

contention that animals were themselves agents of colonial history will interest readers far beyond history, including anthropologists, political scientists, and hopefully also those in the animal sciences.

Animality represents a major contribution to the history of colonial Africa, and one that transforms our understanding of the period. By centering animals within his account of Nigeria's colonial history, Aderinto achieves two main theoretical innovations. Firstly, he convincingly argues that animals must be understood as colonial subjects in their own right, albeit ones lacking human agency. Animals were transformed by the colonial state, and constructed afresh in social and cultural terms. Secondly, Aderinto shows why historians of colonial Africa must consider the animal world not only when writing environmental or scientific history, but also when examining the whole gamut of social experience and political language where the natural world might not conventionally be considered. The resulting book will be useful for teaching colonial Nigerian and African history, and its theoretical scope means that it will also work well in continental survey courses, interdisciplinary area studies, as well as in postgraduate seminars.

doi:10.1017/S002185372300004X

West African Soldiers during the Colonial Era

West African Soldiers in Britain's Colonial Army, 1860–1960

By Timothy Stapleton. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2022. Pp. 400. \$125.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9781648250255); \$24.99, e-book (ISBN: 9781800104198).

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Keywords: West Africa; colonial intermediaries; military; war; masculinity; ethnicity

Britain's West African soldiers were busy during the colonial era, whether aiding British colonial conquest of West Africa; expanding, sustaining, surviving, and protecting Britain's colonial rule; assisting in the conquest of German East Africa for Britain during the First World War; contributing to Britain's success in the Second World War by fighting for Britain in East and North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia; and moving on to serve the British colonial system in several other capacities even after retiring from military service. Indeed, as Walter Rodney famously observed, 'the most important force in the conquest of West African colonies by the British was the West African Frontier Force – the soldiers being Africans and the officers British'.¹ Based on copious archival evidence from Britain and former British West African colonies, Stapleton's *West African Soldiers* explores an understudied history: the military cultures and the experiences of West Africans who served Britain through different historical periods and on various fronts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The choice to focus on British West African soldiers has been largely influenced by the fact that the unit comprised 'Britain's largest military force in colonial sub-Saharan Africa'; far more than the King's African Rifles, its British East African equivalent (1–2). Also, the British depended on their West African soldiers for the conquest of West Africa even more than their East African counterparts because the West African climate militated 'against the

¹W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, 1972), 226.

large-scale employment of metropolitan troops' (2) in the region as compared to East Africa. Finally, the East African military unit has been more studied than the West African one, beginning notably with Timothy Parson's excellent 1999 study.² Even for West Africa, there have been detailed studies on the subject for French West Africa but not for British West Africa, such as those by Myron Echenberg, Gregory Mann, and Richard Fogarty.³

The book's diverse themes spread across eleven core chapters. Chapter One establishes the social and cultural identities of the initial recruits, many of whom were enslaved men bought from their slave traders by the British in the 1790s and turned into colonial soldiers. Chapters Two and Three show how changing circumstances came to inform the multiethnic origins and composition of the ethnic identities of the soldiers in the British West African colonies of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. Chapter Four probes into the neglected role of religion in the soldiers' military lives. Religious faith, it shows, informed soldiers' fighting practices, with Hausa Muslim soldiers of Nigeria often 'chanting verses from the Koran' (40) and invoking Allah and the Prophet Muhammad in military battles (130). Chapter Five explores how visual military symbols — badges, flags, ceremonies, uniforms, emblems, rituals, and public events — 'formed key elements in the production of British colonial military identity and culture in West Africa within a broader imperial context' (201). Here, Stapleton offers an ornamentalist perspective of virtual military symbols that deconstructs the exotic West African uniform as one which emerged within a certain imperial context and attributed to its West African users a certain military prestige that elevated their social status.

