid philosophy. Missionaries remain front and center throughout, since they initiated the discourse on African languages and their relationship to culture, ethnicity, and race, and continued to shape the discipline even after Germany lost its colonies during World War I. Although the missionaries active earlier in the nineteenth century were not associated with a specific national tradition or empire, once Germany had developed into a colonial power they, too, became imperial agents. When missionaries began to work alongside colonial officials, African language studies, which had served missionary aims, were reconstituted to suit German colonial objectives. This shift was anxiety provoking, because previously missionaries had identified themselves in terms of religion, not nationality. Once the colonial moment arrived, there was fierce debate over whether missionary loyalty lay with universal Christendom or Germany. Ultimately, most missionaries moved toward affiliation with German imperialism and away from ecumenism.¹⁰ Both the racialization and professionalization of African studies progressed quickly in this framework, meaning that as the discipline developed, it also nationalized.

The racialization and professionalization of African studies also went hand in hand with an increasing objectification of Africa. Meinhof was consumed with producing a linguistic and ethnological map of Africa. He believed that such a map would allow him to identify the origins and sub-

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sequent movements of every African group or “tribe.” The project would help clarify the murky ethnic situation in Africa and make the continent’s myriad cultures more accessible to German colonists who knew little if anything about Africa before heading there. Meinhof’s linguistic map would organize the complex jumble of African peoples into a neat classificatory hierarchy that was largely made up of three distinct language families: the Hamitic, the Bantu, and the Sudanic/Nigritic. There were some subcategories—including Nilotic and “Bushman”—but for the most part, these three were the overarching categories with which Meinhof worked. In this way, Africa became a clearly defined, rationalized object of study that could be easily broken down, digested, and then controlled through European knowledge. This linguistic map never went uncontested, however; prior to Meinhof’s rise as the dominant figure in African studies at the end of the nineteenth century, other scholars, including Bleek, Richard Lepsius, A. W. Schleicher, and Robert Hartmann, were working out their own Africanist maps, which varied considerably from each other’s as well as from Meinhof’s. Further, even after Meinhof was established as a fixture in Africanist circles, his ideas were constantly challenged, both by outside observers such as Austrian linguist Ferdinand Hestermann and by his own students, including van Warmelo.¹¹

The compartmentalization and “mapping” of Africa undertaken by Meinhof and his colleagues constituted a form of Saidian Orientalism or Mudimbean alterity.¹² German scholars imagined that Africans spoke and acted in a certain manner and were unlikely to deviate from a specific set of behaviors. The Africa of their imagination did not correlate with what they encountered on the ground, but that was of little consequence; colonizers steadfastly believed in the exotic, primitive Africa of their invention. European images of Africa—German or otherwise—also had clearly destructive repercussions, since white colonists encouraged ethnic separatism where it had sometimes not previously existed, with dramatic and horrific results not only in South Africa but in many other African nations, for example, Rwanda and Burundi.¹³

African studies in general—and the study of African languages in particular—thus became critical to the German colonial project, since their knowledge allowed a seemingly chaotic linguistic picture to resolve itself into a neatly ordered map. Gauri Viswanathan has written that the academic field of English in Great Britain first emerged in the colonial context of the Raj, and that “no serious account of its growth and development can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civiliz-

ing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways.”¹⁴ It is almost a truism to say that the same was so for *Afrikanistik*. Yet with *Afrikanistik*, it was not the language of the colonizer but of the colonized that was being put to use in the service of imperialism. Missionaries, lay scholars, and colonial officials all wanted to use African languages to extend European power.

German images of Africans and their languages were not, however, especially stable; they shifted over time, as biological race grew increasingly important to linguistic description.¹⁵ Further, individual opinions on the colonies and how Germans could best relate with their inhabitants varied widely. Missionaries, professionally trained scholars, and government functionaries did not always share the same vision of Africa. If we are trying to define *Afrikanistik* as an Orientalist discourse, this difference of vision becomes problematic. Thomas Trautmann has argued that the concept of Orientalism as characterized by Edward Said was “badly underspecified.”¹⁶ Saidian Orientalism was too expansive, incorporating a wide range of Western cultural products, from art to literature to philology.¹⁷ It was an all-encompassing system of knowledge, absorbing all European views on the Orient into one monolithic image of the Other. By contrast, the nineteenth-century concept of Orientalism was narrow and primarily philological, based on the close reading and interpretation of texts. When philologists became involved with colonial policy, they often came into conflict with political officials who had opposing beliefs about how best to implement colonial control. Philological and political forms of Orientalism were different and cannot be lumped together under the same totalizing label.

