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Review: Dörte Lerp, *Imperiale Grenzräume. Bevölkerungspolitik in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und den östlichen Provinzen Preußens 1884-1914*, Frankfurt/M., Campus, 2016.

Dörte Lerp's revised Ph.D. thesis (Rostock University 2013) aims to analyse "Imperial border spaces. Population politics in German Southwest Africa [GSWA] and the Eastern provinces of Prussia 1884 to 1914". However, in her last 40-page chapter, *Entgrenzung* ("removal of boundaries"), the author details the German labour policies and "colonial rule" (p. 307) in the occupied Russian territories (*Generalgouvernement* and *Ober Ost*) during the First World War. Thus, the title should have been more precise with regard to the period covered, 1884 to 1918.

From the outset it must be stated that the attempt to merge into one field of analysis Germany's colonial policies in GSWA and the Prussian provinces inhabited mostly by Polish speakers seems a worthwhile undertaking. The notion that the adjective 'colonial' can be meaningfully employed not only in an African, but also in an (Eastern) European territorial context to describe the Imperial expansion policies of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, or even the Ottoman Empire is now widely accepted among historians. Contemporaries were also aware of 'similarities' in this 'imperial context' that saw, particularly in the German case, the simultaneous expansion of German settlement policies in several African and historically Polish territories (as a reminder, the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned in 1795 with the borders being redrawn between Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and Russia in 1815). As this reviewer is not familiar with the historiography of the Polish-German territories in Imperial Germany and can therefore not assess the quality of her contributions to existing research, this review will focus on Lerp's analysis of German policies in GSWA. It is worth mentioning, however, that Lerp, whose 'Polish part' concentrates mostly on the province and town of Poznan (German: *Posen*) has included merely three (! perhaps this reviewer overlooked one or two?) Polish language publications in her secondary literature and not a single Polish primary source, though she references the recent standard literature on colonialism in German and English. All this speaks for a rather 'Western' perspective of her research. Lerp has published parts of her findings in English-language journals.¹

Structured in four main chapters – *Grenzziehungen* ("drawing borders"), *Siedlungskolonialismus* ("settler colonialism"), *Die geteilte Stadt* ("the divided city"), *Entgrenzung* ("removing boundaries") – , the book provides readers with a comparative ('entangled') history of the territorial population policies applied in the Polish-majority eastern provinces of Prussia

¹ Dörte Lerp, "Beyond the prairie. Adopting, adapting and transforming settlement policies within the German Empire", *Journal of Modern European History*, 14, 2016: 225-244; idem, "Farmers to the frontier. Settler colonialism in the Eastern Prussian Provinces and German Southwest Africa", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44, 2013: 567-583.

and in GSWA. Both territories become analytically comparable because high-ranking German officials, reacting to a perceived tension between 'nation and empire', wished to 'strengthen' Germanness there at the expense of the non-German majority (*Germanisierungspolitik*). Seeking parallels, continuities, and transfers, but also differences, between both territories, the book analyses when and how attempts were made to influence the relationship between space and population within the 'Imperial border spaces' by settling (often at public expense) more Germans and, if possible, expelling non-Germans.

Another example is the German labour policy that, as Lerp explains, was intended to provide (cheap) non-German labourers to the labour market in both territories, but, simultaneously, also sought to ensure that these labourers were denied German civil rights. As necessary as the labour force was, German policy-makers were intent on making "second class citizens" of Africans and Poles (p. 142). "Imperial labour markets" (p. 116) remained strictly controlled, hierarchically structured, even racialized in GSWA and Germany's eastern provinces. They were often based on (seasonal) migration and included the possibility of resorting to deported labour force. Readers of this journal will not be surprised that Lerp illustrates this argument with the German policy towards Ovambo and the related labour recruitment system, which is by now familiar through a number of studies. The question is rather whether Lerp can offer any new insights on the migration labour system in GSWA. The answer is that she cannot.

It is also not clear why she includes in her analysis a number of well-known deportation cases of Africans that were transported from GSWA to Togo and Cameroon respectively. Even though she attempts to put these cases in the context of Imperial labour policies, she concedes that these deportations from GSWA were, from the perspective of the colonial officials in GSWA and Buea, most of all a "security matter" (pp. 119 ff.) in the context of the war against the Nama (1904-1908). Instead, with her focus on labour, it would have been more apposite to include here the research of Dag Henrichsen on the recruitment of 'Damara' workers to the Cape.² Lerp, by quoting extensively from Imperial Colonial Office files (AA or RKA, R 1001), gives the impression that all this is unchartered territory, which it evidently is not. It is remarkable that in her seven-page discussion of the deportation cases Lerp does not refer to or discuss Jakob Zollmann's extensive treatment of the 'deportation question' which was published only a few years before her book and covers the exact same cases.³

