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Do not destroy our honour. War time propaganda directed at East African soldiers in Ceylon (1943-44)

“When this war started, we improvised propaganda simultaneously to win the war. But if we had considered the matter intelligently, we would have realised that propaganda to win the war should have been started twenty years ago. It takes decades for an idea to seep into the consciousness of the public.”¹ The truth of this observation by the Colonial Office public relations department became more apparent when the deployment of East African soldiers of The King’s African Rifles (KAR) shifted primarily to territories outside East Africa. Immediately after the Abyssinian campaign in February 1942, soldiers of the 2/4th (KAR) stationed in Gura (Ethiopia) held a meeting and wrote a resolution “to the effect that the *askari* would not go to another country without first having leave and that they would not go anywhere by ship as they could not tell where it was going.”² The Command consented. In the meantime, however, the first KAR units had been prepared for their ‘voyage’ to Madagascar and later to Ceylon. In 1943, 35 000 of the 250 000 *askari* on active service had been sent to Ceylon on garrison duty and especially to be trained for operations in Burma.³

Given the fact that a large number of conscripts were fighting for ‘their King’ under duress or for financial reasons, cleverly designed propaganda was required to discipline them and keep them motivated. The paper will thus argue that HESHIMA, the army weekly of the 11th (East African) Division, was not primarily introduced „to counter a sense of inactivity and boredom [...] and to maintain the morale of those East African troops who have for some time been serving overseas, and those to be sent on active service”.⁴ It was one of a bundle of measures introduced to secure the individual and collective discipline of the *askari*. As will be shown, both its content and verbal strategies served the overwhelming aim formulated by Major-General Fowkes, Commander of the 11th (EA) Division: “[...] to build the Division into a highly skilled, self-reliant and disciplined fighting machine.”⁵ The fact that the 11th (EA) Division was not included in military operations until late 1944 constituted a major problem for both British military officers as well as the East African ranks. Patience and training for jungle fighting were demanded of both sides and caused disciplinary problems among the troops. Thus, the paper will focus largely on the period between the arrival of the first East African military units and their deployment in Burma (1943-44).

HESHIMA and the propaganda scheme for East African troops in Ceylon

¹ Edmett 6 August 1941, Public Relations: Future of PR, PRO CO 875/11/1, 22.

² 2/4th KAR, War Diary, February 1942 WO 169/ 7027. The diary further discloses that two days later a message from the C-in-C promised that “although their method of bringing it to notice was strongly deprecated their complaint had been considered and it had been decided to send 100 men to leave forthwith; and that the remainder would move to a station in or near Kenya from which leave could easily be arranged.”

³ Plan for Propaganda for East Africa, INF 1/564.

⁴ Proposal for Combined Civil and Service Information Bureau (East Africa) 1943, PRO WO 106/5102.

⁵ Training Instructions No. 3, 22nd June 1943, PRO, WO 172/ 3985, 4.

The propaganda directed at East African units in Ceylon was primarily the responsibility of the East Africa Command.⁶ The Principal Information Officer (PIO), Sir Geoffrey Northcote, had to maintain a close liaison between the military authorities and the civilian information officers under his authority “in all the activities which concerned them both, and to assist the former as far as possible in publicity and propaganda matters vis-à-vis the Army, especially African troops, and prisoners-of-war.”⁷ This was achieved through weekly meetings attended by military intelligence, the Navy, the Royal Air Force, the East African Intelligence Centre, and Kenya Security.⁸ Army representatives, regardless of the central organization they belonged to, were responsible for dealing with information and propaganda activities directed at all troops within the Command, as well as the East African troops serving outside it. Evidence that this liaison was somewhat problematic is revealed in the correspondence between the PIO in Nairobi and the authorities in the Ministry of Information (MOI) in London, to whom the former was responsible:

“We are not quite clear here to what extent the military view this as their exclusive function, or whether there is indeed close liaison between the military and the civilian authorities in respect to these troops. After all, these men will be returning to civilian life in East Africa, and the whole number of social problems are being created for which the civilian authorities would be more competent to deal than the military, and for this reason should have a considerable say in what type of propaganda is put across to them while they are actually in the Forces. If this is agreed, and a propaganda scheme is being prepared, the next question is finance. Naturally, if the military are providing the money they may very well wish to call the tune. On the other hand, if all or a part of the money is to be found from a non-military source, the type of propaganda suitable for these troops can be more readily controlled by those who will be subsequently responsible for their welfare.”⁹

Financing seems to have been a major problem between the civilian and military authorities in the East Africa Command. With regard to the MOI policy on the provision of propaganda material to the East and West African Forces outside their home territories, even the provision of two crystals to service broadcasts from African troops in Ceylon to their homes in East and West Africa began to cause headaches when the Governor of Ceylon raised the question as to who was going to pay for them.¹⁰

Despite cooperation between civilian and military authorities on propaganda aimed at the troops in out-of-area employments, its content lay exclusively with the military, or to be more precise, in the hands of the respective intelligence branches.¹¹ This also holds true for the production of HESHIMA.