Trautmann’s work concerned India and pinpointed a tension between British philologists and colonial officials. Africanist scholars and government officials in Germany had similarly differing ideas about what constituted practical colonial knowledge and often disagreed over how that knowledge should be dispersed. Academics sought “deep” understanding of African natives through close analysis of oral texts. Conversely, civil servants wanted simple, straightforward communication that required little comprehension of their African subjects. Even though they were supposedly moving toward the same goal, that of efficient and productive colonization, linguists like Meinhof continually quarreled with administrative personnel over how to get there.

The South African case was different, since many of Meinhof’s stu-

dents worked directly for their country's government. Meinhof's student N. J. van Warmelo was government ethnologist, as was Lestrade. After Eiselen acquired his degree in Hamburg, he left academe entirely and spent his life in politics, working under leaders like Hendrik Verwoerd.¹⁸ Their work contributed more to policy than Meinhof's; nonetheless, the general disconnect between scholars and bureaucrats appears in various contexts and constitutes another theme that will thread its way through this book.

The discourse of *Afrikanistik* was not, moreover, the exclusive domain of white missionaries, bureaucrats, and academics. Rather, it was the product of a colonial encounter between Germans and Africans. Without African collaboration Germans could not have carried out their linguistic inquiries. They relied on native middlemen—interpreters and translators—for information on all aspects of African life. While most Africans were not credited for their work and remain anonymous, others appear by name in German texts on African languages or represented themselves personally in published articles or letters with German correspondents. In general, colonial societies were defined by their hybridity,¹⁹ and the case of *Afrikanistik* shows that the German colonies were not exceptions, nor was the German metropole. *Afrikanistik* was not merely the product of European dominance and African submission but of an interplay between two or more cultures. The science emerged among German missionaries and African informants on the mission field and traveled back to the German metropolises of Berlin and Hamburg, where it was taught by both Germans and Africans. Then finally, the knowledge that *Afrikanistik* had produced was carried once again to Africa with those who had studied it.

***Afrikanistik*, Protestant Missionaries, and (German) Colonialism**

Germany was not unified until 1871 and did not acquire its overseas empire in Africa and the Pacific until the 1880s. That empire—never large in comparison to the holdings of England or France—collapsed bit by bit over the course of World War I. Given the short duration of German colonialism and its seemingly marginal position with respect to other eras in German history, scholars have only recently begun to realize how profoundly that brief colonial interlude affected the country. Over the last two decades or so, this realization has led to a marked upswing in research and writing on German encounters with the non-Western world. This spate of publi-

cations has confirmed that while Germany's colonial heyday was short, the country's formal colonial experiences had a significant impact on its twentieth-century history.²⁰ Colonial enthusiasm well predated the acquisition of empire, too, as Susanne Zantop's seminal study on German colonial fantasies in the pre-1871 era attests. Germans were fascinated by colonialism even in the absence of physical empire. They yearned for overseas possessions long before unification or the "Scramble for Africa" of the 1880s, and developed a strong belief that they were the "ideal" European colonizers, who would treat their imaginary subjects with a benevolence that none of the "real" European colonizers—the Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch, French, or English—ever had.²¹

Colonial dreams of the kind Zantop pinpointed were deeply bound to German national identity. Images of Germanness were constructed alongside of and in association with images of non-Western Others. Carefully crafted knowledge of the Oriental or African Other was as important to modern Germans as it was for their English or French counterparts. Yet in a glaring oversight, Said did not consider German scholarship in *Orientalism* because Germany had no formal Oriental empire. Kaushik Bagchi and others have provided a powerful corrective to Said in suggesting that Germans were in fact crucial to Orientalist scholarship; they generated authoritative statements about the Middle East, India, and the rest of the world that informed the texture of the German imagination.²² Orientalist thought was not constrained by the political situation but transcended the presence of tangible links to the non-West.²³ "The set of attitudes" that went along with the growth of European hegemony, which included the idea of the unchanging Other, were as pervasive in Germany as they were elsewhere.

