

Violent Intermediaries

*African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday
Colonialism in German East Africa*



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INTRODUCTION

Reconstructing Askari Realities

IN LATE September 1917 a company of African colonial soldiers operating behind Allied lines in the northern part of German East Africa reached the limit of their willingness to continue fighting under their commander, a German naval engineer named Bockmann.¹ Weeks of successive forced marches through the arid Maasai Steppe had left the soldiers, known as *askari*, undernourished, ill, and “at the end of their strength.”² Indiscipline began to manifest among the troops, with soldiers and porters deserting in large numbers as the company continued to march. At some point, Bockmann promised his remaining exhausted soldiers rest, but with dwindling numbers of porters on hand, he instead ordered his soldiers to help move the company’s matériel to an overnight campsite.³ Indignant over this perceived slight, the soldiers then leveled a series of complaints against Bockmann and the German colonial army, the *Schutztruppe*.⁴ They complained that he lacked *nguvu*—Kiswahili for strength or hardiness. They were incredulous that they would ever receive long-overdue back pay from their German employers, who appeared to the askari to be in disarray. At the same time, they seemed convinced that transferring their loyalty to the British colonial army, the King’s African Rifles (KAR), would automatically bring them higher rank and lighter work. They summed up their feelings of anger, hopelessness, and fear in one simple, but remarkable sentence: “We don’t want to die for nothing.”⁵ A bewildered Bockmann dismissed his soldiers’ concerns as “inane”

and instead offered them what he called a “genuinely well-meaning speech” as a salve. But the damage was done. The following night, four more askari deserted the company.⁶

Not long after these desertions, Bockmann surrendered the remainder of his company to the British, and they all became prisoners of war. His British captors separated him from his troops and transported him to the town of Arusha to receive medical treatment. The next day, he looked out the window of his room and became “an eyewitness to how [his] askari, without exception, enlisted as English askari.” Only his old senior askari, Majaliwa—a Schutztruppe member since the organization’s founding, in 1889—refused to sign on with the British. Disabused of any naive ideas about his former soldiers’ loyalty to the German Empire, Bockmann spent the rest of the war in captivity in Tanga, Dar es Salaam, and Alexandria, while his remaining askari went to Nairobi as “uniformed KAR.”⁷

The simple but powerful declaration “we don’t want to die for nothing” might easily have come from any number of wartime contexts in history. Certainly the notion that soldiers volunteer for military service, thereby risking injury or death, for patriotic, nationalistic, or civic reasons is commonplace in the United States and Great Britain, for example. Even nation-states that use conscription to populate their armies use the language of shared sacrifice for the common good to justify recruitment of young men and women to the military. Bockmann’s askari, however, linked their continued willingness to risk their lives in the Schutztruppe to their immediate social and material circumstances. Thus, in criticizing Bockmann’s lack of *nguvu* and inability to protect their status as African colonial elites, they articulated their perception that the Schutztruppe, and German colonial rule itself, had become feeble. One historian aptly labels this aspect of askari experience in World War I “the loss of the aura of the big man.”⁸ The soldiers’ disbelief that Germany would ever make restitution to them underlined this point further, as did the idea that the KAR would offer them much better opportunities. At the heart of these complaints, and inherent in the decisions of Bockmann’s askari to desert the company, lay an assessment that the Germans had proven themselves irresponsible as patrons to their askari clients by not caring for their needs and not respecting their status vis-à-vis those the askari perceived as beneath them, such as porters.⁹ In short, Bockmann’s askari viewed

their commander's masculinity and abilities as an effective patron—his *nguvu*—as compromised. They therefore looked to the new regional power brokers, the British, for patronage in the rapidly shifting political and military environment World War I unleashed in East Africa.

This example would be far less remarkable had the Schutztruppe's askari previously shown tendencies to acts of collective indiscipline, strikes, or mutinies. Far more serious acts of indiscipline, strikes, or mutinies occurred in British and French contexts, for example, than in the German East African case.¹⁰ These can be explained by variations in conditions of colonial soldiers' employment, which directly affected soldiers' willingness to fight in various contexts. Such conditions included rates and frequency of pay; recruitment terms or lack thereof; the presence or absence of women; soldiers' assessments of risk during combat and other violent confrontations; and the extent to which officers recognized the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate treatment of their soldiers. In many ways, then, how officers treated their soldiers had much to do with whether or not the soldiers rebelled.

But apart from a few notable incidents in the Schutztruppe's formative years (1890–95), when inexperienced or reckless Schutztruppe officers made errors in judgment that cost them unit discipline and obedience, askari lived up to their reputations as dedicated Schutztruppe soldiers.¹¹ The absence of significant acts of mass indiscipline sets the Schutztruppe's experience apart from the experiences of other colonial armies, and especially from other British colonial forces operating in East Africa during the same period.¹² The hardships of the latter half of the East African campaign of World War I revealed, however, the fragility of this apparent dedication to duty. More pointedly, it revealed the extent to which askari loyalty was tied to the ability of the Schutztruppe to maintain its soldiers' status as respectable men, or at least the ability to restore them to that status once the war ended. Bockmann's askari recognized their precarious future far earlier than others whose circumstances, while still harsh, had not yet caused them to abandon their commanders for lacking *nguvu*. Most notably, the approximately twelve hundred askari who surrendered alongside Schutztruppe commander General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in late November 1918 seem not to have expected defeat, at least in part because they perceived the general as a strong leader and patron until the very end.¹³ They believed, in short, that Lettow-Vorbeck would take

care of them. Although it took many years, he ultimately did convince the German government to pay the ex-askari what they were owed for their wartime service, thus at least fiscally acknowledging what Germans who had worked in the colonies already knew—that German colonialism in East Africa could not have existed without the askari.¹⁴

This book tells the story of how the askari helped make the colonial state in German East Africa. They did so not just as soldiers who carried out the violent conquest of German East Africa, but in their everyday activities as tax collectors, messengers, escorts, guards, and executioners that shaped the character of colonialism in German East Africa between 1890 and 1918. In these acts of everyday colonialism, askari routinely interfaced with East African colonial subjects and European colonizers. Such interactions placed them in the category of “intermediaries” that historians have recently used to describe other kinds of African colonial employees, such as clerks, interpreters, and teachers.¹⁵ This book thus illuminates the microprocesses involved in the making of colonialism and empire from the vantage point of the African soldiers and agents of colonialism who carried them out.

The askari enabled state making in German East Africa through their efforts to fashion themselves as local “big men”¹⁶ (see fig. 1). They aspired to and pursued a kind of respectability, or “a right to respect that individuals believed they possessed but could enjoy only if it was admitted by others.”¹⁷ The askari version of respectability was characterized by the accumulation of large households, herds of livestock, and the ability to act as wealthy patrons and power brokers to others. In the process of becoming big men, they helped tie increasing numbers of East Africans to German colonial state-making projects. On one hand, these pursuits provided some measure of domestic security, kinship, and belonging to vulnerable, opportunistic, or aspirational individuals who became dependents in askari households and communities.¹⁸ On the other hand, the askari took advantage of their positions of authority to benefit themselves, most notably through the capture of women and children and the expropriation of livestock and goods.¹⁹ Some of these actions they carried out in the course of warfare, but many others were integral to the quotidian interactions that characterized German colonial administration. As the sizes of their households increased, they also had the potential to attract new dependents in need of the security afforded by kinship or clients in need of economic resources. The



FIGURE 1. This photo, taken sometime between 1907 and 1914 by Schutztruppe lieutenant colonel Kurt von Schleinitz, bears the caption “Sultan Moham. Achmed with his wives.” The title “Sultan” perhaps indicates that at the time Schleinitz took the photo, Mohammed Achmed was a veteran askari, and that he had assumed a local leadership role in the colonial administration. His uniform shows that he had achieved the rank of sol, the highest possible for rank-and-file askari, and that he was highly decorated. His rank and decorations suggest that he was Sudanese. Women dressed in brightly colored cloth wraps known as *kanga* surround him, providing visible markers of his household’s size, its ability to acquire prestige goods, and its cosmopolitanism. In this photograph, Mohammed Achmed exudes the status of “big man” that aligned askari household interests with those of the colonial state. *Used with permission of the Photo Archive of the German Colonial Society, University Library, Frankfurt am Main.*

soldiers’ aspirations to become big men through colonial military service led to their participation in coercive and violent activities that simultaneously served their own interests and those of the German colonial state.²⁰ This mutually beneficial relationship between the askari and the German colonial state, as mediated by German Schutztruppe officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), facilitated colonial rule throughout most of the German period in East Africa. Following the askari through their everyday lives as soldiers, colonial agents, householders, and community members shows the “working of the colonial state” from the perspective of those who performed its most mundane bureaucratic tasks, its

most spectacular acts of violence, and a range of state-making activities that fell somewhere between these two poles on a spectrum of tactics used to secure and maintain colonial rule.²¹