On 3rd Mai 1943, Lieut. R.W. Circus took command of the 11th (EA) Division Intelligence Section. The unit began to operate in Moshi (Tanganyika Territory), where Sgt. De Woronin, a photographer, Sgt. Ryan and Sgt. Turner were employed in the Intelligence Section. Later Capt. Crawford and ‘two Africans’ were also posted there. The unit disembarked at Colombo on 27th June 1943 and continued to Peradeniya where the headquarters of the 11th (EA) Division SEAC were camping in the Royal

⁶ The East Africa Command stretched “from Northern Rhodesia (inclusive) to Eritrea (inclusive) and from the Indian Ocean to the Congo (including the Katanga Province) and the frontiers of A.E.F. (Afrique Équatorial Française).” Centralised Control of Publicity and Propaganda in East Africa (1941-42), PRO INF 1/552.

⁷ Whitehall to E. Munroe, 18th November 1941, PRO INF 1/552.

⁸ Planning Committee. Plan for Propaganda for British East Africa (1943-44), PRO INF 1/564.

⁹ Usill to Northcote 7th October 1943, PRO INF 1/554.

¹⁰ Usill to Huxley, 2nd December 1943, PRO INF 1/554.

¹¹ Sabine to Usill 2nd September 1943 “It was noted that under new arrangements which have been agreed with the East Africa Command, the Principal Information Officer would no longer have any responsibility for propaganda and information towards troops within the Command and East African troops outside the Command.”, Centralised Control of Publicity and Propaganda in East Africa (1942 - 43), PRO INF 1/553.

Botanic Gardens.¹² On 3rd July 1943, Capt. Crawford was ordered from Peradeniya to Colombo, PR Directorate Ceylon Army Command. Two weeks later Crawford and De Woronin began preparing the first issue of HESHIMA. Written in Kiswahili, Chinyanja and English, it appeared on the 4th of August.¹³ Crawford, who seems to have been the editor of the weekly, was assisted by an African sergeant. PRO documents suggest that he was Sgt. Mfaume Omari. According to the Division's Progress Report, HESHIMA seems to have been "rather successful and the African ranks showed great appreciation of their weekly 'HESHIMA', the editor of which has a large and increasing 'fan' mail to deal with".¹⁴ Contrary to this, Mfaume Omari commented that some units were reluctant to subscribe to the newspaper and that measures had to be taken to ensure that the 2,500 copies did not prove a waste of effort and paper. Nevertheless, he stressed the enormous educational value of the army weekly, which makes the disbursement of a certain amount of regimental funds well worth while.¹⁵

However, announcements such as "All issues have been sold out. It makes no sense to order them now", and a change of publishing house¹⁶, which could have been responsible for the improvement in quality, speak for a positive reception by the readership and greater attention to detail by army officials.

Apart from print material, propaganda directed at the services also included films, information rooms, broadcasting and, of course, individual talks. Film shows for East African units in Ceylon were reported to have had a poor reception:

"Mobile Cinemas are few and far between and many of their films quote unsuitable for showing to African ranks. Welfare for the whole East African Force is being taken over by EA Base Adm HQ and it is hoped that regular concert parties and film shows will tour the outlying stations where recreational facilities are far less than those in similar stations in EAST AFRICA, SOMALILAND or ETHIOPIA."¹⁷

Information rooms and broadcasting were certainly more effective propaganda methods. The information room was seen as combining the work of the Unit Education and Information Officers. It was used as the unit schoolroom, but also as a recreation room, library, newsroom and letter-writing centre for the *askari*. Set up as a kind of showroom, it was to combine utility and attractiveness.¹⁸

However, broadcasting seems to have been the medium best received among the African rank and file. The Kenya Information Office handled broadcasting in Kiswahili and Chinyanja to East African troops away from home. The Principal Information Officer in Nairobi had to finance this service in part.¹⁹ Broadcasts from Nairobi or Colombo could be heard twice weekly. According to official reports, "[...] local topics [were] received with great joy. Several soldiers have heard their relatives speaking to them and [caused] great excitement. This broadcast should be continued."²⁰ Wireless sets were distributed but initially used more by officers. This led to the following critical comment:

¹² War Diary 11th (EA) Division, Intelligence Section, PRO WO 172/4000.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 11 (EA) Division Progress Report No. 2, Period 16th Aug. – 7th Sept. 1943, App. 6, p. 2, PRO WO 172/3985.

¹⁵ "A" Branch, HQ, 11th (EA) Division, Ceylon, 1943, PRO WO 172/3986.

¹⁶ In 1943/44, HESHIMA was printed by C.A.C. Press, Colombo. 1945 issues were printed on high gloss paper by the Statesman Press, Calcutta.

¹⁷ 11th (E.A.) Division Progress Report No. 2 (16th August to 7th September 1943), PRO WO 172/3985.

¹⁸ Education Directive, 13th July 1943, G Branch (EA) Division, Ceylon. 11th Division, PRO WO 172/3985.

