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*“Another town, another maiden”:
German Colonial Postcards as Propaganda (1884-1914)*

ABSTRACT: *This essay examines how postcards supported colonialist propaganda during the German Empire. Utilizing historical images archived in the “Deutsche-Schutzgebiete” online project, as well as scholarly works on German colonialism and gender theory, it demonstrates how the sexualization of Indigenous women became a key strategy to recruit young German male sailors for the German Empire’s colonial endeavors in Africa and East Asia.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; Imperial Germany; Africa; East Asia; colonialism; navy; postcards; perception-transfer; romanticizing; gender studies*

Introduction

Exotic women, shiny beaches, and romantic boat rides: this is the life that awaits you in the colonies, where a sailor always gets what he wants – or, at least, this is the life your government advertises in its propaganda. Like many other enthusiastic European powers, nineteenth-century Germany harbored colonial ambitions. Its victory in the Franco-Prussian War and subsequent unification in 1871 created a modern Germany capable of expanding beyond its borders. Once this expansion was underway, Germany became just as invested as Britain or France in maintaining its Empire by populating its newly colonized lands with members of its own race. One efficient means to achieve this result was the production and distribution of propaganda in the form of simple, yet egregious postcards. Why did colonial German postcards sexualize and romanticize¹ Africa and East Asia? Essentially, the gender objectification and cultural control which represented colonialism on postcards – specifically those targeting members of the navy – communicated a brazen motif of European superiority. Due to these postcards’ explicit and implicit narrative of “conquerability,” the German Empire was able to rally troops and sailors to safeguard the colonial front. This essay examines a series of historical postcards to unveil Germany’s motivations with regard to its colonial endeavors. The postcards in question are archived in the *Deutsche-Schutzgebiete* online project.² *Deutsche-Schutzgebiete* features an extensive library of visual media pertaining to German colonialism – from battleships, photographs, historical maps, stamps and texts to the specific sexist postcard imagery addressed in this essay. In addition to the material available from this online project, scholarly literature, reference works, and statistical data from the German government are utilized here to obtain a more complete picture.

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “romanticize” (1): “To make romantic or idealized in character; to make (something) seem better or more appealing than it really is; to describe, portray, or view in a romantic manner;” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Romanticism” (2): “Romantic movement or style in art, literature, or music [...]; the distinctive qualities or spirit of this movement.”

² Ralph Anton and Jakob Schmitt, “Deutsche Kolonien,” *Deutsche-Schutzgebiete* (blog), July 5, 2017, accessed June 4, 2021.

I. The Cause for Colonization

Acquiring colonies was considered a necessity, for the German government viewed its land as overpopulated, which is somewhat comical in light of today's demographic data.³ During the late nineteenth century, though, Germany's population was increasing rapidly and reaching ever new highs. This exponential growth was caused by industrialization which, in turn, was being promoted to catch up to Britain's industrial and naval might. According to the German *Statistisches Bundesamt* (Federal Office of Statistics), the population of Germany increased from around 25 million people to around 38 million people between 1816 and 1867.⁴ Part of this was due to the consolidation of what we now know as Germany from the region's leading power, namely, the kingdom of Prussia and its territories. Prussia's population dominated demographic statistics until Germany's eventual unification in 1871. From then on, its population—not counting places like Austria—increased from 41 million people to a staggering 65 million people on the eve of World War I.⁵ To put this into perspective, Germany's current (2021) population is estimated at just above 83 million people.

The apparent overpopulation was considered a threat by Germany's (also) growing aristocracy who feared that such large numbers of people would eventually rally in violent socialist revolutions. To prevent such revolutions, the nobility, as well as the liberal middle class promoted *Auswanderung*, or emigration, from Germany. Given the increase in population and often more than five children per household, many felt—as early as the 1830s—that people should leave and move on to other places in Europe and America. Yet, it was not until the failed Revolution of 1848 that this was taken more seriously. Now, millions of Germans were "encouraged" to emigrate to America, Australia, and Eastern Europe. While many did, in fact, leave Germany, political leaders at home were already eyeing new opportunities to stretch their might across the world, namely, colonies.

