“Imagining Threatened Peoples: The Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker) in 1970s West Germany”

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The creation of Biafra in 1967 and the ensuing Nigerian Civil War sparked a remarkable movement in West Germany for solidarity with Biafra. In 1970, however, the Nigerian Civil War ended with the defeat of secessionist Biafra. At that point, some of those West German activists reorganized. They changed the name of their group from Biafra Aid Campaign (Aktion Biafrahilfe) to the Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker). Over the 1970s, they developed into one of Germany’s most innovative and important human rights nongovernmental organizations. While still concerned about Biafrans in and out of Nigeria, they widened their focus to a range of cases they identified as “threatened peoples.” As part of that process, they brought about several shifts in how human rights were imagined in 1970s West Germany: toward group rights, toward a critique of the West German Left, and toward imagining German and non-German victims of human rights violations in the same framework. This last shift was highly unusual in the context of West German human rights activism, and has remained controversial.

Between 1970 and today, the Society for Threatened Peoples has focused on minorities and indigenous groups, in particular with respect to genocide, forced migration, forced cultural change, and discrimination. It has demanded political change in Germany as well as in other countries, by exposing German state and corporate complicity in abuses of indigenous and minority peoples, for example, and by opposing the narrowing of access to political asylum in Germany. The Society has around 6,000 members, making it at least terms of formal members the second-largest human rights organization in Germany today, after Amnesty International. It has held special consultative status at the United Nations since 1993, and in 1994 it helped to found the main consortium of human rights NGOs in Germany, the Human Rights Forum (Forum Menschenrechte). The Society was especially influential in the 1970s and 1980s with its work with Indians in the Americas and with Sinti and Roma in Europe. It again gained wide notice in the 1990s for its work with Kurds during the Gulf War and with Bosnians in the Yugoslavian wars (Zülch 1993). While it is not widely known outside Germany, probably because it has remained a largely Germanophone organization in the age of Internet English, it continues to be well-known inside Germany today.

This essay concerns the Society’s first decade, the 1970s, and the question of how it constituted the category of threatened peoples for its West German audience. What did various cases of threatened peoples have in common, and what made threatened peoples a
distinctively new focus in West German human rights activism? The examination of how a human rights organization collectively imagines a wrong, defines its program of work to counteract that wrong, and then sustains that work, is fundamental to writing the history of human rights. Such choices, made in particular contexts, can have long-lasting effects on how people well beyond that organization imagine human rights. For example, Amnesty International’s choices shaped for many years the wider perception that human rights concerned especially political prisoners and torture, rather than poverty or domestic violence (Buchanan 2002 and Hopgood 2006).

Human rights activists use the power of imagination to make visible what had been invisible, and to make feasible what had been seen as impossible. In so doing, they often invoke morality beyond history or context, and they seek to elicit emotional responses. Human rights rhetoric is therefore often ahistorical: though historical narration is present, it works primarily on a direct, emotional level. Historicizing that rhetoric helps observers to elude the rhetorical demand of immediate identification with victims; even the elementary steps of arranging human rights actors and institutions chronologically and in selected historical contexts serve to provide some distance, whether one agrees or disagrees with the claims made by human rights activists. Such distance allows us to pose our own questions about the material, rather than remaining interpellated by that powerful rhetoric. The history of human rights deepens our understanding by showing the context in which the imaginative choices of human rights activists were made.

This essay turns first to some domestic and transnational contexts for the emergence of the Society for Threatened Peoples. It then turns to the key elements in the Society’s concept of threatened peoples around the year 1970: that they were peoples—that is, groups and not individuals, requiring group rights; that they faced physical threats, up to and including genocide; and that they had been forgotten by the dominant states, ideologies, and social movements of the day. With the concept of threatened peoples, the Society directed attention to state violence as the central wrong to be confronted. The analysis it developed of vulnerable peoples subject to abusive states was key to its unusual advocacy of human rights for both Germans and non-Germans.

Domestic and Transnational Contexts

By the 1960s a model for publicizing rights causes had taken hold in West Germany, though it was not unique to that country: public intellectuals and artists committed their names to a new organization and wrote appeals for members and donations in the highbrow press. This model had served, for example, the International League for Human Rights (1959), the West German chapter of Amnesty International (1961), and the Humanist Union (1961)—and was nicely satirized by the early Amnesty member Felix Rexhausen (Wildenthal 2012, pp. 63-100 and Rexhausen 1965).

The model served the Biafra Aid Campaign as well: it quickly gained many famous friends. Novelist Günter Grass spoke at its first demonstration in 1968, and renowned
figures including philosophers Ernst Bloch and Jürgen Habermas, poet Paul Celan, writers Heinrich Böll and Erich Kästner, and artist Oskar Kokoschka signed Campaign appeals. So did French and British public intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre. Marion Dönhoff, editor of Die Zeit, also supported them. Biafra Aid Campaign co-founder Tilman Zülch recalled that it was easy to recruit those public intellectuals’ support; he simply wrote to them and they agreed, and some even contacted him first. The famous names seem to have helped: West Germans were second only to the much larger United States in their donations, outdoing the British and French (Hannig 2014a). Continuity between the Biafra Aid Campaign and the Society for Threatened Peoples was strong: an overlapping set of public intellectuals supported the Society, joined by new ones over the years. Some of its longest-running supporters were philosopher Ernst Tugendhat and politician Freimut Duve. Zülch, co-founder of the Campaign with Klaus Guercke, became chairman of the Society in 1970 and holds that post up to the present day. His powerful personality has always dominated the Society, eliciting both strong support and controversy from its members over the years.

The Biafra Aid Campaign and Society for Threatened Peoples greatly benefited from the energy of men and women in the Catholic and Protestant churches who were seeking a form of social justice activism related to the Third World. Indeed, the Catholic and Protestant churches were the most consistent allies of the Biafra cause abroad. Such church-related grassroots support, although until recently overshadowed by the student movement in scholarly histories of the 1960s and 1970s, was important to other human rights organizations as well (e.g. Kovats and Stammberger 2008). These were people whose activism in non-church settings was motivated by their Christian beliefs, and perhaps by the impression that it would be easier to bring about change via an NGO outside the church than to shift their church on politically fraught topics. Churches had to respond to these concerns. In fact, both clergy and lay members of the Catholic and Protestant churches were important for the Biafra Aid Campaign. Bishop Heinrich Tenhumberg, the media-savvy head of the Catholic Bureau (Katholisches Büro, the Catholic Church’s lobbying interface with the West German parliament and other state entities), supported the Biafra Aid Campaign (Tenhumberg 1969). Theology professor Helmut Gollwitzer, who was immensely important for the West German student movement, was a sponsor of the Society from the beginning, as was Joachim Ziegenrücker, the director of Hamburg’s Evangelical Academy (Evangelische Akademie). Ziegenrücker’s importance lay in his role in making the lay Evangelical Academies into leading forums for political discussion in West Germany. Yet another well-known church-related figure who joined on the Society’s board by 1972 was pastor and politician Heinrich Albertz, a former mayor of West Berlin and a pacifist close to social movements.

