

‘Vell, I don’t call dot very shentlemanly gonduck’: The Portrayal of Germans as Ungentlemanly South Seas Traders in Louis Becke’s Short Stories

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Abstract

The second part of the nineteenth century saw a change in the Pacific from the age of beachcombers to that of organized trade and plantations, yet it was still a time when much of the colonial map had not been finalized. Arguably the best Australian author to capture this period is Louis Becke (1855-1913). Himself a trader in Samoa and Micronesia from the 1870s to the early 1890s, Becke turned writer in the mid 1890s. His exotic short stories, bringing an unusually realistic perspective to the hitherto romanticized depiction of the South Pacific, brought him rapid and widespread fame. In nine novels and over 400 short stories, Becke’s work depicted the atmosphere of inter-cultural relations, as well as colonial rivalry at both the local island and atoll level. The paper discusses how Becke’s portrayal of German traders and scientists in his stories articulated wider political transformations occurring in the Pacific region at the time, and in particular, emerging colonial rivalries between Great Britain and Germany.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw increased competition between German, British Australian /British-colonial and American trading interests in the Pacific. Much of the Pacific was under only nominal control by the colonial powers, and the presence of traders and missionaries began to consolidate political claims. This process was concluded by 1900 when the Pacific had been divided up between the United Kingdom, Imperial Germany, France and the United States of America.

In the Central and Western Pacific, the colonial political and economic rivalry was largely played out between the Anglo-phone British and Americans on the one hand and Imperial Germany on the other. Germany, as the newcomer, had the greatest ambitions, and her traders, being both aggressive and innovative, were among the most successful.

Arguably the best author to capture this period is the Australian Louis Becke (1855-1913). As a trader himself in Samoa and Micronesia during the 1870s, 1880s and early 1890s, Becke turned writer in the mid 1890s. His work was widely acclaimed and it influenced public opinion between 1894 and 1900. For Becke, the last decades of the nineteenth century were a time where island life conjured up a romantic imagery of palms and dusky maidens, where traders were colorful individuals, and where a man could still become ‘somebody’, regardless of social status at home. This period also represented the final years of an ‘independent’ Pacific, the time before colonial control had become all encompassing. What was Becke’s perception of the Germans, traders and otherwise? And to what extent does his perception of the Germans echo the political and ideological discourse of the time?

In the following article I will first consider the main elements of the history of German colonization in the Pacific, followed by a brief biographical sketch of Louis Becke set against the ideological discourse(s) in which he was, wittingly, or unwittingly, embedded. These elements set the scene for a discussion on how the Germans are portrayed in Becke’s writings.

The title of the paper ‘*Vell, I don’t call dot very shentlemanly gonduck*’ (‘Well, I do not call this a very gentlemanly conduct’) is a line taken from his 1893 short story ‘A Question of

Precedence' (Becke 1893d). It summarizes Becke's views of the Germans as both ruthless and despicable traders in the South Seas and as uncouth individuals prone to mangling the English language and pronunciation.

The paper concludes with a brief discussion of how Becke was received by the German public and an evaluation of Louis Becke's role in shaping public opinion about the Pacific.

German Trade and Empire in the South Pacific

German trading interests, originating from Hamburg, entered the Pacific in the early 1850s, trading first in the more established and 'safer' areas of Eastern Polynesia and Hawaii, as well as in the Western Polynesian triangle. While very early trade was largely ship-borne because in most instances it was deemed to be too dangerous for a trader to live among the Pacific Islanders, this soon changed with a plethora of individual traders of all nationalities scattered across the Pacific Islands, acting as intermediaries. Gradually, Samoa and Hawaii became the focal points for economic development and homeports for island trading vessels, with Samoa offering the greatest potential as Anglo-phone and Franco-phone competition there was less well established.

An up-and-coming trading company in Samoa at this time was the German trading house Johann Caesar Godeffroy and Sons. Established there in 1857, they had founded a network of trading stations throughout Samoa and Tonga as well as on Futuna, 'Uvea and the Lau Islands of Fiji'. Rather than continuing the tradition of ship-borne trade and independent traders on a few islands, Godeffroy revolutionized the island trade by establishing as many trading stations as possible with their signed-up agents taking a commission on the trade. Reliable shipping meant that traders could be resupplied regularly with stock, and that traders could take, in effect, orders from their island customers, which could be filled within a reasonable time.

Theodor Weber, the manager of the Samoan operations of Godeffroy and Sons, 'invented' the acquisition of copra rather than coconut oil of questionable quality thereby safeguarding quality of product.¹ He signed up the entire copra production of islands in advance through down payments, thus placing communities in perpetual debt; and he established company-owned plantations on Samoa, thereby making much of his company's profit independent of competition (Spoehr 1963; Bollard 1981).

According to Handley Bathurst Sterndale's assertion in the New Zealand Parliamentary papers of 1874 (Sterndale 1874:4), Weber paid no heed to the nationality of his staff, but was wont to ask three questions of prospective employees seeking employment to act as an agent on one of the islands, all of which had to be answered in the affirmative: i) 'Can you speak the language,' ii) 'Can you live among the natives without quarrelling with them?' and iii) 'Can you keep your mouth shut?' Every employee was given two pieces of sound business advice which came close to employment stipulations: 'Have a woman of your own, no matter what island you take her from; for a trader without a wife is in eternal hot water;' and 'Give no assistance to missionaries either by word or deed (beyond what is demanded of you by common humanity), but, wherever you may find them, use your best influence with the natives to obstruct and exclude them' (Sterndale 1874). The company was very secretive in its business operations, to

¹ Locally pressed and stored coconut oil was not pressed as cleanly as industrial processing in Europe was able to achieve. It frequently oxidized (turned rancid) on the long voyage back to Europe, reducing its value for human consumption. By transporting desiccated coconut flesh ('copra'), the oils could be preserved inside the flesh, thus preventing oxidization.

the extent that captains were sent out from Samoa under sealed orders, which were only opened when at specified latitudes (Sterndale 1874).

On islands further afield from Samoa, independent German traders established stations such as Adolph Capelle in Jaluit, while smaller companies trading out of Hawaii, such as Hoffschläger & Stapenhorst, tried to open up markets elsewhere. All this development was essentially private, without support by the German Imperial government of the day.

In the late 1870s, Germany signed treaties of friendship, protection and preferential trade with some Pacific Islands groups, such as Tonga (1877), Bismarck Archipelago (1878), Samoa (1879), and the Ralik Chain of the Marshalls (1879) (Werner 1886; 1889). A major milestone was the formation of the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft in 1884,² rising out of the ashes of the failed Godeffroy enterprise. Colloquially called 'the long-handled firm', the DHPG aggressively expanded the Godeffroy trading empire, using the same strategies, but also through overt and covert political agitation.

By 1884 official German colonial policy had also changed, leading to the annexation of the north-eastern part of New Guinea and the islands off shore (such as New Britain and New Ireland). While Germany was prepared to provide political, and if need be, military support, it was not prepared to fund the expenses incurred in actually administering them as colonies.³

In 1885 Germany took formal possession of the Marshall Islands, having compensated Spain for the loss. Like in German New Guinea, the administration was 'outsourced,' with the bill being footed by the Jaluit Gesellschaft, a trading firm formed by merging the existing German trading interests in the Marshall Islands (Roberston & HERNsheim and DHPG) into one powerful stock company. While notionally independent, the German administrators in the Marshalls had a close working relationship with the Jaluit Gesellschaft. While conditions were always made difficult for the competition, at least initially the legalities of trade regulations were carefully observed.

