

German colonialism

Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (eds), *Kolonialmetropole Berlin. Eine Spurensuche*

Berlin Edition, Berlin, 2002

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Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (eds), *“Macht und Anteil an der Weltherrschaft”. Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*

UNRAST, Münster, 2005

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It may come as a surprise to readers of this South African journal that post-colonial studies are a comparatively new field of study in the Humanities, especially in literature studies, in Germany.¹¹ Of course historians have been dealing with Germany's colonial heritage for decades, yet there were few approaches trying to integrate the account of historical occurrences into the context of a Westernised philosophical concept until the late 1980s. Van der Heyden and Zeller's books aim at dealing with colonialism as a cultural phenomenon, touching on “how colonial discourses influenced the mental and cultural self-image of the former colonial powers and how these discourses contributed to their nation building and their national image” (Van der Heyden & Zeller [2005] from p 8 – reviewer's translation). Both volumes offer fascinating insights for readers of all backgrounds into better and often lesser known aspects of German colonialism; and while Berlin as the geographical locus is the focus of both works, the various contributions transcend this spatial limitation.

Kolonialmetropole Berlin (2002) brings back to mind that Germany's role as a colonial power has often been marginalised, as it “only” lasted roughly thirty years, yet it was in Berlin where in 1884/1885, the infamous “Congo Conference” took place, dividing Africa up between the European powers. While most Germans nowadays certainly do not often remember that their country was once a major colonial power, those three decades of colonialism still strongly inform present-day attitudes towards the African continent and its inhabitants.¹² *Kolonialmetropole Berlin* is grouped into “Early Attempts at Colonising West Africa”, “In the Headquarters of the ‘World Power’”, “Supporters of the Protectorates”, “Economical Aspects”, “German Colonial Research and Researchers”, “Colonial Productions”, “Colonial Culture”, “African Migrants in the Imperial Capital”, “Colonialism without Colonies” and “Colonial Heritage in Berlin Museums” (reviewer's translations). Especially the section “Supporters of the Protectorates”, focusing on the more practical aspects of colonisation, and the section “Colonial Productions”, highlighting the fascination with the “exoticism” of Wilhelmine Germany, reveal the daily manifestations of stereotyping the racial other.

11 M Moustapha Diallo and D Götsche (eds), *Interkulturelle Texturen. Afrika und Deutschland im Reflexionsmedium der Literatur* (Aisthesis, Bielefeld, 2003), p 16; P M Lützel (ed), *Schriftsteller und “Dritte Welt”. Studien zum postkolonialen Blick* (Stauffenburg, Yübingen, 1998), p 16

12 S Arndt (ed), *AfrikaBilder. Studien zu Rassismus in Deutschland* (UNRAST, Münster, 2001), p 9

As can be seen from its sections (“Colonial Policy”, “Colonial Commerce”, “Institutions in Berlin and Colonial Research”, “Researchers and Technology”, “Scenes of Colonial Culture”, “China and the South Sea”, “White Berlin? The Black Presence in the Imperial Capital”, “The Anti-Colonial Metropolis”), *Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus* (2005) is a continuation of *Kolonialmetropole Berlin*, and although the contributions are as informative and well-researched, the book as such, published by a different company, is of a lesser quality. Petty as the point may be, but the quality of paper and typesetting, as well as the optical presentation are lacking in comparison with the first volume, and editorial carelessness, manifesting itself in glaring typing errors and erratic punctuation, deflects from the contents.

Highlights of the two works

Harald Sippel’s contribution “Kolonialverwaltung ohne Kolonien – Das Kolonialpolitische Amt der NSDAP und das geplante Reichskolonialministerium” in *Kolonialmetropole Berlin* (pp 256-261) and Holger Stoecker’s “Koloniale Großforschung im ‘Dritten Reich’. Die Kolonialwissenschaftliche Abteilung des Reichsforschungsrates” in *Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus* (pp 124-130) focus on one of the most fascinating aspects of these volumes, which is of great interest not only for historians: how the Nazi regime kept alive the idea of rising again to a colonial super-power and what plans were made by the “Colonial Policy Office”.

Lesser-known German colonies are discussed in Van der Heyden’s “Die Wüsteninsel Arguin” (*Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, pp 55-62) and Mechthild Leutner’s “Kiautschou – Deutsche ‘Musterkolonie’ in China?” (*Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, pp 203-207). Of special interest for readers of an African journal are Joachim Zeller’s “Friedrich Maharero – Ein Herero in Berlin” (*Kolonialmetropole Berlin*, pp 206-211) and Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft’s “Politik und Performance: Deutsch-Kameruner in der Anti-Kolonialbewegung” (*Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, pp 270-276).

The two volumes are informative and although some academics might consider a few of the contributions rather short, they are well-researched and (not always a given in books of this nature) extremely readable.