

Research, Scholarship and Creativity Grant Application
Submitted by Elizabeth R. Baer

I. Previous RSC Grants and Outcomes

The only RSC funding I have been awarded was to attend a CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange) seminar in South Africa in June, 2007. I was eager to learn more about colonialism in Africa and links between colonialism and genocide. I anticipated that my next scholarly project (the one on which I am now embarked) would focus on these links. The seminar was enormously valuable to me as both a scholar and teacher, and I am pleased that the Kendall Center is now funding one of these seminars per year for a Gustavus faculty member.

I regret to report that my last two requests to the RSC fund have been unsuccessful. For my sabbatical in 2007-2008, I requested funding to travel to Prague in order to undertake research for my manuscript in progress at that time, which was the focus of my sabbatical project. The request was rejected (no reason given) and the Provost Office subsequently provided sufficient funds, from another source, to enable me to travel to Prague so I could complete the manuscript. I subsequently published the book: THE GOLEM REDUX: FROM PRAGUE TO POST-HOLOCAUST FICTION (Wayne State University Press, 2012). Curiously, the Kendall Center website lists this funding as an RSC award.

My next request was for support to attend a CIEE seminar in Senegal, Africa in June, 2011. This request was made in anticipation of the book I am now working on, which is the focus of my sabbatical in Fall, 2014. Again, the request was rejected with very little feedback. I persevered and with financial assistance from various other offices, my department chair stipend, and personal funds, I was able to enroll in the seminar which was, like the seminar in South Africa, incredibly valuable. I am now an active member of the African Studies program, teaching two complementary courses and one core course, and am using the knowledge gained on this trip in my new manuscript.

I find it rather ironic that I won the Faculty Scholarship Achievement Award from Gustavus in 2012, having been rejected by the RSC twice. I certainly hope that you will smile favorably on this request.

II. Complete Project Description

A. Purpose

The new book's working title is Africa Looking at Germany, Germany Looking at Africa. Such research is at the forefront of the field of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, a field which is said to have begun in 1961 with the publication of the first history of the Holocaust by Raul Hilberg. The initial focus of the field was on the victims, then on the perpetrators. From there,

the field expanded in the 1990's to include comparative study of other genocides and to acknowledge that gender was a factor in Nazi ideology and in the experience of the victims. Now the field is expanding again to look at the links between European Imperialism and genocide, and it is at this nexus that my new book is situated.

I want to look at the ways in which the production of literary texts, photography, and an art installation reveal perceptions and stereotypes that Germans had/have of Africans and vice versa. For example, during the colonial era in Africa (roughly 1885-1960, although many countries were colonized far earlier), Europeans viewed their colonial subjects as primitive, barbaric, lacking any kind of civilization, and in need of religious conversion. Africa was "the dark continent," and the perception Europeans had of indigenous Africans is sometimes called the "Imperial Gaze." Having dehumanized the indigenous people, Germans found it easier to commit the first genocide of the 20th century in what is now Namibia. Many of the German men involved in that genocide in 1905 went home to Germany and carried with them the construct of racial hierarchy that made the Holocaust possible. It is instructive to learn that one of Hitler's key henchmen, Hermann Göring, was the son of a colonial soldier in Namibia.

B. Feasibility

The qualifications I bring to this project are complex and only as a senior scholar could I have envisioned the effort to bring together the fields of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Postcolonial Studies as this project will do. Since 1990, I have been a Holocaust Studies scholar. My three most recent books all focused on the Holocaust: The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women (Wayne State UP, 2000), an edition of a memoir by a Catholic woman; Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust (Wayne State UP, 2003), an anthology of essays; and The Golem Redux: From Prague to Post-Holocaust Fiction (Wayne State UP, 2012), a monograph on post Holocaust fiction. I regularly teach a First Term Seminar on genocide and/or the Holocaust and a course on gender and the Holocaust. After work as a scholar and teacher in Holocaust Studies for a dozen years, I determined to expand my knowledge of genocide and to that end, enrolled in an intensive summer program at the University of Minnesota in 2004. During that course, I began to understand the often ineluctable link between colonialism and genocide: colonizers themselves sometimes commit genocide (e.g. the Germans in Namibia); the disruptions, dissensions, and hierarchies introduced among groups in a society by colonization sometimes result in genocide in the postcolonial era (e.g. Rwanda and Darfur).

It is in this direction that I am now going as a scholar. In the new book which is the focus of my sabbatical project, I want to look at the issue of genocide

through the lens of art—fiction, memoir, art installation, and photography-- which interrogates the transnational colonial and postcolonial gaze between Africa and Germany. I want to draw connections between the genocide of the Herero people that the Germans committed in Namibia in 1905 and the Holocaust. While such links have been made by historians in a few recent studies, to date no monograph has focused on artistic representation of such issues.

In 2001, I began teaching a course for the English Department on Postcolonial Literature, a recommendation made by one of our department reviewers in the late 1990's. Initially, I taught texts only from countries I had had the opportunity to visit i.e. Ireland, India, Great Britain, the Caribbean. Eager to include texts from Africa, in 2008 I applied for and was accepted to participate in a Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) Seminar for two weeks in South Africa. The seminar was entitled: "Building a Multiracial, Multicultural Society in South Africa." The experience I had in this seminar was both superb and *transformative*. The seminar was intellectually rigorous, collegial, and just the right balance of lecture and experiential learning. The texts I read, the photos I took, the discussions, both formal and informal in which I took part, have had an enormous influence on me as a teacher, scholar and citizen of the world.