Following the Spanish American War of 1898, the United States of America annexed Guam, while Germany purchased the remainder of the Spanish possessions in Micronesia (the Carolines, the Marianas and Palau), taking possession in October and November 1899 (Bennigsen 2003). The new islands were placed under the administration of the German Governor in Rabaul (New Guinea), rather than being made directly answerable to Berlin (Spennemann 2007a).

After years of jostling for position, events had also come to a head in Samoa in late 1899, leading to the partition of the Samoa Islands between Imperial Germany, which obtained Savai'i, Upolu, and Apolima, and the United States of America which obtained the rest. British interests were compensated by Germany officially withdrawing its interests in Tonga. The economical and political reality in German Samoa, however, meant that German, British and American

² When Godeffroy & Sons went bankrupt, the trading interests were acquired by a group of influential Hamburg businessmen. The Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft (DHPG) pursued an expansionist policy from the start. The DHPG lobbied for protection of its interests by the Imperial German government, while at the same time being active in covertly destabilizing those traditional powers on the various islands that were opposed to the DHPG or who favored other traders/countries. Samoa is a prime example here (e.g. Kennedy 1974).

³ The administration was 'outsourced' to concession companies, the Neu Guinea Compagnie in New Guinea and to the Jaluit Gesellschaft in the Marshalls. The system failed because of disinterest by the companies to invest in non-economic aspects of the administrations as well as conflict of interest, with on occasion blatant moves to disadvantage any economic competitor. (Treue 1942; Spennemann 1998)

business interests continued to compete there, necessitating *inter alia* the publication of a bilingual newspaper (Spennemann 2006; 2007b).

After 1900 the interpretation and execution of German power became increasingly aggressive. The world had been divided and now was the time to set in place conditions that favored German traders. Most blatant were the actions of the German administrator in the Marshall Islands, Eugen Brandeis, who systematically tried to strangle the economic viability of the Australian trading company Burns Philp, the only competitor to the Jaluit Gesellschaft in the lucrative Marshall Islands copra trade. Eventually boundaries of legality were overstepped, forcing Germany to pay compensation in 1905 and necessitating an administrative restructure that saw the Marshalls also placed under the German governor in New Guinea (Spennemann 1998).

Louis Becke

George Lewis ('Louis') Becke was born on 18 June 1855 in Port Macquarie on the New South Wales North Coast, where his father, Frederick Becke, was clerk of Petty Sessions. Becke received little formal education before 1867 when the Beckes moved to Sydney and where he attended the Fort Street Model School. In 1870, at the age of fourteen he accompanied his brother Vernon to San Francisco, looking for employment there. The trip lasted nineteen months. At sixteen he stowed away on the barque *Rotumah* bound for Samoa where he took a job as bookkeeper in the store of Macfarlane and Williams.

First Stint in the Pacific

While in Apia, Becke met notorious blackbirder, buccaneer, swindler and general hell-raiser "Bully" Hayes. In late 1873 Becke was asked by his employers to sail the ketch *E.A. Williams* to Mili Lagoon in the Marshalls, where the vessel was to be handed to Hayes for onwards sale to a local chief. Becke then sailed with Hayes for three months as Supercargo on the *Leonora*. Boxed in between whalers, the vessel sank in March 1874 during a typhoon at Kosrae. Becke survived the shipwreck, and after altercations with Hayes, found refuge in 'Leasse' (across from Utwe Harbor). When the British warship H.M.S. *Rosario* arrived in pursuit of Hayes, Hayes' American citizenship enabled him to evade arrest on a technicality. Becke, however, among others, was arrested and taken to Brisbane for trial. Lack of evidence and because he had managed to salvage a copy of Macfarlane and Williams' power-of-attorney for the disposal of the ketch *E.A. Williams*, saw him acquitted of the charges of piracy.

Staying in Queensland, he took part in the Palmer River gold rush, lived at Charters Towers, worked at Ravenswood Station (1877), and as a bank clerk in Townsville (1878-79).

Second Stint in the Pacific

In the early 1880's Becke took up a position as a trader for Tom de Wolf on Nanumanga, in Kiribati, opening his own store in February 1881 on Nukufetau. He married Nelea Tikenā of that island in 1881 (Day 1966a: 35). Becke lost all his belongings in August of that year in a shipwreck of the *Orwell* on Beru Island, Kiribati, departing from there in October, when hoping to gain employment with the New Zealand firm Henderson & Macfarlane.

Instead, after a short period in Sydney, he worked in New Britain in February 1882 and was employed by the German firm of Hershheim & Co. in Majuro later that year. He returned to Australia in 1885. There is no indication as to what happened to Nelea, whom he had left behind.

The hiatus between the first and second trading period is most significant in understanding Becke's stance towards the Germans. It is during this time that Theodor Weber effectively honed the operations of Godeffroy/the DHPG into a well-run trading and plantation conglomerate that controlled much of the trade in the Western Pacific through efficiency, aggressive sales and purchasing tactics, and business acumen. Between 1872 and 1876, Becke's first trading period in the Pacific, much of the trade in the Pacific was still ship-based, and where it was not, it relied on independent or semi-independent traders. Apart from the DHPG, most trading houses were small, operating one, two, or three vessels. While the German influence would have been felt in Samoa, it would have been less so in Micronesia.

By 1880 that picture had changed. The DHPG had redefined the trade, with non-DHPG independent traders almost completely gone or contracted to trading companies based in Hamburg, San Francisco, Sydney or Auckland. Becke himself was an agent for the Hamburg-based Hensheim & Co trading in the Marshalls.

The year 1885 is a watershed year in the Western Pacific. In the Marshalls, the declaration of the German protectorate saw the formation of the Jaluit Gesellschaft, a conglomerate of all German trading interests in the islands. Although no documentary evidence has been located so far, it is quite likely that Becke's departure from the Marshalls in 1885 was connected with that event. It is quite possible that Becke's employment was terminated because he had run afoul of one of the principals of the new company, Adolph Capelle.

At the same time, in the Southwest Pacific, Germany increased its presence in the north-eastern part of New Guinea and the off-lying islands. In Australia, sentiment against the German expansionism ran high. In April 1883, the colony of Queensland annexed, in the name of the British Government, the southeastern Part of New Guinea. While the British Colonial Secretary, Lord Derby, initially repudiated the annexation for reasons that need not concern us here,⁴ the British Government was forced to formally annex the southeastern part of the island of New Guinea once Imperial Germany had annexed the northeastern part, creating the Protectorate of German New Guinea. The Australian colonies continued to claim a stake in the development of British New Guinea.⁵

Until 1884/85, the nineteenth century colonial world in the Pacific had essentially been bi-partite: British and French. While Germans, Russians and Americans had shown a presence through trading companies, whalers and naval exploring expeditions, neither had staked a territorial claim. Imperial Germany's protectorates in the Marshalls and New Guinea changed all that. The United Kingdom now found itself in the position of having to justify its claims over hitherto independent islands. While this was approached through political means, drawing on the primacy of her own trading interests, there was also a need to demonstrate to the world at large that Britain was the better colonizer. And what better way to do this than through positioning Germany as hardnosed, business-oriented and heavy-handed, if not callous towards the local

⁴ Lord Derby to Administrator of the Queensland Government in Council, 11 July 1883, cited in Wittaker et al., 1975 pp 448–49.

