Wildenthal, Lora. Review of *Koloniale Herrschaft. Zur soziologischen Theorie der Staatsentstehung am Beispiel des 'Schutzgebietes Togo,'* by Trutz von Trotha. *German History* 15, no. 2 (1997): 286-287. doi: 10.1093/gh/15.2.286.

***Koloniale Herrschaft. Zur soziologischen Theorie der Staatsentstehung am Beispiel des 'Schutzgebietes Togo'.* By Trutz von Trotha. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). 1994. 516 pp. DM178.**

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This book, by a historical sociologist, examines how opportunities for domination came to be institutionalized as state power in Togo under German rule (1884-1914). Most accounts of the German colonial empire fall into one of the following categories: Marxist/radical analyses of imperialism; analyses of 'proto-Nazi' or genocidal thought and action; and the still-current genre of nostalgic apologetics. Trotha's book fits none of those moulds, which makes it especially intriguing.

This is not a book about specifically German colonialism, or even about colonization *per se*. Trotha uses materials from the colonization of Togo to support his abstract propositions about early state formation. Power, he argues, is not a 'zero-sum game' (p. 11), but a process. 'Opportunities for power' must be seized by 'competing actors' if power relations are to be institutionalized (pp. 4, 11). He pays particular attention to actors who compete on the margins of that process, such as German colonial officials heading up remote stations, or African interpreters and overland transport workers (p. 12). Like recent US and British work in colonial studies, Trotha argues against assuming that 'the rulers' responded directly to supposedly obvious interests (pp. 9-10), stressing instead contingency and rulers' conflicting desires in the development of a nonetheless often devastating colonial rule. Trotha's book demonstrates these points with clarity and sophistication.

The relationship between 'the state' and 'the colonial state' is close, Trotha observes, not least because modern colonialism took the 'utopia' of the state to every corner of the globe (p. 15). By choosing to examine colonial Togo, Trotha usefully decentres our expectations of a 'typical' example of state formation. However, the differences between 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' (i.e. colonial) theories of state origins need more discussion than just one footnote (p. 4n). Otherwise, the choice of Togo, and even the choice of a colony at all, begins to seem arbitrary; one may even wonder why the book was not simply entitled 'Staatliche Herrschaft'.

The kinds of arguments Trotha engages--primarily those of sociologists Gerd Spittler and Heinrich Popitz, who themselves do not focus on Togo--reinforce the impression of an arbitrary

choice. Trotha has relied on the work of specialists in the history of Togo and German imperialism (especially Peter Sebald), but apparently only for facts. Had he engaged the arguments of both literatures, he might have better negotiated the two levels that dominate the book, isolated detail and abstract theory. *Pace* Trotha's own remarks (p. 25), a more historical approach does not require discovering new sources, but rather attention to context and specificity.

Taken on its own terms, Trotha's book is a rich and ambitious one. But those terms will leave not only some historians disappointed, but also some theorists of state formation. In spite of the established presence of work on gender, class, and racial ideology in African state formation (e.g. Jane Parpart and Kathleen Staudt's 1989 collection), those analytical categories are absent from the book. Such omissions are important not only at the level of empirical detail but also of analysis and theory-making. Moreover, those categories constitute important common ground among the disciplines of history, sociology, and anthropology. Finally, there are a few omissions in the book's scholarly apparatus. The names of many Africans cited in the text do not appear in the index, though Germans cited just as briefly do, for example. And a caption on page 85 makes **[End Page 286]** no mention of the prominently placed African woman in the accompanying photograph, though it lists all other depicted persons.