

‘WE DO IT SO THAT WE WILL BE MEN’:
MASCULINITY POLITICS IN COLONIAL
NAMIBIA, 1915–49*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines struggles for masculinity among Herero elders, South African colonial administrators, and the *Otruppa*, a Herero youth society that appropriated a German military aesthetic, in Namibia between 1915 and 1949. As previous scholars have argued, masculinities are mutually constituted through competitions for authority, though dominance is rarely achieved. Such contestations were integral to processes of Herero societal reconstruction following German rule and during South African colonial state formation, beginning in 1915. Different generational experiences of colonial violence and the destruction of the material resources that undergirded elders’ authority led to conflicts between elders and youths over how to define Herero masculinity and negotiate authority in a rapidly changing colonial milieu.

KEY WORDS: Namibia, southern Africa, clothes, colonial administration, generational conflict, masculinity.

WHEN South African colonial administrators first arrived in South West Africa (SWA, now Namibia) after defeating their German enemies in 1915, they immediately noticed young Herero men wearing German-style military uniforms. Over the next three decades, these troops, *Otruppa* in Otjiherero, became the subject of protracted debates regarding Herero manhood and society as well as the nature of South African colonial governance. Examination of *Otruppa* masculinity illustrates how different experiences of German and South African colonialism influenced and precipitated generational struggles to renegotiate Herero masculinity in a period of considerable upheaval and uncertainty.

In 1915, Herero society was recovering from the Herero–German war of 1904, the genocide that followed, and harsh land, livestock, and labor policies enacted thereafter. Between 1904 and 1907, 50–80 per cent of the Herero people died of malnutrition, disease, exposure, and forced labor as a direct result of imprisonment in German concentration camps. Contemporaries described these events as ‘extermination’.¹ In the immediate aftermath,

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¹ Although the use of the term ‘genocide’ to refer to these events is contentious and only came into common use in the late 1970s (and thus is applied retrospectively), I find it appropriate for the German policies implemented between 1904 and 1907. See D. Olusoga and C. Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London, 2010); J.-B. Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890–1923* (Athens, OH, 1999); H. Bley, *Namibia under German Rule* (Hamburg, 1996); I. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of*

German policies denied Herero the right to own land and significant numbers of livestock, and forced them to work for German settlers. These policies resulted in poverty, extreme hardship, and further demographic decline. Dispossessed of land, cattle, and people – the tools of patriarchy – Herero elders found themselves emasculated and disempowered.

The war and its aftermath also loosened many Herero youths' ties to existing social and familial networks. In seeking to reestablish support systems in this chaotic atmosphere, young men discovered new opportunities to escape elders' control and claim autonomy. To achieve these dual objectives, Herero youths, many of whom were drawn into the German military establishment both before and after the war, formed the *Otruppa*. These troops appropriated German military aesthetics and blended them with precolonial Herero ideals of masculinity. The *Otruppa* was a new iteration of Herero masculinity in which youths aimed to rearticulate their position in society and evade elders' control. The troops' use of German military apparel and aesthetics challenged Herero elders who were desperately attempting to reestablish their authority in a rapidly changing colonial order.

Herero debates over masculinity shaped patterns of social reconstruction and, after 1915, became entangled with the establishment of a South African colonial state. Both Herero elders and the *Otruppa* sought to exploit this new regime to (re)gain power within Herero society. South African administrators, eager to show up their German predecessors and further their own careers, attempted to manipulate Herero generational strife over masculinity but became embroiled in it themselves. South African officials and Herero elders relied on one another to control the troops. Together, they devised a discourse of 'childishness' to allay anxiety regarding the troops and justify their authority over the organization. As elders and state officials colluded to rein in Herero youth and abolish the troops, *Otruppa* opposition intensified. Their resistance threatened South African colonial rule and official visions of proper masculinity.

Exploration of the politics of masculinity in colonial Namibia reveals a shifting web of tenuous alliances and relationships among the *Otruppa*, Herero elders, and South African administrators between 1915 and 1950. Attending to masculinity sheds new light on colonial politics, exposes divisions and alliances masked by persistent race and gender binaries, and foregrounds previously occluded motives and prejudices. Fraught and intense debates over masculinity shaped Herero social reconstruction and South African native affairs policies, and contributed to the *Otruppa's* transformation into icons of Herero history and manhood.

SITUATING THE POLITICS OF MASCULINITY IN COLONIAL NAMIBIA

Studies of masculinity have an increasing presence within historical scholarship. Most are heavily indebted to the work of the Australian sociologist R. W. Connell and his highly influential concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'.

War in Imperial Germany (Ithaca, NY, 2005). For debates surrounding the use of the term genocide, see B. Lau, 'Uncertain certainties', *Mibagus*, 2 (1989), 4–5; T. Dederling, 'The German–Herero war of 1904: revisionism of genocide or imaginary historiography?' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19:1 (1993), 80–8.

Connell argues that one form of masculinity becomes dominant or hegemonic when institutional power and prevailing cultural ideals converge.² Scholars of the British empire, in particular, have engaged Connell's concept to consider history, masculinity, and colonialism. For example, a landmark study in this vein, Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali'*, compares colonial discourses on indigenous effeminacy with the contemporary metropolitan emergence of the threatening figures of the homosexual and the new woman.³

Studies of masculinity have likewise flourished within African historiography. However, Africanists have tended to highlight the limits of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity for making sense of the colonial period. As Robert Morrell argues, men in colonial and postcolonial Africa simultaneously traversed and inhabited a number of different, sometimes conflicting, societal roles in which they negotiated 'rival understandings of what being a man should involve'.⁴ Similarly, Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher have argued that 'it was not always obvious which notions of masculinity were dominant, or hegemonic, since understandings of gender depended on the specific context and different actors' "subject positions".⁵ These observations encourage exploration of how different ideas of gender and masculinity, embedded in cultural discourses and local politics, interacted and competed. Focusing on men's relationships with other men illustrates both the conflict and interconnections between various masculinities in colonial Africa.

In addition to illuminating the multiplicity of masculinities, scholarship on southern Africa has revealed important differences from discourses of masculinity existing elsewhere in the empire, most notably India. Although part of the British Commonwealth, South African colonial culture in Namibia was unique. In addition to geographic contiguity, the complicated ethnic politics of white southern Africa precluded the formation of a unified white colonial masculinity despite a prevalent general belief in white superiority to blacks. South African colonial ideologies developed from English, Dutch, and German colonial legacies and were comprised of a dangerous mixture of racial constructs such as *Baaskap* (white supremacy) and black peril scares that encompassed tendencies towards liberal paternalism, on the one hand, and sexual anxiety, violent repression, and poorly disguised slavery, on the other. Consequently, southern African colonial masculinities produced an image of African men as savage, oversexed, and childlike rather than effeminate.⁶ This exoticizing and juvenilizing imagery was intimately bound up with that of feminization through a paternalist discourse. Colonial

² R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, 1995).

³ M. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1995).

⁴ R. Morrell, *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (New York, 2001), 7.