⁵ Formal administration of British New Guinea was handed to the newly formed Commonwealth of Australia in 1906. (Jinks *et al* 1973:32ff; 81). Writing in 1886, J.A. Froude summed up the attitude of many in the Australian colonies who felt that Britain had acted too late and half of eastern New Guinea which might have been in Australia's possession was now in the hands of the Germans. "They saw at their doors, in the intended New Guinea settlement, German soldiers, German fleets, German competition with their trade, a great rival German influence menacing their wealth, their institutions, their independence. It was a thing too horrible to contemplate, a thing to be instantly denounced and resisted." (Froude 1886 pp 84-5).

peoples under her tutelage? The German actions in Samoa from 1887-1889, when the DHPG stirred civil unrest and sought to install a regime under its control, neatly reinforced this image.⁶

It is this emerging political climate that Becke encountered when he returned to Australia in 1885. On 10 February 1886, Louis Becke married Elizabeth ('Bessie') Maunsell of Port Macquarie. Land-based, he worked as a contract draftsman in the Land Department in Sydney until the family moved to Townsville in 1888.

Third and final Stint in the Pacific

Dissatisfied with life in Australia he again took a position as a trader in 1890. In January 1892 he returned to Sydney from Noumea. Unable to find regular work and unable to readily get another trading station, Becke turned to writing.

By the time Becke came to the Pacific for the third time, the picture had again changed. German trading houses were co-operating and in many cases had formed joint stock companies, designed to control the trade. The only serious competition came from major Australian and New Zealand trading houses (Burns Philp in Sydney and Henderson & Macfarlane in Auckland), who had been able to adjust, largely by emulating the business structures of the DHPG. The efficiency and reach of the German traders increased after many islands became German, thus further reducing competition.

Australia and Europe

Becke had been contributing journalistic pieces on Pacific Island material to *The Bulletin* at least from early February 1893 (Becke 1893a-b). J.F. Archibald, editor of *The Bulletin*, impressed by the stories Becke could tell, asked him to write fiction for the *Bulletin*. Becke's first signed story, '*tis in the blood*' appeared soon after in *The Bulletin* on 6 May 1893. In 1893 the *Bulletin* published nineteen of Becke's stories with other papers, such as the *Sydney Truth* and *Port Macquarie News* also being first outlets of publication, leading to acclaim in Australia. With his first short collection, *By Reef and Palm*, published by T. Fisher Unwin in London in 1894, Becke shot to literary fame in Australia, the United Kingdom and in the United States of America.⁷ The collection went through four British and one American impression in the first year of publication, followed by a novella and another short story collection the following year.

Despite literary success, Becke was never wealthy; indeed, he was declared bankrupt in April 1894. He sold most of his stories outright, rather than on a royalty basis and even where he retained copyright in later years, the volumes that were sold did not attract substantial royalties. He lived at Port Macquarie and worked on short stories, as well as several fiction and semi-fiction books in collaboration with Walter James Jeffery, the editor of the *Australian Town and Country Journal*. Two years later he separated from his wife Bessie, who twice attempted to divorce him (in August 1903 and 1910), and left for England, accompanied by his daughter Nora and by Fanny Sabina Long (1871-1959).

⁶ Kennedy 1975; Hiery 1995; Spennemann 1998

⁷ See these reviews for example: 'Short Stories.' *The Literary World* (London), vol. 50, n° 1306, 9 November, p. 363.—'Stories from Stevenson's Land.' *New York Times*, 6 January, p. 23, col. 3-4.—and untitled reviews in *Critic* (London), vol. 25 (ns 22), 8 December 1894, pp. 389-390.—*The Bulletin*, vol.14 no.768, 3 November 1894, p.15.—*Samoa Weekly Herald* (Apia) vol.2 n° 102, 10 November 1894, p. 2 col. 1.

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Becke, despite his slight stutter was a born raconteur. He soon became a celebrity on the British literary scene and was regarded as an authority on South Seas life. To reduce costs, Becke lived in Ireland in 1901 and, like many contemporaries, also had a residence in the north of France (1903-1906). In mid 1902, Becke visited Jamaica and toured the east coast of the USA.

The decade of 1896 to 1906, in which Becke resided in Europe, coincided with significant shifts in British imperial policy and ideology. The manifestation of the ‘New Imperialism’ saw British politicians rebranding their colonial project from one of economic necessity to one of philanthropic necessity—involving a sacred trust to uplift the lower races of humanity (Cooper & Stoler 1977). In relation to her Pacific possessions, Britain assumed the stance of the ‘protector’ of the welfare of Indigenous peoples under her control, and positioned herself by portraying Imperial German administration as brutal and exploitative due to its sole interest in economic gain.

By 1909 Becke had returned to Sydney and again had taken up writing for the *Bulletin*—but continued to have little money on hand. Hounded by his creditors, with his fame gradually diminishing as the literary audience grew tired of the stories, Becke took to drinking heavily. Having spent the last two years of his life ill and largely alone, Louis Becke died of cancer on 18 February 1913 in his lodgings at the York Hotel, King Street (Day 1966a; Spennemann 2005).

The German in Becke’s stories

The Bulletin in particular championed Becke, as his style was straightforward and down to earth, being able to tell a story effectively, with limited setting up. Written based on experience, Becke’s stories rang true, narrating life in the Pacific in a raw and vibrant fashion. He told of love and lust, intrigue and adventure, despair and death. Many of his stories dealt with the relationship between white men living in the South Seas and the local women they were living with in ‘native-style-marriage’⁸ and the sexual politics that this entailed (Sturma 1997). Most of the short stories centre/focus on the experiences and values of Pacific Islanders or the traders and stand up by themselves. The characters that are depicted range from the sensitive to the brutal, from the supercilious to the pragmatic. In almost all cases the nationality of the characters is essentially irrelevant to the underlying story. There was little in terms of nationalistic characterization of the protagonists in the stories included in Becke’s first collection. As Becke shot to fame, the demand for his stories increased in Australia and especially in the British literary and other weekly magazines, Becke not only seems to have churned out more material, but also seems to have found it possible to bring out into the open or—for those in the know only—thinly disguised side swipes at persons and nationalities. In his later work, however, this nationalistic characterization began to emerge more strongly. Indeed in many cases Becke makes a point of the nationalities involved even when it is peripheral to the story, singling out for special treatment ‘the Dutch,’ as the Germans were generally referred to.

Semi-autobiographical comments

As noted by Gove Day (1966b), the only character that Becke uses more frequently is that of Tom Denison, a young Australian who has been living in Samoa, operating as a supercargo on a trading vessel, who has been sailing with Bully Hayes and working in

⁸ This issue is explored in more depth in novella *His Native Wife* (1895).

Queensland—all aspects that can be related directly to Becke's life and which suggest that these stories have a strong autobiographical character.

Tom is always on the side of the battling British trader, while at the same time deploring the German influence:

Denison had made his acquaintance at Wallis Island about a year previously, and because he found that Tatton hated the intrusion of "the Dutchmen," i.e. the Germans, into the South Seas as much as he did himself, he made friends with him and they drank and smoked together whenever the two ships happened to meet (Becke 1895a).

Here we see Becke as a supercargo, *i.e.* a trader operating a floating store and peddling his wares from island to island without the need for costly shore-based infrastructure. The previously afore mentioned agent system, which reduced previously independent traders to shore-based sales outlets for German trading companies such as the DHPG, was the antithesis to the free-ranging life that Becke loved and portrayed.

While Becke continuously portrays himself as well liked by the trading community, he admits that the antagonism towards the Germans seems to have been mutual—a fact of which Becke seems to have been proud. This is reflected in the following two excerpts:

for nearly every person in Apia, except the Germans there, liked Denison for his gentle ways (Becke 1902).

some fatuous people blaming the goat, and some Denison, who was generally disliked by the Germans (Becke 1900).