Even everyday German citizens considered their place in Germany's colonial Empire as one of God-given power and responsibility. In their own view, they were not malicious colonizers—they were intent on making the world a better place, and to bring order, balance, and the benefits of Western—especially German—civilization. This attitude provided Germany's bourgeoisie and political leadership with an excuse to colonize, as they gained from exploitation and mineral extraction. The ability to enjoy these gains without protest by their own people was a worthy enough prize for them to lie about the state of the colonies in their propaganda and to use the White-man's-burden narrative strategically.

³ Woodruff D. Smith, "The Ideology of German Colonialism, 1840-1906," *The Journal of Modern History* 46, no. 4 (December 1974): 641-662, here 642.

⁴ Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bevölkerung gestern, heute und morgen* (Wiesbaden: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1985), 12.

⁵ Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bevölkerung*, 38.

Consequently, the injustices and crimes inflicted on colonized *aboriginals*⁶ were for the longest time covered up and ignored in the colonizers' homelands. However, the ramifications of *apartheid*⁷ and colonization in countries like Namibia are now increasingly the subject of systematic research. Today, the 30,000 remaining (White) Germans in Namibia (i.e., the former colony of German South West Africa) still control a majority of the wealth of a nation of almost 2.5 million people. With this essentially *apartheid* state still in place, scholars and journals are attempting to expose this injustice for what it is and counter it with a more accurate account of African history, namely, a post-colonial narrative.

While it is difficult to establish which nation initiated the production of postcards and other images of Indigenous colonized people, there were plenty of scandalous and misogynistic photographs in circulation throughout the French and British Empires. A truly global approach would exceed the scope of this essay, but it is clear that colonial photographs and postcards in the German Empire carried similar themes with a unique "flair" considered specific to the respective territories. It is unclear to what extent the German Empire felt inadequate or like a "late arrival" in the Western race for the colonies, especially when we consider that Brandenburg-Prussia had technically already established colonies in the Caribbean and Africa as early as 1683. These colonies were port cities, only lasted until 1721, and never reached their full "colonial" potential when compared to the holdings of other Germanic nations, for example, the Netherlands.

Many in Germany saw the Dutch, more specifically the *boer*⁸ living in South and South West Africa, as a kindred people who needed to be saved from the British during the Boer Wars (1880-1881 and especially 1899-1902).⁹ This notion can be traced back to the days of the medieval Holy Roman Empire when the modern-day regions of the Netherlands, Bohemia, Austria, and others were often all considered *Deutsch*. The phrase *das Deutsche Reich* can be translated in several different ways, most famously as "the German Empire" in the context of World War I and World War II. However, to Germans, *Deutsch* usually just means "people" or "the common people," and it is a nod to how Germans used to

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "aboriginal" (1a): "An original or earliest inhabitant of a land, esp[ecially]. as distinguished from a later settler."

⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "apartheid": "Name given in South Africa to the segregation of the inhabitants of European descent from the non-European (Coloured or mixed, Bantu, Indian, etc.); applied also to any similar movement elsewhere; also, to other forms of racial separation (social, educational, etc.)."

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "boer:": "A Dutch-speaking or (later) Afrikaans-speaking farmer in southern Africa."

⁹ Michael Pretes, "Boer Wars," in *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*, ed. Thomas Benjamin (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 1:138-141, here 138: "The Boer Wars were a series of conflicts fought between the descendants of Dutch settlers and British troops in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The conflicts stemmed from Britain's attempts to expand its South African colonial empire."

differentiate themselves from those using the political and liturgical language of Rome: they, the Germans, were the everyday men, not the snobby speakers of Latin. Thus, the speakers of the common tongue were *das Deutsche Volk*, and anyone speaking this common tongue belonged to their realm (since "realm" is one way to translate the term *Reich*). Finally, the phrase *das Deutsche Reich* also came to denote the domain or the institutions of the republic; hence, the Weimar Republic was known as *das Deutsche Reich*. In short, defending the people, the realm, the institution, or the Empire was a concern Germans used to justify their presence in Africa and elsewhere around the globe.