Nineteenth-century Germans were perhaps even *more* preoccupied with the Orient than their neighbors with a political stake in the region. The turn of that century was a time of foment across Europe, as Napoleon destroyed the preexisting social and political order and imposed his own framework in its stead. In 1806 Franz II, the last Holy Roman Emperor, abdicated his throne and dissolved the empire, which had encompassed most German-speaking lands. The German territory that came under Napoleon's purview was reorganized into the Federation of the Rhine. By the time of Napoleon's defeat and the convening of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the question of what sort of political structure would surface in central Europe was open. What did emerge was a loose German Confederation, which did not come close to satisfying those Germans who

longed for the creation of a truly unified German nation. In the absence of a political nation, some sought a linguistic or cultural alternative through the study of comparative philology. They hoped that by uncovering the roots of the German people, they would also uncover a cohesive German identity. Philologists turned in various directions during their search, including eastward—to Asia and the “Orient”—looking for Germanic origins. Indeed, Tuska Benes has noted that the Orientalist Heinrich Julius von Klaproth coined the term *indogermanisch* with specific reference to a language group that could be traced back to central Asia.²⁴

The passionate quest for origins among groups such as those found in the Caucasus bears further witness to the depth of German engagement with the wider world, and it connects, too, with arguments about colonialism. Both Benes and George S. Williamson have explicated the intensity of German forays into research on India and central Asia, which philologists hoped would, in addition to helping unearth German origins, shed light on such trenchant issues as the essential character of the Bible and Christianity.²⁵ The quest for Germany’s—and humanity’s—beginnings led as well to fierce debates about the concept of race and how the different “races” stood with regard to each other. Scholars like Blumenbach, Kant, Herder, and Hegel were endlessly involved with questions on human nature and the unity of mankind. Kant, for instance, argued vehemently against the suppression, enslavement, or colonization of “inferior” peoples on the grounds that they deserved equal rights, and that Europe disgraced itself and negated its moral superiority when it denied those self-same rights.²⁶

Asia was often considered a wellspring of European civilization in philological discourse, if a contested one. Africa, however, remained a dark, savage wasteland: It was civilization’s antithesis. While Kant’s views were generally anticolonial, he was deeply ambivalent about Africans and their abilities.²⁷ Hegel dismissed Africans by arguing that the climate in which they lived was not conducive to history or higher forms of culture.²⁸ The eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century search for German national, linguistic, and religious origins may have led many places, but it did not extend to Africa. Even so, Africa would later become as entwined with the quest for origins as Asia. Wilhelm Bleek, renowned for his studies of South African languages and folklore, argued as early as the 1860s that “Bushman” and “Hottentot” mentalities were similar to those of ancient Europeans.²⁹ Later, Meinhof and his contemporaries echoed Bleek in their belief that the African present reflected Europe’s primordial state.³⁰ Germans had not emerged from Africa, but that did not mean they were discon-

nected from it; Africa was not a place to seek one's roots directly, but it did mirror them and provided a key to unlocking human prehistory. Moreover, even if Germans were not directly descended from Africans, they could still trace links among African languages and their Indogermanic cousins. Meinhof, for example, posited a relationship between the Hamitic and Indo-European language groups.³¹

Colonial fantasies inspired philosophy and literature, and encouraged scholars to ponder what a German version of colonialism might look like.³² Academics and intellectuals were not, however, the only ones interested in Africa, Asia, or the Americas; the potential relevance of overseas territories to German well-being impinged on more practical debates about issues such as immigration and the "boundaries" of Germanness, as Bradley Naranch has pointed out.³³ Yet in the precolonial era—and even into the colonial age—few Germans actually journeyed to Africa. Missionaries, among them the earliest Africanist philologists, therefore belonged to the minority for whom colonialism was concrete reality, not just idle fantasy. Todd Kontje has argued that in the nineteenth century the British made the Orient or broader non-West into a career, while for Germans it was still largely just an idea; this may have been true for most, but it was not so for missionaries.³⁴ Along with explorers, scientists, mercenaries, and sundry travelers, missionaries journeyed beyond the familiar many years before the establishment of the German Empire.³⁵ German and Danish missionaries dominated English organizations such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Church Missionary Society, which were founded at the turn of the eighteenth and turn of the nineteenth centuries, respectively.³⁶ Germans were heavily invested in the British and Foreign Bible Society³⁷ and were represented in the London Missionary Society.³⁸ Further, missionaries brought Africa home to Germany through festivals designed to encourage local interest in their work abroad and pamphlets concerning their progress in the field.³⁹