Clearly, not only Becke, but several of his friends, had run-ins with the German traders. In the story 'Frank, the Trader,' the protagonist sets up a trading station on 'Nukutipipi Lagoon' purportedly somewhere in the Carolines (in reality somewhere in the Marshalls). After buying up all the copra seemingly without any competition, he finds that the copra harvest had been pre-sold to a German firm and that he had no claim to it. The local community, well aware of the situation, had taken him for a costly ride. The reaction to the protagonist's gullibility is overshadowed by nationalist undertones:

I saw that I had been taken in and would have to go—and to be made a fool of by the natives, and have to give way to hated German rival was a bitter pill for an Englishman to swallow. But there was no help for it. (Becke 1905a).

Here again we see at work the methods pioneered by Godeffroy, *i.e.* ensuring a community was perpetually indebted to the trading company. The system made perfect economic sense for the German company; not only did it guarantee a steady and reliable supply of copra provided that no typhoons or cyclones diminished the harvest, but it also ensured that it was very difficult for competition to gain a foothold. Becke's character rails against having being taken for a ride by the system, but vents his anger at Germans at large. Indeed, in the 1880s and 1890s Pacific, the DHPG had become eponymous for 'Germany' and 'German'. The competition was fierce and there was little space for a nuanced portrayal.

Elsewhere, Becke made his anti-German views and desire to see the Pacific free of Germans quite well known. In a speech Denison, stated:

He was only a very young man yet, but he hoped to be a unit in building up Britain Beyond the Seas, and, if his dear friend now present, Captain Leseman, of the Franziska, would pardon him saying so, he would assist to rid Samoa and the South Seas of the Germans by hanging them all—except good old Schipper Herman Leseman, whom he would like to see made Governor General of

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Oceania, with power to suppress Yankee commercial travelers, missionaries, and other objectionable persons who were now turning this lovely garden of Nature—our beautiful Samoa—into an abode of discord (Becke 1902a).

Written in 1902, after the western part of Samoa had become a German colony, this is the strongest expression of Becke’s anti-German sentiments, and an expression of the frustration that he must have felt that the continued German presence in Samoa was now a *fait accompli*. Singling out the German skipper as an exception to his desire ‘to hang them all’ is congruent with views expressed elsewhere: it is the trading company and its system of shore based agents that galled Becke the most.⁹

Becke also felt despair for Micronesia, where by 1899 German rule had become universal (with the exception of Guam). Critical of the German rule, Becke reminisces about Majuro, where he had been trading in the early 1880s before it had become German:

At the present time [Majuro Atoll] is German territory, and its Malayo-Polynesian native inhabitants are under the “fatherly” care of a few of the Kaiser’s officials, who rule them with a rod of iron, and make them long for the days of a few years ago, when the now expelled English and American traders dwelt among them in happiness and peace (Becke 1905c).

Written in 1905 this commentary clearly refers to the harsh rule exerted by the German administrator, Landeshauptmann Eugen Brandeis, which included pecuniary penalties and even flogging (Spennemann 1998). Brandeis tried to systematically thwart any attempts by the Sydney-based trading company Burns Philp to establish a trading network in the Marshalls (Buckley & Klugman 1981; Spennemann 1998). By the time Brandeis was effectively sacked in January 1906, his widely-publicized heavy-handed and illegal actions to curb Australian trade in the Marshalls had done much to consolidate in the Australian consciousness the image of the colonial German officer as an unmitigated bully.¹⁰

The German Trader

Becke, echoing publicly the opinion held by most British and American traders, was of the view that the German competition swamped British interests in the Pacific. In the story ‘The Flemmings,’ for example, Becke takes up the notion that there are altogether too many Germans in Samoa:

‘Why don’t the Dutchmen capture the beggars?’ asked the captain. ‘There are enough of them in Samoa.’

The old trader laughed—‘Ay, too many, sir; too many for us poor English traders.’ (Becke 1902b).

As mentioned before, German business practices also included the practice to indebt the local population, thereby guaranteeing that all locally produced copra would be offered to them, and not to competing traders. It was a legitimate, if railed against, practice until it was eventually

⁹ Worth noting in the cited excerpt, is Becke’s commentary on the American commercial travellers and in particular missionaries. The meddling American missionary had been an underlying theme in Becke’s first novella ‘His Native Wife,’ and was to be used to good effect in a number of short stories (e.g. Becke 1905b).

¹⁰ There is repeated mention of this in the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

outlawed by colonial administrations.¹¹ An example of this is retold in ‘Frank, the Trader’ as quoted from earlier:

The German surpercargo came on shore to see me, and after drinking a quart or two of lager beer, politely asked me if I was aware of the fact that I had no right to be trading on the island buying copra which belonged to his firm. And in proof of his assertions he produced an authentic document signed by the Samoan teacher, and ten leading natives, whereby they had agreed in consideration of seven hundred dollars’ worth of timber and windows and doors for the new church (to be supplied by the German firm) to sell their copra to the aforesaid German firm only for a term of two years. The agreement was dated about sixteen months back, was written in both English and Samoan, and was duly stamped with the seal of the German Consulate at Samoa (Becke 1905a).

The way the German trader, acting as an agent for the ‘Dutch firm,’¹² had changed the realities of commerce on the islands must have rankled deeply with Becke. Rather than independent traders, the men were employees of the company, which provided a reasonable income and a performance bonus in the form of a percentage of the profits. The firm was known to never forgive a blunder¹³ and expected their traders to work hard. In the story ‘The best asset in a fool’s estate’ an independent British trader is addressed as follows:

Hard at it, Etheridge? I don’t know which looks the paler—you or Lália. ... Any one would think you were some poor devil of a fellow trading for the Dutchmen instead of being an independent man (Becke 1893e).

On successful agents the company bestowed status and with this came not only a considerable standard of living, but also arrogance, as depicted in ‘A Bar of Common Soap:’

¹¹ In the German colonies in Micronesia, see for example: Verordnung, betreffend das Kreditgeben an Eingeborene und die Anmeldung alter Schulden derselben. (25 January 1887) [Regulation regarding the giving of credit to the indigenous population and the registration of old debts]. In: Riebow, G. 1898. *Die Deutsche Kolonialgesetzgebung. Sammlung der auf die deutschen Schutzgebiete bezüglichen Gesetze, Verordnungen, Erlasse und internationalen Vereinbarungen, mit Anmerkungen und Sachregister. Erster Theil bis zum Jahr 1892*. Berlin: D.Reimer—Zusatz zu der Verordnung des Kaiserlichen Landeshauptmanns der Marshall Inseln vom 14. August 1887, betreffend das Kreditgeben an Eingeborene (7 March 1899)[Addition to the regulation of the Imperial Landeshauptmann regarding the granting of credit to the indigenous people]. In: Zimmermann, Alfred. 1900. *Die deutsche Kolonialgesetzgebung. Sammlung der auf die deutschen Schutzgebiete bezüglichen Gesetze, Verordnungen, Erlasse, und internationale Vereinbarungen mit Anmerkungen und Sachregister. Vierter Theil 1898 bis 1899*. Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn.—Fritz, Georg. 1903. “Verordnung des Bezirksamtmanns von Saipan betreffend das Kreditgeben an Eingeborene und den Abschluß von Verträgen mit Eingeborenen über höhere Wertgegenstände, vom 25. Oktober 1900.” [Regulation by the district administrator of Saipan regarding the offering of credit and the execution of contracts with indigenous people regarding items of high value, dated 25 October 1900]. In: Anon (ed.), *Die deutsche Kolonialgesetzgebung. Sammlung der auf die deutschen Schutzgebiete bezüglichen Gesetze, Verordnungen, Erlasse, und internationale Vereinbarungen mit Anmerkungen und Sachregister. Sechster Teil 1901 bis 1902*. Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn. Pp. 261–262.— Hahl, Albert. 1910. “Verordnung des Gouverneurs von Deutsch-Neuguinea, betreffend das Kreditgeben an Eingeborene und den Abschluss von Verträgen mit Eingeborenen, vom 14. Mai 1909.” [Regulation by the Governor of German New Guinea regarding extending credit to and the making of contracts with islanders, dated 14 May 1909]. *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 21, n° 7, pp. 264–265.

