SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

Were Concentration Camp Prisoners Slaves?: The Possibilities and Limits of Comparative History and Global Historical Perspectives[*]

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Summary: The author discusses the question of whether concentration camp prisoners can be characterized as slaves during the period of their intensified exploitation as forced labourers in the German war economy after 1942. Recent research has negated this question. This finding rests, however, primarily on the fact that the form of slavery practised in the southern United States was chosen as a reference system and that certain differences are posited as too absolute. The author analyses differences and similarities in selected subject areas between slavery as it was practised in the American South and the forced labour demanded of concentration camp prisoners. Subsequently, an attempt is made to explain the apparent differences and similarities from a global-historical perspective, and hypotheses towards a history of slavery in the age of globalization are elaborated. The goal here is to criticize the central positioning of slavery in the American South as the normative slavery system and to raise once again the question of the various forms of unfree labour under capitalism.

When I sat at the machine and heard the threatening word "quota", the time in Burma came flooding back to me, when the fear of the unmet quota weighed on us just as heavily. In Siberia we were compelled to fulfil it through reduced bread rations; in Ravensbrück, through beatings, forced standing, and reporting.[...]. In this slave enterprise, there were also women who worked by galvanizing all their strength.[1]

1. Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Als Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler: Eine Welt im Dunkeln* (1949; Munich, 2002), pp. 350–351. An English translation is forthcoming under the title *Under Two Dictators: Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler* (New York, 2008).

Soon after their liberation, former concentration camp prisoners sought to make their experiences more comprehensible by means of comparisons. Margarete Buber-Neumann was able to compare her experiences of incarceration in a German concentration camp and a Soviet Gulag. In addition, she used the analogy of slavery in her account. Yet for a long time the public and historians wanted to hear nothing of this form of recapitulating experiences. In West Germany, it was only in the 1980s that a more comprehensive effort to grapple with what took place in the concentration camps was launched. With this began the engagement with the question of whether the exploitation of the labour of concentration camp prisoners could be characterized as slavery. There is no doubt that the self-characterization of former prisoners as "slaves" is morally legitimate, yet it has been a matter of controversy whether this characterization is also tenable within the framework of a conceptually grounded scholarly discourse. While the initial research tended to answer this question in the affirmative, more recent studies have veered in the opposite direction.

In the following I would like, on the basis of comparative methods as well as global-historical approaches, to test the arguments that have thus far been put forward. An important role here is played by Wolfgang Sofsky's widely discussed theses, in which he rejects the notion of regarding concentration camp prisoners as slaves.[2] I will attempt to show that Sofsky's parameters, while serving to evaluate the character of various forms of slavery well, is of only limited utility when deciding whether a phenomenon should be characterized as slavery or not. In so doing, I will first discuss the creation of the analogy between concentration camp prisoners and slaves, as well as the various definitions of the term "slavery". Thereafter I will compare various aspects of the work performed by prisoners in German concentration camps with that done by slaves on plantations in the American South.

While the comparison is designed to be comparative and to tease out differences and similarities between the two systems, it is most decidedly not intended to equate these two phenomena. Finally, I try, based on a global-historical perspective, to explain the differences and similarities that emerge and to develop hypotheses towards a history of slavery in the age of globalization. My aim here is to criticize the central positioning of southern American slavery as the normative slave system and once again to raise the question of the different forms of unfree labour that exist under capitalism.

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2. Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, NJ, 1997).

ORIGINS OF THE ANALOGY AND ITS JURIDICAL AND POLITICAL USAGE

References to concentration camp prisoners as slaves began to be made even before the end of World War II. The term "slavery" appears sporadically in SS records in relation to concentration camp prisoners, although this usage was limited to a few individual cases. Considerably more significantly for the origin of the analogy is the fact that the survivors of the camps characterized themselves as slaves. One can assume that this was already the case while the camps were still in existence. What is beyond doubt is the fact that immediately upon their liberation, the prisoners spoke of themselves as slaves. Thus, one chapter in the famous *Buchenwald Report*, which was compiled by Eugen Kogon and nine other ex-prisoners in May 1945 from numerous interviews with other prisoners, was entitled "The SS Slave Trade".[3] This chapter heading was inspired by an account dictated by the prisoner Emil Holub from Brno, in which he describes the selection of prisoners for work details in Buchenwald. Holub also speaks of agreements between industry and the SS and of a "compensation for the prisoners' slave labour"[4] which was to be paid by industry.

In this case, the term "slavery" refers only to the phase after 1942, in which concentration camp prisoners were also loaned out to large German private companies.[5] Subsequently, this self-characterization was adopted by the Allies and used in the Nuremberg Trials, although there it was applied to characterize the work of both concentration camp prisoners and civilian forced labourers.[6] By the close of the Allied trials, however, the analogy between slavery and concentration camps had become less relevant to international political debates on the issues of slavery and forced labour. In the scholarly literature, in contrast, attempts to forge this analogy continued to be made.

THE DISCUSSION IN THE FIELD OF HISTORY

In US research on the history of slavery, the comparison with German concentration camps is closely associated with the figure of Stanley

3. David Hackett (ed. and transl.), *The Buchenwald Report* (Boulder, CO, 2002), p. 190–191. On the genesis of the report, see *ibid*., pp. 1–24.
4. *Ibid*., p. 191.
5. This also holds true for nearly all later accounts by former prisoners: The term slavery is almost never used for the period up to 1938, and only rarely for deployment in SS industry up to 1941/2, but frequently for the period after 1942. This essay, too, mainly examines the final phase of the concentration camp system.
6. International Military Tribunal Nuremberg (ed.), *Der Nürnberger Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vom 14. November 1945–1 Oktober 1946* (Nuremberg, 1947), 24 vols, here I, pp. 54 and 71.

Elkins.[7] Elkins compared the behaviour of slaves in the USA to that of concentration camp prisoners from a social-psychological perspective and arrived at the conclusion that both groups were subjected to rigid systems of mass behavioural control. In both cases, he argued, the slaveholders had succeeded in breaking the spirit of resistance by making use of modern control techniques and in "infantilizing" the enslaved groups. In the wake of the book, a wave of literature was produced proving that slaves in America had by no means been thoroughly "infantilized" and that there had been significant acts of resistance. In these studies, the comparison with concentration camps was generally rejected. The virtually parallel movement to study resistance within the concentration camps was usually not taken into consideration.[8]

After the debate surrounding Elkins's book, no further attempts were made by American scholars of slavery to develop a systematic comparison with the concentration camps. Despite continued references in the literature to concentration camp prisoners having also been slaves, and frequent suggestions that a comparison between the two systems would be meaningful, no-one has since translated these words into action.[9]

The study of the history of the concentration camps and the drawing of parallels between slaves and concentration camp prisoners developed in different ways in the two German states after 1945. In West Germany, one cannot speak of any serious study of the concentration camps until the Auschwitz Trial in the mid-1960s, and it was not until the 1980s that more extensive research into the subject began. Historians in the GDR, in contrast, discovered the camps and in particular the deployment of concentration camp prisoners in German industrial production as a research topic much earlier. Indeed, nearly all works of GDR scholarship on the subject refer to the slave labour performed by concentration camp prisoners. Yet in the GDR, as well, only a few researchers devoted any serious thought to the advantages and disadvantages of this analogy.

