



Asya Studies

Academic Social Studies/Akademik Sosyal Arařtırmalar

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31455/asya.745867> / Year: 4 - Number: 13, p. 83-92, Autumn 2020

A CRISIS OF COLONIALISM: THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN DEUTSCH-OSTAFRIKA

SÖMÜRGEÇİLİĞİN KRİZİ: DEUTSCH-OSTAFRIKA'DA BİRİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŐI

Arařtırma Makalesi /
Research Article

Makale Geliř Tarihi /
Article Arrival Date
31.05.2020

Makale Kabul Tarihi /
Article Accepted Date
29.09.2020

Makale Yayın Tarihi /
Article Publication Date
30.09.2020

Asya Studies

Abstract

This paper aims at understanding the First World War in the German colony of Deutsch-Ostafrika from all important perspectives. It aims to show that the situation led to a crisis of colonialism; Therefore, it firstly takes a close look at the actual history of the course of the First World War in Deutsch-Ostafrika and its immediate effects for the African population. Its arguments are that German armed forces consisted mainly of African soldiers under white officers, whose constant replacement weakened the army. A lack of supplies and infrastructure led to lootings and the forced recruitment of local porters, of whom many died in service, and whose absence on their fields led to famine. The Germans therefore were at the good will of Africans, what undermined the classical colonial distribution of roles. Until the war there had been an ideological frontier between black Africans and whites of all European nations. This was important to establish a deterring system of representation, to make Africans feel inferior and not to attempt revolt. The war changed this radically, as black soldiers learned to kill white people and to understand their weaknesses. For long, furthermore colonial missionaries had struggled to spread Christianity among natives; the waring Europeans' display of "Christianity" though led to major setbacks. The following spiritual vacuum was in part filled by the spread of Islam. The paper argues that this interplay of military, ideological and religious points shook the colonial system to its foundations. The article's final chapter traces how some of the events of the war in Africa then effected the subsequent period.

Keywords: Deutsch-Ostafrika, World War One, Colonialism, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, Religion

Öz

Bu makale, Alman Deutsch-Ostafrika kolonisinde Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nı tüm önemli açılardan anlamayı ve durumun bir sömürgecilik krizine yol açtığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu nedenle ilk olarak Deutsch-Ostafrika'da Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın seyrini ve Afrika nüfusu üzerindeki etkilerini yakından incelemektedir. Almanya'nın silahlı kuvvetleri ağırlıklı olarak beyaz subaylar ve onların emrinde olan Afrikalı askerlerden oluşmaktaydı. Fakat beyaz subayların sürekli değişmesi orduyu zayıflatmaktaydı. Takviyelerin yetersizliği ve alt yapıyla ilgili sorunlar bazı sıkıntılara sebebiyet vermiştir. Bunlardan ilki yağmalar olmuştur. Yağmaların yanında askerler birçok yerli halka zorla hamallık yaptırmış ve onların ölümüne sebep olmuştur. Hamallık yapan yerlilerin kendi tarlalarında çalışmaması sonucu da kıtlık meydana gelmiştir.

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na kadar siyah Afrikalılar ve tüm Avrupalı beyazlar arasında ideolojik bir sınır vardı. Kurulan bu sınırın hedefi caydırıcı bir temsil sistemi kurarak Afrikalıları daha aşağı hissettirmek ve onların isyan girişiminde bulunmalarını engellemektir. Savaş, siyah askerlerin beyaz insanları öldürmesi ve beyazların zayıflıklarını anlamasıyla bu fikri kökten değiştirdi. Uzun zaman sömürgeci misyonerler Hristiyanlığı yerliler arasında yaymak için ciddi mücadele verdiler; fakat Avrupalıların bu Hristiyanlık planları yerliler üzerinde tutmadı ve ters tepki oluşturdu Hristiyanlığa karşı oluşturulan tepki sonrası oluşan manevi boşluk, kısmen İslamiyet'in yayılmasıyla dolduruldu.

Bu çalışmada askeri, ideolojik ve dini konuların etkileşimlerinin sömürge sisteminin temellerini nasıl sarstığı ortaya çıkarılacaktır. Son kısımda ise, Afrika'daki savaş durumunun etkilerinin sonraki yıllarda nasıl ortaya çıktığı ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Deutsch-Ostafrika, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Sömürgecilik, Paul Von Lettow-Vorbeck, Din

Citation Information/Kaynakça Bilgisi

Wittmann, M. (2020). A Crisis of Colonialism: The First World War in *Deutsch-Ostafrika*. *Asya Studies-Academic Social Studies/Akademik Sosyal Arařtırmalar*, Year:4, Number: 13, Autumn, p. 83-92.

