In 1879, Charles Ingalls, a skilled carpenter, farmer and hunter, moved to the Dakota Territory, where he started working at a railroad camp. After relocating several times between Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota and Iowa, he and his family eventually settled down in the vicinity of De Smet, where Ingalls filed a claim for a piece of government land the following year.\textsuperscript{1} He did so under the Homestead Act of 1862, which was part of a series of bills the US Congress had passed during the civil war to populate and develop the American West. Prior to the Act, public land had generally been sold or auctioned off in large lots that families with little financial means like the Ingalls could not afford. Now the government granted a maximum of 160 acres to any head of household, whether male or female, black or white, who could raise ten dollars and the additional filing fees. The homesteaders were required to live on the designated land and cultivate it for five years before they gained ownership of it. Nearly 400,000 families were settled under those conditions between 1869 and 1900. The majority migrated from nearby states, but the Homestead Act also attracted settlers from Europe.\textsuperscript{2}

The Ingalls’ experience was in no way unique. Their history is, however, exceptionally well-documented due to the literary works of Charles’ daughter, Laura Ingalls Wilder. With the assistance of her daughter Rose Wilder Lane, Wilder published between 1932 and 1943 seven children’s novels based on her life as a girl in the American West.\textsuperscript{3} They cover the years of her early childhood in the 1870s up to
her marriage in 1885.\(^4\) This «Little House on the Prairie» series turned into a «long-running, best-selling success and a cultural icon».\(^5\) The books have been reissued various times, translated into several languages, and adapted into a popular television series, a Japanese animated series, a two-part movie and a Disney miniseries.\(^6\)

Hence the Ingalls story has spread far «beyond the prairie» (as one of the adaptations is titled).

Quite similar to Wilder’s fictionalised and highly idealised account of American frontier life, the idea of government-initiated settlement schemes like the Homestead Act spread beyond the prairie to other areas of the Americas, Australia, Europe, Africa and Asia in what has been coined by John C. Weaver as a «global land rush» and «a stunning finale to the «expansion of Europe»».\(^7\) While Weaver’s study concentrates on the most prominent British settler colonies – the United States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia –, the global land rush he describes also affected other world regions. Agricultural settlement projects were part of Argentinian efforts to develop the Pampa, the Russian advance into Siberia, French and Italian colonialism in North Africa, as well as the Japanese expansion in Korea and China.\(^8\) The list, which is by no means conclusive, raises the question of whether or not those settlement projects were linked in any way and if so, how.

In order to answer this question, I will focus on the German Empire and how settlement policies were introduced to and implemented within it. My first step is to explore whether or not and to what extent, the inner colonisation of the eastern Prussian provinces was influenced by North American settlement schemes. My second step is to take a closer look at the development of policies within Germany’s so-called settlement colony, German Southwest Africa. However, in order to fully grasp the successive emergence of state-aided settlement programmes, we have to look beyond intra- and interimperial transfers of knowledge and practices, and develop new ways of theorising global interconnections. Therefore, my third step is to introduce and shortly discuss three analytical models to frame those interconnections: the imperial archive, the imperial cloud and the imperial formation. I will conclude my argument by analysing the specific concepts of space and population that informed settlement policies within and beyond the German Empire as part of a settler imperial formation.


\(^{5}\) A. Romines, Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, Amherst 1997, 144.


1. From the Great Plains to Eastern Prussia

During most of the nineteenth century, and German scholars, politicians or writers who were interested in questions of migration, settlement and colonial expansion looked towards the United States. One reason for this interest was clearly the large number of Germans that migrated from Germany to North America. As in other European states, this mass movement was largely the result of population growth, agrarian reforms as well as the economic and social changes brought about by industrialisation.\(^9\) Driven by poverty and the promise of eventually owning a piece of government land, people, especially from rural areas, ventured abroad in search of a better future beyond the Atlantic.\(^10\) Until the 1840s, German state officials and political scientists were influenced by Thomas Robert Malthus’ theory on the dangers of rapid population growth and therefore endorsed this emigration as a strategy to alleviate poverty. As soon as the emigrants crossed the borders, they were no longer of interest to the state.\(^11\) However, between 1845 and 1857, during the first wave of mass emigration from the German land to the Americas, this attitude changed and German nationalists in particular began to lament the loss of human capital through emigration.\(^12\) «What good is it if the emigrants to North America become ever so prosperous?», asked Friedrich von List in 1841. He added, «In their personal relation they are lost forever to the German nationality, and also from their material production Germany can expect only unimportant fruits.»\(^13\) The first German National Assembly in Frankfurt discussed the emigration question in similar terms.\(^14\) To the German liberals, emigrants were not superfluous populations but productive members of a national collective. Thus the Germans who settled in the United States and their motives for doing so became of great interest to nationalist politicians and scholars alike.

---


\(^10\) Bade, Europa in Bewegung, 150.


\(^12\) There were three large waves of transatlantic migration from Germany, the first between 1845 and 1857, the second between 1864 and 1873, and the third between 1880 and 1893. Bade, «Deutschland», 146–149.