¹² That is the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagensesellschaft der Südsee zu Hamburg (frequently called the ‘long-handled firm’ in other contemporary accounts).

¹³ For example. “*the five thousand dollars’ rent would probably have to come out of his own pocket, for he had acted without consulting his superiors, who never forgave a blunder*” (Becke 1907).

‘Vell, I don’t call dot very shentlemanly gonduck’

For five years he had been the boss trader and bully of the Paumotu group, and the most trusted emissary of the great German firm in Samoa, and had lorded it over the few English and American traders in the group, who were poorer men. He would have lorded it over the French traders as well, had he dared, but was too cautious and crafty a man to get himself into trouble with the French authorities, who would liked to have rid themselves of him; but the former governor of Tahiti had given his firm a ten years’ trading license. (Becke 1907).

Arrogance and self-assurance, rather than accepting the environments and local conditions, is another trait Becke ascribes to the German traders and planters:

‘Just fancy that fat-headed Dutchman going all the way to Samoa and picking on a young girl and sending her to the Sisters to get educated properly! As if any old beach girl isn’t good enough for a blessed Dutchman’ (Becke 1893c)

In the eyes of Becke the success of the Germans was largely due to the superior organization, and the deep pockets of the German firm, rather than due to the ability of the traders to actually live happily with the host communities. In the novella ‘The strange adventure of James Shervinton’, Becke gives the following characterization of the typical German trader:

“Like most Germans of any education whom one meets in the South Seas, or anywhere else, he [Krause] was a good native linguist, though, like all his countrymen, he did not understand natives like Englishmen or Americans understand wild races. He had no regard or sympathy for them and looked upon even the highly intelligent Polynesian peoples with whom he had much dealing as mere ‘niggers’—to study whose feelings, sentiments, opinions or religious belief, was beneath the consideration of an European.” (Becke 1902c).

Becke’s notion that Englishmen or Americans ‘understand natives’ while Germans did not, is an interesting one, and one of a number of patronizing attitudes toward the indigenous populations by colonial powers. Becke’s notion echoes perfectly the mantra of the New Colonialism, that only the British could exercise the paternalistic duty to uplift the lower races of humanity (Cooper & Stoler 1977).

The ‘Vile German’

It would appear that the line between the arrogant and the aggressively vile German was a narrow one in Becke’s mind. A great number of stories contain throw-away lines, often placed in the initial set up of the story, that make Becke’s views on the German traders well known. In his story ‘A question of precedence,’ for example, Becke has his character Bob Pakenham, skipper of the trading vessel *Indiana* call out:

“Denison, you sleepy beast, come up on deck and look at Samoa the Beautiful, where every prospect pleases and only the German trader is vile” (Becke 1893d).

Germans were depicted as extremely ruthless and despicable traders in the stories ‘Lida,’ where a trader tries to ruin one of the employees in order to gain the latter’s wife (Becke 1904), and in ‘The strange adventure of James Shervinton’, where the racist German trader Krause brutalizes his employees and tries to drive his wife insane so that he can marry someone else (Becke 1902c). Both Germans were eventually killed. Theodor Rasch, the German trader and shipmaster at Mangareva, who figures in the story ‘A Bar of Common Soap’ (Becke 1907) is depicted as a scheming and conniving individual, prepared to commit murder to obtain a recipe for the composition of soap—and eventually dying in the fight for it. In other stories where the

characters commit brutal acts, Becke does not play up their nationality as a means of characterization. Only Germans are singled out—and in all cases where the characters are portrayed as evil Germans, they tend to meet their just deserts.

In other examples it is the actions of the traders, narrated as part of the background, rather than as protagonists, that sets out the Germans as ruthless. In the story ‘Rima’, which dealt with the labor recruitment from the Solomons for the plantations on Fiji and Samoa, Becke (1904b) effectively accused the Germans of having sold Prussian needled-guns, condemned army rifles, and later Snider rifles to Solomon Islanders, who used them in turn to attack British vessels. In this story he also stressed the point that complaints to the German consul in Samoa were utterly fruitless, suggesting that the Germans in the South Pacific were a law unto themselves.

The Gullible German

Germans are occasionally described by Becke as gullible, usually driven by greed or lust. In ‘A Bar of Common Soap,’ for example, the German trader Rasch, blinded by competition and greed, can be conned into taking a worthless pearl-shelling lease (Becke 1907).

In the story ‘tis in the blood,’ set in Levuka, Fiji, Oppermann, a ‘German planter from the Yasawa Group’ is about to marry Vaega, a half-European, half-Samoan woman, whose education he had paid for in Samoa (Becke 1893c). He extolled her virtues as being properly European in character, while Samoan in beauty. The marriage was not to be, however, as the narrator’s boatswain, Allan of Manihiki,¹⁴ intercedes and eventually succeeds in eloping with the girl. She ends up back in Samoa, earning money as one of the girls entertaining sailors of visiting vessels. Despite the elopement and betrayal, a love-sick Oppermann wishes to get her back. The story is told with sympathy to Vaega, and without any sympathy to the ‘fat-headed Dutchman.’

The Likeable German

The likeable German is not a character that Becke displays in any of his over more than 400 stories. The closest he comes to that this is in his depiction of Germans as amenable ruffians, such as Hans Schweicker in ‘A Question of Precedence’ (Becke 1893d), or as a decent sort of skipper, such as Herman Lesemann “the German skipper of the *Samoa* (who is a decent Dutchman)” in the story ‘Denison gives a Supper Party’ (Becke 1902a). Where the German traders are depicted in a positive or neutral light, they are inevitably cast as ‘independent traders’ or skippers not beholden to the ‘company’.

Literary Devices—Ethnic Stereotyping

Becke makes some use of ethnic stereotypes. One avenue was language, the other was drawing on the German national stereotype of being great consumers of cabbage and beer. In ‘A Question of Precedence,’ Becke casts a scene where the Samoan wives of the traders quarrel about status:

¹⁴ Allan of Manihiki is a character that repeatedly appears in Becke’s stories, always as a loyal friend to Becke’s protagonist of the story. He is modelled on Allan Strickland, son of Geoffrey Strickland and a Manihikan mother. While Becke knew Strickland from his time in Samoa, there are also other connections, mainly via Bully Hayes, with whom Geoffrey Strickland had sailed.

'Vell, I don't call dot very shentlemanly gonduck'

'Siamani vao tapiti elo' (Germans gorge on stinking cabbage) was the quick retort of Mrs Deasy, who pointed scornfully at Manogi's husband, and instantaneously the whole assemblage, male and female, were engaged in hideous conflict again (Becke 1893c).

