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<i>ADDITIONAL NOTES</i>	

P/pacific Propaganda: The Nazi Appropriation of Aloha in Klaus Mehnert's *The XXth Century*

By Alan Rosenfeld

“Aloha! Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono. The life of the land is preserved by righteousness.”¹ This is not a line from a Hawaiian tourist brochure, but rather the opening header in the inaugural issue of a Nazi propaganda magazine - Klaus Mehnert's *The XXth Century*, published in English in wartime Shanghai. That phrase, known to all residents of Hawai'i as their state motto and once serving as the official dictum of the sovereign Hawaiian Kingdom, seems wildly incongruous with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Indeed, the concept of aloha, a value of purposeful compassion that, according to Hawaiian legal scholar Kamanamaikalani Beamer, “requires one to speak and act out in the face of injustice,” is the very antithesis of National Socialist ideology.² Yet, Mehnert, author of this opening article and founding editor of the journal, cited Hawai'i as a shining example of racial harmony for the world to emulate, lauding the island chain as, “the meeting-ground of nations and races, as the cross-roads of civilization and cultures” and a “symbol of peace and fairness, of the will to understand other people and the ability to get along with them - the symbol of Aloha.”³ How do we situate this P/pacific iteration of Nazi internationalism alongside the ruthless dogma of blood and race that fueled the movement? Is there a way to reconcile these fundamental differences without trivializing the horrific legacy of the Third Reich?

It was the incongruity of *The XXth Century's* political platform as well as the rhetorical centrality of the metonym of Hawai'i as part of Mehnert's attempt to carve out a more “P/pacific” alternative to Nazi wartime propaganda that first drew me to this project. *The XXth Century* offered a version of P/pacific propaganda that constituted a radical departure from its Nazi-approved counterparts, including the

¹ Klaus Mehnert, “Aloha!” *The XXth Century* 1, no. 1 (October 1941): 1. For a more accurate translation, see Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 37.

² Kamanamaikalani Beamer, “Tutu's Aloha 'Aina Grace,” in *The Value of Hawai'i 2: Ancestral Roots, Oceanic Visions*, ed. Aiko Yamashiro and Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 15.

³ Mehnert, “Aloha!” 7.

German Army's *Signal* magazine, which, like *The XXth Century*, was an initiative of the German Foreign Office. The publication was an outward projection of the contradictions embodied in its creator, Klaus Mehnert, offering a highbrow assemblage of news pieces, editorials, travelogues, political statements, and short stories - delivered by contributors ranging from Hitler Youth boss Baldur von Schirach to novelist Herman Hesse. It was incumbent upon Mehnert, as *The XXth Century's* founder, editor, and most-published author to navigate that expanse in a way that could appeal to the "cosmopolitan subjects" of wartime Shanghai.⁴ His appropriation of aloha was a crucial element in Mehnert's attempt to present himself, his journal, and his homeland as beacons of cultural sophistication.

The objective here is not to determine whether Klaus Mehnert should be classified as a Nazi, a project that has been undertaken elsewhere, most notably by Michael Kohlstruck.⁵ Neither is it to determine whether Mehnert acted as a spy for the regime during his time in Hawai'i, an accusation that caused a scandal following *Time* magazine's coverage of George Britt's *The Fifth Column is Here* in 1940.⁶ Instead, this essay examines the rhetorical strategies Mehnert deployed in developing an alternate body and practice of propaganda that stretched or perhaps even defied the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Nevertheless, it would be remiss not to take a moment to consider the lesser-known, prewar career of the man who became West Germany's foremost expert on Russia in the Cold War era, achieving record-breaking sales with his 1958 *Sonjetmensch* and earning the Federal Republic's *Großes Verdienstkreuz mit Stern* (Knight Commander's Cross) in 1976.

The Mehnert Paradox

Mehnert's decades-long career as a journalist and pundit, which traversed several German political epochs, defies simplistic labeling or categorization. His ongoing project of negotiation between cosmopolitanism and nationalism was the defining feature of both his private and public life, producing a figure of human

⁴ For more on Shanghai's "cosmopolitan subjects," see Shuang Shen, *Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-Colonial Shanghai* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

⁵ See Michael Kohlstruck, "Der Fall Mehnert," in *Der Fall Schwerte im Kontext*, ed. Helmut König (Opladen-Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, 1999), 138-172; and Michael Kohlstruck, "Klaus Mehnert und die Zeitschrift *The XXth Century*," in *Exil in Shanghai: Jüdisches Leben in der Emigration*, ed. Georg Armbrüster (Berlin: Verlag Hentrich & Hentrich, 2000).