THE ASKARI BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY

German colonialism in East Africa, like other European colonial projects on the continent in the late nineteenth century, formally began with the violence of military conquest. In May 1889 a small and hastily assembled provisional army of African soldiers under German officers' leadership stormed and overwhelmed a fort located outside the East African town of Bagamoyo, on the coast of what is today mainland Tanzania. The fort belonged to the prominent planter and caravan trader Bushiri bin Salim, whose allies and followers had been at war with the German East Africa Company (DOAG), the dominant European commercial and protocolonial concern in the area, since December 1888.²² The defeat of Bushiri's fort gave the German army, called the *Wissmanntruppe* after its founder, Major Hermann von Wissmann, its first victory over the coastal leaders, and marked the beginning of the German Empire's intention to effectively occupy this portion of East Africa in order to establish formal colonial rule.²³ It took until March 1891 for all the coastal leaders to submit to German authority. Meanwhile, the German colonial army received the designation Imperial Protectorate Force for German East Africa (Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika) from the Reichstag in 1889.²⁴ The Schutztruppe eventually conquered the coastal strongholds and then pressed into the territory's interior, where it spent most of the 1890s trying to establish military and administrative control over the territory.²⁵ The Schutztruppe's use of extreme violence against East African polities existed alongside negotiated settlements and alliances with local leaders and decision makers who opted for these tactics as the best hope for securing "the greatest possible independence and power" in the face of the Schutztruppe's encroachment in the region in the 1890s.²⁶ Violence—understood here both as physical infliction of pain or death as well as "assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim"—existed in many forms and to varying degrees of intensity throughout the entire period of German colonial rule in East Africa.²⁷ During the Maji Maji war (1905–7), the Schutztruppe responded to what it imagined as a widespread coordinated anticolonial rebellion

with scorched earth tactics that took the familiar methods and effects of the colonial warfare of the 1890s to shocking new levels of devastation, especially for the inhabitants of Tanzania's southern highlands.²⁸

German rule in East Africa also came to its formal conclusion following sustained violence, this time deployed by European colonial armies against one other, but with many of the same deadly effects on East African peoples as Maji Maji had wrought just over a decade earlier. Two weeks after the armistice that ended World War I in Europe, Lettow-Vorbeck surrendered to the Allies at Abercorn, Northern Rhodesia. German East Africa was the last of Germany's four African colonies to fall to Allied armed forces during World War I.²⁹ The official Schutztruppe historian of the East African campaign, Lieutenant Ludwig Boell, described the East African campaign as "a wrestling match that held the whole world in shock and disbelief."³⁰ Boell's hyperbole notwithstanding, the campaign indeed featured elements that lent themselves easily to future popular constructions as a rollicking adventure story, in which Lettow-Vorbeck and his loyal askari overcame all manner of hardship to remain "undefeated" on the battlefield.³¹ Lettow-Vorbeck's strategy from the war's outset had been to engage as many Allied troops as possible in East Africa so that they could not fight in Europe or elsewhere. Surrounded on all sides by colonies belonging to Allied nations, and their armies of askari, the Schutztruppe found itself in a difficult position. Because of its inability to receive reinforcements, supplies, or provisions from outside, Lettow-Vorbeck's army undertook a mobile "hit-and-run" campaign that destroyed lives and livelihoods across parts of eastern and southeastern Africa.³² "Lettow-Vorbeck's brilliant campaign," John Iliffe pointedly observed, "was the climax of Africa's exploitation: its use as a mere battlefield."³³ Some three hundred thousand civilians died in German East Africa "as a direct result of the German authorities' conduct of the war," and that number does not include those conscripted as porters, whose mortality rates were notoriously high.³⁴

Despite these sobering statistics, until quite recently accounts of the campaign tended to emphasize not the destruction it caused but the exploits of Lettow-Vorbeck and his "loyal askari." At the beginning of World War I, there were approximately 4,700 askari (2,540 in the Schutztruppe, 2,160 in the *Polizeitruppe*).³⁵ During the war, the Schutztruppe's numbers swelled to about 14,600. Only some twelve hundred askari and three

thousand others, including dependents and porters, attended Lettow-Vorbeck's surrender in November 1918.³⁶ Out of that event, colorfully described by witnesses to the scene, a persistent myth about Lettow-Vorbeck's "loyal askari" gathered strength, taking on a life of its own through the 1920s, 1930s, and beyond.³⁷ Lettow-Vorbeck himself fueled the myth in his numerous publications, which began appearing almost immediately after the war ended.³⁸ Heinrich Schnee, the last colonial governor of German East Africa, also published a number of texts after the war that lauded the askari, and by extension all Tanzanians, for their ostensible loyalty to the German cause.³⁹

Lettow-Vorbeck's army of askari, having held out against the numerically superior and better-equipped Allied forces for more than four years despite their ultimate defeat, thus became enduring symbols of past German military prowess and imperial power. Representations of the askari in their khaki uniforms and imperial German military insignia circulated widely in post-World War I German popular culture, seemingly needing little introduction or explanation to the German reading, viewing, and consuming publics.⁴⁰

Until recently, secondary literature about the askari has tended to mirror two kinds of historical writing that emerged after German colonial rule ended, in 1918. In the interwar period a small but vociferous group of German colonial apologists advocated steadily for the return of Germany's former African colonies, which the 1919 Versailles settlement had turned into League of Nations mandate territories administered by former Allied nations.⁴¹ Colonial advocates used the idea of the loyal askari in their propaganda campaigns against what they called the *Kolonialschuldlüge* (colonial guilt lie), a subset of the broader *Kriegsschuldlüge* (war guilt lie), which foregrounded Germany's postwar victimization at the hands of the Allies. They used the loyal-askari image to stand in for all Africans living in the former German colonies, arguing that they all eagerly awaited the return of German colonial rule.⁴² The absurdity of this kind of claim, which relied on self-representations of Germany as a "model colonizer" that deserved to remain part of the community of empires, did nothing to prevent the loyal-askari myth from flavoring anglophone military historiography. This historiography painted askari's service as uncomplicated, loyal, and even heroic.⁴³ Such representations often featured alongside the almost uniformly heroic ones of General Lettow-Vorbeck, who was hailed in Germany

and elsewhere as a brilliant strategist, tactician, leader of men, and gentleman.⁴⁴ For many years, these depictions of the askari as doggedly loyal soldiers of German colonialism received surprisingly little scrutiny, even though ample evidence pointed to a more complicated story. More recently scholars have offered subtler explanations for how and why less than 15 percent of Schutztruppe askari (2,000 of 14,600) managed to stay with Lettow-Vorbeck until he surrendered.⁴⁵ Still, the question of what motivated the askari to fight for Germany has remained largely unexplored.

Additionally, colonial-apologist and military-history narratives that celebrated the askari as skillful, brave, and dedicated soldiers of the German Empire obscured their involvement in the everyday and extraordinary violence that occurred in German East Africa. Colonial apologists, often former administrators or soldiers who had lived in East Africa, promulgated this narrative as a way of upholding the image of Germany as a model colonizer.⁴⁶ Their publications became source material for future military historians, who focused on the East African campaign of World War I to the exclusion of the history of other colonial wars in German East Africa. The askari emerged from this historiography with uncomplicated reputations as good soldiers who executed their duties in exemplary fashion, despite the terrible destruction they caused in East Africa during the entire colonial period.

