

BOOK REVIEW

Marie Muschalek. *Violence as Usual: Policing and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. 255 pp. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$49.95. Cloth. ISBN: 9781501742859

The title of Marie Muschalek's volume, *Violence as Usual*, might refer to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, to Apartheid in South Africa, or to recent police activity on American streets. However, this particular book deals with the *Landespolizei*, the police force in the German colony of Southwest Africa between 1907 and 1915. Muschalek complicates the notion of violence and its use in colonial Africa. Her book has already been termed by reviewers as "required reading" about German Southwest Africa (present day Namibia). Thus, it joins the still modest number of books written about a country underrepresented in the pantheon of African Studies.

Muschalek explains her methodology in her Introduction: "My theoretical approach to this history draws from the disciplinary subfields of historical anthropology and *Alltagsgeschichte*" (10). *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life, as a method led Muschalek to "go beyond an understanding of violence as solely destructive and instrumental ... [and to] propose thinking of state building—whether it is in the colony or in the metropole—as a process involving quotidian, 'messy' violence on the ground rather than as a top-down, planned project" (10). Thus, the author turned to police files available in the German Federal Archives in Berlin and in the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek and to records in Basel and Frankfurt. Using these sources, as well as a considerable amount of research in other books, Muschalek has compiled a remarkable record of day-to-day life immediately following the genocide of the Herero and Nama, which was perpetrated by the German *Schutztruppe* between 1904 and 1907, making it the first genocide of the twentieth century.

In the aftermath of this genocide, which left 80,000 indigenous people dead, victims of a racial hierarchy that represented them as less than human and as impediments to the German lust for a settler colony, the *Landespolizei* were tasked with creating "a 'peacetime' order" (2). As military experience was considered a requirement for work in the police, many men, eager to remain in Africa, entered police service after completing their time in the

military. Since the number of Germans available for such service was limited, indigenous men (primarily from the Herero, Nama, San, and Baster peoples) were also recruited; they were favored if they also brought military service experience. Thus, a police force in a desert outpost might be comprised of six Germans and two Africans who had potentially faced each other in battle a few years earlier. The Germans were equipped with guns while the Africans, by regulation, were not. One can easily imagine what a volatile situation this created, to say nothing of the enormous cultural differences, language difficulties, and disparate family ties of these two groups. The violence of which Muschalek speaks was both intra-force violence as well as violence administered in the course of the police work.

Muschalek divides her analysis into five highly organized, theoretically sophisticated chapters: 1. Honor, Status, and Masculinity; 2. Soldier-Bureaucrats; 3. Of Whips, Shackles and Guns; 4. Police Work: Daily Routines; and 5. Police Work: Violent Regulation of the Labor Market. What such “on the ground” analysis reveals is the enormous scope of what was expected of these *Landespolitzei*. In the German tradition of *Ordnung muss sein* (order must be), they were required to keep meticulous daily records, to present proper appearance in uniform, to be loyal comrades, to preside over disputes among indigenous peoples and settlers, to solve crimes, to arrest perpetrators, to patrol huge tracts of land, to catch forced laborers who had escaped, and to create rule books. And the list goes on; they were expected to collect dog taxes, maintain sewage systems, see to postal and customs duties as well as legal duties, and monitor mining enterprises. Muschalek emphasizes that one of the most important duties of the *Landespolitzei* was to round up men and women to become forced laborers; ironically, workers were in short supply due to the genocide. To control this conscripted group, an “economy of ‘educative violence’” was put into place (132) which enabled the police to create a wage labor system that was essential for the growth of the settler community.

The performance of these duties was complicated by the racial hierarchy imposed within each police barracks. This was made clear by the ways in which indigenous policemen were treated: they were denied weapons, assigned to menial tasks, and given one tenth the pay of their German counterparts. Usually the job of whipping an indigenous miscreant was delegated to an indigenous member of the force. The African police were themselves recipients of what was termed “paternal chastisement,” i.e., being whipped with a *sjambok*, a cruel whip made of hippopotamus hide and the only weapon the indigenous police were allowed to use.

Muschalek closes the book with what she terms her most “basic and unsettling finding ... that violence is not necessarily antithetical to community or social order, that it can be constructive. The daily brutality of modern colonialism was a horrific injustice. But it was also a way of life with its own rules and regularities” (164). *Violence as Usual* is packed with illuminating information on the societies of the Herero, the Nama, and the German settlers themselves. Moreover, the book lays the groundwork for future

studies. Yet to be written is a study of how the *Landespolizei* dealt with issues of gender, particularly prostitution, rape, and other forms of sexual violence in the colony.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Krämer, Mario. 2020. "Violence, Autochthony, and Identity Politics in KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa): A Processual Perspective on Local Political Dynamics." *African Studies Review* 63 (3): 540–59. doi:10.1017/asr.2019.69.
- Pfeiffer, Elizabeth. 2018. "'The Post-Election Violence Has Brought Shame on This Place': Narratives, Place, and Moral Violence in Western Kenya." *African Studies Review* 61 (2): 183–209. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.117.