The churches not only supported the Biafran cause, they also shaped the widespread understanding of that cause as a matter of the persecution of Christians (Hannig 2014b, Hannig 2014c, Heerten 2011, Heerten 2014). Concern about the persecution of Christians seems to have likewise shaped the perception of violence in South Sudan, the next cause to be taken up by the new Society. Indeed, even before the Campaign was founded, West German Catholics (including the tiny Society for African Issues, Gesellschaft für
Afrikafragen) expressed concern about violence in South Sudan as a matter of persecution of Christians. The Society for African Issues was founded in 1967 by Elimar von Fürstenberg and Helmut Ruppert, serious Catholics who sought to draw attention to the violence in South Sudan as a human rights issue (Beckmann 1969, Tenhumberg 1969, von Fürstenberg and Ruppert 1969). Such people viewed human rights activism as arising directly from Christian values and Christians’ specific concerns, rather than a secular enterprise.

Expellee organizations also helped to shape human rights ideas in West Germany. These organizations claimed to represent the large demographic group of refugees (Flüchtlinge) and expellees (Vertriebene) in West Germany, although only a minority of that large group formally joined the organizations (Ahonen 2003, pp. 20-21). The expellee lobby has long irritated a range of West Germans, including many expellees, for its approach to the Nazi past, which has ranged between tone-deaf to outright apologetic. However, they had a strong voice through their ties to the Catholic and Protestant churches in West Germany, and to the moderate Right Christian Democratic Party and Christian Social Union (Christlich-Democratische Union, CDU; Christlich-Soziale Union, CSU) (Stickler 2004, Weger 2008, Ahonen 2003). One of the most prominent expellee politicians, Herbert Czaja, who was a longtime CDU parliamentary delegate and in the 1970s headed the League of Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen), supported the Biafran cause. There is no lack of political material produced by the expellee organizations phrased in terms of human rights, and they were neither superficial nor late in turning to the language of human rights—in fact, they were among the very earliest West Germans to use human rights rhetoric and norms. The plight of German expellees and refugees did not belong directly to the Society’s causes, as the lobby organizations had that well-covered. But the Society had a connection: Zülch, born in 1939, experienced the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia as a child. He has often referred to his and other Germans’ personal experience of forced migration, thereby inviting his West German audience affected by the expulsions to identify themselves with non-German refugees around the world. He was not the only West German human rights activist to make that connection, but he probably made it more frequently and in more visible venues than others have done. Zülch considered both the Holocaust and Germans’ refugee and expellee experience spurs to his and other Germans’ commitment to human rights. The Society invoked Germans’ past sufferings in war and as refugees and expellees in order to sensitize Germans to the plight of genocide faced by distant threatened peoples.

Indeed, another context for understanding how West Germans thought about threatened peoples was their changing understanding of the Nazi genocide. At issue were not merely facts; just as important were those facts’ ever-changing and conglomerating associations and contexts. In a process still being traced by historians, West Germans’ knowledge of the Nazi genocide over the entire postwar era was entangled with their knowledge of German refugees’ and expellees’ sufferings and even of Biafra and other episodes called genocides (Moeller 2001, Heerten 2011). Clearly much changed in West Germans’ perceptions of the Holocaust over the 1960s and 1970s, from the early exposés of Joseph Wulf, Leon Poliakov, and Gerhard Schoenberner to the student movement’s instrumental invocations of the Holocaust, and on to the institutionalization of Holocaust studies from
the 1980s (Knoch 2006, esp. pp. 35-37). This changing context was intertwined with the Society’s history in the 1970s. Indeed, the Society helped to add new knowledge about the Holocaust with its work in the late 1970s and early 1980s to spread knowledge about the Roma people as victims of Nazi genocide, and its campaign to revise contemporary discriminatory ordinances and laws and to entrench Sinti and Roma as replacement terms for gypsy.  

It also explored Germany’s deeper racist past, highlighting, as did other Third World solidarity activists, Imperial Germany’s genocidal war against the Herero and Nama in what is today Namibia.

Developments in the churches, expellee organizations, and in understandings of the Holocaust provided key domestic contexts for the Society’s emergence. Three transnational developments were important as well: the institutionalization of indigenous peoples’ rights via non- and intergovernmental organizations; a shift among some anthropologists towards engaged research; and the quest of some on the European and American Left for forms of ethical political action apart from and even against the state.

The Society for Threatened Peoples emerged around the same time as similar European and American NGOs. For example, in Britain, the Minority Rights Group, while founded in 1961, only came into its own in the late 1960s, and Survival International was founded in 1969. In the United States, Cultural Survival was founded in 1972. In 1971, European and Latin American anthropologists drew up the “Declaration of Barbados” in defense of indigenous groups, an important point of reference for these organizations. The best-known milestones in indigenous rights, in which indigenous activists themselves participated, took place only later in the 1970s: the establishment of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1974-1975; the “Barbados II” meeting in 1977; and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. This last was formed by the U.N. in 1982 and eventually, after many consultations with indigenous leaders, drew up the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007. Indigenous activists’ own local and regional work paved the way for that internationally visible participation from the mid-1970s (e.g. Varese 2006.) But these organizations and principles did not determine the West German development so much as they accompanied and reinforced it, given that they arose around the same time.

The group soon to be known as Survival International was founded in Britain in 1969 by the explorers Robin Hanbury-Tenison and Nicholas Guppy, ethnobotanist Conrad Gorinsky, anthropologist Francis Huxley and others, in the wake of Hanbury-Tenison’s and Gorinsky’s 1968 journey through the Amazon and the 1969 exposé on Brazilian Indians in the British press by travel writer Norman Lewis (Lewis 1969). Hanbury-Tenison described Survival International’s ideas as stemming from “anthropological experience and idealism” (Hanbury-Tenison 1984, p. 106). Survival International started out with work for Indians in Brazil, supporting the work of Brazilian activist Cláudio Villas-Bôas, then over the 1970s took up issues in Indonesia, Panama, and Malaysia, and the Kalahari Desert in Namibia and Botswana. Hanbury-Tenison and his co-founders were inspired by isolated peoples as exemplars of alternative lifeways that did not entail property accumulation or environmental damage. They worried about the loss of diverse cultures and wisdom, including the loss of indigenous knowledge of foods and medicines,
in an era of environmental crisis in industrialized societies. The crass physical violence inflicted on these people as well as the relentless incursions of industry and missionaries appalled Hanbury-Tenison and others, underpinning their critique of civilization. In practical terms, Survival International advocated legal protections to prevent land sales and expropriation, and limited, primarily medical aid, to give isolated communities time to develop new economic foundations and cultural resilience. For these activists, not only individual deaths but also the deaths of cultures, with their distinctive forms of wisdom, were vivid tragedies. Hence their preoccupation with groups, and with not only physical genocide but also cultural genocide or “ethnocide” (Hanbury-Tenison 1984, pp. 89, 180).

