Zur Diskussion

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Cross-examining the Kagera War: A Plea for Multidirectional Postcolonialism

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Abstract: Military historians can benefit from »multidirectional« postcolonial analyses, which open new possibilities for studying war and militarization. Gendered analysis of the 1978–1979 Kagera War between Tanzania and Uganda crosses the different registers of postcolonialism, inviting military historians to account for war's multidirectional effects within one frame.

Keywords: Gender, Uganda, Tansania, Gewalt, Quellen

When the editors of MGZ invited me to write for this discussion, I eagerly accepted. A languishing conference paper enticed me to return to earlier work I had done on the Kagera War of 1979, when Tanzania invaded Uganda, leading to Ugandan dictator Idi Amin's ouster. The paper argued for understanding the war through the lens of Ugandan and Tanzanian leaders' masculinities, and for using this gendered history as a vehicle for thinking about new nationhood and new sovereignties in post-independence African nation-states. I did not name »postcolonialism« as a frame for understanding this gendered international military history. I thought it would be a straightforward endeavor.

I was wrong. The term »postcolonialism« is (in)famously fraught and difficult to pin down.[1] Much work on postcolonialism can be understood within three analy-

1 I draw on Santanu Das's helpful parsing of the term's meanings and registers. See Das, Santanu. »War and Postcolonial Studies,« in *War and Literary Studies*, ed. by Anders Engberg-Pedersen and Neil Ramsey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 119–135, 121. For other helpful overviews, see Go, Julian. *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18–63; Go, Julian. »Reverberations of Empire: How the Colonial Past Shapes the Present,« in *Social Science History*, 48, 2024, 1–18; Hall, Stuart. »When was the ›Post-Colonial‹? Thinking at the Limit,« in *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 242–260; Mishra, Vijay. »Postcolonial Theory,« in *Oxford*

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tical registers that sometimes overlap or intertwine with each other. In its most basic sense, »postcolonial« (or, sometimes, »post-colonial«) refers to the temporal, relational, and processual condition of existing *after* colonialism. Frequently, its point of departure is the end of formal British or European colonialism, despite the fact that there have been other colonialisms, and therefore, other postcolonialisms.[2] For example, both Tanzania and Uganda were »postcolonial« African nation-states that went to war against each other in 1979, thereby exercising that most conventional understanding of what constitutes »war,« in which nation-states fight each other.[3] In this sense, the Kagera War was a postcolonial war, fought by the armies of postcolonial nation-states, led by postcolonial African politicians. The language and ideals of territorial sovereignty mapped onto nation-state logics in seemingly uncomplicated ways. Both Idi Amin and Julius Nyerere made sovereignty-based arguments about cross-border military invasions in 1978–1979. Tanzania, the victim of cross-border incursions from Amin's army in 1978, defended its borders from Ugandan violations of Tanzanian sovereignty. Uganda argued for a different variety of sovereignty, contending that the Kagera region should belong to Uganda based on older histories of place- and boundary-making in the region.[4] Uganda also argued that Tanzania's hosting of former Ugandan President Milton Obote, as well as an anti-Amin Ugandan military force, undermined its sovereignty. Nyerere's decision to invade Uganda in 1979 provoked condemnations of his army's violation of Ugandan territorial sovereignty.[5] Less prominent were condemnations of previous Ugandan incursions into Tanzanian territory.[6] All of this can be discussed within a

Research Encyclopedias, Literature, ed. by Deidre Shauna Lynch (online, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Mishra, Vijay. »Postcolonialism 2010–2014,« in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 50, 2015, 3, 369–390.

2 Tlostanova, Madina. »The postcolonial condition, the decolonial option and the post-socialist intervention,« in *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined: Multidirectional Perspectives on Imperial and Colonial Pasts and the Neocolonial Present*, ed. by Monika Albrecht (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2019), 165–178.

3 Barkawi, Tarak. »Decolonising War,« in *European Journal of International Security*, 1, 2016, 2, 199–214, 199.

4 On the long history of the boundary between Tanzania and Uganda, see Médard, Henri, and Kidari, Ikram. »The Kagera River and the Making of a Contested Boundary: Territorial Legacies and Colonial Demarcations in Buganda (19th–20th Centuries),« in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 52, 2019, 1, 11–30.

5 Umozurike, U.D., and Umozurike, U.O. »Tanzania's Intervention in Uganda,« In *Archiv des Völkerrechts*, 20, 1982, 3, 301–313; Roberts, George. »The Uganda-Tanzania War, the fall of Idi Amin, and the failure of African diplomacy, 1978–1979,« in *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8, 2014, 4, 692–709, 702–705.

6 Austen, Ralph. »Colonial Boundaries and African Nationalism: The Case of the Kagera Salient,« in *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania*, ed. by Gregory H. Maddox and James L. Giblin, (Oxford, Dar es Salaam, and Athens, OH: James Currey 2005), 56–69, 64f.

framework of postcolonialism defined by a particular historical moment: the end of British colonial rule in two former African colonies with a common border, and the beginning of two new independent nation-states engaged in foundational struggles of national self-definition, which included territorial claims and defenses.

