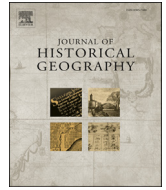




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German colonial geography as a racial-Völkish reordering project beyond the East: National Socialism and the colonial writings of geographer Oskar Schmieder

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ABSTRACT

There is very little research on German colonial geography in general, and the boom in this subdiscipline during the National Socialist period has not received any scholarly attention so far. Against that backdrop, this paper aims to contribute: a) to a finer-grained picture of colonial, *racial-Völkish* thinking – and its application – in German geography during the National Socialist period and b) to our understanding of the continuities and ruptures in German geographical scholarship after WWII. To that end, I focus on the biography of Oskar Schmieder (1891–1980). Two interrelated aspects of Schmieder's writings will guide the analysis: first, his conceptualization of race, *Volk*, and soil regarding (Germans in) South America and, secondly, the political colonial project that he pursued for Nazi Germany. Studying Oskar Schmieder shows that German geographers not only stood up for the re-establishment of a German colonial empire during the National Socialist period, but also fought for its Fascist orientation – which, at least for Schmieder, was to differ from the German colonial pre-1914 empire. Being primarily known as a representative of *Länderkunde*, Schmieder's institutionally and conceptually influential career after 1945 can be seen as a prime example of the continuities within the discipline in Germany.

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Surprisingly, with very few exceptions, the role of geographers in German colonial ambitions has been ignored within the discipline thus far.¹ My aim in this paper is to start to fill in this gap in the literature, focusing on one specific representative of German colonial geography, namely Oskar Schmieder (1891–1980). As I will show, Schmieder was undoubtedly one of the most important figures of German (colonial) geography between the 1930s and the end of World War Two (WWII), and the subfield experienced rapid growth during the National Socialist period. This surge in colonial geography is a chapter of Germany's history of geography that has

been completely overlooked to date.² This is despite the fact that the few published works on German colonial geographers, all of which focus on the formal colonial period before the end of the First World War (WWI), have convincingly shown that geographical knowledge was key to colonial efforts, and that colonial geography has been one of the discipline's most important subfields.³

Oskar Schmieder had spent years living and working in highly reputable Latin American and US universities, holding professorships at the National University of Córdoba, Argentina (1920–1924) and at the University of California, Berkeley, USA (1925–1930), before being appointed Professor of Geography at Kiel University in 1930. Schmieder's career is thus a truly international one, and it

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¹ Carsten Gräbel, *Die Erforschung der Kolonien: Expeditionen und koloniale Wissenskultur deutscher Geographen, 1884–1919* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015); Boris Michel, 'Making Mount Kilimanjaro German: Nation Building and Heroic Masculinity in the Colonial Geographies of Hans Meyer', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 44 (2019) 493–508; Jürgen Zimmerer, 'In Service of Empire: Geographers at Berlin's University between Colonial Studies and Ostforschung (Eastern Research)', in *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich*, ed. by Giaccaria Paolo and Minca Claudio (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 67–92.

² Clearly, this is not true for studies of German colonial efforts in the East.

³ Gräbel, *Die Erforschung der Kolonien*, p. 14; see also Klaus Kost, *Die Einflüsse der Geopolitik auf Forschung und Theorie der Politischen Geographie von ihren Anfängen bis 1945: Ein Beitrag zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Politischen Geographie und ihrer Terminologie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Militär- und Kolonialgeographie* (Bonn: Ferd. Dummlers, 1988).

bears the imprint of these different academic stages. Why is his career particularly well suited to examining the connection between the strong resurgence of German colonial geography in the 1930s, its entanglements with National Socialism, and the continuities and ruptures in the (sub)discipline after 1945? Firstly, Schmieder must be considered, as I will outline in great detail in this paper, to be one of Germany's most prominent and influential (colonial) geographers of the National Socialist period, and he did not lose his institutionally and conceptually influential position in the aftermath of WWII. Secondly, while Schmieder's *Länderkunde* contributions were widely acknowledged in the German as well as in the Anglo-Saxon spheres, his intellectual legacy in terms of colonial thought produced pre-1945 has largely been overlooked, while his post-WWII career has not yet been critically investigated.⁴

This paper examines Schmieder's biography, focusing firstly on the development of colonial thought between the 1920s and 1945 and, secondly, on his institutional and conceptual positioning after the war. In terms of sources, my biographical take on Schmieder is primarily based on a meticulous analysis of his academic oeuvre, backed up by archival research at the German National Archive (*Bundesarchiv*; BArch) and the Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography (*Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde*). Additionally, I build on an academic autobiography that Oskar Schmieder published in 1972.⁵ While I fully agree with Ferretti that autobiographies are an effective way of placing the focus on 'assemblages and inside stories and complicating narratives that only deal with disembodied histories of ideas', I think it is still crucial to look at autobiographies from a decidedly (source)-critical perspective.⁶ Schmieder's autobiography does provide a lively account of his academic steps, gives many insights into his scholarly network and, additionally, reveals a wealth of detail about his private life. However, he partially ignores his work pre-WWII and partly puts it in a light that is untenable after a careful reading of his pre-1945 oeuvre.

Thus, my goal is to work meticulously through this literature. More specifically, two strongly interrelated aspects of Schmieder's writings will guide my analysis: first, his conceptualization of race, *Volk* and space with respect to South America and particularly South American Germans and, secondly, the political colonial project that he pursued for (Nazi) Germany. This paper thus aims to contribute a) to a finer-grained picture of colonial and *racial-Völkish* thinking – and its application – in German geography during the National Socialist period and b) to our understanding of the continuities and ruptures in German (colonial) geographical scholarship after WWII. It is organized as follows: in the next section, I will embed my research within the literatures on the history of colonial geography and on the nexus between geography and National Socialism. After introducing Schmieder's early career, in the two main sections of the article I analyze his road from *Länderkunde* to colonial geography in the 1930s and 1940s and then, after WWII, back to *Länderkunde*. In the conclusion, I discuss how Schmieder's career can inform wider debates concerning colonial geography and state-led settler colonization pre- and post-WWII.

⁴ With the exception of the historian Patrick Bernhard's paper: Patrick Bernhard, "Lebensraumwissenschaft" Die Kieler Geographen, die NS-Volkstumsforschung und der Traum von einem deutschen Kolonialreich', in *Wissenschaft an der Grenze: Die Universität Kiel im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. by Christoph Cornelißen and Carsten Mish (Essen: Klartext, 2010), pp. 341–358.

⁵ Oskar Schmieder, *Lebenserinnerungen und Tagebuchblätter eines Geographen* (Kiel: Selbstverlag des Geographischen Instituts der Universität Kiel, 1972).

⁶ Federico Ferretti, 'History and Philosophy of Geography II: Rediscovering Individuals, Fostering Interdisciplinarity and Renegotiating the "Margins"', *Progress in Human Geography* 45 (2021) 890–901 (p. 891).