Tanzanian nationalist scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s used the askari to make quite a different point about the colonial past. Nationalist historians from Tanzania and Europe (especially Great Britain and, strikingly, the German Democratic Republic, where many colonial archival documents were held) set about the task of creating a “usable past” for the newly independent nation-state. On the canvas representing Tanzania’s historical path to independence, they painted the askari and other colonial employees as collaborators, a category that almost spoke for itself. In this historiography, the askari figured as “bands of mercenaries” who fought for the Germans simply because they paid well.⁴⁷ They were the perpetrators of countless acts of coercion and violence against East Africans, and thus the categorical enemies of the protonational heroes who had resisted German colonial rule during the Maji Maji war and other anticolonial conflicts. They featured as faceless menaces who, like locusts, consumed or destroyed everything in their paths. Nationalist historians prioritized research on

East African resistance to colonial authority, and virtually ignored the histories of African agents of colonialism like the askari, who were so obviously situated on the wrong side of history.⁴⁸ While their emphasis on creating a usable past is certainly understandable, it has also meant that historians who came after them tended to view the German colonial period in East Africa through the prisms of African independence and the Cold War. Neither of these perspectives left much room for studying colonial agents like the askari beyond stereotypes.

Between these two modes of viewing the askari, however, lie valuable insights into the relationship between soldiering, violence, everyday colonialism, and empire, as well as the relationships between Germans and East Africans that molded colonialism's local histories and metropolitan reverberations.⁴⁹ This book sits at the intersection of a few distinct historiographies and, through the askari, brings these fields into conversation in order to suggest new critical and methodological paths to understanding how colonialisms worked in practice.

AFRICAN COLONIAL SOLDIERS: HISTORIES AND HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Primarily a work of African history, this book engages the extensive research done by social and cultural historians of Africa that has dramatically expanded the state of knowledge about African colonial militaries over the last two decades.⁵⁰ A number of striking commonalities among recruits emerge from the historiography on African colonial armies, and my findings on the Schutztruppe askari largely coincide with other scholars' research in this area. First, colonial officers' recruitment practices were infused with, and shaped by, a variant of racial thought that ranked different ethnic groups as "martial" or "warlike" based on characteristics that generally had far more to do with how colonizers viewed themselves as soldiers than they did with any objective truths about one or another group's actual suitability for soldiering. These "martial race" theories often had significant effects on how young men came to understand themselves in relationship to colonial regimes, and the theories sometimes instantiated self-fulfilling cycles by which young men of certain ethnic groups came to elevate "martial" identities over preexisting ones.⁵¹ This is not to argue that colonial officers' and African soldiers' ideas about what it meant to be a martial race coincided. To the contrary, Timothy Parsons has convincingly argued for British

East Africa that British and Kamba notions of “what constituted a martial race” differed quite dramatically: “To British officers, soldiers from a martial race were masculine, tough, and above all, obedient. Most Kamba askaris, however, believed that their status as a martial race enhanced their status in colonial society.” And most important, “they expected specific considerations from the colonial government in return for their service.”⁵² Such tensions between how colonial officers and African troops interpreted soldiering and its value within colonial society had meaningful consequences for how these armies were built and maintained.

Second, in conjunction with martial race ideologies, colonizers employed a spectrum of recruitment practices, ranging from forced conscription to the use of incipient market forces to attract soldiers to colonial armies. These patterns affected how colonial armies developed in different parts of Africa, under different colonialisms, and in different periods. Diverse recruitment practices sometimes even existed side by side during the conquest phase, as Myron Echenberg’s seminal work has shown for French West Africa.⁵³ French recruitment in western Africa, and British recruitment practices in northeast and eastern Africa, also highlight the degree to which early colonial armies relied on the conscription of soldiers with slave or otherwise “unfree” backgrounds.⁵⁴ In other cases, like German East Africa, colonial officers attracted pools of men to the *Schutztruppe* through the promise of regular and substantial pay, prestige, and opportunities for upward mobility provided by allying with German colonizers. Still, many of the men they recruited in 1889 to fight the coastal war in German East Africa also had “slave soldier” or otherwise unfree backgrounds, even if their subsequent employment and good treatment in the *Schutztruppe* somewhat dissipated their associations with these past histories.

Third, most colonial officers ultimately conceded, however grudgingly, that soldiers’ household members had to be included in garrison, and often enough, campaign life.⁵⁵ In so doing, they acknowledged two vital facts of colonial army life that also reveal much about the nature of the colonial state. To begin with, the presence of soldiers’ dependents in army communities helped increase the ability of local colonial administrations to cheaply mobilize labor, since they performed much of the intensive day-to-day physical labor that kept soldiers’ households and military stations functional.⁵⁶ Moreover, in many African contexts,

the size of a man's household was one of the most visible and recognizable markers of his social rank. For colonial officers to deny their troops the ability to display their socioeconomic standing would also have been to undercut the ties that bound African troops to colonial armies. This was a risk that most European officers would have judged imprudent in light of the fragility of most colonial undertakings, especially in the formative years of European imperial rule in Africa.⁵⁷ Finally, there was a direct link between soldiers' morale and the extent to which they could access the "comforts of home"—including prepared food, companionship, and sex—whether in garrison or on the march.⁵⁸

The processes by which colonial authorities came to include soldiers' household members—that is, women, children, and other dependents of colonial soldiers—in their administrative and spatial arrangements unfolded gradually, and in response to their troops' demands for the "flavor of domesticity" in army life.⁵⁹ These processes developed in conjunction with those of the colonial armies themselves, with armies of African auxiliaries or company retainers being replaced by formal, state-supported colonial armies. For example, French colonial officers established the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1857 in French West Africa, and between about 1860 and 1880, they came to view the women with whom the soldiers established domestic and sexual relationships increasingly as integral and vital to the garrison communities.⁶⁰ For the *Wissmanntruppe* in German East Africa, on the other hand, the process happened with great rapidity. In 1889, when they undertook the conquest of German East Africa, they were latecomers to the imperial enterprise, and establishing a reliable colonial military posthaste was essential. By allowing their Sudanese recruits to bring their families with them to German East Africa right away, they gestured their recognition of the value of allowing the soldiers' families to accompany them. In so doing, the *Wissmanntruppe* established a precedent that informed *Schutztruppe* practices for the rest of the organization's existence.

Fourth, existing historiography reveals that soldiers had limits to their willingness to fight for colonial goals.⁶¹ Although European officers routinely labeled their soldiers loyal in public discourses, a closer look reveals that African soldiers' loyalties had far more to do with their own understandings of social hierarchies and relationships of mutual obligation than with any abstract loyalties to European causes or

governments, especially in the formative stages of colonial rule.⁶² By interpreting the histories of colonial militaries through the lens of African social relations, this scholarship, as well as my own, demonstrates that African colonial soldiers actively participated in local sociocultural hierarchies, networks, and practices alongside their roles as the blunt instruments of the colonial state's violent practices.

But in other ways, *Violent Intermediaries* probes distinct and new directions in the social and cultural history of African colonial armies. By and large, existing studies have not included extended discussion of colonial soldiers' precolonial histories and how those histories produced the men that officers recruited to their ranks.⁶³ There are good reasons for these lacunae, including source limitations and the understandable desire to circumscribe research projects to keep them manageable and intellectually coherent. But Richard Reid sees this trend as part of a problematic "privileging of the modern" and "presentism" in African historiography.⁶⁴ One consequence of what he considers an overwhelming focus on the twentieth century as it pertains to Africa's history of warfare is that "the era of partition and 'pacification' . . . placed precolonial war in a historical cul-de-sac, with spear-wielding savages firmly bricked up in the basement of the colonial edifice."⁶⁵ In chapter 1 of this book I take up the challenge of "writing on war in the deep past," and this approach diverges somewhat from existing historiography in its attention to tracing the social and cultural histories of the Schutztruppe askari from their disparate geographic origins in north-eastern, eastern, and southeastern Africa.⁶⁶ A productive side effect of this approach is that the book locates the askari as actors within some broad historical trends and events of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African and colonial history. In outlining their origins and paths into the Schutztruppe, the book highlights mobility as a theme in understanding how colonial cultures developed, and traverses colonial, national, and regional boundaries that have discouraged *longue durée* histories of colonial armies.

