

# **“Those Were Difficult Days Indeed”: Transport Labour in German East Africa’s State-Organized Caravans\***

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## **ABSTRACTS**

This article explores the labour conditions and day-to-day activities of transport workers in German East Africa (today’s Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi). Because the sleeping sickness suspended almost every use of pack animals in this colony, human porters had to mediate all transportation over longer distances. While a labour force of professional wage earners worked in the caravan trade, the colonial state, too, required thousands of porters for its own logistical operations. Focusing on state-organized caravan transport between 1889 and c. 1910, the present article has three aims: first, to outline the different ways in which Tanzanian men ended up as porters in the service of the colonial state; second, to discuss the German efforts to transform porter crews into obedient servants while illuminating the violence inherent to the daily life on the road; and, third, to explore the extent to which transport workers marching under the German flag retained control over their workplace. Zooming in on the microcosms of state-run expeditions and caravans, the article places East African porters and their experiences at its centre. It contributes to a better understanding of African life and labour under colonial rule by providing in-depth insight into their working world.

Im Zentrum dieses Artikels stehen die Arbeitsbedingungen und der Arbeitsalltag afrikanischer Transportarbeiter in Deutsch-Ostafrika (dem heutigen Tansania, Ruanda und Burundi). Da die Schlafkrankheit nahezu jeden Einsatz von Packtieren in dieser Kolonie unmöglich machte, mussten menschliche Lastenträger jeglichen Transport über längere Strecken übernehmen. Während der seit vorkolonialer Zeit bestehende Karawanenhandel auf den Schultern professioneller Lohnarbeiter ruhte, benötigte auch der junge Kolonialstaat Tausende von Trägern für

\* The research presented in this article is based on a larger book project on portage and caravan trading in German East Africa, of which it provides an abridged and revised version. See A. Greiner, *Human Portage and Colonial State Formation in German East Africa, 1880s–1914. Tensions of Transport*, Cham 2022 (forthcoming). Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

seine eigenen logistischen Aufgaben. Die folgende Untersuchung konzentriert sich auf den staatlich organisierten Karawanentransport zwischen 1889 und ca. 1910. Sie verfolgt drei Ziele. Erstens werden die verschiedenen Wege aufgezeigt, über die tansanische Männer in den staatlichen Trägerdienst gerieten. Zweitens diskutiert der Artikel die Maßnahmen, mit denen die Deutschen ihre Lastenträger in gehorsame Diener zu verwandeln suchten. Dabei beleuchtet er auch die Gewalt, die mit dem täglichen Leben auf der Straße einherging. Drittens wird untersucht, inwieweit die unter deutscher Flagge marschierenden Transportarbeiter die Kontrolle über ihren Arbeitsplatz wahren konnten. Der Artikel zoomt somit in den Mikrokosmos staatlich organisierter Expeditionen und Karawanen. Indem er ostafrikanische Träger und ihre Erfahrungen in den Mittelpunkt stellt, gewährt der Artikel einen tiefen Einblick in ihre Arbeitswelt und trägt so zu einem besseren Verständnis afrikanischen Lebens und Arbeitens unter der deutschen Kolonialherrschaft bei.

## 1. Introduction

Germany’s East African empire was a “mosquito empire”:<sup>1</sup> around 1900, vast areas of German East Africa, the colony comprising the present-day countries of Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, were infested with trypanosomiasis. Better known as sleeping sickness, this disease causes weakness and death in affected animals.<sup>2</sup> The pervasive presence of its carrier, the tsetse fly, along with other livestock diseases, seriously affected transportation in Central and East Africa as it suspended almost every use of pack or draught animals over longer distances. Even though a dense network of caravan routes had existed in the world region since at least the mid-nineteenth century, East Africa’s trade caravans did not consist of pack animals or ox-drawn carts, similar to those crossing southern Africa or the Sahara. Instead, all trade and transport were mediated by a force of tens of thousands of human porters.

When Germany took over formal control of the region in 1891, the labour power of these people had already served as the engine of commerce for several decades. In the trade system of the pre-colonial period, porter caravans brought ivory tusks and other products from Central Africa and the East African interior to the Tanzanian coastal towns, from where they were exported via Zanzibar to Europe and America and across the Indian Ocean.<sup>3</sup> As historian Stephen J. Rockel demonstrates in his seminal study *Carriers of Culture* (2006), the trade boom in the second half of the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the emergence of portering as a wage-earning profession. Tanzania’s long-distance porters, he contends, were not slaves but a group of skilled wage workers with a distinct labour culture and many years of experience.<sup>4</sup>

1 J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires. Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914*, Cambridge 2010.

2 For sleeping sickness in the region, see J. Ford, *The Role of the Trypanosomiasis in African Ecology. A Study of the Tsetse Fly Problem*, Oxford 1971.

3 For an introduction to the caravan system and its traders, see E. Alpers, *Ivory & Slaves in East Central Africa. Changing Patterns of International Trade to the Later Nineteenth Century*, London 1971; A. Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar. Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873*, Athens, OH, 1987.

4 S. J. Rockel, *Carriers of Culture. Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa*, Portsmouth, NH, 2006; S. J.

After the colonial takeover, caravan transport remained the central pillar of long-distance mobility in German East Africa. Through the 1890s, trade caravans with an annual number of 100,000 porters continued to arrive in the trade centres along the Indian Ocean from the interior.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the caravan economy, porters were also in high demand for the young colonial state's own mobility and infrastructure since all official efforts to emancipate colonial logistics from human heads and shoulders failed: experiments with potential pack and draught animals remained fruitless while financial constraints slowed down railway extension into German East Africa.<sup>6</sup> As a result, until well after the turn of the century, portage remained the only available mode of long-distance transport for the colonial state apparatus. Around 1900, a force of almost 8,000 porters worked in the service of the colonial state between the coastal belt and the interior, bringing supplies from the port towns to upcountry stations.<sup>7</sup> In addition, an uncounted number of rural dwellers picked up loads at one of the administrative and military outposts in the Tanzanian interior – some of them as day labourers covering short distances, some for official journeys between districts, and others in the supply train of the colonial army (see figure 1).

The present article places these East African porters working in the service of the state at its centre. Providing insight into their working world under the German colonial regime, it joins a growing corpus of literature on colonial labour in East Africa and on transport labour in particular.<sup>8</sup> Studying the pre-colonial and early colonial ventures of missionaries and explorers in the region, previous research has unveiled the extent to which leaders of European expeditions built their authority on acts of violence, coercion, and drill, as well as on the racial divide between themselves and their crews. However, by reading the available source material “against the grain”, Rockel, Ruth Rempel, and other scholars have also revealed that for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, porters

Rockel, “A Nation of Porters.” The Nyamwezi and the Labour Market in Nineteenth-Century Tanzania, in: *Journal of African History* 41 (2000), pp. 173–195; S. J. Rockel, *Decentering Exploration in East Africa*, in: D. Kennedy (ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration. The West in the World*, Oxford 2015, pp. 172–194.