⁵ L. Lindsay and S. Miescher (eds.), *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (Portsmouth, NH, 2003), 6; L. Ouzgane and R. Morrell (eds.), *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (New York, 2005).

⁶ J. McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902–1935* (Bloomington, 2000); J. McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and 'the African Mind'* (New York, 1995); J. Carothers, *The African Mind in Health and Disease* (New York, 1953).

racial ideologies and gender discourses in southern Africa were strongly inflected by an emphasis on paternalism. In Namibia, generational tensions among Herero men intersected with officials' paternalist views and made manhood a subject of colonial debate and policy.

Within Namibian scholarship, the *Otruppa* have been a popular topic. Studies fall into two major, overlapping categories: those focused on the 1904 Herero–German War and subsequent genocide, and those that examine the creation of Herero national identity. Scholarship on the war and genocide has considered the troops' appropriation of German military motifs by connecting them to *Truppenbambusen*, Herero boys and youths who served as batmen in the German military either voluntarily or under duress.⁷ However, these studies have not considered how exposure to the German military and its ideals of military masculinity affected *Truppenbambusen* gender socialization and identities. Nor has this scholarship considered in much detail the impact of severe dislocation on Herero ideals of manhood and Herero chiefs' and elders' masculinities.

Other scholars have examined the emergence of similar groups elsewhere in colonial Africa, especially noting their links to national identity formation. In the early twentieth century, the Beni and Kalela societies in East Africa and on the Copperbelt appropriated aspects of European military culture in order to protest against colonial rule and to commemorate violent histories.⁸ Terence Ranger's *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa*, in particular, emphasizes the centrality of such movements to nationalism, resistance, and societal regeneration. While Ranger and others note the preponderance of male youths within these organizations, they do not investigate how gendered experiences of colonialism shaped the masculinities they expressed. Likewise, previous studies of the *Otruppa* portray the organization as a fundamentally nationalist group aimed at resisting the state. Assuming nationalism as a point of origin, however, obscures the gendered political dynamics through which these societies *became* nationalist symbols.

Other scholars of Namibia have conscientiously attended to gender issues and pioneered masculinity studies in African history. Patricia Hayes's investigations of governmental masculinities based on studies of the native

⁷ Herero youths participated in the German military from its inception in colonial Namibia, sometimes voluntarily or under orders from chiefs. G. Krüger and D. Henrichsen, "'We have been captives long enough. We want to be free': land, uniforms, and politics in the history of the Herero in the interwar period", in P. Hayes, J. Silvester, M. Wallace, and W. Hartmann (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility and Containment, 1915–46* (Athens, OH, 1998), 149–74; W. Werner, 'Playing soldiers: the Truppenspieler movement among the Herero of Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16:3 (1990), 476–502; P. Prein, 'Guns and top hats: African resistance in German South West Africa, 1907–1915', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20:1(1994), 99–121.

⁸ T. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890–1970: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley, 1975); J. C. Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships Among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester, 1956). For other studies of mimetic organizations, see P. Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa* (New York, 1995); M. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, 1993); H. Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', *October*, 28 (1984), 125–33; P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY, 1986).

commissioner 'Cocky' Hahn and Meredith McKittrick's exploration of generation and masculinity provide considerable insights into the dynamics of masculinity in colonial Ovamboland.⁹ In spite of this scholarship and the popularity of the *Otruppa* as historical subjects, research into *Otruppa* masculinity has not been undertaken. Instead, previous studies of the *Otruppa* have consciously focused on locating women within the troops and casting them as participants in Herero nationalism. These perspectives mask the troops' masculine objectives and culture, their antagonistic relationships with elders, and the gendered dimension of their opposition to the state. Examining *Otruppa* masculinity reveals the troops' overarching concerns of achieving autonomy and authority in Herero society as men.

The troops' aesthetics and politics shaped relationships with Herero elders and government servants who were concerned with protecting and propagating their own visions of proper masculinity. Exploring these politics illuminates how such organizations developed into expressions of nationalism and resistance. Attention to the politics of masculinity illustrates Cynthia Enloe's argument that nationalism emerges from 'masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope'.¹⁰ The *Otruppa* focused on reshaping Herero masculinity in their pursuit of increased status and power within both Herero and colonial society. Nationalist sentiments were a corollary consideration. For the *Otruppa*, masculinity, resistance, and nationalism entailed mutually constitutive politics.

Documentary sources concerning the history of the *Otruppa* are almost exclusively limited to official correspondence. Although composed by government officials, these sources contain numerous affidavits from troop members, verbatim transcripts of meetings with chiefs and advisory boards, and a few *Otruppa* circulars intercepted by the government. Internal government memos reveal administrators' candid opinions regarding Herero elders and their personal fears concerning the troops. When juxtaposed with meeting minutes, letters from elders, and *Otruppa* personal statements, these materials bring a web of ambivalent relationships to light. They also clarify administrators' efforts to reinforce their own masculine power through native affairs policies.

These materials illustrate two spikes in government concerns over the *Otruppa*: the early years of the South African administration, from 1915 to the early 1920s, marked by fears of a Herero uprising; and the late 1930s and early 1940s, when rumors circulated of troop involvement with Nazis. In the interim period of the late 1920s, and for the bulk of the 1930s, the South African administrators felt themselves comfortably ensconced and

⁹ P. Hayes, 'Cocky' Hahn and the 'Black Venus': the making of a native commissioner in South West Africa, 1915-46', *Gender & History*, 8:3 (1996), 364-92; M. McKittrick, 'Forsaking their fathers? Colonialism, Christianity, and coming of age in Ovamboland, northern Namibia', in Lindsay and Miescher, *Men and Masculinities*, 33-51. See also G. Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewußtsein* (Göttingen, 1999); G. Krüger, "'The men should marry": koloniale Herrschaft, Geschlechterkonflikte, und gesellschaftliche Rekonstruktion im Waterberg Reservat, Namibia', *Werkstatt Geschichte*, 14:5 (1986), 22-36; M. Wallace, "'A person is never angry for nothing": women, VD, and Windhoek', in Hayes et al., *Namibia*, 77-94.

¹⁰ C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, 1990), 44.

worked towards incorporation of South West Africa as a fifth province of South Africa. However, although government fears of *Otruppa* uprisings remained moderate during much of the interwar period, tensions between the troops and Herero elders reached their apex in 1935 with the Windhoek advisory board election. Following the Second World War, the *Otruppa* provoked less administrative concern and generational friction. This was largely due to troop leaders' own ageing and inclusion in location advisory boards and the chiefs' council, a transformation for which South African administrators congratulated themselves. Officials closed their file on the *Otruppa* around 1950, a few years after the Windhoek location superintendent Octavius George Bowker's triumphant statement that one 'no longer hears of *Truppenspieler*s and non-*Truppenspieler*s'.¹¹

OTRUPPA ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATION

Otruppa masculinity reflects a combination of precolonial Herero ideals and German military aesthetics and organization. At the time of the German arrival in the 1880s, Herero masculinity was based on a man's ability to control cattle and clients, on his age, and on his lineage.¹² Hereros generally lived within pastoral clans in which gender and generation comprised the main fault-lines of power.¹³ Clan chiefs used their large herds of cattle to attract younger male clients through a system of patronage based on livestock lending. Cattle were also essential to ancestor veneration. By controlling cattle as both a material and a ritual resource, chiefs had access to cosmological power that reinforced their authority over clients. In turn, youths strove to become men by amassing their own herds and dependents by attaching themselves to patrons. Generational tensions frequently characterized these patron-client relationships as ambitious youths, eager to establish themselves as men, challenged elders' authority.¹⁴ The establishment of colonial rule thus exacerbated rather than created gender and generational antagonism.

