

01
AIMS

The German Empire was stripped of its colonies after losing WWI. During the 1920s, a desire for these colonies to be restored to Germany was popularised. However, the role of Germany in colonial exploitation has not been widely addressed. I show that colonial attitudes are essential in understanding German history, material culture fruitfully locates colonial fantasies in the everyday interactions of Germans, forcing an acknowledgement of Germany's 'marginal' colonial past, and the differences between colonial postage stamps and emergency money, *Notgeld*, reveal the disparate ways in which colonialism was mobilised.



02
COLONIALISM AND THE NATION

These *Kaiseryacht SMY Hohenzollern* stamps (1900-1915), the only original postage stamps of the Empire's colonial territories, were a standardised administrative design boasting Kaiser Wilhelm II's yacht: a sign of grandeur, intimidation and settlers. The scrolls were engraved with the different names of colonies, demonstrating how the colonies were generalised into a singularity, externalised as just another facet of the Empire. Thus, the colonial project was important to the nation state, unsurprising as the Kaiser's foreign policy saw imperial expansion as intrinsic to German survival and national identity. It highlights how Empire enables the citizen to think of the colonising nation and its ideologies as the world's centre. Therefore, imperial fantasies were integral to the establishment of German identity, suggesting that Germany had a more active relationship to its empire than is emphasised today that must be reckoned with.



03
PALIMPSESTS

After the formal end of empire, German colonial stamps were overprinted for Allied use. The stamps' contingency highlights their materiality, mirroring how memories shift depending on the period. Overwriting has been termed 'symbolic accretion', challenging the notion that symbols have an established, meaning (Alderman and Dwyer 2009: 53). Many Germans felt that their Empire, so tied to their identity as a nation, was being colonised, leading to an identification with victimised groups. This was partially motivated by Germany attempting to cover its own violent traditions. Many of the bourgeoisie, who predominated the colonial revisionist movement, saw a necessity for a form of collective desire that could bolster nationalistic pride - a desire to regain the colonies.

