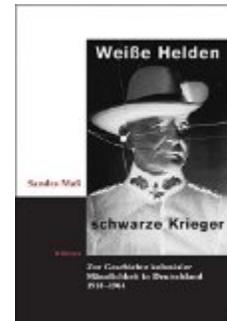


Sandra Maß. *Weißer Helden, schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland 1918-1964*. Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2006. 370 S. EUR 49.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-412-32305-9.

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## Race, Masculinity, and Propaganda: A Look at German “Colonial Masculinity”

Sandra Maß opens her masterful study of German colonial masculinity by invoking September 11, 2001. In particular, she argues that following the attacks, feature writers for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* described Osama bin Laden as an “Other” in terms reminiscent of “the history of the ambivalent friendship between the European conqueror and his indigenous friend” (p. 2). For these writers, bin Laden’s “presentation in photos and in videos combined ‘self’ and ‘other’ to [create] a hybrid image of his person that called forth ambivalent reactions like repulsion and desire” (p. 1). With this reference to a recent, controversial discussion of “Islamist” masculinity, Maß sets the stage for an authoritative historical analysis of how post-World War I Germans used the “colonial pair” of stereotypes, “white hero, black warrior,” “to deal with war experiences and to reconfigure the shaken relationship between masculinity and nation after 1918” (p. 3). Maß shows how German discursive uses of various images and descriptions of black soldiers and Africa corresponded to key crises in German masculinity between the end of World War I and the death of General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in 1964. Lettow-Vorbeck, the commander of German forces (*Schutztruppe*) in the East African campaign of World War I, came to embody powerful symbols of German soldierly masculinity. His death in 1964 marked the end of a cohesive German military masculine identity.

Maß’s study draws on an array of sources that include colonial memoirs and novels, newspapers, and propaganda pamphlets. She counts almost all of her sources as

“propaganda” because they were often commissioned by colonialist organizations, and because their content was usually aligned with official statements on colonialism. Propaganda was also a “practice of self-identification” and a “process of self-ethnicization” for those who produced the texts. She assesses previous attempts to analyze European debates over the use of colonial soldiers as “too static” because they “reduce the complexity and ambivalence of the stereotype” by leaving out the processes by which propagandists created meaning through their texts (p. 18).

Proceeding chronologically and thematically, each chapter analyzes the ways that German producers of “propaganda” shaped a discourse on colonial masculinities under different historical circumstances. These constructions were based on readings of African “colonial” soldiers either as loyal and brave companions to their white officers in the colonies, or as oversexed, wild barbarians intent on raping German women. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, Maß examines discourses on soldierly masculinity during the interwar period. Chapter 2 is a detailed analysis of the construction of the myth of the loyal *askari* (African soldiers of the *Schutztruppe*) as a refutation of the *Kolonialschuldfrage* (“Colonial Guilt Lie”), the Allied insistence that Germany was an unfit colonizer. In chapter 3, Maß explains how groups like the Rheinische Frauenliga (whose involvement has not previously received scholarly attention) and the Deutsche Notbund organized and perpetuated a virulent propaganda campaign against the stationing of francophone African sol-

diers in the Rheinland, referred to by Germans as the *Schwarze Schmach* ("Black Disgrace"). In chapter 4, Maß summarizes this period's colonial imaginary, which included a range of fantasies about Africa and Africans that incorporated both the "loyal" *askari* image and that of the *Schwarze Schmach*. German propagandists, both men and women, used these images to delineate proper bourgeois masculine and feminine behaviors and identities during the Weimar era (pp. 215-216). Chapters 5 and 6 consider how colonial "hero fantasies," constructed around Lettow-Vorbeck, Carl Peters, and Erwin Rommel, functioned (or not) under National Socialism. Chapter 7 argues that although veterans' organizations and the West German Bundeswehr attempted to keep colonial masculinity alive as a part of postwar West Germany's national memory, it found little purchase outside of these specific constituencies.

