

little reflexive thought in his determined project of linguistic preservation and renewal. Kresse is more willing to define his second subject, the poet Ahmed Nassir, as a philosopher, and he discusses one of his poems in considerable detail and depth to make this point. It might be argued that much of this poem is formulaic both in structure and content, but Kresse plausibly argues that it also offers a discussion of the nature of human morality which is both thoughtful and critical. On the third individual discussed here, the religious and political thinker Abdilahi Nassir, the verdict of the book is unequivocal, and almost partisan in its enthusiasm. So much so that the author is perhaps a little too willing to accept Abdilahi Nassir's own account of his political/intellectual journey, in which he presents himself as a long-standing advocate of ethnic and religious harmony, and says little of his role in the secessionist coastal politics of the early 1960s. In that context, it is perhaps not so surprising that Abdilahi was viewed as a turncoat for his subsequent, rather swift, conversion to the politics of Kenyan nationalism, and that similar suspicions of inconstancy attach to his conversion to Shi'ite Islam in the 1980s – a conversion which, surprisingly, Kresse makes no attempt to discuss, beyond briefly attributing it to his belief in 'free will'.

The lack of any serious discussion of that conversion will be keenly felt by many readers. For while Kresse's main argument is about philosophy, I suspect that this book will be read as much – or more – as an immensely useful source on the changing nature of Islam on the Kenya coast in the last three decades. For part of the backdrop to Abdilahi Nassir's thought is the prolonged debate over religious practice, which has pitched what might variously be called 'Salafist' or 'reformist' thought against a range of established practices. Kresse summarizes this very well, and evokes much of the local flavour of this contest. His sympathies evidently lie with the local forms of practice, often Sufi-inspired, which have come under sustained criticism from a new cohort of scholars (and some not-so-scholarly commentators) who have drawn both inspiration and financial support from Saudi Arabia. Abdilahi Nassir's own conversion exemplifies an interesting twist to this story, and this interesting and thoughtful book would have been even more valuable if it had offered some consideration of how Abdilahi's distinctive philosophy led him to Shi'ism, which has apparently been able to reach an accommodation with some of the established religious practices which Salafists have been so determined to eradicate.

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MAMADOU DIAWARA, PAULO FERNANDO DE MORAES FARIAS and GERD SPITTLER (eds), *Heinrich Barth et l'Afrique*. Studien zur Kulturkunde 125. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe (pb €39.90 – 978 3 89645 220 7). 2006, 286 pp.

Heinrich Barth is undoubtedly one of the greatest (if not *the* greatest) of the nineteenth-century European explorers of Africa. It is strange, however, that he seems to be familiar to a narrow group of specialists only, who focus on the history and anthropology of Sudanic Africa. Barth is mentioned indeed in the general histories of European exploration of Africa, albeit in passing, but his travel account is never consulted seriously when the subject is 'European/Western encounters with Africa' – and the same applies to many other German and continental European explorers, too. Equally striking is that there exists no modern comprehensive biography of Barth in English. Even in Germany, the

most authoritative is still the one written by his brother-in-law Gustav Schubert and published in 1897.

In Barth's case, the reason for his marginality in the anglophone world is not the language, as he wrote his account in English. Nor is the reason the availability of his account: if the original English edition of 1857–8 is rare (not many copies were printed), the Centenary Edition published by Frank Cass in 1965 is by no means difficult to obtain. Yet one should not take the English version as definitive. Barth wrote his journal simultaneously in German and these two texts are not identical. They should be read together since there are remarkable differences in their contents, although these differences have not been surveyed systematically. The same applies to his notebooks and letters, which are scattered in various locations in Germany, Great Britain and France.

The true reasons for Barth's marginality are ideological. The first is the tendency amongst British and American scholars to consider continental Europe as irrelevant to the 'Western' experience, which is usually regarded as tantamount to the stereotypes of their own cultures. The second is that Barth is rather inconvenient to those scholars who tend to follow the lines of post-colonial theories guided by Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* (1978). The fact that a European 'white male' of the imperial age was willing to understand and to respect black Africans is perhaps considered too improbable, though Barth was definitely not unique in this respect.

