



Lenny A. Ureña Valerio. *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities: Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840-1920.* Polish and Polish American Studies Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. Illustrations. 320 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8214-2373-8.

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In recent decades, historians have treated the Prussian/imperial German East in the long nineteenth century as a space for German colonialism in Europe as well as for transnational German-Slav interaction.[1] Lenny A. Ureña Valerio's *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities* is not just another contribution to this research trend but rather a work that takes it on an entirely new and unexplored path. Valerio does two things no transnational and postcolonial historian of Polish-German relations—nor Central Europe—has ever done. For one, she entwines the transnational and colonial history of the Prussian East with German imperialism in East Africa. Secondly, she demonstrates that not only Germans but also Poles, despite being colonized by the former, had a colonial agenda of their own, which was not just a discourse but an active project in the German African colonies and migrant colonies in Brazil.

About a decade ago at a graduate student seminar in Berlin, I had the great pleasure of hearing Valerio speak about her research for this book, which at the time was her doctoral dissertation project. In particular, I remember how she conveyed that writing an entwined history of Prussian Poland, German East Africa, and migrant colonies in Brazil was a natural undertaking for her. Indeed, in many respects it was! Certainly, Valerio's

background is quite different from that of most historians working on Central Europe. As a Puerto Rican woman with Dominican roots, her experience of the postcolonial world is not just a bookish but also a first-hand one. Interestingly enough, she decided to invoke this experience to study one of Europe's eminent all-white regions—nineteenth-century Prussian Poland (imperial Germany's Polish partition). At first sight at least, the absence of blatant “racial difference” and common Europeanness among Germans and Poles of this region renders any comparison between German colonization here and European imperialism in Africa quite problematic. Nevertheless, as Valerio notes in the preface to her book, this is mainly what drove her to move to Poland and work on this aspect of German-Polish transnational history in the first place.

This was no easy choice of topic. Quite remarkably, Valerio mastered German and Polish, without which writing this book, which is largely based on close readings of nineteenth-century scientific journals and newspapers in these languages, documents from a number of archives in Germany and Poland, and an extensive reading of German- and Polish-language scholarship, would hardly have been possible. That only covers the European side of this work in global and transnation-

al history. Valerio also worked in the archives of Paraná and Rio de Janeiro. This wealth of painstaking research gives Valerio's book remarkable multifaceted complexity and insightfulness.

Her argument is quite clear and cogent throughout. Valerio contends that "studies that approach the German borderlands from a (post)colonial perspective generally place too much emphasis on German fantasies of domination without effectively integrating the political activities and desires of the 'colonized.'" She also criticizes existing scholarship on perhaps the most intensively worked-on topic of Polish historiography, nationalism and nation-building, for ignoring the "global dimensions and cultural exchanges that could have influenced political struggles and identification process in the region [Central Europe and the German-Polish borderlands]" (p. 2). Valerio's transnational and comparative analysis of Prussian Poland and German Africa is already in and of itself quite innovative. However, her additional treatment of not just German colonial actors but Polish ones as well is nothing less than pathbreaking. Certainly one of the most original aspects of her argument is that despite themselves being the victims of partition and "colonization," Polish professionals and intelligentsia nevertheless developed their own "colonial fantasies" in reflection to their experiences in East Africa and connections to Polish migrants in Brazil. These fantasies promoted ambitions of Polish colonial acquisition and of a special, and moral, Polish way of "civilizing" Africans and Latin Americans. Valerio cleverly argues that these "colonial fantasies" fueled the patriotic ego of the stateless Poles, who were stigmatized for being on the margins of European civilization (p. 7). According to Valerio, by engaging in the "'Pan European colonial project,'" Polish elites imagined themselves as "catching up" "with other (West) European powers" and overcoming the stereotypes of "backwardness" ascribed to them by Germans (p. 46).

