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Otjivanda Presse.Essen

Review: Jakob Zollmann, *Koloniale Herrschaft und ihre Grenzen. Die Kolonialpolizei in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1894 – 1915*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, vol. 191, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010.

Sven Schepp, *Unter dem Kreuz des Südens. Auf Spuren der Kaiserlichen Landespolizei von Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Polizeigeschichte, vol. 8, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaft, 2009.

Research on the history of colonialism in GSWA has been growing continuously since the 1980s. While the role and function of the colonial military as an instrument of colonial control and domination is relatively well researched, this is not the case with the colonial police in GSWA. Jakob Zollmann (2010) and Sven Schepp (2009) have recently attempted to fill this lacuna, with two works that broaden our knowledge of this subject.

Zollmann, a historian and legal scholar, is interested in the relationship between colonial domination and its limits in GSWA. The title of his work reflects this interest. In the introduction to the book, actually a reworked version of his PhD dissertation, Zollmann contextualises his work within the debates on and contestation of the question of the continuity of the German Empire's authoritarian rule in the colonies and those of the genocidal Nazi dictatorship. Accordingly, colonial practice and rule were piloted in GSWA for the behaviour of Nazi Germany after 1933, particularly for its new

colonial space in Eastern Europe. This paradigm – “From Windhoek to Auschwitz” – has been repeatedly presented, but never plausibly argued. It has by now been critically and competently refuted, and Zollmann's book is yet another contribution to this debate. Its main credit, however, is formulated in the introduction, where Zollmann formulates the main tenet of his work. For about 25 years (1890-1915), Germany had tried to impose order and control in her colony. The real situation on the ground in the colony, as reflected in the archives, however, was far removed from this aim (p. 9).¹ Zollmann goes on to argue that (German) colonial historiography has until now been influenced by such (imperial) perceptions as are mirrored in official documentation, legal texts and elaborations, and that no real interest has been shown in the actual implementation of law and order in the colony or in the problems associated therewith (p. 17f.). Instead of presuming the existence and efficacy of colonial tools of subjection, their incomplete nature is described (p. 17).² The author employs archival material and colonial newspapers in addition to a vast selection of secondary sources.

The foundation of the colonial police in GSWA can be dated to 1894, when soldiers of the protection troops

¹ “Etwa 25 Jahre lang (1890 – 1915) versuchten ‘Ordnungskräfte’, das Gebiet unter deutsche Kontrolle zu bringen. Doch der Anspruch und das sich aus den Quellen ergebende Bild klaffen weit auseinander” (Zollmann, *Herrschaft*: 9).

² “Anstatt den Unterdrückungsapparat vorauszusetzen, soll er (*auch*) in seiner Unvollständigkeit beschrieben werden” (ibid.: 17, italics in original).

(*Kaiserliche Schutztruppe*) were ordered to perform police duties. This was only feasible for as long as the number of white settlers remained small and any interference with the African inhabitants of the territory was limited. Law and order could not really be maintained with these limited forces; an attempt to solve this crisis by supplementing this police force with civilians was not successful either. Therefore the creation of a regular police force had been planned since 1900, yet but was only realised in 1905 on account of the wars with Herero and Nama, with the promulgation of organisational stipulations for a regular police force – the *Landespolizei*. A proper, *de facto* legal basis for such a force was only signed into effect by the Emperor on October, 4th, 1907, the “Verordnung, betreffend die Rechtsverhältnisse der Landespolizei in DSWA”. This legal document covered important aspects such as finances and powers.

As a part of the civil administration of the colony, this force answered to the governor and was headed by an inspector (*Inspekteur*); police officers were at the same time subject to the administrators of civil government in the districts, the *Bezirksamtsmänner*. Financial constraints hemmed in, from the beginning, the deployment of this force to the whole colony. A police zone (*Polizeizone*) was therefore created in 1907; it covered, roughly, a stretch of 150 km on both sides of the railway and other important lines of communication; as such it covered approximately 60% of the colony. This area was to be patrolled by 500 non-commissioned officers (*Unteroffiziere*), recruited from

the *Schutztruppe* for a period of three years, assisted by 370 auxiliary police (*Polizeidiener*). They were to be stationed on roughly 110 police stations. Fiscal constraints, however, precluded even these rather modest plans. In 1908 a mere 160 officers had been deployed, and by 1913 it was only possible to maintain about 450 policemen.