The only more extensive discussion of the subject was by Götz Dieckmann, who, on the basis of his research on the work of prisoners in the underground production facilities (*Untertageverlagerung*) at the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp, drew a comparison to antique

7. Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, IL, 1959).
8. Eugene D. Genovese, "Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis", in Ann J. Lane (ed.), *The Debate over Slavery: Stanley Elkins and His Critics* (Urbana, IL, 1971), pp. 43–74. The only indication that conditions in the concentration camps also did not always correspond to Elkins's assumptions is in Roy Simon Bryce-Laport, "Slaves as Inmates, Slaves as Man", in *ibid.*, pp. 269–292, 279.
9. See, for example, the otherwise pioneering essay by David Brion Davis, "Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives", *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), pp. 452–466, 466.

slavery.[10] As a whole, the majority of GDR researchers referred in their analogies to slavery in the ancient world. This served above all to highlight the archaic nature of German fascism, for at least from the viewpoint of the strictly Marxist-Leninist orientation of GDR historical scholarship, slavery was regarded as an anachronism that had been dying out since the Middle Ages: "In powerful popular movement in the face of attacks by the 'barbarian peoples', the slaveholding order collapsed in the fifth and sixth centuries. The relics of slavery survived only in feudalism and, under certain conditions, also in capitalism."[11]

In West German research on the concentration camp system, its characterization as slavery, while not as universal as in the GDR, was also widespread. The first researcher in the FRG to deal more closely with the slavery analogy was Andrzej Kaminski. At the centre of his analysis stood the comparison between the German concentration camps and the Soviet Gulag. In relation to both, Kaminski consistently used the slavery analogy. However, he did not attempt to define the term "slavery". Instead, he occasionally put forward theses that were based on a limited familiarity with the literature. In general, Kaminski embedded the slavery analogy in his reflections in the following manner: "Slavery and totalitarianism. Whereby the latter, according to its nature, is an outrageous, polymorphic, modern extension of the former."[12] Thus, for Kaminski, totalitarianism is a modern extension of slavery. He hereby puts himself on shaky ground, turning a specific form of authority into a further development of a relation that has existed under nearly all forms of human governance. Other researchers subsequently affirmed this characterization of concentration camp prisoners as slaves.[13]

The only two scholars to have engaged with the question more deeply in the past decade both arrived at the conclusion that concentration camp prisoners should not be characterized as slaves. For Claus Füllberg-Stolberg, it is rather foreign forced labourers who should be included in the category of slaves, while he considers the categorization of concentration camp prisoners as slaves to be trivializing.[14] His main argument for this is

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10. Götz Dieckmann, "Existenzbedingungen und Widerstand im Konzentrationslager Dora-Mittelbau unter dem Aspekt der funktionellen Einbeziehung der SS in das System der faschistischen Kriegswirtschaft" (Ph.D. dissertation, Humboldt University, East Berlin, 1974), p. 341.
11. According to the standard historical dictionary in the GDR, *Wörterbuch Geschichte* (East Berlin, 1983; Cologne, 1984), p. 983.
12. Andrzej Kaminski, *Konzentrationslager 1896 bis heute: Geschichte Funktion Typologie*, (Stuttgart, 1982; Munich, 1990), p. 186.
13. Bernd Klewitz, *Die Arbeitssklaven der Dynamit Nobel. Ausgebeutet und Vergessen – Sklavenarbeiter und KZ-Häftlinge in Europas größten Rüstungswerken im 2. Weltkrieg* (Schalksmühle, 1986); special issue, "Sklaverei im KZ", *Dachauer Hefte*, 2 (1986).
14. Claus Füllberg-Stolberg, "Zwangsarbeit in der Moderne – Vergleichende Überlegungen", *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte*, 3:2 (2002), pp. 71–88.

that American slaveholders had an interest in preserving their labour force, while the SS was working towards the prisoners' extermination. In constituting the slaveholders' will as a central criterion of differentiation, however, Füllberg-Stolberg makes a methodological blunder, since he invokes Orlando Patterson's definition of slavery, in which this will does not figure as a defining factor.[15]

Füllberg-Stolberg himself recognizes that, particularly in their condition of being socially dead, concentration camp prisoners more closely approach the Pattersonian definition of slaves than do other categories of forced labourers. He concludes that while this definition would apply to those prisoners that survived, it is not applicable to the general population of prisoners because most of them died too quickly to have been able to experience the substitute for the condition of social death: the possibility of survival. To me, however, it does not seem very reasonable to characterize surviving prisoners as slaves but not those that perished. In brief, one can say that Füllberg-Stolberg's rejection of the characterization of concentration camp prisoners as slaves is unconvincing, even according to his own chosen definition of slavery.

Considerably more influential has been Wolfgang Sofsky's rejection of the prisoner/slave comparison.[16] He challenges the thesis that the concentration camps represented a form of mass slavery. Surprisingly, however, he neither defines the term "slavery" nor cites a single work on the history of slavery. Rather, he bases his argument on ideal types, which he outlines himself. According to Sofsky's typology, the concentration camp is a place of terror and the concentration camp prisoner a creature without value, and the inmate of an organization. Slavery, in contrast, is a system of labour and the slave has value for his private owner. The three decisive differences that Sofsky identifies are thus: work versus terror, value versus non-value, and private versus state. The question of whether these dichotomies are appropriate indicators accompanies this essay and will be answered in the conclusion.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION

Today the term slavery is still both very current and hotly debated. By now, slavery has been formally abolished in all countries on Earth. Yet parallel to this, a small boom in works on "neoslavery" is currently taking place in the books market, a development that suggests the continued existence of slavery on a large scale. According to which definition they use, the authors of these works estimate that there are between 27 and 200

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15. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
16. Sofsky, *Ordnung*, pp. 193–199.

million slaves in the world today.[17] The differential in the numbers already indicates how far-reaching the consequences of the various definitions of the term can be. Furthermore, the enormity of the problem – despite slavery's universal prohibition – suggests what a powerful political significance attempts to define slavery precisely can have. If one desires to attach a fixed definition to the term, one must still be aware that slavery is not a static entity but rather has appeared historically in a multitude of forms and is mutable. This is precisely what makes it so hard to define. As Nietzsche said: "All terms which semiotically condense a whole process elude definition; only that which has no history can be defined."[18]

A common way of avoiding this problem is to refer to the respective expression used in a particular locality and describe what it means. For a term that now carries such blatantly negative connotations as slavery, however, this solution is not an option, as it would simply reproduce the silence that – at least on the part of the slaveholders – still holds sway over the domain. In the scholarly research literature on slavery, there are three primary orientations, each of which has put forward a different definition of the term. The cultural studies approach defines slavery as a system of exclusion and social death that is associated with humiliation and vulnerability.[19] The juridical definition comprehends slavery above all as a private situation of ownership involving an unlimited authority to dispose over persons.[20] The third definition stems from economic and social-historical research contexts and focuses on the economic aspect, according to which the disenfranchised person who has been cut off from any form of possession is exploited in the interest of the utmost profit maximization.[21] Each of these approaches has its justification and is in itself coherent. However, it is also clear that no one of them has the power to explain all historical forms of slavery.

A further possibility would be to use the working definition of Elisabeth Hermann-Otto, which she herself describes as the lowest common denominator that can account for all the various forms of slavery. According to it, slavery is a

> [...] relationship of domination between a subject (master, trader, keeper) and an object (a person who has been robbed of his or her freedom and/or freedom of

17. Twenty-seven million, according to Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley, CA [etc.],1999); 200 million according to Pino Arlacchi, *Ware Mensch. Der Skandal des modernen Sklavenhandels* (Munich, 2000).
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals", in Friedrich Nietzsche & Francis Golffing, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals* (New York, 1956), p. 212.
19. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1982).
20. Max Kaiser, *Das Römische Privatrecht* (Munich, 1971).
21. Cf. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965).

movement), which refers, either temporarily or for an unlimited time, to the entire person or alone to his or her manpower (including the body as an object of desire). This fundamental relationship of dominance can be exercised by one or more private persons or an economic enterprise, but also by a political regime, whereas in the latter case the boundary with the political exercise of authority, under which free citizens and subjects can also fall, is difficult to draw but must be preserved.[22]

I regard this definition as too general and too narrowly tailored to the aspect of repression. For this reason, I would broaden the definition to include cultural and sociological aspects. In particular, it is important to stress the exclusion of slaves from society and their degraded status.[23] According to the definition, concentration camp prisoners would have to be characterized as slaves, while western European forced labourers under National Socialism, for example, would not, as no such degraded status was ascribed to them.[24] With the exception of the legal definition, all the definitions thus far put forward would, in my opinion, indicate that concentration camp prisoners were slaves.

In the following, we will assess what findings the various methodological and substantive approaches in comparing slave relations can bring to light. First, I shall weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the most frequent and favoured comparison: that of the concentration camp system with slavery in the antebellum South.

THE TWO-COUNTRY COMPARISON: SLAVERY IN THE SOUTHERN USA AND THE WORK DEPLOYMENT OF PRISONERS IN THE SATELLITE CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN NAZI GERMANY

Initiation rites and social death

In both systems the dehumanization of the prisoners had begun already with their capture and transport. Upon their arrival at the slave/ concentration camp[25] further steps in this process were taken. Often in

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22. Elisabeth Hermann-Otto, "Einführung", in *idem* (ed.), *Unfreie Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Hildesheim, 2005), pp. ix–xvii, xi.

23. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. Davis also stresses the animalization of slaves. Cf. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 2.

24. This question is far more difficult to answer for the case of eastern European forced labourers, and one of the leading experts on the history of forced labour in the German Reich, Mark Spoerer, concluded in a lecture that eastern European forced labourers could be referred to as slaves. Manuscript of a lecture presented at the conference "Unfreie Arbeit" (Trier, 20–22 October 2005).

25. I use the term camp for Southern US slavery too, but not the term concentration camp, since the concentration camp only developed as a form at the end of the nineteenth century.

both cases beatings were immediately administered to make it clear who was master over life and death. In both cases, the victims were stripped of their own names in order to deprive them of an important element of self-identification. Slaves in the southern US states were given new, invented names,[26] while the SS gave the concentration camp prisoners numbers. Slaves were sometimes branded with the initials of their new masters, while in Auschwitz prisoners were branded with their numbers.

In both cases, the enslaved people were cut off from their social environment. In the case of American slavery, this step was more radical for slaves imported from Africa. The newly arrived slaves had no possibility of making contact with their families in Africa. In addition, most of their work places were small-scale enterprises, with the result that slaves often came to their new slaveholders alone and there encountered others with whom they had only their status, skin colour, and African origins in common.[27] It was different for the children of slaves who grew up in the southern states, who in general were raised by their parents. In the nineteenth century, approximately 73 per cent of slaves lived in nuclear families consisting of father, mother, and children.[28] This means that for the majority of slaves in the American South, their relatives were also slaves and familial relations developed largely within the context of slavery. For the slaveholders, this had the advantage that slaves, in order to provide for their families, developed a powerful need for work bonuses. However, the families of slaves were by no means inviolable. In many cases children were separated from their parents through sale.

In the German concentration camps, prisoners were in many cases not as thoroughly cut off from their families and social environment. At least in theory, most prisoners were allowed to exchange letters with their families. However, the letters had to be written in German, which meant that a large proportion of prisoners required help in writing their letters.[29] During the war, German prisoners were even allowed to receive visitors in the camps if they had family members serving in the *Wehrmacht*.[30] On the other hand, the SS tried with all its might to prevent the creation of new families in the camps by keeping men and women strictly segregated and by quickly killing any children born in the camps either through neglect or through the administration of direct violence by members of the SS.[31]

26. With time, however, slaves asserted their right to name their own children. See Cheryll Ann Cody, "There was no 'Absolon' on the Ball Plantations: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country", *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), pp. 563–596.
27. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 35–76 and 105–131.
28. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619–1877* (New York, 1993), p. 139.
29. Documents of 30 March and 21 June 1943 concerning concentration inmates' correspondence, in Bundesarchiv Berlin, NS 3/426.
30. Order of 19 February 1943, in *ibid*.
31. See Britta Pawelke, "Als Häftling geboren – Kinder in Ravensbrück", in Claus Füllberg-

Overseeing and fear of uprisings

In most slave-holding societies, the danger of uprisings was often invoked and in many cases revolts, at least, took place. In both the American South and Nazi Germany, the masters lived in continual fear of uprisings. For this reason, overseeing was in both cases regarded as necessary. In the southern states the number of overseers employed was considerably lower, however. This was due to many factors: Firstly, 88 per cent of slaveholders in the southern states owned fewer than 20 slaves.[32] The latter were therefore isolated from other slaves and in their small numbers not in a position to plan an uprising but at the most their own escape. While in these small enterprises it was the slaveholder himself who oversaw 10 to 20 slaves, on large plantations with 100 or 200 slaves, it was common for there to be only one overseer for every 50 slaves in order to keep costs down. Often there were no white overseers apart from the slaveholder but rather overseers drawn from the ranks of the slaves.[33] Secondly, for southern slaves, it was easier to escape from their farm or plantation than it was for prisoners to escape from a concentration camp, but the road to safety was considerably more difficult as their skin colour made them conspicuous and the route to the North was often a long one.[34]

In contrast, the chances of the prisoners in the concentration camps going underground after escaping were much better. Most of the prisoners could not easily be distinguished on the basis of their appearance from the people that lived in the vicinity of the camp. In addition, there were also German prisoners in the camps who, upon escaping, could go underground in their own country; moreover for a share of the foreign prisoners their home countries were not far away. For this reason, the ratio of guards to prisoners in the camps tended to be around 1:10. In a few production sites that were deemed particularly important to the war effort, this ratio was reduced 1:5 or even in some cases 1:2.[35]

In both systems, contradictions and conflicts arose between the overseers and the economic beneficiaries of the slave labour. The conflicts arose in the

Stolberg *et al* (eds), *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern: Bergen-Belsen Ravensbrück* (Bremen, 1994), pp. 157–166. Until 1942 pregnant prisoners were often taken to the nearest hospital to give birth. The newborns were then taken away from their mothers and placed in children's homes.

32. Wilhelm Backhaus, *Marx, Engels und die Sklaverei: Zur ökonomischen Problematik der Unfreiheit* (Düsseldorf, 1974), p. 157.

33. As in the concentration camps, where ordinary inmates generally viewed the prisoner-functionaries (*Funktionshäftlinge*) with scepticism, slave overseers also had a low status among other slaves; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, p. 107; Sofsky, *Ordnung*, pp. 152–177.

34. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, ch. 11. Scholars estimate that some 1,000 slaves escaped to the North every year in the nineteenth century, out of a total of about 1 million slaves at the beginning of the century and about 4 million shortly before abolition. Cf. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, pp. 93 and 158.

35. Jens-Christian Wagner, *Produktion des Todes: Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora* (Göttingen, 2001).

majority of cases through the tension between the need for well-fed, able-bodied slaves to assure a high level of output, on the one hand, and the desire to minimize both the danger of uprisings and the prisoners' powers of resistance through terror, starvation, and even racially motivated annihilation. In the southern states, such conflicts of interest manifested themselves above all in the earliest phase, when 10 to 20 per cent of newly arrived slaves died within the first year.[36] Ultimately a mechanism was found to largely defuse these tensions when overseers began to receive a share of the profits and/or the task of overseeing was entrusted to slaves who had proved themselves to be good workers. In addition, it was significant that the overseers were in the employ of the economic beneficiaries of the labour, and thus a clear chain of command existed.

Those responsible for the guarding of concentration camp prisoners were, in contrast, members of the political security apparatus and not subordinates of the economic beneficiaries. The guards were initially drilled to regard the prisoners as their enemies and to use terror against them systematically. Only after 1941/1942 did the aims of the SS expand to include maximal efficiency in the exploitation of the prisoners' labour. No real shift took place in the SS itself, however, but rather both aims were henceforth pursued simultaneously.[37] In addition, there were also cases when employees of the company oversaw the prisoners while they were working. In only a few cases were SS guards actually sent into the work halls.[38] If the economic beneficiaries attempted to intervene with the SS guards or their management apparatus in order to achieve a better output, the success of such efforts was uncertain due to the absence of a chain of command in the factories. Such attempts to exert influence were often successful but they were infrequent. Thus the contradiction between work and terror in the final phase of the war, especially on the large construction projects, was not as significant as is frequently presumed.[39]

Racism and fine definitions

Both systems excluded slaves from society and had or invented ideological justifications for this. The US system had an exclusively racist mode of

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36. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492–1800* (New York, 1997), p. 3.

37. Jan Erik Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung: Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS. Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1933–1945* (Paderborn, 2001), pp. 379–405.

38. Karl Heinz Roth, "Zwangsarbeit im Siemens-Konzern (1938–1945): Fakten – Kontro-versen – Probleme", in Hermann Kaienburg (ed.), *Konzentrationslager und deutsche Wirtschaft 1939–1945* (Opladen, 1996), pp. 149–168.

39. Jens-Christian Wagner, "Noch einmal: Arbeit und Vernichtung. Häftlingseinsatz im KL Mittelbau-Dora 1943–1945", in Norbert Frei *et al.* (eds), *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlich-keit: Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik* (Munich, 2000), pp. 11–41.

exclusion. Under Nazism, other biologistic modes of exclusion as well as political and social fine definitions also came into play.