By destroying people and cattle, German rule leveled the field for men who survived. It deprived elders of their means of dominance while creating new opportunities for juniors to gain manhood. In the wake of this devastation, Hereros latched on to both pre-war and European institutions to rebuild their lives. Jan-Bart Gewald, for instance, has illustrated how Hereros engaged Christianity to forge new identities.¹⁵ Like the church, the military was an institution that Hereros used to remake their social and cultural lives. By appropriating European organizations and reviving older customs such as tooth extraction and circumcision, people marked themselves as Herero and demarcated the Herero nation's boundaries in the absence of land, clients, and cattle.

¹¹ National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek (NAN), SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner SWA Police', 10 Feb. 1946.

¹² NAN, KSW 2/21, 'SWA Commission: Okahandja: examination of Dr Heinrich Vedder', 31 Aug. 1935, 1230-6; H. Vedder, 'The Herero', in C. H. L. Hahn, L. Fourie, and H. Vedder (eds.), *The Native Tribes of South West Africa* (London, 1966), 157-64; National Archives of South Africa (NASA), BAO 5/449/F54/1996/2, 'Erfopfolging - Huis van Tjamuaha/Maherero - Kommentar', c.1970.

¹³ Vedder, 'The Herero'.

¹⁴ Prein, 'Guns and top hats', 99-121.

¹⁵ Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 193-204.

Although the origins of the *Otruppa* are not entirely clear, the influence of German military apparel and aesthetics is unmistakable. Historians speculate that the troops first formed among former *Truppenbambusen* (valets and batmen) around 1908. The military's prominence in German colonial culture may have encouraged other Herero youths to emulate the soldiers. From the time of the German military's arrival, Herero men had consistently been involved either by choice or under the orders of their chiefs. During the Herero–German war and its aftermath, the army impressed Herero youths as *Truppenbambusen*. Gewalt estimates that, by 1915, a thousand Herero men and boys were directly involved with the German military. By the time of the transition to South African rule in 1915, boys impressed as *Truppenbambusen* at the start of hostilities in 1904 had spent roughly a decade within that establishment, a tenure that certainly affected their gender socialization and identities.¹⁶

The *Otruppa* organization and activities were clearly based on those of the German military. Troop members adopted the names of prominent German soldiers and organized themselves into military ranks. Affidavits from members collected shortly after the South African occupation suggest that the *Otruppa* started very shortly after the war began, with members such as Gustaf (aka Major Muller) alleging 'that he has been a major since 1905'.¹⁷ Troop members advanced in rank over time, such as Fritz Kasutu, known as *Schmetterling von Preussen* ('Butterfly of Prussia'), who told South African authorities that 'he has been adjutant since 1915 succeeding another native [...] who was promoted'.¹⁸ The ranks of the troops corresponded to those of the German military and ranged from private (*Gefreiter*) to field marshal (*Feldmarschall*). The increased status and influence that troop members gained as they were promoted was similar to older and, by then, defunct precolonial hierarchies among Herero men.

The *Otruppa* served a variety of important functions for its members. Like the Beni societies in east Africa, the troops were akin to a veterans' association. They recreated familiar military orderliness in a time of chaos in which no one's place was certain, and provided mutual aid and a social network. These homosocial aspects were essential for youths who had become detached from their families and livelihoods.¹⁹ Secondly, the troops provided a new way to become a Herero man now that initiation ceremonies controlled by elder men no longer existed. As one member succinctly explained, 'We do it so that we will be men'.²⁰ Members increased their status and influence over subordinates by advancing in rank. By drawing on an aesthetic and organization markedly different from that of their elders, the troops created an alternative structure that operated intentionally beyond elders' reach. Their aesthetic and claims to autonomy also brought them into conflict with the South African colonial state.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 206.

¹⁷ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Military movement amongst natives', 19 May 1917.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ P. Higate, "'Soft clerks" and "hard civvies": pluralizing military masculinities', in P. Higate, (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, CT, 2003), 33; J. Hockey, 'No more heroes: masculinity in the infantry', in *ibid.* 18.

²⁰ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Statement: Manuel Kanjua', 29 June 1940.

Although the *Otruppa* predominantly consisted of Herero, its social dimensions and clear organization initially attracted Ovambo and Damara men also. Troops proliferated throughout the territory, with chapters in most of the larger towns and in rural areas. Men from other ethnic groups joined Herero chapters and archival records attest to at least one Ovambo troop in the Windhoek location.²¹ Ovambo migrant laborers, detached from older social structures and elders' control, were attracted to the troops' social networks and emphasis on generational autonomy. *Otruppa* activities generally consisted of wearing German-style uniforms, drilling using German field commands, singing German military songs, prayers, and an occasional meal. Among Hereros, the troops organized themselves loosely along clan lines or flags: the Zeruaus (white flag), Mahereros (red flag), and Mbanderus (green flag).²² The red flag became the most politically dominant and administrators often referred to the entire movement as the Red Flag, a designation that sometimes led to tensions among the groups.

Membership in the troops, in addition to being overwhelmingly Herero, was also generally male. Although Krüger and Henrichsen argue for significant women's participation in the troops as early as the 1930s, evidence of their involvement before 1947 is contradictory and scanty.²³ Alphaeus, a colonel in the Windhoek troop, defined troop membership for a native affairs officer in 1927 as 'confined strictly to adult male Hereros. All are fairly young and none of the older men [are members]'. Women's precise roles within the movement at any time are unclear from the documentary evidence. One affidavit taken from 'a native Gabriel' in 1928 attests to a woman's presence at an *Otruppa* meeting in Tses, but states that she 'was told to shedup' for questioning the leader.²⁴ On the other hand, a decade later an *Otruppa* circular reported the deportation of Kumajo, 'the leader of the women of our union in Omangua', from Aminuis Reserve in 1939.²⁵ Herero elders also complained that the troops had a negative influence on Herero women.

Administrators were fond of blaming Herero women for all social ills and it seems unlikely that they would have passed up the chance to implicate women in the *Otruppa* if they had been prominently involved in the group's activities. Women may have participated in an auxiliary capacity and, thus, their involvement may have fallen beyond administrators' purview. Their contribution is only widely acknowledged after the Second World War. In 1947, one *Otruppa* member pointed out women could 'take the ranks as the men but cannot wear badges of demarcation', suggesting that women's roles were subordinate to those of men.²⁶ Most likely, there were no firm or general rules about female rank and participation, but rather they varied by location.

²¹ NAN, SWAA A50/59, 'Minutes: Windhoek Location Advisory Board Meeting', 26 Nov. 1935.

²² NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Report of interview with Fritz Kasutu', 29 July 1938.

²³ Krüger and Henrichsen, 'Captives'. Herero women were undoubtedly a force to be reckoned with, as Gesine Krüger and Marion Wallace demonstrate: see Krüger, "'The men should marry'" and Wallace, "'a person is never angry'".

²⁴ NAN, SWAA A50/59, 'Affidavit: Native Gabriel', 28 Feb. 1928.

²⁵ NAN, SWAA A50/50, 'Circular letter - Herero troop movements (Truppenspieler)', 3 Apr. 1939.

²⁶ NAN, SWAA A50/59, 'Affidavit: William Bakurupa', 19 Dec. 1947.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the troops were almost exclusively male and focused on reconstructing Herero masculinity.

1915-28: ESTABLISHING RULE

German rule after the war and genocide was incredibly harsh and intended to force Hereros into what amounted to slave labor. Hereros were not allowed to own land or livestock, were forced to wear identification necklaces (similar to pass books), and were required to work for whites from the age of seven.²⁷ Deprived of their material sources of power, Herero elders cast about for means to reassert control over youths and reestablish their position of authority within Herero society. At the same time, younger men were taking advantage of altered circumstances to improve their social position and evade elders' authority. The advent of South African colonialism provided elders with the opportunity for which they had been looking.

The South African military administrators who ruled colonial Namibia under martial law from 1915 to 1920 quickly noticed the similarity between *Otruppa* uniforms and those of the recently defeated German army. Although officials possessed little concrete knowledge of the organization, they propounded a number of theories about the troops' origins and relation to the German military. They claimed that the movement was 'the outcome of an original experiment of the Germans', or 'a troop of Herero soldiers raised by the Germans prior to the Herero war'.²⁸ As late as 1940, the Windhoek location superintendent stated, 'history tells us that the Hereros are a war-like people, which characteristic even the ruthless extermination of the flower of their nation by the German conquerors failed to destroy [...] they satisfied the craving by playing at soldiers'.²⁹

The end of martial law in 1920 brought about the establishment of a civil government modeled heavily on that of the Union. Many men within the native affairs administration were English-speaking South Africans who arrived initially through military service, civil service, or the police force.³⁰ Francis Priestly Courtney-Clarke, secretary for SWA and the chief native commissioner during this period, took great pains in his roughly twenty-year tenure to emphasize certain facets of English upper- and middle-class South African masculinity: hierarchy, loyalty, and a commitment to work.³¹ At

²⁷ NAN, KSW 2/17, 'SWA Commission interview with Hereros at Waterberg East', 23 Aug. 1935, 1012; NAN KSW, 2/21, 'SWA Commission interview with Dr. Heinrich Vedder', 31 Aug. 1935, 1233; Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 191.

²⁸ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Military movement amongst natives'.

²⁹ NAN, SWAA A50/59, 'Truppspielers', Superintendent of Locations, Windhoek, to Additional Native Commissioner, 9 July 1940. Hereros were frequently at war for cattle and grazing land with neighboring Nama and Afrikaner groups during the nineteenth century: see H. Vedder, 'The Herero'.

³⁰ Testimony taken by the SWA Commission attests that the chief native commissioner, F. P. Courtney-Clarke, the superintendent of the Windhoek location, George Bowker, and the superintendents of the Herero reserves Tses, Waterberg East, and Ovitoto were English-speaking South Africans: NAN, KSW 'South West Africa Commission', 1935.

³¹ See R. Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920* (Pretoria, 2001), for a discussion of important qualities of English South African masculinity.

least, he emphasized these to the Hereros. His addresses to them generally stressed state supremacy, expectations of Herero loyalty to the government (which he unfailingly noted had done much for them in comparison to the Germans), and the need for Hereros to develop a work ethic.³² The *Otruppa* seemed to transgress all of these ideals.

Administrators aimed to effectively implement versions of South African policies in preparation for SWA's eventual annexation into the Union. Their professional success rested on their ability to carry out this assignment. The men who comprised the native affairs department in colonial Namibia were largely unfamiliar with its peoples and drew on their experiences in South Africa to govern the new territory. *Otruppa* activities, such as drilling and parading in European enemy military uniforms, which administrators perceived as hostile, became the subject of official concern.

The administration began to fear a native rebellion around 1920 and immediately connected it to the *Otruppa*. Similar panic developed in east Africa following the Maji Maji rebellion in Tanganyika and Gikuyu unrest in Kenya in the late 1910s and early 1920s.³³ A common misconception at the time, and one that has lasted into the present, is that the Herero–German war was precipitated by a Herero rebellion. As Gewalt convincingly demonstrates, the war was the result of a series of misunderstandings and started by the Germans owing to the ineptitude of one of their officers.³⁴ Operating under a misapprehension, the South Africans feared a repeat ‘rebellion’. A bevy of internal correspondence titled ‘Military movement amongst natives’, ‘Herero “troop” organizations’, and ‘Drilling of natives’ began to circulate.

A particular set of contradictory statements characterized these communications. Administrators first overstated the troops' danger and then minimized the threat by derisively describing the movement as childish. For instance, the military magistrate of Okahandja wrote to the secretary of the protectorate in 1917:

If the present movement is the outcome of an original experiment of the Germans, it is but another object lesson in the danger of using native troops. As far as I can understand it, the whole thing is a childish game of make believe on a big scale.³⁵

Despite these attempts to downplay the possible danger of the troops by depicting them as childish, fears of an *Otruppa* uprising persisted. This was partially due to the sheer size of colonial Namibia. Adequate surveillance was virtually impossible over its sparse and widely dispersed population. Native affairs officers considered remote reserves as dangerous potential sites of Herero rebellion. Officers considered it common knowledge ‘that when an

³² Loyalty, work ethic, and improved conditions were frequent themes in government speeches and discussions. See NAN, KSW 2/17, ‘SWA Commission: Waterberg: testimony of F. Wood’, 23 Aug. 1935, 992; NAN, SWAA 1148 A158/ 23, vol. 4, ‘Tribal meeting held in Waterberg East Native Reserve on Wednesday August 7th, 1935’; NAN, A/200, ‘Report: burial of the late Chief Samuel Maherero’, 27 Aug. 1923, 6–7.

³³ J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (New York, 1979); E. Odhiambo and J. Lonsdale (eds.), *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority, and Narration* (Athens, OH, 2003); T. Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905–63* (Athens, OH, 1987).

³⁴ Gewalt, *Herero Heroes*, 141–67.

³⁵ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, ‘Military movement amongst natives’.

agitator [...] lives in the reserve, he will always find fruitful fields for his agitation in spreading dissention in the ranks to the Hereros'.³⁶ Administrators became highly suspicious of any rumors of disturbance in rural areas and quickly linked them to the *Otruppa*.