German colonialism, colonial geography and National Socialism

Postcolonial scholarship has compellingly argued that science was of fundamental importance to colonial and imperial ambitions.⁷ Against this backdrop, geographical scholarship inspired by post-colonial thought has, since the mid-1990s, contributed to a reinterpretation of the history of the discipline. Research has shown that the beginning of geography in the nineteenth century is closely linked to masculine, imperial knowledge production and that geographical insights represented a particularly important body of knowledge for colonial conquests in the age of imperialism.⁸ In an effort to decolonize geography, recent postcolonial and decolonial scholarship has focused on pluralizing the discipline by engaging with previously marginalized geographers and approaches in knowledge production.⁹ As Ferretti has recently observed, decolonial themes and approaches have grown significantly in importance in the history and philosophy of geography.^{10,11} Historical geographical scholarship in and on Latin America, for example, shows a growth in the number of publications analyzing the contribution of critical geographers and women, leading to a pluralization and reassessment of the history of the discipline.¹²

While this is undoubtedly a crucial achievement, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge of colonial geographical scholarship and its entanglements with settler colonialism and imperial ambitions. This is particularly true of German-speaking geography and may also have to do with the fact that German colonial history started later and ended earlier than it did in France and Great Britain.¹³ Indeed, it was not until the 2010s that the first contributions from a disciplinary-historical perspective emerged dealing in depth with the development of German colonial geography and colonial geographical research practice.¹⁴

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

⁸ David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Morag Bell, Robin Butlin, and Michael Heffernan, *Geography and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

⁹ Tariq Jazeel, 'Mainstreaming Geography's Decolonial Imperative', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2017) 334–337; Sam Halvorsen, 'Cartographies of Epistemic Expropriation: Critical Reflections on Learning from the South', *Geoforum*, 95 (2018) 11–20; Tariq Jazeel, *Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2019); Julie Cupples, *Development and Decolonization in Latin America* (London: Routledge, 2022).

¹⁰ Federico Ferretti, 'History and Philosophy of Geography III: Global Histories of Geography, Statues that must Fall and a Radical and Multilingual Turn', *Progress in Human Geography* 46 (2022) 716–725.

¹¹ See also Bruno Schelhaas, Federico Ferretti, André Reyes Novaes and Marcella Schmidt di Friedberg, *Decolonising and Internationalising Geography. Essays in the History of Contested Science* (Cham: Springer, 2020); Paloma Puente-Lozano, 'History and Philosophy of Geography I: Heterodox Progress, Critical Scepticism and Intellectual Voluminosity', *Progress in Human Geography* 47 (2023) 447–459.

¹² Federico Ferretti, 'A Coffin for Malthusianism: Josué de Castro's Subaltern Geopolitics', *Geopolitics* 26 (2019) 589–614; Federico Ferretti, 'Decolonising the Northeast: Subalterns, Non-European Heritages and Radical Geography in Pernambuco', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 109 (2019) 1632–1650; Guillermo Ciclase, 'Elena Chiozza', *Terra Brasilis* 10 (2018) 1–27.

¹³ For work on the French colonial geography see: Pierre Singarvelou, 'The Institutionalization of French Colonial Geography', *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011) 149–157; for work on British geographers and colonialism see: Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*; Gerry Kearns, 'The Imperial Subject: Geography and Travel in the Work of Mary Kingsley and Halford Mackinder', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22 (1997) 450–472; Gerry Kearns, 'Geography, Geopolitics and Empire', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35 (2010) 187–203.

¹⁴ Gräbel, *Die Erforschung der Kolonien*; Michel, 'Making Mount Kilimanjaro German'; Zimmerer, 'In Service of Empire'.

As Gräbel meticulously elaborates, colonial geography played an important role in the institutionalization of the discipline in Germany, while geographical fieldwork practices provided crucial knowledge for colonization efforts, which before WWI were primarily driven by an interest in the transfer of resources to Germany.

As Zimmerer details, one particularly important center for German colonial geography was Berlin University, where, for example, the renowned geographers Ferdinand von Richthofen, Albrecht Penck, Carl Troll, and Fritz Jäger, all strong supporters of German colonialism, worked. The latter three (Richthofen died in 1905) were also colonial revanchists after WWI.¹⁵ According to Zimmerer, Fritz Jäger, who held the chair of colonial geography from 1911 until 1925, was a former student of Richthofen and did his PhD – as did Oskar Schmieder – under the supervision of Alfred Hettner.¹⁶ While the period of formal colonialism in Germany came to an abrupt halt with the end of WWI, colonial geography did not. Not only did the institutionalization of colonial geography live on, as, for example, the chair of colonial geography at Berlin University shows, but colonial revanchist geographical work blossomed in the interwar period, as I will detail through the analysis of Oskar Schmieder's scientific publications and networks.¹⁷

In fact, during the National Socialist era there was a veritable boom in colonial geography. As I will show, this was not only due to the regime's interest in settler colonization in the East. While the role of geographers in the development of National Socialist *Lebensraumpolitik* and its implementation in the East have been acknowledged, even though important unanswered research questions remain, the boom in German colonial geography in the 1930s and 1940s has not yet been analyzed.¹⁸ By examining the biography of Oskar Schmieder and his colonial geographical considerations in particular, I aim to make a first contribution to closing this research gap. In doing so, this paper adds to our understanding of the entanglement between National Socialism and geography, given that the existent literature has focused on the development of geopolitics and the *Lebensraum* concept.¹⁹ In particular the focus has been on the figure of Karl Haushofer.²⁰ Finally, against the backdrop of the boom in colonial geography during the National Socialist period, the question arises of how the careers of prominent colonial geographers continued after WWII. While some research has tackled the question of (dis)continuities of careers and scholarly work in German geography, there is still a significant lack

of scholarship on this topic.²¹ By examining the post-WWII career of Oskar Schmieder, this paper contributes to our understanding of the continuities and ruptures in German geography after the fall of National Socialism.

From Heidelberg via Córdoba to Berkeley: Schmieder's early academic career and his *Völkish* ideas

Oskar Schmieder did his PhD under the supervision of the world-famous geographer Alfred Hettner. Hettner was a strong advocate of the colonial expansion of the German Empire, but he became renowned for his conceptualization of geography as chorology.²² In the words of Ute Wardenga the latter was '[...] a specifically German variant of Regional Geography [...]', characterized through its 'strongly narrative approach, which links physical and human geography through the medium of space'.²³ It thus comes as no surprise that Schmieder devoted himself to the chorological-regional geographical tradition from his early scientific years until the end of his life. His pre-WWI PhD in Heidelberg analyzed the Spanish Sierra de Gredos mountain range from a geomorphological perspective. After his military engagement during the war, he wrote his habilitation (second dissertation), which built on material he had already collected for his PhD, and then left for Argentina, where he held a professorship on mineralogy and geology at the National University of Córdoba between 1920 and 1924. During that time, Schmieder carried out intensive fieldwork in Argentina and its neighboring countries, particularly Bolivia. In 1925, he left Argentina for the USA, where he was granted first a visiting professorship and later an associate Professorship of Geography at the University of California, Berkeley. During that time, Carl Sauer held the Chair in Geography. Sauer had studied in Germany and was strongly influenced by the German *Länderkunde* and *Landschaftskunde* traditions.²⁴ Thus it is no coincidence that the Hettner scholar Schmieder found his way to Berkeley. Sauer wanted to keep Schmieder there and was able to offer him a full professorship, but Schmieder decided to accept a full professorship at the University of Kiel in 1930 and moved back to Germany.²⁵ Although he had held a Professorship of Mineralogy and Geology in Argentina, at that

²¹ Gerhard Sandner, 'Die unmittelbare Nachkriegszeit. Personelle, institutionelle und fachlich-inhaltliche Aspekte 1945–1950', in *Kontinuität und Diskontinuität der deutschen Geographie in Umbruchsphasen*, ed. by Ute Wardenga and Ingrid Hönsch (Münster: Institut für Geographie, 1995), pp. 141–150; Boris Michel, "'With almost clean or at most slightly dirty hands". On the Self-Denazification of German Geography after 1945 and its Rebranding as a Science of Peace', *Political Geography* 55 (2016) 135–43; Gerhard Rainer and Simon Dudek, 'Globalizing Geography before Anglophone Hegemony: (Buried) Theories, (Non-)Traveling Concepts, and "Cosmopolitan Geographers" in San Miguel de Tucumán (Argentina)', *Geographica Helvetica* 77 (2022) 297–311; Simon Dudek and Gerhard Rainer, 'Von Kontinuitäten und fehlenden Brüchen: Die Entnazifizierung der Geographen an der Universität München', *Berichte Geographie und Landeskunde* 95 (2022) 117–139.