5 Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BAB), N 2303/11, Franz Stuhlmann, “Professor Schweinfurth’s Kritik über afrikanische Eisenbahnen”, [c. 1900], p. 4; “Der Karawanen-Verkehr: Eine Gefahr für unsere Kolonie”, *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung* (27 July 1901), p. 1. For the relevance of ivory trading under German rule, see B. Gißibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism. Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa*, New York 2016, pp. 67–73.

6 For experiments with animals, see B. Gißibl, *Das kolonisierte Tier. Zur Ökologie der Kontaktzonen des deutschen Kolonialismus*, in: *WerkstattGeschichte* no. 56 (2016), pp. 7–28; and A. Greiner, *Bio-Engineering across Empires. Mapping the Global Microhistory of Zebra Domestication in Colonial East Africa*, in: *Journal of World History* 32 (2021), pp. 127–159. For railway construction, see D. van Laak, *Imperiale Infrastruktur. Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas 1880 bis 1960*, Paderborn 2004, esp. pp. 137–143.

7 BAB, R 1001/6475, “Jahres-Bericht 1900/1”, p. 235.

8 For recent studies on labour in German East Africa, see M. Haschemi Yekani, *Koloniale Arbeit. Rassismus, Migration und Herrschaft in Tansania (1885–1914)*, Frankfurt am Main 2019; T. Sunseri, *Vlilmani. Labor Migration and Rural Change in Early Colonial Tanzania*, Portsmouth, NH, 2002; S. Conrad, “Education for Work” in Colony and Metropole. The Case of Imperial Germany, c. 1880–1914, in: H. Fischer-Tiné/S. Gehrman (eds.), *Empires and Boundaries. Rethinking Race, Class, and Gender in Colonial Settings*, New York 2009, pp. 23–40.

were able to define the limits of their exploitation through individual and collective acts of resistance.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 1: Georg von Prittwitz und Gaffron, “Porters”, 30 January 1910.<sup>10</sup>



The existing literature has also already touched upon portage under German rule. Michael Pesek’s analysis of colonial state formation partially addresses the disciplinary regime of German expeditions in the early days of the colony, observing that expeditions were “the first institution [*Ort*] to turn visions of Africa’s future into a reality. [...] It was here where Africans were to be disciplined and transformed into colonial subjects”.<sup>11</sup> Michelle R. Moyd’s insightful study of African soldiers within the colonial army explores day-to-day routines on the march and reveals conflicts between soldiers and accompanying porters.<sup>12</sup> Rockel’s discussion of power contestation in expeditionary travel likewise considers a number of expeditions in the colonial period. He concludes that by the mid-1890s East African “porters were gradually losing the struggle over control of crucial aspects of caravan work [...] and were increasingly subject to foreign ideas about work and justice”.<sup>13</sup>

9 In addition to the literature cited in FN 4, see R. Rempel, *Exploration, Knowledge, and Empire in Africa. The Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, 1886–1890*, PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2000; C. Essner, *Some Aspects of German Travelers’ Accounts from the Second Half of the 19th Century*, in: *Paideuma* 33 (1987), pp. 197–205; B. Heintze, *Afrikanische Pioniere. Trägerkarawanen im westlichen Zentralafrika (ca. 1850–1890)*, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

10 Source: Saxon State and University Library Dresden, 71794499.

11 M. Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft in Deutsch-Ostafrika. Expeditionen, Militär und Verwaltung seit 1880*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, p. 116. All translations are my own.

12 M.R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries. African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*, Athens, OH, 2010.

13 Rockel, *Carriers*, p. 219.

The following analysis seeks to substantiate these different observations. It provides new understandings of both the inner workings of official travel parties and of the structures underlying the recruitment and employment of porters in German East Africa. Focusing on state-organized caravan transport in the German colonial period, the article has three central aims. The first aim is to outline the different ways in which Tanzanian men ended up as porters in the service of the colonial state and its army, the *Schutztruppe*. The second is to zoom in on the microcosms of state-run expeditions and caravans and discuss the German efforts to transform porter crews into obedient servants. The article illuminates how porters experienced increasing violence and military discipline and pays close attention to the life-threatening dangers they encountered on the road, especially in military operations. The third aim is to explore the extent to which free and unfree caravan workers retained control over their workplace. Despite the exploitative conditions, the analysis seeks to show that transport workers developed adaption strategies in response to labour coercion and violence. Taken together, the article's ultimate goal is to contribute to a better understanding of African life and labour under colonial rule by providing in-depth insight into the day-to-day activities of porters marching under the German flag.

## 2. Military Porterage During German Conquest, 1889–1893

In August 1888, Tanzania's coastal population revolted against the German East Africa Company (*Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft*), the chartered company claiming territorial possession of the Tanzanian coastline and its hinterland. To suppress the so-called Abushiri Uprising, in early 1889 Chancellor Otto von Bismarck sent the experienced explorer Herrmann Wissmann to East Africa, whose force of Sudanese mercenaries and German navy soldiers was soon able to capture the rebellious coastal towns. On 1 January 1891, the empire took over official control from the chartered company and established German East Africa as a colony.<sup>14</sup>

To establish military security and political control, the newly formed colonial army, the *Schutztruppe*, proceeded upcountry along the caravan trails and waged concentrated war against the interior population. By 1893, the military campaigns in northern, central, and southern Tanzania had seized the strongholds of several important chiefs while fighting continued in many areas.<sup>15</sup> In this phase of conquest, porterage was the essential means of colonial mobility. Porter crews usually outnumbered the group of African sol-

14 For the chartered company's activities, see Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, pp. 168–185; J. Bückendorf, *Schwarz-weiß-rot über Ostafrika. Deutsche Kolonialpläne und afrikanische Realität*, Münster 1997, pp. 158–337. For the rebellion and its suppression, see J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot. Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888*, Portsmouth, NH, 1995, pp. 199–248; T. Bührer, *Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika. Koloniale Sicherheitspolitik und transkulturelle Kriegführung, 1885 bis 1918*, Munich, 2011, pp. 35–86.