By crossing these boundaries, *Violent Intermediaries* points up how patterns of warfare, enslavement practices, and colonial military incursions that occurred across mid-to-late-nineteenth-century Africa configured African masculinities in ways that influenced recruitment patterns for colonial armies all over the continent. The performance of these militarized masculinities—through uniform wear, drill and

ceremony, and the corporeal embodiment of authority they enabled—filtered into other colonial subcultures and helped shape expressive cultures in novel ways. The most telling example from Schutztruppe askari history is the interplay between the askari and the East African dance form, *ngoma*. Evidence suggests that the askari's activities on the Schutztruppe's *Exerzierplätze* likely inspired new forms of *ngoma*, which spread across East Africa during the latter stages of German colonial rule. Other historians (most notably Terence Ranger and Michael Pesek) have written about this relationship between the askari and a particular variant of *ngoma*, the *beni*, which incorporated significant military elements in its performance.⁶⁷ *Violent Intermediaries* engages and extends these analyses by illustrating how the soldiers' everyday activities around the military and administrative stations known as *ma-boma* [sing. *boma*] may have helped shape local colonial cultures.⁶⁸

Another difference in how this book approaches the history of colonial troops is that it presents the askari as men who passed through several stages on their way to becoming colonial soldiers. It traces their experiences through the different sociocultural contexts that molded them. Here, the book's most important historiographical contribution comes through its focus on military training as a socialization process. It explores the quintessential military elements of soldiers' lives and the meanings they produced for soldiers as well as for those around them.⁶⁹ Thus askari uniforms, training, drill and ceremony, and combat experiences are a focal point. My interest in engaging broader military historiographies coincides with military historians' recent assessments of the state of their field, particularly regarding the need for "more comparative work and more international perspectives." They see these aspects as vital to the work of countering underlying "cultural assumptions" that impede more complex analyses of the similarities and differences between various military cultures and histories.⁷⁰ Military historians also increasingly acknowledge cultural history's value in formulating "more holistic questions of the evidence" and in helping scholars "probe more deeply the context of the landscape of choices" that soldiers have made in different historical contexts.⁷¹ Cultural history thus provides common ground on which Africanists and military historians might fruitfully engage questions in colonial African military history that have attracted the attention of anthropologists but less so Africanist historians.⁷²

While there are now many histories of African soldiers, and histories of African wars, there are surprisingly few histories of African colonial soldiers *at war*.⁷³ By focusing on how askari fought and then made meaning out of their combat experiences, this book brings colonial military historiographies into closer conversation with the social histories of East African wars, most notably the Maji Maji war (1905–7) and the East African campaign of World War I (1914–18). It embeds soldiers' combat experiences within the East African "warscapes" that they helped create as a result of Schutztruppe military actions against many African peoples, only some of whom considered themselves to be in a state of war with the Germans at any given time.⁷⁴ Studying soldiers as military actors as well as social actors within wartime contexts furthers the process of folding Africa's military history into global histories of soldiering and warfare and contributes to the development of comparative work across temporal and regional boundaries.

If the elucidation of askari soldierly contexts in training and combat form one major area of divergence from existing historiography, my focus on their roles as state-making agents is another. Thinking of the askari as both soldiers and agents of colonialism expands the category of intermediary to include those who used not literacy but instead violence or the threat of violence—implicit or explicit—as methods of colonial governance.⁷⁵ By this logic, the askari are best understood as integral parts of the diverse African and colonial histories they helped construct, and not as alien mercenaries kept isolated from East African colonial subjects. The specificity of the German case, in which the Schutztruppe's evolution was cut off by its defeat in 1918, in some ways enables my analysis of the askari as intermediaries. Most important, it has led me to question the notion that colonial armies, at least during the earliest stages of colonial rule, were isolated from surrounding populations. Such isolation developed in other colonial armies later on as part of military modernization processes that never played out in German East Africa because of the German defeat in World War I. Had the German East African colonial enterprise continued beyond 1918, perhaps the Schutztruppe also would have moved in the direction of trying to physically isolate its troops by moving them into barracks.⁷⁶ But there is little evidence to support the idea that that isolation occurred between 1890 and 1918 in German East Africa, Schutztruppe officer protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

European colonial armies in Africa tended to follow similar trajectories in their organizational development patterns. The pace at which those patterns transpired, however, varied according to the local constraints and opportunities colonizers encountered when they arrived, as well as the military histories and imperial imaginations that shaped their expectations of how conquest and consolidation of authority would progress.⁷⁷ In most cases, formal colonialism was preceded first by European explorers and missionaries. As these colonial forerunners traveled through various parts of Africa, often with significant amounts of trade goods, scientific equipment, and personal items, they used small groups of soldiers, either hired directly or negotiated through allies, to provide security for their expeditions. Commercial companies like the German East Africa Company also usually preceded the formalization of colonialism. Like explorers and missionaries before them, these companies also employed military retainers to secure their interests and to escort them from place to place. In the decade following the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, at which the major European powers negotiated and confirmed spheres of influence on the African continent, efforts to establish effective occupation over African territories accelerated.⁷⁸ At first relying on company and other locally recruited retainers that we might think of as protocolonial armies, by the 1890s most colonial powers had formalized standing armies composed mainly of African recruits.⁷⁹ These were the armies that conquered and consolidated colonial rule for each respective European empire. The story of the *Schutztruppe askari* fits squarely within this larger set of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century historical developments.

In the early stages of conquest, colonial armies set up outposts or garrisons at strategic and trading sites, or at places where allied military concentrations already existed. These military stations, often built quickly with whatever labor and materials could be locally sourced, or taken over from previous occupants, served as launch points for future military expeditions. As more and more of these outposts were established, they formed networks that linked often far-flung colonial strongholds to each other, establishing the spatial arrangements that evolved into colonial administrative structures. From these stations, colonizers and their African employees, including *askari*, attempted to establish authority and control over the vast territories they claimed as their colonial possessions.

The process of “conquest” involved far more than the military aspects that most readily jump to mind, and it is here that *Violent Intermediaries* makes another intervention into existing historiography on colonial armies. I argue that the askari played a critical role in making the colonial state. Askari personal aspirations to become respectable men and householders worked in conjunction with state-making processes designed to convince vast numbers of disparate East African peoples of the German colonial state’s might and authority.

Generally speaking, the askari served in two state-making capacities. First, they were soldiers, responsible for the conquest of German East Africa. They secured colonial territorial and material gains and backed up colonial claims to power. In addition, however, they acted as a constabulary force, assisting in the day-to-day policing and administration of the colony. There are likely two reasons that this second capacity has not been treated within existing historiography. First, different colonies handled constabulary or policing work in different ways. In German East Africa, askari performed both soldiering and policing functions, despite the nominal existence of two separate organizations (*Schutztruppe* and *Polizeitruppe*). In German Southwest Africa, by contrast, police and soldiers belonged to separate organizations with distinct identities and divisions of labor. The same held for British East Africa, although the differentiation occurred later in the 1900s, again pointing up the need for attention to periodization in narrating histories of colonial armies.⁸⁰ Second, and related to the first point, the particular constabulary role that the *Schutztruppe* askari filled was directly related to the specificities of the German East African case. In short, it was not a classical settler colony that required a substantial white police force to uphold “the prestige of race” in the maintenance of law and order.⁸¹ Moreover, Germany’s defeat during World War I stunted German East Africa’s colonial trajectory, so that the kinds of differentiations that played out over time in other colonial contexts never occurred there.⁸² The critical point here is that askari constabulary roles featured centrally in their abilities to act as colonial intermediaries, which also supports the larger point—that they helped, from the very beginning, to make the colonial state. The praise leveled by their officers on the one hand, and the dread they produced among East Africans on the other, suggest a degree of effectiveness in carrying out the colonial state’s goals. In the process, they solidified ties to

families, communities, and wider networks that at times reinforced, and at times complicated, their positions as the primary African agents of state authority.

State making refers to the colonizers' "conscious effort at creating an apparatus of control" over German East Africa—the processes by which German colonizers and their African agents performed their claims to authority, and by which they attempted to negotiate with, convince, or force East Africans to submit to that authority.⁸³ This is not to argue that colonial control was total, for it was not.⁸⁴ Rather, the colonizers' keen awareness of their manpower and resource deficiencies led them to pursue particular strategies of state making that were designed to mask these problems.⁸⁵ Pesek has argued convincingly that "insufficient resources meant an insufficient presence of the colonial state and its agents," and that in turn this condition caused the colonizers to use spectacular and often devastating displays of military power to "redouble their presence in the consciousness of the colonized."⁸⁶ Performances of power undoubtedly figured prominently in colonial efforts to exert a semblance of control over the vast territory of German East Africa and its peoples. Yet it was precisely that insufficient presence, and the compensatory state-making practices necessitated by it, which helped individual askari become big men. During the conquest and policing of German East Africa, askari accumulated war spoils, including goods and livestock. They also captured women and children, enslaving or otherwise incorporating them into their households as dependents. Insufficient presence, then, was in the eye of the beholder during most of the period of German colonial rule over East Africa.