Cultural Survival was inspired by Survival International and was its United States counterpart (Benthal 1992) Founded in 1972 by David Maybury-Lewis, a British anthropologist at Harvard, his wife nutritionist Pia (Henningsen) Maybury-Lewis, and his fellow Harvard faculty, anthropologists Irven DeVore and Evon Vogt, Jr. and sociologist Orlando Patterson, it likewise focused on Brazilian Indians. The Maybury-Lewises were concerned about the effects of capitalism on the Xavante there. David Maybury-Lewis insisted on the importance of analyzing of his own impact on and moral obligations to the Xavante (Prins and Graham 2008, esp. p. 119 and Maybury-Lewis 1965).

The Society for Threatened Peoples was nominally affiliated with Survival International, describing itself as its German chapter over the 1970s. However, the Minority Rights Group, founded 1961, seems to have been the more important partner abroad for the Society. David Astor, editor of the newsweekly The Observer, created the Minority Rights Group. Astor was an opponent of apartheid, an early British advocate of African states’ independence, and a serious advocate of human rights; his Observer was the periodical through which Amnesty International was launched in 1961. The Minority Rights Group was more an information clearinghouse than a membership organization; it supported or helped distribute writing by investigators, and it worked particularly on apartheid and the Naga people of South Asia. Astor asked a succession of individuals to serve as director of the Minority Rights Group over the 1960s, and the fact that each director recalled himself as the founder hints at its loose character as an organization. The Society’s archived correspondence indicates that two Minority Rights Group members who were themselves German émigrés, Michael Wolf and Hannah Baneth, were particularly important for contacts between the two organizations.

Not only was the formation of these groups an important context for the Society, but also the developing internal criticism of the field of anthropology that accompanied them, which cast the discipline as politically passive and even neo-colonial (Messer 1993). Further expressions of this critical current within the discipline were anthropologists’ formation of the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in 1968 in Denmark, and the “Declaration of Barbados” of 1971 ("Barbados I"). The Declaration, drawn up at a meeting of anthropologists sponsored by the World Council of Churches among others, was signed by eleven anthropologists of Latin America. Some of those signatories, including Brazilian anthropologist, educator, and politician Darcy Ribeiro (whom Norman Lewis had quoted in his 1969 exposé) were political exiles from their home countries. Indeed, three anthropologists present at the Barbados meeting did not
dare to sign the Declaration due to their fear of political reprisal. The Declaration confronted national governments, fellow anthropologists, and missionaries with their responsibility for “genocide” and “ethnocide” of Indians in the Americas. It demanded a politically committed anthropology that would put itself at the service of Indians. This orientation in anthropology extended beyond those working in the Americas. The American anthropologist Stanley Diamond likewise called for a politically engaged anthropology in those years, including through his journal, founded in 1976, Dialectical Anthropology. Diamond considered Nigeria’s war against Biafra to be an attempt at “cultural genocide.” He was an important contact for the Biafra Aid Campaign, and from 1974 served as an honorary board member for the Society for Threatened Peoples.

A third transnational development was the quest of some activists in the 1970s for forms of political action that did not rely on the state, or even counteracted its power; these activists had little or no faith in the state as a means of social transformation. The scholarly literature on this issue may be best with regard to France due to its well-documented 1970s debate on “antitotalitarianism” and “anti-Third Worldism,” and to Michel Foucault’s theoretical writings (Ross 2002, pp. 158-69; Christofferson 2003; Foucault 1991, pp. 87-104). “Third Worldism” (tiersmondisme) referred to activists’ and intellectuals’ reliance on the newly liberated, postcolonial states for revolutionary inspiration, given the faltering prestige of the Soviet Union among the global Left. Those on the non-Communist Left sought to reinvent democracy through various forms of spontaneity and centering of authority, challenging Old Left loyalties to Lenin and Stalin, and newer loyalties to Mao. Critics of “Third Worldism,” including humanitarians such as Bernard Kouchner of Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, founded in 1971), condemned postcolonial states’ violence toward their own citizens and rejected the justification of violence in the name of revolutionary or development projects (Desgrandchamps 2011 and Redfield 2013) The central insight of 1970s humanitarianism was that states, the culmination of the hopes of national liberation movements, could be threats and not saviors to those living inside their borders. Disillusioned Third Worldists now sought non-political criteria for where to direct their solidarity. In other words, they claimed to drop ideology, politics, and even institutions. As we will see, the Society for Threatened Peoples reflected some of this thinking as it embroiled itself in debate within and beyond the West German Left on ideology and genocide. The Society was an important part of a of a larger shift in Left politics over the 1970s away from the critique of capitalism and toward a critique of state power.

From Biafrans to Threatened Peoples

In 1970, the Society for Threatened Peoples emerged from its single-issue predecessor, the Biafra Aid Campaign. Already before 1970 there had been discussion of adding cases of other threatened peoples to the Biafran case. Indeed, just a few months after the Biafra Aid Campaign itself was founded, in the autumn of 1968, Campaign activists and others from across West Germany met to discuss the possibility of creating a new organization that would work on behalf of the South Sudanese and the Kurds in Syria and Turkey as
well as the Biafrans (“Bilanz” 1969). From 1969 on, Latin American Indians joined this list in Biafra Aid Campaign materials, no doubt because of Norman Lewis’s exposé and the ensuing activism. The South Sudanese, the Kurds, and Indians in the Americas featured prominently in Pogrom in 1970, its first year of publication.

The new Society for Threatened Peoples chose the word “pogrom” for its periodical to connect atrocities both domestic and international, past and present:

\[
\text{Pogrom} \\
\quad \text{will in the future report regularly on those areas, especially in the Third World,} \\
\quad \text{whose population is physically threatened by racism, colonialism,} \\
\quad \text{chauvinism...} \\
\quad \text{will not shy away from criticizing those responsible in the East, West, and in the} \\
\quad \text{so-called Third World, in equal measure;} \\
\quad \text{will expose the involvement of German state policy and of companies;} \\
\quad \text{will give representatives of the affected opportunities for stating their position;} \\
\quad \text{will point out political, educational, and humanitarian ways to help;} \\
\quad \text{[and] report on campaigns of this type and help coordinate actions and} \\
\quad \text{information of German and international groups.}
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This was a program for domestic activism for change, to expose West German official and commercial abuses, to provide information, and to cooperate across state borders directly with the affected groups. This program, along with the 1970s issues of Pogrom, deserves closer analysis for its implications. It drew connections among, for example, Biafrans, South Sudanese, Kurds, and Brazilian Indians: they were all “physically threatened by racism, colonialism, chauvinism.” These were cases of peoples that were suffering physical threats up to and including genocide, whose suffering and indeed existence was danger of being ignored or forgotten. They were “physically threatened.” They faced “discrimination and extermination away from the global public eye”\(^\text{27}\); these were “peoples who, forgotten by the world, were threatened by genocide” (“An alle Aktionsgruppen” 1968).