H. Glenn Penny has contended that ethnologists in imperial Germany were less interested in using their discipline to support national colonial aims than they were in crafting museum displays that would telegraph an expansive, humanist understanding of world history to much more local audiences.⁴⁰ Missionary involvement in colonialism did not automatically equal longing for German imperium either, if for different reasons. For most of the nineteenth century German-speaking missionaries worked in non-German empires in places like Georgetown (Freetown), Sierra Leone, with the permission of their foreign—usually English—hosts. They were

members of English missionary societies and labored in the field beside their English colleagues. Instead of imagining themselves as part of a nation with fixed political boundaries, these missionaries identified with a transnational Protestant community that especially included Britons.⁴¹ When they compiled their grammars and dictionaries, they did so in English, and for a mainly English-speaking audience and market.⁴² African language studies emerged in this expressly international context, and missionaries conducted their research in the service of an ecumenical church rather than a national institution. This is a significant point, one that suggests that nationalism was not as crucial to the emergence of African studies in Germany as it was for the birth of Orientalism. It also complicates the idea that colonialism as practiced by Germans was necessarily and always “German” colonialism; while German-born and German-speaking missionaries were certainly supportive of colonial expansion, in this early phase it was—perhaps ironically—mainly British imperialism that they were buttressing.⁴³

Through their connections with foreign missionaries, as well as with their congregations in Africa, missionary linguists became enmeshed in global networks of exchange and communication. This “globalization” was critical in shaping their perceptions of colonialism, which, prior to the late nineteenth century, was for them a Protestant, Western enterprise, not a German one. Globalization in the nineteenth century was generally connected to the spread of industrialization, which allowed people to travel much more quickly over greater distances than ever before, enabling the rapid transfer of goods on an international market, as well as of technologies.⁴⁴ Improvements in the medical field further allowed for the penetration of areas that were previously deadly to Europeans, since they lacked immunity to tropical diseases. Missionaries were constantly advancing further inland as the possibilities to settle more widely grew, and their movements away from the coast coincided roughly with the rise of Germany’s own empire.

The process of globalization did not, however, lead to the acceptance of universality in Germany after its unification in 1871. On the contrary, the limits of the nation grew ever more sharply defined. Sebastian Conrad has argued that globalization created an exclusionary German national identity that manifested itself in discussions on topics such as passport controls and sanitary regulations. Questions about how to maintain an orderly industrial society sounded very similar whether the subject being addressed was African workers in German East Africa or their German

counterparts in Westphalia; discourses on how to encourage work among “lazy” individuals varied little. At the same time, new understandings of space and territoriality defined African and German workers differently, with the latter being able to participate as members of the German nation, whereas the former were explicitly left out.⁴⁵ Marcia Klotz has likewise demonstrated that global encounters were critical to German identity; such encounters encouraged dualistic thinking, as Germans divided the world into two halves—one occupied by superior Westerners, the other by primitives whose land was ripe for colonization. As the world grew closer and contact between cultures more common, identity came to be constructed in binary fashion that took “civilized” and “savage” peoples as its two poles.⁴⁶ In Klotz’s interpretation as well as Conrad’s, German nationalism did not so much predate globalization as it was forged by it.

Once Germany had assumed colonial control over territories in Africa, China, and the Pacific, debates on “Germanness” and who belonged to the nation certainly increased in metropole and colony alike, as well as beyond. German South West Africa is a case in point. In the metropole, organizations such as the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* defined the parameters of the ideal German colony that would emerge in the South West, one built on agrarian German values and infused with a specifically German morality.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, as Birthe Kundrus, Daniel Walther, and Robbie Aitken have shown, German settlers in the colony strictly policed the borders of what they called *Deutschtum*, deciding who would and would not belong in the new German community they were constructing, one that was beset with problems of miscegenation.⁴⁸ Moreover, the issue of defining who did and did not belong to this broadly conceptualized “Germany,” whose boundaries stretched wherever there was German settlement, was not limited to the overseas colonies; the position of Germans living in Poland, Russia, and elsewhere in the “East” were also central to debates on national identity.⁴⁹

The march of globalization and simultaneous sharpening of German national identity complicated missionary objectives, as from the late nineteenth century missionaries were increasingly pressed to reexamine their loyalties. Figures such as Friedrich Fabri and Carl Büttner called the ecumenical, evangelical project into question when they argued for a closer connection between Germany’s Protestant missionaries and the newly emergent German Empire. Fabri was a longtime director of the Rhenish Missionary Society, which was centered in Barmen. In 1879 he wrote the influential tract “Does Germany Need Colonies?,” a question that he an-

swered with an emphatic yes. Fabri believed, along with members of pressure groups such as the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*, that with the nation's exploding population came a responsibility to find new opportunities for German settlement abroad. Fabri's pamphlet did not change the missionary stance on ecumenicalism overnight, and indeed the relationship between mission and nation was passionately debated for decades.⁵⁰