15 For the *Schutztruppe* and its wars, see E. Mann, *Mikono ya Damu. African Mercenaries and the Politics of Conflict in German East Africa, 1888–1904*, Frankfurt am Main 2002; Bührer, *Schutztruppe*, esp. pp. 211–235.

diers, called askaris. They carried not only the equipment and personal belongings of the soldiers and their German officers but also ammunition, dismantled artillery, and food supplies.<sup>16</sup>

To fill the ranks of their human-powered supply train, German officers drew on prisoners of war, conscripted local men through force and intimidation, or requested chiefs to provide their subjects as auxiliary porters.<sup>17</sup> Silimu bin Abakari, the Comorian servant of Schutztruppe officer Theodor Bumiller, later recounted that during Wissmann's privately sponsored Lake Nyasa expedition, Merere, chief of the Sangu people in south-western Tanzania, was summoned before Bumiller under the threat that "if he does not show up, I cannot guarantee what will happen"<sup>18</sup> and was ordered to provide his male subjects as porters. When these people deserted a few days later, the German expedition returned to Merere's capital and demanded new porters.<sup>19</sup>

Enemy engagement almost always caused conscripted porters to throw down their loads and vanish into the bushes.<sup>20</sup> Fighting for somebody else's cause, these people regularly chose to desert when the Schutztruppe's expeditions turned into life-threatening ventures for African participants. Accordingly, the first major threat facing porters was warfare. The column of transport workers was the most vulnerable element of the expedition in the early phase of colonial conquest because no infrastructure existed that could serve European-style battalions. Even the major caravan routes were only narrow footpaths on which columns marched in single file, often stretching over several kilometres. Weeds and thorn bushes surrounded the paths, making it impossible for soldiers to march parallel to the crews and defend them against enemy forces.<sup>21</sup>

On 17 August 1891, 5,000 hostile Hehe warriors, a group living in south-central Tanzania, ambushed the German expedition under Lieutenant Emil von Zelewski near the town of Iringa, killing 10 European officers, 290 soldiers, and 200 porters.<sup>22</sup> To protect its supply train, the army soon introduced the so-called *Knäuel* formation, an infantry square, in which soldiers surrounded the porters and their loads, shooting volleys at their enemy.<sup>23</sup> Still, historian Erick J. Mann estimates the total number of killed and wounded

16 Mann, Mikono, p. 50.

17 W. Wolfrum, Briefe und Tagebuchblätter aus Ostafrika, Munich 1893, 136; Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 622-2/16 A VIII, Pasha, Journal January–October 1892, entry of 1 August.

18 S. bin Abakari, Meine Reise nach dem Nyassa mit der Dampferexpedition des Herrn Major von Wissmann, in: C. Velten (ed.), Schilderungen der Suaheli. Von Expeditionen v. Wissmanns, Dr. Bumillers, Graf v. Götzens, und Anderer, Göttingen 1901, p. 91.

19 Ibid., p. 99. For Silimu bin Abakari's career, see J. Diebold, Alternative Weltläufigkeit und die agency des "Diener" Silimu bin Abakari, in: B. GIBIB/K. Niederau (eds.), Imperiale Weltläufigkeit und ihre Inszenierungen. Theodor Bumiller, Mannheim und der deutsche Kolonialismus um 1900, Göttingen 2021, pp. 145–170.

20 BAB, R 1001/279, report by von Tettenborn, Dar es Salaam, 20 September 1891, 158; "Koloniale Rundschau: Ostafrika", in: Deutsche Kolonialzeitung (7 February 1891), p. 2; T. von Prince, Gegen Araber und Wahehe. Erinnerungen aus meiner ostafrikanischen Leutnantszeit 1890–1895, Berlin 1914, p. 34. See also Bühner, Schutztruppe, p. 187.

21 G. Maercker, Unsere Schutztruppe in Ostafrika, Berlin 1893, p. 196.

22 Mann, Mikono, p. 136.

23 E. Nigmann, Felddienstübungen für farbige (ostafrikanische) Truppen, Dar es Salaam 1910, p. 11; Maercker, Schutztruppe, p. 198; H. Fonck, Deutsch-Ost-Afrika. Eine Schilderung deutscher Tropen nach 10 Wanderjahren, Berlin 1910, p. 88; Bühner, Schutztruppe, p. 238.

porters in the phase of military conquest to be between 800 and 1,100, almost equal to the number of losses among soldiers.<sup>24</sup>

The high death rates were not only a result of the defencelessness of porters in the face of the enemy but also a result of their ruthless deployment by German officers. Lieutenant Tom Prince, for instance, chained the conscripted workers of his expeditionary force, well aware that this meant they would stand no chance in the event of an assault.<sup>25</sup> The low value that German military men ascribed to their porters' lives also becomes evident from the Schutztruppe's battle against Chief Meli in Moshi at Mount Kilimanjaro. On 10 June 1892, armed forces under Albrecht Freiherr von Bülow suffered a crushing defeat when Meli's warriors, armed with breech-loaders, killed 22 askari soldiers and wounded another 13.<sup>26</sup> During the battle, porters were sent into the line of fire to recover the precious cannon as well as the bodies of the fallen Germans. An officer, Barthel, described the scene in his official report:

*Two times, the porters [of the corpse] were shot. [...] Mister von Bülow was put into a hammock and carried off the battlefield. The porters dismantled the gun. The porters of the gun carriage were shot first. The carriage was left behind. [...] Then, the porters of the barrel were killed. We threw the barrel into a deep trench. All loads were lost.*<sup>27</sup>

Such an account shows that the military expedition leaders regarded their porters as an expendable workforce. For Barthel, it was the loads that they lost that was significant, not the people who had carried them.

The second major threat to the porters' lives was physical abuse off the battlefield. To enforce discipline, German officers felt they had the authority to decide the fate of their porters. During the German Kilimanjaro campaign of 1891, for instance, officer Wilhelm von Zitzewitz shot a porter for disobedience only a few days after the porter had been recruited through an allied chief.<sup>28</sup> In April 1893, to give a further example, staff surgeon Julius Schwesinger encountered his porters pilfering a village during a march, and another officer, Josef Weinberger, later gave a vivid description of what followed:

*Without hesitation, Schw[esinger] ordered to fire 3 volleys at the porters who were near the tembe [house]. 6 laid dead on the ground, 4 were seized in the tembe. Without any interrogation, he ordered me to hang them. I refused to do so, explaining that the place was not suited for executions. Angrily, he ordered to instead shoot the 4 men immediately. A black corporal executed the command. During the shooting, Schw[esinger] sat in his tent, drinking a bottle of champagne with [medical sergeant] Jurock.*<sup>29</sup>

24 Mann, Mikono, p. 90.

25 Prince, Gegen Araber, p. 153, 159.

26 Mann, Mikono, pp. 113–114.

27 Wolfrum, Briefe, p. 169.

28 Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim, Theodor Bumiller, "Expedition nach dem Kilima Ndscharo Januar–Februar 1891", entry of 23 January, p. 35.

29 J. Weinberger, Ostafrikabelege 1884–1896 und spätere Schriften, p. 38, cited after J. Hubach (ed.), Josef Weinberger

In the previous year, shortly before the battle at Moshi, an askari, Fadalla Adam, had shot a locally recruited porter without any discernible reason.<sup>30</sup> At that time, the askaris were mostly of Sudanese origin, many of whom regarded Tanzanian porters as inferior.<sup>31</sup> The previous pages have shown that the German colonizers of East Africa were in dire need of transport labour during the phase of military conquest. They recruited porters from among the rural population, usually through force. Porters in the service of the Schutztruppe who did not manage to flee their conscription or desert the columns faced high likelihood of never returning home. For them, violence was seemingly inescapable, perpetrated by the enemies of the new colonial state as much as by its own agents.