However, German nationalists did not only see the United States as a competitor for human resources but also as an example. As Jens-Uwe Guettel argues,

[...] during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially for Germans of a liberal political persuasion, the United States appeared to demonstrate that colonialism and territorial growth were inextricably linked to the establishment of a nation-state based on liberal principles. In consequence, the United States and American Westward expansion were of continuing importance for these Germans’ hopes of creating a liberal and nationally unified Germany. At the same time, the ever-growing American republic inspired them to ponder the benefits and necessity of expansion from a German perspective. 

German debates about migration, national unity and colonial expansion were closely linked to one another and generally took the settlement of the American West as a reference point. Many nationalists were convinced that Germany did not just need a nation state but also territories to absorb the population overflow. Where exactly this German frontier was to be found remained disputed, though. From the 1840s onwards, politicians and academics offered two different but interrelated solutions to the migration problem. Some proposed the establishment of German colonies in North or South America, Africa or Asia. Others called for the settlement of less densely populated areas within Germany. Thus, overseas expansionism and inner colonisation emerged as two interrelated concepts of German settler colonialism that complemented and contradicted each other.

The discursive connections between migration, nation and territorial expansion did not dissolve after the German Empire was founded in 1871. Instead, colonial advocates like Friedrich Fabri, Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, Ernst von Weber and Carl Peters now called for the «creation of a second, overseas empire». At the same time, the economic crisis that followed the 1870s crash led to the third and largest wave of emigration to North America, and prompted advocates of inner colonisation like Theodor von der Goltz and Johannes von Miquel to promote mass settlement within Germany. In this situation, the Prussian Ministry for Agriculture and the Agrarian Economics Council decided to send the economist

Max Sering to North America to investigate, among other things, why so many Germans had chosen to settle there. Sering had been recommended to them by the renowned economist Gustav Schmoller, one of the founding members of the Verein für Socialpolitik. Like his teacher, the young scholar belonged to the historical school of economics, whose members based their economic analyses on empirical historical research.\textsuperscript{19} Most of them were also political advocates and believed in social reforms as a means to mitigate the negative effects of industrialisation. American settlement policies were of interest to Sering not only because the promise of free land lured Germans across the Atlantic, but also because they combined social liberal ideals with colonial expansionism.

In 1883, Sering visited the United States and Canada for several months. He travelled through the Midwest and Manitoba, visited German farmers and studied the effects of the homestead legislations.\textsuperscript{20} «The North American Republic’s economic history is that of a colonising nation», he wrote after his return to Germany. «Its most important fact is the great, ceaseless flow of migration towards the West, that, creating one state after another, gradually seized the whole vast territory of the present-day Union and yet has not come to a standstill. [...] A unified plan governs the settlement of the central and western parts of North America, a plan that finds its expression in the federal legislation on public land.»\textsuperscript{21} Sering was impressed by the homestead laws, the US-American laws as well as the Canadian laws of 1872, but he also criticised them for being «all too liberal» and therefore vulnerable to land speculation.\textsuperscript{22} Settlers could easily sell and leave their land. «In our colonies we have to do a better job,» he wrote to Schmoller.\textsuperscript{23} According to his letters, the trip turned Sering into a «keen supporter» of German colonialism. He considered it a shame that Germans «were forced by external employment conditions to assimilate and subordinate themselves» to Americans, and argued that «many defects of our nation’s life could be healed» through colonies.\textsuperscript{24} He even contemplated travelling to South America to gauge the opportunities for German settlement there.\textsuperscript{25} Once back in Germany, though, Sering did not join the colonial movement but instead became an ardent supporter of the inner colonisation of eastern Prussia.

By the time, Sering returned from his trip, Bismarck and part of the Prussian state ministry had become increasingly obsessed with the so-called «Polish question». The cultural politics, which aimed at the assimilation of the Polish-speaking...
population in the eastern parts of Germany, had failed. In January 1885, while Otto von Bismarck tried to present Germany as a new imperial power at the Berlin Africa Conference, the popular philosopher Eduard von Hartmann lamented the «decline of Germandom (Deutschtum) in Russia and Austria». He questioned if the German people had lost «their previous inherent colonising power» and argued that, at least within the empire, German rule needed to be secured: «If the Slavs eradicated Germandom within their borders, we need to take measures, eradicating Slavdom (Slawenthum) within ours. Otherwise the influence of Germandom in the history of the civilised people will decline considerably.» Drawing on the idea of inner colonisation, he proposed to settle Germans in the eastern parts of Prussia, while at the same time sending Polish farmworkers off to the newly acquired colonies.26

One year later, the district president of Bromberg, Christoph von Tiedemann, picked up part of Hartmann’s plan. He did not suggest settling Poles in Africa. After all, by then, the Prussian government had already started to deport approximately 30,000 Poles and Jews without German citizenship from the eastern provinces to Russia and Galicia.27 However, the majority of the Polish-speaking population could not be evicted, because they were Prussian citizens. To secure German hegemony in the eastern provinces, Tiedemann advised the government to buy estates that had been sold by the Polish gentry, divide them up and settle the lots with German farmers.28 He thereby successfully linked concepts of inner colonisation with government policies to increase the German population in the Prussian East. His memorandum had «all the hallmarks of ‹homestead› thinking»,29 as Robert Nelson argues. However, Tiedemann neither referred to the Homestead Act, nor did he mention Sering and his publication. He also left no further records that could prove a direct link between Sering and Tiedemann, as Nelson admits. Even if we take into account that Schmoller tried to convince the Prussian Agricultural Minister, Robert Lucius, of the inner colonisation scheme, the transfer of settlement concepts remains implicit.30