⁶ For more on the political impact of George Britt's *The Fifth Column is Here*, see Robert J. Goldstein, ed., *Little "Red Scares": Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 341-342.

contradiction. Born in Moscow in 1906 to German parents, Mehnert was raised as a bilingual child in Czarist Russia, before moving to Stuttgart during the Great War and eventually earning his doctorate from the University of Berlin under the tutelage of Otto Hoetzsch. Young Klaus Mehnert was a shining academic star in the late Weimar years, gravitating toward transnational programs and experimental politics. He spent a year at UC Berkeley on a DAAD fellowship, married American Enid Keyes, served as secretary of the DAAD office in Berlin, and, as general secretary of the German Society for the Study of Eastern Europe, edited the journal *Osteuropa*, which his mentor Hoetzsch had founded.⁷

However, Mehnert's project was incompatible with the dualistic and intolerant political environment that followed Adolf Hitler's seizure of power. Mehnert evinced what Ulrich Schmid has described as a "seemingly paradoxical enthusiasm for Russia and Germany" in the early 1930s.⁸ He flirted with National Socialism and became a supporter of Otto Strasser's "Left Nazi" Black Front movement.⁹ Yet, he remained fascinated by events unfolding in the Soviet Union and joined the secretariat of Arplan - the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft zum Studium der Sowjetrussischen Planwirtschaft* (Working Group on the Study of the Soviet Planned Economy) - in 1932.¹⁰ In his postwar life, Mehnert highlighted his clashes with Goebbels' ministry and the Gestapo as the impetus behind his 1934 flight to the Soviet Union as a press correspondent, followed by a year as a guest lecturer at Berkeley and four years on the faculty of the University of Hawai'i, where he taught European and world history.¹¹

Nevertheless, Klaus Mehnert hardly fits the picture of the Nazi-era German intellectual emigre. While it is true that Nazi intelligence viewed him as having a "pro-

⁷ For a deeper biographic exploration of Klaus Mehnert's career, see Kohlstruck, "Fall Mehnert," 1381-1471; Kohlstruck, "Zeitschrift *The XXth Century*"; Michael Kohlstruck, "Salonbolschewist und die Pioneer der Sozialforschung: Klaus Mehnert und die *Deutsche Gesellschaft zum Studium Osteuropas*, 1913-1934" *Osteuropa* 55, no. 11 (December 2005): 19-48; Rüdiger Ahrens, "Klaus Mehnert," in *Jugendbewegt geprägt: Essays zu autobiographischen Texten von Werner Heisenberg, Robert Jungk und vielen anderen*, ed. Barbara Stambolis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Unipress, 2013), 461-472; Astrid Freyeisen, *Shanghai und die Politik des Dritten Reiches* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000), 243-306; Ulrich Schmid, "Wie bolschewistisch ist der 'Sowjetmensch'? Klaus Mehnert erkundet die russische Mentalität," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 4, no. 3 (2007): 466-471; Sheng, *Cosmopolitan Publics*, 135-142; Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921- 1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 251; Klaus Mehnert, *Der deutsche Standort* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1967); and Klaus Mehnert, *Ein Deutscher in der Welt, 1906-1981* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982).

⁸ Schmid, "Der Sowjetmensch," 467.

⁹ See David-Fox, *Great Experiment*, 251; and Freyeisen, *Shanghai*, 289.

¹⁰ David-Fox, *Great Experiment*, 251.

¹¹ Klaus Mehnert, *Ein Deutscher auf Hawaii, 1936-1942* (Honolulu, 1983), 405.

Bolshevist tinge,”¹² Mehnert penned a pro-Hitler article for the magazine *Die Tat*, after his lifelong friend (and future *SS-Stürmbahnführer*) Giselher Wirsing took over as its editor, as well as an essay entitled “Laughing at Russia” for the Nazi newspaper *Der Angriff* in 1935.¹³ When Wirsing was installed as editor-in-chief at *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* - via Heinrich Himmler’s intervention¹⁴ - Mehnert emerged as one of the paper’s most prolific foreign-based contributors, penning fiftyeight articles, including an unsettling piece on “Die Judenfrage in Poland” in which Mehnert depicted his encounters with the “eternal Jew” in the “dreadfully dirty” haunts of the ghetto.¹⁵ The intellectual chasm between this Mehnert and the author of *The XXth Century’s* opening proclamation of aloha would thus appear as daunting to traverse as the geographic expanse between Poland and Hawai’i.