¹⁹ Northcote to Sir Donald Cameron, 14th August 1942, PRO INF 1/552.

²⁰ War Diary WO 169/ 7032: 1/ 4.

“Welfare wireless sets should be used to broadcast special troops programmes and not allotted for the sole use of officers and BNOCs messes. An officer will be made responsible for making the necessary arrangements for broadcasts to the troops. It is often the case that the *askari* do not hear the broadcasts owing to lack of interest in making arrangements for them.”²¹

Referring to the responsibilities of Unit Educational Officers, the document continues “that the higher the academic standard in a unit, the more appreciation will be given by the *askari* to sound and reasonable propaganda and information.” As early as 1940, the newly-established public relations department of the Colonial Office, which was obliged to co-ordinate its work with the Empire Division of the MOI and the War Office, had dissociated itself from short-sighted ‘win the war’ propaganda and defined it as a by-product of education, based on the principals of truth, mutual tolerance and respect.²²

The content of the propaganda was deduced from three sources. First of all, material provided by the MOI and the military, secondly information given by the Chiefs in their monthly letters on the situation in the home areas and, thirdly, the unit censorship board. The latter is particularly reminiscent of activities described by Sanjoy Bhattacharya for propaganda directed at Indian troops in Eastern India (1939-45). However, while he explained how „censorship [...] began to designate the secret examination of their [Indian soldiers – KB] personal correspondence. [...] the existence of such initiatives were seldom publicised since it allowed much information of value to be collected, which would seem to suggest that the people targeted remained unaware of the censor’s activities”²³, the East African soldiers stationed in Ceylon were made fully aware of the fact that every single letter would be censored. Apart from lecturing on the need for censorship, HESHIMA published a two-page article about the work of the Division Command censorship board. It explained in detail the type of information that should not be written home about and promised immediate postage of censored letters.²⁴

Let me briefly touch on a topic that appears to be of crucial importance to the study of these army newspapers and their potential effect on the readership. Who was in a position to actually read them, given the fact that the literacy rate among East Africans was still fairly low at the time? While the KAR contingent of educated soldiers amounted to no more than a hundred drivers and signallers in the 1930s, the number of trained and, therefore, literate *askari* rose to tens of thousands. During the course of the Second World War, approximately 600 African teachers from the East African Army Education Corps trained African soldiers from all ranks to read in their own vernaculars. A substantial number became literate in Kiswahili in the same period, while English language education was particularly in demand.²⁵ To give an example: the British journalist Gerald Hanley observed that almost 85 per cent of an artillery battery in Burma had to learn to read and write in just six months. This development was brought about by the fact that the British Army needed inexpensive African specialists to function and that British officers had no alternative but to produce their own educated

²¹ Education Directive, 13th July 1943, G Branch (EA) Division, Ceylon. 11th Division, PRO WO 172/3985.

²² Future of Public Relations (1941), PRO CO 875/11/1.

²³ Bhattacharya, Sanjoy. 2001. Propaganda and Information in Eastern India 1939-45. A Necessary Weapon of War. Rochmond: Curzon Press, 180.

²⁴ Wakaguzi wa Barua, Heshima 27th October 1943, 6.

²⁵ Parsons, Timothy. 2000. Dangerous Education? The Army as School in Colonial East Africa. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 8, No.1, 113.

askari. Rank and file African soldiers enthusiastically embraced the new educational opportunities provided by the military. In his book *Monsoon Victory*, Hanley described the situation as follows:

“The passion for writing and reading had gripped them and every man had learned even a few words. In their spare moments they sat down with stubs of pencil, pushed out their tongues, and with much labour wrote a letter to Africa. [...] Soon the output of letters to Africa increased, became vast.”²⁶

Some of the soldiers even advised their relatives to attend adult classes whenever possible,²⁷ and in an attempt to provide them with reading material, even sent home their army newspapers. Although the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed discussion, it can at least be stated that apart from government and missionary education, the army played a major role in making a substantial section of the East African population literate, especially during the Second World War. Furthermore, the KAR language policy forced both African and British soldiers to learn Kiswahili or Chinyanja, thus broadening the opportunities for African rank and file soldiers in post-war civilian employment. Furthermore, English lessons were in great demand by the *askari*. In order to encourage them to improve their English, HESHIMA wrote: “English is the most widely spoken language, and even in Ceylon it is spoken by many people. If you want to make friends with people you meet here or in other countries, you had better get a smattering of English.”²⁸ In the initial phase, English texts were occasionally accompanied by a Kiswahili translation. Even the letter box (*Barua za Askari*), albeit quite rarely, published *askari* questions and the editor’s answers in English. In mid-1944, however, English texts gradually began to disappear and had petered out completely by 1945.

²⁶ Hanley, Gerald. 1946. *Monsoon Victory*. London: Collins, 30.

²⁷ Parsons, *Dangerous Education?*, 113.