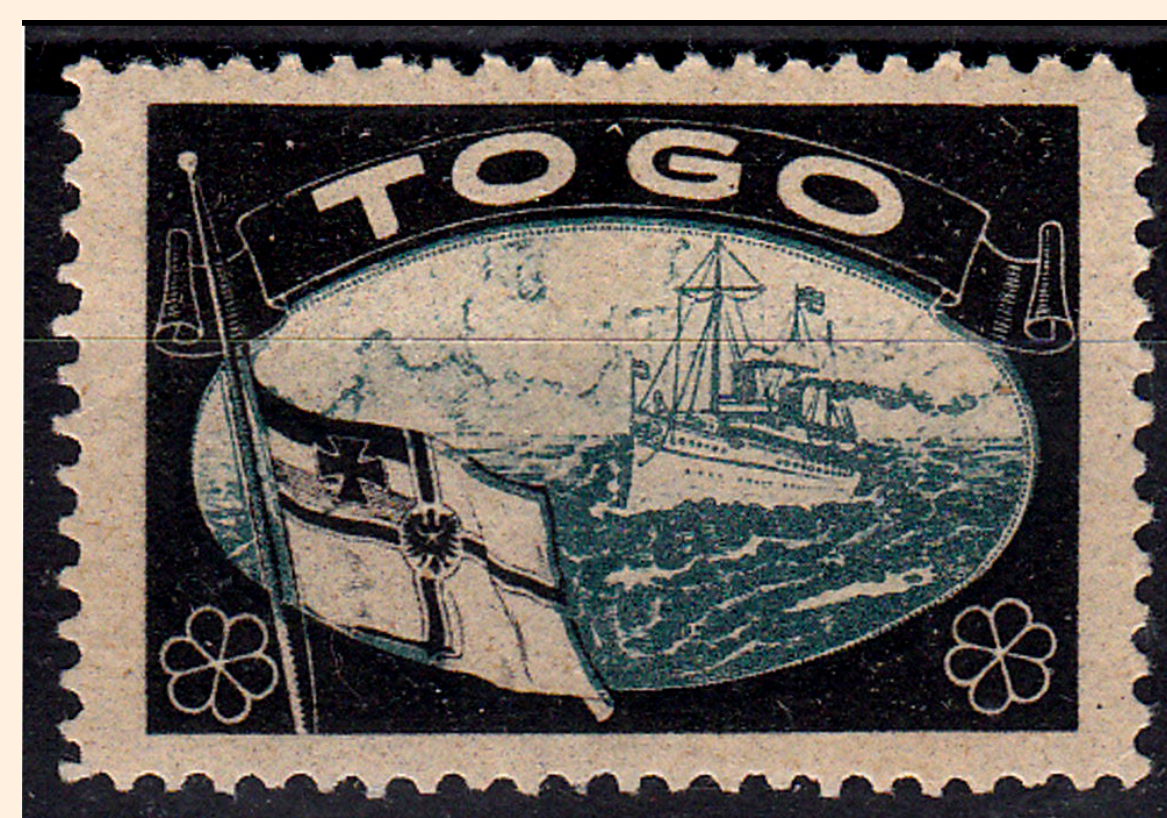


04
GERMAN PURITY

Revisionists produced private propaganda stamps, known as cinderellas, for private circulation and collection. In 1921, a set of cinderellas overprinted Weimar-era stamps with sayings such as 'Ohne Kolonien ist Deutschland nicht lebensfähig' ['Without colonies Germany is not viable']. The figures in the background are blacksmiths and miners, which represent domestic self-sufficiency. They recall the notion of *Heimat*, the desire to return to a romanticised, secure Germany in the face of industrialisation and economic precarity. The traditional rural occupations reflect an 'amnesiac impulse' to move towards spatial and temporal idyll (Willett 1989: 127). By imposing quotations that call for restitution on these *Heimat*-referencing stamps, these cinderellas demonstrate how the dream of restitution of German colonies was rooted in a warped memory of imperial glory and desire for economic strength.

05
REVANCHIST CINDERELLAS

This 1920 series commemorates the lost colonies. The yacht is surrounded in black for mourning and overlaid with a lowered Imperial war ensign, the *Reichskriegsflagge*. The monochrome Iron Cross and eagle echo Prussian symbolism. Moreover, the Iron Cross has roots in the flag of the State of the Teutonic order, a crusader state. Weimar-era nationalists such as the *Freikorps* used the flag to protest the Republic. This demonstrates how the colonial fantasy has morphed over time to be significant on German identity and how symbolism has been appropriated because of the ideologies they recall. This desire for empire in the formation of a collective identity necessitates a confrontation of Germany's colonial past today.



06
NOTGELD NARRATIVES

Notgeld, a substitute community currency, was failure commodified. Collector's items, these designs appealed to those longing to escape post-war reality, a reflection of the patriotic fantasies of the time. The contrast between colonial officers and indigenous peoples represents the so-called 'civilising' process, enforcing a hegemonic narrative of superiority. Spatial representations like buildings imply other cultures as temporally distant, located in less advanced times (Macdonald 2003: 3). In this series, there are three temporal narratives: ongoing national progress (the drive to regain former standing), the nation at the final stage of triumphant achievement (idealised Empire) and the immemorial (through the objectification of local culture). Presenting the local landscapes as permanent naturalises them, specifically as property. This exhibition-like gaze reinforces Western self-identity as owners and the Western perception of the world as objective.

07
RESPONSIBILITY

The writing in the *Notgeld* below are lyrics from the 1813 Napoleonic uprising. They reference the shame of having lost colonies, emphasising how German victimhood allowed for a divorce from responsibility. Central to fantasies was the exceptionalist argument that German colonial administration played progressive roles in economic and religious modernisation. This led to colonialism becoming an imaginative tool used to construct a sense of identity.

08
POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES

Material culture is useful to decolonisation debates because how identity is imagined in historical artefacts illuminates how we present ourselves today. They disclose how concepts of nationalism can be branded and legitimised in the banal and mundane. Collecting these artefacts as historical objects part of a recreational goal allows for an amnesiac relationship with the context of the artefacts. This leads to an estrangement from the past and the responsibility that entails. Contrastingly, this is impossible for formerly colonised nations. For example, the Marshall Islands issued a First Day Cover featuring the Yacht issue behind a contemporary stamp of a boat, juxtaposing the image of incoming colonial settlers with the image of Marshallese navigation by sea, reclaiming the relationship to German colonisation through redesign. It also points to continual contemporary engagement with its colonial past in a way that is absent from German discourse.

09
CONCLUSIONS

This original study has demonstrated the varied facets of everyday material culture, the pervasiveness of colonial ideas in the public space, demanding responsibility for the colonial past from Germans today. It also emphasises the need to analyse aspects of the colonial project beyond settler colonialism. However, just as the stamps and *Notgeld* reflect dominant perspectives of the past and legitimise ideologies, they can be used subversively. Transnational, postcolonial approaches to stamps by former colonised nations demonstrate how in making certain histories tangible and familiar, oft-mythologised representations of the past can be denaturalised. This study is situated in a relatively new area of German Studies, blending global history with visual studies. Many thanks to Dr Tom Smith for the endless encouragement and Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw Foundation for funding this project.



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