For Maß, "colonial masculinity" refers to a Wilhelmine notion of chivalric military action enacted through individual soldierly skills and readiness, but also characterized by camaraderie with fellow soldiers. It presented *Schutztruppe* officers' longing for adventure in distant lands as a positive trait. During the Weimar period, German propagandists contrasted the East African campaign of World War I with the "industrialized" experience of war on the Western Front, and concluded that East Africa had been the last of Germany's "knightly" wars. General Lettow-Vorbeck and his loyal *askari* were thus held up as paragons of honorable behavior in war, and as true defenders of German national honor. This version of colonial masculinity fell out of favor during the Third Reich. Nazi leaders propounded a different vision of manliness, one that found adventurism and individualism among soldiers suspicious and threatening. More concretely, Nazi leaders came to view Lettow-Vorbeck as a reactionary vestige of the old Germany. Nazi propagandists instead found a new colonial hero in Carl Peters, the imperialist agitator and "conquistador" of the 1880s and 1890s. His career as a colonial officer ended in scandal when the Reichstag was notified of his violent actions against Africans while he was serving as district officer in the Kilimanjaro region. By the late 1930s, however, the Nazis had rehabilitated him as a "white hero" and passionate defender of German empire, his recklessness and propensity to violence celebrated as desirable traits. Germany also found a "white hero" in Erwin Rommel, an "old warrior in new clothes" (p. 249), whose military actions in Africa, which were both "knightly and reckless" (p. 258), appealed to both old colonialists and to Germans in the Third Reich. After World War II, Lettow-Vorbeck

briefly resumed his position as an example of Germany's honorable military tradition, with his brand of "colonial masculinity" referring back to the Wilhelmine military ideal.

Maß carefully explains how different categories of black people, especially African soldiers, featured in the German imaginary in different moments after World War I. The heart of her argument lies in her contention that African soldiers appeared in these writings as "phantasms of propaganda" that allowed the authors to exorcise traumatic wartime experiences by "casting out wartime violence" through a process of "naming" it (p. 158). In Maß' words, "while the writings against the Rheinland occupation emphasize the 'wildness' and 'absent civilization' of the colonial soldiers, the reminiscences of East Africa fixate on the African soldiers through the lens of the 'loyal *askari*'" (p. 157). In the first case, wartime violence was projected onto "the Other," while in the second, the violence of war was concealed by the image of the "black comrades" who fought alongside the *Schutztruppe* officers in a "knightly" war in East Africa. The "loyal *askari*" figure completed the white officer, was a good comrade to him, and contributed in the end to the creation of an unbroken self-image of the white man" (p. 176). On the other hand, the brutal figure of the Rheinland occupation soldier represented the "mutilation" of German men, women, and the nation itself.

Maß also accounts for other groups of black people in Germany's postwar conceptions of masculinity. She discusses children born of sexual unions between German women and Rheinland occupation troops; African immigrants to Germany in the interwar period; African soldiers in World War II; and African American soldiers of the post-World War II U.S. occupation force. Yet, it is not altogether clear how each of these different sets of "Others" all connect to "colonial masculinity" as an overarching construct. Maß's effort to historicize German racist discourses, and to link them to specific racist practices (such as the forced sterilization of mixed-race children in 1937 or the massacres of francophone African soldiers in 1940) is commendable, but these portions of her analysis do not add much to previous scholarship on black peoples in Germany, and they further complicate her already very intricate argument.

In explaining her method of analyzing colonial propaganda, Maß writes in her introduction, "[i]t is not a certain mentality or experience that produces an expression [*eine Aussage*], but an expression that constitutes an experience, a mentality, or a subject status" (p. 19).

Not surprisingly, then, her work does not address the local African histories that informed the discourses she so carefully describes and analyzes. Her deft and sensitive readings of the source materials undoubtedly give us the richest, most comprehensive analysis to date of how German colonial apologists used stereotypes of Africa and Africans to fashion themselves and each other as heroes and/or victims. However, the cumulative effect of using these descriptions throughout the text without exploring the local African histories of their production leaves the reader with no way of comparing experiences in the colonies to the discursive use of these experiences in

the propagandistic materials published after Germany's colonial era ended. It renders Africa "static" yet again. The memoirs themselves, however, provide particularly rich details on the everyday experiences of African colonial life that generated the "white hero, black warrior" discourses. Perhaps Maß's otherwise outstanding contribution to the field will provoke other scholars of German colonialism to begin probing these local histories so that we might better understand how "the causality between mentality and expression" (p. 19) was not unidirectional, but moved back and forth in both directions, between Africa and Germany.

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