The American system was based largely on the adoption of the Spanish system of slavery, which was transplanted to the American South via the English Caribbean islands and the early forms of racism that developed there. However, in South America and the Caribbean, there existed mostly "multi-colour systems", with gradations of shade and the possibility of rising through the social hierarchy. In the southern American states, on the other hand, a "two-colour system" developed that was based on an extreme form of racial segregation which, through the so-called "one drop of blood" policy, attempted to exclude anyone with even a small portion of "black blood" from the society of "whites".[40] The slavery system in the American South and the literature defending it then played a role in the emergence of modern racism.[41] Nazism, in contrast, could draw upon an already extant arsenal of modern racist and anti-Semitic worldviews. Alongside racism, political and social fine definitions also played a large role here.

One difference between the two systems consisted in the fact that the mechanism of exclusion in the southern states was visible. The difference in skin colour was immediately ascertainable to the eye and required no further external markers,[42] whereas in the finely gradated system of racism in the concentration camps, the guards had to rely on the system of triangles to know which treatment method to employ against which category of prisoner.

Another difference doubtless consisted in the Nazi's biologistically motivated intention of completely annihilating certain enemy groups. Jews, Gypsies (Sinti and Roma), and the mentally ill and disabled were systematically murdered. This exterminatory practice has no counterpart in the history of American slavery. While blacks were often not acknowledged as human beings and for a long time could be killed by their owners with impunity, no systematic programme for the annihilation of blacks existed in North America. On the contrary, late-phase southern American slavery is the only example in history in which a slave population independently reproduced itself and even grew.

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40. Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (Westport, CT, 1964); George M. Frederickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, 1981), esp. pp. 94–135.
41. Imanuel Geiss, *Geschichte des Rassismus* (Frankfurt, 1988).
42. On this, see the critique of Michel Foucault's notion of racism, which ignores this aspect, by Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, NC [etc.], 1995), p. 205; Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 56.

Work, violence and death

The everyday level of violence and the mortality rate in the satellite camps was, in comparison to the conditions in slave enterprises in the southern states, on average much higher. However, when slaveholders used violence, this was often characterized by extreme brutality. Frederick Douglass's account of the following incidents in Maryland testifies to this: "Mr Thomas Lanman, of St Michael's, killed two slaves, one of whom he killed with a hatchet, by knocking his brains out. He used to boast of the commission of the awful and bloody deed."[43] And another case: "Mrs. Hicks, finding the girl slow to move, jumped from her bed, seized an oak stick of wood by the fireplace, and with it broke the girl's nose and breastbone, and thus ended her life."[44] In concentration camps, such occurrences only seldom exceeded these in brutality.

Violence, however, is extremely difficult to quantify. For the satellite camps, such a thing would be virtually impossible, and levels of violence also differed from camp to camp. Organized whippings or executions were only the tip of the iceberg. Most accounts by former prisoners reveal that only a small minority was whipped more than once or twice and that many never had to undergo this experience, while beatings with hands, fists, or truncheons are almost universally mentioned. For southern American slavery, few punishment books from plantations have been preserved, although one surviving example documents 160 whippings having been meted out to 120 field slaves over a two-year period. If evenly distributed, this would imply that on average any individual slave was beaten once every fifteen months.[45] Yet accounts of former slaves in the southern states reveal that this system was also accompanied by daily beatings that never appear in the statistics.[46] Without the continual threat of violence and punishment, the slavery system in the southern states would not have been viable.[47] Thus in both cases, violence was a necessary precondition for the maintenance of the system.

A further point of difference is that slaves in the American South had from the very beginning been captured and abducted exclusively for their manpower. Until 1941/1942, however, prisoners were sent to the concentration camps because they were regarded as enemies of the Nazi system and to be re-educated, incarcerated, or killed. This changed with the turning point in the war in 1941/1942, because the SS, determined to make a contribution to the redressing of labour shortages, had concentration camp

43. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston, MA, 1845; New York, 1995), p. 14.
44. *Ibid*. p. 15.
45. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston, MA, 1974; New York, 1989), p. 145.
46. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
47. Herbert C. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game* (Urbana, IL, 1975; 2003).

prisoners deployed to work in the armaments industry, a move which they hoped would lead to a growth in their power. Henceforward, people were hauled off to concentration camps who, in earlier years, would probably not have ended up there. The rationale behind these arrests, be it for punishment/incarceration or work deployment, became inextricably intermixed. This must have applied to the majority of concentration camp prisoners for the SS, in response to the acute need for labour, swelled the ranks of the inmates from 110,000 in the late summer of 1942 to 714,000 in January 1945.[48]

The most serious difference between the slavery system in the American South and the satellite system of the concentration camps manifests itself in the differential in mortality rates. In the southern US, a mortality rate of up to 10 per cent or even 20 per cent existed only in the early phase, among slaves imported from Africa within their first three years of arrival.[49] Around 1850, the average life expectancy of a slave in the southern US was 36 years. A white American living at that time had a life expectancy of 40 years, while people in Holland and France could also expect to live around 36 years.[50]

The mortality rate among concentration camp prisoners in the satellite camps was, in contrast, dramatically higher than among the German civilian population. The average life expectancy even of younger prisoners engaged in construction work in the satellite camps often plunged to less than half a year. For the satellite camps of Mauthausen, Florian Freund has provided evidence for a mortality rate of 5 per cent for production *kommandos* and 30 per cent for construction *kommandos*.[51] In the final phase of the war, mortality also increased in the production *kommandos*. Of the average figure of 40,393 male prisoners held in the Neuengamme concentration camp, 6,129 (or 15.16 per cent) died in the first quarter of 1945.[52]

Much points to the conclusion that in both the Atlantic slavery system and the National Socialist concentration camps, the size of the camp played an important role in the mortality rate. Thus mortality was often markedly lower on the frequently small farms in the southern US than on large-scale plantations in the Caribbean.[53] A study of the satellite system

48. Karin Orth, *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager* (Hamburg, 1999), p. 192.
49. Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, p. 3.
50. Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, p. 125.
51. Florian Freund, "Mauthausen. Zur Struktur von Haupt- und Außenlagern", *Dachauer Hefte*, 15 (1999), pp. 254–272.
52. Quarterly report of the SS physician of KZ Neuengamme, 29 March 1945, in Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, PS–2169.
53. Peter Kolchin, "Die südstaatliche Sklaverei vor dem amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg und die Historiker. Zur Debatte 1959–1988", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 16 (1990), pp. 161–186, 185; Eugene D. Genovese, "The Treatment of Slaves in Different Countries: Problems in the Application of Comparative Methods", in *idem* and Laura Foner (eds), *Slavery in the New World: A Reader in Comparative History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1969), pp. 202–210.

under National Socialism also shows that mortality in small camps containing fewer than 100 prisoners often approached zero, while in the big satellite camps with more than 2,000 prisoners it increased exponentially.[54] This aspect alone highlights the difficulty of making a comparison between American slavery and the satellite concentration camps, as the majority of slaves in the USA lived on plantations with fewer than 50 slaves,[55] while most of the concentration camp prisoners were held in camps containing more than 500 prisoners.[56]

Results and possibilities of a comparison between the systems in two countries

The advantages of this kind of comparison doubtless lies in the fact that the similarities and differences of the two systems can be very clearly teased out and underlined. In the process, certain aspects that a researcher working in just one field might either have forgotten or taken for granted could gain in significance when presented in a comparison. Thus, for example, while the relationship between the state and the economy is continually referred to in the literature on forced labour deployments, the question of what would have been different if those economically exploiting the slave labour had also been in charge of the guards can better be answered in a comparison with American slavery.

In general, though, the dangers implicit in this form of comparison do seem to me to outweigh the benefits. In the past, the noting of similarities has often led to proclamations of a facile similarity between the two systems. In addition, there is the danger of making comparisons without placing the respective systems in a temporal context, and that the identification of any similarities and structural resemblances will be traced back to alleged anthropological constants.[57] On the other hand, there is the tendency when differences are found to immediately presume a dominant structural difference between the systems and to claim that what one is dealing with here are two entirely unlike phenomena to which the same term cannot be applied.[58]

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54. This matter has not been studied much, and the conclusions come from my own findings for the satellite camps of Neuengamme, as well as Freund, "Mauthausen", p. 272.

55. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, p. 101. On average, a Southern plantation had twenty-three slaves. Most cotton and tobacco plantations were quite small, while sugar plantations had an average of 175 slaves.

56. For the women's satellite camps, the SS stipulated that industrial enterprises had to apply for at least 500 prisoners. In the men's satellite camps, too, there were very few companies that requested fewer than 500 inmates.

