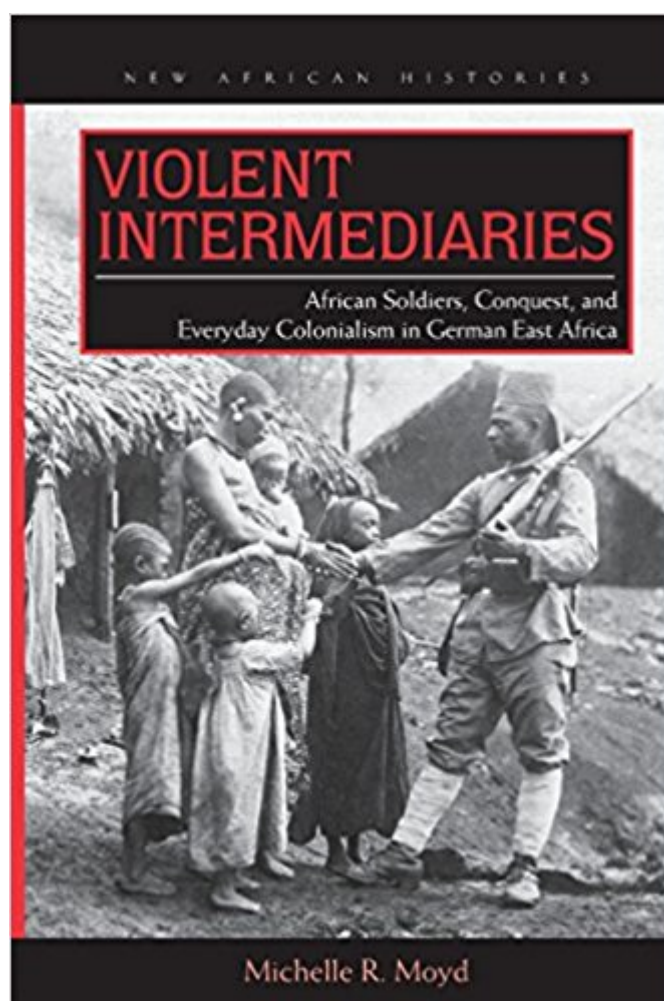


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# Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, And Everyday Colonialism In German East Africa



## Synopsis

“Overcoming methodological challenges posed by translation, memory, and frankly a scarcity of documents disclosing askari voices, Moyd sought to understand these soldiers on their own terms. As a result she explores the everyday life of the askari, from within their households to their official and unofficial roles within colonial society, and she recovers a past widely misunderstood due to German praise and Tanzanian denunciation for their loyalty to the Schutztruppe (the official name of the German colonial army).

Violent Intermediaries, like other books in Ohio University Press’s New African Histories series edited by Jean Allman, Allensaacman, and Derek R. Peterson, expands the boundaries of African history in new and exciting directions.

Canadian Journal of History

The askari, African soldiers recruited in the 1890s to fill the ranks of the German East African colonial army, occupy a unique space at the intersection of East African history, German colonial history, and military history. Violent Intermediaries recovers and reconsiders the origin and role of these men, and of colonial soldiers more generally. Lauded by Germans for their loyalty during the East Africa campaign of World War I, but reviled by Tanzanians for the violence they committed during the making of the colonial state between 1890 and 1918, the askari have been poorly understood as historical agents.

Violent Intermediaries situates them in their everyday household, community, military, and constabulary contexts, as men who helped make colonialism in German East Africa. By linking microhistories with wider nineteenth-century African historical processes, Michelle Moyd shows that the construction of the German East African colonial army resulted from convergences and collisions among differing conceptions of masculinity, radical reconfigurations of socioeconomic, political, and military structures, and European imperial incursions. As soldiers and colonial intermediaries, the askari built the colonial state while simultaneously carving out paths to respectability, becoming men of influence within their local contexts. Yet their positions as clients of German officer-patrons also exposed their dependency on a particular political order, which in the case of German East Africa proved ephemeral. Through its focus on the making of empire from the ground up, Violent Intermediaries offers a fresh perspective on African colonial troops as state-making agents and critiques the mythologies surrounding the askari by focusing on the nature of colonial violence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“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. Violent Intermediaries is a highly readable monograph offering an empathetic view on the stigmatized African soldiers of the colonial army in German East Africa. H-Net [Violent Intermediaries] offers a new and well researched perspective drawing on the insights of the social history of recent decades [Moyd] has produced a fine social history of African soldiers as intermediaries in the everyday life of colonialism in German East Africa. International Journal of African Historical Studies &#147;Michelle Moyd brings to life the world of the East African askari in this imaginative and original study of their role in shaping German colonialism in Africa in the early twentieth century. Readable, well argued, and carefully researched, Violent Intermediaries is an important study that will enrich the work of scholars in many areas. &#151; Philippa Levine, author of The British Empire, Sunrise to Sunset [A] fascinating and scholarly study of African soldiers in the German Schutztruppe, and their role in establishing German colonial rule in eastern Africa. What is distinctive about this study is the way Moyd includes the pre-colonial history and situation of these soldiers. She argues that pre-existing warfare, enslavement practices and spreading violence before colonial rule must be factored into recruitment and warfare. Also, she shows how African soldiers went through a number of stages in their military training which had an important social dimension and reach. Their power and role as the new ‘big men,’ in turn went on to shape newly emerging colonial African societies. Africa at LSE blog [Moyd] manages to reconcile the German inflated myth of the ‘loyal