In an even more disturbing form this lack of reference and historiographic debate recurs in Lerp's chapter "The

² Dag Henrichsen, "'Damara' labour recruitment to the Cape Colony and marginalisation and hegemony in late 19th century central Namibia", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 3, 2008: 63-82, <https://namibian-studies.com/index.php/JNS/article/view/102>

³ Jakob Zollmann, *Koloniale Herrschaft und ihre Grenzen. Die Kolonialpolizei in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894-1915*, Göttingen, V&R, 2010: 147-163 [4.3. "Versuchsfelder jenseit des Rechtsstaats. Deportationen aus und nach Deutsch-Südwestafrika"].

divided city” with her analysis of “Segregation in Windhoek” (pp. 267-291). For someone who read and reviewed Zollmann’s book a couple of years ago, these 20-odd pages constantly read like *deja-vu* or a summary of Zollmann’s “Short history of segregation in Windhoek”.⁴ To be sure, in one section (“In the interest of order”) Lerp dutifully refers to Zollmann’s chapter (pp. 272; 275; 280; 282), but does not mention him anymore in the second section (“The dual city”) and, most of all, she fails to mention specifically that Zollmann’s work covers the exact same topic – with identical sources. It is therefore absurd to claim that Lerp’s chapter on the “Segregation in Windhoek” is “avant-garde”.⁵ While in her chapter on deportation Lerp uses the Berlin files of the colonial administration where Zollmann used the Windhoek files, in her chapter on Windhoek Lerp recounts with the same files (NAN BWI 36, E 1 f, vol. 1-2, “Eingeborenenangelegenheiten Werften,

⁴ Andreas Eckl, “Jakob Zollmann, Koloniale Herrschaft und ihre Grenzen. Die Kolonialpolizei in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1894 – 1915, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010“, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 9, 2011: 119-122, <https://namibian-studies.com/index.php/JNS/article/view/49/29> Zollmann, *Koloniale Herrschaft*: 219-243 [5.1.2 “Auf dem Weg zur ‘dual city’. Eine kurze Geschichte der Segregation in Windhoek, 1898–1915”].

⁵ This is, however, what one reviewer claimed: Markus Hedrich, “Rezension zu: Lerp, *Dörte: Imperiale Grenzräume. Bevölkerungspolitiken in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und den östlichen Provinzen Preußens 1884–1914*. Frankfurt am Main 2016”, *H-Soz-Kult*, June 9, 2017, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-23520>

1906-1914”) how in 1906 the Windhoek administration dreamed of stationing a German policeman on the “new native werft” outside of the city, but failed in this attempt at better control (on p. 277 the map is reprinted that Zollmann discussed on p. 226, which Lerp does not acknowledge). But Lerp does not debate where both authors diverge in their interpretation of the archival findings. What is new about her interpretation of the history of segregation in Windhoek?⁶ And if *this* history of segregation in GSWA is already well-researched (or offers a researcher no opportunity a diverging interpretation), why not chose a different location, for example, the segregation of Swakopmund, Keetmanshoop, or Karibib? The files for this research are available in the same archives as for Windhoek. Lerp gives no reason why she chose Windhoek and Poznan for her research. Thus, another town in GSWA could have served her comparative (‘entangled’) analysis equally well but would have furthered Namibian historiography much more than this recounting in two German Ph.D. theses written within 5-odd years of the same histories and names based on identical archival files. If historians continue quoting from the same sources over and over again, without even offering diverging interpretations, no new insights will be gained.

This can also be seen in Lerp’s rather boastful argument that her book

⁶ The topic is taken up for the period 1910-1945 by Pierre Tim Böhm, *Residential Segregation as Part of Imperial Policies: A Transnational Analysis for the Case of Windhoek*, Vienna, Lit, 2018, (Diss. TU Darmstadt 2016).

contributes to the debate on the continuity from “Windhuk to Auschwitz” (p. 19). It is hard to see how this can be the case. In her conclusion, Lerp merely points out that Germany pursued an “overseas and continental policy of expansion” before 1933 and pleads for the acknowledgement of the relevance of the “Imperial border spaces” before the First World War for a continuation of this debate (p. 342). This insight is neither new nor surprising. And neither can it explain why the “connecting lines” between GSWA and Prussia's eastern provinces before 1914 should be seen as a “prerequisite” for a “well-grounded debate” (ibid.) about the relations between Imperial and National Socialist policy of expansion.

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