### 3. Colonial Logistics between Pressure and Professionalism

Coercion and terror were central elements of both the forced recruitment of porters for military campaigns and their deployment on the battlefield in the early 1890s. Along the coastal belt and in the vicinity of the few administrative and military stations in the Tanzanian interior, the German administration developed two separate modes of porter recruitment after the mid-1890s. In 1895, coast-based porter recruitment for the colonial state was centralized under the auspices of the Central Depot (Zentralmagazin).<sup>32</sup> Located in the colonial capital, Dar es Salaam, this state agency managed the day-to-day transportation of official parcels and supplies from the coast to the over 20 colonial outposts that existed in the interior by the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup> An additional task was the outfitting of scientific expeditions with porters and equipment.<sup>34</sup> According to reports, a force of 2,000 porters in 1896, and later 3,000 in 1899, worked regularly for the state agency.<sup>35</sup> These recruited porters earned well compared to other labour: for the 19-day march from Dar es Salaam to Mpwapwa, for example, they usually received a wage that was not only higher than the wages paid in commercial caravans but also similar to the average monthly wage paid on plantations in Dar es Salaam.<sup>36</sup>

aus Tölz. Ein Bayerischer Unteroffizier als Sergeant bei der Kaiserlichen Schutztruppe in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1891–1896, Haßloch 2004.

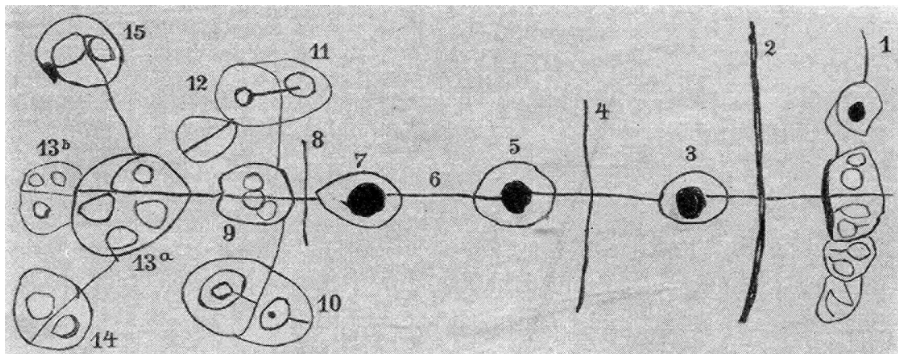
- 30 G. Ekemode, *German Rule in North-East Tanzania, 1885–1914*, PhD thesis, SOAS University of London 1973, p. 136.
- 31 Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, p. 125. See also T. Morlang, *Askari und Fitafita. Farbige Söldner in den deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin 2008, pp. 72–92.
- 32 BAB, R 1001/118, "Runderlass", 13 January 1895, p. 21; Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Deutschen Schutzgebiete im Jahre 1895/6, in: *Verhandlungen des Reichstages*. 9. Legislaturperiode, 4. Session, 5. Anlageband, Berlin 1897, p. 2980; BAB, R 1001/644a, "Runderlass", 2 July 1897, p. 71.
- 33 For these stations, see Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, pp. 244–265.
- 34 Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Deutschen Schutzgebiete im Jahre 1897/8, in: *Verhandlungen des Reichstages*. 10. Legislaturperiode, 1. Session, 1. Anlageband, Berlin 1899, p. 221.
- 35 Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Deutschen Schutzgebiete im Jahre 1898/9, in: *Verhandlungen des Reichstages*. 10. Legislaturperiode, 1. Session, 4. Anlageband, Berlin 1900, p. 2883; J. Közle, *Neuer Wegzeiger für die deutschen Schutzgebiete in Afrika, der Südsee und Ostasien*, Stuttgart 1900, p. 55.
- 36 BAB, R 1001/786e, "Runderlass", 13 May 1902, p. 28; BAB, R 1001/118, "Zusammenstellung der an der Küste üblichen Lohnsätze", 1903, p. 146.



These wages helped the Central Depot to fill its ranks with experienced porters. In the decades before colonization, as mentioned in the introductory remarks, long-distance portering became the profession of wage-earning specialists. Although, as Bernhard Gißibl illuminates, the most profitable branch of the caravan economy – ivory – collapsed within the first decade of colonial rule, tens of thousands of porters continued to mediate most commercial transactions in German East Africa, especially the trade in wild rubber.<sup>37</sup> That the Central Depot's porters came from this skilled labour force becomes evident from the records of German expedition leaders. Geographer Fritz Jaeger, for instance, who travelled throughout northern Tanzania in 1906 with porters provided by the state agency, wrote of his crew member Pagazikubwa that he “did his 17th journey with a European. In addition, he has travelled 7 times on behalf of Indians [i.e. South Asian merchants, who were important entrepreneurs in the long-distance trade]”.<sup>38</sup> The name Pagazikubwa, a Kiswahili travel alias translated as big, great, or elder porter, further underlines the experience of its bearer.

Porters who had undertaken extensive caravan routes were also found in German ethnologist Karl Weule's expedition in 1906 into southern Tanzania. Sabatele, according to Weule, was a porter born at the southern end of Lake Tanganyika. In one of Weule's ethnological experiments, he drew a map of his previous journeys as a caravan porter. Covering a distance of at least 2,300 kilometres (one way), they stretched from Dar es Salaam along the central caravan route to the west, as far as Ujiji and Kasanga at Lake Tanganyika and Mwanza at Lake Victoria (see figure 2).

Figure 2: A map drawn by Sabatele, a porter of the Central Depot, depicting the central route and the major caravan hubs, including Dar es Salaam (1), Mpwapwa (7), Tabora (13a), and Ujiji (14), as well as Mwanza (15).<sup>39</sup>



37 See Gißibl, *Nature of German Imperialism*, pp. 68–73; P. Krajewski, *Kautschuk, Quarantäne, Krieg. Dhauhandel in Ostafrika 1880–1914*, Berlin 2006.

38 Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig (hereafter IFL), 848-3/351, Jaeger, *Journal* September–December 1906, entry of 9 November.

39 Source: Weule, *Native Life*, p. 9.

Although the Central Depot helped Pagazikubwa, Sabatele, and other experienced porters to cultivate their professional identity, many East African men who had no prior experience as porters found themselves forced to mediate the logistics of interior stations. The Kilimatinde station in central Tanzania alone, for instance, recruited 1,200 men as porters for coastwards journeys in 1898, who were officially labelled as "volunteers".<sup>40</sup> There is no doubt that only very few actually volunteered, whereas the majority consisted of chained penal workers and tributary workers. Labelled as *corvée* (Fronddienst), authorities in Kilimatinde and elsewhere conscripted rural dwellers from the vicinity of their stations for porter services. To round up these people was a task assigned to chiefs, village headmen, and *maakida* (newly-installed Kiswahili-speaking administrative agents).<sup>41</sup> The inability or unwillingness to provide porters whenever requested was understood as a proof of a chief's weakness, often leading to his punishment.<sup>42</sup>