In April 1886, the Prussian parliament adopted a settlement law aimed at the «strengthening of the German element» in the provinces of Posnania (Posen) and West Prussia, the two provinces with the largest Polish-speaking population.31 Over the following years, the government allocated a total of 955 million marks for the programme. Part of the money was used to establish a settlement commission that took up headquarters in the city of Posen. Until 1914, the government bought up

28 Ch. v. Tiedemann, «Denkschrift betreffend einige Maßregeln zur Germanisierung der Provinz Posen», 6.1.1886, BAB, R 43, Nr. 661, 70–100a, 80–81.
29 Nelson, «From Manitoba to the Memel», 446.
435,000 ha land, parcelled and sometimes improved the larger estates, and then sold or rented the lots to German farmers. The settlement programme bore only a faint resemblance to those in the United States and Canada. Whereas the North American homestead legislation followed the principle of minimal political intervention, the Prussian settlement commission did not only select the settlers, but also monitored the settlement process. To prevent land speculation, the farmers were not allowed to sell their lots without government permission. In addition, instead of the single-farm settlements that characterised the American frontier, the Prussian settlement commission grouped German settlers together in carefully prepared settlement villages.32 «In Posen-Western Prussia it is our goal to create nationally cohesive colonies», Sering explained the differences in 1893. «Especially because of this reason the establishment of a system of individual farms has been continuously avoided.»33 After all, the law’s main objective was to increase the number of Germans living in the Prussian East. In order to achieve this goal, the commission had to guarantee that the land remained in German hands and that the settlers maintained «their German identity vis-à-vis the Polish majority population».34 By 1918, 21,886 families, approximately 153,800 persons, had been settled in the two provinces.35 However, only two thirds of the acquired land had been sold or rented out, and the commission failed to reach its aim of settling 40,000 families by a long shot. It also did not manage to stop the emigration of German farmers from the East nor did it increase the percentage of Germans in Posnania and West Prussia.36 Still, the work of the Settlement Commission was not deemed a total failure. On the contrary, in 1903 government officials suggested basing another settlement programme on the Prussian model – this time in Africa.

2. From Prussia to Southwest Africa

In 1903, the Colonial Division of the Foreign Office (Kolonialabteilung des Auswärtigen Amts) compiled a memorandum detailing a settlement plan for German Southwest Africa.37 Up to that point, there had been no colonial settlement policy to
Even though Adolf Lüderitz and Heinrich Vogelsang had called for the settlement of the colony from the start, the colonial administration in Berlin, as well as in Okahandja and later in Windhoek, did not pursue the issue before the mid-1890s. The only agency that actually tried to further the settlement of the colony was the Settlement Syndicate for German Southwest Africa that had been founded by members of the German Colonial Society. Lobbying groups like the Colonial Society and the Pan German League advocated settlement colonialism and called for a state-aided migration to the colonies, but the colonial administration in Berlin was reluctant to comply and only agreed to granting few settlers limited financial support. 

Provided with limited resources, Theodor Leutwein, the territorial captain and later governor of the colony, contented himself with trying to persuade discharged colonial soldiers to stay permanently. The government supplied cheap farmland, sometimes also with livestock and funds. By 1898, it was even giving land away for free. Very similar to the homestead legislation in North America, the only condition was that the former soldiers had to settle down and cultivate their land as farmers.

Around 1900, the situation changed – though not because of inner-imperial developments, but due to a shift in British colonial policies. Like the German colonial administration, the British had refrained from state-organised settlement schemes, albeit less for financial than for ideological reasons. According to the liberal orthodoxy that dominated colonial policy, migration was best left to market forces. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, imperialists began to advocate state-aided settlement programmes as part of systematic Empire development. Similar to the liberal discourse in Germany discussed above, emigrants were now viewed as «national asset[s]» that should be «openly and systematically channelled to Empire countries for reasons of racial solidarity, imperial political unity, imperial defence and Empire economic development». The South African War strengthened those positions and eventually resulted in the implementation of state-funded settlement schemes in Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

In August 1900, a Land Settlement Commission convened by order of Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain to investigate the possibilities for settling British soldiers in the newly occupied territories. In its report, which was presented to both

---

40 Kundrus, Moderne Imperialisten, 51–52.
Houses of Parliament one year later, the Commission declared the settlement of South Africa with British citizens a «most vital» issue. It even urged to pass an expropriation law to guarantee the acquisition of land for the plan. The German Colonial Paper (Deutsche Kolonialzeitung) discussed the report in a lengthy article, which the Colonial Division copied and sent to the local governments because of its «interesting and instructive content». Friedrich von Lindequist, who worked for the consulate general in Cape Town at the time, diligently reported on the progress of the South African settlement efforts and supplied the German colonial administration with copies of relevant documents. The Colonial Division replied that it was «following the local measures aimed at the settlement of South Africa with interest» since «[t]he systematic and state-aided settlement of German Southwest Africa with Germans [is] here currently the object of intense deliberations».

