

secretariat, and the whereabouts of its members and leaders. The outcome is a rather insightful book, which omits neither the major nor the minor details.

One thing that puzzles me is the titles of the four parts that comprise *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*. Weiss uses the first names of his four main characters: Bankole, James, George, and Otto. Why not Renner, Ford, Padmore, and Huiswoud? And why use these names at all, since the four parts only slightly coincide with these four key individuals?

Finally, a remark concerning the editing of the book. Regrettably, this volume contains many mistakes, mainly typographical errors, which could have been avoided. One would have expected more careful editing of such an expensive publication.

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ZACCARIA, MASSIMO. *Anch'io per la tua bandiera. Il V Battaglione Ascari in missione sul fronte libico (1912)*. Giorgio Pozza Editore, Ravenna. 2012. 263 pp. € 17.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000261

This volume traces the history of the first Eritrean battalion employed by the Italians in the war for the conquest of Libya during 1912. In his introduction, the author explains that his book is not intended to be a study in military history, but rather a “visual novel” (p. 9). More broadly, *Anch'io per la tua bandiera* contributes to the history of colonial and post-colonial imaginary, showing the entangled process started by the *ascari* (“soldiers”, in Arabic) and their “exhibition” in Italian and Eritrean societies. In particular, Zaccaria analyses the “celebration” of the *ascari* both in colonial areas and in Italy, and he explains how this celebration was related to a number of political goals. In Italy they were used to rally the population behind the colonial war, alleviating the trauma of the defeat at Adwa (inflicted by the Ethiopian Empire in 1896). In Libya the Italian government sought to undermine Libyan resistance using the *ascari* in their propaganda in religious terms: they were presented as specifically Muslim soldiers who were loyal to the Italians. Finally, the Eritrean battalion served as a symbol of an Italian “civilizing mission”, demonstrating Italy’s colonial achievements to the European colonial powers.

In relation to existing Italian literature on the colonial and post-colonial period, the book goes beyond the divide between, on the one side, the “classical” historiographical approach to colonial history, focused mainly on institutional and political issues, and cultural history on the other. With regard to the sources, the author combines institutional sources, such as government and military accounts, with visual sources, including post-cards and pictures. In doing so, he aims to integrate national and colonial history, showing the reciprocal correlation between the processes occurring in Italy and in the colonies. Following this double perspective, the book can be divided into two parts: Chapters 1 to 4 examine chronologically the path of the *ascari* from Eritrea, where they were recruited, to Libya, where they fought, to Italy, where they were sent to in order to be “celebrated”, up to their return to their homeland. Chapters 5 to 7 focus on the cultural aspects of the presence of the *ascari* in Italy, and in its two former colonies.

Beginning with the recruitment of the Fifth Battalion, Eritrea increasingly became the military reserve for the Libyan campaign. As the author underlines, the exploitation of human

resources for military purposes by the Italians significantly modified both the country's economy and labour relations throughout the colonial era. Nevertheless, this book is not focused on colonial labour dynamics, which certainly deserve further in-depth historiographical examination. In particular, the relationship between the chronic shortage of labour in Eritrea – also due to the military enrolment of the *ascari* – and the labour market for Italian poor whites, who accounted for the majority of Italian settlers, are not explored by Zaccaria.

This study concentrates more on exploring the shifting perceptions of colonized people within the Italian and Eritrean societies. On the one hand, the recruitment of Eritrean soldiers allowed the Italian government to assert its power over the native population and to show its allegedly successful “civilizing mission”; on the other hand, the glorification of their bravery in the colonial battles for the conquest of Libya increased their popularity in Italian society, contributing to a blurring of the borders between the colonized and the colonizers. With reference to this, the author stresses how such popularity went beyond the colonial and military establishment's purposes, giving rise to what one Italian journalist called “acute askarophilia”. Zaccaria underlines the tension between the ideological discourse prompted by the government and the popular perception of the *ascari*, which had its own dynamics, partly independent from the official propaganda of the role of the Eritrean soldiers. In particular, in Naples and Rome, the two cities visited by the *ascari*, crowds rallied around the soldiers, revealing an “excessive” enthusiasm that broke the “racial etiquette”, the rules that were supposed to regulate social dynamics in the imperial space. The behaviour of the Italians was inconsistent with the “prestige” of a colonizing race, and in consequence the official policy on the *ascari* sought both to celebrate and to erase the native soldiers at the same time.

In a general account the author traces the ventures of the battalion, their cultural outcomes, and the socio-political context at the beginning of the Libyan occupation, and he highlights how the Eritrean battalion contributed to triggering political and social tensions both in Italian and in Eritrean societies. In Chapters 5 to 7, the author addresses a number of crucial issues in the field of cultural studies, analysing the relationship between writing and identity, the dress of the Eritreans and their social status, and the “racial” process, in conjunction with gender and class issues in the colonial and imperial spaces. With regard to writing, it is remarkable that, as Zaccaria stresses, the letters of the Eritrean soldiers are the first recorded epistolary exchange among subaltern classes in Eritrean society. Furthermore, the writing skills of the native soldiers gave them a social position higher than that enjoyed by the subaltern illiterate Italians.

Analysing the cultural aspects of the *ascari* in the imperial space, on the whole Zaccaria highlights the shifting position of the soldiers in terms of social status and the tensions this brought about in the nation-building process in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. In doing so, the author illustrates colonial dynamics and national processes as a mutually reinforcing system. In this regard, the book sheds light on some important but still unexplored topics of Italian colonial dynamics, such as the relationship between the social and political processes of Italy and those of its former colonies, and the interconnections between different Italian colonial domains. From this point of view, *Anch'io per la tua bandiera* contributes to the analysis of the circulation of people, ideas, and cultural practices within the Italian “imperial” space at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Massimo Zaccaria leads us along the Fifth Battalion's path, combining academic rigour and a pleasant writing style that allows him to make sense of the historiographical entanglement initiated by the Eritrean battalion in colonial and post-colonial history.

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