*Corvée* was the major source of involuntary transport labour – but not the only one. In 1898, the colonial administration established a so-called hut tax, to be paid annually by every house and hut owner in the colony.<sup>43</sup> It was simultaneously decreed that tax defaulters could be compelled to work for the state authorities.<sup>44</sup> As far as can be retrieved from the available sources, only a few upcountry officials made portage an option for taxpayers, namely in the districts of Bismarckburg (Kasanga) and Bukoba.<sup>45</sup> Still, coerced recruitment remained ubiquitous around the turn of the century. Schutztruppe officers or district officials sent their soldiers to nearby villages to conscript male residents whenever they were in need of porters.<sup>46</sup> These conscripts then had to carry loads to the borders of their district, where they passed them to other forced workers.<sup>47</sup> In the Langenburg district (Lumbila), historian Bernd Arnold remarks that these raids were so common that missionaries even felt compelled to issue letters of confirmation to their own servants to prevent them from being conscripted randomly on the street.<sup>48</sup>

This section has discussed porter recruitment beyond the immediate combat zones. On the Indian Ocean coast, free porters were recruited from among the skilled workforce of the existing long-distance caravan economy. Station commanders across the colony, by

40 BAB, R 1001/6468, "Denkschrift [draft]", 1898, p. 289.

41 J. Koponen, Development for Exploitation. German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884–1914, Helsinki/Münster 1995, pp. 118–129, 344–345; Pesek, Koloniale Herrschaft, p. 241.

42 For examples, see W. Methner, Unter drei Gouverneuren. 16 Jahre Dienst in den deutschen Tropen. Wrocław 1938, p. 168; BAB, 10.03 FC 1150, Resident of Urundi to Government, Bujumbura, 28 April 1910; BAB, R 1001/831, Kirsch to Government, Tabora, 5 December 1913, p. 28.

43 BAB, R 1001/1053, "Verordnung betreffend die Erhebung einer Häuser- und Hüttensteuer", 1 November 1897, pp. 48–50.

44 Denkschrift 1898/9, p. 2878.

45 Runderlass betreffend das Trägerwesen, 12 May 1900, in: Die Deutsche Kolonial-Gesetzgebung: 1899–1900, vol. V, Berlin 1901, pp. 80–81; Denkschrift 1898/9, p. 2911; BAB, R 1001/1053, Liebert to Foreign Office, 24 January 1899, p. 73; IFL, 246/1, Prittwitz und Gaffron, Journal January–September 1899, entry of 7 July. See also Sunseri, Vilimani, p. 65.

46 Moyd, Violent Intermediaries, p. 178.

47 P. M. Libaba, The Maji Maji Rising in the Lindi District, in: Department of History of the University of Dar es Salaam, Maji Maji Research Project. Collected Papers, Dar es Salaam 1968, 7/68/2/1.

48 B. Arnold, Steuer und Lohnarbeit im Südwesten von Deutsch-Ostafrika, 1891 bis 1916. Eine historisch-ethnologische Studie, Münster 1994, pp. 167–168.

contrast, continued to base recruitment on strategies of labour coercion and violence. Coercion and wage labour coexisted in colonial logistics, often being found within the same caravan as additional porters were drafted during the journey. The differences between these types of labour relations thus blurred in the porters' everyday life on the road. Porters travelling under German command, whether employed or conscripted, worked in similar conditions and underwent similar treatment. Both groups witnessed a reorganization of caravan travel according to the colonial agenda, as the remainder of this article will illuminate.

#### 4. Everyday Life and Everyday Violence on the Road

State authorities tackled caravan travel with regulatory vigour. Aiming to transform day-to-day logistics into manageable complexities, the Germans fixed the maximum weight for loads in official caravans at 65 pounds (later 60 pounds), a weight much in line with the typical loads of trade caravans, which averaged around 60 to 70 pounds.<sup>49</sup> The time spent on the road likewise became regulated. After 1899, timetables were issued for all major routes of the colony, containing a specific number of marching days to set the maximum travel time allowed. Officials were required to calculate their planned journeys according to these numbers.<sup>50</sup> By 1906, the official route list included timetables for about 170 routes across the colony. Dar es Salaam–Ujiji, the entire horizontal stretch of German East Africa, for example, was stated to take 65 days.<sup>51</sup> A one-day halt was permitted after every six-day march. If we take the numbers and compare them with an estimate of the distances, caravans were expected to march an average of 20 kilometres per day.

If officials wanted to conform to the route list, they had to make their caravans march in an appropriate mode, translating the decreed marching speed into everyday practices. Schutztruppe officer Heinrich Fonck reported a daily average of 20 to 25 kilometres being covered by many official travel parties.<sup>52</sup> The colonial army, however, could make its porters travel much farther. The Schutztruppe's training handbook contained advice for footslog drills, in which columns marched 40, or even 60, kilometres in one single day.<sup>53</sup> Field diaries testify to the fact that marching such distances was indeed possible. Fonck's colleague, Schutztruppe officer Georg von Prittwitz und Gaffron, for instance, regularly made his porters march for up to eight hours in the late 1890s, covering di-

49 The circular explicitly mentions lbs., not German *Pfund*. See Runderlass betreffend das Gewicht der Lasten, 9 May 1899, in: Landes-Gesetzgebung des Deutsch-Ostafrikanischen Schutzgebiets. Systematische Zusammenstellung der in Deutsch-Ostafrika geltenden Gesetze, Verordnungen etc. Berlin 1902, p. 478. See also BAB, R 1001/831, testimony of Sergeant Faupel, Dar es Salaam, 12 March 1910, p. 12. For loads in trade caravans, see Rockel, Carriers, pp. 103–110.

50 Runderlass betreffend die Routenlisten, 14 July 1899, in: Kolonial-Gesetzgebung V, pp. 106–107.

51 Kaiserliches Gouvernement, Taschenbuch für Deutsch-Ostafrika, Teil III. Gesetze und Verordnungen. Berlin 1910, pp. 43–46.

52 Fonck, Deutsch-Ost-Afrika, p. 83.

53 Nigmann, Felddienstübungen, p. 33.

stances of between 38 and 45 kilometres in this time.<sup>54</sup> The journal of Jaeger even recorded marches of up to 55 kilometres per day, albeit "on a good road", as he remarked.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, improved infrastructure, where it existed, was certainly a reason for speeding up transport. The physical drilling of porters, especially those in the permanent service of the Central Depot, also allowed the German officers to push the distance and time travelled by the porters. The effect, as von Prittwitz und Gaffron noted in his field journal, was that "through the many years of portage, the men were trained in almost a military fashion".<sup>56</sup>

Expeditions, Pesek contends, "were not only [a] territorial conquest but also a conquest of the crews' bodies; in other words, they enforced a disciplinary regime".<sup>57</sup> This regime was based on institutionalized violence, abusive treatment, and an increased intrusion into the caravan's work rhythms.<sup>58</sup> Crews in official transport were subjected to a European time regime with a reveille every morning before sunrise, followed by a march of up to eight hours.<sup>59</sup>

On the march, discipline was guaranteed by a strict marching order.<sup>60</sup> A visual depiction through African eyes is provided by a member of Weule's above-mentioned expedition, Barnabas (see figure 3). The scene depicts a group travelling in 1906 under the command of the military surgeon of Lindi, who is the tall character with the pith helmet. In front marches an African non-commissioned officer, carrying the German flag, followed by a file of soldiers and the porter column. One askari marches in the rear.<sup>61</sup> Soldiers flanking the group of porters, as in this illustration, served as a disciplinary force. They were expected to spur porters and to prevent them from strolling or falling behind, in this way guaranteeing the required fast pace.