Missionary attitudes toward nationalism were changing around the same time that another development, in the realm of racial thought, was occurring. Pascal Grosse has contended that idea of racial hierarchy that was so central to Nazi Germany first emerged in the colonial and immediately precolonial periods. Eugenicians—those who practiced “race” science—became absorbed in colonial debates that reflected a distinct revision of earlier, liberal principles. The concept of meritocracy governing liberal beliefs in how the state should be structured in a post-Enlightenment world was mediated by a biologism that stressed the importance of racial descent to individual and societal success.⁵¹ Moreover, Andrew Zimmerman has shown that the imperial period was one of transition from a humanistic perspective on society to one that was biologically driven. The “antihumanism” of anthropology, which had a broad appeal across Germany, rejected older ideas of linguistic nationhood in favor of an ethnic identity grounded in biological characteristics.⁵²

New theories about racial order had a direct impact on missionary discourse about Africans. That this was so is discernible not only in their discussions on language but in missionary reactions to and confusion over the question of *Rassenmischung*. Kathrin Roller and Ursula Trüper have shown that marriages between German missionaries and native women were accepted in the early nineteenth century. For instance, Johan Hinrich Schmelten, a German member of the London Missionary Society, was married to a Nama woman named Zara, and they became patriarch and matriarch of a sizable clan.⁵³ As the century progressed, general acceptance of relationships such as that of the Schmelens declined among Germans, and those who were “half-caste” or *Mischlinge* were shunned.⁵⁴ By the early twentieth century the colonial government in South West Africa had reclassified two of Schmelten's descendants—who were once considered white—as natives.⁵⁵

Whatever their claims to belief in a universal humanity that could be united in Christendom, missionaries were not immune to overarching political and intellectual trends, and by the early twentieth century were severely conflicted about the issue of race. In 1909, at the twelfth annual con-

ference for German-speaking Protestant missionaries in Bremen, participants debated the mission's position on the "race question." They upheld the belief that mankind was essentially one—as opposed to the polygenists of the previous century, who had assumed that each race had a different origin⁵⁶—but also agreed that the various races embodied their own peculiar qualities, and that at present they were both separate and unequal. P. Hausleiter, who gave the keynote address, argued that what separated the "Indogermanic" race from the other two major races, the "Mongolian" and the "African," was its monotheism. Religion and culture were still the main determinants of racial difference, not biology or genetics. Nonetheless, even as missionaries emphasized cultural divides, the language they used could recall that of biological race; at the same conference in Bremen, even missionaries who agreed that they would not forbid "mixed" marriages and hoped that the "Neger" (Negro) would become a brother in Christ were revolted by the idea that he might also become a "Schwager" (in-law).⁵⁷

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, and for much of the pre-colonial era, German-speaking, Protestant missionaries did not see themselves as envoys of Germandom but, instead, as soldiers for an international Christianity. By the end of the same century and for the start of the next they worked alongside government officials and saw their efforts as contributing to an explicitly German colonialism. Along the way they created a distinct discourse on the interplay among language, culture, and race, which was influenced by linguistic nationalism but never defined by it. Protestant missionaries also represent a category of colonial agents and knowledge producers whom English-speaking scholars of German imperialism have not yet sufficiently addressed.⁵⁸ This book serves as a corrective by reintegrating the missionaries into the history of German colonialism and demonstrating how vital they were to the development and maintenance of empire, both German and otherwise.

South African Concerns

The German Protestant missionary debate on race was a vexed one. It was complicated by a conflicting desire to convert Africans and simultaneously keep them at arm's length. Moreover, missionary concerns about miscegenation were echoed in the German articles and books on African languages, which expressed ambivalence not about *Rassenmischung* per se but

rather about the fixity of linguistic/racial groups and which peoples belonged in various, European-constructed, categories. However, whether it was confused or not, German missionary rhetoric on language and culture proved extremely appealing in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Africa. German ideas concerning racial separation, both in theory and practice, resonated in a country where questions of human classification took on more immediacy, as African and European populations were coming into increasing contact with each other, and whites, especially Afrikaners, began to fear for their national survival.⁵⁹

During the early twentieth century, when *Rassenmischung* was being debated in the German senate,⁶⁰ and the imaginary lines that German academics and missionaries were drawing among groups were growing ever more rigid, South Africa was going through its own state of flux. The South African (Anglo-Boer) War had ended in 1902. Thereafter the victorious British and defeated Afrikaners had worked together toward reconciliation, hoping to achieve a unified white-run government in South Africa that would deny all political participation to blacks. After the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which at least in theory solidified bonds between the British and Afrikaners,⁶¹ government officials began to draft laws that would legally segregate Africans from whites. The Natives Land Act of 1913 expressly forbid African ownership of land outside of specially designated reserves, while the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 extended segregation in cities. Both aimed at forcibly separating blacks from whites.