The highly destructive and spectacular military operations of the Schutztruppe's conquest of German East Africa constituted only one part of colonial state-making practices, however. As the Schutztruppe pressed into the German East African interior, it established maboma as military garrisons and nodes of colonial administration. In order to enact an image of a strong colonial state, officials undertook periodic expeditions to conduct official business and "show the flag." In these "choreographies" of colonial rule, the askari played central roles as escorts, guards, and messengers.⁸⁷ They conducted patrols, collected taxes, summoned people to judicial proceedings, and searched for fugitives. In all these capacities, the askari acted as primary state-making agents. At the same time, these roles gave them a largely unchecked

ability to coerce and expropriate resources from the peoples they encountered in their day-to-day movements and encounters around the stations. Such duties also put them in intermediary positions between colonial state interests and those of the East African peoples who lived within the “concentric circles of influence and control” that surrounded the maboma.⁸⁸ Positioned between colonizers and colonized, askari enabled both state authority and practices of power while simultaneously opening up opportunities for their own upward mobility and wealth accumulation, as well as for outsiders to become incorporated into their households and communities. Thus ever-larger numbers of East Africans became tied to the maboma through the askari. Moreover, increasing numbers of East Africans developed boma connections through family, religious networks, and other communities of belonging, such as the competitive dance associations known as ngoma. These networks sometimes extended over great distances and encompassed disparate groups who might not otherwise have been connected to the colonial centers. In contrast to later colonial experiences in which soldiers were kept largely separate from other populations, in this early phase askari were part and parcel of the colonial political, social, and economic landscape, and they were at the heart of the production of the nascent colonial state.

Askari relationships to the colonial state elevated their status vis-à-vis other colonized subjects of German East Africa, and thus proved profitable to the soldiers. Yet paradoxically, askari desires for recognition as big men collided with racist and civilizationist colonial ideologies that positioned the soldiers as less than fully adult men in European imaginations. The Schutztruppe military hierarchy consisted of two separate rank structures (one white/German, one black/African) and thus bolstered a form of colonial racism by foreclosing the possibility that African soldiers would ever command white men. Colonial officers and administrators viewed the soldiers through paternalist lenses, partly a feature of German military rank hierarchies and paradigms, and partly a strain of racist thought that cast Africans as eternal children. European settlers contributed yet another strain of racist thought and practice to everyday colonial life in their vehement disapproval of colonial administrators’ placement of askari in authority positions, especially in policing roles. Colonial racisms certainly constrained the soldiers’ range of possibilities, but the inconsistencies between the different kinds of racist

thought and practice that featured in colonial life also exposed spaces within which askari asserted their self-understandings—their “situated subjectivities”—as respectable men by opposing what they considered disrespectful or abusive treatment from Europeans.⁸⁹ As Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher put it, “colonial racism denigrated African men, but it did not prevent assertions of powerful masculinity outside of its gaze.”⁹⁰ The soldiers’ positions thus exposed contradictions within colonial governance.

The khaki-clad askari embodied some of these very contradictions. Their uniformed bodies were supposed to represent colonial ideals of order and obedience. Their uniforms, insignia, and weapons marked them as soldiers and agents of the colonial state, clearly displaying their rank and status among themselves, as well as to those they encountered in battle and in the course of carrying out colonial administrative and disciplinary work. In part as a result of their outward uniformity, which presented an image of political and military might, many people feared the askari and minimized contact with them. But uniforms could be worn improperly; missing pieces or misplaced insignia potentially signaled the incompleteness of colonial control over their soldiers. Uniforms also connoted prestige and relative wealth, which attracted people into askari communities, for employment or membership in askari or other colonial households.⁹¹ By becoming connected to askari households, individuals who otherwise would have been without kin or community found a sort of domestic security, thereby decreasing their socioeconomic vulnerability during times when being without kin could have dire consequences.⁹² As more people became integrated into the boma communities through the askari and other colonial employees, the colonial state shifted to accommodate their presence.

Askari communities appeared orderly on the surface, but that superficial calm masked messy household dynamics that often disrupted the troops’ good order and discipline.⁹³ Colonial officers and administrators found themselves negotiating all manner of household and community-level disputes—a role they endlessly complained about but that also allowed self-congratulatory reflections on their self-defined roles as civilizing agents. As askari and their family members turned to colonial authorities to help them resolve disputes, they also helped shape a colonial political culture that challenged German efforts to impose order on not just their African colonial employees but

all the peoples they considered subject to their authority.⁹⁴ Yet because the families and communities that lived around the maboma were indispensable to maintaining their troops' morale and to colonial labor needs more generally, they made concessions that tacitly acknowledged the incomplete capacity of the colonial state to control African lives, social relations, and economies.

Askari, their families, and the communities that developed around them in the vicinities of the maboma contributed directly to new local economies that similarly exemplified the inability of the colonial state to control the outcomes of the processes it had set in motion. Boma economies centered on providing goods and services especially to the soldiers, as well as others who lived at or near the stations and to those passing through surrounding areas. Askari spending habits infused cash into local economies, thus likely reshaping socioeconomic relationships beyond the maboma. Traders of all types took advantage of the concentrations of people around the stations to set up businesses. These traders included women who set up small businesses near the maboma, where they sold beer, surplus produce, and handcrafted items to community members and passersby. Askari "wives" and daughters also ran small businesses that added to household wealth.⁹⁵ Although the maboma served first and foremost as military forts and administrative spaces, they were also multipurpose sites that included markets, livestock pens, gardens, and storage areas. Laborers reported to the maboma for assignment to colonial building, upkeep, and transportation projects. This mix of soldiers, traders, workers, and others animated the maboma, making them into centers of economic exchange.

At the same time, askari involvement in everyday boma life laid bare the most exploitative features of colonialism, including the predatory features of a nascent capitalist economy. For example, askari supervised and guarded chain gang prisoners and other unfree persons who performed unpaid labor over extended periods and who thus directly experienced the askari as practitioners of the everyday violence of colonialism. Askari actively participated in the boma economies that made a wide range of goods and services available to them, but many of them failed to grasp, or ignored, the consequences of their spending habits. They notoriously owed great amounts of money to the traders who sold them goods on credit. The appearance of markets around the maboma stimulated local economies that served colonial

goals by bringing pools of laborers to the stations. Askari certainly benefited from these opportunities to perform their authority, and perhaps even to forcibly incorporate vulnerable prisoner-laborers into their households. Yet reckless use of their relative cash wealth in the colonial economy made them vulnerable to creditors' claims, which in turn made them subject to punishments administered by the colonial government, including chain-gang labor. Viewing the colonial state from the soldiers' vantage point exposes some contradictions within colonialism, but with a twist. That is, the askari, as both wielders and subjects of colonial power, serve as an analytical pivot around which to consider the contradictions inherent in the colonial state's reliance on African soldiers and their community members as their key agents of conquest and administration.⁹⁶

In telling a story of colonial conquest, state making, and empire building from the bottom up, this book also intervenes critically in modern German historiography. It pinpoints and explicates some of the local African histories that gave rise to German discursive practices around its colonial past in the interwar period. These narrative and visual practices used the celebratory image of the loyal askari to stand in for the violence that German Schutztruppe officers ordered and oversaw in the colonies.⁹⁷ At the same time, images of the askari represented a stoic military masculinity that appealed to certain audiences within the defeated nation. *Violent Intermediaries* argues that postwar German discourses about colonialism make real sense only when they are linked with the soldiers' local histories. These very histories were used as plot devices in the construction of potent narratives about Germany's colonial past, in which that country appeared as the exemplar of the European civilizing mission. These "colonial fantasies" shaped how most Germans remembered and forgot their colonial past until the 1990s, when scholars reignited interest in German colonialism as a field of historical inquiry, demanding that it be taken seriously as an integral piece in understanding modern German history, particularly its intertwined histories of violence and racism.⁹⁸

Exploring how German and African military cultures interacted with each other in the Schutztruppe, especially through military training, drill, and ceremony, also ties Germany's military history and its colonial history together in textured ways. *Violent Intermediaries* argues for thinking of colonialism as more than a top-down process, whereby

German military ideals and practices reshaped African men into pseudo-German soldiers.⁹⁹ Instead, it argues that making the Schutztruppe required an interactive sociocultural process between Africans and Germans and that it yielded an army and style of warfare that, more often than not, served Germany's colonial aspirations to deadly effect.