57. Wolfgang Sofsky, *Zeiten des Schreckens: Amok, Terror, Krieg* (Frankfurt, 2002).

58. Jürgen Schriewer expresses a similar critique in "Problemdimensionen sozialwissenschaftlicher Komparatistik", in J. Schriewer and Hartmut Kaelble (eds), *Vergleich und Transfer:*

This short circuit in the argumentation is most often aggravated by the circumstance that little reflection is given to the fact that the results of a comparison always depend on what it is that is being compared. Thus, a comparison of concentration-camp slavery with antique slavery would bring different findings to light from a comparison with American slavery. Ultimately, much of the debate thus far about the question of whether concentration camp prisoners were slaves has rested on the absolute positioning of American slavery as the paradigmatic slave system for all times. In contrast to this, however, it must be stated that slavery has proved to be an extremely multi-layered phenomenon that has shown itself capable of adapting flexibly to a wide variety of societal forms throughout history.

Correspondingly, the pinpointing of a few differences between two systems of slavery should not lead to the one of the systems not being recognized as such. Thus, for example, American plantation slavery differs in significant ways from forms of slavery in Asia.[59] What appear more clearly, in contrast, are the similarities between antique and American slavery, and indeed Robin Blackburn has found that plantation slavery incorporated certain traditional elements of slaveholding. At the same time, however, many innovations were introduced, so that, for Blackburn, American slavery ultimately represents a combination of modern and traditional elements.[60] This admixture of traditional elements and innovations can also be demonstrated for concentration-camp slavery.

THE GLOBAL-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In my opinion, any serious treatment of the question of whether concentration camp prisoners were slaves should begin with a brief overview of the history of slavery in the modern period – something that nearly all previous researchers investigating this question have neglected to do. This would enrich our understanding of how a particular slaveholding society should be categorized both temporally and economically and what role the slave system played within the broader organization of labour.

Plantation slavery in the southern US was introduced around the

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Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften (Frankfurt [etc.], 2003), pp. 9–52, 27–30.

59. Gwyn Campbell and Edward E. Alpers, "Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia", *Slavery and Abolition*, 25:2 (2004), pp. ix–xxvii.
60. Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, pp. 4 and 10; Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, ch. 2. See also Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London, 1980). Blackburn refers to the more commercial character of the Atlantic slave trade as the most important distinction to ancient slavery. The commercial orientation of slaveholders in the Southern states is undisputed, however. Cf. Mark M. Smith, *Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in the Antebellum American South* (Cambridge 1998), pp. 15–30.

beginning of the seventeenth century. It persisted through the American War of Independence (1775–1783) and survived up to the end of the American Civil War in 1865. The entire phenomenon thus encompasses a time-span of about 250 years, although the period of the system's greatest significance and expansion fell within the final 50 years. The first slaves reached North America when the region was under British rule. Here slavery gradually replaced a system of unfree labour that had been based primarily on indenture.

While in several northern as well as southern states one can initially speak of societies with slaves, in the northern states free labour relations increasingly took hold. In contrast to this, some of the southern states transformed themselves from societies with slaves into slaveholding societies.[61] This was based on the one hand on the fact that the major export products of the southern states – tobacco and later cotton – required extensive tending year-round, which made the expensive, one-time investment in slaves seem cost-effective.[62] On the other hand, supplies of new contract workers from Europe gradually petered out as the economy in the Old World experienced an upturn.[63] In the southern states slavery thereby gradually replaced another form of unfree labour as the dominant mode. In North America – as previously in the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean – this development was accompanied by efforts to annihilate or displace the indigenous population, who only rarely allowed themselves to be enslaved by Europeans.[64]

In general, it is evident that the slavery system in the southern US can hardly be viewed in isolation, but rather must be seen in close connection with processes unfolding in other regions of the world. The need for slaves was associated with the ebb of European immigration. The treatment of the aboriginal population was also shaped by the experiences of other colonial powers in the New World, just as the development of the plantation system was bound up with experiments in the Caribbean and in Latin America.[65] Correspondingly, a good deal of the literature speaks of an "Atlantic" system of slavery.

The basic stages in the development of slavery in the southern states took place as a result of private initiatives. The state did not play a leading role

61. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

62. David W. Galenson, "The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas", *Journal of Economic History*, 89 (1981), pp. 446–467; Jordan Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Culture of Dependence* (London, 1993).

63. David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 262–263.

64. On attempts to enslave the Indians of North America, see Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labour: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 10.

65. On the economic form of the plantation, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, 1990).

here but merely set out the framework. In integral parts of the apparatus of persecution, it provided the legal basis for the ownership and punishment of slaves. The capture and transport of slaves was carried out by private slave-hunters seeking potential financial yields.[66] The slaveholders likewise sold the agricultural goods they produced predominantly according to market mechanisms. Uniquely in the history of slavery, the slave population in the southern states at the end of the eighteenth and above all in the nineteenth century reproduced itself independently.[67] A major reason for this was the ban on the transatlantic slave trade that came into force on 1 January 1808, which reduced the influx of slaves from abroad to a limited, illegal trickle.[68]

With the end of the overseas slave trade and its newly won independence from Great Britain, the American slavery system partially broke away from the colonial model. Slavery became part of an intricate process of building an economic system for an aspiring nation that was independent while still remaining connected to world markets. The proportion of slaves in the general population provides an index for measuring the importance of slavery for society as a whole. For the period around 1690, slaves made up 15 per cent of the population in the entire southern region. Thereafter this figure rose steadily, peaking at 40 per cent in 1780, but then dropping again to fluctuate between 33 per cent and 35 per cent in the years between 1800 and 1860. However, in a few especially profitable agricultural regions in the South, the proportion of slaves exceeded 50 per cent by 1860.[69] Slavery in the southern states ended with the Confederacy's defeat in the Civil War. Thus, its demise was forced from outside and did not come about through changes within society or the economy, nor as a result of slave uprisings. Furthermore, the majority of the research today presumes that at the time of its abolition, slavery in the southern states was still highly profitable.[70]

66. The majority of slave hunters in Africa were Africans. See Albert Wirz, *Sklaverei und kapitalistisches Weltsystem* (Frankfurt, 1984), ch, 1.
67. On the uniqueness of this development, see Kolchin, *Unfree Labour*, p. ix.
68. Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776–1848* (London, 1988).
69. The figures come from Patterson, *Slavery as Social Death*, esp. p. 483.
70. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaates* (Göttingen, 2001), ch. 14. This applies above all to large enterprises, while the results are not so clear for small and middle-sized enterprises. It is far more difficult to answer the question of whether in the long term slavery is a less efficient form of labour than free wage labour, and thus slaveholding societies would inevitably fall behind in competition with societies with free wage labour. The majority of Marxist scholars believe that slavery is unprofitable in the long term. The most influential of these was Eugene D. Genovese, against whom the econometric studies demonstrating the high profitability of slave labour in the South were directed. Further research has shown, however, that except for per capita income, the South increasingly lost ground to the northern states in all the criteria for assessing modernization. See esp. Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy in the Cotton South: Households, Markets and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978); Frederick Bateman and Thomas Weiss, *A Deplorable Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981).

FROM PRIVATE TO STATE SLAVERY

The situation in which a system of slavery developed in Germany was entirely different. The industrial revolution had taken place in some parts of western Europe and North America and had made it possible for them to become the leading powers in the world. Over the course of industrialization, the system of free wage labour had gradually established its dominance in these countries. Parallel to this, the Abolitionist movements in Europe and North and South America had become more important and had extended the range of prohibitive legislation.[71] However, these successes led not, as many people expected, to the establishment of free wage labour as the dominant economic model but rather to the rise of new forms of unfree labour and of slavery.

This rise was closely associated with the division of Africa among the European powers, which was also presented as a battle against slavery. Thus, the condemnation of slavery in Africa represented the prelude to its reshaping.[72] The urgent need for manpower in the building of the colonial infrastructure was decisive for the emergence of new forms of forced labour. The development of inhospitable swathes of land in Africa began with the massive deployment of indigenous forced labourers and evolved into a nearly classical form of forced labour in the first half of the twentieth century.[73] In Africa, indigenous labourers were compelled to participate in the erection of the colonial infrastructure via different methods: forced recruitment by the colonial administration, alliances with village elders on the mustering of labourers, the raising of taxes and the broadening of colonial criminal law, and the use of forced labour as punishment for indebtedness and vagrancy.[74] Especially significant for further developments was the fact that the strongest criticism of the conditions of forced labour in Africa was voiced in opposition to exploitation by plantation owners and private companies, while forced labour by the state was seen as a comparatively lesser evil.[75]

In the German colonies, as well, the deployment of the colonized in

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71. Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*.