Meinhof dreamt of using his linguistic classificatory models to shape policy in the German colonies, dictating how various linguistic groups were to be treated based on a series of cultural traits that were supposedly associated with each language family;⁶² yet evidence suggests that on the whole scholarly theories never were applied in Germany's territories, which were in any event lost during World War I.⁶³ Reserves of the kind that came to exist in South Africa did appear in German South West Africa following the Herero War of 1904–7, but they were not carved up based on academic information supplied by metropolitan scholars but were instead parceled out according to the loyalty that certain groups had displayed to the Germans.⁶⁴

In South Africa, however, the white interest in defining and categorizing Africans continued well beyond World War I. Industrialization and labor migration had changed population dynamics, as increasing numbers of blacks move from countryside to city. Whites sought to regulate black

traffic, while also ensuring that a large labor pool remained for the mines and other industrial complexes. The Afrikaner scholars who journeyed to Germany or demonstrated interest in German linguistic theories on Africa were intrigued with them precisely because the German methodology for determining group origins offered a solution to the question of where each “tribe” had geographically emerged, and thus where it “belonged.” Van Warmelo, a Meinhof student and South Africa’s government ethnologist from 1930 to 1969, discussed the problem of African displacement as one of the most significant facing the country in his 1935 *Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa*.⁶⁵ That book, which was used as a template for South Africa’s homeland system under apartheid,⁶⁶ drew on the classificatory models that Meinhof and his colleagues had proposed. Like Meinhof, van Warmelo argued that the Bantu living in South Africa had experienced too much upheaval to confirm each group’s primordial location, but he nonetheless proceeded to approximate the boundaries of the areas in which each lived.⁶⁷

German arguments may also have proved compelling because there were already so many intellectual ties between Germany and South Africa. In the early nineteenth century, members of the Berlin Missionary Society established stations in the Transvaal and elsewhere,⁶⁸ and began to proselytize among people such as the Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, and Sotho.⁶⁹ Other German missionary societies, such as the Hermannsburgers and Moravians, also settled in South Africa.⁷⁰ The Rhenish Missionary Society was mainly in South West Africa, not South Africa proper, but some of its missionaries moved to South Africa instead of returning to Germany after their retirements.⁷¹ Some of the German missionaries were active linguists, including Kropf, Döhne, and Endemann from Berlin, and F. W. Kolbe and Carl Hugo Hahn from Wuppertal;⁷² others were relatives of individuals who would later become scholars and administrators for the South African government, such as Gustav Eiselen, father of Werner Eiselen. These missionary societies embodied the paternalistic attitude toward Africans that was so prevalent in linguistic discourse, since they believed in eventual equality for the races but did not think it existed in the present.

In addition to the missionaries, one other nineteenth-century German traveler to South Africa had a strong and lasting impact on all of the linguists who followed him, both German and South African. This was Bleek, who was among the first European scholars to write a dissertation on African languages. Bleek coined the term *Bantu* to describe that language family, and he also presented an early version of the Hamitic theory

later espoused by Meinhof and his contemporaries. Bleek was best known, however, as the librarian for Cape governor Sir George Grey, and he ultimately immigrated to South Africa, where he settled. Bleek was not a missionary and in this sense does not fit into the general pattern laid out in this book. Nonetheless, his position in the field of African studies was so vital that he needs to be discussed in any study of the subject. Moreover, he was linked not only to South African scientific circles but German ones as well through his cousin, zoologist and race theorist Ernst Haeckel; Bleek therefore personifies the strong connection that existed between intellectual communities in the two countries.⁷³

The German–South African association did not end with the nineteenth century, as the examples of van Warmelo and Eiselen show. Scholars from both regions were also united by a continuing fealty to diachronic theories of anthropology even after the British, for instance, had turned to synchronic explanations for cultural phenomena.⁷⁴ Indeed, South African *volkekunde*, which was predominantly practiced by Afrikaners and not those of English descent, bore a strong resemblance to German *Völkerkunde*.⁷⁵ Both suggested that cultural characteristics were diffused among far-flung societies over a period of time, instead of developing independently in different areas. A particular type of spear might manifest itself across cultures, and adherents of *volkekunde* or *Völkerkunde* would imagine that its origins lay with one society but that it had been transmitted to or borrowed by others. British social anthropology as represented by figures such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, by contrast, looked within a society itself to determine how cultural traits had emerged. In Germany, diffusionism was represented by what was known as the *Kulturkreis* school, whose most prominent members included museum workers Bernhard Ankermann and Fritz Graebner, the priest Wilhelm Schmidt, and the adventurer-collector Leo Frobenius. Carl Meinhof and his linguist colleagues were not technically part of the *Kulturkreis* school. Yet Meinhof's belief that languages spread as populations moved was extremely similar to diffusionism, and demonstrates that he and his South African colleagues were drawn to *Kulturkreis* philosophy.