²² For literature on Hettner's chorological approach see Ute Wardenga, *Geographie als Chorologie. Zur Genese und Struktur von Alfred Hettners Konstrukt der Geographie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1995); Francis Harvey and Ute Wardenga, 'The Hettner-Hartshorne Connection: Reconsidering the Process of Reception and Transformation of a Geographic Concept', *Finisterra* 33 (1998) 131–140.

²³ Ute Wardenga, 'German Geographical Thought and the Development of *Länderkunde*', *Inforgo* 18/19 (2006) 127–147 (p.127).

²⁴ For an excellent overview of the evolution of *Länderkunde* in Germany from the nineteenth century until the end of the twentieth and the relationship between *Länderkunde* (regional geography) and *Landschaftskunde* (landscape geography) see Benedikt Korf, Eberhard Rothfuß, and Ute Wardenga, 'Disziplinhistorische Tauchgänge zur *German Theory*. Ein Gespräch mit Ute Wardenga über die deutsche *Länderkunde* und *Landschaftsgeographie*', *Geographica Helvetica* 79 (2024) 1–13; Wardenga, 'German Geographical Thought'; Ute Wardenga, 'Theorie und Praxis der länderkundlichen Forschung und Darstellung in Deutschland', in *Zur Entwicklung des länderkundlichen Ansatzes*, ed. by Frank-Dieter Grimm and Ute Wardenga (Leipzig: Institut für Länderkunde, 2001), pp. 9–35.

²⁵ Schmieder, *Lebenserinnerungen*.

¹⁵ Zimmerer, 'In Service of Empire'.

¹⁶ Zimmerer, 'In Service of Empire', p. 78. Interestingly, Hettner did his PhD under the supervision of Ratzel in Leipzig, who was the successor of von Richthofen as Leipzig University's Chair of Geography.

¹⁷ See also Zimmerer, 'In Service of Empire'; Kost, *Die Einflüsse der Geopolitik*.

¹⁸ Mechthild Rössler, *Wissenschaft und Lebensraum: Geographische Ostforschung im Nationalsozialismus. Ein Beitrag zur Disziplingeschichte der Geographie* (Berlin: Reimer, 1990); Gerhard Wolf, 'The East as Historical Imagination and the Germanization Policies of the Third Reich', in *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich*, ed. by Giaccaria Paolo and Minca Claudio (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 93–109.

¹⁹ For an excellent recent overview of the literature on German Geopolitik and the *Lebensraum* concept, most of which was published in the 1980s, see: Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca, 'For a Tentative Spatial Theory of the Third Reich', in *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich*, ed. by Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 19–44.

²⁰ Most recently: Trevor Barnes and Christian Abrahamsson, 'Tangled Complicities and Moral Struggles: the Haushofers, Father and Son, and the Spaces of Nazi Geopolitics', *Journal of Historical Geography* 47 (2015) 64–73; for a broader picture of geography at Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University, the Institute in which Karl Haushofer was employed, see: Gerhard Rainer and Simon Dudek, 'Beyond Haushoferism: Geography, Geopolitics and National Socialist Rule at Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University', *Geopolitics* 28 (2023) 1967–1989.

time his publications already spanned physical and human geographical matters and bore the imprint of *Länderkunde*. In 1927, for example, he published an article with the title, 'The Pampa; a natural or culturally induced grassland', in Berkeley's geography publications.²⁶ That year, he also gave a speech on the same topic – 'The development of The Pampas into a cultural landscape' at the German Geographical Congress in Karlsruhe. For these articles, he built on fieldwork that he had conducted during his professorship in Córdoba. While working in Argentina and the USA, his publication strategy was truly international, with articles appearing in Germany, Argentina, and the USA. Although based in the US at that point, almost all of his publications still focused on Latin America.

In his memoirs, he explains this, saying:

On the United States a large quantity of literature had been published and a great amount of geographically important material still awaited analysis. My situation was similar to that of Ferdinand von Richthofen, who moved on from North America to China to open up a virgin scientific field in which he could produce groundbreaking research.²⁷

Another focus of his influential supervisor Alfred Hettner, colonial geography, did not feature in Schmieder's publications in the 1920s, but this started to change significantly in the following decade. Before investigating this change, it is worth looking briefly at Schmieder's only publication to analyze Argentina explicitly from a regional geography approach and assessing how he perceived and interpreted Argentina's demographic make-up and nation-building process. Schmieder stated,

Today's citizens of the country, the Argentines, are still a nascent people [Volk]. Here, as in the United States, we can witness with our own eyes the birth of a nation (Kjellén). The vast majority of Argentine citizens are already united by a surge of national feeling that is at least as intense as it is among most European people who can draw on thousands of years of living on the same soil. And this national feeling causes assimilation power to all foreign elements!²⁸

He then went on to detail the country's racial characteristics, arguing that the Spanish conquerors were not of 'a pure race' but included 'Roman, Germanic, Moorish, and Old-Iberian blood'.²⁹ Until Argentine independence, control of the country was completely in the hands of European Spaniards, who subsequently lost the 'upper hand' in favor of the 'half-barbaric gaucho element'.³⁰ In the mid-nineteenth century, the European Argentines regained control of the country and from that point on, according to Schmieder, the 'actual colonization of the country' began. The strong influx of white people from Europe pushed back the gauchos and, for Schmieder, those immigrations were the reason behind the 'complete Europeanization of this nascent young nation'.³¹ So Schmieder was clearly fascinated by the new nation-building process in South America, and particularly by the rapid

rise in national identity; however, at the same time he was concerned about the country's *Völkish* and racial composition.

From *Länderkunde* to colonial geography: Schmieder's writings in the 1930s and 1940s

Back in Germany in the 1930s and building on material gathered during his years in North and South America, Schmieder published three large *Länderkunden* (Chorologies): *Länderkunde von Südamerika* (Chorology of South America), *Länderkunde von Nordamerika* (Chorology of North America), and *Länderkunde von Mittelamerika* (Chorology of Central America).³² In these volumes, he said little about the conceptualization of *Länderkunde* as such; his interest was clearly in extending the regional-studies approach to new areas of continental reach. This is made explicit in the foreword to the first of the three volumes:

With this book I attempt to divide South America into extensive landscapes [*Großlandschaften*]. My ultimate aim was to present the history of development of the individual cultural landscapes that have developed in South America in close harmony with the continent's natural environment.³³

This concept of *Länderkunde* as a supposedly objective, apolitical synthesis of the characteristics of regions that, however, in a second step could and should inform politics, is in no way contradictory to Schmieder's colonial geographical research during the National Socialist period, to which we now turn.

