

James Giblin and Jamie Monson (eds.) (2010), *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, ISBN: 978-90-04-18342-1, 325 pp.

One of the worst atrocities of German colonialism is associated with the Maji Maji War (1905–1907) in German East Africa, which caused over 100,000 deaths. Members of approximately 20 different ethnic groups fought the representatives of the colonial administration using a war medicine called *maji*, which was supposed to make its followers invulnerable. After Tanzania's independence, the Dar es Salaam school of historiography came to the conclusion that the Maji Maji War was an anti-colonial resistance movement with an early proto-national component.

It took until the turn of the millennium for the Maji Maji War to come into the focus of another research group. Supplemented by joint field research, a couple of conferences were organized between 2001 and 2007 under the leadership of the editors of this volume, Giblin and Monson, involving researchers from North America, Europe and Africa. One of the outcomes of these activities is the volume *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War*, which compiles articles from nine different authors.

In the introduction, the editors sketch the historical events of the war and the way different narratives of the war emerged subsequently among its analysts. The first of the five sections focuses on the “contexts of communication”. Here Monson looks into the narrative efficiency of medicine. Referring to the subtitle of the volume “Lifting the Fog of War”, she links the term “fog” to a state of anxiety and the lack of knowing which is created by hearsay and rumours (58). Everyone involved in the Maji Maji War was confronted with rumours, altering and producing them in turn. Shaped narratives also influenced the course of the war, as well as how it was and is remembered. Larson's chapter on the Ngindo analyses in detail a region about which very little is known. His research enables a better understanding of the spread of the *maji* medicine and the *maji* movement through southern Tanzania.

In the second section, called “straddling boundaries”, Moyd and Sunseri discuss the occupational groups of elephant hunters and askari. Sunseri explores how ivory trading and hunting networks enabled the spread of the war medicine, which roles individual hunters played, and how the war paved the way for an ecological crisis. Moyd applies concepts of identity and honour to the African members of the *Schutztruppe*.

The third and fourth sections of the book deal with regional topics. Schmidt's and Mapunda's articles focus on the war in Ungoni. Schmidt gives a detailed account of the various interest groups and their actions in this area while Mapunda is the first to introduce archaeological methods into the

research of this war. He presents the preliminary findings of four excavations and is able to link them with historical reports. However, he does not explain what the found pottery, glass or metal tell us about the war.

The Bena settlements are at the centre of Nyagava's and Giblin's contributions. Nyagava's 18-page analysis of local alliances is quite short, as is Mapunda's. That makes the reader wonder why the Tanzanian contributors were only given half the space of their fellow authors. Giblin surprises readers with interpretations of the events around the Yakobi Mission, concluding that the actions there were localized and not directly linked to the Maji Maji War. Though Giblin provides some new insights, the language used seems to be quite imbalanced: In his words, *maji* fighters "massacre" (263) and "plunder" (264), whereas the German forces are on a "pacification campaign" (264) in which they "confiscate" (263) and cause "casualties" (266).

In the final section, called "The Aftermath", Becker carefully demonstrates how the Maji Maji War was part of a chain of disasters that triggered change, and she mentions that concepts of war medicine, witchcraft and millennial ideas continue to thrive among the population in southeastern Tanzania. Her sensitive analysis of the remembrance of the war is a worthy closure for this volume.

The editors comprehensively analyse the backgrounds of colonial, and later national, interpretations of the Maji Maji War and conclude that former researchers constructed "another kind of legend" (34) that served the needs of the time (e.g. nation-building) and neglected the complexity of the war itself, as well as the shaping of its memory. While the contributors to this volume indeed succeed in unearthing various different narratives of the war and therefore contribute remarkable new insights to *maji* research, the construction of a divide between the "new" approach of the editors and an old "nationalist" approach is not convincing. The editors should also have been more self-aware of the "needs of the time" of their own approach and should have reflected on their interest in a topic that had not received much attention over the previous three decades. The ridiculing of representatives of the "nationalist" approach as "deaf" (261, 290) seems unfair, especially as their work is still seen as "canonical" (34). For some contributors, the *maji* movement is still a "multiethnic alliance" (223) based on "African initiative" (257), while others challenge the "nationalist" approach.

The strength of the volume is its focus on micro-studies, which enables a better understanding of the agency and motives of local actors. The analyses of individual actors of the war (e.g. Mpangile, Kinjala, Groeschel) also includes a female leader (Nkomanile). This highlighting of gender aspects is

remarkable, as the role of women is often overlooked in studies on colonial warfare.

Has “the fog of war” been lifted? Indeed, the contributors manage to disperse the haze of the Maji Maji War by focusing on selected areas, thereby adding considerably to our knowledge. The “diversity of viewpoints” (239) presented, however, also blurs our vision. Though the editors criticize former explanations of the war for being too simplistic, they don’t suggest alternatives besides stating that the whole affair was quite complex. Therefore, the publication complements former studies rather than offering a new paradigm.

The volume is supplemented by five maps, as well as by 16 photos comprising current shots of former war sites and photos from missionary archives.

- Jigal Beez