Although I was still working on my golem book (published in 2012) at the time of the CIEE seminar, I already knew what my next scholarly project would be, and indeed, the CIEE South Africa seminar shaped my next book. Through the seminar, I learned an enormous amount about Africa in the postcolonial period, about African writers whose names were new to me, about the problems that face Africa, and about socioeconomic issues. As has been the case for all four books I have published, I begin engagement with a topic by reading widely, then teaching about it, and as my interest deepens, I embark on scholarly writing.

Originally, I had requested and been granted a full-year sabbatical for 2014-2015.. Recently, however, my family's financial situation has required that I trim this to Fall, 2014. Had I been able to take the full year, I would have completed the manuscript. I have already written two of the six chapters (#1 and 3) and presented portions of those chapters at conferences to good response, most recently at the African Studies Conference in November, 2013. I now am confident that I will complete two more chapters during the leave, #4 and 5. I have done considerable research for chapter 2 already. I anticipate being able to full complete the manuscript by Fall, 2015.

I include here a draft Table of Contents:

Africans Looking at Germany:

Chapter One. Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy (1977), a novel which reverses Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness by depicting the study abroad experience of a Ghanaian student who travels to Germany, the "heart of darkness" of Europe in the post-Holocaust period.

Chapter Two. The life of Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of Apartheid, an Afrikaner who attended university in Germany in the late 1920's as the Nazi party was gaining strength; I want to look at the ways in which his early experience of fascism informed the laws which he helped create for Apartheid (1948-1994).

Chapter Three. While in Berlin during the summer of 2012, I discovered an art installation by South African artist William Kentridge entitled "Black Box/Chambre Noir" (2005). This installation, which incorporates photography, film, and etchings and runs 22 minutes, is a work of "*Trauerarbeit*," Freud's term for grief work, or mourning. The installation represents the German colonization of Namibia and the subsequent genocide of the Herero people. Kentridge is white and Jewish, which adds a certain *frisson* to his depiction of this genocide which preceded the Holocaust. He grew up under Apartheid, which is also a significant theme in this work.

Germans Looking at Africa:

Chapter Four. Gustav Frenssen's Peter Moor's Journey to Southwest Africa (1907), the imagined memoir of a German soldier who was part of the colonizing forces of Germans who went to Namibia in the early 1900's. Moor questions the colonization effort and the genocide of 100,000+ Herero tribal people by the Germans. Some scholars view this genocide as a dress rehearsal for the Holocaust.

Chapter Five. Uwe Timm's Morenga (1983). Timm is a contemporary German writer who sets this novel in Namibia (then called Südwest-Afrika) in the first decade of the 20th century, during the German period of colonization; Morenga was the heroic leader of the doomed Herero people.

Chapter Six. Leni Riefenstahl's photographs of the Nuba people in what is now Sudan (taken largely in the 1960's). Riefenstahl was, of course, Hitler's filmmaker and is perhaps most famous for her Nazi propaganda films "Triumph of the Will" (1934) and "Olympia" (1938). Riefenstahl was *persona non grata* in Germany after the war and decided to take her talents to Africa to photograph an isolated tribal people; many scholars claim that her photographs are informed by a Nazi aesthetic that viewed black-skinned people to be racially subhuman.

C. Project Design/RSC Request:

Sometime during Fall 2014, I need to go to Germany to do research in the colonial archives. Access to these primary documents and to photographs will be invaluable for understanding German motivation for the colonial project, for the sponsorship of genocide, and for national attitudes toward Südwest-Afrika before, during, and after the genocide. These documents include government memos from the German Ministry for Colonial Affairs (Reichskolonialamt), letters from German military and settlers in the field in Africa, memoirs, journal and newspaper articles, photographs, and so forth.

While some colonial files were destroyed during Allied bombing of Germany in WWII, many have been meticulously maintained (according to the German temperament and insistence on 'ordung mus sein' ['order must be']). In addition, some documents and photographs are available online or at the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago (though their collection focuses more on Germany's colonies in East Africa than on Namibia). One of the largest archives is at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt am Main; another is at nearby Koblenz. I anticipate needing at least a week to work in such an archive; requesting documents requires a 24 hour advance notice; my German, while sturdy, often requires use of a dictionary which can slow me down.

Such archival research is *essential* to my project. Not only will it provide photographs for inclusion in my text, but more importantly, it will give me the opportunity to read primary sources. Such sources are critically important for me in understanding the links between the colonial endeavor and the Holocaust. What did German soldiers in Namibia write in their reports back to the Reich? How did they understand the colonial enterprise? How did they perceive the Herero people? How were such attitudes, in turn, represented in German newspapers and journals of the late 19th-early 20th centuries? How fervently did the German populace embrace the idea of racial hierarchies? These are some of the questions I will bring to archival research. Being able to use such documents in my book will bring a socio-historical context and an authenticity which otherwise will be missing, resulting in a weaker manuscript.

Finally, a word on publication: after I presented excerpts from Chapter 1 at a conference in Fall, 2012, I was contacted by an editor from Rowman and Littlefield who asked if I would consider signing an advance contract for the new book. This is a reputable press with a good African list, but I am reluctant to sign an advance contract at this point for various reasons given to me by other scholars. However, the early contact from a press was encouraging and signaled to me that the topic I have chosen is an important and saleable one. At the African Studies Association Conference in November, 2013, I devoted considerable time talking to editors at the book display. These included editors from the following presses: Indiana University, Routledge, Berghahn, Lexington, and Witswatersrand Press, a South African

Press. All editors with whom I spoke expressed interest in the manuscript; I also learned something unexpected: almost every editor told me that his/her press was publishing fewer "lit crit" books but the interdisciplinary nature of my approach as well as the intersectionality of the topic would make the manuscript attractive to them. I will be writing a book proposal during the leave and begin submitting it by late 2014/early 2015.

Thank you for consideration of this request.