72. The lines between old and new slavery were often fluid, however, and the two coexisted in French West Africa, for instance, until World War I. See Lutz Raphael, "Krieg, Diktatur und imperiale Erschließung: Arbeitszwang und Zwangsarbeit 1880 bis 1960", in Hermann-Otto, *Unfreie Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse*, pp. 258–280; Wirz, *Sklaverei und kapitalistisches Weltsystem*, p. 220.

73. Dirk van Laak, *Weiße Elefanten: Anspruch und Scheitern technischer Großprojekte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1999), and *Imperiale Infrastruktur: Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas*, 1880 bis 1960 (Paderborn, 2004).

74. Raphael, "Krieg, Diktatur und imperiale Erschließung", pp. 264–265.

75. Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York, 1998); Myers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 47–57. This went so far that the League of Nations declarations permitted forced labour on the state level and prohibited its private use; *ibid.*, p. 114.

forced labour was widespread. At the heart of German colonialist ideology was the view that the indigenous population had to be shaped into compliant workers through harsh discipline.[76] In German East Africa (today Tanzania), the German authorities outlawed slavery but not, as in most of the other colonized regions, because this was perceived as indispensable to secure the collaboration of the regional elites. Instead it was movement among slaves that led to abolition.[77] In German East Africa, as well, the sector of state forced labour was developed. In 1905 a tax ordinance was enacted which stipulated a sentence of tribute labour for non-payment of taxes. As the tax was very high, the bulk of the indigenous population had to perform this work. Such tribute labour was conceived with the aim of public road-building in mind, yet the colonial state frequently sold the workers on to plantation owners. This form of forced labour was a major cause of the Maji Maji Rebellion, which was brutally suppressed by the German colonial army and claimed 75,000 lives.[78] Subsequently, the German colonial administration tried to curb the use of forced labour, but the simultaneous expansion of the plantation economy prevented this. To satisfy their need for manpower, the plantation owners in the coastal areas resorted to the blatant abduction of indigenous people from the colony's interior by means of recruiters. A mortality rate of 7–10 per cent prevailed on most of the plantations, although on the Prinz-Albert plantation it reached 26 per cent.[79]

The most murderous form of forced labour, however, developed in German Southwest Africa, in today's Namibia. The uprising of the Herero and Nama peoples that began in the spring of 1904 led to a genocidal colonial strategy on the part of the German Schutztruppe under the leadership of Lieutenant General von Trotha. In October 1904 Trotha ordered all prisoners of war to be shot. At the heart of the genocide, however, stood the fact that he drove the Herero into a waterless desert, leaving them to a slow death.[80] Out of tactical necessity, Berlin amended

76. See Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner: Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia* (Münster 1999), p. 283; Horst Gründer (ed.), *"da und dort ein junges Deutschland gründen": Rassismus, Kolonien und kolonialer Gedanke vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1999), p. 227.

77. Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c.1844–1914* (Oxford, 2006).

78. Felicitas Becker and Jigal Beez (eds), *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1905–1907* (Berlin, 2005).

79. Rainer Tetzlaff, *Koloniale Entwicklung und Ausbeutung: Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte Deutsch-Ostafrikas 1885–1914* (Berlin 1970), esp. pp. 250–253; Detlef Bald, *Deutsch-Ostafrika 1900–1914: Eine Studie über Verwaltung, Interessengruppen und wirtschaftliche Erschließung* (Munich, 1970); Patrick Krajewski, *Kautschuk, Quarantäne, Krieg: Dhauhandel in Ostafrika 1880–1914* (Berlin, 2006).

80. Jan-Bart Gewald, *Towards Redemption: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia between 1890 and 1923* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 218–222; Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter*

its genocidal strategy in late 1904, when the decision was made to remove the Herero to prisoner-of-war camps and there deploy them to forced labour.[81] Between 21,000 and 24,000 Herero and several hundred Nama were subsequently interned in such camps. Due to insufficient food and the harsh working conditions, the mortality rate in the camps was horrendous; for this reason, their existence is sometimes described as a continuation of the strategy of annihilation.[82] In the literature, the POW camps are therefore also described as concentration camps.[83]

After the suspension of war captivity in 1908, a free labour market should actually have arisen, at least according to the plans of the colonial administration. However, once again a system of forced induction quickly developed which violated the principle of free choice of employment for Africans. Due to the punishment beatings that were meted out, cases of forced inductees escaping were frequent. Despite its criticism of especially brutal employers, the colonial administration arranged for escapees to be returned to their employers, thus insuring the perpetuation of the system.[84]

In recent years a debate has arisen on the question of the extent to which continuities can be drawn from German policies in German Southwest Africa to National Socialism.[85] However, the attention here has focused

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deutscher Kolonialherrschaft: Der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus (East Berlin, 1966), pp. 187–220. According to Isabel Hull, these actions can be attributed more to the German army's doctrines of military strategy than to racism. Cf. Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 2005).

81. Jan-Bart Gewald, "The Issue of Forced Labour in the Onjembo: German South West Africa 1904–1908", *Bulletin of the Leyden Centre for the History of European Expansion*, 19 (1995), pp. 97–104.

82. Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, p. 44; Gewald, *Redemption*, p. 242; Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1914* (Hamburg 1968), p. 208.

83. Jürgen Zimmerer "Krieg, KZ und Völkermord in Südwestafrika", in Joachim Zeller and J. Zimmerer (eds), *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin 2003), pp. 45–63; Joel Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot, *Das Jahrhundert der Lager: Gefangenschaft, Zwangsarbeit, Vernichtung* (Munich 2001), pp. 75–86, French original, *Le siècle des camps: Détention, concentration, extermination* (Paris, 2000). The first concentration camps in history, however, had been set up in 1896 by the Spanish in Cuba. See *ibid*, pp. 45–56; Kaminski, *Konzentrationslager*, p. 34.

84. Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 182–199.

85. Jürgen Zimmerer, "Die Geburt des 'Ostlandes' aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus. Die nationalsozialistische Eroberungs- und Beherrschungspolitik in (post-)kolonialer Perspektive", *SozialGeschichte*, 19 (2004) 1, pp. 10–43, and "Annihilation in Africa: The 'Race War' in German Southwest Africa (1904–1908) and its Significance for a Global History of Genocide", *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute (Washington)*, 37 (2005), pp. 51–58; Birthe Kundrus, "Kontinuitäten, Parallelen, Rezeptionen. Überlegungen zur 'Kolonialisierung' des Nationalsozialismus", *WerkstattGeschichte*, 15:43 (2006), pp. 45–62; Henning Melber "How to Come to Terms with the Past: Revisiting the German Colonial Genocide in Namibia", *africa spectrum*, 40

less on concentration camps and forced labour policies than on strategies of annihilation and racist exclusionary procedures. In the meantime, the discussion has veered away from talk of a direct continuity and more towards transfers, chains of effects and parallels.[86] Direct continuities can most readily be found in the National Socialist colonial planning for the African continent.[87]

Yet colonial forced labour and the building of concentration camps in the colonies of Cuba, South Africa, and Southwest Africa did not fail to have an effect on Europe. The experiences with colonial forced labour often led to disquisitions in the metropolises of Europe on the re-importation of forced labour in order to keep the working class in check.[88] These debates only became virulent during World War I, when labour shortages returned to the densely populated cities. In many countries, a system of mandatory service was set up in response and, especially in Germany, prisoners of war were extensively deployed in the war economy, a formative experience for developments in World War II.[89] For this reason, in analysing the return of forced labour in the European metropolises, one must remain mindful of the military background and especially of the tendency towards the expansion of war into total war with the upheaval of civil society.[90] Ultimately both world wars were "the culminations of state systems of forced labour in countries around the world".[91]

A further background for the increased implementation of state systems of forced labour was the growing criticism of free wage labour as exploitative, as well as of individualism and of liberal contract theory more generally. Instead, the right and/or duty to work was emphasized, and

(2005), pp. 139–148; H. Melber and Reinhart Kößler, "Völkermord und Gedenken. Der Genozid an den Herero und Nama in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904–1908", in Irmtraud Wojak and Susanne Meinl (eds), *Völkermord und Kriegsverbrechen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt, 2004), pp. 203–226.