In 1934, Schmieder received funds from the German Research Foundation for a research project examining 'the whole-life forms of soil-attached [*bodenständig gewordene*] German colonists in Brazilian Espirito Santo'.³⁴ In 1936, again financed by the German Research Foundation, he returned to Argentina to research 'the current cultural development of the Argentine part of the Gran Chaco, with a particular emphasis on the situation of German colonists'.³⁵ While Schmieder's 1922 paper aimed to provide a chorological analysis of Argentina, he now – in keeping with the trend of the 1930s – stuck to chorological tenets but focused almost exclusively on Germans and Germanness (*Deutschtum*) in Latin America. Although he was unable to realize his plans to study German colonization in Brazilian Espirito Santo due to a lack of funds, as he commented in his memoirs, he and his assistant Herbert Wilhelmy did travel to Argentina in 1937 to study German colonization projects in the Argentine Pampas region, as well as in the Argentine and Paraguayan Chaco region.³⁶

On the one hand, Schmieder was driven by the then widespread idea that many nations were suffering from a surplus population and thus urgently needed colonization projects as a solution. On the other hand, some nations including Argentina were in dramatic need of people to populate their countries. In the preface to his paper published in 1938, which analyzes Fascist colonization in North Africa and to which we will return later, he cites the famous Argentine president Alberdi, who stated in the nineteenth century, '*gobernar es poblar*' – to govern is to populate.³⁷ Hence, he believed

²⁶ Oskar Schmieder, *The Pampa; a Natural or Culturally Induced Grassland* (Berkeley: University of California publications in geography, 1927).

²⁷ Schmieder, *Lebenserinnerungen*, p. 157. For a discussion of the importance of Richthofen to German colonial geography as well as German colonialism see Zimmerer, 'In Service of Empire'.

²⁸ Oskar Schmieder, 'Argentinien', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 28 (1922) 232–252; own translation.

²⁹ Schmieder, 'Argentinien', p. 243; own translation.

³⁰ Schmieder, 'Argentinien', p. 243; own translation.

³¹ Schmieder, 'Argentinien', p. 243; own translation.

³² Oskar Schmieder, 'Länderkunde Südamerikas' (Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1932); Oskar Schmieder, 'Länderkunde Nordamerikas' (Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1933); Oskar Schmieder, 'Länderkunde Mittelamerikas' (Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1934).

³³ Schmieder, 'Länderkunde Südamerikas', preface; own translation.

³⁴ BArch, R 73/118; own translation.

³⁵ BArch, R 73/14407; own translation.

³⁶ Schmieder, *Lebenserinnerungen*.

³⁷ Oskar Schmieder, *Die faschistische Lösung des Kolonialproblems* (Neumünster: Kurt Walchholz, 1939), p. 4; own translation.

in the enormous importance of colonization to the entire world, even though the reasons behind it differ fundamentally: some nations want to accommodate their surplus population, while others wish to populate – and thus govern – their countries.

Although the majority of German immigrants to Argentina ended up in (its large) cities, Schmieder and Wilhelmy confined their studies to rural German colonization projects. This surely had to do with Schmieder's observation, dating back to the 1920s, that assimilation happens relatively quickly in Argentina, and that most city-dwelling Germans could already be considered part of the country's nation-building project. In contrast, Schmieder and Wilhelmy considered rural German colonists as 'deutsche Volkssplitter' [German Volk splinters] so, due to their agricultural, rural lifestyle, for them (as for the National Socialist project), they constituted a particularly important part of the larger German *Volksgemeinschaft* [union of the Volk]. Schmieder and Wilhelmy studied the *Völkish* attitude of German colonists across the different colonization projects and their state of assimilation into the Argentine/Paraguayan nation-building process, as well as their possibilities to sustain their lives from the land.

They considered the state of (dis)assimilation of German colonizers as primarily a result of their inner attitude. Even though some Russian Germans had lived outside German borders for generations before moving to Argentina, for Schmieder and Wilhelmy they demonstrated that *Völkish* language and traditions could still be preserved.

It is particularly within the group of Russian Germans that we can still find a clear and natural awareness of the difficult situation that all foreign Germans have to confront due to their fateful blood [*blutsmäßig*] bond with Germanness and due to the economic necessity of living in foreign lands. Those people have seriously considered the possibility of moving back into the home [Heimat] of their ancestors. They are particularly moved by the German colonial question, as they hope that a life under German rule might be possible in the colonies. They boil their situation down to the formula: "We have lived for 200 years under foreign people [*Völker*] and want our children finally to have a real home [Heimat]."³⁸

This paragraph also makes clear that *Völkish* and racial interpretations of Germanness go hand in hand. Schmieder and Wilhelmy speak of a German *Volk* splinter in Argentina – a particularly valuable one because of its rural lifestyle, which is directly connected with the land. Yet at the same time, alongside with the *Völkish* argument, they speak of a blood [*blutsmäßig*] bond.

The deep and secure connection with their land [*Scholle*] – of significant importance to all German settlers in the eyes of Schmieder and Wilhelmy – is frequently jeopardized in Argentine colonization projects, as the authors detail case by case. They refer to a lack of government help and protection, not least with regard to the national desire for assimilation, as well as to the German colonies' precarious economic situation, for which not only natural disasters but also anti-Semitic arguments concerning the Jewish people who only exploit rural workers for their own benefit, are invoked.³⁹ Schmieder and Wilhelmy were also members of the *Überseedeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [Overseas German Research Group], which aimed to research, strengthen, and

preserve Germanness in the Americas from the early 1930s onwards.⁴⁰ This is also highly visible in Schmieder and Wilhelmy's analysis of German colonization in Paraguay and Argentina. They highlight the importance of strong German leaders, German schools, and the [National Socialist] party to sustain, or – in other colonization projects analyzed, in which the connection to Germanness had gradually been lost – to restore the connection with German *Volk*.⁴¹ However, with regard to German colonization in the Argentine Chaco, they state at the end of the book: 'In the long run, in Argentina, a development appropriate to their species [*artgerechte Entwicklung*] will be doomed to fail for German settlers due to the decisive assimilation policy of the [Argentine] government'.⁴²

On the one hand, Schmieder argues that the role of German colonizers had been dramatically undervalued in terms of their importance to (agri-)cultural development in South America. In a paper published in 1940, he states:

German farmers were the first to break the Pampas soil with a plough. In the east as well as the west of the South American continent, in temperate climates as well as in the tropics, German colonization work initiated a new cultural period – the epoch of large clearings, which is still in full swing. In the open grasslands, too, their work has been groundbreaking. Indeed, it created the economic prerequisites for Argentina's modern cultural development and political power position.⁴³

In the paper, he also clarifies why the German colonization project in tropical Espirito Santo (Brazil) is of such a great importance to scientific investigation:

As a successful colonization attempt of white people from the Northern Race in a tropical, humid climate, the accomplishment of German colonists cannot be overestimated, as the group of colonizers fought on their own against the hostile tropical force of nature [...] a colonial experiment whose importance to the history of humanity cannot be assessed yet.⁴⁴

His argument here must be viewed against the backdrop of an extensive scientific discussion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about whether Nordic people were (biologically) capable of living in tropical or subtropical climates.⁴⁵ On the

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the role of the *Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften* [*Völkish* German research groups], of which the *Überseedeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* was a part, see Michael Fahlbusch, *Wissenschaft im Dienst der nationalsozialistischen Politik? Die Volksdeutschen Forschungsgemeinschaften von 1931–1945* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999); Martin Seckendorf, 'Deutsches Ausland-Institut', in *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, ed. by Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar, and Alexander Pinwinkler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 1356–1366; Bock writes that with Schmieder's appointment as a professor of geography in Kiel, this city became one of the main centers for Latin American Studies in Germany. She also argues that Schmieder was one of the German Latin Americanists most in line with National Socialist thought: Ulrike Bock, 'Deutsche Lateinamerikaforschung im Nationalsozialismus. Ansätze zu einer wissenschaftshistorischen Perspektive', in *Der Nationalsozialismus und Lateinamerika: Institutionen – Repräsentationen – Wissenskonstrukte*, ed. by Sandra Carreras (Berlin: Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, 2005), pp. 7–22.