1. Introduction

Just a little more than a hundred years ago the First World War, a conflict whose scale and fierceness surpassed everything known to mankind until then, ended. It had been a war, fought for many reasons and by many countries and the atrocities of the Western Front, the battles at the Somme or at Verdun are deeply entrenched in the Western consciousness. Indeed, they are entrenched to such an extent, that the global character of the conflict often is hardly even remembered. The Russian or the Turkish theaters of war are known to far less Westerners and the fighting in Asia and Africa seems to be ignored by the greatest part of First World War research. Especially for Africa this is a curious fact, as the struggle there was directly between European colonial powers. Here British, French, Belgian, Italian and German agendas, interests and forces clashed. Considering the current misery in wide parts of the black continent, and bearing in mind, that the First World War was the main factor in shaping the political and often enough also cultural and social landscape of the past century, the war in Africa must not be neglected.

Unlike previous campaigns in Africa, the World War brought the European states themselves to the edge of destruction, thereby also influencing the colonial “properties” overseas. This is the reason why, by many means and in many different ways, the European crisis found its echo in Africa. Beside the mere military events, enormous shifts and changes happened here, on cultural and religious as well as on ideological and social levels. Like in Europe the war left hardly anything unchanged and a full-grown crisis of colonialism emerged. It is this paper’s aim to analyze this crisis, to trace all of its important aspects and to show their connections, and interdependencies. As will be shown, the Eastern African German colony of *Deutsch-Ostafrika* (DOA) serves as a very good example here. This is, amongst others, for the fact, that, unlike in the other African German colonies, the fighting in DOA continued until the end of the war, what even aggravated the crisis.

The paper will be structured as follows: After a short overview of the military events in the colony, at first the military aspect of the crisis will be shown, touching on infrastructural and soldierly problems, such as the situation and relationship of black and white troops, and their effects on the population of the land. This will be followed by the crisis of the colonial ideology, of white and black means of representation and self-conceptions. The last aspect to be analyzed will be the social transformations triggered by the crises, focusing on the changes in the composition and identity of the African population and especially the religious developments. The paper will end with an outlook on the following period and a conclusion of the research.

2. The Crisis of the Military and the Administration

2.1. The course of the war in Deutsch-Ostafrika

After having started in July and August 1914 as a regional conflict in the Balkan, the – soon to be called – First World War was to rapidly take global dimension, as already before the Japanese or American entry to the war, already Africa had been drawn into the European struggle (Koller, 2015:42).

In the very beginning, it had been tried to keep DOA neutral, as had actually been decided about 30 years earlier on the Berlin conference (General Act of the Berlin Conference, 1885). Nevertheless, neither an intensive communication via telegrams between the nations, nor civil administrations or missionary programs could prevent the outbreak of war. Britain saw it necessary to attack the colony, as it feared that German warships could use it as a base and interfere with British vital shipping traffic in the Indian Ocean. First Heinrich von Schnee, German governor of DOA and formally the supreme commander of the colony’s troops, the *Schutztruppe*, saw the war as too risky and tried to prevent it, yet he was ousted by the troops general Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (Pesek, 2009:1). This officer, who had already collected colonial fighting experience in the suppression of the Chinese Boxer-Rebellion and the German genocide of the Herero and Nama in German South-West-Africa (Pesek, n.d.a.:4), regarded it as his duty to carry out the war also in Africa (Pesek, 2009:1). It was this man, who would mainly shape the course of the events in DOA. “

The Germans were fortunate in having an exceptional leader in Lettow, who displayed remarkable drive and energy in shaping the Schutztruppe. He was instrumental in creating a large and highly capable force despite many old and less vigorous officers. His personality and unshakeable will to win kept his troops going throughout the entire war [...]”(Anderson, 2014:348).

In DOA Lettow-Vorbeck commanded a troop of 7500, soldiers against 160.000 British and later also Belgian and South African troops (Koller, 2015:43). It must be stated here, that in different accounts the numbers differ (Pesek, 2017:2) The German forces, not unlike the allied, mostly consisted of Africans that were known by the name ‘askari’.