²⁸ „Kiingereza ni lugha inay-ujulikana [sic!] zaidi kuliko zote duniani, na hata Ceylon wengi wanajua. Kama unataka kuwa rafiki na watu utakaowakuta hapa auch nchi nyingine ni vizuri ujifunze Kiingereza kidogo.“ Kwa Wasomaji, Heshima 11th August 1943, 2.

Structure and aim of HESHIMA

“This is the first issue of ‘Heshima’, a newspaper designed to help East African soldiers in Ceylon.”²⁹

In the opening sentence of his editorial statement to the readership, Major-General Fowkes, Commander of the East African troops in Ceylon, makes the general intent of the army weekly quite clear: to help. What exactly does this mean? Firstly, to provide the troops with news from home and information on the various theatres of war. Home news was not merely to remind them of those left behind, but also to clarify that their transfer to Ceylon was vitally linked to the security of their families.³⁰ Secondly, he encourages the readership to personally take part in the selection of news and information. Interestingly, the discussion was to be conducted within the units and criticism not addressed primarily to the editor. This message was repeated in December 1943, when the editorial board was faced with almost 200 letters per week. In an editorial note, the *askari* were urged to consult their “[...] officers, clerks, teachers and post orderlies, who are responsible for your needs, especially pay, promotion, leave, and mail.”³¹ However, a second letter contest initiated in the No. 8 issue invites the readership to openly criticize the contents of the newspaper. Frankness was marked explicitly as the “most agreeable feature” of the first letter competition, which had requested soldiers to write about their situation in Ceylon.³²

By drawing attention to broadcasts in Kiswahili and Chinyanja on Radio Colombo, the first editorial places the newspaper within a larger propaganda context. According to the editor, HESHIMA would not only advertise the scheduled vernacular programmes, but also give space to pro and contra opinions on the respective content. Arguably, HESHIMA was part of a major propaganda concept, one of whose aims was to establish a discursive culture between soldiers and their officers. With reference to the original question posed above, the aim of HESHIMA was to help soldiers channel their criticism effectively, in turn providing the Command with an ideal basis for control and subsequent counter measures.

So far, nothing is known about the choice of the name. HESHIMA, which means honour, respect or good reputation, refers to the key concept of respectable behaviour as cultivated in the East African (coastal) cultural context. While the Kiswahili version of the editorial places *heshima* in this wider (civilian) context by linking it to “us the people of East Africa”, the English version as well as other articles narrow its scope to military honour: “The name chosen for this paper is ‘HESHIMA’ because the heshima of our E.A Army is high. As strangers in Ceylon, let us be careful not to spoil our good name.”³³

Although the structure of the weekly newspaper changed slightly when crucial information had to be focused on with front positioning, most issues were composed of separate sections with the following order: *Kwa Wasomaji* (Editorial) introduced the main topic of the issue and was often visually backed

²⁹ “Hii ndiyo mara ya kwanza ya ‘Heshima’, gazeti amablo limetengenezwa kusaidia askari wa Afrika Mashariki walioko Ceylon.”, *Usumaji wa Bwana Mkubwa*, Heshima 4th August 1943, 2.

³⁰ Of the numerous positive comments, I would like to quote one by Lance Corporal Gabriel Thuma „This newspaper is like our ears [listen] back and forth in time, in that it provides us with home news and news of the military affairs that lie ahead of us.” [Gazeti hili ni kama masikio yetu ya nyuma na mbele, yaani inatupasha habari za nyumbani na za mbele mambo ya vita yanayotungoja.], *Barua za Askari*, Heshima 8th September 1943, 7.

³¹ “[...] Mabwana, Makarani, Walimu, ama Maorderli wa Posta ambao kazi yao ni kuangalia shida zenu, hasa mishahara, kuongoza tepe, livu, na shauri za barua.”, Heshima 15th December 1943, 2.

³² Editorial, Heshima 15th September 1943, 1.

³³ “sisi watu wa Afrika ya Mashariki”, *Kwa Wasomaji*, Heshima 4th August 1943, 3.

up by a suitable front page photograph. *Habari za vita* (War News) provided the *askari* with brief information on the movements of the Allied Forces and the Red Army. *Habari za Nchi* (Home News), which according to a letter competition was the most popular section of the newspaper, was published in two languages – Kiswahili for information from Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda, and Chinyanja in the case of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. This news became increasingly personalized or, to be more precise, authorized by letters from African Chiefs. *Mazungumzo ya Bwana Kiko* (Talks of the Officer with the pipe)³⁴ - fictitious dialogues between a British officer and his soldiers - seems to have enjoyed equal popularity. It served mainly to address difficult issues of army life, such as finances, homesickness, declining morale, and leave.³⁵ Since the editors believed story-telling to be a must in an African newspaper, it reserved space for a *Hadithi* section. However, the letter competition clearly voiced a declining interest in *hadithi* (story) so that this section was dropped altogether. A similar dislike was expressed for crossword puzzles. Articles on technical equipment and the latest weapons were often accompanied by photographs showing African instructors in action. Both text and pictures depicted African soldiers as an educated military elite, fit for jungle fighting and fully prepared for the action ahead of them. The final section of the newspaper was reserved for the voice of the troops. It appeared in the form of letters to the editor, fictitious dialogues and educative comments by senior soldiers to their young comrades, or short poems.