⁴¹ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Deutsche Ackerbausiedlungen*, p. 130.

⁴² Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Deutsche Ackerbausiedlungen*, p. 130; own translation.

⁴³ Oskar Schmieder, 'Die grundsätzliche Bedeutung der deutschen Kolonistenarbeit für die kulturelle Entwicklung Südamerikas', in *Deutsches Archiv für Landes- und Volksforschung* 4 (1940), 21–28 (p. 25); own translation.

⁴⁴ Schmieder, 'Die grundsätzliche Bedeutung'; own translation.

⁴⁵ See, representative for this debate, Ernst Rodenwaldt, 'Akklimation und Kolonisation' in *Lebensraumfragen europäischer Völker. Band II: Koloniale Ergänzungsräume*, ed. by Karl-Heinz Dietzel, Oskar Schmieder and Heinrich Schmitthenner (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1941), pp. 57–67.

³⁸ Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy, *Deutsche Ackerbausiedlungen im südamerikanischen Grasland, Pampa und Gran Chaco* (Leipzig: August Pries, 1938), p. 54; own translation.

³⁹ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Deutsche Ackerbausiedlungen*, p. 72.

other hand, Schmieder's analysis of German colonization projects in South America is characterized by a deep-seated regret that such an important part of German *Volkstum* was in danger of assimilation almost everywhere on the continent, and that Germans were frequently under significant economic pressure and struggled to make a living.

Colonial geography from South America to Africa

Schmieder and Wilhelmy turned to studying Fascist colonization projects in North Africa in 1938. I argue that this switch can only be understood against the backdrop of the (for them) strongly disappointing conclusions from their empirical work in Argentina and South America more widely. Indeed, Schmieder is quite explicit in this regard. In a lecture organized by the scientific academy of the National Socialist German Lecturers League in Kiel, in which he spoke on the 'Fascist solution of the colonial problem', Schmieder states:

The colonization of empty spaces has been the most important political task of many people [Völker]. Accordingly, they see the colonial problem from the perspective of empty space. The difficulty for them is to find apt human material [Menschenmaterial] to complete their insufficient natural population growth. The New World has not understood the full significance of this immigration problem. It was initially understood purely in terms of quantitative numbers and, consequently, all immigrants were welcomed, regardless of race, religion, language, worldview or professional qualifications. The immigrant's suitability for certain jobs was considered too late, and it was recognized too late that a unified *Volk* would be unlikely to grow from a mixture of races and nations.⁴⁶

He adds that this is fundamentally different with respect to Fascist colonization in Libya. 'A greater difference in colonization methods [between Argentina and Italy] can scarcely be imagined'.⁴⁷ What lies at the core of these differences, in Schmieder's opinion?

On the one hand, for Schmieder, Italy's colonial position stemmed from its overpopulation problem and thus from the strong need to 'expand the living space [Lebensraum]' for its people.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the ideological, economic, and political framings of colonization are completely different. Against the backdrop of these differences, what made Italy's colonization in North Africa so interesting for him (and Wilhelmy) was the potential to learn lessons for Germany's own colonial aspirations.

The development of Italy's colonial empire is of great interest to us [Germans], because it stems from necessities that we also feel and because Fascist colonization is based on ideological [weltanschauliche] principles which correspond to our own.⁴⁹

To study Fascist colonization in Libya, Schmieder and Wilhelmy built up and drew on strong support from the Italian colonial authorities; in the preface to their book, they explicitly thank the director of the meteorological service in Northern Africa and the director of the National Settlement Society.⁵⁰ This clearly implies that their academic investigation had ideological-political aims

and, perhaps even more importantly, was based on transnational scientific and political cooperation.⁵¹ What did they observe in Libya and what conclusions did they draw?

One crucial difference between Fascist colonization and other European colonial projects was the importance that Italy attributed to farmers [Bauern]. As Schmieder himself put it:

Today we are all aware of the importance of farmers to the continued existence [Bestand] of the *Volk* and the state. Fascism is aware of another important fact: for a colony to become an integral part of the state, a colonial population has to really set foot in the colonial land [...] From then on, the goal for Fascist colonization had been set.⁵²

Schmieder and Wilhelmy were fully aware that Italy's expansion caused massive death and suffering for significant numbers of North African people, but nonetheless, they still considered it an important and justified effort.⁵³ Furthermore, in their view it was a *Völkish* vocation.

It was the Romans who made a cultural land [Kulturland] of North Africa; they constituted for almost a millennium "the salt of the world". That was what Fascism has taught Italians: to realize that they were descended from the Romans and that they had a vocation to found a new empire based on the Roman spirit.⁵⁴

Another similarity with the German Reich clearly fascinated Schmieder and Wilhelmy: the difficulties that Italy faced in building a colonial empire compared with other European nations such as France and Great Britain, who had already subsumed the most attractive parts of the world into their empires, leaving only the sparsest parts – Libya being a paradigmatic example of the latter. In their book, they argued that only the Fascist approach to colonization could succeed under these particular circumstances, and that the German Reich could learn a lot from these experiences due to its similar situation. As well as admiring the Fascist push to populate Libya with Italian colonizers, they were clearly attracted to Italy's attempt to transform Libya from a colony into a national territory. This also becomes apparent in the title of their book's conclusion: 'A colony becomes a province'.⁵⁵

For Schmieder and Wilhelmy, this Fascist attempt to transform a colony into a [populated] province is also a crucial difference compared with the earlier colonization efforts of France and Great Britain, as well as with the pre-1914 colonial administration of the German empire. They recount that in 1925 an Italian colonial expert could still argue that the relocation of Italian rural workers was neither desirable nor should it be a goal, and thus this expert argued from precisely the same stance as German colonial politicians before WWI.

In their [the German colonial experts'] view, European immigrants are defeated by undemanding natives. Additionally, they think that their own work belittles white people in the eyes of

⁵¹ For a detailed investigation of colonial cooperation between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy see: Patrick Bernhard, 'Nazi Germany's Colonial Aspirations in the Shadow of Italian Expansionism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41 (2013) 617–643; Patrick Bernhard, 'Hitler's Africa in the East: Italian Colonialism as a Model for German Planning in Eastern Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History* 51 (2016) 61–90; Patrick Bernhard, 'Colonial Crossovers: Nazi Germany and its Entanglements with other Empires', *Journal of Global History* 12 (2017) 206–227.