The Society’s focus on a people had important ramifications. For the Society, the turn to group rights was a way to define the perpetrators’ deeds at least as much as a way to define the peoples themselves. For the Society, a state targeted a people for violence; by its abuse, the state determined who was part of a threatened people. In other words, the contours of that people emerged via the harms done by the state. “People” as used in Society materials therefore did not require rigorous international-law or anthropological definitions or even be shown to exist prior to the state’s abuse, although ethnic distinctiveness was taken for granted by both members and the public regarding most cases. The case of Biafra had shown this ambiguity in action: while Biafran spokespeople emphasized that Biafra was a multiethnic state, European and American commentators tended to speak of it as an Igbo state. Theoretical or conceptual matters did not trouble the Society; it never tried to define a “people” in any serious way. The absence of discussion of international law concepts throughout Pogrom suggests that the Society found such exercises unnecessary.\(^\text{28}\) Moreover, the use of “people” did not preclude
concern for individuals, as individuals suffered because they were in a group or perceived as such. Articles in *Pogrom* often showed that cultural difference was a reason for state violence, but the Society did not restrict itself to a cultural interpretation of conflict. The Society was critical of those who labeled conflicts as religious or tribal; it insisted that conflicts should be seen as political. In sum, the Society relied on the concept of a “people,” but did not take on associated meanings of cultural stasis or exotic cultural difference. At least in the 1970s, the manner in which the Society used “people” turned attention not so much to the exotic qualities of that group as to the targeting of that group, be that targeting was instigated by capitalism, racism, or political conflict.

The turn to “peoples”—to group rights—served to widen greatly the kinds of human rights violations and victims imaginable for the Society’s audience. Not just censorship, imprisonment and torture appeared in the pages of *Pogrom*—the sorts of human rights violations that tended to affect highly articulate individuals well-integrated into their societies. Now also forced migration, poverty, colonialism, neocolonialism, war, development, and even capitalism and state power per se appeared in *Pogrom* as human rights issues. And human rights victims encompassed both articulate activists, for whom the Society sought to be a mouthpiece, as well as the inarticulate and radically excluded of all ages. Nor was the Society very interested in whether the people it sought to help advocated violence. Threatened peoples sometimes did; for example, Biafrans and the Anya-Nya movement of South Sudan used military force. The Society did not want to fund wars, but it did not want to repudiate peoples simply because they had resorted to violence. State abuse, and not the cultural or other qualities of victimized people, defined the groups that interested the Society. There was therefore also no barrier to including ethnic Germans (such as expellees, or those still living in East Bloc countries) in the Society’s mission. The Society’s emphasis on *physical threats* was a manifestation of that 1970s antitotalitarian effort to locate criteria for political action beyond politics, ideology and, for the kind of humanitarianism developed by Doctors without Borders, even beyond institutions. Drawing attention to the immediacy of physical suffering was intended as a new radicalism. At the same time, attention to physical suffering could moderate political differences and promote consensus. The Biafra Aid Campaign’s fundraising cooperation with the Catholic charity *Caritas*, for example, gained it credibility, as the West German public trusted that longstanding organization. For the Society, the emphasis on physical suffering supported its claim to be anti-ideological.

However, the Campaign and Society did not want to be perceived as “only” humanitarian, but rather as a political human rights organization: “Charitable aid by itself lengthens lives. The suffering of the Biafran population and the mass murder of so far ca. 1 million civilians is due to political causes. That is why our effort starts there.” To Tilman Zülch, being political meant daring to attack powerful wrongdoers openly and refusing corporate donations. It also meant offering high-quality information and analysis so that readers could understand complex conflicts and take action. Humanitarian work without solidarity would merely be an “alibi.” So while it was simply necessary sometimes to give money and time, as when Zülch rented an apartment...
for Biafran refugees, it was important to the Campaign not to do humanitarian work alone.

For this reason, the Society focused on one, especially political kind of violence: genocide. The Society defined genocide expansively and as an impetus for action in the present, as well as commemoration of past victims. As Nobel Prize-winning writer Heinrich Böll, one of the Society’s prominent supporters, put it in a 1970 speech:

> Who would have intervened in Hitler’s politics of destruction if it had remained domestic politics? Some politicians and diplomats consider it improper for a German who was a contemporary of Auschwitz to intervene in the politics of another country. Should Auschwitz act in this way as a brake on brotherhood, or should it not be a motive for it? (“Heinrich Böll” 1970)

Far from restricting what Germans might properly say or do in protest, the Shoah ought to drive Germans to act, in order to show that they had learned from the past. In invoking the Shoah as a spur to Germans to act against genocidal violence in the present, the Society expressed an idea that went back to, for example, the visionary West German peace activist Reimar Lenz, and one that was shared by the West German Third World solidarity movement more generally.

To label a situation a genocide, then, was to issue a call to action. This context helps us to understand what may seem like an inflationary use of the term in the 1970s. Typical headlines in *Pogrom* were “Auschwitz – Biafra – Bangladesh” or “Bangladesh: Auschwitz Every Day” (Arens 1976). One of the Society’s best-known causes in the 1970s was that of the Aché Indians in Paraguay. Mark Münzel, a West German anthropologist, became convinced during his fieldwork with the Aché that the Paraguayan government was knowingly allowing their extinction; after he was expelled from the country he intensified his accusations. The Denmark-based International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs published his findings in English, and *Pogrom* published German versions. Münzel and the Society were not the only ones to argue that the Aché faced genocide; so did Richard Arens, an American international lawyer who held posts in Survival International, in a book to which Elie Wiesel contributed an epilogue (Arens 1976). Anthropologists and historians have more recently examined the case of the Aché and conclude, without minimizing the dire situation at that time, that it is incorrect to assert that the regime specifically planned genocide. However, they also note that Münzel’s and Arens’s work helped the Aché gain negotiating power with the Stroessner regime (Horst 2007, pp. 67, 80-99 and Reed and Renshaw 2012). Charges of genocide generally do have political effects—usually, of course, the effect of eliciting denials not only from the perpetrating government, but also from other governments, lest they be compelled to act (Smith 2010). The choice of the term was therefore itself eminently political.

Besides peoples, physical threats, and genocide, being forgotten was key to the Society. Being forgotten meant not fitting into dominant political ideologies of the day, and so not
having any powerful allies in the outside world, and perhaps not even being known to the outside world. The first issue of *Pogrom* announced:

Great power politics, economic interests, blind nationalism and racism threaten whole peoples in various parts of the world (e.g. in Biafra, Iraqi Kurdistan, the South Sudan, Portuguese Guinea and Indian parts of Latin America). Since these peoples are of little or no consequence as power factors, governments, parties, international organizations and the media pass them over or only mention them only marginally. This lack of interest is all the stronger, the less easily conflicts can be made to fit the usual ideological or political clichés.\(^{43}\)

For the Society, the Cold War obscured victims: both Left and Right helped to create an ideological veil that could only be rent by providing information.