One such example occurred when the secretary for SWA temporarily re-assigned several police constables from Okahandja to Rehoboth in 1928. The magistrate at Okahandja nervously complained that he had been left with 'a depleted force under not too qualified leadership [since] Sgt. Prinsloo hardly inspires confidence', adding ominously, 'this is the Herero HQ'.³⁷ The cause of this anxiety was a case of assault by an African employee on a farm in the district. Although no evidence was found to substantiate rumors of a planned armed *Otruppa* uprising in response to the case, this statement illustrates officials' propensity to connect threats in Herero areas to the troops. The magistrate at Okahandja claimed the potential danger of the troops drilling, 'might be that, stirred by the rhythm of martial movement and by rousing songs, the thought might arise in these regiments "We are boys! What work is to hand?"'³⁸ The implication being that, because the African troops were highly impressionable and lacking self-control, German marches and songs might whip them into a frenzy of spontaneous unbridled masculine violence.

In addition to rumors of a rebellion, South African administrators were disturbed by the troops' uniforms. Many administrators served in the South African army, and such service was an integral part of their masculine identities.³⁹ By wearing European-style military uniforms, a quintessential emblem of white manliness, the troops blurred the distinction between European rulers and African subordinates. *Otruppa* uniforms generally consisted of a military coat, a Sam Brown belt, breeches, bandoliers, and various badges. The fact that these uniforms were German and, hence, reminders of a recent enemy was particularly appalling to administrators' sensibilities (although the troops welcomed British and South African uniforms as well).⁴⁰ Accordingly, the administration outlawed the *Otruppa* in 1917. The troops persisted despite vague government threats that 'stern measures will be taken against all those who disobey this order'.⁴¹ Such orders were difficult to enforce as colonial officers were thin on the ground across vast districts.

In spite of the governmental ban on the troops and their uniforms, Samuel Maherero's funeral in 1923 became a public spectacle for the *Otruppa*. Samuel was a prominent chief in the years immediately leading up to the Herero-German war and an important role model for the troops'

³⁶ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Herero organizations: NC Keetmanshoop to NC Windhoek', 28 Feb. 1928.

³⁷ SWAA, 432 A50/59, 'RE: Confidential circular: Herero organizations', 28 Feb. 1928. A number of Hereros were involved in the 1925 Baster Revolt in Rehoboth, although this was not clearly linked to the *Otruppa*.³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ S. Dudink and K. Hagemann, 'Masculinity in politics and war in the age of the democratic revolution', in S. Dudink, K. Hagemann, and J. Tosh (eds.), *Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, 2004), 6; M. Kovitz, 'The roots of military masculinity', in Higate, *Military Masculinities*, 6-18.

⁴⁰ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'NC Office of the Magistrate Windhoek', 17 June 1938; NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Statement: George Bowker', 31 Dec. 1946.

⁴¹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Drilling of natives - confidential circular', June 1917.

masculinity. He was not a legitimate successor to his father's chiefship, yet, as a young man, he contravened Herero inheritance customs, ignored the authority of elders to select a successor, and manipulated the German governor of SWA into appointing him paramount chief of the Herero. This new title provided him with unprecedented power, including over other clans to which he had no legitimate authority. Samuel was actively involved with the German military and fond of wearing a German uniform.⁴² Although his selfish ambition and poor choices (selling off Herero lands to German settlers for personal profit) contributed significantly to Herero oppression under the Germans, he remained highly regarded in exile by many members of the Maherero clan and Red Flag section of the troops, who signed their letters 'God with us Samuel Maherero'.⁴³ His German uniform, his ambition, and his readiness to disregard the power of elders and instead take advantage of colonial opportunities to become the most powerful Herero chief to date epitomized the ideals of *Otruppa* masculinity.

Hosea Kutako, whom Samuel appointed as his successor in 1920, arranged for South African authorities to transport Samuel's body to be buried at Okahandja. At his funeral, which lasted four days, approximately 1,500 *Otruppa* paraded in homage to the deceased chief. The funeral exemplified the pastiche of colonial culture in Namibia through a combination of Herero burial practices, German military funeral rites, and English administrative expedience. A German missionary presided over the service and the troops' brass band played military marches.⁴⁴ Courtney-Clarke then gave a speech in which he extolled the virtues of South African rule and informed the Hereros that he expected loyalty to his government.⁴⁵ Previous scholars have rightly pointed to this event as the birth of the troops as Herero national icons.⁴⁶

1928–38: COLLUSION, CONFLICT, AND CHILDISHNESS

As the 1930s dawned, an *Otruppa* uprising failed to materialize and the South African administration became more securely ensconced. However, with administrators struggling to establish a firm grasp in the colony, they relied on Herero elders, whose desires dovetailed conveniently with their own. Cooperation with the government offered elders a means to regain control and status backed by state resources. The native affairs department became more sophisticated, established reserves and urban locations, and appointed headman and native advisory boards. Elders began to regain some semblance of authority. During this decade of relative stability, the South African government's focus shifted from establishing rule to expanding it and incorporating SWA into the Union.⁴⁷ Administrators turned from

⁴² See Gewalt, *Herero Heroes*, for an excellent account of Samuel and his relations with the Germans during his tenure as paramount chief.

⁴³ SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Truppenspieler circular', 22 Mar. 1939.

⁴⁴ NAN A/200, 'Report: burial of the late Chief Samuel Maherero'.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Henrichsen and Krüger, 'Captives'; J. Zimmerer and J. Zeller (eds.), *Genocide in German South-west Africa: The Colonial War of 1904–1908 in Namibia and its Aftermath* (Monmouth, 2008).

⁴⁷ South Africa tried unsuccessfully to annex SWA twice, in 1935 and 1945.

deploying juvenilizing rhetoric to downplay threats to using it to support paternalist ideologies. The troops' political activities and animosity towards elders peaked in the 1930s owing to the latter's increasingly close relationship with administrators.

The *Otruppa* became a considerable source of consternation to both Herero elders and the administration during the annual August memorial of Samuel Maherero's funeral. This event became the troops' major performative platform. It was an event attended by large numbers of Herero as both an important social event and a public commemoration of the Herero past. The *Otruppa* played an important part in that commemoration; Krüger and Henrichsen describe these performances as signaling 'a symbolic resurrection of the Herero army'.⁴⁸ While evoking bravery, the troops' uniforms and parades celebrating Samuel's legacy reinforced the tenets of their masculinity – namely claims to manhood and autonomy from elders. The German motif was particularly effective at conveying the latter, recalling Herero elders' emasculation at the hands of the Germans. Such displays agitated administrators, perturbed by the quasi-military performances of black men in European enemy uniforms.