Whereas in 'A Christmas Eve in the Far South Seas' he draws on the German proclivity for drinking beer:

"[Ludwig] Wolfen, a fat, good-hearted Teuton, with a face like a full moon in a fog, called upon me, and remarked in a squashy tone of voice, superinduced by too many years of lager beer, and its resultant adipose tissue" (Becke 1898).

The theme of Germans resorting to beer for consolation is also repeated in 'Billy Maclaggan and the Fiji Ram:' "Capelle was conscious and was calling for a seidel of lager" (Becke 1902f).

The easiest and most effective way of ethnically stereotyping Germans and at the same time achieving a good effect, however, was through imitating the thick and heavy German accent. Examples can be drawn from all those stories where the German characters speak for a prolonged time:

'By shingo, dot's a big fellow,' said planter Oppermann. (Becke 1893c).

'Shoost vat you mide expeg from a new chum!' replied Hans, who had lived in Australia (Becke 1893d).

'Vell, I don't call dot very shentlemanly gonduck,' grunted Hans (Becke 1893d).

The German doctor had said, 'You must dell him to be gareful, Mr. Lawson. Any excidemend, any zooden drouble mit anydings; or too much visky midout any excidemends, and he drop dead. I dell you.' (Becke 1897)

Vell, I vill dry vat I gan do. But if he dies you must nod blame me mit. I was vonce a dogtor; but I haf nod bracticed vor a long dimes now. I vas ein naduraliz now. (Becke 1897).

The device of the heavy accent sets up a distance between the educated British reader and the character. While this was a cheap shot, it certainly very effectively set up the characters as not fitting in with the rest of the Anglo-phone Pacific that Becke portrayed. On the few occasions where Becke used the same linguistic device to ethnically stereotype the Scots (Becke 1893d; 1898b), those characters are generally portrayed with great warmth.

Dr. Ludwig Schwalbe, South Sea Savant

An exception to the portrayal of the German as a nuisance and ruthlessly competing trader is Becke's character of Dr Ludwig Schwalbe, a German physician turned naturalist, residing on 'Gerrit Denys Island' (Sanambiet Island, off New Ireland), where he lived among a "pack of woolly-haired Papuan niggers, who are always fighting, and ready to eat a man without salt" (Becke 1897). In the narrative, an injured sailor is taken off a vessel and placed into the care of the doctor who, albeit very reluctantly, accepts him into his home. The reasons for Schwalbe's reluctance soon become clear once the health of the patient improves: the good doctor is not only collecting specimens of natural history as he makes known, but, drawing on a steady supply delivered to him by warring tribes, he is also engaged in the business of collecting human heads for preparation as skulls or as cured specimens for sale to European museums. Becke describes the naturalist in a somewhat warm and affectionate fashion, while at the same time stressing the grisly nature of his business:

‘Vy,’ he said quietly, ‘vot harm is dere? Dese black beobles do kill each oder and eat de podies of dose who are slain. I buy der heads—dot is if der skulls are not broken mit bullets or clubs. Und I vork very hart to make dose heads look nice and goot, und I sell dem to the museums in France and Russia, und Englandt und Germany. I dell you, my friendt, it is a goot business. Ach! you may spit on der groundt as mooch as you like, my friendt, but I dell you dot is so (Becke 1897)

Despite the portrayal as a somewhat off, yet likeable scientist, Becke repeatedly emphasizes the profit that the German was to make from this:

‘So! but der heads are dead! Und dey are vorth money. Blenty of beobles vant to study such dings as dese. Und dese heads from Gerrit Deny’s Island are prim full of inderest to savants, for dey present a remarkable illusdradion of the arporeal descend of man.’ (Becke 1897).

Becke adds in a comment though, that it was not just the Germans who had engaged in the skull trade for scientific purposes, when he has Schwalbe say:

Und I dell you some more—it vas at von dime a grade business in New Zealandt, und a goot many of your English officer beobles make blenty of money buying dose schmoked Maori heads und selling dem to der Gontinental scientists. But by and by der British Governments put it down, and now der business in Maori heads is finished.’

While allowing that British officers had been engaged in a similar trade, the text clearly advances the notion that the British government at the time of writing was much more enlightened and thus had moved to terminate such practices.¹⁵ Again, it serves to emphasis that Pax Britannica and the new paternalistic colonialism was more civilized than the colonialism practiced by the Germans.

The whole irony of the diligent collection exercise in the face of continually warring parties becomes clear in the final paragraph of the well-told story:

A year or so afterwards Denison read in a colonial paper that the distinguished German naturalist, Dr Ludwig Schwalbe, had left the Bismarck Islands for Singapore in a small schooner on May 2, 18—. About ten days later she was found floating, bottom upward, off the Admiralty Group, near New Guinea. ‘The unfortunate gentleman had with him an interesting and valuable ethnographical collection, the labor of ten years.’ (Becke 1897).

Dr. Ludwig Schwalbe seems to have been fashioned on Johan Stanilauz Kubary, a native of Poland but naturalized British citizen. Traveling the Pacific as an ethnographer, collector and trading agent in the employ of J.C. Godeffroy, Kubary lived in Samoa (1869), the Marshalls (1870), Yap (1870), and Palau (1871-73), traveled through the atolls of the Carolines (1873), and lived on Pohnpei (1873-74), Jaluit (1874), and in New Zealand (1874). After a trip to Europe (1875) he established a plantation on Pohnpei in 1875, but continued collection travel in Micronesia as well as New Guinea. In October 1896 he committed suicide in Pohnpei (Spoehr 1963; Paszkowski 1971. Like the fictional Schwalbe, Kubary too suffered a loss of all of his collections. During 1873 and 1874 Kubary accumulated a large collection of ethnographica in the Carolines and Pohnpei, which he took with him when he left. The sailing vessel *Alfred* went aground in a pass in Jaluit Atoll, Marshalls in 1874, with the loss of all cargo (Young 1876).

¹⁵ Even in the German Pacific this was only carried out clandestinely and against the will of the islanders, making use of power differential between the German officials and the local population (Spennemann 2006b).

Becke's Stories in German

Given the generally negative portrayal of Germans it is no wonder that German reaction to the Becke stories was muted, with the reading public voting with their feet. During Becke's lifetime, only one German edition was published, a compilation volume of stories drawn from the collections 'By Reef and Palm' (1894), 'The Ebbing of the Tide' (1895) and 'Rodman the Boatsteerer' (1899). The stories contained therein are, of course, those stories where Germans do not figure negatively.¹⁶ The volume was issued in 1902 by a minor publisher in Stuttgart who, judging by the subtitle '*Erste Sammlung*' (first compilation), had ambitions of publishing additional volumes (Becke 1902d). This never eventuated as the sales of the volume were slim, making this German edition one of the rarest Becke editions on the market.¹⁷

Apparently the edition was never reviewed in the German press...in short, it sank like a stone. At the same time, other British colonial authors, such as Kipling, Conrad and Stevenson, were widely translated into German, meeting acclaim in the reviews.

Apart from that collection, there is, as far as the author can ascertain, only the translation of one other short story, 'Long Charley's Good Little Wife' (Becke 1893f) published in 1909 that has been actually attributed to Becke (1909).¹⁸ There are two translations of stories, published in the *Koloniale Zeitschrift* in Berlin, where any attribution of Becke's authorship was omitted: 'Challis, the Doubter' (Becke 1902h) originally published in 1893 (Becke 1893g) and 'Nikoa' (Becke 1902e) originally published 1896 (Becke 1896). It is unclear, but doubtful, whether these were authorized translations, with Becke receiving any royalties.