The first weeks of the war were rather calm in DOA, being limited to small-scaled border skirmishes. It was not until November 1914, when the British suffered several defeats against the Germans, that that was to change (Pesek, 2009:2). Especially the attempted British landing operation at Tanga turned into a disaster (Barrett, 2017:247). The Germans could hold the strategic initiative until early 1916, when the well experienced *force publique* from the Belgian Congo (Pesek, n.d.a.:1) and South African troops under General Jan Christiaan Smuts (Anderson, 2014:347) joined the British efforts (Pesek, 2009:2). Retreating, Lettow-Vorbeck adopted the tactics of scorched earth to harden the allied advance (Pesek, 2017:4). Indeed, due to shortage of supplies the enemy forces were halted in early 1917. As will be discussed extensively below, also the German troops suffered a great lack of supplies (Pesek, 2016:10), as the British royal navy blocked the supply routes (Pesek, 2004:2) and it is even stated, that many maneuvers of the war were done in order to acquire fertile land and resources, rather than for strategic gain (Pesek, 2017:4). In November 1917 the Germans had to temporarily leave DOA ground to Portuguese controlled Mozambique. Here their supply situation even worsened due to the natives’ hostility (Pesek, 2009:2). Anderson states, “that the fighting power of the Schutztruppe was effectively broken and it was only the sheer incompetence of the Portuguese forces that enabled the enemy [the Germans] to survive” (Anderson, 2014:348). It was not until September 1918, that Lettow-Vorbeck, because of Belgian and South African troop withdrawal, could return to DOA. Nevertheless, the outcome of the war was already decided, and on November 23rd, two weeks after the armistice of Compiègne, the Schutztruppe surrendered (Pesek, 2009:2).

At the end of the war, more than 10.000 allied soldiers were dead (Koller, 2015:43) and vast parts of DOA had been destroyed to an unprecedented extent. Not even the Maji-Maji uprising of 1905 had led to such destruction (Ranger, 1975:45). The suffering of the African population will be analyzed in detail on the following pages. Lettow-Vorbeck, indeed, had achieved at least one of his aims: He had successfully diverted large enemy forces from being deployed to the European battlefields (Anderson, 2014:349).

2.2. The immediate effects for the African population

The only way to relieve his troops from the shortage of supplies, that Lettow-Vorbeck could think of was looting the properties of the native Africans, and he, like the allied forces, did so extensively. The owners of the requisitioned goods were “payed” with paper receipts, which were yet of little worth, as most of the time nothing was there to be bought for them (Anderson, 2014:347). The next immense problem, was the fact, that, even though the War in DOA bore features of modern conflicts like the usage of warplanes or machine guns, the German colony lacked a modern infrastructure. This led to one of the major tragedies of the war, as all fighting parties had to rely extensively on the hundreds of thousands of African porters, of whom many were never to return home (Anderson, 2014:346). We will turn back to them in a moment. Both the reckless seizure of vital stocks and this removing of indispensable work forces lead between 1916 and 1918 to several famines with tens of thousands of casualties (Pesek, 2017:3). This and the anyway hard climatic conditions of DOA eased the way for illnesses and epidemics like malaria, dysentery and pneumonia (Anderson, 2014:346).

DOA’s climate had another significant disadvantage. It was a suitable habitat for the Tsetse-fly, an insect, that transmits the so-called sleeping sickness, that kills larger animals and makes the usage of horses or mules impossible. For this reason and the already mentioned lack in infrastructure, the fighting parties desperately needed to conscript porters, in order to not get stuck (Barrett, 2017:239). Even though working as porters for the colonial powers was no new experience for the Africans (Pesek, 2017:3), its scale during the First World War certainly was. “The German Governor Heinrich Schnee estimated that in the first two years, nearly every male African worked at least for some time for the German war effort. Although this estimation seems somehow overstated, it illustrates the desire of the colonial state for African labor”(Pesek, 2017:4). The porters’ service were very hard, as without any equipment or even tents for the nights they had to carry loads of 20 or 30 kg over long distances in harsh weather conditions, and were furthermore preferred targets for enemy troops (Michels, 2009:180). Rumors (Pesek, 2017:4) of these deadly conditions made it harder and harder for the commanders to find new porters and soon downright hunts for them were organized, reluctant individuals were tortured by German officers, and not

even missionary stations were spared (Pesek, n.d.a.:10). Michels writes, that even children and sometimes pregnant women were forced into service (Michels, 2009:182). It is somehow curious, that the German genocides of the Herero and Nama in South-Western Africa is today well known and researched, but these war crimes of similar dimensions in DOA are not (Hull:2005:155).

It was tried by some Africans to undertake acts of resistance against the war and their abusing by all the belligerent parties. High desertion rates, strikes and sometimes even ambushes on passing troops or uprisings happened (Pesek, 2017:2-6), yet none of those was powerful enough to noticeably improve the Africans' situation. One other way to deal with the hardships were the Beni ngmoa dances. „Very many of the men who found themselves in these various predicaments used the Beni mode to express either pride or acceptance of dislocation and defeat, either bewilderment or a tenacious will to survive” (Ranger, 1975:51). “The dances mimicked violence of the marauding soldiers, the brutal treatment of porters with the kiboko, the lash. The dancers portrayed the idiosyncratic rules of Europeans in the war, when they were taken as prisoners. Songs remembered the rape of women by British askari” (Pesek, 2017:8).