The emphasis on information was one of the most striking qualities of the Campaign and Society. They executed major translation projects to create a body of information on threatened peoples for German readers. For instance, Zülch and Campaign co-founder Klaus Guercke published an anthology on Biafra in 1968, and a new edition in 1969.\(^{44}\) This book contained over 250 pages of translated press clippings, interviews, poems, and tables, as well as photos (some taken by Zülch during his visit in Biafra in early 1969). It was bigger, contained more data, and offered more diverse points of view than any contemporary publications on Biafra in English or French, even though those were the languages in which almost all new information about Biafra was generated. *Pogrom* carried forward this explicit goal of supplying high-quality information. All of its 1970s issues contained foreign press items that Society members had translated into German. The Society also located anthropological, other scholarly, and NGO-commissioned research on cases of state abuse of population groups. These full-length studies were authored in English, Spanish, or Dutch, so again Society members translated them into German for publication. About a third of all *Pogrom* issues of the 1970s carried such articles; one 1977 issue even contained 100 pages of a periodical by and for Colombian Indians that the Society had translated from Spanish into German.\(^{45}\) Longer studies appeared as free-standing books, and yet more information appeared in the Society’s pamphlet series *vierte welt aktuell* (e.g. Münzel 1979 and Savvidis 1980). As demand grew for the Society’s publications, *Pogrom* occasionally pleaded with readers to help with what must have been an overwhelming burden of translation work.\(^{46}\) Altogether, someone who collected the Society’s literature through the 1970s had a sizeable and sophisticated ethnographic and current affairs library, in German.

The Society gained wide visibility for some of its research through the influential political affairs paperback series *rororo aktuell*, edited in the 1970s but its strong supporter, the journalist and later Social Democratic politician Freimut Duve. Duve, who had visited South Africa in 1961 and was a vocal critic of apartheid, wanted to bring to West German readers information about Asia, Africa, and Latin America and critical perspectives on development policy.\(^{47}\) Two books produced by the Society appeared in the *rororo aktuell* series in the 1970s, gaining wide visibility and going into multiple editions: a volume on minorities forgotten in the age of détente, and a volume on the
Roma in the Holocaust and after (Zülch 1975 and Zülch 1979a). These books, along with the rororo aktuell series generally, were important points of reference for West Germans, especially on the Left. The Society’s publications belong to any account of the postwar “deprovincialization” of the West German public (Leggewie 1984, p. 29). Of course, those on the Left had quite different sources of information on the Third World as well, which led to the Society’s lasting and formative confrontation with the Left.

To be sure, the Campaign and Society saw themselves and were seen as part of the Left—as part of the array of movements in 1960s and 1970s West Germany known as the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (Ausserrparlamentarische Opposition, APO). But it undertook open, polemical exchanges especially with Marxist-Leninist parts of the Left. The confrontation went back to the Campaign’s earliest days, given the fact that to work for the Biafran cause was already to criticize “the Left” and to claim an untheoretical, “humane” standpoint. This was because the Biafran war and the international response to it did not fit the molds of the Cold War or of Third World national liberation movements and decolonization. Both Britain and the Soviet Union supported Nigeria and opposed Biafra; no great powers supported Biafra. Also, the Biafran secessionists were not fighting for independence from a European imperial metropole; they were fighting the newly independent postcolonial state of Nigeria. For a certain rigid Left analysis, the Biafrans were reactionaries because they were fighting against newly independent Nigeria, because their only state ally abroad was the authoritarian Portugal of António Salazar, and because their greatest helpers abroad were the Catholic and Protestant churches. If those Leftists knew that expellee politician Herbert Czaja and the lobby organization League of Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen) supported Biafra, that would have only confirmed them in their analysis. The Socialist German Students’ League (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, SDS), the key West German New Left organization, refused to speak out for Biafra (Zülch 1969a, p. 197).

The Campaign and Society were scathing about Leftists who reasoned about Biafra or other cases in those terms. Historian Golo Mann, writing in Zülch and Guercke’s anthology on Biafra, exclaimed: “there are situations in which theory is useless, in which all theory is indeed harmful! All twisted artificial thinking must then be thrown out of the window” (Mann 1969, p. 10). The Society pointed out occasions over the course of the 1970s where Left organizations and journalists excused the violence of perpetrator regimes if they were in some sense socialist. Prominent examples concerned violence against the Kurds (because some West German Leftists supported Iraq’s Baath Party), Bangladesh (because Maoists supported China’s aid to Pakistan in that war), and the Crimean Tatars and Azerbaijanis (who suffered under Stalin and after). Only causes such as the Black Panthers, FRELIMO of Mozambique, and El Fatah, Zülch complained, could gain support from the West German Left, at a time when each of those organizations had leading figures committed to Marxism-Leninism. This was tantamount to excusing genocide, Zülch argued:

The pro-Soviet German Left is reluctant to confront Stalinist crimes and almost always uncritically accepts neo-Stalinist policies, to which the discrimination against the Crimean Tatars belongs just as much as the invasions of Hungary
(1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), while the Maoist groups see Stalin as an iconic socialist figure. If one follows their arguments, in the end one would have to distinguish between progressive and reactionary genocide and could then only reject the latter.\footnote{This passage shows how the use of the term genocide, however inflationary, helped the Society gain an argumentative footing that purported to be outside ideology. Zülch made clear that the Society had no reservations about cooperating with groups across the political spectrum if they shared concerns about an abused people. To one reader who complained that \textit{Pogrom} had carried a notice appealing for support for Czech dissident Jiří Müller, whose cause had been embraced by conservative Cold Warriors, Zülch replied that the Society worked with a wide political range of organizations without attaching itself to any of them: 

\begin{quote}
...to us it seems very useful to drive the process of clarification onward, within the Left too, to the point where a clear gulf develops between those who consider human rights and democracy under the rule of law to be indispensable, and those who sympathize with Stalinist or neo-Stalinist systems.\footnote{The Society strongly criticized Soviet violations of its minorities’ human rights over the 1970s.}\end{quote}

Meanwhile, some on the Left fought right back. The Society faced criticism from the Left for having denounced the Sandinista regime’s Miskito Indian policy\footnote{Meanwhile, some on the Left fought right back. The Society faced criticism from the Left for having denounced the Sandinista regime’s Miskito Indian policy in the early 1980s, and for supporting Croatian independence in the early 1990s. In 1991, the Society was forced out of the main Third World solidarity movement umbrella group, the Federal Congress of Development Action Groups (\textit{Bundeskongress entwicklungspolitischer Aktionsgruppen}, BUKO); it was compelled to resign when the other member organizations refused to have any dealings with it (Wüst 1999, pp. 249-50). While the Society has received much positive press coverage between the 1970s and today, it also has a slightly prickly relationship with the left-liberal and progressive press.\footnote{One evergreen issue for journalists critical of the Society, on the Left and beyond, is Zülch’s affiliation with the expellee lobby—and of course the Society is overwhelmingly identified with Zülch’s person. This polemic has lasted until today, particularly among self-described Left and antifascist publications; a quick Internet search using the name of the Society and the term \textit{völkisch} yields numerous items.\footnote{These writers criticize what they see as the Society’s resuscitation of nationalist and racist concepts from the Nazi years such as the concept of the \textit{Volksguppe}, and the Society’s attention to Germans’ victimization, which they see as relativizing Nazi crimes. \textit{Volksguppe} (literally, nationality group) is indeed a term stemming from nationalist Weimar- and Nazi-era international law scholarship that was revived by West German scholars associated with the expellee lobby after 1945, and Zülch has used the term and is acquainted with that body of scholarship.\footnote{However, I have found it impossible to discern any influence of that body of work on the actual contents of \textit{Pogrom} and other Society publications, and I suspect those journalists have as well—otherwise, they would have long since made more}}}}
specific allegations. Meanwhile, West Germany’s Federal Border Guard categorized *Pogrom* as “Left-extremist” literature to be seized upon entry to the country in 1978.  