The third category of Becke stories in German are examples of outright plagiarism. Becke's story 'Reo the Fisherman' (Becke 1901a) was plagiarized verbatim by the German author Friedrich Meister. The only changes to the story are a brief introduction, set in Kiribati, that sees a group of seamen swapping stories, providing the foil for Becke's story. Under the title 'Nalik der Fischer. Eine samoanische Skizze' ('Nalik the Fisherman. A Samoan sketch') the story was first published in the *Berliner Tageblatt* and from there reprinted in the *Samoanische Zeitung* in Apia (Meister 1907; reprinted 1916). Intriguingly, the *Samoanische Zeitung* had actually published the English original six years earlier, but under a different title (Becke 1901b).

The translation of 'Billy Maclaggan and the Fiji Ram,' which pokes fun at the Germans, cannot be seen in the same light as the translations discussed so far (Becke 1916). This translation was carried out in early 1916 by Hans Neffgen, then translator and interpreter for the New Zealand occupation forces in Samoa. Neffgen, in charge of the German section of the *Samoa Times* (the continuation of the *Samoanische Zeitung*) had been a veterinarian in German Samoa and had been arrested by the German administration for utterings critical of that administration at the beginning of World War I. The occupying New Zealand forces made use of

¹⁶ Included are: Ninia ('Ninia')—An Honour to the Service (Ein Mann auf den die Marine stolz sein kann)—A Point of Theology on Maduro (Ein theologischer Streitpunkt auf Maduro)—The Fate of Mrs Clinton (Missis Clinton)—Hickson, a Half-Caste (Hickson, der Mischling)—A Dead Loss ('Einbarer Verlust)—Proctor the drunkard (Proctor, der Trunkenbold)—The Escapee ('Der Flüchtling')—Ema, the Half-blood (Emma, das Halbblutmädchen)—A Boating Party of Two (Eine Bootsfahrt zu zweien)—The Cutting off of the 'Queen Charlotte' (Der Ueberfall der 'Königin Charlotte')—A Tale of a Mask (Eine Geschichte einer Maske)—The Fallacies of Hilliard (Hilliards Irrtümer).

¹⁷ The 1902 volume was issued in both cloth and cardboard covers.—Another German translation appeared in 1969 (*Südsee. Geschichten aus Ozeanien*. Hamburg: Verlag Die Brigantine).

¹⁸ The translation was favorably reviewed in 'Bill - Jim in German.' *The Bulletin* vol. 30, n° 1547, 7 October 1909, p. 2.

his language skills (Spennemann 2006). Intriguingly, though, the English original of the story, initially published in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Becke 1902f) and then in the *Irish Times*,¹⁹ had once been printed in English in the German-owned and –run *Samoanische Zeitung* in May 1902 (Becke 1902g).

Becke's Reception in Germany

It is very easy to dismiss a fiction writer as someone who doesn't know what he/she is writing about and who is making it all up. As Becke was little published in Germany, and not well sold, silence as reception would be expected. It is thus somewhat intriguing to note that Becke drew the ire of the German naval physician and anthropologist Augustin Krämer. In 1903, Krämer had published his anthropology of Samoa (Krämer 1903) and was later to direct part of the German South Seas Expedition to Micronesia. In his 1906 book '*Hawaii, Ostmikronesien und Samoa*' Krämer made reference to Becke on two occasions (Krämer 1906: 56; 213):

Now the books of a Cooper, Most, Churchward, Stevenson, and the already on page 56 mentioned Becke etc are sufficiently instructive about our popularity in the Australian colonies. If the saying 'Viel Feind, Viel Ehr' ('Many Enemies, Much Honor!') holds true, then we must be some of the most honored of the planet. It must dawn on every thinking person, however, that there are underlying motives to the effect that the Australians cannot compete with German trade and industriousness, and this feeling of impotence led to their regrettable yell of rage (Krämer 1906: 213)

The specific context to Krämer's statement makes out as though the portrayal of Germans by Becke and other authors critical of German influence, such as Churchward (1887) in his 'My Consulate in Samoa,' or works by Robert Louis Stevenson (1892), were solely responses to the situation in the Marshalls in 1905 as brought about by Brandeis' actions (Spennemann 1998). Apart from the chronological problems, clearly Krämer is both unable to accept genuine commentary and criticism, as in the case of the Marshalls situation or the German handling of the Samoa affairs, and unable to identify that the anti-German undercurrent in Becke's stories is not merely directed at single events, but represents long-accumulated, deep-seated antipathy.

This reflects more on Krämer's nationalistic tendencies and his prickly attitude to criticism however, rather than on anyone else. In line with expectations that authors critical of Germany were simply ignored and silenced that way as long as possible, there appears to be no commentary on Becke and his writings in the files of the German colonial office.

Becke's Reception in other European countries

While the anti-German attitudes would have harmed his sales in Germany, Becke also had a generally limited audience in Continental Europe—at least as far as translations are concerned. Becke's work saw only limited translation into other European languages. A French edition of 'By Reef and Palm' was published in 1903 in Paris, which was accompanied by a

¹⁹ The *Irish Times* is mentioned as source for the item in the *Samoanische Zeitung*.

small number of short stories in French magazines.²⁰ During Becke’s lifetime, a selection of stories was published in Swedish in 1898, followed by a translation of ‘Pacific Tales’ 1909 (Becke 1909b). After Becke’s death there were a select number of translations into Swedish, Dutch, Finnish, Italian, and German, with the most recent, a translation into Portuguese, appearing in 1975.

Fiction and Reality

Becke’s stories are literary contortions of true events, displaced in space and time. Thus while it is impossible to use any of his stories as reliable sources *per se*, they can and should be used to provide a background to the times and settings of the German colonial period in the Pacific. Some of the characters are only thinly disguised, while others are true to form and merely transplanted in their settings. Some examples may suffice:

It has already been mentioned that Dr. Ludwig Schwalbe is in part based on the Polish-German ethnographer Stanislaus Kubary.

The benign German captain Herman Leseman in the story ‘Denison gives a Supper Party’ is most likely Friedrich Lesemann, a Prussian merchant captain, working for the HERNSEIM & Co and later for the Jaluit Gesellschaft on various Pacific routes.²¹

Theodor Rasch, Denison’s aggressive fellow-trader at Mangareva in Eastern Polynesia is possibly shaped after Robert Rasch, trader and temporarily also administrator on Nauru,²² whom Becke would have met while working for HERNSEIM & Co in the 1890s.

The German planter Capelle of Levuka, who in the story ‘Billy Maclaggan and the Fiji Ram’ is described as ‘short and fat and wore a solar topee and carried a stick’ and labeled as ‘one of the meanest and richest men in Fiji,’ is in fact a representation of Adolph Capelle, planter or co-owner of Likiep Atoll in the Marshalls,²³ who had a reputation of being a hard and tight-fisted businessman. While Becke was usually careful not to engage in comments that could result in libel action, this section came quite close as Capelle was still alive—and Becke’s books were read in the Marshalls:

Capelle was taken to Dr Brower’s house and the missionary wanted the German consul to go there and take his dying depositions, but the consul said that such an idiot as Capelle could never be killed and would not go (Becke 1902f).

²⁰ E.g. French version of ‘Swain, the half-caste’ [=‘Ema the Halfblood’] (Becke 1895b) published under the title ‘Ema La Metiere’ in an unidentified French magazine (contained in Becke’s own clippings file held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney).