II. Postcards and Colonies

As a unique means of communication that combines the written word with images (and also as collectors' items), postcards are more recent than one might think. While sending letters and other forms of written correspondence is probably as old as the development of human writing, the actual first postcard appears to have been written in 1861 by one John P. Charlton.¹⁰ From there, the demand for these simple, easy-to-produce cards that could be mailed around the world spread like wildfire. Between 1865 and 1875, citizens from every major country came to utilize them to communicate with family and friends. In addition, postcards soon served to show off places one had visited, such as the new Eiffel Tower in Paris (completed in 1889). It was during the subsequent "golden age" of postcards, from 1890 to 1915, that the majority of the postcards featured in this essay was distributed.¹¹ During this same time, newspapers, particularly newspapers in small towns, published few or no photographs. Thus, postcards offered an "incredibly inexpensive" way to conveniently capture and convey images of people, places, events, or national monuments.¹² Each year during this "golden age," billions of postcards were printed and mailed. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that colonial rulers and statesmen were eager to employ postcards to distribute their propaganda to the masses. For instance, *Figure 1*, a postcard with the message "Ander Städtchen, ander Mädchen!" (Another town, another maiden!), exemplifies the colonizers' racial and sexual objectification of women of colonized people groups. The dissemination of an overtly romanticized imagery was simply the beginning of waves of postcards intended to utilize exotic women as props to convince boisterous men to join their country's colonial endeavors.¹³

¹⁰ "Greetings from the Smithsonian: A Postcard History," *Smithsonian Institution Archives*, accessed June 4, 2021.

¹¹ Fred Bassett, "Wish You Were Here!: The Story of the Golden Age of Picture Postcards," *New York State Library, Postcard Collection*, Appendix C, May 24, 2021, accessed June 4, 2021.

¹² Bassett, "Wish You Were Here!"

¹³ Sarah Sentilles, "Colonial Postcards and Women as Props for War-Making," *The New Yorker*, October 5, 2017.



Figure 1: "Ander Städtchen, ander Mädchen!" [Another town, another maiden!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

German colonial ambitions did not come to full fruition until 1884, when King Leopold II of Belgium (r. 1865-1909) annexed a large portion of Central Africa.¹⁴ European powers scrambled to claim as much of Africa as they could before the Berlin Conference that same year divided the continent among them.¹⁵ Until then, most European colonization had pertained to the Americas, East Indies, and port cities in Africa and India (apart from India's domination by the British Crown since 1858). Now, Germany was granted Cameroon, Togo, East Africa (Tanzania), South West Africa (Namibia), Samoa, and New Guinea. In 1898, the Chinese city of Kiautschou (Kiao-Chao) was added to the list (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).



Figure 2: "Gruss aus Kiao-Tschau: Kriegsgefangen!" [Greetings from Kiao-Tschau: War-captured!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

¹⁴ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1991), 8.

¹⁵ Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa*, 10-12.



Figure 3: "Gruss aus Kiao-Tschau: Ich bin ein Deutscher / kennt Ihr meine Farben?" [Greetings from Kiao-Tschau: I am a German / do you know my colors?]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

With these territories now "legally" divided among them, European powers began to exploit them for their resources and people. They also initiated a system of colonial perception-transfer¹⁶ to entice young men, who were struggling back in Europe home, to populate their colonies. It was thought that, without these men, the colonies would collapse, descend into rebellion, or be usurped by neighboring European colonies. To prevent this, postcards were used as propaganda. A simple, yet effective way to portray a colony was by giving it a flair or mystique in the form of a postcard, much like how German South West Africa found itself portrayed in Figure 4, one of its earliest "greetings" postcards.

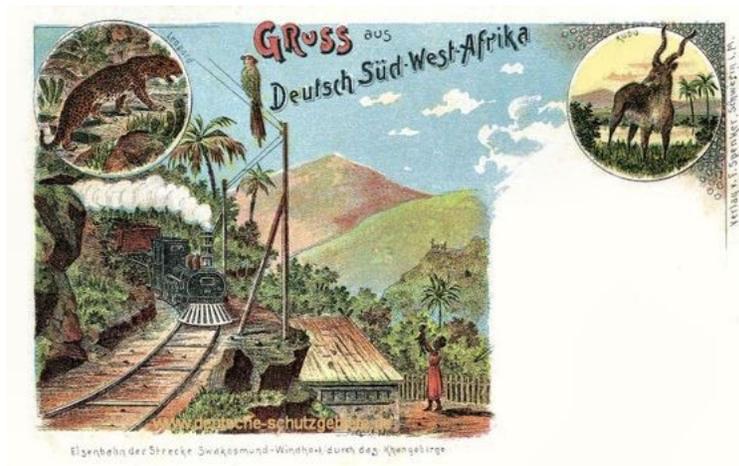


Figure 4: "Gruss aus Deutsch Süd-West-Afrika" [Greetings from German South West Africa]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