Chapter Six focuses on measures adopted by British colonial authorities to cater for the health of the soldiers. Controversies about sexually transmitted diseases among the soldiers caused measures to be taken to limit the presence of unauthorized women in and around military camps. Chapter Seven looks at family life in the colonial military service, by exploring the role that wives and other women played in the functioning and stability of the military. Women often lived in the camps with the men, provided male combatants with food, firewood, intelligence, motivation, ran entrepreneurial activities within the camps, and sometimes followed the men to the front. Chapter Eight examines the everyday violence (especially flogging) that British officers meted out on the soldiers in the barracks in a bid to maintain military discipline. Stapleton argues that racism informed such practices, and although the practice of corporal punishment had been outlawed in mainland Britain, 'Britain's African forces continued to use flogging as a disciplinary instrument among African soldiers until the Second World War' (259). Chapter Nine discusses the various forms of resistance that African soldiers deployed — ranging from passive strikes to violent and armed insurrections — to protest colonial military injustices and to try to negotiate better and improved statuses and wages. Chapter Ten explores the everyday violence of colonialism, including the mayhem of violence and murder that British colonial soldiers committed on African civilian communities and among themselves. Here, Stapleton argues that soldiers' violence among themselves and against civilians represented 'modes of self-expression' whereby the soldiers who had been alienated from and antagonized against African communities and had themselves incurred and internalized violent flogging in the hands of their white officers in the camps, went on to replicate that sort of violence on others outside the camps (296–7). Instructively, Stapleton's suggestion that the 'widespread acts of ... everyday violence committed by West African colonial soldiers against civilians' (319) could partly be explained by 'earlier practices of warfare in the region' (319–20) dilutes the fact that colonialism was an ubiquitously violent project as well as his own thesis that the soldiers had 'internalized' the colonizers' violence. While precolonial African

²T. Parsons, *The African Rank and File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Portsmouth, NH, 1999).

³M. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: the Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, NH, 1991); G. Mann, *West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC, 2006); and R. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore, 2008).

societies generally did not have standing armies, the history of those that had, including the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in medieval Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, does not appear to have established any ‘terrorizing’ violence of soldiers against civilians.

West African Soldiers contributes to the story of African agency in what came to constitute the British African colonial army. It is often assumed that European-African colonial armies were built from scratch, and that Africans owed their military skills and capabilities entirely to their European recruiters and trainers. But Stapleton shows that the British had much to learn from African military men, and often depended on Africans who already possessed military skills and experiences to provide military advice and recruit troops and be involved in the training of those new recruits. Additionally, precolonial traditions of African warfare influenced the colonial military experience and fighting abilities and practices of African colonial troops, including consistent wearing of traditional magical protection amulets throughout the colonial era, a practice that persists to date (26–7).

The book equally intervenes in the debates among historians on the role of African colonial soldiers in the post-Second World War nationalist movements. Reiterating the findings in his earlier work on *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Rochester, NY, 2011), and contrary to nationalist scholarship that has placed army mutinies ‘within the panorama of anticolonial resistance movements’, Stapleton concludes that ‘there is little evidence that these incidents represented anticolonial movements’ (295). Furthermore, Stapleton’s incorporation of women’s experiences in the functioning of the Royal West African Frontier Force not only contributes to a subject matter that has been abysmally neglected but provides a useful context and frame for reconstructing biographies of individual women who were married to some of the soldiers and those who were part of the army camp life, even as we also struggle to reconstruct the biographies of the men. By demonstrating the integral role of women in the functioning of the military organization, the book contributes to our understanding of gender in West African military history.

Empirically, the book provides largely unknown knowledge. We now know that easterners and southerners in Nigeria were as ‘martially’ fit as northerners and came to comprise significant numbers in the British Nigerian colonial military unit during the two world wars; that the British deployed soldiers from British West Indies and other parts of Africa notably Nyasaland (now Malawi) to serve in Gambia (101); that while the slightly different nature of colonialism caused soldiers in British East Africa to generally receive more and protracted flogging than their British West African counterparts, the practice in British West Africa was more rampant in Nigeria followed by the Gold Coast (now Ghana), and almost completely absent in Sierra Leone and Gambia; and that British colonizers in Sierra Leone (Chapter Three) openly admitted and confessed (rather myopically) that there was no such thing as martial races in Africa and turned all ethnicities in the colony into ‘martial races’.