The present volume includes fourteen contributions, both in French and in English, which are based on selected papers presented at an international conference which was held in Timbuktu in late 2004 to celebrate Barth's visit to the city 150 years earlier. A similar volume appeared in 1967, edited by Heinrich Schiffers, to coincide with the centenary of Barth's death. These two festschriften do not overlap with each other. The emphasis in the present volume is on Barth's influence in the development of European historiography and ethnography of Africa. There are many important questions and conclusions which are not limited to the personality of Barth only but concern the research in the history of European encounter and exploration of Africa in general. It is therefore most desirable that the present volume should reach a wider audience than the narrow confines of Barth's fan club.

Three contributions deserve particular attention. One is written by Achim von Oppen, a descendant of Barth's sister Mathilde, who analyses the tension between the texts and illustrations in Barth's account. Those who have seen the original English and German editions of 1857–8 have certainly admired the colourful plates skilfully drawn by the artist Martin Bernatz. Yet Barth himself was less happy with Bernatz's illustrations. The second is written by Georg Klute, who discusses Africans' knowledge of the wider world according to Barth's account, which contains many references to Africans who were familiar with news from the Mediterranean and eager to expand their knowledge of Europe. This question – the extent of pre-colonial African knowledge of the wider world – has been touched on superficially by other scholars, too, including myself, but it is still a blank area in research on the encounter and interaction between Africans and Europeans. The third is written by Muhammad S. Umar, who examines in an innovative way the extent to which Barth's account reflects and/or refutes Said's critique of the linkage between knowledge and power in the European discourses on the other.

Yet there is still one aspect of Barth which was not touched on in the volume edited by Schiffers and equally is not addressed in the present one. The biographical descriptions of Barth always tend to focus on his experiences before his great African voyage. Much less attention has been paid to his life after he had

returned from Africa and finished his account in London. As is well known, Barth never returned to Africa but performed several brief and leisurely trips in northern Spain, Italy, Ottoman territories in the Balkans, and Asia Minor before he died in Berlin in 1865. These trips were all documented in books which are now forgotten. However, it would be worth examining Barth's behaviour during these trips, if only to see to what extent Africa and Africans had educated him as a traveller.

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DAVID KILLINGRAY, with MARTIN PLAUT, *Fighting for Britain: African soldiers in the Second World War*. Oxford: James Currey (hb £45 – 978 1 84701 015 5). 2010, 296 pp.

David Killingray's latest book is sober and judicious but also thrilling and dramatic. The sobriety is revealed in his overall assessments. He states clearly the view of those historians who believe that experience of the war radicalized or modernized African soldiers so that they returned to play a great role in anti-colonial movements. But he himself finds that 'most' Africans had not conceived of Europeans as superhuman before the war and that seeing them afraid, ignorant, captive and dead did not revolutionize African ideas about their rulers. He finds that 'most' of the so-called 'white' women with whom African soldiers remember sleeping were Egyptian or Anglo-Indian. He finds that 'most' African fighting men, while resenting delays in demobilization and only too well aware of ungenerous compensation when they returned home, wanted no more than to regain or better a place in African society. Nationalist orators made much more of their wartime sufferings and bravery than soldiers did themselves.

These are sensible and well-founded assessments and stated with a proper concern to differentiate between different parts of Africa. But if they make it seem that this great upheaval did not, after all, upheave very much, this impression is countered by the many parts of the book in which Killingray quotes African testimony. The overall judgements are, so to speak, sociological propositions based on general experience. The African testimony, by contrast, is intensely individual, taking the form of dramatic narrative. Killingray quotes very extensively, drawing on the research of the very large number of doctoral students who have studied aspects of the war as well as upon his own interviews. This is very much a 'voiced' book and many of the voices are extraordinary in their recall, their colour, their mastery of narrative. The book would make a wonderful radio documentary and provide material for dozens of plays.

The people who are revealed – as Killingray remarks, all except one 'other ranks' and with no women among them – are undoubtedly upheaved men. They were heaved away from their own families and out of their own societies; they were thrown into extreme environments of deserts and forests; they were dumped with hitherto unknown enemies and left to invent scarifying identities, having to answer their fears of unmitigated Japanese ferocity by acting out their own pretend cannibal barbarity; they were relied upon to carry the uncarryable through the impassable and to survive without relief supplies where no other soldier could. Many whites thought that in becoming soldiers Africans were regaining communication with their own feral and savage nature. In fact African soldiers were often confronted with dimensions of human depravity hitherto