Rather than comparing German colonization in Central Europe with European imperialism in Africa, Valerio takes another clever approach. She writes a transnational history—not so much comparative as interwoven—of German and Polish colonial agents and their "colonial fantasies." She approaches this subject from the angle of the history of medicine, focusing on the work and discourses of German and Polish medical professionals, broadly defined—experts of health, medicine, hygiene, ethnography, and anthropology. Analyzing their travel stories and research published in the press and scientific journals, Valerio argues that "many German and Polish physicians ... contributed to the political expansion of empires and national agendas in overseas colonies and the Prussian-Polish provinces" (p. 8). Certainly, beyond a narrow interest in Polish ventures to expel the Jews of interwar Poland to Madagascar, scholarship has only cast a colonial identity to Poles within the context of their territorial expansion within Europe, but not outside of it.[2]

Movement and migration mark important themes of this book. Valerio emphasizes the circulation and transfer of information. This theme becomes quite clear in the second chapter, in which she emphasizes that ideas on medicine and colonial practices were shared between German Africa and Polish Prussia, and among Germans and Poles traveling to both regions. In similar respects, in both regions, the Germans viewed native migrants with suspicion. According to Valerio, both German and Polish medical experts shared the view of "diseases that migrated from East to West," and labeled migrants from the eastern partition of Poland—Poles and Jews—as prone to spreading disease due to their "backward" way of life (p. 45).

The first two chapters largely deal with the discourses of German and Polish medicine experts during the rise of the modern medical profession in Germany in the late nineteenth century. One of the central figures of Valerio's analysis is the German medicine specialist Robert Koch. As someone

who was active in German Africa and Prussian Poland, he is the highlight of the transfer of German colonial knowledge between these two places. Valerio notes that German medical experts saw imperialism as important for the progression of medical research. Their Polish colleagues in Prussian Poland, although marginalized and largely excluded from the global networks their German colleagues benefited from professionally, nevertheless learned from the latter, especially from Koch. One of Valerio's stunning findings here is that just as German medical experts associated contagious diseases, such as cholera, with a certain lifestyle, class, place, and race—often associating them with Poles and Jews—Polish medical doctors often concurred with these racist views.

Titled “Intersecting Roads,” chapter 3 examines medical politics in German Africa and Prussian Poland under a common analytical framework. Valerio is keen on emphasizing the major differences between medical discourses and the politics of disease control between the two regions. In the colonies, the natives were seen as the inferior racial “other,” subject to violence and becoming objects of medical experimentation, and had little in the way of rights or choice. She notes that medical professionals loved to travel to the colonies to conduct their research precisely because they could treat their African subjects in the kind of inhumane ways they could never get away with in Europe. However, Valerio also emphasizes the common (biological or cultural) racist ideology that guided German medicine in East Africa and Prussian Poland: the privileging of ethnic Germans on the one hand, and the “othering” of non-Germans with depictions of Africans, Jews, and Slavs as carriers of disease due to their “backwardness,” “lack of civilization,” and race, on the other. In the second part of the chapter, she demonstrates how these ideas and a phobia against migrants were behind the building of concentration camps in Africa and medical containment centers in Prussian Poland. Valerio notes that the Africans’ concentration camp experience was far more brutal than

that of Slavic and Jewish migrants quarantined for typhus; nevertheless, these European groups were also subject to racist labeling as natural carriers of germs and disease.

In chapter 4, Valerio returns to a theme that she introduces in the previous chapter: Polish colonial discourses. The major question guiding her inquiry is whether these discourses were any different than those of members of imperial European states, given that Poles themselves were “subalterized” (p. 15). According to Valerio, the response is to some extent yes, but mostly no. She examines travel literature of the first Polish expedition to Africa in the early 1880s, led by Stefan Szolc-Rogozński, whose participants included major authors of the Polish national literary canon, Henryk Sienkiewicz and Bolesław Prus. Among the objects of her analysis here is Sienkiewicz’s classic novel, *In Desert and Wilderness* (1911). Valerio argues that this travel literature promoted the idea of Poles as “morally superior vis-à-vis other Europeans”; Poles were portrayed as kinder, more responsible, and more benevolent colonialists than the brutal, violent, and neglectful Germans in East Africa (p. 138). To highlight this, Valerio notes that Szolc-Rogozński thought of establishing kind-hearted paternal care over the natives of Cameroon, treating them as “big children” to whom their “white brothers,” the Poles, would bring “light” and transform their “barbaric customs” (pp. 126-27). The other examples she cites support her claim that members of the Polish educated middle class actually supported imperialism and echoed European racist and white-supremacist ideas and discourses that legitimated it. Even the father figure of the Polish national literary canon, Sienkiewicz, endorsed German violence to put down African uprisings, even as he criticized German harshness against Poles in Prussian Poland. Polish colonial discourses entertained the thought of colonial acquisition for a Poland that officially did not exist. They also embraced eugenicist ideas of racial purity preservation and refrained from blood and cultural mixing among

Poles and natives in Africa and Brazil. Contrary to mainstream Polish national history's tendency to claim that Poles never really had any colonial aspirations, Valerio demonstrates that in fact imperialist-nationalist state activists, in particular, the Maritime and Colonial League, used these nineteenth-century Polish colonial fantasies to lobby for colonial acquisition.