Apart from the very first issue of the paper, which gave information on the topographic position, ethnographic peculiarities, and the animals to be found in Ceylon, no local news was published. Ceylon and the Sinhalese were mentioned in concrete interaction with East African soldiers only, as in the case of Islamic holidays or car accidents. All in all, the newspaper was army-referential.

Interestingly, similar blanks exist for the *adui* (enemy) – the Japanese Army – which is described in detail only once by a Chinese soldier.³⁶

Visual back up for textual information was provided in the form of photographs, cartoons and maps. Since war geography and map reading was part and parcel of elementary army education, most of the news on different areas of operation were accompanied by maps, to which the readership responded very positively. Furthermore it can be said that army newspapers introduced cartoons to the Kiswahili press. HESHIMA also published an extensive article about war-time photographers. Apart from factual information on the nature of their work in the war zones, the readership learned of the two British photographers who belonged to the 11th (EA) Division. “The two Europeans, whose duty it is to take pictures of our soldiers while route taking or training, will accompany us later when we go to war.”³⁷

Although the editors attempted to create a discursive atmosphere that would give African ranks a voice and permitted a certain amount of candour, the army weekly pursued the general propaganda line to the services. This served the aim of maintaining a motivated fighting force and, when demobilization became a topic, of educating the *askari* to be good citizens. Or to put it in another way: minds were to be disciplined for times of war and peace.

³⁴ Achim von Oppen has pointed out that a pipe is the typical attribute of a high-ranking British administrative officer in East African cartoons.

³⁵ Letters to the editor asked about *Bwana Kiko*'s unit and even invited him personally to come and have talks. In 1945, a picture of a British officer with a huge pipe was published close to the text.

³⁶ *Adui yetu*, Heshima 17th November 1943, 6.

³⁷ “Wazungu wawili ambao kazi yao ni kupiga picha za askari wetu wakati wa rutek ama mafundisho, na halafu wakati tutakapokwenda vitani.”, *Wapigapicha wa Vita*, Heshima 12th January 1944, 8-9.

Verbal strategies to keep them disciplined

The 1943 and 1944 issues of HESHIMA reveal four main topics that served to maintain discipline in the 11th (EA) Division. Most important of all was discipline within the unit, since strict adherence to military regulations on and off duty, at least in the eyes of the commanding officers, constituted a sound preparation of the *askari* for the military action that lay ahead of them. It goes without saying that this included unquestioned observance of orders along the lines of the military hierarchy – with King George at the top. This theme formed a second focus around which disciplinary discourse revolved. The fact that *askari* were deployed out of area and tension with the local population could cause moral decline on both sides, decent behaviour was demanded of the KAR soldiers. Thus, self-control and control of (uncertain) situations, especially off duty, was a third aspect highlighted by HESHIMA. Last but not least, the KAR units were in close contact with units from other Command areas, especially the South East Asia Command. Discipline therefore included cooperation whenever necessary. In this respect HESHIMA responded to the growing sense of egalitarianism that had permeated the Forces.

According to the relevant documents of the War Office, the prior aim of the KAR stay in Ceylon was to achieve the necessary fitness for the potential ‘jungle war’ that awaited the *askari* in Burma. In the words of Major-General Fowkes, “fitness does not only imply mighty muscles but also a sound mental and physical stamina able to support anxiety and hardship with unimpaired efficiency.”³⁸ This ‘hardening period’ included in the first instance *ruteki* (route marches) and physical training in a natural terrain similar to that of their future operational service. Arguing that Ceylon was halfway to East Africa and that the 1942 Japanese air raids had clearly indicated its strategic importance, HESHIMA pointed out the natural conditions.³⁹ Soldiers would train there in ‘jungle war’ methods and, no less important, in patience, so as to “finally drive the Japanese devils out from their hiding place in the bush.”⁴⁰ For the soldiers, however, it was completely new to march long periods of the route barefoot, carrying their boots.⁴¹ Since most of the *askari* had already had extensive fighting experience during the Abyssinian campaign and in Madagascar, more explanation was required as to why these training methods were necessary. *Mazungumzo ya Bwana Kiko* was the key discussion forum in this case. In one fictitious conversation, a soldier declares that this boot-wearing policy might be an attempt to bully the *askari*.⁴² Although *Bwana Kiko* explains to him that the Japanese soldiers were able to move silently in the bush precisely because they did not wear boots, the soldier replies: “You are right, sir, but I do not want to wait. I don’t like route marches and daily training.”⁴³

³⁸ Training instructions, 2nd March 1943, PRO WO 172/3985.

³⁹ On 5th April 1942, Colombo was attacked by over 300 aircraft from Japanese carriers.