While the German colonial administration closely followed the British settlement schemes in South Africa and consequently revised its own position on state-aided migration, it did not simply adopt British policies. Instead, the Colonial Division’s memorandum of 1903 argues that German farmers were used to more stable conditions than the South African government offered its settlers: «If we want to win not adventurous, but risk-averse German settlers, we need to offer them first of all economic conditions that are easy to understand and clearly laid out. Therefore, it is necessary that those conditions are shaped similar to the ones at home.» Consequently, the Colonial Division suggested the establishment of a government agency modelled on the Prussian Settlement Commission. The agency was supposed to acquire land, recruit settlers, regulate the settlement process and manage the finances. Its director was to be a former member of the Prussian Settlement Commission who might not be familiar with «the African conditions», but would «exactly know the needs of the German settlers». The Colonial Division also suggested selling the land for an annual rent or installing other provisions to prevent land speculation similar to those in Posnania and West Prussia. In the end, none of those ideas would be realised.

Leutwein, who apparently had not been consulted for the memorandum, expressed his unease with the plan and argued that the situation in German Southwest Africa could not be compared to that in Posnania. There, he explained to the Colonial Division, one estate could be parcelled into approximately fifty farms under the supervision of one appointed manager, here one would have to settle ten

44 Colonial Division to Leutwein, 11.10.1901, BAB, R 1001, Nr. 8749, 16.
45 Lindequist to Colonial Division, 7.10.1902, BAB, R 1001, Nr. 8749, 127–131.
46 Colonial Division to Lindequist, n.d., BAB, R 1001, Nr. 1136, 139.
48 Ibid, 61.

https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2016-2-225
Das Erstellen und Weitergeben von Kopien dieses PDFs ist nicht zulässig.
families on ten different estates, requiring intermediate managers for all of them.\textsuperscript{49} Besides, the German parliament only approved a sum of 300,000 Mark, which was hardly enough money to copy the Prussian settlement scheme. Nevertheless, the Colonial Division insisted that one third of it should be used to establish the commission. With this small budget, the Division could not be tasked with too many duties. Instead, the officials in Berlin now declared vaguely it should «create the basis for a thriving development of our settlement system through careful study of the relevant conditions» and support the settlers «with words and deeds»\textsuperscript{50} The war that broke out between Germans and Ovahereros in 1904 brought those plans to an abrupt end and the Settlement Commission for German Southwest Africa was never established. Although Leutwein was not happy with the idea of the commission, he did agree to appoint a settlement commissioner. He suggested Hans von Tecklenburg, who had worked for the provincial government in Posnania before becoming a colonial official for the job. Instead, the Colonial Division appointed Paul Rohrbach – again without consulting the governor. In Germany, he was considered an expert on settlement issues because he had published works on Turkish settlement projects in Mesopotamia and on the Russian settlement programmes in Siberia.\textsuperscript{51} However, Rohrbach had never been to Africa or the German colonies. Because of that, he began his service with an extensive tour through German Southwest Africa and the Cape colony. His detailed reports, much more than any Prussian or South African precedents, determined the further course of German settlement policy in Southwest Africa. In those reports, Rohrbach argued that the colony was a place for wealthy farmers with means to buy and manage large estates. Giving financial support to settlers in order to further mass migration «would do little to serve the colony and its development».\textsuperscript{52} Once the government resumed its settlement efforts after the colonial war had ended in 1908, it did so under this premise.\textsuperscript{53} As a result, only about 15,000 whites lived in German Southwest Africa in 1913, even though approximately 6.4 million ha of government land had been sold or rented out.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{49} Leutwein to Colonial Division, 13.6.1903, BAB, R 151F, Nr. 82870 L.II.A.3; Vol. 1, 89–90.

\textsuperscript{50} Colonial Division to Leutwein, 20.4.1903, BAB, R 151F, Nr. 82870 L.II.A.3; Vol. 1, 77–78.


\textsuperscript{52} P. Rohrbach, «Bericht des Ansiedlungskommissars Dr. Paul Rohrbach [Abschrift für das RKA]», 16.8.1904, BAB, R 151F, Nr. 82870 L.II.A.3; Vol. 2, 46.

\textsuperscript{53} However, Governor Friedrich von Lindequist developed a settlement plan that allotted land within certain districts for smaller farms; his successors Bruno von Schuckmann and Theodor Seitz continued those projects. Lindequist to District Offices, 14.12.1905, National Archives of Namibia (NAN), BKE, Nr. B.10.G., vol. 1, 1.

