

Reviews of books

Reginald Elias Kirey, *Memories of German Colonialism in Tanzania*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg (hb €89.95 – 978 3 11099 629 6). 2023, 247 pp. Also available Open Access.

The German colonial empire was the shortest-lived colonial regime in Africa, but it was arguably one with far-reaching consequences. These include the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, the Rwandan genocide, demands for reparations over colonial genocide in Namibia, and proliferating debates over the return of human remains and cultural objects from metropolitan collections. But despite a flurry of activism over the past two decades, there has been a dearth of studies examining how the African societies subjected to the German colonial empire recalled this regime after its collapse in the First World War. Reginald Elias Kirey's *Memories of German Colonialism in Tanzania* is therefore a long-overdue and welcome analysis of the ways in which peoples affected by German colonization have remembered it over the past century. Countering *en vogue* claims of 'amnesia' and forgetting in these societies, Kirey rightly concludes that 'German colonialism [is] the most remembered colonial period in Tanzania' (p. 3).

Combining Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) and Jan Assmann's notion of cultural memory with primary sources in Swahili, English and German, Kirey argues that Tanzanians have recalled the first colonial occupation mainly through 'concrete memories or objectivized memory' (p. 2), ranging from archival records and buildings to monuments and former makeshift scaffolds. The book is organized into five chapters that examine the impact of the Anglo-German rivalry on local memory politics until the 1950s; the history and use of German archival records during the British and postcolonial period; the commemoration of the Maji Maji war in one of the conflict's epicentres in Songea; the remembrance of colonial violence and proselytization in Uchagga around Mount Kilimanjaro; and the preservation of German heritage in Dar es Salaam since British times. Kirey's approach is most effective in the chapters on the southern region of Songea and the northern region of Uchagga, where he critically reads his oral history interviews against colonial and postcolonial records. He thereby highlights that the Ngoni have commemorated the devastation caused by Maji Maji continuously over the past century, first in secret ceremonies, then, since the 1970s, in public rituals (p. 116), revealing local people's dogged persistence in seeking accountability for the war. In the chapter on Uchagga, Kirey skilfully outlines how memories of German colonization still loom large in regions that did not experience a major anti-colonial war. Around Kilimanjaro, built structures such as churches embody both traumatic memories of quotidian colonial violence and nostalgia for individual missionaries and Christianization. Kirey thereby illustrates the contradictory nature of memories of colonialism and the ways in which trauma, affect and nostalgia are inextricably tied up in them (pp. 149–54).

Some issues detract from the book's evident quality. In addition to editorial glitches, the volume's bibliography does not include recent contributions to the study of memories of German colonialism from Tanzanian and from other scholars, including Memory Biwa, Bettina Brockmeyer, Frank Edward, Michelle Moyd, Stefanie Michels, Nancy Rushohora, Albert-Pascal Temgoua, Dotsé Yigbe, and this reviewer. Situating his intervention vis-à-vis their work would have allowed Kirey to paint a more nuanced picture of African agency. While Kirey acknowledges that 'Africans were not passive actors' in remembrance, he sometimes casts them in this way. 'Africans,' he claims, 'were always overwhelmed' by rumours of Tanganyika's return to Germany (p. 43). Rather than take the initiative, 'Africans were dragged into' the competing politics of commemoration of their former and current colonizers in the interwar years (p. 60).

In this and other instances, the blanket category of 'Africans' detracts from Kirey's claim that Tanzanians remembered German rule differently depending on their region of origin, race, gender and religion, among other factors (pp. 3, 17). Kirey further asserts that former African soldiers of the Germans, the *askari*, 'were lured into supporting colonial revisionism', but it remains unclear why or by whom (p. 40). The author maintains that German payouts of outstanding wages to *askari* were a generous gift, commending the 'readiness and swiftness of the Germans honouring the claims of their former Askaris' (p. 49). Yet it was *askari* demands that prompted recalcitrant former colonizers to pay their debts after more than a decade, not imperial generosity.

Finally, the author leaves readers wanting to know more about the impact of the popular memories he illustrates. Kirey carefully examines the uses of German archival records for subsequent British colonizers, the archives of independent Tanzania and historical researchers. But how did ordinary Tanzanians engage with these records, for example in making land and property claims? More generally, how did memories of German rule affect Tanzanians' approach to British colonizers and the postcolonial state? In what ways did the strange experience of an imperial transition shape decolonization as well as relationships with erstwhile rulers, many of whom returned to East Africa in the 1920s? And how do Tanzanians' memories of colonization correspond to those of other postcolonial nations, including other former German colonies? The conclusion makes a tentative comparison with Namibia (p. 215) but it remains unclear why Namibians were quicker to formulate legal claims for reparations and restitution despite gaining independence almost three decades after Tanzanians.

Apart from its source-rich and theory-informed analysis, Kirey's achievement lies in bringing these questions to the fore, underlining the need for the increased study of memories of colonization in African societies based on the use of African-language sources. By placing at the centre of analysis the people who had to live through a conspicuously violent colonial regime or make do with its aftermath, Kirey has enriched the history of Tanzania, modern Africa and colonialism.

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