Nazi Cosmopolitanism

As a wartime “nexus of information exchange and circulation,” Shanghai - Paris of the Orient - served as East Asia’s primary propaganda battleground.¹⁶ Mehnert’s eclectic journal fit the city’s equally eclectic population, which included Western-educated Chinese intellectuals, 54,000 Japanese nationals, 25,000 Russians, 18,000-20,000 Jewish refugees, 10,000 citizens of Britain and the Commonwealth, and at different periods, troops from Britain, France, the United States, and, above all, Japan.¹⁷ The city housed hundreds of publishing houses and newspapers, producing works in both Chinese and English, and at one point eleven different German Jewish newspapers and journals.¹⁸

The luring of Mehnert from Honolulu to Shanghai - which appears to have been brokered by Wirsing - was part of a massive expansion of the Foreign Office’s

¹² Freyeisen, *Shanghai*, 291.

¹³ Kohlstruck, “Fall Mehnert,” 148.

¹⁴ For information regarding Heinrich Himmler’s role in Giselher Wirsing’s appointment as editor of *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, see Eckert Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, and Moshe Zimmerman, *Das Amt in der Vergangenheit: Deutscher Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010), 150.

¹⁵ Mehnert’s articles for *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* are examined in Kohlstruck, “Fall Mehnert,” 148-151.

¹⁶ Shen, *Cosmopolitan Publics*, 141.

¹⁷ For more on the foreign population of wartime Shanghai, see Irene Eber, *Voices from Shanghai: Jewish Exiles in Wartime China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3-7; and Bernard Wasserstein, “Ambiguities of Occupation: Foreign Resisters and Collaborators in Wartime Shanghai,” in *Wartime Shanghai*, ed. Wei-hsin Yeh (New York: Routledge, 1998), 24.

¹⁸ Eber, *Voices from Shanghai*, 8, 17.

propaganda capabilities during following Germany's invasion of Poland.¹⁹ Indeed, the launch of *The XXth Century* in July 1941 followed the Foreign Office's takeover of Shanghai radio station XGRS, with broadcasts mainly in English.²⁰ Although the city's Chinese population of 3.5 million dwarfed the number of foreign residents, English had been used as a common language of instruction in higher education in China since the 1920s, and during the war, it became the preferred language of propaganda campaigns featuring vociferous attacks on British imperialism.²¹

Running from October 1941 through June 1945, *The XXth Century* offered its readers a "P/pacific" alternative to the typical inflammatory racial discourse and demonic iconography deployed by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.²² In the end, the defeat of the Axis Powers prevented the magazine from achieving the ambitious vision Mehnert and the Foreign Office envisioned for it; and although the publication proclaimed to reach an audience from "the Amur River to Burma,"²³ its typical production was limited to 3,500 copies, split between China and Japan.²⁴ In this context, Mehnert's appropriation of aloha served as a mechanism to establish a cosmopolitan worldview while denouncing Anglo-American imperialism, an ideological platform that would have resonated with *The XXth Century's* Chinese audience as well as its readers in Japan. As was the case with the transnational cinematic partnership examined by Valerie Weinstein,²⁵ *The XXth Century* provided a canvas on which to illustrate a new interdependent relationship between Germany and Japan, more narrowly, and the West and East, more broadly. These two projects shared a strategy of harnessing cosmopolitan tropes as a mechanism to challenge the Allies' imperialistic claims in the greater Pacific region. In the case of *The XXth*

¹⁹ For details on personnel growth within the German Foreign Office, see Conze et al., *Das Amt*, 146-147.

²⁰ For more on radio station XGRS, see Bernard Wasserstein, *Secret War in Shanghai: An Untold Story of Espionage, Intrigue, and Treason in World War II* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 67-68; and Wasserstein, "Ambiguities of Occupation," 34.

²¹ Shuang Shen discusses the use of English in the classroom in prewar China in *Cosmopolitan Publics*, 12. See Wasserstein, "Ambiguities of Occupation" for a more detailed discussion of anti-British propaganda in wartime Shanghai.

²² For a detailed analysis of the use of demonic iconography in the Pacific Theater by both the Japanese and American propaganda industries, see John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986).