3. Imperial Archive, Cloud or Formation?

The developments described above show that the history of settler colonialism within the German Empire was one of inter- and intra-imperial borrowings as well as adaptations and transformations. While scholars or politicians invested in the transfer of ideas and concepts from one place to another, it was generally the local or regional administration that determined the specific directions the policies took. Even if their superiors confronted them with strategies developed in and for other places (as was the case with Theodor Leutwein) or if they seemingly appropriated those ideas themselves (as Christoph von Tiedemann had done), they would not only adjust them to their own purpose, but would often also not acknowledge their foreign origins. Within the peripheries of the empire, those «men on the spot» generally held more authority than they would have in a metropolitan setting, but in order to strengthen their political position, they also had to prove their expertise by stressing the value of local versus metropolitan knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that the settlement programmes in the eastern Prussian provinces and German Southwest Africa differed considerably not only from the settlement acts in North America or British South Africa but also from each other.

One can further complicate the story by asking to what extent German settlement programmes influenced those of other empires. In Siberia, state-organised settlement started in 1896 after the completion of the first section of the Siberian railway. The programme was primarily devised by Anatoly Kumolzin, who headed the railway committee. Like the Prussian officials a few years earlier, Kumolzin based his plans on several surveys dealing with the homestead legislation in the United States and Canada, but he also studied various European colonial policies and the work of the Prussian Settlement Commission.\(^{55}\) However, even though the aims of the Russian and Prussian settlement programmes were similar – both were supposed to integrate imperial frontier space into the empire –, they differed noticeably in scale. While Posnania and Western Prussia attracted only a few thousand settlers, the migration to Siberia became one of the largest mass movements in the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.\(^{56}\)

The Prussian settlement scheme also served as an example to Japanese imperial officials. In 1903, Gotō Shinpei visited the settlement commission and a model village in Posnania. According to German sources, the governor came to «seek instructions» for the colonisation of Taiwan.\(^{57}\) Three years later, Gotō was among the first


\(^{56}\) Between the 1880s and the 1920s, around ten million people migrated eastwards to Siberia while at the same time about twenty million left Europe to cross the Atlantic. D. Hoerder, «Migrations and Belongings», in: E.S. Rosenberg (ed.), A World Connecting 1870–1945, London 2012, 435–589, 534–539.

politicians to promote Japanese settlement, although not in Taiwan but in Manchuria.\(^{58}\) However, in the end those settlement schemes were as locally specific as the German ones and there is no evidence that the latter influenced the former. Instead, the Japanese settlements in Hokkaido, Korea, North and South America, and Hawaii are more likely precedents for the Manchurian case. Louise Young also points out that it resembled settlement schemes in Siberia and Libya. Besides, the policies were closely linked to the migration restrictions that several American and Pacific settler societies imposed on Japanese migrants.\(^{59}\)

Following the transfer of settlement policies further beyond the prairie might lead to more captivating tales about multiple and sometimes complex intra- and interimperial connections, but it would not explain why Germany and other empires turned towards policies of state-organised settlement in the first place. In order to understand what provoked this turn at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, we need to investigate the shared assumptions about the relationship of space and population on which the settlement programmes were built. It is at this point that the analogy of an imperial cloud – rather than a colonial or imperial archive – might be helpful.

In his study on knowledge production within the British Empire, Thomas Richards uses the term «imperial archive» to describe the Victorians’ attempts to assemble imperial knowledge and organise it «into a coherent imperial whole».\(^{60}\) By accumulating facts and information about spaces and populations, British imperialists tried to gain control over the far reaches of the empire. Knowledge production thus became an essential part of imperial rule. According to Richards, the «imperial archive» is therefore not a fixed place, but rather a «fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire».\(^{61}\) Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski use the term «colonial archive» to explain how various colonial powers produced and exchanged knowledge about the colonised in order to exercise control over them, especially in the context of colonial warfare.\(^ {62}\) While Richards restricts the «imperial archive» to the British Empire, Gerwarth and Malinowski stress the exchange between colonial powers and their collective knowledge production. However, in the case of state-organised settlement colonialism, the term «imperial archive» seems to be more appropriate, since colonial as well as continental empires took part in the process of producing, collecting and sharing knowledge.

The problem with the idea of an «imperial archive» lies on its focus on systematic and organised knowledge production. The archive analogy suggests that scientists, experts and administrators stored their collective knowledge in physical form.

\(^{58}\) Young, Japan’s Total Empire, 310.
\(^{59}\) Ibid, 309–317.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 6.
(books, statistics, maps, administrative files, etc.) with the explicit intent to make this information accessible to contemporaries and future generations. It also implies that scholars today should be able to explain global processes like the spread of settler colonialism by accessing those physical remains and tracing the transfer of knowledge from one imperial context to another. However, as I have argued above, pointing out moments of transfer and adaptation does not suffice if we want to understand the imperial turn towards forms of state-sponsored settlement at the end of the nineteenth century. As imperial practices, those settlement programmes were not just based on shared knowledge, but also on «a shared analytical space for forms of rule», as Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan call it.63