The Society and the Left disputed, more than the particulars of each case, the role of context and historical development in understanding violence. Zülch irritated with his relentless drawing of equivalences. Meanwhile, his Leftist opponents contextualized, and presumably could not imagine grounding political action any other way. The Biafra Aid Campaign asserted that the cause of a conflict was simply irrelevant once a humanitarian catastrophe was underway, but no self-respecting Old or New Leftist could ever say that (Zülch 1969b, p. 12). How could the cause of a conflict be irrelevant to one’s position on it? This struggle played out not only between the Society and the Left, but also inside the Society, where there was discussion of imposing an internal rule that Society members had to commit themselves to condemning all genocides equally.

Genocide was central to the Society’s confrontation with the Left. As Zülch wrote in 1971, with regard to Bangladesh: “If the Left remains silent about genocide, it loses its real justification for existence, as Sartre said already in 1968 in his appeal on Biafra” (“Auschwitz” 1971, p. 3). The Society sought to reorganize the Left around opposition to state violence—up to and including genocide—instead of class conflict, or class conflict mapped onto interstate relations.

**States and Peoples, Germans and Other Victims**

Along with its many notable accomplishments, the Society for Threatened Peoples has long had a whiff of ill repute about it. It really is controversial, as other human rights NGOs in Germany and elsewhere are not. During my research, for example, members of other German human rights organizations with whom I spoke sometimes asked me if I were also researching the Society for Threatened Peoples, and what my opinion was regarding where it stood politically. These were not its vocal Leftist critics, but people with long experience in human rights activism who had cooperated with the Society in various settings. They were genuinely ambivalent about the Society’s politics and curious about a historian’s perspective.

The Society has been almost permanently controversial because it is the only West German human rights organization to have gone against a marked pattern in human rights activism there: a pattern of avoiding comparison of wrongs suffered by Germans with those suffered by non-Germans. From an abstract legal standpoint, there need be no problem with such comparisons, and indeed should not be. Human rights norms are intentionally phrased as universals and therefore do render various kinds of victims comparable. From the standpoint of historical politics, however, such comparisons can be toxic to many Germans and to others.

What kinds of human rights violations affected those Germans who were not targeted by the Nazis? West Germans pointed to expulsions of ethnic Germans from Poland,
Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere in the wake of the Second World War, as well as Allied policies of wartime aerial bombardment, unconditional surrender, and the extended retention of prisoners of war (Wildenthal 2012, Douglas 2012). Less controversially, they have pointed to the plight of Germans in the Soviet zone of occupation and later East Germany, and to ethnic Germans living in other East Bloc states, such as Poland, the Soviet Union, or Romania. There is no inherent reason why an organization could not combine activism about Nazi crimes with activism regarding the expulsions, if its members wished to do so. In practice, however, West German human rights organizations have foregrounded the crimes of Nazism or the Allies’ wrongs (along with whatever additional issues they take up), but not both. When, in practice, an organization saw internal discussion of both issues, it turned out that members viewed each other’s politics with so much suspicion that cooperation was in practice unworkable (Wildenthal 2012).

The Society for Threatened Peoples broke that pattern by sustaining attention to both German and non-German sufferers. Certainly most of its activism has concerned a wide array of often geographically distant non-Germans. But the exposure of Nazi crimes, on the one hand, and the fate of the expellees and ethnic Germans living under Communism, on the other, have played roles as well. The German refugees and expellees have not been one of the Society’s cases per se, as (at least to a West German public), they are by no means forgotten or lacking advocates. Yet the expellee cause has never been absent from the Campaign and Society, because Zülch has never silenced himself on that topic. Zülch condemns the expulsions, and invokes them together with the Holocaust as the basis of his and other Germans’ commitment to human rights for people everywhere threatened by state violence. He has been a member from the outset of the advisory board of the planned Center against Expulsions in Berlin (originally named Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen and now administered by the Stiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung). This project, which will more or less explicitly compare the Nazi genocide of the Jews to the expulsions of Germans, has been controversial since the early 2000s. In 2003, Zülch accepted the Human Rights Prize of the Sudeten German Homeland Association (Menschenrechtspreis der Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft)—one of those expellee lobby groups that had done little to distance itself from its own questionable leaders. These are the expellee-related snippets of news that have given the Society that whiff of ill repute. The Society’s emphasis on peoples as opposed to their oppressive states opened up the possibility of placing various groups of Germans among the cases of threatened peoples, a noteworthy development in the overall history of post-1945 German human rights activism.

This essay has provided contexts for the emergence of the Society for Threatened Peoples and some discussion of the implications of its key terms. The Society successfully imagined threatened peoples and thereby transformed the human rights scene for West Germans in the 1970s and since. It did so by setting out fresh criteria for human rights violations and by introducing a great deal of new information to the reading public. It argues that the reason why the Society has been so lastingly controversial is that its analysis of the plight of threatened peoples relies on the idea of great distance between a people and its state. While this is a truism of international human rights work—states are
by definition the entities that commit or permit human rights violations—it is also permanently controversial proposition in the context of post-Holocaust Germany. The idea of the people’s responsibility for their state, before, during and after the Nazi period does not fit well with the idea of (some) Germans as a threatened people. However, human rights norms alone cannot resolve this tension—if they could, they would comprise a universal political language, which they certainly do not.

Bibliography

A note on citations from “biafrahilfe-all.pdf”: Some archival documents from the Society for Threatened Peoples that are cited below were consulted using a scanned collection of Biafra-related documents prepared for internal use by Society staff member Abdul Raffert. I designate this electronic collection as he did, “biafrahilfe-all.pdf.” I thank him very much for providing me a copy. The originals of those scans are held in the Society’s archive at its main office in Göttingen, which I visited in May 2012. While at the archive, I also consulted an overlapping set of documents in their original form, which are organized by boxes. If an archival document has a clear author or title, it is cited with its own bibliography entry; if not, details are given in a footnote.

A note on citations from Pogrom: Ten years (1970-1980) of Pogrom were consulted for this essay. Portions ranging from entire issues to brief items lacking an author or title are cited. If the article has a clear author or title, it is cited with its own bibliography entry; if not, details are given in a footnote.


“Editorial I” (1971): In *Pogrom* 2, no. 9, inside front cover.

“Editorial II” (1971): In *Pogrom* 2, no. 9, inside front cover.


“Frohe Weihnacht” (n.d.): In biafrahilfe-all.pdf.


“Die politische Problematic des Konfliktes Nigeria/Biafra” (n.d.): In biafrahilfe-all.pdf.


“Schweigemarsch” (1968): In Die Zeit. 16 August.


