

Muschalek, Marie: *Violence as Usual. Policing and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa*. New York: Cornell University Press 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5017-4286-6; 270 S.

Rezensiert von: William Blakemore Lyon, Seminar für Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Marie Muschalek's *Violence as Usual* brings new perspectives to the German South West African (modern Namibia) colonial state, via a study of the *Landespolizei*, or the colonial police force. It is a social history of local colonial actors focusing on violence, governance and law with an incorporation of *Alltagsgeschichte*. In the book, Muschalek details how the few hundred members of the *Landespolizei*, as one of the colonial state's most localized tools of control, viewed their roles in local society, related to one another, functioned in the field, dealt with daily tasks and carried out their mission over a geographic area more than twice the size of imperial Germany. Originating from Muschalek's doctoral research at Cornell University, *Violence as Usual* contributes to the formidable output by Isabel Hull, Michelle Moyd and others trained or working at Cornell focusing on violence, soldiering, policing and governance in the German Empire.¹ The book in exploring Namibia's past incorporates methodologies from a variety of disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. It is a valuable addition to the historiography of German colonialism, joining Jakob Zollman's work on the *Landespolizei*.²

The book is organized into five chapters with sections related to themes rather than chronology. These sections take us through the police force's background and culture, the operations of bureaucracy, tools of control, daily life, and their oversight of work in the colony. The format is rather fitting as the book has a relatively narrow chronological timeline, from 1908 to 1915. This covers approximately the period from the end of the colonial war and genocide against the Herero and Nama to the beginning of the First World War in the colony.

The first chapter, which focuses on „Honor, Status and Masculinity“ exemplifies some of

the book's most engaging elements. It effectively argues how similar cultures of honor in both imperial Germany and southern Africa meant that the multi-racial workforce, which made up the police, had relatively similar cultural backgrounds. The bringing together of both European and African members of the *Landespolizei* in the research is a clear strength. It is also important for the historiography of colonial police as Muschalek points out that German South West Africa was one of the only places in colonial Africa where both black and white members of the police force worked together (p. 58). However in focusing her work on the bi-racial makeup of the police, the author also shows the limits of the archives. In the colonial records, mentions of the African police „assistants“ are far and few between compared to Europeans. That leads to her use of sources that do include African actors to perhaps be over representative of actual African police realities.

Violence as Usual attempts to remedy the challenges of the colonial archive through the implementation of creative methodologies. For example, in the third chapter Muschalek examines tools of control such as whips, shackles, guns and symbolic clothing related to power, like uniforms. The analysis of these items, their uses and societal meaning gives readers perspectives on the police that are not directly represented in many written sources. She also occasionally supports written accounts via the examination of photos and in doing so brings out fascinating details. In one photo the author points out the variety of uniform accoutrement African assistances wear with pride, such as pistols (p. 65). She then makes clear that much of what they are wearing, including the holstered weapons are against protocol. In highlighting these details, the reader is given a taste of the clash between bureaucracy, law and racial hierarchy. The photograph reminds us that the complexities on the ground did not always have simple ex-

¹ Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, Ithaca 2005; Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*, Athens 2014.

² Jakob Zollmann, *Koloniale Herrschaft und ihre Grenzen: Die Kolonialpolizei in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1915*, Göttingen 2010.

planations.

The book's methodology is enhanced by descriptions of daily life. Muschalek highlights the challenging realities for the *Landespolizei*, especially in rural outposts where interactions with others could be far and few between. That includes particulars given on the typical monotony of patrol rides through the vast expanse of dry bush that makes up most of Namibia's landscape (p. 113). But perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Alltagsgeschichte* explored in the book is how difficult and isolated work circumstances forced both African and European police into close contact. The bi-racial workforce had to work together to maintain some modicum of control over the colony's population. In many isolated regions they were the only representation of the colonial state. Furthermore, in *Landespolizei* interactions with local Africans, having a racially diverse police force clearly made them more effective. African police were often able to speak local languages as well as having more knowledge of the local landscape than Europeans in the organization.

There are times in the book however, where details are wanting. *Violence as Usual* is less focused on the police of the more populated and economically more vigorous regions such as the diamond mines around Lüderitzbucht. Furthermore, mentions of interactions between the police and the largest workforce after 1908 in the colony, migrant men from the Ovambo polities, also seem to be completely lacking. Rather interactions with farmers and farm workers seem to encompass most of the section on policing the workforce. But while some details of the history of the *Landespolizei* may benefit from expansion, the book's primary conclusions are well structured.

Muschalek's unique perspective is clear in her most prominent argument within the book's conclusion. She states that „The law-making power of the police was hardly the ‚rule of law‘[...]. But [...] these state practices produced a viable peacetime social order in German Southwest Africa, one that allowed people to live out their lives, however mutilated by violence“ (p. 160). This is as she points out against the standard historiograph-

ical supposition that violence meted out by colonial regimes was a sign of weakness. Furthermore, the author invites us to reconceptualize our basic concepts of makes up state violence as well as the modern foundations of state power.

Marie Muschalek presents us with a very readable and simultaneously impactful work on violence in German South West Africa. For those interested in the early 20th century history of colonial police in Africa, *Violence as Usual* serves as a welcome addition to an expanding field of research. Its examinations of violence, bureaucracy and a workforce give new insights to the inner workings of the German imperial machinery on the ground. Throwing out old biases regarding the colonial regime in German South West Africa, Marie Muschalek shines new light on the *Landespolizei*. The book demonstrates that this police force while primarily unable to complete much of their defined legal role, did create a form of stability and state presence through controlled and at times random violence. Additionally, this work shows that there is room for exciting new research that can be done on actors of the colonial state in German South West Africa.

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