

Charles Norton
University of Arizona

**REVIEW ESSAY:
TRANSLATING AFRICA**

*Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics
in Germany and Beyond, 1814-1945*

By Sara Pugach

University of Michigan Press, 2012. 316 pages.

Pugach's *Africa in Translation* documents the origins, development, and legacy of the field of *Afrikanistik*, or the study of African languages in German. Framed as an examination of the works and contributions of major German linguists, both clergy and lay, and contextualized by geopolitical events occurring both within and outside of Germany from 1814 to 1945, *Africa in Translation* pursues three main threads. Drawing on archival and documentary research, Pugach explores the racialization of linguistics, the professionalization of African Studies, and the contributions of *Afrikanistik* and German missionary discourse to segregationist and Apartheid ideology in South Africa.

Well-situated within The University of Michigan Press' "Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany" series, *Africa in Translation* employs a trans-disciplinary approach to documenting and understanding Germany's contributions to the field of African Studies. In doing so, Pugach casts light upon lesser-studied facets of Colonial African history, and makes convincing and logical connections to broader concepts, portraying German Protestant

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missionaries as influential colonial agents. Previously unexamined in English-language scholarship, this oversight is corrected by integrating German Protestant missionaries and lay linguists into a history of colonialism in Africa, and Pugach describes the vital roles they played in the development and maintenance of German Empire. While the book is packaged and marketed as a historical text, it raises and addresses issues that remain relevant today, and which reach beyond the domains of German or African Studies. Of these transcendental issues, three emerged as the most interesting: German missionaries' shifting loyalties between international Christianity and German nationalism, the pernicious paternalism of German missionary discourse, and the counter-intuitive language ideologies of the Pietist missionary tradition.

Chapter Two aptly describes the transformation of the mission of German colonial linguists from Protestant Universalism to German nationalism. Following the Unification of 1871, and Germany's subsequent foray into the European race to colonize Africa, *Afrikanistik* transitioned from a loose network of amateur missionary linguists working in remote colonial outposts, to the establishment of academic departments in prestigious universities in *métropoles* like Berlin and Hamburg. The codification of African Studies as a nationalistic academic pursuit represents a paradigm shift in both the language and goals of German missionary scholarship. Prior to the onset of the German colonial project, German missionaries acted less as imperialists and more as "soldiers for an international Christianity" (3), largely working within the administration of the Anglican Church (and under the aegis of the British colonial empire) and producing English-language scholarship on African languages and cultures. By focusing on the life and work of Carl Büttner, a missionary turned bureaucrat who helped expand Germany's colonial holdings and became the first African Language instructor at Berlin's Seminar for Oriental Languages, Pugach describes and analyzes the transformation of *Afrikanistik* from a proselytizing tool to its codification as an academic field of study with strong ties to Germany's burgeoning colonial enterprise. In addition to laying the groundwork for discussing Germany's most prolific and influential *Afrikanistik* scholar, Carl Meinhof, this chapter sheds light upon the illusive and enigmatic convergence of religion and nationalism, as well as the ideologies that fueled them.

In addition to their well-documented and enduring contributions to contemporary African linguistics, early scholars of *Afrikanistik* also developed language ideologies and classificatory rubrics whose influences extended far

beyond the confines of the short-lived German colonial Empire. Beyond imposing a system of cultural-linguistic racial classification on subjugated Africans (which directly challenged long-held European colonial racial hierarchies based on physiognomy), *Afrikanistik* scholars established a broader German missionary discourse with far-reaching influence. According to Pugach, this German missionary discourse espoused a certain pernicious paternalism, which relegated Africans to a lower level of human development, but promised equality in the distant future. Under this ideology, Africans were to be left alone to reach civilization on their terms; however, they required European guidance if they were to achieve this goal. As convenient as it was contradictory, this discourse justified European exploitation of African labor while creating enough social distance between Africans and Europeans to enact and maintain segregationist practices of all kinds. Nowhere was this practice more enthusiastically adopted than Apartheid-era South Africa. Informed by South African students returning home after studying in Germany, influential racist and fascist ideas espoused by the Nazi party, and the direct employment of German linguists and former colonial administrators, German missionary hypotheses on race and language in Africa dovetailed well with white South/ern African desires to implement segregationist social engineering leading up to and during the Apartheid era.

Considering Germany's rich tradition of scholarship on language, culture, and nationalism, it is not surprising that German missionaries made such profound contribution to *Afrikanistik*. What is surprising, however, is the way language ideologies were deployed in the establishment and maintenance of imperial power in German missions. As followers of the Pietist tradition, Protestant missionaries believed that the gospel could only be communicated in one's mother tongue, and subsequently learned African languages as a pragmatic necessity. Furthermore, these early missionaries used English as their primary language of scholarship, making German almost obsolete in terms of its *cachet* as a colonial language. This linguistic hierarchy offers a stark contrast to the state of affairs in the United States of the present day, where cultural wars rage over the role of Spanish (and other languages) in public schools. Although states like California and Arizona are not actively colonizing new territories populated by linguistic others, they are grappling with legacies of historic linguistic baggage in regions that have complex histories of internal colonization and related migrations in the not so distant past. Comparing the present-day linguistic,

nationalist, and ideological battles in the US Southwest to those of colonial Germany could serve as a powerful pedagogical tool for instructors of language, history, and politics in universities at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Read alongside, say, Paolo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and bell hooks' *Class Matters*, *Africa in Translation* would provide a welcome lens to the glocality of European linguistic dominations in former colonial regimes. Furthermore, Pugach's engaging writing style as well as his careful selection and explanation of relevant historical examples make *Africa in Translation* both accessible and appealing to the general educated reader.