SOURCES AND METHODS

Recovering the sociocultural history of the askari requires the use of sources and interpretive techniques that differ somewhat from those employed in other histories of colonial armies in Africa. While historiographies on the francophone and anglophone African colonial armies developed out of historians' extensive collections of oral interviews documenting African colonial soldiers' and veterans' life histories, no such effort was ever undertaken for the Schutztruppe askari. Allied bombing of Germany during World War II also destroyed many Schutztruppe files that might have provided additional written official documents on the askari's lives. In reconstructing their lives and communities, I have thus used a mosaic of sources including government, missionary, and personal archival materials from Germany, Great Britain, and Tanzania; photography; newspapers; military manuals, guides, and phrasebooks; and published memoirs and reports. Published life histories of askari and other Africans who observed and wrote about them, as well as the transcribed oral histories from the Maji Maji Research Project (MMRP), and Kiswahili epic poetry, all contribute to the construction of a multifaceted representation of the askari that accounts for their various subjectivities as colonial agents, soldiers, householders, and community members.

But how exactly does one read, interpret and use such sources to render a useful representation of the askari? The European provenance of most of the sources and the lack of available oral histories presented me with a research challenge: how could I situate the askari within their overlapping and diverse African history contexts without access to their "voices"?¹⁰⁰ A multipronged solution emerged. First, I layered different kinds of sources to help me gain an impression about the questions at hand. To whatever extent possible, I also situated the sources within the contexts of their production. For example, I used Schutztruppe training manuals, translation guides, and military handbooks as sources for understanding askari military lives. These sources offer

idealized visions of Schutztruppe operations, or described situations that might be used as models for how to manage troops under various circumstances. Most of them were not published until quite late in the Schutztruppe's history, and it is unclear to what extent officers used them. Still, when paired with other sources, such as newspaper articles, diaries, anecdotes in memoirs, and photography, these documents offer us a glimpse of the Schutztruppe's accumulated knowledge base regarding its soldiers. They provide instructive and sometimes unexpected insights into officers' expectations, soldiers' reception of the rules and regimens that ordered parts of their lives, and the presence of a wider askari community that the Schutztruppe tried to regulate. In addition—perhaps an obvious point that nonetheless bears reiterating—these military documents were indispensable in reconstructing the soldiers' military context, an area thus far largely neglected in the English-language historiography, but a central focus of this book.¹⁰¹

A second way of addressing the problem of the lack of sources where askari might have revealed aspects of their self-understandings and interpretations of their experiences, is to read the available sources in two directions—against the grain and along the grain. Reading against the grain reveals evidence that the authors may not have intended to produce, but which nevertheless helps us see otherwise invisible aspects of the soldiers' history. On the other hand, reading materials along the grain exposes what German officers, administrators, missionaries, and other European representatives of colonialism thought they were doing as they built German East Africa, and how their practices of governance grew out of these logics.¹⁰² Taken together, these two ways of reading sources show the askari operating through a range of power relations and social settings, adding substance and refinement to how we understand African intermediaries in everyday colonialism. Reading against and along the grain also shows how askari roles in everyday colonial state projects generated new communities of belonging, political alignments, enmities, and abuses.

In addition to conventional archival materials, this book draws heavily on life histories, biographies, and anecdotes found in colonial memoirs as evidence from which “to begin considering what is said or not said, done or not done, in the universe of possibilities that constitutes the lifeworld of the past.”¹⁰³ This genre of colonial text, usually written by the European explorers, missionaries, officials, and officers

whom Marcia Wright calls “intimate outsiders,” has been underutilized in the historiography of German East Africa. Wright cautions that “colonial literature in this genre often verges on fiction in that it enters imaginatively into the life circumstances of Africans . . . and transgresses boundaries between the observer and the observed.”¹⁰⁴ The authors of these texts employed contemporary racist stereotypes of African peoples with abandon in support of their overt agendas of fostering German imperial expansion and colonial enterprises. Yet precisely because of their overt agendas, these authors also provided rich, unvarnished, and otherwise unavailable details on everyday life in the colony. Askari featured prominently in these texts because of their central roles in the routines of colonial life, as well as in the mechanics of colonial administration. Because the askari were so central to the German East African colonial project, authors of such texts represented their troops in subtler terms than typical racist renditions of Africans in circulation during the *Kaiserreich*. By paying attention to the genre’s characteristics and quirks, and using other sources to critique and contextualize them, these memoirs have proven indispensable to the work of recovering askari self-understandings. Perhaps more important, however, these texts show that the askari created their own narratives about the past to help them live in their immediate circumstances.¹⁰⁵ The narratives also provide insights into how askari, and sometimes those close to them, such as their “wives,” positioned themselves in relation to the intimate outsiders who recorded their stories.¹⁰⁶

A bit more explanation of my interpretive method in using these “intimate outsider” texts is warranted here. In particular, the published life histories of the Sudanese askari Abdulcher Farrag, and the Nyamwezi askari Ali Kalikilima, raised troubling questions about how to responsibly use such fraught sources in a reconstructive historical project such as mine.¹⁰⁷ There is no question that these narratives, as highly mediated texts, present a welter of methodological problems. Questions of translation, transcription, genre conventions, and memory abound. For example, the texts were published in European languages, but we know little about the translation and transcription processes involved in producing them. And how did Europeans record these stories in the first place? Without a doubt, these narratives reflect the editorial, stylistic, and genre preferences of the intimate outsiders who recorded the soldiers’ stories—their amanuenses.¹⁰⁸ So what is the historian to do? Is

it possible to “disentangle the voice” of the African soldier from that of his amanuensis?¹⁰⁹ Perhaps not fully. Yet as Sandra Greene has recently shown in her work on African slave narratives, by paying attention to the “identities and concerns of both the narrators and the recorders,”¹¹⁰ we might glimpse how the soldiers understood and represented their experiences, as well as how they used their interlocutors to aid in the pursuit of their own “projects” and politics.¹¹¹

Reading the source materials ethnographically—by which I mean using a combination of primary and secondary materials to reconstruct the sociocultural historical contexts of the peoples under consideration—is a first step in the direction of discerning the range of interests of the historical actors treated in these problematic materials. This method aids in the task of discerning askari interpretations of life experiences and choices within their locally informed yet malleable self-understandings.¹¹² Regardless of their geographic origins, the men who became askari were shaped by distinctive socioeconomic and often racialized structures and hierarchies; gendered notions of authority, prestige, and work; as well as local and cosmopolitan outlooks and cosmologies that actively influenced how they made sense of the world and their places in it.¹¹³

In addition to devoting careful attention to the historical contexts within which African men came of age and became candidates for the *Schutztruppe*, however, I have tried to keep in mind that both the askari narrators and their amanuenses played roles in shaping the texts. In Abdulcher Farrag’s and other similar narratives, at least two layers of shaping occurred—first by the African narrators in explaining their pasts to their recorders, and second by the recorders in conveying their stories to wider, mostly European, readerships.¹¹⁴ It is hardly surprising that doing this work is far easier for the European interlocutors than it is for the African men who told their stories to them. Thus alongside the ethnographic readings of sources described above, I have also compared and analyzed available narratives for any commonalities in life experiences and trajectories that led to the men becoming colonial soldiers. For example, a comparison of Farrag’s narrative to those of two other Sudanese men who lived through soldiering experiences in the late nineteenth century, Salim C. Wilson and Ali Effendi Gifoon, reveals his breathtaking story of serving in first the Anglo-Egyptian army, then the Mahdi’s army, then the *Schutztruppe*, as plausible. Indeed,

Schutztruppe major Georg von Prittwitz und Gaffron claimed that in 1898 he met an old Sudanese askari, Effendi Murgan, whose experiences mirror those of Farrag. Murgan, a survivor of the 1891 Zelewski catastrophe,¹¹⁵ had been a Schutztruppe askari since the organization's founding. He retired from the Schutztruppe sometime around 1897, returning to Cairo. But he found it not to his liking and asked to return to the Schutztruppe. The officer gushed about Murgan in his journal: "Murgan Effendi is a soldier who has become old and gray in military service, who fought in Sudan, Khartoum and Kassala. He is the model of a professional Sudanese lansquenet. He is 'Effendi,' which means [he is a] black officer and an exceptionally capable, responsible soldier. He was already 'Effendi' [when he was] taken over from the Egyptian army."¹¹⁶ Prittwitz's encounter with Murgan confirms the possibility of Farrag's existence, however much Farrag's amanuensis, August Leue, may have shaped the narrative for publication.