Lorenzo Veracini includes this shared analytical space in his analysis of the «settler colonial archive». While he introduces this concept to distinguish settler colonialism from state-organised colonialism, his thoughts can also be applied to the imperial archive. Veracini’s archive is more than an ever-growing body of knowledge that is produced, collected and permanently stored with the intent to rule over people and places. Instead, it contains a «repertoire of images, notions, concepts, narratives, stereotypes and thoughts». This content is «constantly tested, updated, added to, in progress, and continuously transforming through time». Therefore, the settler imperial archive is «readily available to be mobilised in different contexts and for different objectives».64 By emphasising the vagueness and ambiguity of the archival content and its constant transformation, Veracini’s settler colonial archive resembles a digital rather than a traditional archive. «In the world of information technology», as Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook point out, the term «archive» is used either «to describe a machine-readable location for older data» or as a verb to refer to «the action of transferring computer data to a place for infrequently used files».65

Jonas Kreienbaum and Christoph Kamissek expand on the digital analogy by introducing the idea of an «imperial cloud».66 The term «cloud computing» describes the storage of data on or the execution of programmes from remote servers that are connected to local computers through a network, normally the internet. Various users can access and change the cloud’s content at any time and from anywhere. Consequently, a cloud is always less hierarchical, structured and permanent than an archive. In choosing «cloud computing» as an analogy to explain the spread of imperial practices and ideas, we can stress the fact that imperial knowledge and notions were not always organised systematically and could be transmitted in various ways and forms. Thus, the idea of an «imperial cloud» captures the ambiguities

66 Ch. Kamissek / J. Kreienbaum, «An Imperial Cloud?», in this volume.
of transimperial circulation and adaptation much better than the image of an «imperial archive». The analogy with modern technology also steers us away from the search for direct links between similar historical developments that can prove futile in cases where there just might not be enough evidence of connections or none at all. In order to understand historical developments within and between empires, it might not always be important to discover how exactly the settlement schemes were transferred from one locale to another, but rather to divulge the general conditions that enabled their transfer. Do we really need to know whether or not Tiedemann had read Sering’s article in order to understand the link between North American and German settlement policies? Furthermore, is the memorandum the Colonial Division sent to Theodor Leutwein in 1903 enough to prove the connection between eastern Prussia and Southwest Africa? The more relevant question seems to be why state authorities in all three locales (and in other empires) felt the need to invest in settlement schemes and how they implemented them. Within an imperial cloud, it is not the transfer that matters, but the reasons and the ways through which people access and change information.

However, there are some drawbacks to the imagery invoked by the idea of an imperial cloud. First, while the traditional archive is always a «source of knowledge and power», the digital archive and the cloud suggest «a neutral, even mechanical, accumulation of information for safekeeping». In utilising digital analogies to understand imperial histories, we therefore risk losing sight of the power imbalances that structured the exchanges between and within empires. Secondly, the image of an imperial cloud alludes to an almost global interconnectedness of the imperial world, where everyone from anywhere within empires could gain instantaneous access to imperial knowledge. One can argue that access to digital clouds can be restricted by administrators or the lack of computer technology, however, the technology is based on the assumption that users have access to the «World Wide Web» and that information can be shared with all of the users. Thinking about transimperial phenomena in this way suggests that globalisation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century produced «a single system of connections», a perspective that has been criticised by Frederick Cooper as misleading; it leads to the «assuming [of] coherence and direction, instead of probing [of] causes and processes».

In her 1995 study on colonial masculinity, Mrinalini Sinha presented the imperial social formation as another alternative to frame inner-imperial links. She applies the imperial social formation as a heuristic model to explain how colonial and British imperial masculinities were produced by local conditions and relations as well as broader economic, political and ideological structures at the same time. Stoler and
McGranahan reintroduced the concept in their volume, «Imperial Formations». In the introduction, the editors trace the French terms «colonie» and «colon» in order to point out «the broad scope of imperial comparison developed through the exchange of principles, practices, and technologies between empires in their metropolitan regions and far-flung domains». They suggest taking these connections seriously by attending «less to what empires are than to what they did and do, for these transformative practices altered their relations with other empires and with their own subject populations». Instead of studying empires as geopolitical entities, they argue for the analysis of imperial conditions and of the concrete economic, political, ideological and cultural practices, processes and «moving categories» that produced them.

I prefer this idea of an imperial formation because, unlike the cloud or the archive, it allows for an analysis that goes beyond tracing the transfer of ideas or practices from one place to another. If we want to study local policies, like the settlement schemes in eastern Prussia and Southwest Africa, as part of a settler imperial formation, we must not only ask where German officials became inspired and gained their knowledge, but also which macro-political structures and discourses advanced the spread of settlement schemes around the globe towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

4. Tracing the Settler Imperial Formation

While the German settlement schemes suggest that imperial practices were primarily shaped to accommodate specific local situations, they nevertheless seem to have been informed by a set of shared ideas. Officials in Berlin, Posnania and Windhoek drew on those ideas and situated their particular practices within a broader framework of imperial discourses and policies. Those discourses centred primarily on the changing concepts of «population» and «space».