A second way of understanding the postcolonial is in the title of this »Zur Diskussion« forum: Military History Postcolonial. This title evokes a German way of doing »the postcolonial«, in which scholars and activists identify the traces of Germany's colonial past in the present in order to critique them so that the wider public comes to understand the presence of these violent histories in the everyday: the paths they take to work, the shops they frequent, the sweets they buy, the museums they visit. Collectives and projects such as Berlin Postkolonial, Hamburg Postkolonial, Freiburg Postkolonial, and numerous others, have taken on this work across Germany. Their efforts have produced many tangible outcomes that have shifted the contours of knowledge about Germany's colonial pasts, much of which involves military history. Berlin-Neukölln's former Wissmannstraße, for example, honored the founder of the Wissmanntruppe, Hermann von Wissmann. This small colonial army composed of African rank-and-file troops fought in the Coastal War of 1889, establishing a military foothold in what became German East Africa. He then commanded the force in the early 1890s, and later became the colony's governor.[7] In 2021, the Neukölln district renamed the street Lucy-Lameck-Straße to honor Tanzanian politician Lucy Lameck, the first woman to become part of independent Tanzania's National Assembly.[8] This example of a street renaming illustrates how postcolonial analysis and activism can call attention to German colonial military history that might otherwise go unnoticed. The space between Wissmann and Lameck is vast and largely irreconcilable.[9] Yet through historical research, steadfast refusal to forget the colonial past, and local political mobilization, those who called for and accomplished this street renaming closed the gap within the space of a street sign. In this way, scholars and activists evoke »the postcolonial« in German memorial cultures and politics, linking temporally and spatially distant events to present-day cityscapes.[10]

7 Obituary, E.G.R. »Hermann von Wissmann,« in *The Geographical Journal*, 26, 1905, 2.

8 <https://oyoun.de/en/event/die-neue-lucy-lameck-strasse-umbenennung-und-rahmenprogramm/> (last retrieved on 16 May 2024). See also Peeples, Alexander. »Women's Works: The Evolution of Tanzanian Women's Movements from Late Colonialism to Post-Structural Adjustment,« in *Global Africana Review*, 3, 2019, 1, 21–31, 26.

9 Ibid.

10 Albrecht, Monika. »Negotiating memories of German colonialism: Reflections on current forms of non-governmental memory politics,« in *Journal of European Studies*, 47, 2017, 2, 203–218.

A third way of understanding postcolonialism, and the most difficult to engage succinctly, is its role as a theoretical intervention (or set of theoretical interventions).[11] According to Julian Go, »postcolonial thought« is »a sustained *critique* of empire and, in particular, a critique of the ways of knowing, seeing, and being attendant with empire.« Postcolonial studies has been, and continues to be, many things since its emergence in the 1980s.[12] But according to Monika Albrecht, it is now »normalized« such that knowledge of colonial violence and its devastating aftershocks is now widespread, and that many more people likely have new vocabularies for engaging these histories productively.[13]

Postcolonial thought has come in for much criticism over the decades.[14] Yet it persists alongside »decolonial« thinkers' continuing efforts to make a »fresh start« that goes in new directions — multidirections — without simply returning to postcolonialism's roots with the goal of mere revision.[15]

In making my way through the dense knot of postcolonial conditions and epistemes, and thinking about what might constitute a »postcolonial military history,« my thoughts turned to these criticisms, alongside the current limitations of military historiography. Here, two brief observations. First, »mainstream postcolonial studies« has made it appear that Western European colonialisms are the only ones that matter for understanding both history and the present.[16] Postcolonialism's central concerns have been the European empires that invaded and colonized Africa, the Middle East, and Asia in the long nineteenth century. The dominance of this way of constructing postcolonialism has produced what Albrecht calls »an overall *unidirectional* discursive framework of any colonial issue«.[17] Instead of

11 Go, *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory* (see note 1), 19.

12 Ibid., 19f.; Mishra, »Postcolonialism 2010–2014« (see note 1).

13 Albrecht, Monika. »Unthinking postcolonialism: On the necessity for a reset instead of a step forward,« in *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined* (see note 2), 181–195, 182.

14 See Hall, »When was the ›Post-Colonial‹?« (see note 1) for a helpful overview of early criticisms of postcolonialism, as well as a sharp assessment of its possibilities. See also Appiah, Kwame Anthony. »Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?,« in *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 1991, 2, 336–357; McClintock, Anne. »The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ›Post-Colonialism‹,« in *Social Text*, 31/32, 1992, 84–98; and Shohat, Ella. »Notes on the ›Post-Colonial‹,« in *ibid.*, 99–113.