In addition, I identify common or recurring narrative strategies regarding masculinities, social hierarchies, the trappings of modernity that expressed the narrators' aspirations and affinities for soldiering in colonial armies, and the constraints that forced some of them onto a soldiering path. Ali Kalikilima's life history, for instance, highlights his memory of the moment when he transitioned from boyhood to manhood, recalling the significance of learning to fire a muzzleloader under his father's tutelage, as well as the pride of independently supervising his first long-distance caravan and slave raid.¹¹⁷ In a similar way, Farrag's narrative returns over and over to attributes like "steadfastness" that Schutztruppe officers most appreciated, emphasizing this and similar themes while downplaying others. The narrative's fabric interweaves several such thematic threads that reinforce the notion that askari perceived themselves as men with martial aptitudes with aspirations to becoming big men. They threw in their lot with an alien authority, the Schutztruppe, expecting to receive privileges and rewards that would help them secure respectable futures.

And what of the amanuenses' roles in shaping these narratives? The prefatory pages of their texts often purport having goals similar to those stated in Leue's text, namely, to provide "a collection of modest sketches and pictures" while at the same time "contribut[ing] to the general advancement of interest for our often unrecognized colony German East Africa."¹¹⁸ This genre of colonial writing offers intriguing

information on the nature of day-to-day colonialism, but it presents numerous analytical problems for the historian. After all, how did these authors recall the vivid life-history details they conveyed? What were their particular interests in relating these stories, and what were their purposes in conveying these stories in such meticulous detail? How do we interpret the layers of translation embedded in the text? Farrag's narrative, as conveyed by Leue, accurately reflects what occurred in Egypt and Sudan in the early 1880s. Leue provided considerable historical context to his readers, noting key dates and explanations of events throughout, and interjecting his own voice into the narrative by way of posing questions to Farrag that are clearly meant to help clarify both the story line and the historical context of the period of the Mahdi wars in Sudan. Numerous sources on the Mahdi wars, including captivity narratives, were available at the time Leue wrote his memoir, and it seems that he had familiarized himself with the region's history. His role in applying context to Farrag's story emerges clearly in his attention to historical detail.

Most authors of these kinds of texts had authorized or participated in devastating violence in German East Africa as *Schutztruppe* officers or colonial officials. They therefore were invested in presenting themselves to their readerships as men who could respect a fellow soldier, regardless of racial difference, if they fit into German conceptions of who constituted soldierly material. These narratives thus often diverge from other contemporary racist representations, which tended to show Africans as childlike or irresponsible, an image in keeping with imperial German and wider European print and visual cultures.¹¹⁹ Leue, for example, represents himself as being genuinely interested in Farrag, questioning him directly about his traumatic experiences of soldiering in three different armies, and as a prisoner-of-war. His attitude toward Farrag stands in stark contrast to his expressed racist attitudes toward other Africans—that “the African must first feel the clenched fist before he will become accustomed to the easy yoke.”¹²⁰ His recounting of Farrag's story is that of “a recollected relationship” presented from his position as an intimate outsider to African life.¹²¹ Although Marcia Wright uses this term to highlight men's ability to gain ethnographic insights through their physically intimate relationships with African women, it is also a useful way of thinking about the masculine intimacy, or comradeship, that inhered in *Schutztruppe* officers' relationships

with their askari.¹²² Through Farrag, Leue expressed his thoughts on the “human dimensions” of warfare and comradeship in the colonies while still remaining within the genre framework his readership preferred.¹²³ Working within the conventions of the memoir, he expressed professional respect and even fondness for Farrag and the askari. At the time of publication, in 1903, German interest in the colonies was on the upswing because of the activities of patriotic organizations such as the Pan-German League and the Navy League. Leue’s sympathetic portrait of one askari’s life served the purposes of German colonialism by providing a humane, intimate portrait of a colonial subject who voluntarily participated in the furtherance of German colonial objectives. Perhaps Leue wanted to assure readers back home in Germany that reliance on African troops in the colonies was the best solution to the colonies’ security problems, even if they were not seen as suitable for service in Europe.¹²⁴

The blend of sources used here, coupled with my interpretive methods—layering, reading in multiple directions, using memoirs and anecdotes, and working toward thick description—have resulted in what can aptly be described as a history of everyday colonialism. Everyday colonialism, like the everyday more generally, is both a category of human experience and a category of analysis.¹²⁵ On one level, this book focuses on practice by using *everyday colonialism* to refer to the routinized processes by which colonial representatives, whether German or African, sought to establish (or perform a vision of) dominance and control over German East Africa and its peoples. It also considers the range of ways that these peoples engaged, opposed, or perhaps just ignored these state-making efforts.¹²⁶ The soldiers’ self-understandings, socially embedded practices, and the local outcomes they produced support more general conclusions about the roles of soldiers, police, and their families in state making.¹²⁷ If the “history of everyday life” genre has been criticized for eliding the “big issues” in history, one goal of this book is to show that a fuller understanding of the processes behind the big issues—such as how colonial states came to exert a measure of control over African peoples, economies, and territories—can result from closely studying how individuals like the askari participated in those processes.¹²⁸ Delineating these microprocesses within the larger histories of colonial “conquest” and “governance” underlines the point that the idea of an inevitable European conquest of Africa

is a luxury of hindsight—a point already made by other historians but one that bears repeating.¹²⁹

“Everyday colonialism” also functions as a category of analysis—a kind of frame within which to discern the micropolitics involved in colonial state-making processes. Like other historians of everyday life, I treat daily life in German East Africa as “problematic,” context-driven, and fluid, and try to avoid casting it as unproblematic, “self-evident,” or static.¹³⁰ In this sense, the notion that the askari routinized certain processes of conquest and administration also accommodates the fact that their routines changed unpredictably according to events, contexts, and their own “willfulness.”¹³¹ Following the day-to-day activities of African agents of colonialism—their movements in, around, and between the maboma—reveals that local geographies are very useful vantage points from which to think about the workings of colonialism and empire from the ground up. In addition, a focus on the movements of African colonial agents brings their families, social networks, and hierarchies into the analytic frame, enabling a view of how colonial state making relied on ordinary people and their everyday activities around the maboma.

Violent Intermediaries treats the askari as practitioners of everyday colonialism in several ways. First, it examines their ordinary experiences across the scope of the Schutztruppe’s organizational history, highlighting the activities that made them (in)famous, including their involvement in colonial brutalities and their seemingly exceptional performance during the East African campaign of World War I. It does so, however, with an eye toward the meanings they associated with these activities.¹³² At the same time, the book shows the soldier’s entanglements in diverse household, community, and state-level encounters that blur the boundaries between colonizers and colonized, revealing the askari as intermediaries of a different sort than the better studied “interpreters and clerks” who also acted as colonial intermediaries.¹³³

Second, I regard individual “agency” as laden with political potential, even when it must operate “in the shadow of massive, and culturally (as well as physically) hostile, forms of power,” such as colonialism.¹³⁴ As Sherry Ortner has argued, agency can be understood as operating in two fluid fields of meaning—one that relates to “domination and resistance,” and one that relates to “ideas of intention, to people’s (culturally constituted) projects in the world and their ability to engage and enact them.”¹³⁵ The askari moved back and forth between these

modes, deploying power for the state, as well as for themselves, in the “projects” that helped turn them into men of influence in their local settings. The power they exercised was “double-edged,” functioning at times as domination, at times as resistance, and often somewhere on the continuum between the two. The incident cited at the beginning of this chapter, in which askari expressed disdain for their German commander’s leadership, and for the Schutztruppe as a whole, before deserting to the British, exemplifies “resistance,” even as their soldierly roles firmly ensconced them in the mechanics of colonial domination.