⁴⁰ „[...] kisha twende kuwashambulia shetani hawo Wajapani katika maficho yao ya majani.”, Sababu tatu kwa nini tumekuja Ceylon, Heshima 11th August 1943, 7.

⁴¹ „The object is for the feet of the African to be kept hard so that he can operate barefoot if necessary, at the same time to ensure that he has a good pair of boots he can wear at any time. [...] Infantry will wear boots for one whole day each week and march at least 10 miles in boots at least twice a month. [...] unit orders will provide for native ranks to walk barefoot for fixed periods daily or weekly as appropriate.” G Branch (EA) Ceylon Division, Policy Wearing of Boots and Shirts or Blouses by African Ranks, PRO WO 172/3985.

⁴² Similarly annoying was the wearing of long “shapeless” trousers that reminded the soldiers of female or prison clothing. *Mazungumzo ya Bwana Kiko*, Heshima 27 October 1943, 4.

⁴³ “Kweli Bwana maneno yako ni kweli, lakini mimi sitaki kungoja. Sipendi kazi ya ruteki na training kila siku.” Heshima 22nd September 1943, 7.

The soldier linked his answer to another problem: the waiting around and lack of understanding as to why they were not being transferred immediately to the front. At this point in the conversation, *Bwana Kiko* becomes more stern: „Are you a soldier or a normal citizen?“ He then resorts to a mode of explanation that he (or the editors) considers suitable for the ‘African’ mind – the agrarian circle. Route marches and training are like seeds and the way a farmer takes care of his field daily without complaining. He knows that one day he will harvest what he has planted. The same could be applied to military routines. The soldier should perform them without complaint as he knows that he will one day face the enemy. However, this example not only exposes the comparison of military aspects with civilian experience as a verbal strategy applied by the editors. It also reveals a lack of confidence in the orders of the British officers. The 11th (EA) Division Progress Report No.4 gives a lengthy account of the “lack of sympathy” between the African ranks and their British leaders. Both sides were made responsible. “A number of British soldiers [...] were not a very high quality in the first place and this sudden promotion [they had been rapidly promoted to sergeant – KB], together with a feeling of power over the African ranks, has gone to their heads.”⁴⁴ The more educated *askari*, who had reached “a slightly higher grade of civilization than the average” were in particular reported to have become more difficult to handle.⁴⁵ Consequently, it was the British ranks who were asked to treat their Africans with more respect.

Another verbal strategy to counteract disciplinary problems was the use of the African voice in the troops. Contrary to ASKARI, the vernacular newspaper of the East Africa Command, it was not the *Askari Mzee* or senior KAR soldier who tried to teach his junior comrades, but soldiers of all age groups. In his letter to the editor, Lance Corporal Joel Warui urged his comrades:

“To all my friends who are on this island, I want to say two words - ‘Adabu’ [correct behaviour – KB] and ‘Tabia’ [character – KB]. My comrades who are here are not children, but some of us have a very bad character. If you do foolish things that have nothing to do with proper behaviour, then wait until you return and do them at home. Be thoughtful and respectful, show your bravery and we will win.”⁴⁶

The reference to key words of the East African (coastal) concept of proper behaviour was one of the more prominent verbal strategies employed to instil discipline. They were carefully implanted into the military code of good behaviour in the military discourse. Arguably, it was exactly this interface that provided fertile ground for the influence of other key words. In his letter to the editor, British driver Maurice Margeson argued that UPENDO (love), by which he meant the love for “our King” (*mfalme wetu*), is what welds soldiers of the Empire together. Unity (UMOJA) is derived from the fact that soldiers on active service have only one father – King George. He also reminds the readership that UTII (obedience) is the backbone of a successful army. By applying the ‘we-are-all-in-the-same-boat’ strategy, the author makes use of a powerful linguistic device, the primary mode of which addresses the readership as part of the Allied Forces.⁴⁷ Lack of mail, money, and tobacco is shared by ranks from

⁴⁴ 11th (EA) Division Report No. 4 (8/10/-7/11/1943), PRO WO 172/3985, 4.

⁴⁵ For the topic ‘army education and its consequences’ see Parsons, *Dangerous Education?*, 113.

⁴⁶ “Kwa rafiki zangu, mnapokaa ndani ya kisiwa hiki napenda kumtaja maneno mawili haya ,Adabu’ na ,Tabia’. Wenzangu mlifika hapa hakuna mtoto lakini wengine miongoi mwetu wana tabia mbaya; kama unataka mambo ya ujinga yasiyo na adabu ngojea murudi kwetu mkayafanye. Muwe wataalamu wanyenyekevu, onyesheni ushujaa wenu na tutafaulu.” Heshima 27th October 1943, 7.