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1 I thank Brianne Rodgers for her research assistance, and Yasna Causevic, Iris Castro, and Tilman Zülch for welcoming me at the Society’s archive in Göttingen in 2012. On Biafra’s impact in West Germany, see Florian Hannig 2014a, Heerten 2011, and Heerten 2014. Hannig and Heerten will soon complete a dissertation and book respectively that will greatly advance our understanding of this episode.

2 The Biafra Aid Campaign was both a Hamburg-based organization and, as the Komitee der Aktion Biafra-Hilfe, the coordinator of some ninety Biafra groups across West Germany. See, e.g., “Schweigemarsch” (1968). Beyond the Society’s own publications, the main published account is Wüst 1999, pp. 237-271. Between 1970 and 1973, its name was “Society for Life and Future of Threatened Peoples” (Gesellschaft für Leben und Zukunft bedrohter Völker); then that name was shortened to its current form.

3 The Society’s current statement of goals is “Aufgaben und Ziele” n.d.

4 At the end of 2012, it had 5,643 members and 3,359 Bedrohte Völker – Pogrom subscribers. See Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (2013). The Society saw its most rapid membership growth in the mid-1970s and in the early 1990s; over the 2000s its membership leveled off at about 6,000 members. See Wüst 1999, pp. 240-244 for older membership statistics. Of course, the number of formal members is no longer as useful as it once was for gauging the prominence of an organization, given mass fundraising techniques and visibility on the Internet. In 2013 the German section of Amnesty International had about 30,000 members, and many more donors. See Amnesty International—Deutsche Sektion (2014).

5 In 1977 and 1978 the Society sponsored U.S. Indians on speaking tours of West Germany that were very well attended; see this special issue: *Pogrom* 9, no. 54-56 (1978). On Sinti and Roma, see Zülch 1979a and Zülch 1983.


The church-based charities in West Germany, *Caritas* and the *Diakonische Werk*, overshadowed even the Red Cross during the Biafran war, as the latter halted its airlift in 1969 out of concern about its relations with the Nigerian government. See “Die politische Problematik (n.d.), p. 17; flier dated December 1969 in biafrahilfe-all.pdf; and Forsythe 2005, pp. 63-68.

*Pogrom* 1, no. 1 (10 April 1970), inside front cover. On Gollwitzer, see Weitbrecht 2012. Weitbrecht’s book highlights the upsurge in Third World solidarity work in the churches, which historians have neglected. See also Lepp 2007 and other essays in that volume. On the Evangelical Academies, see Bolewski 2009.

*Pogrom* 3, no. 12-13 (1972), inside front cover.

Campaign co-founder Klaus Guercke was likewise interested in South Sudan: Zülch and Guercke 1969, p. 265.

Tenhumberg 1969 is cast entirely in terms of “human rights.”

For example, Rupert Neudeck has also invoked his own childhood experience as a refugee from East Prussia as the source of his identification with Vietnamese “boat people” and other refugees (Wildenthal 2013).

*Pogrom* 10, no. 61 (March-April 1979), pp. 2-9; Zülch 1979a, Zülch 1983.

*Pogrom* 6, no. 38 (1975).

The Society sent Claus Biegert as a representative to the 1975 meeting of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in Canada; he was the only European journalist present. *Pogrom* 7, no. 41 (1976), p. 18.

Bentley 1979; Hanbury-Tenison 1984, pp. 80, 89, 98-99. In 1971, they replaced the initial name of Primitive Peoples’ Fund with the new name Survival International.

Tilmn Zülch confirmed that (personal communication, Göttingen, 24 May 2012. Numerous Minority Rights Group-funded field reports were translated by Society members from English into German and appeared in the Society’s periodical *Pogrom*, e.g. *Pogrom* 2, nos. 14 and 19 (1972); *Pogrom* no. 4, no. 24 (1973); *Pogrom* 6, no. 32 (1975); *Pogrom* 6, no. 33 (1975).

The traveler, missionary, and authority on Tibet George Patterson, the anti-apartheid activist and advocate of Namibian independence Reverend Michael Scott (Yates and Chester 2006), and fellow periodical editor and South African David Kessler were involved from 1961, when it was still called the International Committee for the Study of Group Rights. By 1962 it was already focused on the South Sudan. South African anti-apartheid journalist Laurence Gandar took over at some point, then historian of Africa Roland Oliver; after 1969, liberal politician Jo Grimond was director. See Cockett 1991, pp. 205-206; Oliver 1997, pp. 309-311; Barberis 2005, p. 193; Sampson 2001.

Wolf worked as an actor; Baneth worked as secretary to Martin Buber until 1968. Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 24 and 25 May 2012. So too were German émigrés in Britain important in the early years of Amnesty International, including for its contacts with West German Amnesty leaders.

Diamond 1970. This piece was reprinted in Zülch 1975, pp. 48-68. The Biafra Aid Campaign had also anthologized Diamond in Zülch and Guercke 1969, pp. 57-65.


A fuller list of issues contained in Pogrom’s first year is: the aftermath of the Biafran war, Kurdistan in Syria and Turkey, South Sudan, Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau and Angola, Communists in Indonesia, Christians in Iraq, Vietnamese in Cambodia, apartheid in South Africa; South Africa’s treatment of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and Zambia, the Cabora Bassa dam in Mozambique, dictatorship in Brazil, genocide in Brazil (regarding both Indians and Brazil’s dictatorship), Latin American Indians more generally, and U.S. American Indians.

Pogrom 1, no. 3 (July 1970), inside front cover. It is very similar to the Society’s mission statement today. Biafrans had frequently used the term “pogrom” in their materials.

Untitled flier dated 17 February 1970, in biafrahilfe-all.pdf. This is why the Society did not work on well-known cases such as the Vietnam War or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A rare exception, itself criticizing the idea of clear or homogeneous group identity, is Schultze and Schultze 1974. See also other items in the same issue, which is devoted to Indians and the idea of the Fourth World. In 1974, we see this gloss on its mission: “The Society sees itself as a human rights organization for minorities.” Elsewhere in the passage, there is mention that affected peoples might also be majorities and mention of “tribal peoples.” Pogrom 5, no. 28 (1974), inside back cover. Survival International used the phrase “threatened peoples,” but not consistently. Hanbury-Tenison 1984, pp. 128, 219.

A late example of such a statement is Duve 1998a.

E.g. regarding Bangladesh, Pogrom 2, no. 9 (1971), p. 1; regarding South Sudan, Pogrom 6, no. 37 (1975), p. 56.

This was part of the Society’s criticism of the West German churches’ position on the Anti-Racism Program of the World Council of Churches. Because the WCC was supporting some national liberation movements, the churches responded that they did not want to support armed guerrillas. “Editorial I” (1971); “Das Antirassismusprogramm” (1971); “Editorial. Weltkirchenrat” (1973); and Pogrom 10, no. 64 (1979), p. 4.