¹⁶ When Indigenous peoples are disavowed in a variety of ways and their actual presence is not registered; an example is when Indigenous people are understood as part of the landscape. See Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 37.

A "greetings" postcard is typically a soft way to initiate a perception-transfer for the benefit of the colonizing force.¹⁷ It is an essential first step to activate successive perception-transfers for the sake of conceptual displacement. To ruin the integrity of the land, one has to create the perception that the land is empty, or "virgin," and that it must be populated by others to prevent nature from wasting it. In this specific postcard (*Figure 4*), we see a rural landscape—mountains, jungles, and palm trees—juxtaposed with a train moving swiftly on its tracks through this landscape. Due to the power and civility of the White man and his burden, locomotive technology has transformed a previously barren landscape into a thriving and civilized nation. The leopard and kudu (antelope) are relegated to medallions in the postcard's top left and top right corners, like curiosities, unimportant for industrialization, but crucial to signify the country's "otherness." A Black woman, standing next to a reed-covered house, is gradually raising up a child, glancing upward at the locomotive. The woman is pointing the child toward the progress of the machines brought by the Europeans. She is raising the child both physically and symbolically in the direction of the future, like a submissive offering, indicating that the child's future labor will be reaped as spoils of Indigenous transfer by assimilation.¹⁸ The implicit message here—underscored by the postcard's printed "Gruss aus Deutsch Süd-West-Afrika" (Greetings from German South West Africa)—is that those Indigenous who have not been deported or exterminated will soon be assimilated, speak German, and use European technologies. While some modern advertisements use puppets like the Michelin Man to communicate friendliness and otherworldliness, this postcard uses a single Black woman with a child—in a landscape that is changing due to locomotive technology—to romanticize and advertise Africa's "virgin" nature.¹⁹

Virgin-land narratives can quickly morph into motifs of other "virgin" objects that are then portrayed as equally ready for the taking, namely *aboriginal* females. Germany's Imperial Navy issued a series of postcards intended to be mailed back to the homeland in hopes of securing more enlistments and manpower to stave off both the neighboring colonial empires as well as the Indigenous in these respective regions. A simple, yet effective way to do this was to continually circulate postcards with images of Indigenous women who appeared as seductive and "easy" to obtain. An example of this objectification is *Figure 5*, a postcard celebrating "Samoas Einverleibung" (Samoa's annexation), which features Germany's Imperial colors and a White gentleman in a black tailcoat (on the left) bowing to a scantily clad Indigenous woman (on the right), and it should be noted that the German word *Einverleibung* literally means "absorbing a body."

¹⁷ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 36-38.

¹⁸ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 37-38.

¹⁹ David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 150.



Figure 5: "Samoa's Einverleibung" [Samoa's annexation]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.



Figure 6: "Hurrah! Samoa ist unser! 1899" [Hurrah! Samoa is ours! 1899]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

In *Figure 5*, one can tell the woman is *aboriginal* due to her darker skin color and her exotic attire. While today's observer may not consider the latter particularly "erotic," a dress with a hemline above the knee certainly would have been viewed as revealing and suggestive a hundred years ago. Her dress leaves the woman's neckline, arms, knees, and lower legs exposed, and (in *Figure 5*) she covers her cleavage with a green plant-leaf, all of which would have made her appear seductive back then. Granted, for Samoa's hot climate, the woman's attire is much more appropriate than the man's tailcoat; however, on these historical postcards, the woman's comparative nudity is intended to accentuate her sexual appeal and

"availability." The man's tailcoat, on the other hand, communicates that he has come to "civilize," and his bow, much like the bow associated with an invitation to dance, suggests that he come to lead, to dominate, and to own (see also *Figure 6*).