⁴⁷ By means of pronominal deixis in the 1st person plural (hortative), news about the Allied Forces’ movements verbally include African soldiers. Mentioning that *Bwana Kiko* also suffers from the shortage of tobacco creates a sense of unity with other smoking soldiers.

all parts of the Empire and therefore works as a unifying argument. The same is true for the shared aversion to being far from home. Raising this topic, Margeson emphasizes the importance of AKIBA (saving money) and BARUA (letters).⁴⁸

Saving and writing letters were evidently given top priority by the editors, as they were impressed upon in almost every issue in 1943/44. Money in particular remained a “source of mingled mystery and dismay to African ranks”, since a rupee was worth Sh.1 Cts 50 but bought only about “25 cents worth of goods by East African standards”.⁴⁹ Apart from a table comparing East African currency with that of Ceylon, the second issue of HESHIMA left it once again to *Bwana Kiko* to explain how to handle the pay book or who to turn to for assistance. He asks the soldiers not to waste their money or risk being cheated, but to save it for their families. The motto is “Certainly, the pay book never lies!”⁵⁰ Cases of spending money recklessly are usually reported in connection with leisure activities, e.g., the use of expensive rickshaws instead of buses and trams as a cheaper means of transport. Although occasionally alluded to, prostitution was never openly discussed. However, the authorities were obliged to pass legislation against “pimping”, which was to “mitigate some of the money-making tricks [...] reported to have been practised on *askari* in search of female company.”⁵¹

The significance of BARUA (letters) for the soldiers was clearly recognized by the military authorities, and HESHIMA provided a channel for critique and questions concerning the delay of home mail or censorship. Delayed mail was a constant issue on both sides of the Indian Ocean. HESHIMA put the blame exclusively on the *askari* themselves, arguing that the address must have been wrong. Given the fact that the soldiers had to cope with a new and highly complex system of postal arrangements, this may have been true for the initial phase of their stay.⁵² However, mail from East Africa seems to have been off-loaded at Bombay, which was a bottle neck anyway.⁵³ In order to give voice to soldiers’ complaints about the lack of mail from home, MAMBO LEO, the Kiswahili newspaper of the Tanganyika Territory Government, published an article on the subject. Tabora (Central Tanzania) reacted by passing on the complaints to the District Commissioner, where they were marked unfounded because the families of the soldiers had used every opportunity to write to them. The publicity of the debate shifted the disciplinary force from the military leader to an African civilian public. The ‘letters from Chiefs’ had a similar function. They not only personalized and authorized news from the home areas, especially with regard to the well-being of the soldiers’ wives, but were exploited by the editors to remind the *askari* of their duties. By publishing repeated statements that African Chiefs were doing everything in their power to protect the soldiers’ homes and appealing to the latter to be diligent, obedient and brave in crushing their common enemy, HESHIMA created the image of a joint civil and military war effort.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the joint war effort still had to be achieved first and foremost by the military side. For the KAR, with its military hierarchy along racial lines, this meant mutual confidence between the African ranks and their British officers. Archival sources, memoirs by British officers and HESHIMA

⁴⁸ Barua toka 18194 Driver E, Maurice Margeson, Heshima 1st September 1943, 12.

⁴⁹ 11th (EA) Progress Report No. 2, 16th August – 7th September 1943, PRO WO 172/3985.

⁵⁰ “Nakubali, paybook haisemi uwongo.” Mazungumzo ya Bwana Kiko, Heshima 11th August 1943, 12.

⁵¹ 11 (EA) Progress Report No. 2, 16th August – 7th September 1943, PRO WO 172/3985.

⁵² 11 (EA) Division Security Instructions No. 16, 9th July 1943, Postal Arrangements, PRO WO 172/3985.

⁵³ 11th (EA) Division Report No. 4 (8th October – 7th November 1943), PRO WO 172/3985, 4.

⁵⁴ However, the *askari* were known to challenge chiefly authority when they were on leave, often by force. Good behaviour on leave was a hotly debated issue in ASKARI, the Kiswahili weekly published by the East Africa Command. A systematic study of this topic has yet to be carried out.

emphasized an excellent tradition in this respect. Cases of insubordination among the African ranks towards their military (British) leaders were seldom openly discussed. Instead, more general statements were put across about the need for respect. In his poem '*Tusiharibu Heshima, wakatuita Wajinga*' (Don't destroy our honour, they will call us fools) the author, Clerk Stephens M.S. Raphael, urges his comrades:

*Heshima tunaipata hakika hapa Ceylon
Tusifanye matata wakatuita wazimwe.
Hamu yangu ninataka uvumilivu yakini.
Tusiharibu heshima, wakatuita wajinga.*

Here in Ceylon we will certainly receive honours.
Do not cause trouble that they can call us fools.
My sincere wish is [that you show] patience.
Don't destroy our honour, they will call us fools.

*Heshima ni jambo bora, ndugu zangu sikizeni,
Sio kupigwa bakora au adhabu ya kambini.*

Respect is a good thing, listen my comrades.
Neither corporal punishment nor to be confined to barracks.