Populations emerged not only «as an economic and political problem» but also as a resource towards the end of the eighteenth century. With the advent of modern state governments, bureaucrats and scholars began to concern themselves with birth, death and fertility rates, public health, nutrition and living conditions, as well as emigration and immigration patterns. This interest grew throughout the nineteenth century while economic, technological and political globalisation processes increased the growth and mobility of populations within and beyond Europe. Serfdom and slavery were officially abolished in many parts of the world, but at the same time new connections of labour and migration emerged. «Today one cannot tie the
population to a place by force and laws», argued Johannes von Miquel in 1874. «In my opinion, all efforts to restrict the freedom of movement are entirely futile.»\textsuperscript{74} He regarded emigration not as a passing phenomenon but as «a symbolic consequence of modernisation». However, like many of his contemporaries in Germany and other countries, Miquel believed that migration flows could be regulated and channelled.\textsuperscript{75} State-aided settlement emerged as one of the ways to do so. Through settlement programmes, governments tried to control the flow of people instead of leaving this process up to market forces, the migrants themselves or private agencies.

As concepts of population changed, so did ideas of space. At the heart of this shift was the emergence and ascendancy of what Charles Maier has described as «one of the most encompassing or fundamental socio-political trends of modern world development»:\textsuperscript{76} the principle of territoriality. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards territory was no longer envisaged «as an acquisition or as a security buffer but as a decisive means of power and rule».\textsuperscript{77} On the one hand, this new concept of territoriality led to a new imperial expansionism, best summed up by the geographer Friedrich Ratzel, who argued that the expansion of Lebensraum through territorial conquest was a natural process for states – they either grew or were doomed to vanish.\textsuperscript{78} On the other hand, the conquered spaces needed to be «saturated», as Maier calls it.\textsuperscript{79} Legal, administrative and military control no longer sufficed to uphold permanent state sovereignty over a territory, especially not on the edges of empires. The settlement programmes described above were all designed to secure imperial frontier spaces by populating them, generally with members of whichever group was considered the ethnic or racial elite. The new concept of territoriality turned the American West, Eastern Europe and Southern Africa, as well as Siberia and Manchuria, into spaces of struggle for political dominance through spatial means.\textsuperscript{80}

Spatial expansionism was also discussed as a means to alleviate tensions within colonising societies. Frontier life seemed to promise a renewal of moral values and a way of living that had been gradually replaced in the process of modernisation. Settlement discourse was suffused with agrarian romanticism, anti-urbanism and longings for a pre-industrial past. Rural populations, with their alleged ties to the land, their work ethic and their ability to endure hardship, came to be idealised as the antidote to the social unrest and instability associated with industrialisation and urbanisation. They were «stylised as the last stronghold of a healthy national identity in a society that was falling apart from within».\textsuperscript{81} This imagined peasant
community was a fantasy that had little to do with the realities of rural life. The agricultural sector in Europe (and other parts of the world) became increasingly industrialised throughout the nineteenth century and relied heavily on migrant contract labour.\textsuperscript{82} Nevertheless, agrarian romanticism influenced settlement policies not only in Germany but also in the United States and Japan.\textsuperscript{83}

Another aspect that advanced the emergence of settlement schemes in America, Africa and Asia was the overlap of imperial and national policies within empires. The modern nation state did not abruptly end the age of empires. On the contrary, both formations characterised the nineteenth century and especially the era of High Imperialism. One can classify the political entities that emerged in nationalising empires and imperialising nation states as Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Jörn Leonhard have proposed.\textsuperscript{84} However, in both cases, the transformation process led to tensions between imperial policies aimed at territorial expansion as well as the administration of difference and national policies with the goal to homogenise populations and fix spatial borders. One way some imperialists alleviated this tension was to reframe the nation in racial terms and turn it into the bearer of imperial expansion. Settlement policies played a key role in this process because they turned migrants into colonisers, who expanded the empire while remaining members of the national collective. As such, they were assigned the ability to turn imperial frontier spaces into a «Heimat abroad».\textsuperscript{85} «[O]ur colonial policy strives almost exclusively at bringing race and blood into foreign countries and plant our «Heimat» and language there»,\textsuperscript{86} argued the pan-German activist Theodor Reismann-Grone in 1905. Those ideas were not very far from those of John Robert Seeley, who claimed that British colonisation had effectively extended the boundaries of the state. His «conception of «Greater Britain» was a key ideological construction which fed into the self-image of the British as an imperial race»,\textsuperscript{87} explains Keith Williams.

Within the logic of imperial expansionism and racialised nationalism, all people without territorial political structures were expected either to «succumb to modern
states»

or to disappear. As an article in the Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung expressed in 1901: «[T]he land, of course, must be transferred from the hands of the natives to those of the whites, [this] is the object of colonisation in the territory. The land shall be settled by whites. So the natives must give way and either become servants of the whites or withdraw.» This reasoning was generally applied to non-Europeans like Native Americans and most Africans, but it could be extended to other stateless people like Jews and Poles as well. As citizens of European countries, the latter were generally protected by law to some degree, but had to prove themselves worthy of this protection through assimilation. In contrast, non-Europeans were permanently excluded from the main privileges of European capitalist modernity; political self-determination and property possession. Within the logic of territoriality, their expropriation could be easily legitimised. Within empires, there was little room for stateless groups who were not deemed able or willing to be integrated into an imperial labour force. Not only the Native Americans and First Nations of North America, but also the Witbooi-Nama and various San communities in German Southwest Africa, were considered «vanishing peoples», whose expropriation and eventual cultural and physical destruction were legitimised as part of a process of natural extinction.