Primarily, this force was tasked with the maintenance of law and order in the colony, performed on two different levels. On the one hand, the settlers had to be policed, on the other hand, the colonised African population. Regarding the latter, the force had to maintain the legal provisions of the *Eingeborenengesetzgebung*, the native legislation of 1907, which covered enforcing the carrying of passes and overseeing forced labour regulations. Colonial rule, therefore, was both, the control of the colonised Africans and at the same time governance of the, mostly German, colonial settlers. The latter numbered 14,000 by 1914.

Zollmann has ordered his material plausibly into three large chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the organisational history of the *Landespolizei*, its legal framework and, in particular, the role and function of the auxiliary police. Their recruitment and training, as well as their authority and competence vis-a-vis the European settlers, questions of armament, remuneration and maintenance, also disciplinary measures such as the controversial flogging by the auxiliary police. The latter, who were recruited from nearby villages, were fluent in basic German and could, as ex-mission school pupils, also read and write. Zollmann shows how the colonial state

actually depended on the contribution / cooperation of these auxiliary police. As interpreters and with their local knowledge they were indispensable for policing the African population (p. 57).

Legal and organisational requirements and stipulations as outlined in chapter 1 did often not meet the requirements of the situation on the ground, however. Chapter 2 addresses this discrepancy by describing the reality of colonial penal practice: Flogging, prison affairs, deportations, the use of firearms, capital punishment, cattle rustling and patrols to combat bands of thieves are some of the topics Zollmann explores. His findings are in stark contrast to the findings of Drechsler and others, who describe the period after the wars of Herero and Nama as one in which 'the silence of a cemetery' (*Friedhofsruhe*) prevailed. He emphasises that it was only possible to enforce such silence in very small areas of the colony.

In chapter 3, the author elaborates on the weakness of colonial power in GSWA. It never managed to establish uncontested power over the whole territory. With acuity, Zollmann evades generalisations by dividing the area into three different zones: the urban zone of Windhoek, settlements in the countryside, these two being the police zone (*Polizeizone*) and the area beyond this. Colonial rule in this last area, largely the northern stretches of the colony, remained largely fictional until the end of German colonialism in 1915, on account of fiscal necessities – there was simply never enough money. The author shows convincingly, that colonial rule was not only weak in these peripheral spaces of GSWA, but remained tentative

even in the urban zone, i.e. Windhoek as the actual centre of colonial power. To demonstrate this, the author focuses on the maintenance of law and order in the living quarters of the colonised Africans of Windhoek, the *Werft*, or location. He does so by contrasting and correlating the targets with the real situation on the ground. It was never possible to establish colonial authority without serious challenges, nor was the balance of power ever decisively settled between indigenous population and colonial power, even in the centre of colonial authority.

Zollmann also manages to contextualise the colonial police within the larger framework of colonial legislation. Thus he reveals previously overlooked aspects of the legal and administrative history of GSWA, for instance the fact that the problems which dogged the relationships between the non-military governor, the commander of the military and the leadership of the police were never really solved. He also throws some light on the rather amusing debate around the question whether an indigenous police auxiliary actually could be regarded as an Imperial bureaucrat? (p. 63 ff.).

Throughout the book, Zollmann traces the debates about colonial administration; they may not be of any interest to many readers interested in the empirical historical reality. Yet, these debates show the profound discrepancy between colonial ideal and reality, how clueless colonial administrators were in the face of the actual situation in the colony; and also the prevailing tendency to rely on a system of trial and error. This is also contrasted with other

colonial situations, particularly the British colonial experience. Zollmann draws for this on a broad selection of secondary literature on German and international imperialism and its analytical categories.

One of the shortcomings of the book – actually Zollmann himself acknowledges this on p. 26 f. – is in the nature of the archival sources. This is a major problem of colonial African history in general, and in this particular case the author had to deal with the fact that his sources were purely European-generated and for this reason did not deliver any useful information regarding the African experience under German colonialism. It is here that the author has not been able to maintain the same level of excellence as in the rest of his book. The sections where he deals with questions of African perceptions of German colonial rule are thus rather weak. In section 2.3 “Ebenbürtigkeit und ‘Mimicry’” – equality and mimicry – the author elaborates on the motivation of African auxiliary police, which begs the question, why these were actually supporting colonial authority? One possible answer would be to point to the increased respect and reputation that such individuals were afforded. But this still does not explain, why those who carried out floggings, who were employed as overseers of forced labour and as prison wardens, and those who had simply put a secure income ahead of the interests their own people, were not considered as collaborators. Zollmann attempts to answer this by pointing to the symbolic power of uniforms; he contextualises his argument in a debate on the *Truppenspieler*, and the

interpretations that were offered. It might have been more appropriate if the author had resisted this temptation and not offered interpretations, where the absence of archival sources precludes this anyway. As an aside: an interpretation of the symbolic power of uniforms is per se imperialist in itself, at least in part.

