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Review of Bettina Brockmeyer, *Geteilte Geschichte, geraubte Geschichte:
Koloniale Biografien in Ostafrika (1880–1950)*

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BETTINA BROCKMEYER, *Geteilte Geschichte, geraubte Geschichte: Koloniale Biografien in Ostafrika (1880–1950)*, Globalgeschichte, 34 (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2021), 401 pp. ISBN 978 3 593 51287 7. €45.00

The biographical approach has been used to good effect in several recent studies of German colonialism.¹ These have shed further light on, among other things, the mechanics of colonial rule, the violence of the colonial project, and German colonial careers. Typically, such studies have tended to focus on German members of the colonial administration, particularly prominent officials and military officers. Bettina Brockmeyer's *Geteilte Geschichte, geraubte Geschichte*, the published version of her German habilitation thesis, similarly focuses on colonial biographies—in this case in order to examine an 'entangled' colonial history which links Tanzania, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Her choice of lesser-known and seemingly quite different subjects is unusual, and adopting the historian Natalie Zemon Davis's model of following three life stories enables her to investigate multiple perspectives of European colonial rule as well as colonial memory and the issue of German colonial amnesia. The result is a wide-ranging study which makes important contributions not simply in terms of its coverage, but also its imaginative use of sources.

At the forefront of Brockmeyer's work are three individuals, all born within a generation, who have largely been ignored in the existing historiography: Sapi Mkwawa, son of the Tanzanian Hehe leader Mutwa Mkwawa and himself a future chief during the period of British rule; Magdalene von Prince, German settler, writer, and wife of colonial officer Tom Prince; and Severin Hofbauer, a German missionary in the service of the Benedictine order who lived and worked in Tanzania for much of his life. Although the three would appear to

¹ Among many examples, see Peter J. Hempenstall and Paula Tanaka Mochida, *The Lost Man: Wilhelm Solf in German History* (Wiesbaden, 2005); Eckard Michels, *'Der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika': Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. Ein preußischer Kolonialoffizier* (Paderborn, 2008); Katharina Abermeth, *Heinrich Schnee: Karrierewege und Erfahrungswelten eines deutschen Kolonialbeamten* (Kiel, 2017); Heiko Wegmann, *Vom Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika zur Kolonialbewegung in Freiburg: Der Offizier und badische Veteranenführer Max Knecht (1874–1954)* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2019).

have little in common, they were united in several key ways. For example, they experienced the German military conquest of Tanzania; they held prominent positions within colonial society; and all three were known to one another. Further uniting the three biographies is the shared space of Iringa, which forms the geographical focus of the study. As the author outlines at various times, Iringa was a centre for the Hehe population, a key site of African resistance for the German colonial administration, a missionary base for the Benedictine mission, and an important region during the period of British mandate rule. The time period the study covers extends roughly from the immediate pre-colonial period in Tanzania to encompass German colonial rule over the territory as well as the period of British mandate control. By following the lives of her protagonists over this longer duration, Brockmeyer is able to engage with debates over the exceptionality of German colonialism, which she challenges through acknowledging both the differences and the continuities between German and British colonial practices.

As Brockmeyer concedes, picking rather obscure biographies to examine poses potential difficulties in terms of the scarcity of traditional research materials available, the content of these materials, and whose voice can or cannot be heard. The construction of the colonial archive and its Eurocentric nature, which erases African agency, is, however, one of the key processes which she seeks to demonstrate throughout. At the same time, she suggests strategies to overcome these research barriers. Building on the work of the historian of modern Africa Richard Reid, she adopts a method of combining a wide, eclectic range of public and private materials from national, regional, and family archives in Tanzania, Germany, and the United Kingdom. This includes photographs, objects, published and unpublished sources, and ego-documents. Complementing as well as challenging these forms of evidence are informal interviews Brockmeyer carried out primarily in Tanzania, but also in Germany. These talks with members of both the Mkwawa and Prince families brought to the surface alternative forms of knowledge, in particular memories, rumours, and stories passed down within families, as well as new information and insights. Brockmeyer employs this combination of sources throughout, often to great effect, in order to offer potential

alternative readings of selected events, relationships, and processes, which bring into question the dominant European narratives of this entangled history.