15 Albrecht, »Unthinking postcolonialism« (see note 13), 181.

16 Ibid., 183. Elsewhere, Albrecht defines the »postcolonial mainstream« as »[pointing] to nothing other than the one feature that contributions to postcolonial scholarship have in common, namely that, diverse as they may otherwise be, the matrix on which they are mapped is the assumption that colonialism and post-colonialism are tantamount to *Western* colonialism and post-colonialism«. Albrecht, Monika. »Introduction: Postcolonialism cross-examined: Multidirectional perspectives on imperial and colonial pasts and the neocolonial present,« in *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined* (see note 2), 1–47, 2.

17 Albrecht, »Unthinking postcolonialism« (see note 13), 183.

continuing to perpetuate this unidirectional mode of analysis, Albrecht suggests the need for a »broadening of the postcolonial horizon,« which will »generate a genuine *multidirectional* approach [...] that will meet the challenges of the many commonalities and diversities of imperial and colonial experiences and legacies«.[18] Decolonial thinkers like Albrecht seek »new comparisons and juxtapositions« across spaces that have typically not been compared;[19] and call for lenses to be widened to incorporate other imperial and colonial experiences beyond those defined by Western Europe's 19th century expansion.[20]

A second observation: postcolonial thought and military history have, for the most part, bypassed each other. The Gulf War, 9/11, and the Global War on Terror have been generative for postcolonial thinkers in calling attention to the continuing power imbalances and lethal effects of colonialism and empire both in formerly colonized spaces *and* within Britain, Western Europe, and the United States.[21] According to Bill Aschcroft's definition, »›postcolonial theory‹ can be defined as ›the cultural and political impact of European *conquest* upon colonized societies‹«.[22] Yet despite the centrality of »conquest« in Ashcroft's definition, postcolonial thinkers have not had much use for military history. »Yet,« Tarak Barkawi writes, »warfare made possible and sustained not only colonialism, but the modern world orders we seek to understand«.[23] To be fair, military historians have not usually had much use for postcolonialism either. But, as Barkawi argues, »postcolonial critique can reveal what drops out in the reduction of war and the military to the modern-nation state.« This gives military historians the means by which to identify what has been »taken for granted« in their field.[24]

18 Ibid., 189.

19 Ibid., 191.

20 Tlostanova, »The postcolonial condition« (see note 2), 165–176.

21 Hall, »When was the ›Post-Colonial‹?« (see note 1), 244; Shohat, »Notes on the ›Post-Colonial‹« (see note 14), 104–106; Chukwuma, Kodili Henry. »Critical terrorism studies and postcolonialism: constructing ungoverned spaces in counter-terrorism discourse in Nigeria,« in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15, 2022, 2, 399–416; Edwards, Erica R. *The Other Side of Terror: Black Women and the Culture of US Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2022); *Orientalism and War*, ed. by Tarak Barkawi and Keith Stanski (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Porter, Patrick. *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

22 Ashcroft, Bill. »Introduction: A Convivial Critical Democracy: Postcolonial Studies in the Twenty-First Century,« in *Literature for our Times: Postcolonial Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft [et al.] (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi 2012), xv–xxxv, here xv; cited in Albrecht, »Introduction« (see note 16), 2. Emphasis mine.

23 Barkawi, Tarak. »War, armed forces and society in postcolonial perspective,« in *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Sanjay Seth (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 87–105, 87.

24 Ibid., 88.

Thus, a fourth register of postcolonialism is multidirectional postcolonialism, which aspires to displace the unidirectional focus of older modes of postcolonial thought. Military historians might take inspiration from scholars who have approached the field obliquely, interdisciplinarily, and creatively. By choosing multidirectional analyses, they can reframe postcolonial conflicts to decenter European and North American perspectives, emphasizing instead the myriad ways that these wars radiated outwards through cross-border invasions, the making of refugee and exile populations, and human losses across different demographics; and pressed inward through abuses against ordinary citizens and residents, especially women; disruption of local economies, and military occupation. I will return to some of these examples of war's multidirectional effects in the conclusion.

Gender is a mode of analysis that allows for crossing, and »cross-examining«[25] each of these registers of postcolonialism, using the Kagera War as an example. I interpret the Kagera War through Nyerere's and Amin's martial masculinities, embodied by both men in different ways as they led Tanzania and Uganda through the vicissitudes of new nationhood and into war in 1978–1979. I conclude with some thoughts on how to reinterpret this history through the lens of »multidirectional postcolonialism,« and how this work might help generate postcolonial military histories that traverse the different registers explained above.

Two martial masculinities: Civilian and military

Although African nation-states' independence experiences are often imagined as a rupture with colonialism, the story also includes much continuity with colonial governance. Tanganyika became independent in 1961, and Uganda followed in 1962. With Kenyan independence in 1963, the period of formal British colonialism came to an end in East Africa. Julius Nyerere, Milton Obote, and Jomo Kenyatta transitioned from nationalist party to national leadership roles, and by the mid-60s, one-party rule characterized all three nations' politics.