⁵² Schmieder, *Die faschistische Lösung*, p. 10; own translation.

⁵³ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation*.

⁵⁴ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation*, p. 14; own translation.

⁵⁵ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation*; own translation.

⁴⁶ Schmieder, *Die faschistische Lösung*, p. 4; own translation.

⁴⁷ Schmieder, *Die faschistische Lösung*, p. 12; own translation.

⁴⁸ Schmieder, *Die faschistische Lösung*, p. 5; own translation.

⁴⁹ Schmieder, *Die faschistische Lösung*, p. 5; own translation.

⁵⁰ Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation in Nordafrika* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1939).

people of color. Fascist policies completely broke with this worldview. As workers and farmers, Italians demonstrate that, in terms of work performance, they surpass every native. This recognition should also give us [Germans] food for thought; particularly since German farmers have demonstrated in foreign colonial lands that their superior knowledge and performance can lead to success under the most difficult circumstances.⁵⁶

Schmieder then went on to recount briefly the history of German colonization in tropical Espirito Santo (Brazil), which in his opinion had still not been analyzed sufficiently from a scientific point of view. It becomes clear that, for him, colonization should not just be about sourcing raw materials but – contrary to German colonization before WWI – about providing a nationally controlled, *Völkish*, racially uniform living space that, additionally, could feed the mother nation. If this were achieved, the area in question would become a province, not a colony.

In the eyes of Schmieder and Wilhelmy, Fascist colonization was characterized by a strong focus on scientific and technological studies, economic protection by the state for settlers and an emphasis on (cultural) education: ‘a material and moral support that is unique in the colonial history of European people [*Völker*]’.⁵⁷ With their specific form of colonization, Italians had killed two birds with one stone: the loss of people who were part of the Italian *Volk*, while at the same time avoiding the mix of *Völker* that characterizes American agricultural lands.

In Libya, the broad class [Schicht] of pioneer children without culture that we know from South America simply does not exist. [...] Instead of the complaints and the misery of Chaco colonizers, in Libya one sees only happy and satisfied people wherever one goes.⁵⁸

Schmieder's colonial ambitions, National Socialism, and WWII

Schmieder was not directly drawn into the war efforts at the frontline. However, his colonial, racial-*Völkish* ambitions became further radicalized during the war years. According to Schelhass, Schmieder was the driving force behind the founding of the German Geographical Society, which many German geographers wanted to see established, but whose foundation was only successfully completed in 1941.⁵⁹ As Rössler reconstructs, Schmieder sought the support of Nazi Germany's highest officials to that end. On 29, October 1940, he wrote a letter to Reich Marshal Göring, asking him to become the patron of German geography:

So I highlight the wish that, due to your high personal standing, German geography will find its position in international science and that through your patronage, German geographical science will eventually become organized in a way which corresponds to the justified interests of our people.⁶⁰

Schmieder then became the first chairman of the German Geographical Society, founded in 1941. In this position, he was responsible for organizing the European Geographical Congress in

Würzburg in 1942, which united geographers who mainly came from the three Fascist powers: Germany, Italy and Spain. Schmieder thus clearly held a powerful position within the discipline during the war.⁶¹

Additionally, he was one of the closest collaborators of his Kiel University colleague Paul Ritterbusch, who in 1940 initiated the ‘Military Service of the German Humanities’ [*Kriegseinsatz der Deutschen Geisteswissenschaften*], better known under the name *Aktion Ritterbusch*, which aimed to sustain the war effort from the humanities.⁶² The historian Hausmann considers that the jurisprudential and geographical contributions to the *Aktion Ritterbusch* were most closely aligned with National Socialist rule.⁶³ Oskar Schmieder, together with the two other prominent colonial geographers Heinrich Schmitthenner and Karl-Heinz Dietzel, was responsible for geography's contribution to the *Aktion Ritterbusch*. As editors, the three coordinated the book series ‘*Lebensraumfragen europäischer Völker*’ [Questions of living space of the European people], which includes individual contributions on different regions of the world from a wide variety of prominent geographers. The historian Patrick Bernhard goes so far as to argue that ‘The publication was to give the murderous racial politics of the Nazi regime in Eastern Europe a solid scientific underpinning’.⁶⁴ Following Bernhard, Italian Fascist colonization had a much greater significance as a role model for German colonization in the East than had been acknowledged so far and the study of Italian Fascist colonization by German experts – being Schmieder and Wilhelmy two of them – had a direct impact on German settlement policies in the East.⁶⁵

Volume II of the book series ‘*Lebensraumfragen*’ bears the subtitle ‘Europe's Colonial Complementary Spaces’ and, as the editors Dietzel, Schmieder and Schmitthenner explain in their preface, builds on a scientific conference at the Institute of Colonial Geography at the University of Leipzig that was held in July 1940. The editors clearly define the aim of the volume in their foreword: ‘From their particular field of work, geographers take a stand here on questions that will be essential for the future colonial work of our people [*Volk*]’.⁶⁶ In Volume III of the living space compilation on North America, Schmieder once again made it very clear that state-led colonization under Fascist auspices was, for him, the only way to overcome the problems of settler colonization.

The terrible setbacks that wild, unplanned colonization in climatically unsuitable landscapes can lead to were demonstrated in full force by the example of the Great Plains in the post-war years. Only where a provident state leadership plans the work and then supports and assists the colonists can the unused areas of scarcity be utilized without excessive human sacrifice. Fascist colonization in Libya seems to us to be a prime

⁵⁶ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation*, p. 9–10; own translation.

⁵⁷ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation*, p. 203; own translation.

⁵⁸ Schmieder and Wilhelmy, *Die faschistische Kolonisation*, p. 186; own translation.

⁵⁹ Bruno Schelhass, *Die Deutsche Geographische Gesellschaft: Ein Beitrag zur Verbandsgeschichte der deutschen Geographie* (unpublished diploma thesis, Münster University, 1997) p. 80.

⁶⁰ Rössler, ‘*Wissenschaft und Lebensraum*’, p. 35–36.

⁶¹ Hans Präsent, ‘Die Arbeitssitzung europäischer Geographen in Würzburg’, *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 48 (1942) 177–185.

⁶² Frank-Rutger Hausmann, *Die Geisteswissenschaften im ‘Dritten Reich’* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2011); Frank-Rutger Hausmann, ‘Kriegseinsatz der Deutschen Geisteswissenschaften’, in *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, ed. by Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar and Alexander Pinwinkler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 1055–1061; The *Aktion Ritterbusch*'s most famous participant was Carl Schmitt. For a discussion of Schmitt's spatial theory see Claudio Minca and Rory Rowan, ‘The Question of Space in Carl Schmitt’, *Progress in Human Geography* 39 (2015) 268–289; Claudio Minca and Rory Rowan, *On Schmitt and Space* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁶³ Hausmann, *Die Geisteswissenschaften*.

⁶⁴ Bernhard, ‘Hitler's Africa in the East’, p. 77.

⁶⁵ Bernhard, ‘Hitler's Africa in the East’.