Perhaps, the book’s greatest contribution is on debates about the ‘martial race’ theory in colonial Africa. It demonstrates compellingly that colonial ‘martial race’ theory was flexible and adjustable, and imposed on any group willing to provide recruits at given times (58). This position, according to Stapleton, counters the revisionist scholarship represented in Myles Osborne’s work (2014) and Giacomo Macola’s work (2016) that ‘question the idea that colonial officials imposed the “martial race” label on African communities’ and argue instead that the theory aligned consistently with ‘preexisting African military identities and concepts of honor’ (58).⁴ It argues how in especially Sierra Leone and Gambia, attempts by the British to create ‘martial races’ failed woefully, leading these authorities to conclude categorically that there was no such thing as ‘martial races’ in Africa. My interjection here is that Stapleton, Osborne, and Macola are indeed not as variant as Stapleton seems to suggest but have arrived at conclusions that speak specifically to the African societies they studied. An African historian of Cameroonian origin, my own research reveals that there were ethnicities in precolonial and colonial Cameroon (the Kom and Nso, for example) and other

⁴M. Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c.1800 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2014); G. Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa: A History of Technology and Politics* (Athens, OH, 2016).

regions in Africa that consistently labelled and prided themselves as ‘martial’ peoples in relation to their neighbors.

In a postscript-like conclusion to Chapter Three, Stapleton breaks the narrative to intervene in Africa’s postcolonial military historiography. Pointing to the occurrence of coups, counter coups, civil wars, and mutinies in both postcolonial Nigeria where the British found and created ‘imagined martial races’ and Sierra Leone and Gambia where the British failed, Stapleton suggests that this can be used to counter scholarship that often emphasizes recruiting of African ‘soldiers from among imagined martial tribes as forming the historical context for ethnic factionalism in postcolonial African armed forces’ and mutinies (120). This rather underdeveloped thesis is unconvincing. The issue may not be whether the British succeeded or failed in finding martial races but rather that the very policies and attempts to do so raised tensions, suspicions, and hatred among African ethnicities and created inherent problems that have contributed to militaries remaining problematic in post-colonial Africa. By pitting ethnicities against each other under the rubric of ‘martial and non-martial races’, and by using soldiers of different ethnicities to visit violence and terror on civilians, the British fomented the types of factionalisms that have come to haunt postcolonial Africa.

That critique aside, Stapleton’s book is an important contribution to the fields of West African military history, postcolonial history, women’s and gender history, to name but these. By providing a historiographical sketch of colonial militaries in Africa, the book brings ‘together the hitherto separate fields of African History and Military History’ into ‘a rich literature that places African colonial military service within the context of the wider colonial system and society’ (6). Stapleton has successfully extrapolated the voices of African soldiers by carefully reading the voices of Europeans who employed and managed them. A bookended appendix consolidates the mini-biographies of selected soldiers and strengthens the book’s ability to offer insights into individual soldiers’ life experiences. Alongside work produced by leading historians in the field — including that of Michelle Moyd, David Killingray, Myron Echenberg, Richard Fogarty, Timothy Parsons, Joe Lunn, Melvin Page, and Richard Reid — Stapleton’s *British West African Soldiers* contributes substantially to how we understand, reconceptualize, theorize, recast, and reinterpret the centrality of the African colonial soldier in the European imperial project. Non-specialist readers in military history will benefit from, among others, Stapleton’s insights on colonial racism and ethnocentrism in Africa, religion and the imperial project, and women’s agency and experiences within the colonial project. The book is concisely articulated, with clarity of language and accessibility. It is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate students.

doi:10.1017/S0021853723000178

New Approaches to the Prison in African History

L’Afrique en prisons: Sociétés, Espaces, Temps.

Edited by Frédéric Le Marcis and Marie Morelle. Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2022.
Pp. 332. €25.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9791036204975).

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Keywords: prison; microhistory; governance; law; historiography