International media played up Nyerere's intellect and aplomb from the earliest days of independence. In March 1964, a *Time Magazine* article described him as »Africa's most sensible and sensitive statesman«.[26] A striking full-page artistic representation of his face, looking serious and determined, graced the issue's cover. His shirt collar displayed the colors of the new Tanzanian flag. Behind him, patches of

25 I take the idea of »cross-examining« from Albrecht, »Introduction« (see note 16).

26 »Africa: Who is Safe?« in *Time*, 13 March 1964, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,828240–1,00.html> (last retrieved on 17 May 2024).

long, dark green grass interspersed with areas covered in flames gave the image an ominous tone. The *Time* cover came early in Nyerere's career as Tanganyika's (and after April 1964, Tanzania's) President. The feature article, entitled »Africa: Who is Safe?«, describes a continent of newly independent or soon-to-be independent African nation-states, many of them rendered as chaotic and dangerous. Situating Nyerere within this purported continent-wide chaos, the article touted Nyerere's leadership as the key ingredient in Tanganyika's reputation as a haven of stability and peace vis-à-vis other parts of Africa.[27] Congo, Togo, and Nigeria all received mention as unstable places with greedy and capricious leaders. In contrast, Nyerere was a »slender, soft-eyed man with a Chaplinesque mustache, [...] the antithesis of most African leaders«.[28]

By the time this article appeared in *Time*, 1964 had already been a very tumultuous year for Nyerere and Tanganyika: in January, Zanzibar went through a bloody revolution, and the Tanganyika Rifles mutinied right after the violence on Zanzibar.[29] Plans were almost complete for unifying Tanganyika with Zanzibar in April. Nyerere's initial response to these events was to go into hiding, but he soon emerged, hopeful that his government could negotiate a settlement with the rebellious soldiers and forestall wider violence. He soon realized, however, that this was not to be, and he asked the former colonizers, the British, for troops to help subdue the mutineers. Britain sent a unit of Marines, who quashed the uprising. Rather than ordering harsh punishments for the mutinous soldiers, Nyerere simply dismissed both battalions of the Tanganyika Rifles.[30] Fourteen mutineers received prison sentences, though most received no more than two or three years.[31] Nyerere was critical of the judge's decision in the case, but decided not to interfere, arguing that to do so »would be to do exactly that thing for which the nation condemns the soldiers — it would be to abrogate the rule of law«.[32] By the end of the year Nyerere had established a new army, the Tanzania People's Defense Force (TPDF). In establishing the TPDF, he decided to »sacrifice military efficiency for political security«.[33]

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 The Tanganyika Rifles was a battalion of the King's African Rifles, the British colonial army in East Africa. It remained in place after independence. Nyerere disbanded it after the mutiny of January 1964. He founded the Tanzania People's Defense Force (TPDF) in late 1964 to replace it.

30 Parsons, Timothy. *The 1964 Army Mutinies and the Making of Modern East Africa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 155.

31 Nyerere, Julius. »Comment on the Mutineers' Sentences« (Dar es Salaam, 1966), in *Freedom and Unity – Uhuru Na Umoja. A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952–1967*, ed. by Julius Nyerere (London, 1967), 298f., 298.

32 Ibid., 298.

33 Parsons, *The 1964 Army Mutinies* (see note 30), 181f.

He remained wary of the potential for another military coup. But »by 1966,« according to Timothy Parsons, »[his] control of the military was complete«.[34] Nyerere had turned the events of early 1964 to his advantage, using them to dislodge the remnants of the the Tanganyika Rifles, described by Charles Thomas as »a powerful subnational identity that remained as a colonial legacy«.[35] This move allowed him to build a new military to serve TANU ideology, socialist ideals, and the nation. In 1967, the Arusha Declaration laid out Nyerere's vision for Tanzanian socialism, self-reliance, and good leadership. The TPDF became a powerful symbol of unity, a »people's army« that would put Tanzania's interests first.[36]

In the 1970s, Nyerere articulated a commitment to ideals of »familyhood« (Ujamaa) as expressed in the 1967 Arusha Declaration.[37] These expressed ideals led to policy decisions that helped build a »new national society« governed by his vision of African socialism, but at great economic and social cost.[38] Most notable among these was his villagisation scheme (*Ujamaa vijijini*), which »between 1973 and 1975 [. . .] morphed into a compulsory drive in which millions of peasants were forcibly relocated into concentrated settlements«[39] in the pursuit of rural development. Historians have emphasized the complexities of the villagization project and how it is remembered. Here, I simply want to point to the »significant upheaval throughout the country« caused by this bold, but flawed, national project, which resulted in reduced food production and widespread hardship.[40] In addition, the TPDF's invasion of Uganda in 1979 worsened Tanzania's financial problems. The military operation and the thousands of soldiers who crossed through the border region may have accelerated the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region.[41] The promise of independence had turned to disappointments, and while this was a common trajec-

34 Ibid., 182.

35 Thomas, Charles. »From Martial Races to a People's Army: Decolonization and Martial Identity in Tanzania,« In *Making Martial Races: Gender, Society, and Warfare in Africa*, ed. by Myles Osborne (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2024), 290–318, 311.

36 Ibid., 311.

37 Hunter, Emma. *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy, and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 210 f.