²³ See Mehnert's note to his readers in the final issue of *The XXth Century* 8, no. 6 (June 1945): Z30.

²⁴ Frey Eisen, *Shanghai*, 296.

²⁵ Valerie Weinstein, "Tire Holy Goal: Film, Sport, and Cultural Alliance between Germany and Japan in the late 1950s and early 1940s," in *After the Imperialist Imagination: Two Decades of Research on Global Germany and Its Legacies*, ed. Adam Bladder, David Pizzo, and Sara Pugach (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020).

Century, the foregrounding of the cultural crossroads of Hawai'i, whose residents included 157,000 ethnic Japanese and whose *hapa haole* music had greatly influenced the Japanese cultural sphere, provided an additional hook with which to ensnare readers.²⁶

Where the Nazis bemoaned miscegenation as the downfall of society, *The XXth Century* celebrated multiculturalism, with Mehnert's experience in Hawai'i providing the requisite degree of ethos for his readers. He set the tone in the inaugural issue, with his opening essay entitled, "Aloha!" in which he called for the "preservation of the spirit and charm of Hawai'i," praising "its hospitality and broadmindedness."²⁷ Here Mehnert touched upon the topic of race, but only to rejoice in the islands' hybridity:

*Nowhere in the world can you study race problems better than in Hawaii, where you find not only Hawaiians, whites of all nationalities (called haoles), Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and negroes, but also their increasingly mixed descendants, all of them living peacefully side by side.*²⁸

It is not miscegenation that plays the role of villain in Mehnert's paradisiacal narrative but rather American imperialism. For, as Mehnert introduced himself to the Shanghai reader, he bid farewell - not only to his tropical island home but also to the "spirit of Old Hawaii,"²⁹ which was "desperately trying not to be overrun and crushed" by "its transformation from a south sea paradise to a naval and military fortress of first magnitude."³⁰ Mehnert returned to the theme of anti-imperialism in subsequent issues, mourning Hawai'i's metamorphosis into an "outpost of American imperialism."³¹

However, *The XXth Century*, much like its founding editor, was an embodiment of continuous contradiction. The publication did indeed provide support for Axis imperialism during the war, primarily by serving as a vehicle for dissemination of the concept of the *Grossraum*, which had circulated in various forms in the Foreign Office and the Nazi Office of Colonial Policy since 1936.³² The *Grossraum* essentially referred

²⁶ George H. Lewis, "Beyond the Reef: Cultural Constructions of Hawaii in Mainland America, Australia and Japan," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (1996), 123-135.

²⁷ Mehnert, "Aloha!" 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

³¹ Klaus Mehnert, "Gibraltar of the Pacific," *The XXth Century* 2, no. 1 (January 1941): 18.

³² Wolfe Schmolke, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), 57, 134-135.

to a large geographic space unified under the leadership of a dominant nation, and Nazi Germany was presented as the standard-bearer of a new Greater European *Grossraum*.³³ *The XXth Century* invited an array of experts and ideologues to provide their expertise on the *Grossraum*, including German Ambassador to Japan Heinrich Stammer, jurist Carl Schmitt, and Ichiro Hara, a Japanese professor of English literature in Shanghai. While Japan's euphemistic Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere was the most immediate point of reference for this geopolitical project, it was the United States that curiously provided the conceptual blueprint. In an essay that appeared in the journal's second issue, Carl Schmitt cited the American Monroe Doctrine as "the first and so far most successful example of the *Grossraum* principle in international law."³⁴ American imperialism was thus presented as the chief nemesis in one issue and the model to be emulated in the next.

While the prominence of the *Grossraum* ideal in *The XXth Century* would seem to undermine the magazine's claims to cosmopolitanism, Mehnert struggled valiantly to bridge this divide. The prominence of pernicious racial propaganda between the principal opponents in the Pacific Theater is well chronicled.³⁵ Mehnert's journal, however, ignored Japanese atrocities in the region and eluded expressions of biological racism, turning its readers' attention instead to the importance of language as a porous and inclusive conduit for identity formation. In an April 1941 article entitled "The Capital," in which Mehnert introduced the city of Tokyo as the epicenter of the Asia-Pacific region, he proposed English as a candidate to serve as the lingua franca of this *Grossraum*. Interestingly, the viability of English for this essential role did not stem from any beneficial features inherent in the language or its speakers, but rather from the allegedly cosmopolitan attitudes of Japanese intellectuals, many of whom had begun advocating for the use of English as a *koago*, or "Asian development language."³⁶ Drawing from Waseda University Professor of Politics Kojiro Sugimori - a prominent critic of Western imperialism - Mehnert contrasted Japan's willingness to embrace foreign cultural practices against arrogant and obstinate Brits and Americans who, per Sugimori, had been "too conceited to take the trouble to study Japan and appreciate her true worth."³⁷

³³ See especially Klaus Mehnert, "The Capital," *The XXth Century* 2, no. 4 (April 1941): 242.