As the whip depicted so prominently in Barnabas' drawing indicates, authorities and expedition leaders regarded violence as the best practice to subject porters to a colonial rule set and make them obedient.<sup>62</sup> For offences, delinquents received 25 lashes with the *kiboko* (a hippo-hide whip). Flogging was usually carried out in public to deter other caravan members from future misdemeanours. In addition, expedition leaders customarily whipped porters (or, more commonly, ordered the askaris to do so) in case they could not keep pace or tried to evade the disciplinary regime.<sup>63</sup>

54 IFL, 245/1, Prittwitz, Journal July 1897–August 1898, entry of 9 July 1897; IFL, 245/2, Prittwitz, Journal August–October 1898, entry of 2 September; IFL, 246/1, Prittwitz, Journal January–September 1899, entry of 2 June.

55 IFL, 849-1/2, Jaeger, Journal 1904, entry of 3 December.

56 IFL, 246/3, Prittwitz, Journal May 1900–November 1901, entry of 1 July 1901. See also IFL, 245/2, Prittwitz, Journal August–October 1898, entry of 2 September.

57 Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, p. 233.

58 Ibid., pp. 307–308.

59 For time regimes, see Ibid., p. 243; Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, p. 104.

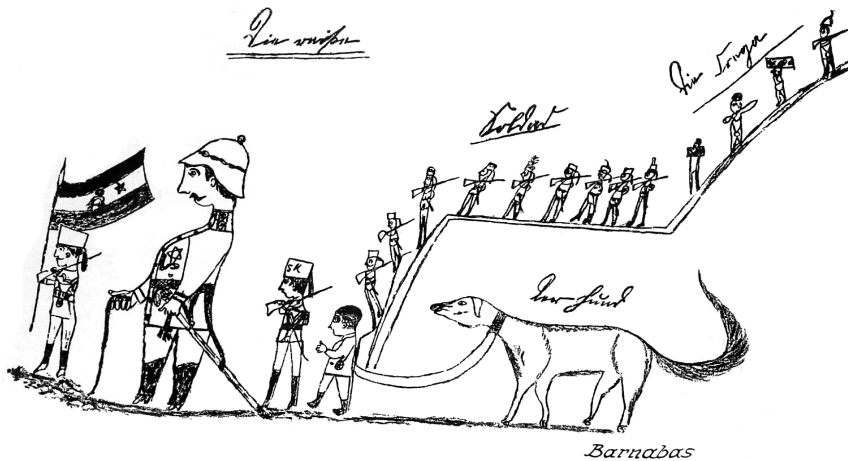
60 Bühner, *Schutztruppe*, pp. 237–238; Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, p. 234.

61 K. Weule, *Ostafrikanische Eingeborenen-Zeichnungen. Psychologische Einblicke in die Künstlerseele des Negers*, in: IPEK. Jahrbuch für Prähistorische und Ethnographische Kunst (1926), p. 121.

62 For violence in expeditions, see also Rockel, *Carriers*, pp. 164–179.

63 Fonck, *Deutsch-Ost-Afrika*, p. 70; Weule, *Eingeborenen-Zeichnungen*, p. 118.

Figure 3: Barnabas, “Caravan on the march”. The drawing depicts a German expedition in south-eastern German East Africa, 1906.<sup>64</sup>



The cruelty with which the male population was forced to act as porters becomes evident from the Maji Maji research project, a series of oral interviews collected in 1968 by historians Gilbert Gwassa and John Iliffe and their students at the University of Dar es Salaam. The interview series documents African life before and during the Maji Maji War (1905–1907), which followed an uprising against the colonial rulers in south-eastern German East Africa.<sup>65</sup>

Porterage for the colonial state was one source of grievance for Africans in the years leading up to the Maji Maji War. Mzee Andrea Mesegu from the Ukaguru Mountains near Morogoro, for instance, remembered the German labour regime most vividly:

*I won't forget the hardship we experienced from the German reign. There were no roads or motor cars as there are now. We carried all the loads on our heads from Kilosa to Songea or from Mpwapwa through Mamboya to Saadani and Bagamoyo. We also carried the Germans themselves who constantly beat us when we showed signs of tiredness. Those were difficult days indeed.*<sup>66</sup>

Another witness, Mzee Selemani Msiwanda, pointed to the threat official safaris posed to the lives of the pressured workers: “When we approached a town like Korogwe, several

<sup>64</sup> Source: Weule, *Native Life*, p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> See J. Monson, *Relocating Maji Maji. The Politics of Alliance and Authority in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, 1870–1918*, in: *Journal of African History* 39 (1998), pp. 95–120. F. Becker, *Traders, ‘Big Men’ and Prophets. Political Continuity and Crisis in the Maji Maji Rebellion in Southeast Tanzania*, in: *Journal of African History* 45 (2004), pp. 1–22; as well as the essays in F. Becker/J. Beez (eds.), *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika, 1905–1907*, Berlin 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Andrea Mesegu, in: Department of History of the University of Dar es Salaam, *Maji Maji Research Project. Collected Papers*, Dar es Salaam 1968, 2/68/2/3/11; Interview with Melicho Mbamila, in: *Ibid.*, 3/68/1/3/2; A.K. Kalembo, *An Account of the Maji Maji Rising in the Lukulidi Valley*, in: *Ibid.*, 7/68/1/1.

women came to meet us on the way. Some women were glad to see their husbands back but others mourned, for their husbands could not be seen while nobody could explain their whereabouts".<sup>67</sup>

A third interviewee, Mzee Kibilange Upunda, explained that "if you had experienced it, you would have known how grave it was. To be chained, to be shot with bullets [...] while in addition you carried loads as the great eye of heaven rose up!"<sup>68</sup> Regarding corporal punishment, Upunda further remembered that "if you did not carry them [Germans in hammocks] gently, even as you passed through stones and gravel or up or down hill, you were whipped profusely on your buttocks, back and legs and severely reviled".<sup>69</sup> Nicknames that Africans marching under the command of Germans invented for the officers give an impression of their harsh treatment. Schutztruppe lieutenant Phillip Correck, for instance, became known as Bwana Mota (Mr. Fiery Temper), because of his frequent use of the *kiboko*.<sup>70</sup> Other Germans were known as Bwana Kinyonga (Mr. Malicious) or Mabale Gasagandi (The Strong Hitter).<sup>71</sup>