The work is split into three broadly based thematic sections on travel, work, and memory, which are organized chronologically. A real strength of the study is the way in which Brockmeyer anchors her subjects in time and space by offering considerable contextual detail, which then enables her to widen her focus and engage with multiple sub-themes. In the first section on travel, for example, she follows Sapi Mkwawa's movements, first to Dar es Salaam, and provides a brief but rich overview of the development and spatial segregation of the city, including the sights Mkwawa would likely have been confronted with. Later in the section she focuses on his travels to Rome and then St. Ottilien Archabbey in Bavaria, reconstructing elements of these stays. Overall, this focus on Mkwawa's travels serves to provide a broader discussion of African mobility, the degree to which it should be seen as forced or voluntary, and its absence from both the archival record and the historiography. At the same time, this section on travel is also about the movement and transfer of ideas. Brockmeyer charts how over a longer period, beginning in the pre-colonial era, European representations of Iringa and the Hehe became self-reinforcing in producing a romanticized representation of a landscape ripe for European exploitation and inhabited by an attractive, but warlike population. These not only informed both German and British policy and practice towards the Hehe, but she also argues that elements of these constructs survived long beyond the end of the colonial period and continue to influence European writing on the region and on the Hehe.

The long section on work is similarly expansive. Here, among other things, Brockmeyer examines interesting aspects of everyday colonial practices, including violence (a theme throughout) and the tensions between local representatives of the colonial administration and missionaries on the ground. The bizarre case of the missionary Hofbauer examining the sperm of a Hehe man is taken as an example of this friction, which also caused considerable annoyance to the Benedictine mother house in Bavaria. In his zeal to convert members of the local population, Hofbauer intervened in their private lives

to a degree that was deemed unwanted and politically dangerous by German officials. In turn, Brockmeyer shows how African women, in turning to Hofbauer for support, could use these tensions to their own advantage to escape unhappy relationships, without necessarily feeling any long-term commitment to Catholicism. This is one of a number of examples where the author's close reading of her sources allows for African agency to be demonstrated. A further key example in this section is her interpretation of Sapi Mkwawa's removal as chief and his deportation in 1940, following an incident in front of the British administrative buildings. Dismissed at the time as a drunken outburst by British officials, Brockmeyer analyses eyewitness testimonies, Mkwawa's reported words, and the greater context to build a convincing case that his actions can instead be seen as a form of resistance. The incident further serves to highlight both the precarious role of African intermediaries within European colonial projects and practices of British indirect rule.

Work is also understood to include the active involvement of her protagonists, primarily Magdalene von Prince, in shaping colonial memory. Over all three sections Prince emerges as an unreliable eyewitness who in her writings, both public and private, consciously sought to cultivate an image of herself and her husband as colonial pioneers in the service of the German colonial project. Yet, as Brockmeyer argues, the romanticized image of benevolent, successful settlers the Princes wished to portray outwardly was far from the reality. Instead, the couple attempted to impose a feudal system on their plantations and Magdalene especially was physically violent towards her African workers. Economic success eluded them and they appeared to be facing financial ruin. Nonetheless, in Germany the constructed image of the Princes as colonial heroes survived well into the post-First World War period.

A discussion of colonial memory primarily in Germany and Tanzania is expanded upon in the final, shorter section of the book, which looks more closely at the process of memory making: what is remembered, by whom, why, and in what form. Brockmeyer first examines private memories by taking a family heirloom—a necklace said to contain a tooth taken from the body of Mutwa Mkwawa—alongside family stories to unpick suppressed and hidden memories of the

colonial past within the Mkwawa and Prince families. She then takes the better-known history of Mutwa Mkwawa's skull to consider the changing meanings it has held in German, British, and Tanzanian memory. These examples make clear that while the three countries are linked by a colonial past, the remembering (and silencing) of this past both privately and publicly has created less of a shared memory than one which is contested and divergent.

Geteilte Geschichte, geraubte Geschichte is a rich, complex, at times frustrating, but always rewarding and ultimately very impressive work. Given the wide-ranging nature of the study it is inevitable that not all the topics engaged with are treated in full. More could certainly have been said not simply about Africans who stayed at St. Ottilien, but also about how representative Sapi Mkwawa's stay was of African migration to Germany in general. At times, the treatment of the British side of this interwoven history feels underdeveloped, especially in the discussion of colonial memory, and not all the alternative readings presented are convincing. These minor criticisms aside, however, Brockmeyer makes multiple contributions not simply to the history of German colonialism, but to the history of empire in general. As she rightly stresses, despite its short duration, the German colonial project was part of a greater European one. Among many other things, she provides insight into the mechanics of everyday colonial rule and the centrality of violence, the construction of knowledge, African resistance, and the legacies of colonialism. In addition, she makes clear that colonial history is, to a degree, a shared one which, despite asymmetric relationships, impacts on and binds both the colonizing power and the colonized territory. At the same time, while this history might be shared, the study stresses that memories of colonialism often diverge and that African voices have frequently been silenced in the archival record and in the existing historiography. In creatively employing a wide range of disparate sources, in part to emphasize African agency, Brockmeyer crucially demonstrates the possibilities for recovering these hidden, suppressed memories of colonial rule, which can be used to challenge long-established European narratives of empire.

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