On ethnic Germans in the East Bloc, see Rogall 1989, Zülch 1989a, Kotzian 1989. A more recent example of how a “threatened people” need not be culturally different is the 2011 work by the Society for the so-called wolf children (Wolfskinder), orphaned and homeless children left behind at the time of the expulsions who had grown up marginalized in Lithuania and elsewhere—and who had been left out of the numerous welfare provisions offered to refugees and expellees in West and unified Germany. See the Society’s press release “Letzte Zeitzeugen” 2011. What was important for the Society’s work with this group was that they were forgotten, not that they were or were not in some sense German.
Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 24 May 2012. (Archived Campaign fliers show the bank information for Caritas, so that donors could send money there rather than to an unfamiliar new organization.) The Campaign defended humanitarian work to students whose idea of political sophistication led them to scorn it: it pointed out that that students might not like humanitarian aid, but they once depended on it, in the wake of the Second World War (“Frohe Weihnacht” n.d.).


Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 24 May 2012.


Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 24 May 2012.

On the importance of not defining genocide too narrowly, see Zülch and Guercke 1969, p. 158. On not letting one’s concern about genocide be restricted to the past, see Pogrom 1, no. 3 (July 1970), inside front cover. Regarding Bangladesh, see Pogrom 2, no. 9 (1971), p. 5.

As Quinn Slobodian has pointed out, “the instrumentalization of Auschwitz awareness for the sake of Third World activism was precisely what [was] intended...the complaint...was not that the older generation was ignoring the past but that it had found a way to remember it that deflected attention from the present. [Third World activists] contrasted their own determination to speak out about contemporary injustice against the passive, elegiac mode that they diagnosed in the mainstream.” Slobodian 2012, p. 147. As Slobodian notes, this critique extended back to Lenz 1963. Slobodian briefly notes Pogrom’s invocations of the Holocaust on p. 253 n. 184. See also an appeal by the Biafra Aid Campaign dated 11 January 1970, quoted in Bedrohte Völker – Pogrom 39, no. 6 (2008), pp. 20-21, which reads: “It should be unbearable for every German citizen who is seriously concerned with clearing up the past that with the cooperation of a close ally we see a repetition of what happened in Germany: the wiping out of a people. Remaining silent on this policy of our British ally means complicity.”

I do not wish to give the impression, however, that there is scholarly consensus today on defining genocides. For a group of historians and other scholars currently exploring the concept of genocide, see Bloxham and Moses 2010 and references cited there.

Münzel’s first report appeared in Pogrom 4, no. 18 (1973); see also Pogrom 5, no. 28 (1974); Pogrom 8, no. 49 (1977); and Pogrom 8, no. 50-51 (1977). See also Zülch 1975, pp. 147-161. From 1976 on, Münzel served on Pogrom’s editorial board.

Pogrom 1, no. 1 (1970), on back cover.


Pogrom 8, no. 53 (1977).

See “An unsere Leser” 1976, where it is mentioned that the readership increased sharply in 1975.

Duve was editor of the series from 1970 and stayed at Rowohlt as editor until 1989. His memoir emphasizes his engagement in the Bosnian war of the 1990s (Duve 1998b). See also “20 Jahre” 1981.

This general impression was confirmed by Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 24 May 2012.
For that matter, Zülch and the Society also publicly criticized allies, if that seemed called for. For criticism of the churches and Günter for their lessened concern about Biafra, see Pogrom 1, no. 4-5 (1970), on back cover. For criticism of the World Council of Churches regarding South Sudan, see Pogrom 6, no. 37 (1975), p. 56.

Sometimes the Society dismissed entire periodicals, and at other times it differentiated, praising a periodical’s coverage of one issue and condemning its coverage of another. For those who are curious, the periodicals that figured most often were: Antiimperialistische Informationsbulletin, Berliner Extradienst, Deutsche Volkszeitung, Dritte-Welt-Magazin, Kurbliskern, Progress Dritte Welt (formerly Afrika heute), Neue Politik, Rote Blätter, Die Stimme, Die Tat, Unsere Zeit, and publications of the Pahl-Rugenstein publishing house. Zülch characterized most of these as close to the DKP and SEW (Zülch 1978). The SEW (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins) was supported by the East German Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED), the ruling party there. It praised, e.g., Berliner Extradienst and Links. Sozialistische Zeitung (Pogrom 2, no. 11 [1971], inside back cover) and Pflasterstrand (Pogrom 10, no. 61 [1979], p. 51).


Survival International was also so criticized (Hanbury-Tenison 1984, p. 218).

See, e.g. Schneider and Schenz 1997, in which the Society is used as an example of how problematic it was that human rights NGOs could draw attention to issues without being held accountable for their actions. The authors seem not to have considered that journalists could be criticized in the very same way. Zülch claimed to me that the Society
was not always treated well in the pages of Germany’s main progressive newspaper, *taz, die tageszeitung*. Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 24 May 2012. He named an example that rankled: journalist Philipp Mausshardt confronted Zülch with the fact that one of the Society’s inaugural board members, journalist Peter Grubbe, was in fact the Nazi-era war criminal Claus Peter Volkmann. Grubbe became known after the war as a critical left-leaning journalist well versed in Third World topics. Zülch removed him from the Society’s board (Mausshardt 1995). In Zülch’s view, the article drew disproportionate attention to the Society among the various organizations where Grubbe/Volkmann had worked. However, I have not found consistently negative coverage of the Society in the *taz*. Another early Society board member was writer Luise Rinser, who had also concealed her pro-Nazi activities as a young adult; those were revealed after her death (Sánchez de Murillo 2011). The pattern of Grubbe/Volkmann and Rinser has much to do with postwar German society but nothing specifically to do with the Society.


61 For usage of “Volksgruppe,” see, e.g., *Pogrom* 1, no. 1 (1970), inside front cover. This scholarship was produced by a number of Austro-Hungarian Germans concerned with nationality rights, Nazi-era legal scholars, and their students. They developed concepts such as the “right to a homeland” (*Recht auf die Heimat*) and a body of legal thought about nationality rights they called *Volksgruppenrecht* to develop human rights norms intended to generalize specific Germans’ experiences (Schönwälder 1996, Wildenthal 2012, pp. 45-62, 101-131). These concepts were discussed at conferences such as those held by the Federal Union of European Nationalities (Föderalistischer Verein Europäischer Volksgruppen, FUEV), which Züelch and other Society members attended, and to which the Society formally belonged. Zülch gives a partly critical account of meetings of these European nationality rights activists, mentioning far-Right Sudeten German representatives and a disruption by some West German neo-Nazis, and mentioning with apparent approval the principles of *Volksgruppenrecht* (Zülch 1979b). See also materials on pages following, on the Internationaler Verband zum Schutze bedrohter Sprachen und Kulturen, FUEV, and *Volksgruppenrecht*. Zülch was acquainted with the international law work on *Volksgruppenrecht* by e.g. Theodor Veiter and Rudolf Laun: ibid. and Tilman Zülch, personal communication, Göttingen, 25 May 2012. See also his positive mention of FUEV (Zülch 1989b, p. 278).

62 “Grenzschutz” 1978.

63 On the question of whether someone who accepts certain abuses can still work in the Society (Zülch notes that even Society members sometimes sympathized with the Khmer Rouge, Saddam Hussein, or Muammar Gaddafi), see Tilman Zülch to Käthe Meentzen (10 June 1980), Society Archive, Göttingen, in box labeled “Biafra” (1968-1980).