Violence, however, was perpetrated not only by German expedition leaders but also by African agents of the colonial state. In the internal hierarchy of official travel, porters were assigned an inferior rank to the askari soldiers. Soldiers made use of the power and position assigned to them by their German commanders. Being "[a]t once construed by their officers as racial inferiors, but also as superior to most other East Africans, askari bolstered their claims to big-man status through their everyday soldiering and policing activities",<sup>72</sup> as Moyd notes. This self-perception becomes evident from another interview conducted by the Maji Maji research project. In it, Mzee Mohamed Mbenju remembered that "[t]here was every kind of suffering. The askari were a calamity. You carried a heavy load. He did not assess your strength to carry the load. If it were too heavy for you, you carried it until you died. [...] All people were barbarians to the askari. A small mistake would be punishable with twenty-five strokes".<sup>73</sup>

It was not only corporal punishment that made life on the road one of hardship and exhaustion. Most porters lacked adequate equipment and marched barefoot, making them highly susceptible to injuries and illness, especially pneumonia and foot injuries through jiggers.<sup>74</sup> In addition, porters were threatened by malnutrition, attacks by animals, and warfare, the latter of which continued as a major facet of German occupation even after

67 Interview with Selemani Msiwanda, in: Ibid., 2/68/2/3/11.

68 Interview with Kibilange Upunda, in: G. Gwassa/J. Iliffe (eds.), Records of the Maji Maji Rising, Dar es Salaam 1969, p. 8.

69 Interview with Kibilange Upunda, cited after G. Gwassa, The Outbreak and Development of the Maji Maji War, 1905–1907. PhD diss., University of Dar es Salaam, 1973, p. 382.

70 Moyd, Violent Intermediaries, p. 91.

71 For a list of nicknames, see H. Cory, Buhaya and the African Explorer, in: Tanganyika Notes and Records no. 43 (1956), p. 27.

72 Moyd, Violent Intermediaries, p. 43. See also Pesek, Koloniale Herrschaft, pp. 317–318.

73 Interview with Mohamed Mbenju, in Gwassa and Iliffe (eds.), Records, p. 8.

74 Medizinal-Berichte über die deutschen Schutzgebiete. Deutsch-Ostafrika, Kamerun, Togo, Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Deutsch-Neuguinea, Karolinen, Marshall- und Palau-Inseln und Samoa für das Jahr 1903/04, Berlin 1905, p. 74, 79. See also Pesek, Koloniale Herrschaft, p. 242.

the turn of the century.<sup>75</sup> In combat situations, supply trains were still very vulnerable. For instance, according to official figures, 66 porters of the German forces died during the Maji Maji War, a number only slightly lower than the body count of the askaris.<sup>76</sup> It is very likely that the actual number of victims was much higher, given that slow and weak porters were sometimes left behind to die.<sup>77</sup>

The enforced footslogs increased the risk of death. Von Prittwitz und Gaffron, for instance, described in early 1898 how a number of his porters succumbed to the exhausting conditions and the harsh climate:

*Everybody was shaking with cold so that they could barely keep moving. After 1 ½ hours, 7 of the 14 porters had become entirely incapable of walking. They staggered as if they were drunk. Then, suddenly they collapsed under their loads and lay on the ground stock-still. [...] I ordered the askaris and boys to carry the loads. The porters, as far as they were not entirely insensate, were pushed up the hill by the askaris.*<sup>78</sup>

In a similar vein, Schutztruppe officer Rudolf von Hirsch explained in a letter to his parents that during his campaign in the Maji Maji War three porters drowned in a swamp after ten hours of marching because “at nightfall, they sat down dead tired and drowned while sleeping”.<sup>79</sup> Both passages exhibit the Germans’ willingness to accept the loss of their porters’ lives for the progress of the expedition.

However, even the Tanzanians who were violently drawn into porter service were able to retain at least some autonomy over the work process. The Germans never could achieve full control over the daily routines because semi-skilled or unskilled workers that were coerced into portering or were recruited during the journey did not stay long enough with the expedition to let its labour regime “improve” their workflows.<sup>80</sup> Assigning loads, for instance, took hours as new porters competed for the lightest loads and often would pick up bulky items only through the threat of violence. A typical response to these assaults was desertion, which often caused the expedition to pause and find new workers.<sup>81</sup> Earlier studies have explored the numerous strategies with which porters were able to guarantee their well-being in European expeditions, especially in the pre-colonial era. Rockel’s pioneering research, in particular, details their means of being non-compliant

75 See, for instance, IFL, 848-2/350, Jaeger, Journal May–August 1906, entry of 3 August; IFL, 848-5/353, Jaeger, Journal 1906–1907, entry of 10 April 1907; G.A. von Götzen, Deutsch-Ostafrika im Aufstand 1905/06, Berlin 1909, p. 170.

76 “Zusammenstellung der Verluste”, in: Deutsches Kolonialblatt (15 April 1907), p. 333.

77 See Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, IV, NL Hirsch, 9, Journal October 1905–March 1906, entries of 9, 12 & 15 March, cited after T. Menger, The Origins of Colonial Violence. The Perpetrator’s View, M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2016.

78 IFL, 245/1, Prittwitz, Journal July 1897–August 1898, entry of 12 January.

79 Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, IV, NL Hirsch, 10, Hirsch to his father, 3 July 1906, cited after T. Morlang, ‘Ich habe die Sache satt hier, herzlich satt’: Briefe des Kolonialoffiziers Rudolf von Hirsch aus Deutsch-Ostafrika, in: Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift 61 (2002), p. 512.

80 Pesek, Koloniale Herrschaft, p. 235.

81 IFL, 245/1, Prittwitz, Journal July 1897–August 1898, entry of 1 August 1897; IFL, 245/2, Prittwitz, Journal August–October 1898, entry of 2 September; IFL, 248/6, Prittwitz, Journal April 1898–March 1899, entry of 27 August. For the competition over loads, see also Rockel, Carriers, p. 112.



and subversive, including desertion, strikes, slowdowns, and what he calls "day-to-day forms of protest".<sup>82</sup> Based on his analysis of expeditions in the early colonial period, however, Rockel also observes that after the colonial takeover "open protests such as strikes were rarer and less effective than before. Desertion continued to be the main form of resistance".<sup>83</sup>

A study of the available evidence confirms this observation with regard to official caravans. While strikes occasionally still occurred in the commercial caravan sector – including caravans organized by German trade companies – porters working for one of the colonial state's different branches usually applied more individual strategies of resistance.<sup>84</sup> Through the 1890s and the first decade of the new century, desertion remained a regular occurrence in official transport.<sup>85</sup> In 1895, Lothar von Trotha, acting governor of German East Africa, observed that "signed porters do not fulfil their obligation but throw their loads away and run. Often this happens immediately after they have left the initial place of departure".<sup>86</sup>

The continuous occurrence of desertion underlines that the disciplinary regime and the strict marching order could never obtain any hermetic status. Due to the fact that caravans mostly travelled on narrow trails, the file of porters stretched over several kilometres. Vast sections of the column thus marched unmonitored and the rear often arrived in the day's camp only hours after the front. This long stretch made movement behind enemy lines potentially dangerous for porters in expeditions at war. But in everyday situations, it left room for the "hidden transcripts" of non-submission, allowing porters to walk at their own speed or take short breaks.<sup>87</sup> "Taking a break from work", historian of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) Alf Lüdtke observes with regard to industrial workers in Germany, "must be understood as a form of non-compliance, as a form of self-determination during the working time".<sup>88</sup> The goal of such actions by the porters was to create distance between themselves and their situation – distances that allowed porters to enjoy themselves amid a racialized regime, even though the askaris would pass by them at some point and give them a start.