2.3. The structure of the German troops

As has already been said, the units of the German Schutztruppe mainly consisted of black soldiers under some white officers. With few exceptions the highest possible rank for blacks were the positions of sergeants, in which they served as a very important linkage. As the whites often enough were unaware of how to deal or communicate with the black soldiers, their knowledge was crucial. From a postcolonial point of view, they established a third space, like defined by Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994:211; Spivak, 2011:53). It is, furthermore, interesting to know, that the colonial military system attached, beside the normal drill, great importance to the troops ability of being able to parade just as good as the Prussian troops of Germany (Michels, 2009:179). The askari were officials of the colonial state and seem to have established a degree of self-esteem as respected parts of society. They even were able to appeal to the colonial non-native-jurisdictions (Michels, 2009:174). Nevertheless, the colonial every-day racism, that will further be discussed below, did not exclude them:

“The ration system for troops assumed that even allied African soldiers ought to receive less food than white troops, reflecting the basic assumptions that white superiority must be reflected in better treatment and that blacks required less food to survive than did whites. Rations for prisoners were then depressed even further by two additional principles: that prisoners must never be treated better than one’s own (in this case, African) troops, and that rebels deserved punishment”(Hull:2005:174).

It must be mentioned, that Hull speaks here on the Situation in Germany’s South-West African colony Deutsch Süd-West-Afrika, yet it is not to be assumed, that the situation in DOA differed, especially as Lettow-Vorbeck had served in South-West before coming to DOA. Furthermore, in case an askari accomplished something extraordinary, it was tried by the colonial system to mention such merits only in unpublished reports (Michels, 2009:172). Moreover one can observe, that, due to deep-rooted racist stereotypes “many [white] soldiers were sentimental about animals, anthropomorphizing them at the same time as denying human status to Africans”(Barrett, 2017:241).

Beside this, already disquieting, misbalance in the troops, there, moreover, were not enough troops at all in DOA, in fact, not even enough to effectively control the hostile population. This bore the seed of disproportionate military responses and violent pacifications (Hull:2005:206). The situation was even worsened by the shortage of white officers. This was mainly due to a secret firing order on officers, that had been given by all the belligerent colonial states. The officer ranks were refilled by the incoming volunteers from Germany, who often enough had no experience at all in colonial warfare (Pesek, 2009:4). Hull states further, that these volunteers’ motivations often were fast careers and merits. Also, a certain brutal type of men seems to have been attracted to the colonial wars (Hull:2005:133), as it was known, that moral boundaries were much more lenient there, and the phrase of “the African way of doing things”, served as an excuse for many atrocities (Pesek, n.d.a.:5). One example for this ‘African way’, was the fact that the newly adopted Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907 were seen as unimplementable for Africa and were often simply ignored (Pesek, n.d.a.:2); the very little knowledge of and interest for the situation in Africa in Germany, even intensified this. One could be sure, that most of the events and atrocities of the war in DOA would never become publicly known at home. Furthermore the Germans were completely depending on their African troops, as soldiers, scouts, translators or servants (Michels, 2009:185). For this reason, the German colonial state rather made concessions for them, than regulations.

This, of course threw open the doors also for war crimes committed by the black soldiers (Pesek, n.d.a.:11).

Many of the brutalities of the First World War in DOA had their precursor in the suppression of the Maji-Maji revolt between 1905 and 1907. In this war the estimated death tolls ranked between 75.000 and 300.000 Africans (Kellerhof, 2005; Hull:2005:150), of whom about 26.000 had been executed, what was officially approved by the German Foreign Office (Hull:2005:146f). Indeed, “one-third of the population of the rebellious areas [was killed]. Whole districts were so thoroughly depopulated, and the human ecology so transformed that they were later turned into reserves for big game“(Hull:2005:157) The main reason for this enormous number was a total war against dwellings, fields and food stores (Hull:2005:206), that was to be repeated in the First World War. To be able to understand the extend of the German brutality and disproportion here, one must look at their own death toll: 15 Germans and 389 askari had lost their lives during the uprising (Kellerhof, 2005). Beside these, both in the Maji-Maji uprising and the First World War rape and other kinds of sexual exploitations of African women were a standard practice and syphilis was widespread among German (an also English) troops (Hull:2005:151).