These annual performances created serious rifts in Herero society. The elders and those who sided with them refused to attend the commemorations and complained that they had become 'a *Truppenspieler* show'.⁴⁹ Courtney-Clarke banned uniforms in 1928, and every year thereafter members petitioned to be allowed to wear their uniforms at the celebration, but were only permitted hatbands and flags.⁵⁰ Chief Kutako provided the most vociferous objections to the annual performances. He complained to the chief native commissioner (CNC) and assistant native commissioner (ANC) that he had organized the funeral in the first place and arranged for it to be commemorated the next year even though 'it is not our true custom to hold ceremonies at the graves of chiefs. It was not done in the old days.'⁵¹ He insisted that the reason the annual ceremonies began was to 'show our loyalty to the government and our thanks for the benefits that they had given us [... now] the people who go are not loyal'.⁵² He went on to suggest that troop members should be deported from colonial Namibia as a remedy to the problems they were causing by their laziness and disrespect for elders.⁵³

Native affairs policies were designed to ensure a steady stream of cheap labor for white businesses, farms, and industries. Administrators relied on chiefs, headmen, and advisory board members to ensure this labor and generally keep the peace among their people. Herero elders consequently expected to re-commandeer the labor and allegiance of young men based on their official authority over reserves and urban locations. They were mistaken. Herero youths, particularly troop members, no longer felt bound to the authority of these elders. Many *Otruppa* worked for their own personal interests. Rather than remitting wages, they spent them on purchasing

⁴⁸ Krüger and Henrichsen, 'Captives', 156.

⁴⁹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Herero ceremonies – Omaruru', 24 Nov. 1937.

⁵⁰ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Notes of interview', 9 May 1938.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.* Kutako griped, 'now the Herero nation have got their freedom (from the Germans) and have got fat'.

higher commissions within the troops or luxury items, or they worked just long enough to finance business enterprises such as shops or to purchase cattle in the reserves and retire there.⁵⁴ Financial independence went hand in hand with political autonomy.

Administrators considered Herero youths to be recalcitrant and lazy throughout this period. They sought desperately to check this undesirable autonomy and drive them into the workforce. The CNC attempted to do so by calling *Otruppa* manhood into question. At a 1935 meeting in the Waterberg East Native Reserve, he pointed out that 'In the Union a native was not regarded as a man until he had worked for a period on the Johannesburg mines'. He then enquired if the Hereros 'want their young men to stay home and help the women'.⁵⁵ Undeterred, *Otruppa* members continued to work for their own objectives, which were in many ways congruent with precolonial masculinity: to amass and care for cattle, and to escape from the control of elders as soon as possible. A critical difference was the way in which those objectives were achieved – the troops' very public use of German military aesthetics performed at annual commemoration ceremonies, their vocal opposition to colonial policies carried out by Herero elders, and their alternative hierarchical organization.

On occasion, divisions between the administration, the troops, and Herero elders blurred. Although active *Otruppa* members did not hold positions in the native administration, some were employed by the government. Samuel Tjiho, for example, was simultaneously the secretary and treasurer of the Windhoek *Otruppa* chapter and a messenger for the registry office.⁵⁶ *Otruppa* members sometimes left the organization and, like Boardman Shifene, became administrative officials. Because he had been a member, Shifene felt that he could criticize the troops 'speaking from experience, not hearsay'.⁵⁷

In urban areas, advisory boards consisted of men nominated by the state, elected by the local Herero community, and then approved by South African officials. Like chiefs, board members tended to be Herero elders generally well disposed to the state (otherwise they would not have been appointed); however, as Philipp Prein argues, they 'were neither uncontested tribal leaders nor conformist collaborators'.⁵⁸ Herero board members were not simply resisters or collaborators but often inhabited both roles simultaneously. They made political choices based on motives that ranged from broad economic factors such as the transition to a cash economy to personal circumstances that shifted over time.

Otruppa, however, tended to view Herero who served as administrative officials as colluding with the state for personal gain. Their resistance against Herero elders escalated in the 1930s through attempts to remove them from

⁵⁴ NAN, KSW 2/17, 'SWA Commission: testimony of Mr. Frank Wood,' 23 Aug. 1935, 997. Mr. Wood complained that Herero youths owned sufficient cattle and so could not be compelled to seek employment outside of the reserve. NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Notes of interview', 9 May 1938. See also W. Werner, *No One Will Become Rich: Economy and Society in the Herero Reserves in Namibia, 1915–46* (Basel, 1998), on the process of 'self-peasantization'.

⁵⁵ NAN, SWAA 1148 A158/23, vol. 4, 'Tribal Meeting'.

⁵⁶ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Affidavit: Samuel Tjiho', 19 Dec. 1947.

⁵⁷ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Advisory Board Minutes, Windhoek', 26 Nov. 1935.

⁵⁸ Prein, 'Guns and top hats'.

advisory boards. When the Windhoek location superintendent interrupted an *Otruppa* meeting in 1933 and asked its purpose, the troops responded: 'We are endeavoring to bring about the dismissal from office of the present boardmen'. When he asked if they 'had the power to remove the boardmen from office before the expiry of their own term', they replied: 'Yes, we have the power.'⁵⁹ Although the precise nature of the power they imagined was unclear, the troops' dissatisfaction with the present boardmen's power was not.

The troops made their most serious bid to remove the boardmen in 1935 in conjunction with the Windhoek advisory board elections and a scheme for a municipal beer hall. Shortly before the elections, the administration proposed prohibiting the sale and consumption of local home-brewed beer in favor of a municipal, Durban-style beer hall.⁶⁰ The troops and other location residents loudly denounced the proposal because home-brewed beer provided a lucrative income, had considerably higher alcohol content, and could be enjoyed at home.⁶¹ The *Otruppa*, determined to oust the boardmen as government lackeys in support of the beer venture, took matters into their own hands. Alarmed by mounting tensions, the ANC noted, 'The annual election splits the natives into different political parties, each striving for power and jealous against each other. The danger seems to be between militarists and non-militarists (*Otruppa* and elders, respectively), who are at present leading'.⁶² The ANC further stated that the troops undertook a 'certain amount of propaganda work in connection with the local administration and [...] there were several unsavory incidents at the elections'.⁶³ They passed out unofficial ballots for non-registered *Otruppa* candidates. A number of people gladly turned them in to protest against the headmen and the beer venture.⁶⁴

Distressed by this assault on their authority and position, boardmen and headmen also paired dismissive comments about the troops' childishness with contradictory concerns over their potential dangers. 'Childishness' became the theme of a 1935 Windhoek advisory board meeting held shortly after the elections, in which the boardmen retained their positions. Boardman Mugunda complained that the *Otruppa* were 'bad for our young people [...] Young men neglect school to attend these drills in the hope of getting a military title.'⁶⁵ Likewise, Boardman Shifene disapproved of the

⁵⁹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Statement – Superintendent of Locations, Windhoek', 26 Nov. 1935.

⁶⁰ J. Crush and C. Ambler (eds.), *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa* (Athens, OH, 1992), 22–4.

⁶¹ NAN, SWAA 466/29, vol. 2, 'Native beer', 23 Nov. 1934. Residents were unhappy with the beer hall's higher prices and surveillance capacities. Boardmen petitioned for higher alcohol content and a weekly brandy ration. Lieut. Bowker, the Windhoek superintendent and driving force behind the beer venture, estimated the alcohol content of Herero moonshine, *kari*, to be 10–15 per cent ABV compared to the 3 per cent of state-brewed native beer.

⁶² NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Truppenspieler – ANC (Trollope) to CNC', 13 Dec. 1935.

⁶³ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Festus Kaatura', 20 Feb. 1936.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Evidence suggests that the troops also used coercive and illicit measures, including inebriating voters.