38 Bjerk, Paul. »Remembering Villagisation: National Consciousness Amidst Economic Failure,« in *Africa after Fifty Years: Retrospections and Reflections*, ed. by Toyin Falola, Marice Amutabi and Sylvester Gundona (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013), 21–41, 25.

39 Lal, Priya. *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

40 Thomas, Charles. *Ujamaa's Army: The Creation and Evolution of the Tanzania People's Defence Force, 1964–1979* (Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, forthcoming 2024), 192. Cited with author's permission.

41 Kaijage, Frederick J. »AIDS Control and the Burden of History in Northwestern Tanzania,« in *Population and Environment*, 14, 1993, 3, 279–300, 297 f.

tory for many new African nation-states, the »Tanzaphilia« of Nyerere's first decade in office made these disappointments more acute.[42] James R. Brennan sums up Nyerere's critics' perspectives:

> »The substance of their criticisms also reflects the nature of political debate with Nyerere, who as teacher and president put great stock in the need for consensus through debate, but who in practice served as Tanzania's lone authorized critic.«[43]

Nyerere's authoritarian style was entwined with his goal of creating a unified Tanzania, which had its human and material costs.

Despite these less favorable legacies, since his death in 1999, Nyerere has continued to be revered as a kind of saint. His diocese in Musoma appealed to the Vatican for his beatification, which continues to percolate nearly a quarter century after his death.[44] Even Uganda's current President Yoweri Museveni weighed in on Nyerere's credentials for sainthood, noting that Ugandans owed him a profound debt of gratitude for liberating them from Idi Amin's tyrannical rule in 1979.[45] He was eulogized as the »conscience of Africa«, a man who had led an exemplary life of self-sacrifice, and who strived for the betterment of his people.[46] His *New York Times* obituary described him as »uncharacteristically humble and modest«, »idealistic«, and »principled«. Yet it also noted that »some would say [he was] naively misguided.«[47]

These are not words that would have been used in describing Nyerere's nemesis, Uganda's Idi Amin. In 1964, as Nyerere was managing the multiple crises of the Tanganyika Rifles mutiny, the Zanzibari Revolution, and unification, Idi Amin was a major in the Ugandan Army. Inspired by the Tanganyika Rifles mutiny,

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42 Mazrui, Ali. »Tanzaphilia: a diagnosis,« in *Transition*, 31, Jun.–Jul., 1967, 20–26.

43 Brennan, James R. »Julius Rex: Nyerere through the eyes of his critics, 1953–2013,« in *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8, 2014, 3, 459–477, 460.

44 Norbert, Paschal. »Tanzania: Country's Founding President, Julius Nyerere Cause for Sainthood Gathers Pace,« in *Catholic Information Service for Africa,* November 21, 2023 <https://cisanewsafrica.com/tanzania-countrys-founding-president-julius-nyerere-cause-for-sainthood-gathers-pace/> (last retrieved on 17 May 2024).

45 Kasasira, Risdel. »Museveni praises Nyerere over Idi Amin overthrow,« in *Daily Monitor*, June 2, 2014. <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Museveni-praises-Nyerere-over-Idi-Amin-overthrow/-/688334/2334766/-/rhb31dz/-/index.html> (last retrieved on 16 May 2024).

46 Robbins, James. »Julius Nyerere: The Conscience of Africa,« in *BBC News-Africa*, October 14th 1999 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/441768.stm> (last retrieved on 16 May 2024).

47 Kaufman, Michael T. »Julius Nyerere of Tanzania Dies. Preached African Socialism to the World,« in *New York Times*, October 15, 1999 <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/15/world/julius-nyerere-of-tanzania-dies-preached-african-socialism-to-the-world.html?src=pm&pagewanted=2&pagewanted=all> (last retrieved on 16 May 2024).

African soldiers in both Uganda and Kenya followed suit. In Uganda, Amin seems to have played some part in negotiating an end to the uprising, which continued in spite of his efforts. He received two promotions from President Milton Obote within the space of one year, after which he became »more astute in creating a personal following in the army«.[48] As he continued rising through the ranks, taking on increasingly important posts as a senior military leader, he also became, after Obote, »the second most powerful figure in the country«.[49]

He embodied a highly visible and easily recognizable martial masculinity. In March 1962, even before Ugandan independence seven months later, King's African Rifles (KAR) Lieutenant Amin had commanded a platoon that committed atrocities against Ngwatella Turkana pastoralists. »Operation Utah,« writes Mark Leopold, »was a cross-border action involving both Kenyan (5KAR) and Ugandan (4KAR) colonial forces«.[50] An investigation after the incident found that although Amin had given orders to carry out beatings that caused the deaths of at least five Ngwatella Turkana men, he bore no more overall responsibility than his British superiors.[51] His involvement had no effect on his career. As shown above, after independence he »resumed his steady rise through the ranks, in what was to become an increasingly fast-changing army«.[52] As Obote came to view the army as an essential partner in his own form of authoritarian governance, Amin became all the more important in his capacity as a trusted military advisor.[53] At the same time, Amin navigated the »complex and fast-moving politics of post-independence Uganda« adeptly, thereby demonstrating »a new ability to operate politically as well as militarily«.[54] As the army »more than doubled in size between 1964 and 1965,« he secured formidable power through ethnicity-based recruitment practices.[55]

In 1971, while Obote was out of the country on an official visit, Amin seized power in a military coup. Initially backed by Western powers, Amin upended the model of the erudite East African post-independence leader, which up to that point had included men who were more like Nyerere than him. Amin's was certainly not the first military coup after independence, but it was the first successful one in East Africa.