86. Kundrus, "Kontinuitäten", p. 60.

87. Forced labour by the indigenous African population played an important role in this planning. See Karsten Linne, *"Weiße Arbeitsführer" im "Kolonialen Ergänzungsraum": Afrika als Ziel sozial- und wirtschaftspolitischer Planungen in der NS-Zeit* (Münster 2002), pp. 101–105.

88. Patrick Wagner, "Empire's Hero is Coming Home. Lord Kitchener of Khartum: Symbolfigur einer autoritären Option für das Großbritannien der 'edwardianischen Krise'", *WerkstattGeschichte*, 15: 43 (2006), pp. 23–44.

89. Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (1985; Bonn, 1999), pp. 27–40; Mark Spoerer, "Zwangsarbeitsregimes im Vergleich: Deutschland und Japan im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg", in Hans Jürgen Seidel and Klaus Tenfelde (eds), *Zwangsarbeit im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts: Bewältigung und vergleichende Aspekte* (Essen 2007), pp. 187–226.

90. Jörg Echternkamp, "Im Kampf an der inneren und äußeren Front. Grundzüge der deutschen Gesellschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, IX/1, (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 1–92, 77–85.

91. Raphael, "Krieg, Diktatur und imperiale Erschließung", p. 271.

higher interests demanded that the importance of work contracts be curbed. Right-wing critics justified this restriction in the name of the national interest, whereas those on the left did so with reference to social interests.[92] Such criticism was by no means limited to the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Indeed, it was widespread among all parties in Great Britain, for example.[93]

THE GERMAN FORCED LABOUR AND CONCENTRATION CAMP SYSTEM

In the 1930s, Germany was among the most technically industrialized countries in the world. The German elite, however, believed that this position was not adequately reflected on the international stage. They burned for a rectification of the outcome of World War I and were prepared to accept even forms of unfree labour to achieve this end. In the wake of the global economic crisis and the shift to the right under Hindenburg's presidential government, the first forms of unfree labour were introduced in 1931.[94] However, it was only with the political victory of Nazism that the extensive expansion of various systems of unfree labour began. Initially, labour policy pursued the goal of overcoming the economic crisis with the help of the channelled labour. Later, the system of unfree labour served to decouple wage policy from the economic boom.[95] Parallel to this, from 1936/1937, increased numbers of contract workers entered the country from abroad. With the beginning of the war and the conscription of German men into the *Wehrmacht*, the recruitment of foreign workers under conditions of increasing compulsion grew in importance.[96]

At first, the labour system in the concentration camps developed largely independently of the German labour market. Initially, the main purpose of the camps was to break the spirit of resistance of the imprisoned cadres of the German workers' movement. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that a tendency had existed since 1933/1934 for residents of workhouses to be transferred to concentration camps, where they were deployed as forced labourers. Already in 1934 all prisoners had to perform compulsory labour. Until 1938 the SS used the manpower of prisoners above all to build the camps and a system of logistical support for the SS.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 272–274.
93. Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution 1931–1983* (London, 1994), pp. 9–56.
94. Henning Köhler, *Arbeitsdienst in Deutschland: Pläne und Verwirklichungsformen bis zur Einführung der Arbeitsdienstpflicht im Jahre 1935* (Berlin, 1967).
95. Rüdiger Hachtmann, *Industriearbeit im "Dritten Reich": Untersuchungen zu den Lohn- und Arbeitsbedingungen in Deutschland 1933–1945* (Göttingen 1989), pp. 37–49.
96. Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*.

However, prisoners were still also required to do meaningless work that served only to torment them. From 1938, the work in the concentration camps began to be more tightly interwoven with the rest of the German labour market. Following an agreement between the SS and Inspector General for Construction, Albert Speer, concentration camp prisoners were deployed in the manufacture of construction materials to advance the new building plans of the Reich. In so doing, the SS harboured hopes of establishing its own economic empire.[97]

These plans foundered on the incompetence of the SS and above all on the progress of the war. The end of the German advance on Moscow in the winter of 1941 led to an aggravation of the situation in the German labour market and to an extensive mobilization of all resources for the war economy. Under pressure from the military and economic elites, the SS had to make the concentration camp prisoners available for deployment in armaments production. Until the spring of 1944, however, this deployment remained limited to a few projects, as the essential needs of the German labour market could be met through the coercive recruitment of foreign forced labourers.[98] Also until the spring of 1944, SS policy in the concentration camps had been to gas such Jews and members of the Sinti and Roma communities as were considered, according to SS criteria, to be unfit for work. This situation changed with the collapse of the recruitment system for forced labourers in the spring of 1944. At this point, concentration camp prisoners became the last contingent that could be called upon to satisfy the requirements of the German war economy. The SS extended its system of arrest and capture, leading to an abrupt rise in the prisoner population in the camps. Moreover, Jewish prisoners whom SS doctors had declared to be fit to work were now brought back into a German Reich that had only just been made "*judenfrei*", while those Jewish prisoners who had been declared unfit for work were, as before, sent to the gas chambers.

The provision of prisoners to industry was carried out according to a leasing system. In the majority of cases it took place at the request of industry itself, so that it is safe to assume that industrialists saw an advantage in engaging the workers.[99] For the enterprises, it was first and foremost a question of whether the profits derived from the sale of the goods produced by the prisoners exceeded the costs involved in employing them. These goods were not sold on the open market but were intended exclusively for the use of the German military. The system of German

97. Orth, *System*, pp. 67–94; Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung*, pp. 332–364.
98. Rainer Fröbe, "KZ-Häftlinge als Reserve qualifizierter Arbeitskraft. Eine späte Entdeckung der deutschen Industrie und ihre Folgen", in Ulrich Herbert *et al.* (eds), *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur* (Göttingen 1998), II, pp. 636–681.
99. Mark Spoerer, "Profitierten Unternehmen von KZ-Arbeit? Eine kritische Analyse der Literatur", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 268 (1999), pp. 61–95.

slavery in the concentration camps only came to an end with the military defeat. There is no indication of either an internal move to turn away from this system or of a serious revolt on the part of the prisoners.

Due to its destructive radicalism, the slave labour of the concentration camp prisoners represented a *qualitatively* significant phenomenon for the evaluation of labour conditions under German fascism. *Quantitatively,* however, the work of the concentration camp prisoners was, even at its zenith just before the end of the war, a relatively insignificant phenomenon when compared to forced labour or to American slavery. At no time did camp prisoners provide more than 3 per cent of the manpower employed in the German Reich. In contrast, at somewhat over 30 per cent of the work force towards the end of the war, all forms of unfree labour combined made up a similar proportion of the working population as had slaves in the American South.[100] In sum, German slavery represented a quantitatively marginal phenomenon, which, moreover, only developed into a complete slave economy in the final years of the war, in many cases barely extending beyond the experimental stage.

The deployment of slaves served as a measure of last resort for a mercilessly overheated armaments industry and in a system whose downfall was ever more likely in view of the hopeless state of the war. In contrast to the American slave system, in which slavery was intended by the slaveholders to exist in perpetuity, the mobilization of the German war economy was oriented towards the short-term goal of winning the war with all the means the state could muster. In view of this goal, even the ruthless exploitation of the prisoners to the point of exhaustion made sense, as apparently it was only through criminal exertions that victory in the war could be achieved, and the survival of the state depended on this victory.

THE RE-PRIVATIZATION OF SLAVERY

After the military defeat of Nazism, the Soviet Gulag system and the older forms of slavery in Arabia and in parts of Africa became the focus of the criticism of the anti-slavery movement and of discussions within the corresponding bodies of the UN. With the release of many prisoners after Stalin's death, however, the heyday of state-sponsored slavery systems – which can roughly be dated from 1880 to 1960 – came to an end.[101]

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100. Roth, "Unfreie Arbeit", p. 201. In August 1944 there were 28.8 million workers in the German Reich, of whom 21.2 million were Germans and 7.6 million foreigners (26.5 per cent), among them 5.7 million civilian forced labourers and 1.9 million prisoners of war. Not included in the statistics were the c.500,000 concentration camp inmates at that time. See Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, p. 314.