The German racial theories that van Warmelo, Eiselen, and their colleagues espoused cannot be directly equated with the biological, eugenic understanding of race most commonly associated with the Nazis. Instead, like Meinhof their ideology was much more in line with the linguistic and cultural racism of the missionaries. While there were definite connections between Nazism and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa,⁷⁶ the intellec-

tual origins of apartheid and preapartheid thought were exceptionally diverse.⁷⁷ Eiselen's insistence on separate development and the potential of Africans to reach the same civilizational pinnacle as whites, but in their own culturally unique way,⁷⁸ echoed that of Meinhof and missionary linguists such as Diedrich Westermann. Although Eiselen, in his capacity as secretary for Native Affairs in Verwoerd's government, was the Meinhof student most strongly tied to the apartheid regime and its brutal practices, he viewed race through a cultural lens, not a biological one. This is a significant point, since it draws attention to the general disjuncture between Nazi and missionary racism. Biological or eugenic and cultural hypotheses on race could and did overlap, as chapter 4 will demonstrate. Nonetheless, Africanists drew mainly on cultural and linguistic terms in their writings and were often ambivalent toward overtly physical descriptions of their subjects. Linguistic racism shared ideas with its biological counterpart but was not the same.

Organization of the Book

Many missionary or missionary-linked linguists were caught between the pragmatic and the academic, since they started to research African languages for the practical purpose of evangelization but found themselves increasingly drawn to studies of human origins and interrelationships among far-flung peoples. The first chapter of the book examines these missionary linguists in the earliest, practical stage, before academic questions or problems with a colonial government became as much a matter for concern. It focuses on the missionaries' pietist heritage and how it influenced their work in Africa. I argue that the missionaries who became linguists at this stage were also universalists, ones who were not actively involved with political upheavals in Germany or nationalist struggles. Instead, they identified themselves primarily with the church and its members, irrelevant of whether they were German-speaking or not. Racism was certainly not absent from the dialogues of missionaries before German unification in 1871 and German colonization in the 1880s, but there were few efforts to codify difference or express German patriotism. This chapter also looks at some of the early German missionaries in southern Africa, as well as at Wilhelm Bleek, the linguist who became Cape Colony governor Sir George Grey's librarian and who coined the terms *Bantu* and *Hamitic* to describe African language families.

The second chapter, by contrast, focuses on the missionary shift from embracing universalism to eschewing it in favor of nationalism. It covers what happened when Germany became a colonial power in Africa and the amateur discipline of African studies moved from the mission field to metropolises like Berlin and Hamburg. In the late 1880s African language studies were institutionalized at Berlin's Seminar for Oriental Languages, where courses on Africa and its peoples were instituted for the first time in "newly colonial" Germany. The mission connection remained; Carl Büttner, the former Rhenish society missionary in South and South West Africa, was the first African language instructor at the seminar, where he also taught courses in "The Geography and Ethnography of Central Africa, with a special emphasis on German Colonial History."⁷⁹ Büttner is an enigmatic and transitional figure in the history of African studies, a new kind of missionary whose loyalty to the German state was unwavering. Büttner could neither stand his life in the mission field nor tolerate the Africans to whom he preached,⁸⁰ and he ultimately left the mission and began to work for the German government. He assisted them in procuring South West Africa as a colony. Throughout his brief colonial career—which ended with his early death in 1892—Büttner always kept up his language studies and was a major champion of the nationalization of both the mission and its African language research. He blended his practical and theoretical responsibilities quite efficiently and seemingly without effort, not seeing any conflicts of interest between the two. This chapter charts Büttner's involvement with the colonial cause, as well as the foundation and early growth of the seminar to which he belonged.

