

Moyd, Michelle R.: *Violent Intermediaries. African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8214-2089-8; 304 S.

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In „Violent Intermediaries,“ Michelle Moyd focuses on one particular social and professional group in colonial German East Africa, namely the askari of the *Schutztruppe*, i.e. the African soldiers of the German colonial army. As highly controversial figures, askari were and have been largely misrepresented by their contemporaries as well as by later generations. Tanzanians and African historians have considered them traitors, collaborators, and brutal henchmen of the colonial state, while German colonialists and colonial apologists have portrayed them as loyal and obedient servants in the colonial army, who famously stayed at the side of General Lettow-Vorbeck even until after World War I had officially ended. Moyd convincingly argues that both of these portrayals are misleading and superficial, and the book is an attempt to write an alternative historical account by way of conceiving of askari not only as professional soldiers but also as fathers, husbands, heads of households, and individual men with personal goals and desires that were not always congruent with colonial policies and imaginations. According to Moyd, askari soldiers joined the *Schutztruppe* and acted in highly violent ways because it helped them to establish themselves as „big men“ in their social worlds, which consisted of askari villages where wives, askariboys, and other dependents lived alongside African soldiers.

In five thematically organized chapters, Moyd describes how African men became soldiers and performed roles as both military and social actors. Throughout the book, she consciously refuses to strictly separate African soldiers' professional and personal lives. This allows her to outline African soldiers' roles in creating and shaping the colonial German East African state and society in new ways. As „agents of everyday colonialism,“ askari not only fought in the battlefield but they also undertook more mun-

dane activities such as policing and administrative work, which were essential for the nascent colonial state. In addition, askari exposed relatively large numbers of Africans to colonial sensibilities and practices as they and their various household members lived in so-called askari villages, which were often located outside of the actual *maboma* (military and administrative stations). Due to askari's spending power, askari villages developed into bustling micro-economies attracting traders as well as local entrepreneurs and artisans. During military parades askari helped to propagate the power of the colonial state to crowds of Africans, while the subsequent *beni ngoma* dances served as fora for askari to appropriate colonial military emblems and insignia into local cultural settings, thus providing the grounds for alternative readings and interpretations of colonial signs and symbols.

Moyd's insistence on viewing askari not only as soldiers but also as men with social lives and aspirations that transcended their professional activities in *maboma*, on expeditions, and on the battlefield is refreshing and insightful. It allows her to portray askari as gendered individuals, who were driven by the desire to achieve and maintain the status as „big men“ in their social worlds. However, in contrast to Moyd's arguments about askari's roles as agents of everyday colonialism described above, her claims about African soldiers' „superiority complexes“ (pp. 91, 188), their binary worldviews dividing other people into „civilized“ and „uncivilized“ (p. 130), and their ever-present „big men“ aspirations are only scarcely supported by the source material. In fact, the author herself admits that her sources did not provide her with an access to askari „voices“ (p. 22). Even if Moyd's arguments seem plausible, the sources at hand provide little evidence to formulate convincing arguments about African soldiers' gendered subjectivities and their violent behavior, which, as Moyd argues, mainly derived from askari's aspirations to become big men. As a matter of fact, one of the two askari „voices“ available (although European-mediated), Abdulcher Farrag, never became a big man as he failed to marry and become the head of a household until his death

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(pp. 49–59). On the other hand, Moyd's emphasis on askari's sense of masculinity and respectability downplays the role German officers played in inciting and encouraging askari's violent behavior as professional soldiers of the *Schutztruppe*. In fact, she uncritically reproduces German officers' statements, which described askari abuses as unwanted but difficult to limit and control (p. 184).

Carefully theorizing masculinities might have helped Moyd deal with these challenges of interpretation but her understanding of askari manhood seems to be based on the assumption that African soldiers defined their masculinity mainly in contrast to the women present in their social worlds (pp. 125–126). Certainly, however, askari formulated and acted on their ideas of masculinity not only in contrast to women but also vis-à-vis other men in a more complex gender hierarchy including askariboys, porters, and German officers, the ultimate „big men“ and patrons. Again, Moyd's strict focus on African soldiers and their agency leads her to forget who was really calling the shots and it inadvertently downplays the responsibility Germans officers had for *Schutztruppe* activities and practices. When explaining askari's exceptionally violent behavior, for instance, Moyd attribute little explanatory weight to the process of socialization during recruitment and military training, which aimed at creating new askari selves in which the use of violence played a constitutive role. At one point, Moyd seems to insinuate that the use of scorched earth tactics applied during the Maji Maji war were inspired by long-established African methods of war (p. 120) rather than by German officers' orders and tactics.

Overall, „Violent Intermediaries“ is a highly readable monograph offering an empathetic view on the stigmatized African soldiers of the colonial army in German East Africa. Most convincingly, Moyd draws on the German *Alltagsgeschichte* to describe askari as „agents of everyday colonialism,“ thus highlighting askari's roles as extraordinarily important builders of the colonial state not only as soldiers but also as policemen, tax collectors, and bureaucrats, thus truly making *maboma* „nodes of authority“ (p. 163)

of the German colonial state. Furthermore, Moyd outlines the commonalities of the earlier caravan trade with the *Schutztruppe*, one of these commonalities being the presence of African women, who played an integral part in the workings of the *Schutztruppe* as they prepared food for askari soldiers and were responsible for their „comforts of home.“ In sum, „Violent Intermediaries“ portrays African soldiers as both military and social actors, who violently contributed to the building of the German colonial state because their occupation allowed them to pursue their personal goals in life. As such, students and scholars interested in colonial armies and in German colonialism stand to gain the most from reading „Violent Intermediaries“.

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