3. The Ideological Crisis

3.1. Colonizer’s views on the colonized

Even though this paper’s focus is on a German colony it can be assumed, that the ideological situations in other European nations’ African properties was very similar. For this reason, when applicable also examples of the British or other colonies will be used.

Henning Melber described the colonizer’s view as arrogant, intolerant, the presumptuous view of a ruler, bearing the arrogance of power. According to him it is unscrupulous, pseudo-morally, cold and merciless (Melber, 1992:160). In this sense the black Africans were constructed as wildlings, whom European codes of honor of morals could not be applied to (Michels, 2009:178). Administration and organization of Africans’ lands was seen in the colonizers’ self-conception as a cultural achievement, the natives should be thankful for (Barrett,2017:247). The colonial view perceived the colonized not as full human, indeed one can observe “a long history of the dehumanization of the African [...] in two ways: the African is closer to nature, and the animal kingdom, than are Europeans, and the African is a child not an adult human. The two discourses complement each other to deny full any humanity“(Barrett, 2017:240). For the colonizer these childish and beastly attributions both justified and demanded the forced domination of Africa. The first verses of the contemporary poem “the white man’s burden” illustrates this set of mind:

“Take up the White man’s burden / Send forth the best ye breed / Go bind your sons to exile/ To serve your captives need / To wait in heavy harness / On fluttered folk and wild / Your new-caught sullen peoples / Half devil and half child”(Kipling 1992).

There are many examples of how these racist attitudes manifested themselves in everyday colonial life, one is given by the British War Graves Commission. This institution responsible for the maintenance of the graves of fallen soldiers had decided, that individually marked graves for killed black soldiers were not necessary, as Africans had not yet achieved a stage of civilization to appreciate such. Furthermore, it was decided to not maintain African graves after the war as this would be a waste of public money. It is reported from British white combat troops in Africa, that the soldiers had no problems to be buried in the same cemeteries like fallen Germans, but they would not accept fallen black soldiers, not even from the British troops beside them. (Barrett, 2017:244ff).

The colonial view was distinguished by inconsistency and adaptability, what the motive of the ‘brave askari’ demonstrates. Lettow-Vorbeck referred to African colonial troops “casually, in his reminiscences of the war as ‘our brave blacks’ and ‘our brave black soldiers“(Barrett, 2017:247). Both during and after the war they were portrayed as loyal subjects. In the press they were shown in an exotic yet positive light, strongly differing from normal descriptions of Africans or the negative stereotypes used for the blacks fighting in the enemies’ colonial armies (Koller, 2015:43).

3.2. The crisis of representation

A standardized picture of the Africans, the “Negroes” was necessary for the Germans to define themselves as superior. Yet, in this lies one of the major problems of the German colonial state: Having had defined the “wild, childish negroes”, as inferior, the administration often enough lacked factual knowledge of his subjects. Pesek writes, that in the beginning of the First World War the whites knew hardly more about “their” Africans than the number of huts, as this was necessary for collecting taxes

(Pesek, 2009:3). It must be assumed that this lack of effort to find out more on the subjects, resulted from a feeling of already having understood them sufficiently. Here the old European prejudice of Africa being without a history, meaning no relevant or meaningful changes could come from the Africans themselves, can be observed. One of the Europeans' mistakes in this was to construct the Africans as one monolithic group, completely ignoring their diversity and often enough also rivalry. Africans never reached the degree of unity, the whites considered them to have (Pesek, 2017:2).

Having already mentioned the insufficient number of German troops in DOA, in fact, the whites rationally were not in a very powerful position. The only way of preventing a rebellion of the "beasts and children", therefore, was a certain way of white self-representation, that was to deter the natives. This wish of the colonizer to be respected and even feared, is in fact nothing more than a sign of his own powerlessness, that he was well aware of (Pesek, 2009:6). The Africans should be filled with fear and awe of the whites, in order to obey. European technological superiority was intentionally used to impress them, knowing that they would sometimes even perceive it as magic (Michels, 2009:161). The black colonial troops played a very important role in this representation: Being the actual basis of colonial power, wearing German uniforms and carrying out German orders, but nevertheless being black, in themselves the frontier between white and black, civilized and wild, power and powerlessness were incorporated. The barracks, or Boma, were therefore the center of colonial representation (Michels, 2009:163). Having outlined this situation, the German racist feeling of superiority, their reluctance to better understand their subjects and their actual very limited power, one understands that it was of utmost importance for the administration of DOA to keep her deterring system of representation intact. Was it to break, the consequences were unforeseeable (Pesek, 2009:2).