In European iconography and art, women routinely stood for the various continents (whose Latin names, after all, were all female). Well into the twentieth century, a woman continued to be used to represent Africa. This feminine characterization was employed for any and all entities that could be controlled by the patriarchy, such as continents, ships, and other (personified) objects. To refer to an object or region as a woman could serve as a way to subtly demean it and to suggest that said object or region was submissive and ready to be controlled, especially by Victorian-era standards. This does not mean, of course, that all references of womanhood were inherently intended to denote submissive qualities, especially when considering that references to the "motherland" or to nature as having woman-like qualities emphasized caring, nurturing, and even protective qualities. However, this does not negate the message sent by period images like the ones included on the historical postcards discussed here. As David Ciarlo has shown in his 2011 book, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, women were routinely viewed as subservient icons and recipients of projections of dominance.²⁰ In the colonizers' eyes, Indigenous women needed to become the personification of their land in order to be similarly dominated by the colonizing force, in this instance, Germany. Women in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe were expected to be submissive and dominated by men, which is why historical postcards comparatively rarely depict men as being colonized or representing the land of the colonized (see, however, *Figure 2* above). Generally, women and maidens were the virgins young colonizers expected to conquer.

III. Imperial Navy Postcards

Conquering is an act of overcoming or overpowering someone, typically by use of force.²¹ In order to complete the conquest of a people, conquerors must attain the submission of the conquered and establish themselves as the new ruling faction. To accomplish this task, the German Imperial Navy circulated certain postcards that encouraged immigration from their White fatherland. Thus far, we have examined examples of colonialist propaganda toward colonized races and genders. We now turn to postcards that employ both of these strategies together. In the early 1900s, Imperial Germany issued postcards that employed both nationalistic and superior gender sentiments. Considering that Germany had joined the modern era's colonial "game" comparatively late, it was crucial for its propaganda to aid in the effort to capture and dominate its colonies.

²⁰ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 193.

²¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "conquer" (II.2.a): "To acquire by fighting, win in war; to make a warlike conquest of; to subjugate."



Figure 7: "Unsere Marine - Fahr' mich hinüber, schöner Schiffer!" [Our Navy - Ferry me on over, handsome sailor!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

The example to be considered here (Figure 7) is a postcard titled "Unsere Marine - Fahr' mich hinüber, schöner Schiffer!" (Our Navy - Ferry me on over, handsome sailor!), the latter being a phrase from a song of the earlier nineteenth century. A common motif on these postcards, which may have served to emphasize its legitimacy and familiarity, the image is that of a German sailor rowing a small boat which is carrying an Indigenous woman. The woman's darker skin color suggests an African origin, and—indeed—the postcard originated in German East Africa (modern-day Tanzania), but her facial features appear more Indian than African. She is embracing the German sailor from behind, and with his head turned back toward her, they kiss. Both seem to be enjoying each other's company. The man glances down, not at the woman's eyes or the waves, but, rather, either at the postcard's beholder or, more likely, the woman's unclothed, uncovered left breast—her flowing, long yellow dress or skirt only begins to cover her body just below the naked breast. Thus, this is explicit content.

It was relatively uncommon in Europe at the time to depict nudity, so much so that the mere sight of a woman's unclothed wrist or ankle would have weakened a proper European man's knees. However, nudity was a rather common phenomenon in the painting and photography of *aboriginal* women in the colonies, and Germans were particularly known for this representation of *aboriginal* women, even more so than the British or the French. How is this to be explained? As we have seen, *aboriginal* women were viewed as a sexual expression of the virgin land of Africa. By exposing Indigenous women, painters and photographers underscored the alleged ease with which these women—and their land—could be captured.²² This, in turn, sent a clear message to the elites back home, who may

²² Helmut Walser Smith, "The Talk of Genocide, the Rhetoric of Miscegenation: Notes on Debates in the German Reichstag concerning South West Africa, 1904-1914," in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy*, ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 107-124, here 101.

have been considering investing large sums of capital to fund expeditions or trade routes. Easing their minds would help line their pockets. Yet, the latter was only a secondary message. Apart from this subversive and layered motif, there was a primary reason for the woman's "explicitification."²³ Given her state of "undress," this alluring woman is portrayed as "available" for what was foremost on the mind of these postcards' senders and recipients, namely, sexual intercourse.