101. I follow Raphael here, "Krieg, Diktatur und imperiale Erschließung", p. 278. On the Gulag system, cf. Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London, 2003); Ralf

Henceforth, criticism of state-sponsored slavery played a more marginal role in the battle against slavery, even if the continued existence of the Chinese Laogai system speaks against a real end to the phenomenon.[102] Moreover, with the outlawing of slavery in Saudi Arabia in 1962,[103] the old system of slavery increasingly disappeared and today is still found only in Mauritania.[104]

Since 1975, however, in the wake of globalization, new forms of slavery have developed.[105] According to Kevin Bales, three major factors have spawned this new slavery: (1) population growth; (2) the continuing modernization of agriculture in the developing world and the land dispossessions associated with it; and (3) the incredible speed with which developing countries are changing and the chaotic relations that this yields.[106]

The new forms of slavery are taking root, above all, in the periphery or rather in the semi-periphery of the world system. If we compare these new forms of slavery to that in the southern American states, a host of differences immediately becomes apparent. In the southern states, the right of ownership was legally safeguarded, while today in general no such formal protection exists. In contrast to the southern states, the sale price of a slave today is extremely low, as only very limited capture and transport costs are involved. In contrast to the general paucity of slaves in the American South, today there tends to be an oversupply of people who have no work and therefore swell the ranks of potential slaves. The scarcity of slaves and their high purchase price in the southern US resulted in a long-term relationship of ownership, and in most cases in the slave being looked after until his or her death. Due to the large supply today, it is short-term relations that dominate, in which the slaveholder gets rid of the slave after he or she has reached a certain age or degree of exhaustion. Moreover, the importance of ethnic differences in slavery has noticeably decreased. While in the southern states, a "two-colour system" with a dividing line between "black" and "white" dominated, today in most cases the slaveholders are members of the same ethnic group as the enslaved people. Therefore, social forms of racism have become more significant than ethnic racism. The great commonality consists in the fact that in both cases we are dealing with forms of private slavery.

Stettner, *Archipel GULag: Stalins Zwangslager – Terrorinstrument und Wirtschaftsgigant* (Paderborn, 1996).
102. Jean-Luc Domenach, *Der vergessene Archipel: Gefängnisse und Lager in der Volksrepublik China* (Hamburg, 1995); James Seymour and Richard Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts: Prisons and Labor Reform in China* (New York, 1998).
103. Myers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 339–357.
104. Bales, *Die neue Sklaverei*, pp. 109–160.
105. On the chronology, see Myers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, p. 386.
106. Bales, *Die neue Sklaverei*, p. 308.

CONCLUSION: SLAVERY IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD

The term slavery describes an ongoing process that can by no means be consigned to the past. It is politically highly charged and is today still used in international bodies to designate current phenomena. Historians should not turn away from these debates and represent slavery as part of a lost era. It is also unhelpful to regard American slavery as the textbook case, as has often been done in previous attempts to compare the forced labour in concentration camps with slavery. If one regards slavery in all its complexity, then much speaks in favour of also designating the work deployment of concentration camp prisoners in the German armaments industry as a form of slavery. Yet what does this mean? This statement can only be filled out through comparisons, which in turn create new problems. The direct two-country comparison between the southern United States and Nazi Germany shows that, alongside structurally similar contexts, there are also many clear differences. Yet how can these differences be explained?

Here, the global-historical view is also helpful because it traces long-term changes and thereby allows us to situate the emergence of new developments. A further advantage is that it reduces the danger of making an absolute out of a special case. Viewing the phenomenon in a broader context shows the complexity and transformations of systems more clearly than a comparison between two countries. However, despite the greater openness, these global-historical perspectives have ultimately to lead to a higher level of abstraction than with the two-country comparison. Ultimately diachronic comparisons always have to grapple with the problem of the differences between the historical settings, while synchronic comparisons have to struggle with the singularity of the process. The global-historical perspective and the world systems theory have to confront both problems at the same time. Correspondingly all attempts at a global-historical perspective have to take these difficulties into account. In this considered form, the global-historical method seems to me to be of considerable value for a broad range of questions. Thus, it is evident that the history of state-sponsored slavery was by no means limited to the twentieth century but rather can be situated within a time frame from 1880 to 1960, and thus Nazi slavery – at least in this respect – fits into a broader tendency.

This shows that Sofsky's first dichotomy between state and private is by no means suitable for assessing whether a phenomenon can be characterized as slavery or not. Where it would appear more helpful is in distinguishing between various systems of slavery. Does this apply to Sofsky's other two dichotomies as well? Value or non-value? The slaves in the southern US were of value to the extent that they could be bought and sold. When slaves died, this value "died with them". Concentration camp

prisoners, in contrast, could not be bought or sold. They were leased to industry by the SS or the state. For an entrepreneur, the slave only had value if s/he worked. If the prisoner died, the SS sent a replacement. Prisoners only had value if they possessed or acquired specialized knowledge that not every prisoner had, rendering them difficult for the entrepreneur to replace.

In present-day slavery, too, slaves have little value. They are seldom bought but are rather driven into slavery by debt or abducted by force. If they are sold, the price is significantly lower than was the case in the American South. The question of price is linked to that of whether there is an over or an undersupply of labour and how the slaveholder/entrepreneur judges this. The beginnings of slavery in the southern US states were closely associated with the temporary ebb in the supply of indentured labour from Europe. To this extent, American slavery was based on an insufficient supply of labour in a land that remained to be conquered and cultivated.[107]

This by no means applies to the situation in which the German satellite concentration camps arose. Germany was a densely populated country in which hardly any land remained to be developed. Rather the use of camp prisoners became necessary because the conscription of German workers into the Wehrmacht had led to temporary shortages in the labour market. At the same time, however, notions persisted that both Germany ("a people without space") and eastern and south-eastern Europe were overpopulated. Such notions served as legitimization for Germany's war and were closely associated with the belief of the German occupiers that they needed or could deport or murder large portions of the eastern European and Jewish populations.[108] Present-day slavery also rests more on the idea of a large free potential workforce than on the idea of labour as a rare and valuable commodity. To this extent, the history of slavery in the modern period appears to have developed more from the value to the non-value of slaves, although the extremes of these two categories were never reached. Slaves in the South were never so valuable that they could not be beaten or killed; and while the value of the concentration camp prisoners was surely low, it was still a factor in the calculations of those in power. When the supply of foreign labour threatened to dry up in the spring of 1944, Hitler and the SS removed the Jews they regarded as capable of working from the extermination process and deported them to Germany for forced labour. The question of the diminishing significance of slaves on

107. For that reason, some early theorists of slavery assumed that slavery would only spread where there was available land but little population: H.L. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnological Researches* (The Hague, 1900); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944).
108. Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung*, (Hamburg, 1991).

a value scale is doubtless closely associated with the extensive development of the world and with the fact that there are hardly any fertile places left on Earth that are not already densely populated.

Sofsky's third dichotomy is that between work and terror. Here, too, the opposition strikes me as false, as nearly all forms of slavery use violence and terror to force people to work. The criticism of Fogel and Engermann's underplaying of violence in *Time on the Cross* has demonstrated very well how central violence and terror were for the maintenance of the American system of slavery.[109] More recent research into the history of the satellite camps has also revealed as untenable Sofsky's claim that the SS leadership's plans to elevate the status of the work of prisoners were not acknowledged at the grassroots level and that the labour deployment of camp prisoners ultimately changed nothing.[110] Assignment to a production *kommando* could indeed improve a prisoner's chances of survival, especially if the he or she was a highly qualified skilled worker. For the vast majority of construction *kommandos*, the prisoners were, however, unskilled labourers. In these cases, the average survival time of prisoners was usually only a few months. This should by no means be attributed exclusively to the attitudes of the SS guards, however. Rather the high pressure to finish work and the method of accounting meant that construction firms also had a great interest in wringing as much work as possible out of prisoners.

Since dead prisoners were replaced very quickly, there was often no contradiction between labour and terror. Instead, labour and terror were mutually reinforcing.[111] By this, I do not mean to equate the level of violence in southern slavery with that in the concentration camps. Rather, the mortality rate shows that the everyday level of violence in the concentration camps, even in the period of the satellite camps, remained far higher. In sum, the result of my global-historical view is that the three dichotomies used by Sofsky should not serve as exclusionary factors but rather as three central criteria for distinguishing among different forms of slavery.

109. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game*.
110. Sofsky, *Ordnung*, p. 196.
111. Wagner, "Noch einmal: Arbeit und Vernichtung".