²¹ He is on record as living on Jaluit in December 1889–January 1890 and serving as Assessor of the Jaluit Court 1890. Lesemann died on Jaluit on 12 October 1890. (Spennemann, unpublished compilation ‘Who was who in German Micronesia’).

²² Rasch, Robert.—*13 February 1853 Königsberg (Pr.); Prussian citizen—Protestant, married to a Nauruan, 3 children.—Trader Nauru; acting Stationsleiter Nauru from the commencement of the German administration on 2 October 1888–9 May 1889; Acting Stationsleiter (during F. Jung’s furlough) 1896.—Listed as trader in 1911; Deputy Deputy Assessor Jaluit Court 1906–1907, 1909–1911; Assessor district court Pohnpei for Nauru 1912; Deputy Assessor district court Pohnpei 1912–1913 (Spennemann, ‘Who was who’).

²³ Adolph Capelle—*8 May 1838 (Braunschweig) † 30 September 1905 (Likiep).— Prussian citizen.—Trader on Jaluit for Hoffschläger & Stapenhorst 1859 ?; Ebon 1863; independent 1863; for Godeffroy & Sons 1869; owned three vessels in 1869; Co-owner of Capelle & Co., Jaluit with trading stations in Pohnpei and Guam (in 1880); Consular agent for the USA in Jaluit 1873–>1883.—Assessor Jaluit Court 1890, 1893; Deputy Assessor Jaluit Court 1891–92; 1894–1900. (Spennemann, unpublished compilation ‘Who was who in German Micronesia.’).

In this context it is worth noting that Capelle was a principal in the company deBrum & Capelle, which competed with Becke's employer Hershheim in the Marshalls. When all German trading interests in 1885 formed the Jaluit Gesellschaft, Capelle with his co-ownership of Likiep Atoll, maintained a position of prominence. As has been speculated above, it may well be that Capelle objected to Becke's continued employment as a result of the restructure of trading stations that followed the establishment of the Jaluit Gesellschaft. Becke, one of many non-German traders whose services were no longer required, seems to have been among the first to be let go.²⁴

The German vessel *Iserbrook*, that features in a number of stories is based on a genuine vessel of the same name, run first by J.C. Godeffroy & Sons and later by the DHPG. Other vessels mentioned in his stories, such as the *Anna Godeffroy*, the *Sussanah Booth* and the like are all genuine ships, but displaced in their setting for his purposes.

Becke's Role in Shaping Public Opinion

How influential was Louis Becke in voicing and shaping public opinion about colonial Germany's management of the Pacific and the conduct of its traders and agents?

To understand this, we need to split Becke's oeuvre into two phases, the periods before and after 1905. In the early period, Becke's fresh and raw approach to short-story writing, as well as the subject matter, attracted a wide audience. Becke's books were lauded in the press and were well received by the reading public in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the other British colonies, as well as in the USA.²⁵ Many of his books went through several printings, and on occasion different editions. Between 1893 and about 1902, Becke had a major influence on the English-speaking reading public. The reviews of his short story volumes demonstrate his standing and influence. But this went well beyond the literary arena.

Between 1898 and 1901, Becke provided news copy and commentary of events in the Pacific. Indeed, some papers drew on him as the resident Pacific expert commissioning articles and various matters of history, natural history and politics. In the latter capacity, Becke wrote five items on German colonization efforts in the Pacific, all highly critical of the German approaches while warning of the implications of the German encroachment on British interests (Becke 1897b; 1899a–c; 1900b). Becke *was* influential in shaping public opinion at that time.

After about 1902 to 1905, however, Becke's influence waned dramatically. The reading public gradually tired of his stories, which were, in essence, variations on a theme. While the Pacific buffs remained loyal readers, the general public preferred other authors, such as Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, who had demonstrated literary growth as writers as time went on. On the commentary front, Becke's influence also waned, most probably due to two causes. For one, he had essentially become a Britisher, resident in London, northern France or Ireland and

²⁴ The composition of the foreign population in the Marshalls can serve as a proxy sample. In 1890 there were 33 Germans, 23 British and colonial British, and 39 members of other nine nationalities, American, Brazilian, Danish, Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, and Swiss (Anon 1894). By 1900 that had shifted to 48 Germans, 8 British and colonial British and 19 members of four other nationalities (Anon 1902).

²⁵ E.g. 'The libraries of fiction. His Native Wife.' *Athenaeum* (London) vol. 108, n° 3602, 7 November 1896, p. 637.—'The Ebbing of the Tide.' *The Guardian* (Manchester) 17 July 1896, p. 9 col. 7.—'Gore Galore.' *New York Times* 22 April 1896, p. 10, col. 3.—'Pacific Tales.' *New York Times Review of Books and Arts*, 13 November 1897, Saturday Supplement p. 3, col. 2.—'The Bookman's Table. Wild Life in the Southern Seas.' *Bookman* (London) vol. 13, n° 77, February 1898, p. 163.

'Vell, I don't call dot very shentlemanly gonduck'

detached both in space and time from the events in the Pacific. Secondly, the colonial situation in the Pacific had played out. The Pacific was divided up between the colonial powers, and wherever one went, the small, independent trader had been replaced by the company agent and the government's tax collector. Indeed, in his 1903 poem 'Wrecked Illusions', Victor Daley criticizes Becke for portraying a Pacific that no longer was, a romanticized view that had been overtaken by the modern colonial world (Daley 1903).

Becke died in February 1913, eighteen months before the events of World War I, which saw the 'hated' Germans thrown out of his beloved Pacific.

But Becke's writings live on. In 1957 James Michener and A. Grove Day devised a series of questions to identify those who really knew the Pacific. Questions about famous ships, geographic knowledge, including variant names of well-known islands, or missionary encounters, all were deemed either too selective or too easy. The only useful question to ask, so they felt, was to name the "best writer about the Pacific," as there was only one 'correct' answer: Louis Becke (Michener & Day 1957) Indeed, Becke remains essential reading for anyone interested in the 1870s to 1890s Pacific.

Why did Becke dislike the Germans so much? And why did he express his views so publicly and, through his stories, so effectively? In the absence of any diaries or letters that could shed light on this, we have to interpret it based on his short stories and what is known about his time in the Pacific.

Becke was a child of his times, and thus was enmeshed in the public discourse on the moral and political rights of the British to rule the colonial world in the Pacific. While nothing could be done about the French, recent interlopers, such as the Germans, could conceivably be headed off. When that proved impossible, they could be positioned as money-grubbing exploitative colonialists, and thus inferior to British paternalism.

Clearly, Becke lived through a period of major structural change in the way business was carried out in the Pacific. While the 1870s, Becke's formative years, were the age of the independent trader, the 1880s saw the rise of the well-run trading conglomerates pioneered by the DHPG. That approach was the antithesis to Becke's romantic, free ranging spirit, effectively shattering hopes to become a free, and eventually wealthy, trader. The 1890s saw the German system adopted by other companies, while at the same time the Pacific world became much more regulated and controlled by colonial governments.

While this change was of course continuous, Becke's presence in the region was intersected by stints in Australia, first in Queensland (1877-79) and then in Sydney and Townsville (1885-1890). It is possible that if Becke had lived continuously in the Pacific rather than living in Australia at intervals, he would have experienced the development as more gradual and the differences less stark. Clearly, during Becke's periods in Australia, agents had been at work that changed the Pacific as he knew it. And rightfully, Becke blamed the German trading interests for this change. What Becke failed to appreciate, at least publicly, was that such change was inevitable, and that Australian and New Zealand firms followed suit.

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