If Germany was to capture and maintain its overseas colonies, it needed men. Scores of colonizers became a necessity once – with the stroke of a pen – Germany had acquired regions in Africa and elsewhere that exceeded the size of the German fatherland many times over.²⁴ These male German colonizers were not always needed to subdue rebellions, but their mere presence served to keep neighboring colonial powers at bay. Employed overseas, they became guardians of vast trading operations in which Europeans forced the Indigenous to labor and then took the spoils of their labor. After all, colonized Africans had no access to the means of production to process their own raw material, like ore, oil, and rubber.

Getting sailors excited by means of enticing images was only the beginning: the ultimate goal was the dehumanization of the colonized. Sexualization played a pivotal role in portraying *aboriginal* Africans as savages. Apart from her dress or skirt, the Indigenous woman in *Figure 7* is wearing a considerable array of primitive jewelry that is, in fact, ahistorical. While Indigenous East African women were wearing necklaces and hair jewelry on occasion, contemporary historical photographs suggest that this was the exception rather than the rule. Thus, the woman's golden earrings and bracelets in *Figure 7* are likely the result of the artist blending stories of rich Oriental moguls with a need to perpetuate colonial narratives of lands of gold and opportunity. The woman's necklace, in any case, would not have been made of pointy teeth. According to historical photographs, Indigenous women would, at best, have worn necklaces made of pearls or other shiny objects. Paintings of necklaces made of teeth on colonial postcards only served to surround the Indigenous with an additional mystique – elegant due to their decorative quality, yet tribal and savage due to their material which, as one was led to believe, would have had to be harvested from predatory beasts. Perhaps needless to say, hunting carnivorous animals for their teeth would have been both impractical and improbable for Indigenous society trying to survive.

Thus, historical postcards romanticized and idealized Africa and Indigenous women with Germany's young men back home as their intended audience. In his 2010 essay, "The Visual Representation of Blackness during German Imperialism around 1900," Volker Langbehn points out how "postcards engage the viewers' self-knowledge and their socially and politically conditioned experience of

²³ "To make explicit." The noun "explicitification" does not (yet) exist in official dictionaries.

²⁴ The size of Imperial Germany was 540,857.54 square kilometers in 1900, expanding to 2,658,161 square kilometers by 1913. For comparison, Germany today encompasses 357,386 square kilometers.

alterity" or difference.²⁵ The rejection of alterity in society leads to a fear of the other, and in this regard, the postcards were harmful to society at large. Langbehn particularly refers to the theme of *Mohrwäsche* or "Moor Washing," found in both contemporary paintings and postcards, in which an African is being washed or depicted in a bathtub of some kind.²⁶ At the time, Germans were still using the word *Mohr* as a blanket term to refer to Africans. Historically, the term "Moor" pertains to the inhabitants of northwestern Africa (Mauretania and Morocco), but it came to be used as a derogatory term for all Africans. As Muslim Africans who had invaded the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century, the Moors eventually became targets of the Crusading movement, of the Reconquista, and of the Inquisition. In a way, Europeans viewed and legitimized their own colonization of Africa as revenge for the Muslim invasion of Europe during the Middle Ages. This explains perhaps why the *aboriginal* East African woman in *Figure 7* appears more Indian, Arab, or even North African than Indigenous Tanzanian.

As common themes, these historical postcards do not just portray alluring and submissive Indigenous women; they also feature impressive naval vessels. Each of the postcards intended to be mailed to Germany shows an anchored steel behemoth in the background, most likely a *Kaiser Friedrich III* or *Wittelsbach* class, pre-dreadnought battleship. Commissioned between 1898 and 1903, these were among the earliest battleships built for the German Navy during the naval arms race with Britain. An easy indicator that they were not older is simply their bulkier frame, yet they still only featured two coal exhaust funnels situated between the two masts. A third was added to the 1904 *Braunschweig* class for its more powerful engines. In their top left corner, postcards of the "Our Navy" series usually depict the German Imperial naval flag. So, why this continual depiction of mighty warships and German Imperial naval flags? It comes down to the complexity of protectorate rule. The colonized "belonged" to Germany, but they were usually not yet counted as Germans, which made it even more difficult to literally draw Africans or Asians as Germans (for an exception, see above, *Figure 3*). Flags were one of the few ways to mark something as abstract as national sovereignty, or to assert a nation's claims over a particular territory. Just before 1900, German Imperial naval flags became one of the means "by which to mark scenes of tropical exchange (or commerce) as explicitly 'German'" and therefore denote them as colonial prizes that had been won.²⁷ Thus, while anchoring in foreign harbors, colossal vessels flying Imperial flags created a German aura of prestige.