82 See Rockel, *Carriers*, pp. 163–195.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

84 For strikes in commercial caravans, see Tanzania National Archives (hereafter TNA), G1/35, Grawert to Government, Kisaki, 11 June 1895, p. 52.

85 Denkschrift 1898/9, p. 2883; IFL, 245/2, Prittwitz, Journal August–October 1898, entries of 5 & 6 September 1898; IFL, 248/6, Prittwitz, Journal April 1898–March 1899, entry of 6 September; IFL, 180/45, H. Meyer, Journal October–November 1911, 15; Fonck, *Deutsch-Ost-Afrika*, pp. 119–120. See also Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, p. 242; Sunseri, *Vilimani*, p. 59.

86 BAB, R 1001/118, "Gouvernementsbefehl", 6 July 1895, p. 23.

87 For these "hidden transcripts", see J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT, 1985. For examples, see IFL, 188/14, Uhlig, Journal July–August 1904, entry of 25 July; IFL, 188/15, Uhlig, Journal August 1904, entry of 22 August. For "lagging" as a form of resistance in expeditions, see also Rockel, *Carriers*, pp. 192–193.

88 A. Lüdtke, *Arbeitsbeginn, Arbeitspausen, Arbeitsende. Skizzen zur Bedürfnisbefriedigung und Industriearbeit im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, in: *Idem, Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus*, Hamburg 1993, p. 112.



More than that, the fissures in the monitoring regime enabled forced porters to flip the colonial system to serve their own ends. Usually travelling with a group of soldiers, many porters engaged in raiding villages along the caravan routes.<sup>89</sup> While raiding settlements and pilfering food were also a practice of many trade caravans, the German administration realized in October 1895 that the ongoing devastation of the caravan routes “mainly stems from pillages and raids committed by soldiers and the government’s porters in particular”.<sup>90</sup> As Rockel observes, villagers defending themselves could eventually face the wrath of the accompanying soldiers or the next military station.<sup>91</sup> Turning their involuntary engagement into a means of profit-making for themselves, porters capitalized on the firepower and symbolic capital of colonial rule to steal the residents’ foodstuffs or property.<sup>92</sup>

Another misdemeanour was theft from within the caravan party.<sup>93</sup> There is at least one recorded incident in which a porter stole from an askari whose belongings he had to carry.<sup>94</sup> Far more common was theft from supply caravans transporting cash money up-country or taxes to the coast. By 1899, thefts from cash transports occurred so regularly that the administration had to issue instructions on how to safely protect coffers. Moreover, it was stipulated that these caravans should always march under the command of a European leader rather than an African non-commissioned officer.<sup>95</sup> For people pressured into portering, stealing from the caravans’ stocks was a way to at least profit somewhat from their engagement.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In 1914, the character of expeditions again turned from warlike to actual warfare. Since 1909, permanent structures for transportation existed within the colonial army, consisting of units of 50 professional porters attached to each of the 14 Schutztruppe companies.<sup>96</sup> This porter corps turned out to be insufficient when the First World War reached East Africa as the combatants’ movement was almost completely built on portering. Raids on villages or pressure on chiefs to provide porters soon became the sole mode of recruitment.<sup>97</sup> During the four years of war, the different empires deployed more than

89 S. J. Rockel, *Forgotten Caravan Towns in 19th Century Tanzania*. Mbwapwa and Mpwapwa, in: *Azania* (41) 2006, pp. 18–21.

90 BAB, R 1001/784, “Gouvernementsbefehl”, 16 October 1895, p. 5.

91 Rockel, *Forgotten Caravan Towns*, p. 19. For examples, see TNA, G1/35, report by Beringe, Mpwapwa, 20 June 1895, p. 69; BAB, R 1001/280, instructions by Rüdiger, Dar es Salaam, 20 February 1892, p. 93; IFL, 245/1, Prittwitz, *Journal* July 1897–August 1898, entries of 29 July 1897 & 27 January 1898; Fonck, *Deutsch-Ost-Afrika*, p. 83; TNA, G1/36, “Aus-schreitung der Karawane Lt. Richters”, Pangani, 26 May 1898, p. 60.

92 Rockel, *Carriers*, p. 195.

93 *Ibid.*

94 IFL, 848-3/351, Jaeger, *Journal* September–December 1906, entry of 6 September.

95 BAB, R 1001/786d, “Runderlass”, 13 February 1899, p. 177.

96 BAB, R 1001/6484, “Jahresbericht 1909”, p. 13; Pesek, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, p. 316.

97 Bühner, *Schutztruppe*, p. 447, 469. For porters in the German campaign, see M. Pesek, *Das Ende eines Kolonialreichs*.

one million Africans as porters in the East Africa campaign. According to Anne Samson, the total number of Schutztruppe porters was around 192,000.<sup>98</sup> In all the armies involved, the mortality rates of porters were shocking. Geoffrey Hodges estimates the rates to be over 20 per cent (including those missing) of British front-line porters. Similar numbers have been estimated for the Belgian forces and appear likely for the German army, too.<sup>99</sup>

The First World War revealed the full extent of the colonial state's coercive power, with German officials drawing on a reservoir of experience accumulated in the two and a half decades of colonial rule. The military organization of transport during the war was only the culmination of the practices established in state-organized transport since the late 1880s. The present article has shed a spotlight on these practices and their implication for the daily life of porters working for the colonial state. Empowered by a colonial regime, officials ruthlessly utilized Tanzanian men as porters in military campaigns, supply caravans, and expeditions. Tanzanian voices bear witness to the centrality of terror and violence in the everyday life on the road. Still, the frequent occurrence of unsolicited breaks, thefts, raids, and desertion underlines that Tanzanians engaged as porters were not entirely incapable of taking action. At least to some extent, they were able to impose their own ideas on their work circumstances. The article has thus highlighted both the German efforts to force porters into a colonial set of rules as well as the agency these people retained. Transport workers in German East Africa, contrary to what the colonizers believed, were never fully transformed into submissive "tools of empire".<sup>100</sup>

Ostafrika im ersten Weltkrieg, Frankfurt am Main 2010, pp. 154–187; Idem, The War of Legs. Transport and Infrastructure in the East African Campaign of World War I, in: *Transfers* (5) 2015, pp. 102–120.

98 A. Samson, East and Central Africa, in: 1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, 2016, [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/east\\_and\\_central\\_africa](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/east_and_central_africa) [accessed 1 June 2022].

99 G. Hodges, Kariakor – The Carrier Corps. The Story of the Military Labour Forces in the Conquest of German East Africa, 1914–1918, Nairobi 1999, p. 19; Bühner, Schutztruppe, p. 460.

100 For this term, see D. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire. Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York/Oxford 1981.