³⁴ Carl Schmitt, "'Grossraum' and 'Realm': New Terms for International Law," *The XXth Century* I, no. 2 (November 1941): 114.

³⁵ Above all, see Dower, *War Without Mercy*.

³⁶ Mehnert, "Capital," 243.

³⁷ Kojiro Sugimori, as quoted in Mehnert, "Capital," 244.

Even on the rare occasions when the topic of race was addressed explicitly in *The XXth Century*, it was used to promote an attitude of unity. The key piece in this case does not come from any of the magazine's German contributors but rather from Ichiro Hara, who identified Japan as the only candidate "really qualified to be the leading nation of the East Asian Grossraum."³⁸ Specifically, Hara claimed that the Japanese blood had "absorbed and completely fused ... almost all of the important racial elements in East Asia." "Heredity," Hara asserted, "preserves... *dominant* superior factors in a mixed race, rejecting *recessive* inferior ones."³⁹ This constitutes a fundamental disruption of the Nazi understanding of race, in which miscegenation inevitably leads to the downfall of a society. For Hara, any superiority the Japanese nation possesses has arisen not from its racial purity, but rather from the nation's function as a vessel containing an amalgamation of racial elements from across the region.

It is not only *The XXth Century's* content, however, but also its silences that set it apart from other examples of Nazi propaganda. Moreover, these differences cannot be simply attributed to disparities between the Ministry of Propaganda and the Foreign Office, which the Nazi Party had increasingly infiltrated for the duration of the war. Examining the wartime Arab world, Jeffrey Herf, for example, has documented a "cooperative effort" between the two rival bureaucracies, as part of a mutual initiative to inflame anti-Jewish prejudices and opposition to British rule.⁴⁰ The ultimate litmus test is provided by the German Army's *Signal* magazine, also produced by the Foreign Office and featuring Mehnert's enduring colleague Giselher Wirsing as editor. Whereas *Signal* presented the Soviet Union as a detestable enemy inhabited by "Bolshevist hordes" and "half-savages,"⁴¹ Klaus Mehnert presented himself as a "sincere friend of the Russian people and admirer of their national genius."⁴² The cynic might dismiss such rhetoric as a strategic appeal to Shanghai's sizeable community of (anti-Bolshevist) White Russians. However, unlike Wirsing's *Signal*, Mehnert's *The XXth Century* was also entirely devoid of anti-Semitic themes, including Nazi-supported variations that might have seduced White Russians as well as readers in Japan. References to the alleged influence of Jews in Shanghai or sympathy for

³⁸ Ichiro Hara, "The Foundations of East Asia," *The XXth Century* 3, no. 1 (July 1942): 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Herf, "Nazi Germany's Propaganda Aimed at Arabs and Muslims during World War II and the Holocaust: Old Themes, New Archival Findings," *Central European History* 42, no. 4 (2009): 714.

⁴¹ Sebastien Saur, *Signal et "Union Sovietique"* (Paçray-sur-Vienne: Anovi, 2003).

⁴² Klaus Mehnert, "Bolshevism and Its Pedigree," *The XXth Century* 1, no. 1 (October 1941): 16.

Japan's "plight" trapped between two "Jewish" powers - the Soviet Union and the United States - are nowhere to be found. Instead, Mehnert forged a political line in which the Axis Powers supplanted the Allies as cultural brokers and champions of tolerance across the globe.