The last chapter develops the topic of Polish immigration to Brazil. Valerio argues that the Polish intelligentsia hailed this project as a way for Poles to fulfill their dream of colonial acquisition at a time when they did not have a state of their own. Driven out of the Polish partitions by Germanization and other political repression, as well as by poverty, ordinary Poles migrated to Brazil. There, they formed settlement colonies, mainly in the southern Brazilian states, such as Paraná, which became known as "new Poland." Welcomed as Europeans—along with their German counterparts—by the Brazilian government to settle and work on modernization projects in Brazil, by 1918, some 120,000 Poles migrated there. In this chapter, Valerio demonstrates how, to fuel pride, nationalists promoted the settlement colony in Paraná as a symbol of Polish cultural and racial superiority among native Brazilians. They emphasized, for example, that "what Brazilians were not able to accomplish for centuries, Polish diligence was able to achieve overnight" (p. 161). Moreover, regard toward the Polish migrants as hard working, civilized, and European on the part of their Brazilian hosts—and even their migrant German counterparts in Brazil—further fueled these nationalists' patriotic ego.

In the conclusion and epilogue, Valerio reiterates that a common ideological framework of (cultural and biological) racial hierarchies, eugenics, and "othering"—the ideas of which were commonly present in the discourse of medical professionals—integrated German colonial projects in East Africa and Prussian Poland. Moreover, she emphasizes that educated middle-class Poles, through

their interaction with their German counterparts and their own colonial experiences, bought into these ideological tenets. She ends the book by arguing that in the late nineteenth century, "German and Polish relations were redefined in colonialist terms," making the case for treating nineteenth-century Prussian Poland as a colonial project, since the discourse of contemporary elites and professionals portrayed it as such (p. 185).

Some aspects of Valerio's work leave room for more extensive elaboration and analysis, especially within the transnational framework that she establishes in her early chapters. For example, in her chapter on Polish migrants in Brazil, she implies that Poles developed their own concept of "Polish work" and "Polish civilization," which can be examined as a counterpart to German notions of "Arbeit" and "Kultur." Moreover, in that chapter she also looks at how various Polish scientists and nationalists worked to maintain relations with Polish settlers in Paraná to keep them from losing ties with their home country and culture. This implicitly marks the rise of a Polish tradition of ethnic nationalism that can be compared to the German tradition of the *völkisch* movement. Finally, the connection between Polish colonial thought, racism, and anti-Semitism warrants further analysis, particularly as Valerio addresses interwar Poland's colonial activists. After all, one of their important colonial fantasies was to expel Poland's Jews to overseas colonies, such as Madagascar.

However, this book's great accomplishments make these issues go almost unnoticed. Valerio has written an outstanding book that stands to revolutionize how scholars conceive of imperial Germany's eastern domains as well as German-Polish and German-Slavic relations during the nineteenth, and even the twentieth, century. This book will be of great interest to an interdisciplinary audience that includes specialists of Central Europe, Germany, Poland, migration, imperialism, race, the history of medicine, and African and Latin American studies. Her approach and findings are re-

markably original and important, and offer an excellent example of how Central European history, and even Polish history, can be written in a global approach and in the context of European colonialism.

Notes

[1]. See Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Mark Tilse, *Transnationalism in the Prussian East: From National Conflict to Synthesis, 1871-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Vejas Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Robert Nelson, ed., *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Charles Ingrao and Franz Szabo, eds., *The Germans and the East* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008); and Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1949* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[2]. See Zofia Trzębacz, *Nie tylko Palestyna: Polskie plany emigracyjne wobec Żydów, 1935-1939* [Not just Palestine: Polish plans for Jewish emigration, 1935-1939] (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2018); Timothy Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

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