This eloquently written book which has its entertaining sides was awarded a grant by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, together with the German Publisher's Association, VG Wort and the Federal Foreign Office, for translation into English – good news thus for those, whose command of German is insufficient for this text.

Sven Schepp's *Unter dem Kreuz des Südens. Auf Spuren der Kaiserlichen Landespolizei von Deutsch-Südwestafrika* – appeared almost simultaneously and deals with the same subject; both authors could not reference and acknowledge each other's work, as they worked and published at about the same time. Schepp's aims are twofold. On the one hand he wants to present an academically researched, sound representation of the history of the colonial police as a part of the civil administration of GSWA; on the other he is interested in portraying as authentically as possible biographies of former members of the colonial police and their families. These he wants to contextualise these as examples of typical biographies of people involved in German colonialism (p. 9).

At the centre of Schepp's attempt at biographical reconstruction we find the two families Wilhelmi and Kratz; their

biographical development is embedded in 17 chapters which are sorted primarily by topic and secondarily chronologically. His work is based on government publications, archival sources, contemporary colonial newspapers and colonial fiction, private accessions and personal memories of surviving family members of former police men. The coverage spans from the foundation of the force through to the end during World War I, which is covered by the last chapter of the book. He presents a detailed picture of the internal organisational structures, of the criminal investigation police and the diamond police, of its tasks, its structure, numbers, its legal foundation, training, uniforms, weaponry as well as aspects of daily life including accommodation and victualing. The work is rounded off with an extensive appendix (pp. 539-585) and an index (pp. 603-618), which helps to find individual members of the colonial police forces.

Schepp's dedication to a biographical approach is highly welcome. Administrative, as well as civil and military formations of colonial rule are usually treated as collective and monolithic blocks, which hide the individual aspects from view. Not so in this book: the author is interested in such questions as the motivation to emigrate to the colony and the day-to-day reality of a colonial policeman. The book pulls together an incredible and meticulously collected wealth of material of many years – chapter 15, for example, includes the biographies and careers of 45 colonial policemen. Tables, statistical material and – hitherto unpublished – approximately 300 photographs, blue

prints, drawings, private letters and newspaper cuttings, in addition to colonial archival documents and fold-out maps, complement the book. A particular feature of this book and at the same time a one of its definite merits is that the author has cited the sources extensively; this is particularly remarkable as Schepp has used the hitherto unpublished private papers of 48 colonial police men.

Yet the two books reviewed here do not have much in common. Schepp's self-defined aim to write an academically and scientifically grounded treatise on the subject is obviously presumptuous. He has delivered an uncritical and empiricist rendition, one that evokes an 'odd feeling'.³ The author remains completely wedded to the inner perspective of his sources, without any critical distance and without any source critique. He also does not position his sources within the broader framework of recent research in colonial history. A look at his list of sources confirms this; there is only a list of primary material and no (additional) list of other literature he might have consulted. The few texts that can be considered secondary sources are treated as primary sources. Schepp does not analyse. He is not interested in the discrepancies between colonial ideals and colonial reality, he does not treat the colonial police as an instrument of colonial control, nor do any Africans, the actual colonial subject, feature in his book. Aside from a few

³ "ein eigenartiges Gefühl" (Ulrich van der Heyden, "Rezension", <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Rez-2011-Schepp-Polizei-Deutsch-Suedwestafrika.htm> (accessed 17.05.2011)).

African police auxiliaries in photographs, they are absent from the 600 pages of the book. In chapter 13, which deals with the administration of justice, he elaborates exclusively on the adjudication of European colonial inhabitants.

This biographical approach and the rather uncritical use of the perspective of the archival documents reflect, to a certain extent, the background of the author. Sven Schepp is not an academically trained historian, but employed in the State Office of Criminal Investigation in Wiesbaden / Hessen.⁴ Therefore, his book is not an academic treatise and should not be seen as such. Doing this would do injustice to the value of his work. New knowledge cannot be expected, yet as a primary source, the book is of great value.

Andreas Eckl
Ruhr-University Bochum

⁴ Mücke, "Seiner Majestät, dem deutschen Kaiser treu gehorsam", *Oberhessische Zeitung*, 30.03.2010, http://www.oberhessische-zeitung.de/lokales/vogelsbergkreis/muecke/print_8687281.htm (accessed 9.11.2011)