askari— and the post-colonial Tanzanian emphasis [on] the askari as brutal agents of colonialism, by showing the many nuances in between—tracing the contradictory accounts to reveal simple human behavior.—history.transnational— “[Moyd] furthers our understanding of everyday colonialism by fleshing out the lives of individuals who were simultaneously agents of colonialism and objects of colonial rule. . . . She uses [limited sources] thoroughly to provide rich and insightful details about this underexplored dimension of colonialism.—American Historical Review

Michelle R. Moyd is an assistant professor of history at Indiana University. Previously, she has been a resident fellow at the International Research Center of Humboldt University, Germany, and at the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas, Austin. She was also an instructor in the Department of History at the United States Air Force Academy.

Excellent! Thank you!

As a result of a large, well-carved early-mid 20th C. East African historical-art military figure purchased nearly 10 years ago, I sought to achieve greater knowledge about the African soldiers dragged into Europe’s wars - namely the ‘Askari.’ What I began to discover was indeed ultimately horrifying. During World War I alone, within East Africa more than one million Africans were killed. In fact, many soldiers were forced to fight members of their own families on the battlefield because of the way borders were eventually drawn by European colonial powers during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, signed by 13 European powers in attendance. Ultimately, this led to the scramble for Africa and slaves;— The Scramble for Africa: White Man’s Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912. African men and women played a key role in sustaining the war-related operations in south-west Tanzania, and without them, German colonialism in East Africa could not have existed - let alone without the ‘Askari.’ The German colonial army was essentially an African army. Yet, very little to nothing is known about Tanzanian participation. And, what of the general public of ordinary men and women who grew food such as maize, beans, and cassava, or their livestock? The colonial armies relied on their food to feed soldiers and carrier corps. Tanzanians did not give away this food supply willingly. Armies acquired it by force and looting Tanzanian rural homes and communities. Later, nearly all “post-independence” armies in Africa quickly discarded the fez cap as a colonial relic. As “informants and enforcers”, military and civic policing are nothing new and certainly not a revelation in colonial and imperialistic Africa. So, with the German “Schutztruppe”

there were no exceptions. One of the most important features hinged on intelligence gathering. 'Askaris' interrogated informants - some were deserters and were killed in similar manner as with the European Jewish mesirah and "Din Moser", or others of various ethnic genocides and campaigns. These African colonial "Violent Intermediaries" carried out gruesome and disingenuous tasks - acting as the collective body to the most reprehensible thoughts, reasoning and evil in like manner. The author Michelle Boyd has well intentions (through her personal curiosities). The depth of her research and scholarly assessments are impressive, yet much conjecture and self-serving perspectives still overshadow conclusive facts. These African soldiers were mere disposable \*specimen\* not appreciated by Germany. In many cases it is said that the Germans actually blamed and held them responsible for [Germany] not winning the war. The designation 'Askari' is still in use today to describe police, gendarmerie and security guards in Africa. It is worth noting that during both World Wars, 'Askari' units also served outside their colonies of origin, in various parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia."one truism is that all human cruelty springs from weakness"

This is the most complete book I have read on the Askari soldiers in German East Africa. It is thoroughly researched and well written. There is a slight academic tone and some academic vocabulary, but nothing that should bother most readers. It is not a military history or campaign history; the focus is on who these African soldiers were, what they did, and how their societies were affected. The book deliberately does not follow the usual admiration of the Schutztruppe's performance in World War 1. One basic fact is that the German askaris were recruited from a quite wide geographic area and represented many peoples, some of whom were seen as more martial than others. Many brought experience as slave soldiers (bought or taken as children and trained as soldiers). Some had experience in other armies. They became powerful representatives of the colonial government, and apparently, if Moyd is correct, often used force or threat of violence to force official policies (or unofficial plundering). She tracks the Schutztruppe from its beginnings through the end of World War 1, describing recruitment, training, relationships between German officers and men, the local fortified camps and some about marches and German policies. The best chapters are "Becoming Askari," and "The Askari Way of War." Among interesting detail is that discipline was not as harsh as in Germany, because the Askari required more or less that their households march along with them--attempts to lighten the burden by getting rid of the women and children met fierce resistance from women that forced German commanders to back down. In post-modernist terms, the African soldiers had agency of a kid that mitigated the formal discipline structure. Some German officers were babes in the woods, apparently; some officers seem to have

used portions of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales as "makeshift field manuals." Askari formations held together well, based not on loyalty to Germany but to their comrades and officers. Wars did great damage to the regional societies. There was a great deal of violence as Germans took control of "German East Africa," taking many years of war. World War 1 led to 300,000 African deaths in what is now Tanzania, not counting high death totals in the drafted porters (in conditions not so different than slavery) or combat casualties. In total that must mean a half million deaths.

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