The main reason, why the First World War meant a crisis for European colonialism in Africa was, that exactly this happened. Before, the dividing line in the colonies had been between black and white. In fact, the different colonial black subjects had been trained to respect all the whites alike, disregarding the nationality. Racial segregation, furthermore, had defined everyday life. The World War was to disrupt all of this, as now whites were going to fight whites, each of them supported by "his" blacks (Pesek, 2004:5). Until the conflict erupted, it was even unthinkable for a native African subject to kill a white man, because of the fatal consequences, in form of punitive expeditions, that such a step would provoke. The depth to which this colonial pattern of thought had penetrated the African mind is visible in the fact, that at the beginning of the war many African soldiers found it indeed difficult to shoot on enemy white troops (Pesek, 2009:3). Soon enough they were to adopt to the new ways, and with it they were to realize, that the reality of the white man was far away from his representation. Ranger writers „It [WW1] was a time of very confused impressions. European power was displayed in the most terrifying way – but at the same time it was shown that the African askaris of the German army were more than a match for white troops" (Ranger, 1975:51). Beside of their own strength, black soldiers learned of the whites' weaknesses in the harsh African climate, and their easier infection rates with illnesses (Michels, 2009:171). Not even the final white trump card, the superior equipment and weaponry, could be played anymore, as the black soldiers, of course, learned to use it (Pesek, 2004:9). The Germans tried at least to prevent that last point from happening, forbidding black troops to operate machine guns. They were allowed to clean or reload, but not to fire them. The fact, that watching a German soldier operating the gun over and over again would teach them anyway, and also that in the heat of battle if necessary most likely nobody would comply with such an instruction, shows the desperation of this rule (Michels, 2009:174). Also in other aspects of the daily routine during the war, segregation often could not be maintained. The differences in the food provision of white and black soldiers was a luxury that only seldomly could be "enjoyed" (Pesek, 2016:10), and during the war also the separate burials were more and more given up. Some white commanders became very afraid for the colonial system as a whole during this period, yet others seem not to have bothered at all: When the German cruiser *Königsberg* had been sunk in 1915 Lettow-Vorbeck included its crew in his troop, having the sailors serve in the same ranks as the askari, paying them the same and even equipping them with qualitative inferior material, even though this provoked a conflict with governor Schnee (Pesek, 2009:2ff).

Taking all the mentioned points into account, the German colonizers had to understand that their nimbus of representation, at least in the eyes of the black soldiers, had suffered to a great extent. One last attempt to not lose their superiority was to even stronger than before separate oneself from the Africans in the realm of thought. It was claimed, that in spite of all, the Europeans were of a higher ethical attitude, of better character and personality (Pesek, 2009:8). Such a thing is, of course, easy to postulate, but how

could it be implemented? The German colonial state did not want its soldiers to plunder, but rape and sexual exploitation of black women was, as already mentioned, not only tolerated, but indeed widespread and accepted (Hull:2005:150). Here the European “ethical superiority” was to be implemented. Few voices had always warned white soldiers to abstain from such relationships, but during the war official prohibitions were issued. The explanation for this was, that if a white man would become too intimate with a black woman, using the “natural instincts of a child of nature” she would be able to see through the colonial mirror of representation. Beside the appalling racial basic assumption of this idea, it is interesting, that at the same time the “natural instinct of a child of nature in the male African population had been assumed for many years to believe the nimbus of representation (Pesek, 2009:6f).

4. The Religious Crisis

4.1. The situation of Christianity and native religions

As was already been shown in the poem of the white man’s burden, one of the official European justifications for their colonization of Africa was bringing “civilization” there. This of course included the spread of Christendom via extensive missionary engagements. Not judging the individual missionaries’ intentions, nevertheless, this claim as a whole, was debunked during the war as a pretext for other interests. This can be seen for example in the fact, that both German and Belgian forces did not hesitate to plunder and destroy missionary stations (Pesek, 2017:8). Furthermore, the Germans had already suspended much of the missionary work (Nimtz, 1980:15), and “enforced politics of persecution and humiliation on British and French missionaries and African converts belonging to their mission societies” (Pesek, 2017:8). Barrett states, that furthermore it is reported, that colonial troops when hunting for porters “preferred mission people to pagans [and] would come to a village on Sunday in order to catch the Christians easily. [...] Apparently the fear of being caught for service in the war ‘made many people revert [...] and burn their books’ (Barrett, 2017:246).