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48 Omara-Otunnu, Amii: *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890–1985* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), 61f. Cited in Leopold, Mark. *Idi Amin: The Story of Africa's Icon of Evil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 115.

49 Leopold, *Idi Amin* (see note 48), 121.

50 Ibid., 97.

51 Ibid., 103f.

52 Ibid., 105.

53 Ibid., 118f., 121.

54 Ibid., 122.

55 Ibid., 124.

Like Nyerere, Amin made the cover of *Time* magazine on June 21, 1976. He wears a dark blue dress uniform with a chestful of medals, gold epaulets, and gold cords draped across one side. He looks to the side, and his mouth is open as if he is talking. The cover's text (»Appetite for Trouble«) exclaims, »He's outrageous in person. He loves race cars, cartoons, and boxing. Critics say crocs (and Amin!) are eating dissenters. Is he serious or just having fun?« Less than one year later, Amin's picture appeared on the March 7, 1977 cover of *Time* again, this time with the caption »The Wild Man of Africa.« On this cover, he again wears a military uniform, but it is subdued–olive drab, with ribbons instead of medals. General Amin renders a salute, looking into the distance, his eyes squinting a bit, his face resolute. Between his seizure of power in 1971 and being labeled a »wild man« by an icon of the western press in 1976, he had achieved notoriety as a capricious, defiant, charismatic, and ruthless leader. He snubbed western expectations of decorum and created his own. He was a disruptor who refused to be contained by the west. In this, and in his brutal decision to expel South Asians from Uganda in 1972, he »did enjoy some appeal as a leader who dramatically broke with the colonial order and thus opened up new possibilities for African politics«.[56] By 1977, as evidence of his regime's crimes became impossible to ignore, and as the ruins of Uganda's economy plunged people further into poverty, the elements that some Ugandans had welcomed took a back seat to widespread fear of running afoul of government officials or the State Research Bureau and its depredations.[57]

The crisis that led to Amin's ouster in 1979 had actually begun in October 1978, when his army occupied the Kagera Salient in northwest Tanzania in its quest to annex the region. The 1978 invasion was only the latest in a series of territorial incursions by Amin against Tanzania. This time however, Nyerere decided to take decisive action against him.[58] In mid-November, TPDF forces massed on the south side of the Kagera River, and gradually began pushing Ugandan forces back. Libyan troops and equipment reinforced Amin's army. In February 1979, the TPDF and a small army of Ugandan exiles (UNLA) crossed into Uganda, and on April 10, 1979, took Kampala. A TPDF occupation force remained in Uganda for a couple of years afterwards. This move drew approbation from the Organization of African Unity

56 Austen, »Colonial Boundaries« (see note 6), 66.

57 A rich historiography on the Amin regime's crimes offer more thorough analysis than I can provide here. See especially Decker, Alicia. *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 2014); Peterson, Derek R., and Vokes, Richard. *The unseen archive of Idi Amin: Photographs from the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation* (Munich, New York: Prestel 2021).

58 Roberts, »The Uganda-Tanzania War« (see note 5), 702.

(OAU) and some African nations, who expressed dismay at Nyerere's disregard for an independent African nation's sovereignty. But Nyerere maintained that Tanzania had a right to defend its territory from Amin's encroachment, and also that his humanitarian concern for Uganda's peoples outweighed concerns about violating Ugandan sovereignty.[59]

Martial masculinities beyond archetypes

Continuities from colonial rule to postcolonial governance manifested in both Nyerere and Amin. Nyerere was part of the small group of elite men who rose to national leadership through their educational attainments and involvement in mass nationalist movements in the 1950s. For Amin, the continuity traveled with him through his life as a colonial and postcolonial military man. He had been part of the British colonial army in Uganda, and had been an officer during violent actions against the Ngwetella Turkana. He came to power in a military coup, and for a time, enjoyed support from the anti-socialist, anti-Obote west.[60] His version of martial masculinity was highly legible: it could be read through his rank of Field Marshal, the massive amounts of insignia he wore on his many uniforms, his swagger, his boxing, his bombast.

But both Nyerere and Amin were disruptors, albeit in different ways, and both performed martial masculinities that underpinned their disruptiveness. Nyerere's socialist vision, his refusal to align with either superpower, his insistence on Tanzanian self-sufficiency and ujamaa, and his generosity in supporting anti-apartheid resistance on Tanzanian soil positioned him as an African icon. His role in setting up the TPDF as an army built to serve the nation, and then deploying it against Amin's troops in Kagera, reflected a martial masculinity that did not require brashness or bluster. Nyerere's authoritarianism, masked by his status as the nation's »Mwalimu« (»teacher« in Kiswahili), created the conditions within which the TPDF could respond to Amin's cross-border violent provocations in 1978 with the force that toppled is regime in 1979.