Silencing Native Voice

Nevertheless, Klaus Mehnert's P/pacific propaganda produces an alternate narrative of domination couched in emancipatory rhetoric. Here the work of postcolonial scholars such as Epeli Hau'ofa and Renato Rosaldo is particularly illuminating. They have endeavored to write back against the colonial gaze and reclaim native voice by disrupting the Western-imposed binary of isolation and redemption that has dominated scholarship on the Pacific. Hau'ofa, in his 1995 seminal essay, "Our Sea of Islands," frames *his* Pacific as a "boundless ... sea of islands" rather than "islands in a far sea," confined and imprisoned within "tiny spaces" dictated by the idiosyncrasies of nineteenth-century imperialism.⁴³ Hau'ofa rejects the notion that Pacific Islanders are isolated and marginalized, imagining the Pacific in the light that his ancestors viewed it - as a corridor rather than a barrier. Rosaldo has coined the term "imperialist nostalgia" to describe a mechanism that Westerners have deployed to "make racial domination appear innocent and pure," distancing themselves through cries of lamentation from the very cultural erosion in which they are complicit.⁴⁴

It is through the expression of "imperialist nostalgia" that Mehnert is able to transform himself into a guardian of Hawaiian culture and proponent of aloha even as he erases native voice and denigrates the Polynesian people. In a sense, Mehnert's work can be situated within a long trajectory of German scholarship on the Pacific, dating back to Georg Forster's outpouring of sympathy for the "harmless natives" of Tahiti that he encountered during his travels with Captain Cook.⁴⁵

Not only does Mehnert construct Hawai'i as an isolated and marginalized island paradise, but also he deliberately exaggerates these features to undergird his own sense of agency. His assertion, for example, that he was "the only German

⁴³ Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 151-153.

⁴⁴ Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 16 (1989): 107.

⁴⁵ George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Oliver Berghof (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 11: See also Rainer Buschmann, "Oceanic Carvings and German Carvings," *Journal of Pacific History* 41, no. 3 (1007): 303.

citizen on the island” of O‘ahu is preposterous considering the prominent position Germans had occupied in Hawai‘i for decades.⁴⁶ Examples include businessman Paul Isenberg, who ran Hackfeld and Company (later Liberty House and then Amfac) and served in the Hawaiian Kingdoms House of Nobles; Hermann Widemann, who served as Minister of Finance under Queen Lili‘uokalani; and Prussian Henri Berger, who conducted the Royal Hawaiian Band.⁴⁷ During World War II, more than one hundred ethnic-German civilians Hawai‘i were interned, the majority of whom held German citizenship.⁴⁸ In fact, Mehnert’s letters home to his mother from Hawai‘i are peppered with references to dinners and encounters with at least half a dozen German families.⁴⁹ Mehnert also had at least one German-speaking colleague on the university faculty, in the form of Austrian-born Harry Tauber.⁵⁰

His descriptions of O‘ahu’s neighbor islands in *The XXth Century* romanticize Hawaiians, setting them outside of historical time. He claims to have experienced the endangered “life of the natives” first-hand, recalling his travels to the Puna region of the Big Island, “existing on fish, and fruit which dropped into our laps, playing in the surf for hours with the native children,” who in Mehnert’s account remain nameless and faceless, emerging only to underscore the author’s authority as a world traveler and evoke resentment against the encroachment of American militarism.⁵¹ Once again, his letters to his mother reveal a different reality, one that included restaurants and evenings beneath the stars with Mozart and Beethoven playing on the car radio.⁵²

Mehnert’s pattern of reserving agency for himself and his European forerunners contributes to what Hau‘ofa has termed the “belittlement of Oceania,” even as Mehnert decries the evils of Anglo-American imperialism.⁵³ In his December 1941 essay on “Pacific History,” Mehnert trivialized the accomplishments of the

⁴⁶ Mehnert, “Aloha,” 6.

⁴⁷ For further details on the history and position of Germans in Hawai‘i, see especially Niklaus Schwiezer, *Hawai‘i and the German Speaking Peoples* (Honolulu: Topgallant, 1982).

⁴⁸ For more on this topic, see Alan Rosenfeld, “Neither Enemies Nor Aliens: The Hearings of ‘German’ and ‘Italian’ Internees in Wartime Hawai‘i,” *Social Process in Hawai‘i* 45, special issue (1014): 80-108.

⁴⁹ Examples include the Isenbergs, Kraussens, Hoermanns, Roehrichs, Arnemanns, and Bachmanns. See Mehnert, *Hawaii*, 56-57. This appears to be a self-published compilation of Mehnert’s letters and files from his time in Hawai‘i. It is available in the University of Hawai‘i Manoa’s Northeast Asia archival collection.

⁵⁰ See “Sand Island Detention Camp Report,” March 19, 1941, National Archives and Records Administration, Group 494, Entry 15, Box 334.

