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**Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop, editors.**  
***The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy.***  
**(Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany.) Ann**  
**Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1998. Pp. vi, 370.**

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This collection of essays takes up the challenging question of how colonialism and colonial legacies have shaped the German past and present. It necessarily also faces the question of how to define colonialism, a question that emerges already in the first of three chronologically defined parts. Part one deals with colonial discourse during the Kaiserreich (1871-1918). While Helmut Walser Smith analyzes parliamentary debates on colonial war and race mixing and Friederike Eigler and John Noyes discuss literary texts that explicitly portray life in the German colonies (in Noyes's case extending into a more general discussion of ideas of nomadism and settlement among colonialists), Nina Berman moves outside the bounds of formal empire when she contextualizes Karl May's *Orientzyklus* in informal colonial relations between Germany and the Middle East.

Part two turns to "Imperialism without colonies," the era in which Germany had lost its formal overseas empire but not its colonial ambitions. One of the four essays in this part, a longer piece coauthored by Tina Campt, Pascal Grosse, and Yara-Colette Lemke-Muniz de Faria, fully carries out the promise of the volume's subtitle, explicating across forty years and three political regimes the changing fantasies and policies that white Germans attached to blackness and to black Germans (as opposed to black colonial subjects or black visitors to Germany). No other essay in the volume so successfully connects ideas of formal empire to later forms of racial thought in Germany. In fact, most of the essays in the volume do not attempt to do so. Rather, they use implicit definitions of colonialism that expand that word to mean a fascination with primitivism (Andreas Michel), encounters with "the Other" (Leslie Morris), racism, or inequality (Sara Friedrichsmeyer). Such inflation of colonialism's meanings is both the strength and weakness of the cultural studies approach taken here.

Part three takes up "imperial fantasies" in West, East, and unified Germany. The quality of these essays is more consistent than in parts one and two. Part three is also on relatively familiar

methodological and disciplinary ground. Almost all of them analyze the workings of individual literary or philosophical texts (Sara Lennox, Leslie Adelson, Friedrichsmeyer, Willi Goetschel) or juxtapose the work of two creative artists to revise earlier critical approaches (Lisa Gates's interesting critique of Susan Sontag's interpretation of Leni Riefenstahl's African photographs). Katrin Sieg's essay on the politics of "ethnic drag" in theater productions discusses the casting of white German actors in roles for non-Germans, as well as the reverse as portrayed in Emine Sevgi Ozdamar's playful work *Keloglan in Alamania*. Her essay is very worthwhile reading. But by this point in the volume, the reader is given very few clues for how to interpret these late twentieth-century racial issues as legacies of German colonialism. The final essay, by Willi Goetschel, discusses how Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* "exposes the paradigm of critical thinking itself as predicated upon the model of colonization" (pp. 321-22). It is also a successful piece, though its position as the final essay moves an already sprawling volume to a yet more abstract and sweeping level.

Some of the best questions are posed in the editors' useful introduction. That essay provides some historical and critical background. It also shows what is at stake in bringing postcolonial critique to German studies. If post-Holocaust Germany's choice for "Europe," shorthand for parliamentary democracy, is basic to the world's acceptance of the Federal Republic, then German participation in a postcolonial critique of Europe will necessarily be fraught. As the editors put it, "so long as the options are postulated to be Europe or Auschwitz, that critique of the European legacy remains difficult for Germans to advance" (p. 5). A related, major question is whether German colonialism was closer to the wider colonization and "Westernization" of the world in the modern era or closer to a specific development toward Nazism not shared by other colonial powers (p. 29). None of the essays take up these vital questions. There are a few factual errors showing unfamiliarity with some of the historical literature (pp. 10, 137, 175, 297 n. 4), but the errors are in each case peripheral to the points their authors are making. This book is the first to bring together scholars in various disciplines who work on German colonial- [End Page 1824] ism and postcolonial racial issues, and it is a vital contribution to German studies.