The notion that migration flows could be directed to certain areas, the principle of territoriality, agrarian romanticism, the tensions between imperialism and nationalism, and the idea of vanishing people all made up essential elements of the settler imperial formation. Together they served as a backdrop for the transfer of policies within and between empires. All imperial powers were affected by the changing concepts of space and population. However, the shifting set of beliefs, interpretations and paradigms had only little influence on the specific forms that the settlement schemes eventually took. As Stoler and McGranahan argue, imperial agents did model their practices on other policies, but «their modelling was less a wholesale replication of practices than a selective bricolage», where practices were transformed and converted in different places to meet different ends.

The state settlement programmes analysed in this article are very good examples of how this «modular modelling» worked. Although they never seemed to measure up to the expectations of a particular local or imperial government, others were continued by

88 Maier, «Consigning the Twentieth Century», 819.
the colonisers to try and improve the situation. Thus, despite the local discrepancies, state-aided settlement became a shared imperial project.

5. Epilogue: The Little House beyond the Prairie

While the idea of government-aided settlement was picked up by various empires throughout the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the story of Laura Ingalls’ frontier childhood also circulated and under rather peculiar circumstances. In 1949, nine years after its first publication, one of the Little House books, The Long Winter, was simultaneously released in Germany and Japan. The US State Department arranged the translation at the request of General Douglas MacArthur, whose wife, Jean MacArthur, had suggested to include the book among the body of literature that the American military would introduced to both countries as part of the post-war re-education efforts. According to Anita Clair Fellman, German and Japanese readers related well to Wilder’s book, because the Ingalls’s first harsh winter in Dakota «described their deprivation during the war with the same sense of relief and pleasure at the end of the ordeal. The emphasis in the book on frugality, hard work, and deferred gratification met their post-war task of rebuilding when the country was very poor».

The American authorities probably chose this book for a second reason. As part of the re-education programmes, literature like Wilder’s The Long Winter was supposed to communicate new political values to the German and Japanese public, especially to young people. To the MacArthurs, the little house series obviously represented American democratic values. It is most likely that their choice was grounded in the idea – first formulated by Jackson Frederick Turner in 1893 – that the frontier had been the true birthplace of American democracy. As Richard White points out, Turner’s work was based heavily on popular representations that negated the violence of the settlement process, and instead depicted the frontier as a place of equal opportunity and progress. While the «frontier thesis» had come under academic criticism in the 1930s and 1940s, popular culture still embraced the myth of peaceful conquest and democratic values rooted in frontier culture. In Wilder’s books, the American West was not a place of aggressive expansionism, but one where modest


farmers struggled to build up a just and egalitarian society. It is therefore not surprising that the US authorities in occupied Germany and Japan included *The Long Winter* in their list of eligible books. They failed to recognise, however, that settlement discourse in Germany and Japan had never encompassed democratic ideals. While German liberals in the middle of the nineteenth century might have seen the American frontier as an example of how national, expansionist and democratic ideals could come together, German imperialist, towards the end of the century justified their settlement projects solely in nationalistic and expansionist terms. In Germany and Japan, frontiers did not serve as a model for successful democratisation. Instead, settler imperialism became an integral part of fascist politics in both countries during the 1930s and the 1940s. The American post-war authorities might have wanted to introduce German and Japanese readers to the little house series in order to democratising them. However, given the fact that they recommended literature that idealised settler colonialism in two countries that had planned and partially executed state-organised settlement schemes on a grand scale, this was a highly ambiguous endeavour.

**ABSTRACT**

**Beyond the Prairie. Adopting, Adapting and Transforming Settlement Policies within the German Empire**

The article investigates the emergence of state-sponsored settlement schemes in various empires throughout the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The main focus lies on the German Empire and how settlement policies were introduced to and implemented within it. Focusing on inter- and inner-imperial borrowings, as well as adaptations and transformations, the article explores whether or not and to what extent, the inner colonisation of the eastern Prussian provinces was influenced by North American settlement schemes like the United States Homestead Act of 1862 and the Canadian homestead legislation of 1872. It also takes a close look at the development of policies within Germany’s so-called settlement colony, German Southwest Africa: a process that was shaped by the Prussian precedent to some degree, but even more so by British settlement policies in South Africa. However, even though scholars and politicians were engaged in the transfer of ideas and concepts from one locale to another, it was primarily the administration that determined the directions the policies took. It is therefore not surprising that the settlement programmes in the eastern Prussian provinces and German Southwest Africa differed considerably not only from the settlement acts in North America or British South Africa, but also from each other. This article argues that, in order to fully grasp the emergence of various state-aided settlement programmes within and beyond the German Empire, we have to look beyond inter- or intra-imperial transfers and analyse the broader concepts of space and population that informed those programmes.

Dörte Lerp
Universität zu Köln, Historisches Institut
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
D–50923 Köln
dlerp@uni-koeln.de