⁶⁵ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Advisory Board Minutes, Windhoek', 26 Nov. 1935.

organization because it 'teaches the children bad ways. Children think it manly to copy the swearing, drinking, and fighting habits of the soldiers.'⁶⁶ Concern for youth welfare merely disguised the real issue. These statements reveal elders' fears of losing their masculine authority and control over the youth. Boardmen griped that 'The organization does not recognize the authority of the advisory boards; they are hostile to the properly constituted authority in the location.'⁶⁷ Beyond hostility, 'The young men obey the orders of an officer in the organization in preference to the boardmen.'⁶⁸ They concluded that

the organization known as the *Truppenspieler* is harmful to the morals of the young men and ... hostile to the properly constituted government of the locations. For these reasons, the meeting asks the authorities to put a stop to the movement entirely.⁶⁹

Administrators supported these accusations. One claimed to have 'proof that members of the *Truppenspielers* have made serious attempts to undermine the authority of the native headmen [and] obstruct the work of the location superintendent by not recognizing the properly elected boardmen of the location'.⁷⁰ The Windhoek superintendent pointed out that younger Hereros defied the headmen's authority and in this way the tribe became split into two camps, commonly known as the 'loyal and disloyal groups'.⁷¹ He pinpointed the issue, saying, 'Actually, the disloyalty was one directed against the headmen and not against the administration at all. Of course this defiance undermined the authority of the headmen.'⁷²

Chief Hosea Kutako's position as Herero paramount chief was especially precarious.⁷³ At his home in Aminuis reserve, residents referred to him as a 'government man' and desired that 'Samuel Maherero's son (a legal subject of Bechuanaland) should take [his] place'.⁷⁴ At a meeting with colonial officials in 1938, his advisors doubted 'whether the people in Aminuis will listen to Hosea [...] so bad is the feeling against him'. Kutako himself explained that *Otruppa* in Windhoek wrote letters to people in Aminuis, encouraging them to ignore and defy him. He further complained that the troops negatively influenced Herero women, who 'flapped their red aprons' at him and then accused him of 'theft and swearing at women'. He elaborated, telling the ANC, 'These people (the troops) hate the loyal Herero leaders and they hate the government [...] At present they only listen to their own leaders. They are trying to make a government of their own.'⁷⁵

The CNC endorsed this view. He noted in a letter to the secretary of the prime minister that the *Otruppa* were 'antagonistic to the old tribal leaders

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Message to Hereros', 29 July 1938.

⁷¹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Superintendent of Locations to ANC', 9 July 1940.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Appointed by the South Africans in 1917 and by Samuel Maherero in 1921, Kutako's power was legitimated by both Herero leadership and the government. NASA, BAO 5/449/F54/1996/2, 'Erfopfolging – Huis van Tjamuaha/Maherero – Kommentaar', c.1970. See also Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 263.

⁷⁴ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Superintendent of Locations to ANC'.

⁷⁵ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Minutes of interview with Hosea Kutako', 9 May 1938.

and aspire to take their place if they can undermine them'.⁷⁶ While it is unlikely that the troops wanted to set up a new government, their ranks opened new paths to manhood and weakened elders' and administrators' power.⁷⁷ Chief Kutako also blamed the government for allowing the troops to undermine his authority. He insisted that it was the state's responsibility to support him: 'Why does the government allow this? Why is it not stopped? They should be made to listen to the leaders placed in authority by the government', he insisted. At the same meeting, Kutako and Nikanor Hoveka, chief of the Mbanderu Herero and a long-time ally of Kutako, chided the ANC by evoking paternalist discourse. Hoveka argued, 'If a father failed to punish a child it was a sign of lack of love for the child. The administration is letting the child go unpunished for a long time'. Kutako continued: 'The administration has let the *Truppspieler* go too far, farther than a loving father should allow.'⁷⁸ The CNC deflected the paternalist discourse back on the chiefs by griping that 'the younger Hereros thought they would well and easily [become men] by merely adopting expensive European attire [but] the older Hereros are afraid to use their right of parental correction'.

The charge of 'childishness' became a discursive tool through which elders and administrators affirmed their own authority. It permitted elders to claim legitimate authority over youth while simultaneously allowing officials to affirm that authority and downplay the threat that the *Otruppa* posed to their masculinity. As Lindsay and Miescher have argued more broadly about evocations of 'boy' in colonial Africa, the rhetoric of 'childishness' assumed Africans' intellectual inferiority and sustained the ideology of colonial paternal duty in Africa.⁷⁹ Herero elders' use of this language demonstrates its political weight and ability to bind Herero generational hierarchies to colonial paternalism. Even the word *Truppspieler*, which means 'play soldiers' in German, is derisive in its invocation of immaturity. It likens the troops to children pretending to be combatants rather than properly trained and battle-hardened men.

1938-45: MISPLACED FEARS OF OTRUPPA AS NAZIS

Beginning in the late 1930s, administrators' renewed fears of an *Otruppa* uprising overshadowed tensions between the troops and Herero elders. In addition to a potentially hostile troop organization influenced by German military culture, the South African regime faced an antagonistic (and armed) German settler population, many of whom retained German citizenship. Rumors of Nazi activity among the Germans in Namibia flourished, and administrators began to suspect a conspiracy between the Germans and the *Otruppa*.⁸⁰ They believed that the Germans were importing munitions from

⁷⁶ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59 'Administrator, Windhoek to Secretary of the Prime Minister', c.1938.

⁷⁷ Krüger and Henrichsen, 'Captives', 174.

⁷⁸ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Minutes of interview with Hosea Kutako'.

⁷⁹ Lindsay and Miescher, *Men and Masculinities*, 5.

⁸⁰ See T. Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1996* (Basel, 1999); NASA, BLO 112 PS 4/11/1 a-b, 'South West Africa: newspaper clippings from European sources - German colonial aspirations' and 'Nazi activities in South West Africa', c.1937.

the *Vaterland* and wooing the *Otruppa* by promising higher wages, secretly planning to use them as shock troops to take over the government.⁸¹

The *Otruppa* uniform also generated significant discomfort among administrators. The Windhoek superintendent berated *Otruppa* members, saying,

I see you do not know the meaning or value of a uniform, but I do. I am a captain under the seal of the Governor General of the Union [...] I consider this unauthorized use of military uniforms and military titles an insult to the military forces and police of South Africa.⁸²

Affronted officials claimed 'the natives have never been in any uniformed force and have no right to the uniforms or insignia of rank which they assume'.⁸³ On 3 December 1935, Mr. Trollope, the ANC, described the troops 'as really rather pathetic [...] the childish dressing up and strutting around in imitation of the departed glories of an army whose pomp they admired'.⁸⁴ On the same day, Trollope admonished Festus Kaatura, the *Otruppa* leader, that 'Drilling is wrong – Europeans don't do it and it is likely to cause misunderstandings and ill-feeling'.⁸⁵

Administrators saw younger Hereros as especially vulnerable to sympathizing with the Germans. Trollope worried about Herero youths who 'have been educated at the German mission schools', whereas 'the older Hereros are too well acquainted with the history of their people under German rule and the benefits accrued to them under our government to be led astray by such propaganda'.⁸⁶ Wrestling control of the annual commemoration as a political platform, Courtney-Clarke, the CNC, confronted the issue in a statement to Hereros and *Otruppa* at the 1938 memorial, stating 'This territory was handed over to the Union government and it has no intention of giving it up. It is a part of South Africa and it will remain such.'⁸⁷ He claimed that 'attempts are being made on a large scale to undermine the loyalty of the natives to the Union government' as 'their minds are agitated by such questions as "who is master here, the German Consul or the Administrator?"'⁸⁸ The administration feared that a league of German missionary teachers, *Otruppa* leaders, and known Nazi elements in the territory were conspiring to confuse impressionable youths and lure them into cooperating with the enemy.