⁵¹ Mehnert, “Aloha,” 3.

⁵² Mehnert, *Hawaii*, 107-110. Mehnert also mentions listening to the radio at the home of the Li family in Kalapana.

⁵³ Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” 159.

Polynesian navigators who first discovered the Hawaiian Islands, in comparison to the European explorers of a more recent era:

*It was the newcomer, the white man, who first saw the Pacific as something to be crossed.... The Pacific became for almost 400 years a white man's sea, the indigenous races not participating actively in the destiny of the area as a whole.*⁵⁴

Mehnert's refusal - or perhaps inability - to acknowledge the accomplishments of the indigenous cultures of the Pacific is strikingly consistent with the outlook he espoused during his prior term of employment at the University of Hawai'i. This is apparent in a co-authored essay on "Hawaii and the Pacific" that appeared in the journal *Geographical Review* in 1940, in which Mehnert denied any semblance of an independence movement in Hawai'i and asserted that the islands' original Polynesian inhabitants "had only used a small fraction of the land."⁵⁵

In fact, Mehnert's "belittlement" of the people of Oceania is a necessary element of his rhetorical strategy. Much like the supposed incapacity of Pacific Islanders for self-rule provides the political justification for the concept of an Oceanian *Grossraum*, it is the alleged inability of Hawaiians to act or speak on their own behalf that *compels* Mehnert to speak in their place, lamenting the demise of their culture as he accelerates it, and establishing himself as a compassionate and supportive ally and informed world citizen. The problem is that Klaus Mehnert was anything but an expert on Hawai'i and in no sense endowed with the authority to disseminate the Hawaiian concept of aloha to the world.

Conclusion

The story of Klaus Mehnert's *The XXth Century* suggests that the instability of the wartime political landscape opened up space for ideological experimentation, even within the umbrella of the Nazi state. We are then faced with the question, "Was Nazism more flexible in 1941 than it appears in retrospect or is *The XXth Century* merely an anomaly?" Gerhard Wolfs recent research on occupied Poland provides a poignant example of Nazi officials placing a higher priority on patterns of behavior and "völkisch loyalty" than on blood and race as boundary markers for inclusion in the

⁵⁴ Klaus Mehnert, "Pacific History," *The XXth Century* 1, no. 3 (1941): 227.

⁵⁵ Stephen B. Jones and Klaus Mehnert, "Hawaii and the Pacific: A Survey of Political Geography," *Geographical Review* 30, no. 4 (1940): 359.

Volksgemeinschaft, suggesting that Nazi utopian visions could be counterbalanced by pragmatic necessity.⁵⁶ In the case of *The XXth Century*, one can detect the persistence of a cultural and linguistic approach to racial difference with deeper roots in the German imaginary than the biological racism championed by eugenicists and transformed into genocidal policy under the Nazis.⁵⁷

The writings of Native Hawaiian scholars have underscored the challenges of cultural translation, drawing attention to linguistic subtleties that Klaus Mehnert could not have realized. We return to the opening salvo for *The XXth Century*. “Aloha! Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i kaponō. The life of the land is preserved by righteousness.” Although this had been the established English rendering for more than a century, Noenoe Silva has stressed a combination of historical context and the Hawaiian language’s “understood multiplicity of meanings” in offering an alternative interpretation that focuses on the word “*ea*” and refuses to translate “*pono*”: “The *sovereignty* of the land has been continued because it is *pono*.”⁵⁸ First uttered by Kamehameha III in 1843 following a failed attempt by a renegade British naval officer to assert colonial authority over his kingdom, the king’s remark was originally intended as a declaration of Hawaiian sovereignty rather than a generic celebration of the “life of the land.” Little could the Hawaiian monarch have anticipated that a century later the motto of his dominion would feature so prominently in Klaus Mehnert’s *The XXth Century* or that aloha would be espoused in support of a regime that violated the principle of *pono* as ruthlessly as the Nazis.

⁵⁶ Gerhard Wolf, “Negotiating Germanness: National Socialist Germanization Policy in the Wartheland,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (2017): 218. See also Gerhard Wolf, “The Wannsee Conference in 1941 and the National Socialist Living Space Dystopia,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 2 (2015): 153-175.

⁵⁷ For more on the evolution of German racial theory as it unfolded in colonial contexts, see Sara Pugach, *Africa in Translation; A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

⁵⁸ Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 37.