⁶⁶ Dietzel, Schmieder, and Schmitthenner, ‘*Lebensraumfragen*’, Band II, preface.

example of how even a very sparse colonial area can be made useful for feeding the mother nation.⁶⁷

Schmieder's University of Kiel colleague Paul Ritterbusch not only led the 'Military Service of the German Humanities' initiative but also assumed the leadership of the Reich Working Group on Spatial Research [*Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für Raumforschung*, (RAG)] in 1940. The RAG formed part of the Reich Office for Spatial Research and its aim was 'the systematic bringing together and orientation of all scientific forces towards spatial research in order to achieve, with the help of science, a faster solution to the important question of spatial planning'.⁶⁸ In May 1941, just a year after Ritterbusch had become the RAG's leader, Schmieder was invited onto the scientific advisory board of the RAG, showing that he not only aimed to apply his knowledge to questions of spatial (re)ordering, but that he also had the position and influence to do so.⁶⁹ As Bernhard has shown, at the first special meeting of RAG's colonial researchers, Schmieder argued for a transfer of 200,000 German emigrants from South America to Africa with the aim of founding a farmers' settlement to supply the German Reich with agricultural goods.⁷⁰ Hence, Schmieder actively pushed for state-led German settler colonialism in Africa under National Socialist rule.

The fact that Schmieder was well connected with the who's who of National Socialist colonial politics is also demonstrated in a publication dating from 1942. At a time when the National Socialist empire had reached its greatest territorial expansion, colonial desires – crucially not only in the East – also (re)emerged strongly in science and policy. Against this backdrop, the German colonial yearbook of 1942, promoted by National Socialist official bodies, was published under the title 'Colonial turnaround' [*Koloniale Wende*]. Central figures responsible for National Socialist colonial policies such as members of the NSDAP Office of Colonial Policy, as well as a number of German university professors, published on different aspects of colonialism. Among them was Oskar Schmieder, who published a contribution entitled 'Forms of Fascist colonization' in this anthology, in which he again glorifies Italian (settler) colonialism in Libya.⁷¹ Interestingly, it wasn't just Schmieder who focused on Africa; all the publications in the volume dealt with colonial issues on this continent.

From colonial geography back to *Länderkunde* – Schmieder's career after WWII

Schmieder, rather than distancing himself from his work and his key arguments published during WWII, detached them from

⁶⁷ Oskar Schmieder (ed.), 'Gegenwartsprobleme der Neuen Welt. Teil I: Nordamerika' [*Lebensraumfragen Band III*] (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1943), preface (p. VI).

⁶⁸ Ariane Leendertz, 'Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für Raumforschung', in *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, ed. by Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar, and Alexander Pinwinkler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 1926–1933 (p. 1926); own translation.

⁶⁹ Petra Svatek, 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Raumforschung der Universität Wien' in *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, ed. by Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar, and Alexander Pinwinkler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 1752–1758.

⁷⁰ Bernhard, "Lebensraumwissenschaft", p. 355, states that the two colonial geographers who led the book project on 'Lebensraumfragen' together with Schmieder – Dietzel and Schmitthener – as well as Ritterbusch, economic sociologist Bülow and three staff members of the Reich Office for Spatial Planning participated in the meeting. His source is the German National Archive: BArch, R 113, 1586, pp. 27–28.

⁷¹ Oskar Schmieder, 'Formen der faschistischen Kolonisation' in *Das deutsche koloniale Jahrbuch. Koloniale Wende*, ed. by H.W. Bauer (Berlin: Wilhelm Stüferott, 1942), pp. 43–50.

National Socialist thought. What's more, he argued that significant contributions such as his edited books on *Lebensraumfragen* and the meeting reports of the German geographical congress in Würzburg in 1942 had been possible *despite* 'the time of need during the war'.⁷² He went on to argue that in a 'libertarian' [*freiheitlich*] period there should be much more potential for the development of geography and that the discipline could even 'help to stabilize the German economic miracle through an effective representation of their findings within the context of general development aid'.⁷³ He then outlined his view on the need for development aid in Chile, detailing that the German president had informed him that he was interested in such issues (including development aid in the form of the reallocation of agricultural land).

This clearly indicates that he was (again) well connected with high-ranking political representatives. Equally, his main convictions do not seem to have changed. He regretted that during the 34th German Geographical Congress in 1963, geographers did not adopt a position concerning what Albrecht Penck had considered the 'core problem of physical anthropogeography' as early as 40 years previously.⁷⁴ For Schmieder:

The extraordinary growth of the population is no longer an academic question. It has become a danger to humanity that is no less significant than the nuclear bomb. Birth control, particularly in economically underdeveloped peoples [*Völker*] is probably the only means of avoiding this danger.⁷⁵

Thus, Schmieder did not just regain the Chair of Geography at Kiel University in 1949. He continued to be an influential figure, and he did not sweep his work published between 1930 and 1945 under the carpet. Moreover, his influence was not just confined to the German sphere: From 1953 until 1955, Schmieder was contracted by the University of Karachi, Pakistan, to build up its geography department, and the department's website still states: 'Professor Schmieder [sic] was one of the leading German Geographers who served as Chairman in the department'.⁷⁶ Between 1958 and 1959, he worked as a visiting professor at the University of Chile, Santiago de Chile.

Conceptually, while we have traced a movement from *Länderkunde* to colonial geography in Schmieder's writings of the 1930s, we can also trace a movement back to *Länderkunde* in his post-WWII contributions. Again, Schmieder's contributions focused less on conceptually substantiating/advancing *Länderkunde* and more on providing continental-scale *Länderkunden*. In 1969, at a time when the German *Länderkunde* paradigm was already under substantial critique, Schmieder published an article with the aim of underlining their ongoing significant importance and making recommendations for writing *Länderkunden* at a time of rapidly increasing global knowledge.⁷⁷ That his contribution was influential with respect to debates over the role and evolution of the *Länderkunde* paradigm is demonstrated through its reprint in a compendium entitled 'Problems of *Länderkunde*' which was published in 1979 and compiled classics of German *Länderkunde* (of which two reprints of articles authored by Alfred Hettner and

⁷² Oskar Schmieder, 'Die deutsche Geographie in der Welt von heute', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 54 (1966) 207–222 (p. 211); own translation.

⁷³ Schmieder, 'Die deutsche Geographie', p. 211; own translation.

⁷⁴ Schmieder, 'Die deutsche Geographie', p. 213; own translation.

⁷⁵ Schmieder, 'Die deutsche Geographie', p. 214; own translation.

⁷⁶ <https://www.uok.edu.pk/faculties/geography/index.php>: last accessed 02 February 2024.