While Büttner did briefly struggle to make the importance of African languages known to the German colonial establishment,⁸¹ his protégé, Carl Meinhof, became much more caught up in the practical-theoretical bind. Meinhof, who posited himself as a champion of both Protestant missionaries and German nationalism, is the third chapter's subject. In some ways the mission did embrace Meinhof's theories about African languages and cultures, but it also resisted his ideas and held him at arm's length. For instance, Meinhof's suggestion that students of African languages acquire comprehensive training not only in individual languages but also in the basic grammatical and morphological structures of the Bantu language family met with mixed results. Discussing whether Meinhof's research might have a positive influence on "native" African morality, Barmen mission inspector A. W. Schreiber disdainfully noted that to expect this was tantamount to belief that "the German people would receive similarly salutary

benefits from German studies.”⁸² Moreover, other missionaries told Meinhof that while they admired his scholarship, they could not commit themselves to sending him students once he began to teach out of his rural Pomeranian parsonage.⁸³

Because he was the most important early twentieth-century scholar of African studies, Meinhof continues to figure prominently in the chapters that follow. The fourth chapter is about his relationship with Felix von Luschan, their formulation of the Hamitic hypothesis, and their tendency to conflate physical with linguistic traits when classifying African peoples.

In the fifth chapter, I examine the channels through which linguistic and other ideas about Africa were transmitted to those who pursued “colonial” studies in Hamburg or had occasion to read about them in the journals published there. Specifically, the chapter addresses the establishment of a phonetics laboratory to supplement the classroom learning of African languages. The laboratory was significant because it highlighted the fact that African studies was now also considered a physical science, and that the sounds Africans made were deemed more significant than their cultures or societies. The antihumanist conception of a society where physical differences trumped cultural concerns exerted a considerable impact on African linguistics,⁸⁴ though older beliefs in the value of culture and civilization never disappeared.

The seminar and the laboratory later added to it were instrumental in shaping Africanist discourse in early twentieth-century Germany and were conduits for disseminating the theories that Meinhof and his colleagues had proposed. Germans founded and maintained these institutions, leaving the impression that it was only Germans who had a role in molding *Afrikanistik*. However, nothing could be further from the truth, and in chapter 6 I look at the non-Germans who contributed to disciplinary formation, specifically the African lecturers and teaching assistants who worked in the classrooms of Berlin and Hamburg. From the institutionalized beginnings of the Seminar for Oriental Languages, “native” speakers were indispensable to the language-learning process. In 1908, Berlin seminar director Sachau recalled that at its inception in 1887, the goal was to have “teaching [that was] organized around joint instruction by a German scholar and one or more indigenous *Lektoren* [lecturers].”⁸⁵ The idea was that only native speakers would possess the capability to instruct others in the proper accent and mode of expression for their languages. Yet these native speakers were not parrots; some, such as the Togolese Victor Toso, became actively involved in discussions on the grammar and morphology of

African languages. More important is the fact that African assistants both rebelled against and complied with the images of their languages and people that the Germans presented. The *Lektoren* therefore both subverted and confirmed European notions of race; they questioned their placement in racial hierarchies but also, in some instances, reasserted those same positions for personal political or economic gain.

In the seventh chapter, the focus is on the relationship between the German Africanists and their South African colleagues in the post-World War I era. When Germany was stripped of its colonies, Africanists felt stripped of their purpose. There no longer seemed to be practical reasons for their studies. Some, especially Westermann, did continue with their practical functions in the service of mission societies and educational institutions in other European countries, but many Africanists and missionaries felt cheated by the allies and were more reluctant to collaborate with them. Ultimately, some turned to the Nazis, since they believed that Hitler was interested in returning Germany to its formal colonial glory. From the start South Africans were, however, considered different, and a sense of camaraderie developed between Afrikaners and Germans. Indeed, the German discourse on Africa was co-opted and extended in South Africa. While Africanist work continued apace in Germany throughout the interwar years and World War II, much of this chapter will still concentrate on the evolving relationship between Germans and South Africans, and how German missionary ideas of “race” and language may have been put to practical effect in South Africa in the years leading up to apartheid and beyond.

The book concludes with a look at what has happened to *Afrikanistik* since World War II and reconsiders its legacy in both Germany and South Africa. Africanist concerns were not of immediate interest to Germans, but in South Africa increasing emphasis was placed on ethnic separation. In Germany, African language studies were largely confined to the university, although they were surely pertinent to the humanitarian workers who followed in the colonialists’ wake.⁸⁶ Those same studies took on urgency in South Africa, where white anxieties led to a fanatic desire to police the borders between races. The German Africanists were certainly not the only contributors to the apartheid discourse of the postwar era. However, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Africanist missionaries and scholars did feed the discussion on language and race that factored into its production.