Native African religions saw a variety of new cults emerging during the colonial time. Many were linked to prophecies on the end of the foreign domination, often connected to a huge war as a cleansing storm. Nyangweso quotes one of these prophecies:

“I am the God Mumbo whose two homes are in the Sun and the Lake. [...] Go out and tell all Africans [...] that from henceforth I am their God. Those whom I choose personally, and also those who acknowledge me, will live forever in plenty. Their crops will grow of themselves and there will be no more need to work. I will cause cattle, sheep, and goats to come up out of the lake in great numbers to those who believe in me, but all unbelievers and their families and their cattle will die out. The Christian religion is rotten [mbovu] and so is its practice of making its believers wear clothes. My followers must let their hair grow—never cutting it. Their clothes shall be the skins of goats and cattle and they must never wash. All Europeans are your enemies, but the time is shortly coming when they will all disappear from our country” (Nyangweso, 1930:13).

The Maji-Maji uprising had indeed been a large-scale war, mainly driven by African religious beliefs, but, as mentioned above, brutally crushed by the Germans. Disillusioned by the failure a spiritual vacuum followed, that was soon to be filled by another religion (Nimtz, 1980:12f).

4.2. The situation of Islam

Islam had been on the continent for more than a thousand years, but its main centers were in Western-Africa. Also the East Coast always had had some Muslim groups, most famous the Swahili culture and the Sultanate of Zanzibar. In spite of those, when the Germans arrived, the Muslim share of the colony’s population, might only have been around 3,5%. Shortly after the World War their number had grown up to 25% (Pesek, 2004:12). How was such a shift possible in less than 30 years? In fact, mostly the Germans themselves were the reason for this. “Sometimes consciously, but more frequently not, the colonial governments adopted policies that led to the unprecedented growth of the Muslim community” (Nimtz, 1980:10). Most important was probably the fact, that most of the Africans working for the colonial administration were Muslims from the urban Swahili elites. The reason for this was most likely their ability to write and read (Nimtz, 1980:12). Just like with their askari, the German colonial state was more or less dependent on their cooperation, which is why the administration seems to have done nothing to contain the obvious spread of Islam (Pesek, 2004:3). Also the German askari themselves consisted of more than 90% Muslims, thereby, when marching bringing the religion also to remote areas (Pesek, n.d.b.:4). The general popularity of the Swahili-culture in this time contributed to the trend as

well (Pesek, 2004:10). Another important factor was the spread of Sufi orders across East-Africa. Both their growing importance and the *beni ngoma* dance societies were perceived as a crisis of colonialism, because they “weakened ethnic identities and made contacts between different groups easier. From this fact, a grave danger arises for colonial rule, because it provided a basis for religious and political movements like “Pan-Islamism” [...] The war indeed weakened ethnic identities“(Pesek, 2017:9). Such a merge of different African groups, of course, frightened the Germans, as it brought DOA one step closer to the feared uprising. Finally, in 1912, a new attitude was adopted to halter the spread of Islam (Nimtz, 1980:13). These new plans however, never were enacted, because off the beginning of the war. The German emperor had declared himself friend of all Muslims and the Ottoman caliph in Istanbul even declared a Jihad in Germany’s favor against the allied nations, what unfortunately cannot be discussed here in depth. Therefore, again a positive stance towards Islam had to be taken in DOA.

5. The Subsequent Period

Even though this paper’s aim has been to analyze the important aspects of the historical crisis and not every detail of the historical events, it seems necessary to give a short overview over first time after the end of the war.

After Lettow-Vorbeck’s surrender the white members of the *Schutztruppe* were detained and interned in Darussalam, where they remained until January 1919 and then were sent home. “Amidst the chaos of post-war Berlin, they returned in honour, with Schnee, Lettow and Looff riding at the head of the gallant remnants through the Brandenburg Gates“(Anderson, 2014:350).

At the end of the war also the bargaining over the future of the colonies began. 1919 in Versailles, the question of the German colonies’ future fate was of high importance. Finally, it was adjudged, that Germany was not capable to own colonies and that her “properties” overseas should be divided between the allies as mandates of the League of Nations (Michels, 2009:185). Considering the enormous war crimes, that also the allied forces had committed in DOA, it is “somehow ironical, [that] Belgians as well as the British regarded themselves as liberators of Africans from the yoke of German colonial rule“(Pesek, 2017:6).

Even though the First World War had been a time of radical change and rethink for the Africans (Pesek, 2004:1), the feared large-scale uprising against German colonial rule did not take place, and after the British had taken over the rule, business seems to have continued as usual (Pesek, 2004:9). Some, therefore, pose the question whether the war in Africa can be regarded as a “similar watershed in history as the war in Europe” (Pesek, 2017:1).