Images of Africans, especially images of African women, were embedded in hierarchies that many at the time considered "natural." Unlike domestic gender

²⁵ Volker Langbehn, "The Visual Representation of Blackness during German Imperialism around 1900," in *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Michael Perraudin and Juergen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2010), 90-100, here 95.

²⁶ Langbehn, "Visual Representation of Blackness," 93.

²⁷ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 177.

ideologies, the colonialist framework did not really tolerate any first-hand interaction that might counter or undermine its particular ideologies. Thus, as an imaginative device, *aboriginal* African figures were all the more useful for their remoteness. Africa as a region was a relative newcomer to the German cultural sphere, which allowed it to be more easily mapped and remapped with new commercial motifs. Most Germans, like most Europeans, had never seen an African before but were relatively familiar with East Asian culture. While China was just as "exotic" and certainly distant enough to never be visited in person by most Europeans, "300 years of imported decorated porcelain (as one example) presented an imposing corpus of Chinese illustration," leaving more to the imagination with Africa than with China.²⁸ Ever since the days of the Silk Road, China had been a point of aspiration for anyone interested in trading with luxury goods. What is more, China had been defined by centuries of literature pertaining to its reality and imaginary. Hence, while still sexist, *Figure 8*, "Unsere Blaujacken - Ander Städtchen, ander Mädchen!" (Our Blue-Jackets - Another town, another maiden!), features an East Asian woman fully attired in garments that are much more authentic than the outfits worn by the African women on these postcards.



Figure 8: "Unsere Blaujacken - Ander Städtchen, ander Mädchen!" [Our Blue-Jackets - Another town, another maiden!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

To emphasize the comparatively respectful portrayal of the East Asian (Chinese) woman in *Figure 8*, we include here three more examples of postcards featuring non-Chinese Indigenous women, namely, *Figure 9*, where an Indigenous woman is kneeling before a sailor who is eating the food she has provided; *Figure 10*, where a sailor is gazing (romantically?!) at a shirtless Indigenous woman who is wearing the infamous necklace made of teeth; and *Figure 11*, where an Indigenous woman in a rather revealing dress listens to an accordion-playing sailor.

²⁸ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 212.



Figure 9: “Unsere Marine – O wie herrlich, o wie schön ist ein solches Wiederseh’n” [Our Navy - O how lovely, o how beautiful is such a reunion!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.



Figure 10: “Unsere Marine – Du kennst mein Herz noch lange nicht!” [Our Navy – You do not know my heart yet!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.



Figure 11: “Unsere Marine – Wenn jemand eine Reise tut, so kann er was erzählen!” [Our Navy – When someone goes on a journey, he can tell a story!]. Image Courtesy of deutsche-schutzgebiete.de.

Conclusion

Often overshadowed by Britain and France in the scholarly discourse on colonialism, the German Empire maintained its own considerable colonial holdings in Africa and East Asia. Much like the British, the French, and their other European and American counterparts, Germans were able to achieve supremacy in their colonies through warfare and military might. To safeguard these newly acquired territories, the German Empire needed scores of young men who would conquer the lands and their inhabitants; who would defend the colonies against potential internal and external adversaries; and who would help celebrate the glory of these "virgin" lands to attract White settlers from the homeland and thus alleviate any perceived or real threats of overpopulation in Europe. The "golden age" of postcards contributed to the latter by romanticizing and objectifying nature and Indigenous women, thus serving as a key propaganda strategy to recruit young Germans for the Empire's colonial endeavors overseas.

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