The administration consequently served *Otruppa* members whom it employed with an ultimatum to either quit the troops or leave their jobs. The same day as his above speech, Courtney-Clarke informed Fritz Kasutu (*Schmetterling von Preussen*), a long-term government employee, 'that in

⁸¹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Untitled letter from Administrator SWA to the Secretary of the Prime Minister, Pretoria', 24 Sept. 1938.

⁸² NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Advisory Board Meeting Minutes', 26 Nov. 1935.

⁸³ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Herero troop movement', 13 Oct. 1936; NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Herero ceremonies Omaruru', c.1936.

⁸⁴ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Truppenspieler – letter from Trollope to CNC', 3 Dec. 1935.

⁸⁵ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Untitled – conversation between Trollope and Festus Kaatura', 3 Dec. 1935.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Message to Hereros at Herero Day', 29 July 1938.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

view of his position as an official of the public service, it was undesirable that he should belong to the *Otruppa* and that he should sever his connection with that association'.⁸⁹ Courtney-Clarke then announced to the crowd:

Fritz Kasutu, who is an employee of the SWA Administration and admits himself to be a leader amongst them, ignores the requests of the CNC to disassociate himself from the movement: He knows the movement is banned, yet he admits that he, as a leader, gave certain instructions.

Six weeks later Fritz wrote a letter to the *Otruppa* leader, Festus Kaatura, requesting to 'resign from Samuel Maherero's Society [...] from today delete my name from the society's register'.⁹⁰

Other troop members faced similar ultimata. A Windhoek prison warden explained in a statement to the Windhoek location superintendent that he 'was a member until [...] the chief warden warned us not to take part in the movement'.⁹¹ In another instance, a Herero policeman participated in an illegal *Otruppa* parade and was transferred 'to some isolated area, like Okaukueyo, where there are no Hereros'.⁹² Despite protestations that the troops were peaceful and not antagonistic to the government, these members were forced to surrender a part of their manhood for the sake of their livelihoods.

Within the context of heightening tensions with Germany, *Otruppa* uniforms and performances had become especially intolerable to administrators. However, rather than working with Nazi agents, many *Otruppa* served with the Allies in the Second World War, becoming 'soldiers (again)'.⁹³ In 1945, after the Nazi-era hysteria had died down, ANC H. J. Allen recognized that 'the *Truppenspieler* are harmless [...] and many clerks in government employ are members', but decided, 'nevertheless, a close watch can be kept on their activities'.⁹⁴

Generational frictions and societal divisions did not cease after the War, but the *Otruppa* no longer served as a vector of those tensions. Their role as the primary vehicle of generational opposition against Herero elders declined, largely because of natural ageing. Herero elders of the 1920s and 1930s began to pass away and the troops took their place as elders in society.⁹⁵ Prominent and near-elderly troop members such as Festus Kaatura, the *Otruppa*'s long-time chief officer, joined the Herero chiefs' council and co-operated with his former opponent Hosea Kutako. O. G. Bowker, the Windhoek location superintendent, endeavored 'to re-educate and convert

⁸⁹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Report of interview with Fritz Kasutu', 29 July 1938.

⁹⁰ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Resignation - Fritz Kasutu', 23 Sept. 1938. In Fritz's letter to the CNC of 17 June 1938 explaining the troops' purpose, innocence, and loyalty, Courtney-Clarke penciled, 'Fritz is very disciplined but his protestations do not square with my experience or with Hosea's statements'. NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'RE: Truppenspielers', 17 June 1938.

⁹¹ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Statement Hesekeil Kaundje', 18 June 1938.

⁹² NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Offence: No. 22559 N/CPL H. Kokati', 24 Nov. 1942.

⁹³ Krüger and Henrichsen, 'Captives', 173.

⁹⁴ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner SWA Police', 10 Feb. 1946.

⁹⁵ Chief Hosea Kutako is a notable exception. At 100 years old, he remained the driving force in Herero politics until his death in 1970.

members of the red band to a policy of cooperation with other sections of the native community' in the post-war era in which he, like Allen, recognized the troops as benign and allowed them seats on the location advisory board.⁹⁶

As troop leaders aged and became accepted as legitimate leaders by both state and society, the role of the Germany military aesthetic and its exhibition at annual commemoration ceremonies ceased to be so contentious. Troop leaders finally gained recognition as men and authorities in Herero society. The troops' uniforms no longer embodied a challenge to elders' authority but rather symbolized the perseverance of Herero men in the face of violent oppression and colonial rule. In subsequent decades, troop performances became ever more tightly entwined with Herero nationalism, especially with the centenary commemoration of the genocide in 2004 and the ongoing reparations campaign.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION

Examination of the conflicts between Herero elders, *Otruppa*, and colonial administrators in the interwar years illustrates the importance of the politics of masculinity in shaping colonial rule. Visions of masculinity and men's relationships were central to Herero societal reconstruction following German colonial violence, and critical to the South African colonial state's formation and efficacy. Exploration of *Otruppa* masculinity and its politics offers a more nuanced understanding of the movement's objectives, revealing how attaining manhood was foremost among their concerns. The troops' organization and aesthetics allowed younger men to renegotiate their place in society as men. This process was intimately linked to elders' and administrators' own political aims and masculine claims. The politics of masculinity in colonial Namibia was therefore carried out along various indigenous and metropolitan axes that clashed and converged.

Otruppa seized new colonial opportunities to retain and enhance their status as Herero men, leading to generational collisions. Their struggles assumed new racial, cultural, and political dimensions when colonial administrators entered the dispute. *Otruppa* used German military aesthetics to distinguish themselves from Herero elders and South African administrators, and to create an alternative hierarchy rooted in a reworked conception of masculinity. In the wake of the Second World War and after three decades of navigating and countering administrators' and elders' opposition, *Otruppa* leaders finally achieved recognition of their manhood and authority.

⁹⁶ NAN, SWAA 432 A50/59, 'Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner SWA Police', 10 Feb. 1946.

⁹⁷ See Zimmerer and Zeller, *Genocide*. See also R. Kößler, 'Genocide, apologies, and reparation: the linkage between images of the past in Namibia and Germany', paper presented at AEGIS Conference, Leiden, 11–14 July 2007, available at <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Koessler-Linkages-2007.pdf> (consulted 10 February 2011). Current Herero nationalism and reparations are not without serious debates within Herero and Namibian society; however, these issues fall outside the scope of this paper.