Third, this book foregrounds locality and mobility, using the *maboma* and askari movement between and around them to highlight some of the ways that various kinds of communities, including militarized ones, “are ultimately social in nature: the product of human labor, gestures, and interactions.”¹³⁶ This emphasis on the local also points up the “larger consequences of daily activities” in shaping the “structures of cultural regulation and political expropriation” of colonial life in German East Africa.¹³⁷ In these ways, *Violent Intermediaries* argues for interpreting the past through the lens of “the everyday” in order to show how quotidian actions and complicities produce the institutions and practices that often discipline societies in diverse historical contexts.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

How did recruits become soldiers? What parts did they play in making the state, and how did their lives around the stations contribute to the making of new colonial cultures? *Violent Intermediaries* addresses these questions by examining the askari’s experiences, or “processes of identity production,” in different contexts.¹³⁸ This approach reveals the askari as makers of colonialism in multiple circumstances, and also locates them as actors in different registers of “the colonial encounter.”

Before the recent burst of scholarship on the Schutztruppe askari that grew out of parallel historiographical movements to understand the social history of African militaries on the one hand, and the cultural history of Germany’s colonial past on the other, historians tended either to vilify the askari for their coercive and violent actions or to valorize their military exploits and loyalty, especially during World War I. This book tries to avoid either of these poles of categorizing the askari. Instead, it treats them as social beings engaged in projects that directly

and simultaneously served their personal aspirations and needs, as well as those of the colonial state.¹³⁹ They undertook these projects seemingly without regard to the steep costs borne by those many East Africans who could not somehow avoid, or defend themselves against, the extractive and often murderous power the askari commanded as soldiers and colonial agents.

Each of the chapters that follow offers a distinct vantage point on askari lives. Looking at them within multiple contexts, and situated within various social networks, provides insights into the processes behind conquest and the making of a colonial military culture. It also uncovers the mechanisms by which the colonial state insinuated itself into the lives of East Africans.¹⁴⁰

To illustrate how particular military cultures and moral economies aided in the creation of the Schutztruppe, I begin by tracing the socio-cultural histories and geographical origins of men who became askari to their sites of recruitment in disparate African locations. Chapter 1 begins with the sociocultural histories of men recruited mainly from Egyptian Sudan (“Sudanese”) who formed the core of the Schutztruppe in its initial years (1889–92), and continues with the histories of men recruited later from the central steppe and Great Lakes regions of German East Africa and Belgian Congo.¹⁴¹ Identifying the ethnographic contours of the earliest stage of the Schutztruppe’s formation reveals the kinds of masculinities, military aptitudes, and relationships to authority that askari and their officers valued.¹⁴² These ideals shaped what it meant to be askari throughout the rest of the period of German rule over East Africa.

Chapter 2 considers the Schutztruppe training process and combat as the factors that turned these recruits, who came from far and wide, into Schutztruppe askari. This chapter describes the mechanics of the training process, emphasizing its role in socializing recruits. It understands colonial military training as a cultural encounter between different, and sometimes competing, visions of military masculinity.¹⁴³

Chapter 3 examines how askari, under German officers’ and NCOs’ tutelage, developed a way of war reflective of their training as well as the aptitudes and sensibilities they brought with them into the Schutztruppe. Colonial conquest might thus be imagined as a series of violent “cross-cultural encounters” between Schutztruppe soldiers and those they sought to defeat militarily or otherwise bring into political

submission.¹⁴⁴ The basic styles of warfare employed during the conquest phase of the 1890s remained in place through Maji Maji (1905–7) and World War I (1914–18), but the scale of these later military confrontations led the Schutztruppe to intensify these tactics in ways that caused massive loss of life, especially in the southern highlands, the epicenter of destruction in both wars.

Chapter 4 analyzes the askari in their everyday capacities as colonial intermediaries, state makers, and big men. The “askari villages,” where soldiers lived with their families and dependents, provided them with all the comforts of home, as well as spaces for conviviality, cultural expression, and economic exchange. It also explores askari involvement in religious communities around the maboma and traces how veterans continued to embody colonial authority in their post-Schutztruppe lives.

Chapters 3 and 4 also call attention to the prominent roles played by women and other askari dependents as the “constitutive other” of the men known as askari.¹⁴⁵ *Violent Intermediaries* is, first and foremost, a history of the men who became askari. But to fully comprehend what made them men, we also must consider that their maleness was a “social category that derive[d] its meaning from being counterposed against that which it [was] not—the female.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, women’s presence in the military columns and the maboma were not only essential to the askari’s abilities to fulfill their maleness as heads of households, but also central to the Schutztruppe’s ability to accomplish the logistical and labor tasks that kept it functional. Women also appear throughout the book, reflective of their omnipresence in the making of the Schutztruppe.

Chapter 5 links the everyday of station life with the colonial state’s efforts to perform its vision of authority and mastery over German East Africa through the askari. First, it analyzes the askari in their roles as colonial intermediaries, carrying out the everyday business of the colonial state. Thus, the chapter highlights the “larger consequences of daily activities” for the expression and enactment of colonial authority and the building of colonial communities, especially around the stations.¹⁴⁷ Second, it shows that military drill and other ceremonial performances were at the heart of colonial state-making performances. For those living around the maboma, these events provided opportunities to imbibe and reinterpret colonial symbols, imagery, and bodily expression within both local and wider modes of expressive culture. The most visible

instantiations of such reinterpretations of colonial symbols of authority occurred in the competitive dance societies and group dances known as ngoma, which often followed Schutztruppe parades during festive colonial occasions. The relationship between formal Schutztruppe parades and the ngoma points up the fallacy of imagining the askari as living in isolation from surrounding populations, especially during its formative years. Instead, their entanglements in localities and networks linked them to East African cultural, social, and religious networks, placing them in the middle of discursive debates about the present that unfolded “in terms of ideas and beliefs drawn from the past.”¹⁴⁸ Colonial expressions of authority intertwined with local cultural practices, echoing back to the colonizers in certain ways, while at the same time generating new social ties and potentials that reached beyond what colonial officials imagined they could mold or control.

The Conclusion traces what happened to the askari following the dismantling of the Schutztruppe in late 1918 when Lettow-Vorbeck surrendered to the Allies. This can at best be only a sketch, since evidence to support a fuller history of the ex-askari does not exist. Yet even these sketchy details point up the extent to which their abilities to carry off the roles of respectable men depended on active and viable ties to the German colonial state. It speculates on how the case of the Schutztruppe askari might illuminate contemporary debates around the meanings of soldiering; the nature of soldiers’ involvement in the performance of state and imperial power; and the transformations in relationships between soldiers and states as soldiers progress through the ranks and into the status of veterans. With questions about the nature of military professionalism so prominent in public discourse over the last decade, it seems apt to pose probing questions about the full range of historical conditions that produce men who become soldiers, and what consequences result from these recruitment processes.



Some may wonder why it makes sense to study men who fought in an alien, marauding European power’s army in order to improve their circumstances—men who would seem to epitomize membership in the categories of collaborators, perpetrators, and mercenaries. As Daniel Branch astutely notes in explaining why historians have failed to properly analyze Kikuyu “loyalists” during Mau Mau, “historians

are noticeably less than eager to describe those in the past that in all likelihood most resemble us.”¹⁴⁹ This observation holds true for our current state of knowledge about the askari as well—their “agency in tight corners” disconcerts because it reminds us of our own conscious and unconscious imbrications and complicities in the various state structures and institutions endowed with responsibilities for protecting law and order and national security in our societies.¹⁵⁰ But I submit that it is of some ethical importance to attempt to understand the trends and processes that lead people to join organizations like the Schutztruppe. In short, attractive incentives, as well as visible and less visible coercive factors that limit, or make impossible, other kinds of opportunities, lead people to negotiate their circumstantial tight corners by working for organizations and institutions that, as a matter of course, employ violent and coercive methods. At its heart, then, this book asks how and why people become part of such institutions and what outcomes these commitments produce for them, for those around them, and for the states that employ them.

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