The years after the war saw a long list of publications of memoirs of the fighting in DOA. Also, General Lettow-Vorbeck himself published in this manner (Pesek, 2016:4). He furthermore established contacts to the former enemy commanders, and some friendships, especially to the South African General Jan-Christiaan Smuts, are said to have developed (Samson, 2013:6ff). All of these, and also the, already mentioned, description of the German askari as loyal subjects served to depict the war in DOA as a chivalrous and glorious fight, in contrast to the impersonal and industrial horrors of the Western Front (Pesek, n.d.a.:2). They probably also were meant to motivate the League of Nations to return the German colonies and to cover up war crimes and colonial crisis.

6. Summary and Conclusion

It was this paper’s aim to illuminate the crisis of colonialism during the First World War in DOA from all important angles. It was shown that in the field of tensions between whites and blacks, Europeans and Africans potential for this crisis could be found in military, ideological, social and religious areas.

The text explained, that because of the final act of the Berlin conference of 1884, actually no war should have taken place in the European colonies, but British worries for their naval trade, and a German conflict between DOA’s officialdom and military nevertheless led to its outbreak. In the fighting Germany’s mainly black troops were highly outnumbered and suffered, like the allies, a great shortage of supplies. This lack was tried to fill by a ruthless tactic of plunder. General Lettow-Vorbeck’s army was never completely defeated in the field, but nonetheless had to capitulate in late November 1918. Due to the paucity of infrastructure all belligerent parties depended on a huge number of porters, that were often forced into service. This on the other hand led to a lack of workers and in consequence together with the

lootings to large-scale famines and illnesses. African resistance against these atrocities took place, but never became unified and therefore could not improve the situation.

The German black troops were commanded by few white officers, who were often replaced, as enemy troops with preference shot on them. Their successors mostly lacked experience in colonial warfare and communication with the own African troops and furthermore, seem to have often been of rather fierce character. Black sergeants, therefore played an important role in between the two groups. Due to the overall small number of German colonial military, the commanders were dependent on the askaris' goodwill, therefore tolerating many crimes done by them.

The paper also undertook it to understand a colonizer's view on the colonized. It was in general detected as arrogant and merciless. Perceiving the Africans as children or beasts served as justification for the entire colonial project. Africa was seen as a place without history or civilization, so that for example the British War Grave Commission abstained from taking care for the graves of fallen African soldiers. The adaptability and double standard in this were demonstrated with the motive of the 'brave askari'. For the Europeans it was very important to show their superiority and to segregate blacks from whites. They normally lacked much knowledge about the Africans and saw them more or less monolithic. They understood, that to avoid rebellions, it was indispensable to establish a deterring system of representation, that was never to be shaken. The trouble with the First World War was, that exactly that happened. The former systems of blacks against whites (including all Europeans independent of their nation) was changed to whites against whites, each with black support. Soon the Africans would learn to kill whites, to understand their weaknesses and even to handle their superior weaponry. The segregation could not be maintained, and the only area where the Germans tried to uphold their supposedly superiority was the realm of thought and character. The prohibition of sexual relationships between white men and black women was issued for these reasons.

Perceiving Africa as a place without civilization, bringing Christianity to the continent had always been an alleged goal of the colonizers. The text showed, how ostensible and dispensable this idea actually had been. This was done by displaying evidence for the destruction of missionary stations by the colonial armies, and the preferred porter-hunt on Christian converts. Concerning the African religions, the spiritual vacuum after the Maji-Maji revolt had been mentioned, soon to be filled by the rapid spread of Islam. Beside other factors, the latter contributed to a change in the composition of DOA's society, a merge of cultures and a decline in the importance of ethnic identities. This was feared by the Germans to lead to a higher degree of solidarity between the Africans, and maybe eventually to a rebellion.

As its last point the paper showed, that such an uprising in fact did not take place. It also discussed the war's aftermath, the allies' overtaking of Germany's colonies and the German literary romanticisation of the war.

In the First World War in *Deutsch-Ostafrika* the white Germans had to deal with a transition in the administration of their colony, they had to fight a war with unprecedented hardships and obstacles, they suffered from witnessing the melting of their ideological bases and had to live through military surrender though being undefeated in the field. The black Africans were pulled into an external war, and in spite of being not responsible for it, they paid the highest price and suffered a long list of atrocities and war crimes. Even though they could learn of the Europeans weaknesses they could not manage to unify themselves and revolt, and after the war just the European master was replaced. Converted Christians soon found out about the "brotherly love" of their white fellow believers and white missionary saw how they had been used and forgotten by their governments. The First World War in *Deutsch-Ostafrika* was indeed a crisis for colonialism. It was a crisis for colonizer and colonized, it was a crisis for black and white.

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