The contrast between the two presidents burst into public view soon after the 1971 coup. Amin questioned Nyerere's masculinity in the press and in correspon-

59 For a clear and detailed overview of 1978–1979, see Thomas, Charles. »Uganda-Tanzania War,« in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. by Thomas Spear (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) <https://oxfordre-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-1040> (last retrieved on 17 May 2024).

60 Barkawi, »War, armed forces and society« (see note 23), 99.

dence.[61] Nyerere, on the other hand condemned Amin's militarism and questioned his legitimacy as national leader given how he had come to power. The *New York Times* saw conflict between Uganda and Tanzania as inevitable, referring to President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania as »a slender intellectual that has been leading his country further and further to the left,« raising the specter of global socialism. On the other hand, »President Idi Amin [was] a huge, muscular man, a former heavyweight boxing champion of the Ugandan Army, who values his links to the West.« It concluded, »that two such different men should disagree [was] not surprising«.[62]

Nyerere's martial masculinity was subtle and seemingly reluctant. His version of martial masculinity touted liberation, whether Tanzania's, southern African, or Ugandan. He defended Tanzanian territorial sovereignty and initiated what he considered to be a humanitarian intervention for Ugandans. Nyerere's approach to the question of managing Tanzania's military, and to the larger problem of African militaries as postcolonial actors, connected directly to his desire to promote a politics that would put Africans first. Although Amin and Western commenters described him in terms of an altogether different kind of masculinity, it is important to read him as a military man. Placing him along a spectrum of martial masculinities reveals him as a political actor who was not undone by the military in 1964. Rather, he used the experience of the Tanganyika Rifles mutiny as a foundation for a shrewd reassessment of what the military might do for him, for Tanzania, for eastern Africa, and for southern Africa. It renders his relationship to Tanzanian military history more visible, moving away from surface interpretations of the »sensible and sensitive statesman,« in which he features as a gentle socialist idealist, and towards assessing him as a man whose engagement with the military, and militarism, moved through different registers according to his domestic, regional, and international political circumstances.

Nyerere's fraught relationship with the US and other Western powers can be interpreted as more than an ideological disagreement about how African economics and politics should be organized. Nyerere also posed a challenge to the notion that international politics could keep gender categories neat and tidy, with military dictators like Amin in one place, and »slender intellectuals« like Nyerere in another. For Westerners who produced these representations, Nyerere and Amin were archetypes, easily juxtaposed to spin a postcolonial story of Nyerere's good

61 Weinraub, Bernard. »Abrupt Shifts Mark Amin Rule of Uganda,« In *New York Times*. 26 August 1972; Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow* (see note 57), 149, 152.

62 »African Clash«, In *New York Times*, 29 August 1971, Foreign Notes, Section IV, 3.

triumphing over Amin's evil.[63] But archetypes are not real. Civilian and military decisions to go to war wreaked havoc in the Kagera Salient in 1978–1979, and the citizens of Tanzania and Uganda experienced the very real effects of these decisions for years to come. The distinctions in how the two men displayed their martiality mattered little to those who suffered the devastation of war in 1978–1979.

Resetting postcolonialism, reframing war[64]

In considering the relationship between war and postcolonial studies, Santanu Das asks »what work does a postcolonial critique of violence do to our understanding of war more generally?«[65] Gender offers a specific lens for unsettling the unidirectionality of postcolonial thought *and* military history. Both of these fields tend to position Britain, western Europe, and the United States as the sole purveyors of colonialism, its violence, and its unequal outcomes. Scholarship that challenges this formulation, for example by centering wars fought between postcolonial nation-states, provide spaces for examining continuities and ruptures in colonial and postcolonial governance. A gendered analysis of such conflicts further disrupts the construction of warfare as a normative masculine activity. »Feminist scholarship,« writes Yasmin Khan, »has pioneered alternative approaches, illuminating a far more complex and contested history in which masculinity itself, the actions of armies and the ways in which soldiers interact with local societies all come under the microscope«.[66]

By focusing on two variants of martial masculinities in independent East African nation-states, I tried to show that they come in different packages, and that they cause extensive damage either way. Feminist scholars, novelists, poets, artists, and musicians have explained the scale of this damage in myriad forms. Alicia Decker's history of »ordinary« women in Idi Amin's Uganda traces the complexities and paradoxes that shaped their relationship to »Amin's military state«.[67] Many Ugandan women remembered the war first and foremost from their perspectives

63 For a provocative argument about Amin as a »colonial fantasy figure,« see Leopold, Mark. »Sex, violence and history in the lives of Idi Amin: Postcolonial masculinity as masquerade,« in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45, 2009, 3, 321–330.