⁷⁷ Oskar Schmieder, 'Probleme der Länderkunde im Spiegel der Kritik', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 57 (1969) 19–41.

published in the 1920s and 1930s are key examples) as well as influential post-WWII texts.⁷⁸

Additionally, while German colonial geography was neglected after WWII, disappearing completely, this was not the case for studies on settler colonialism. According to Neuburger,⁷⁹ Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy together with Leo Waibel can be considered as ‘first generation of geographers who carried out expeditions to so-called “frontier” regions in Latin America after the First World War [...]’. As Neuburger elaborates in detail, they can be considered the precursors of a burgeoning German geographical literature on settler colonialism in Latin America, which after WWII was mainly undertaken within the subdiscipline of development geography. German geographers after WWII, however, no longer focused exclusively on German migrants as had been the case in the interwar period.⁸⁰

Conclusion

Through a detailed examination of his biography and his core publications, I have shown that Oskar Schmieder had a highly influential position within the discipline of geography during the National Socialist period. He was one of a number of prominent geographers such as Heinrich Schmitthenner (a PhD student of Alfred Hettner, as Schmieder had been), the geopolitics theorist Erich Obst and Karl-Heinz Dietzel, who contributed to a veritable boom in colonial geographical scholarship during the National Socialist period, a subdiscipline that, as Schmieder's contributions show, firmly aimed to re-establish a German colonial *Reich*. This is clearly not new – geography played a crucial role in German colonial politics pre-WWI.⁸¹ Revanchist colonial publications also mark the interwar period until the National Socialists seized power.⁸² What did change, however, and clearly led to the rise in colonial geographical publications in parallel with the rise of National Socialism, was that colonial geographers such as Schmieder saw that the time had (finally) come to devote their scientific work to the service of colonialism again – and this with the prospect of regaining a colonial empire. The example of Oskar Schmieder also shows that geographers not only stood up for the re-establishment of a German colonial empire, but that they also fought for its Fascist orientation – which, at least for Schmieder, would differ from the German colonial empire pre-WWI in a number of key ways.

In public government and in scientific (geographical) research, pre-WWI colonies were primarily seen as crucial for ensuring that the center (Germany) was supplied with primary resources. Schmieder disagreed. Through his research in Argentina, Brazil and later Libya, he aimed to show that colonies could, and should,

function primarily as settlement areas for white people in general and Germans in particular. Moreover, Schmieder argued forcefully that German settlers in South America (at least if not ‘disturbed’ by the assimilationist policies of South American nation states) and Italian settlers in North Africa (particularly due to the superior Fascist colonial politics) had convincingly shown that their settlement colonies stood out from all the others. For Schmieder, soil is a central element. In his opinion, the relationship with and attachment to the soil is crucial for German farmers. With regard to the German colonies in South America, for example, he argues that it is the desire to maintain Germanness while at the same time being willing to connect to (a new) soil that make this splinter of *Volk* important for the wider *Volk*. For him, the particular relationship with soil is not an exclusively inherited (historical) one in a particular place – he clearly was not an adherent of an environmental (geographical) determinist perspective.

For Schmieder, people have an ability to connect with the soil. In that sense, he was also fully in line with the National Socialist world-view, as ‘[...] the anthropogenic domination of the natural world was an essential part of the activist ethos of National Socialism and became even more pronounced during the 1930s’.⁸³ Schmieder's quest for German colonies in Africa derived directly from his studies of the history of German emigration to South America as well as Fascist Italian colonization in North Africa. On the one hand, he argued scientifically (through his role as researcher responsible for geography's contribution to the Military Service of German Humanities) and politically (through his role in the Overseas German Research Group, in the RAG, and through his collaboration with the NSDAP Office of Colonial Policy) for the rescue of (peasant) German settlers from the ongoing mixture of people in South America. On the other hand, he wanted to give these settlers a *Heimat* in Africa which Germany controlled. For Schmieder, German colonialism and German settler colonialism – both (re)thought under National Socialist racial/*Völkish* ideology – were two sides of the same coin.

Schmieder's career after WWII can certainly be seen as a prime example of the institutional and conceptual continuities within the discipline in Germany. He did not distance himself at all from his work written during the National Socialist period, regained his Chair in 1949 and remained politically connected and highly respected nationally and even internationally. Conceptually, he picked up where he had left off before the Nazi era. As so many other German geographers did – whether they were known for their colonial geographical, geopolitical or *Völkish* geographical research during the National Socialist period – he found a home again (or rather remained at home) within the *Länderkunde* paradigm. Schmieder conceived of *Länderkunde* as an objective, apolitical, and synthetic analysis of the characteristics of regions. However, and this is key, for him these supposedly objective and apolitical *Länderkunden* are important tools that can and should inform politics. This is a crucial conceptual continuum in his research. It can help to explain why Schmieder – in common with many other geographers who collaborated with the regime – did not feel the need to distance himself from work he published during the National Socialist period.⁸⁴ Chorological work formed the foundation of his colonial-geographical, Fascist racial-*Völkish* arguments as well as of his post-WWII contributions – from which, of course, colonial-geographical elements are absent. This

⁷⁸ Oskar Schmieder, ‘Probleme der Länderkunde im Spiegel der Kritik’ in *Probleme der Länderkunde*, ed. by Reinhard Stewig (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), pp. 132–156; see also the obituary to Schmieder, published as a collection of essays concerned with *Länderkunde*: Jürgen Bähr and Reinhard Stewig, *Beiträge zur Theorie und Methode der Länderkunde Oskar Schmieder, 27. Jan. 1891–12. Febr. 1980 zum Gedenken* (Kiel: Geographisches Institut, 1981).

⁷⁹ Martina Neuburger, ‘Geographical Approaches on Territorialities, Resources and Frontiers’, in *ResourceCultures. Sociocultural Dynamics and the Use of Resources – Theories, Methods, Perspectives*, ed. by Anke Scholz, Martin Bartelheim, Roland Hardenberg and Jörn Staecker (Tübingen: Universität Tübingen, 2017), pp. 179–193 (p. 181).

⁸⁰ Neuburger 2017 gives a critical review of German geographical studies on South American ‘frontiers’ starting with the generation of Schmieder, Waibel and Wilhelmy up to the most recent work in the twenty-first century. Her argument is that the concept of the frontier that is still frequently used in geographical studies has a colonial character – primarily through its notion of free space – and thus should be reconceptualized.

⁸¹ Gräbel, *Die Erforschung der Kolonien*; Michel, ‘Making Mount Kilimanjaro German’.

⁸² Kost, *Die Einflüsse der Geopolitik*.

⁸³ Mark Bassin, ‘Blood or Soil? The *Völkish* Movement, the Nazis, and the Legacy of Geopolitik’, in *How Green were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*, ed. by Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc and Thomas Zeller (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 204–242 (p. 216).

⁸⁴ Michel, “‘With almost clean or at most slightly dirty hands’”.

continuity becomes visible, for example, when Schmieder argues in an essay on 'German geography in today's world', published in 1966:

At a time when ignorance of the potential of their *Lebensräume* [living spaces], a knotted economic spirit and insuperable, development-inhibiting taboos are causing many *Völker* [people] to stagger blindly towards their doom, good chorological analyses [länderkundliche Werke] could at least open humanity's eyes. Perhaps then, having gained sight, it would find the right path.⁸⁵

From the analysis of Schmieder's oeuvre, two further research gaps can be identified. Firstly, the body of research on National Socialist continuity in the academic geography of post-war Germany is still very sparse. How former elites could remain in power and what impact the work of committed, influential National Socialists had within the two post-war German states are questions that still require further investigation. Secondly, and against the backdrop of a growing interest in postcolonial theory in geography, more research into colonial thought development in German

geography and its influence within the discipline and on German (colonial) politics, both before 1918 and pre-1945, is needed. Colonial geography necessarily disappeared after WWII in Germany. However, the evolution of geography and, in particular, of *Länderkunde* as well as development geography – in which the analysis of settler colonialism, for example, played a crucial role – could, and should, be (re)visited, tracing continuities (and ruptures) with pre-1945 writings. Finally, we should not overlook the fact that Oskar Schmieder was just one of many German colonial geographers.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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⁸⁵ Schmieder, 'Die deutsche Geographie', p. 208–209.