

## Book Review

*Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities: Race, Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840–1920.* By Lenny A. Ureña Valerio. Ohio University Press. 2019. xxiii + 295pp. \$70.00.

The history and formation of identities in partitioned Poland has received extensive scholarly attention. Nevertheless, in this crowded field, Ureña Valerio makes a powerful and original contribution. *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities* examines German and Polish scientific developments on the fringes of the German Empire used to reinforce racially based concepts of health, hygiene and the spread of disease. In highlighting the importance of colonial ambitions in the partitioned land, the text explores how Poles were both objects and subjects of colonial agendas. Ureña Valerio illustrates how Poles constructed their identities in relation to the Germans, but also in relation to indigenous populations in both German Africa and Brazil, a process which became particularly important after the failed uprising of 1863. Crucially, this work makes a compelling case that Polish colonial ambitions were active before the Second Polish Republic (1918–39) and the creation of the Liga Morska i Kolonialna (Maritime and Colonial League).

Throughout *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities* there is a reiteration of Polish colonial ambitions in both Africa and South America. In the first two chapters, Ureña Valerio studies the ‘civilising mission’ of German scientists in the German east (Prussian Poland) and how they used racialised taxonomies to develop scientific theories regarding the spread of bacteria. The author documents tensions between German and Polish scientists and how, in the later years of the nineteenth century, ‘the language that bacteriologists started to use reflected the politics of cultural struggle and the ethnolinguistic definition of German nationalism’ (p. 53). Both chapters 2 and 3 of the text highlight a tendency to ascribe the spread of disease to people from the east, with the supposedly ‘unclean’ habits, laziness and uncivilised behaviour of Poles, Slavs and Jews being held to cause the spread of infection. The same pseudoscientific rhetoric was then subsequently used as justification for subjecting these people to the process of Germanisation. However, the author demonstrates that attempts to ‘Germanise’ settlers in the German east had the effect of ‘raising the political consciousness of Polish-speaking subjects’ (p. 76). Indeed, Ureña Valerio demonstrates that ‘the Polish question became a testing ground for the German Empire, in which the limits of colonial power and resistance were first exposed’ (pp. 76–7).

The third chapter also explores colonising missions in Africa, focusing on the relationships between medicine, disease control and overseas expansion. By using case studies of Emin Pasha, Robert Koch and Jan Czekanowski, the author is able to demonstrate how Prussian Poland and Germany’s African colonies were connected by an ideology that privileged ethnic Germans. Pasha and

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Czekanowski positioned themselves as cultural interlocutors between colonised and coloniser, identifying not only with the German colonisers attempting to 'civilise the natives', but also with the indigenous population, as victims of German oppression and colonisation.

The fourth chapter looks at Polish travel accounts and colonial fantasies, contrasting the seemingly contradictory ideas of Poles as colonised peoples, 'a nationality without a modern state' (p. 117), and a pursuit of freedom through mimicking the colonial practices of Germany and Britain. Throughout the chapter there is a focus on the making of Polishness within the context of Poles, such as Stefan Szolc-Rogozieński, attempting to create colonies in Africa. Szolc-Rogozieński's expedition was opposed by intellectuals such as Aleksander Świątchowski, who believed they should follow the example of Switzerland and not Spain, by focusing on reinvigorating and uplifting the Polish people instead of obtaining colonies and ruling over others. This chapter is extremely rich in analysis of memoirs, travel accounts and contemporary literature, providing a fresh view on the making of 'Polishness' within the context of Polish colonial ambitions. It looks at how people like Szolc-Rogozieński sought a 'place in the sun' (p. 123) as opposed to trying to work within the existing political and societal structures of a partitioned Poland. The chapter repeatedly shows that 'colonial fantasies' were already part of Polish thinking before the Second Polish Republic was established. This chapter also contends that colonial ambitions, at least among some Poles, were not dissimilar to those expressed in other parts of Europe. Ureña Valerio explores Henryk Sienkiewicz's 1911 novel for children, *In Desert and Wilderness*, as an exemplar of seemingly contradictory approaches to colonialism. Set in Africa, *In Desert and Wilderness* displays not only imagined Polish physical and intellectual superiority to the indigenous population, but simultaneously presents Poles as being more benign and enlightened than other European colonisers.

The last chapter focuses on the creation of the Polish nation abroad, focusing on 'Brazilian fever' (*gorączka brazylijska*) in the late 1880s, which led to the creation of settlements such as Nowa Polska (New Poland), mostly inhabited by 'peasants' wishing to pursue a life outside Poland's borders and away from German control. By 1918 over 120,000 ethnic Poles had settled in Brazil and had created a 'national space where Polish culture and language could thrive semiautonomously' (p. 152). This chapter highlights another dichotomy, that the only way that many Poles saw to retain and express their Polishness was to migrate to South America.

Throughout this book the author uses a rich and well-chosen array of sources to convey the complex network of German–Polish relations across Europe, Africa and South America. The methodology and framework are original and offer a well-researched and valuable contribution to the field. This book is not only an exceptional addition to the discussion around identity formation and the making of Polishness, but also offers new insights on colonial comparative studies, and an invaluable addition to theories of eugenics and race science in Europe.

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