64 The idea of the »reset« comes from Albrecht, »Introduction« (see note 16). The idea of »reframing war« comes from Khan, Yasmin. »Postcolonial History as War History in the Twentieth Century,« in *History after Hobsbawm: Writing the Past for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by John H. Arnold, Matthew Hilton, and Jan Rüger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 259–271, 265.

65 Das, »War and Postcolonial Studies« (see note 1), 119.

66 Khan, »Postcolonial History as War History« (see note 64), 264f.

67 Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow* (see note 57), 2.

as mothers, recalling those years as a time of »protracted struggle to protect [their families] from harm's way«.[68] Women's efforts to protect their families took place alongside profound grief and uncertainty. Amin's militarism and his state security apparatus had killed or disappeared many of their husbands, sons, uncles, and fathers. Women and children's personal narratives reveal first-hand experiences of terror and abuse at the hands of Ugandan soldiers. They describe an array of experiences, such as going into exile in neighboring Rwanda; losing touch with random people who had intervened in potentially deadly situations; and humiliations that stayed with them for the rest of their lives.[69] Grace Kyomuhendo's novel *Waiting* provides readers with an intimate understanding of how the war intruded in a rural family's everyday lives, and how they nonetheless found ways to continue caring for each other with »quiet, unsentimental pathos«.[70]

Postcolonial military history would bring to bear source materials beyond the strictly historical, because they have the potential to name the different registers of gendered violence that people experience in warfare. This might mean bringing multidirectional reading practices to interpreting interviews, memoirs, and newspaper reports; integrating and analysing photography beyond mere illustration; or finding ways to integrate artistic representations of war (as in Kyomuhendo's novel *Waiting)* into historical analyses. Feminist and decolonial scholars have demonstrated the value of oblique, radical analyses for setting new research horizons. This is an urgent task for scholars of postcolonialism and military history: despite decades of studying how war is conducted, we are no closer to realizing what Françoise Vergès calls »the right to a peaceful life« and her related call to reject the naturalization of war because of the unfathomable harm and destruction it causes not only in its immediate effects, but its reverberations into grim futures.[71] Feminist decolonial scholars have also proposed »critical border-thinking« as a valuable mode of inquiry within multidirectional postcolonial thought.[72] The cross-border location of the Kagera War is especially fruitful as a site of analysis, since border-crossing necessarily evokes danger, insecurity, and violence. Indeed, this particular border war and the subsequent revolutionary outcome it enabled, of bringing Yoweri Museveni to power through a cross-border incursion and insur-

68 Ibid., 149.

69 *Looking Back. Tragedies of Ugandan Women and Children 1970–2000*, ed. by Patricia Haward (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2009), 24–40.

70 M.J. Daymond, »Afterword,« in Kyomuhendo, Goretti. *Waiting* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), 113–134, 121.

71 Vergès, Françoise. *A Feminist Theory of Violence: A Decolonial Perspective* (London: Pluto Press, 2022), 4, 102.

72 Tlostanova, »The postcolonial condition« (see note 2), 175f.

gency against Idi Amin's successors, has also produced dangerous outcomes for Ugandans, the effects of which are felt today.

I return to Das's question, »what work does a postcolonial critique of violence do to our understanding of war more generally«?[73] At a minimum, it should prompt military historians to pursue multidirectional analyses that counter the continued centering of European and North American military histories in an age when cross-border, multidimensional warfare expresses both the continuation of colonial forms of violence (albeit with new technologies) and the refusal of formerly colonized peoples to submit to it. A more utopian answer to the question is that decolonial feminist military history pries open new intellectual spaces, showing how the ongoing coercive violence of warfare and militarization has intersected with gender and race hierarchies to produce deadly, destructive outcomes for ordinary people.[74] Along the way, it smuggles in enough radical thought to undermine any easy stories about war as a necessary endeavor. Instead, »insurgent feminisms« encourage us to challenge normative assumptions about militancy and masculinity in favor of demanding the right to peace.[75]

73 Das, »War and Postcolonial Studies« (see note 1), 119.

74 Khan, »Postcolonial History as War History« (see note 64), 265.

75 Shringarpure, Bhakti, and Veruska Cantelli, »Introduction,« in *Insurgent Feminisms. Writing War*, ed. by Bhakti Shringarpure and Veruska Cantelli (Wakefield, Quebec: Daraja Press, 2022), 1–7, 2. See also Decker, Alicia C. »What does a feminist curiosity bring to African military history? An analysis and an intervention,« in *The Journal of African Military History*, 1, (2017), 1–2, 93–111; Moyd, Michelle. *Beyond Women and War: The Lens of Feminist Military History*. Nursling Clio blog, 10 November 2020, <https://nursingclio.org/2020/11/10/beyond-women-and-war-the-lens-of-feminist-military-history/> (last retrieved on 30 May 2024); Romaniuk, Scott Nicholas, and Wasylciw, Joshua Kenneth. »›Gender‹ Includes Men Too! Recognizing Masculinity in Security Studies and International Relations,« in *Perspectives*, 18, 2010, 1, 23–39.