This poem hints only vaguely at cases of insubordination and its consequences. The onus, however, is unquestionably on the *askari* side. *Mazungumzo ya Bwana Kiko* on the subject of military greetings could indeed be interpreted as a counter measure to the lack of respect towards military superiors. When asked about the sense (*faida*) of this procedure, *Bwana Kiko* replied that an indication of good behaviour is a benefit in itself and that "[...] every person has to respect the order of his superior."⁵⁵ In contrast to the various allusions to the subject, Major-General Fowkes addressed it in a clear statement published in the final issue of 1943. He voiced his disappointment about discipline among his soldiers, with whom he had had positive personal experience during the Abyssinian campaign:

"But these days there are too many people in the King's African Rifles who spoil the honour of the East African soldier because they behave in an unacceptable manner that is strictly prohibited. Some of them refuse to go to parades. Others write letters of complaint but are too cowardly to sign them, and some lack respect for their officers. All these things spoil the honour of the East African soldier. You know that before the war these soldiers were greatly respected and their bravery in Somaliland and Abyssinia increased this honour. Don't allow a few ignorant people to destroy this good reputation."⁵⁶

The good reputation of an army is never achieved in the military context only. Amicable relations with the local civil population were not only desired, but often vital for both sides. Apart from the strategic necessity of transferring thousands of East African soldiers to the island of Ceylon, their relationship with the Ceylonese population was made clear from the very beginning: "As strangers here in Ceylon,

⁵⁵ „Kila mtu lazima aheshimu amri ya mkubwa wake.”, *Mazungumzo ya Bwana Kiko*, Heshima 8th December 1943, 5.

⁵⁶ “Lakini siku hizi katika jeshi la Afrika ya Mashariki kuna watu wengi kupita kiasi wanaoharibu heshima ya askari wa Afrika ya Mashariki kwa sababu wanaofuata njia zinazokatazwa za kuleta mashtaka. Wengine katika hawa wanakataa kwenda parade, wengine wanaandika barua ya kushtaki lakini wanaopgopa kuandika majina yao chini, wengine hawana adabu mbele ya Mabwana Ofisa yao. Mambo haya yote yanaharibu heshima ya askari wa Afrika ya Mashariki. Mnajua ya kwamba kabla ya vita askari hawa walikuwa na heshima nyingi na mashujaa yao huko Somaliland na Abyssinia yameongeza sana heshima hiyo. Msikubali watu wachache wajinga kuharibu sifa njema hiyo.”, Barua hii ya Siku Kuu ya Christmas, Heshima 24th December 1943, 4.

we should do nothing to spoil our good reputation.”⁵⁷ In order to familiarize the soldiers with the new area, the editors published extensive information about its physical geography, infrastructure, ethnographic composition, agriculture, education, religion, and animal life. The text pointed out that Ceylon is not part of India and that its inhabitants are Singhalese and not Indians. Such explicit statements seem to have been necessary for two reasons. Firstly, relations with ‘Indians’ were overshadowed by the somewhat negative reputation of ‘Indians’ in East Africa – their prominent economic position has continued to make them suspicious up until today. Secondly, the well-known fighting qualities of Indian soldiers in the Empire troops made the need to assist them in defending their own country somewhat incomprehensible, at least from the *askari* point of view. Since further explanation was required in this direction, the editors readdressed the topic:

“Another confused idea is sometimes heard: Why have we come to protect India against the Japanese? Are they unable to protect themselves? The answer is that we are not here to protect India. We are not in India. We are in Ceylon. We are not only protecting Ceylon itself, but also indirectly our own country, for by staying here we bar the Indian Ocean passage to the Japs, so that they cannot penetrate to our side. Remember this when you discuss it among yourselves.”⁵⁸

Furthermore, the original text requested the soldiers to learn from the Ceylonese, especially with regard to agriculture and the use of animals.

In order to include them in the discourse on *askari* life in Ceylon, HESHIMA launched a letter competition entitled “Why do I like/dislike Ceylon”⁵⁹. The winning letter was sent in by Sgt. K. K. Kasumba, who received a prize of 10 rupees. Many of the letters revealed ambivalent attitudes on both sides. While Kasumba stated that African soldiers were not as warmly received as in Abyssinia, others claimed the opposite, stressing that *askari* were particularly popular with children. The latter was based on individual experiences of some soldiers in North Africa, where the local population had treated them with antipathy (*ukorofi*) and provocation (*uchokozi*). In addition, *askaris* reported cases of racism, although most interpreted such behaviour as ‘astonishment at seeing people with black skin.’ The editors attempted to compare this ‘astonishment’ to the fact that Africans had also been shocked when they first saw white people: “Africans are strangers here and the Ceylonese are not yet accustomed to them. When white people first came to Africa, Africans ran away or fought them. Now blacks are used to seeing whites and do not run away anymore. If you behave properly, they will get used to you and won’t flee again.”⁶⁰ However, relations with the local population were by no means as easy-going as the newspaper suggested. Although Headquarters judged that relations with the local population were generally satisfactory, cases of misbehaviour to the point of knifing were reported. Complaints by civil authorities were more or less belittled or seen as “frenzied efforts of local political leaders” to create the impression of strained relations between the troops and the Singhalese. While good relations were described first and foremost as the result of “the restrained and good discipline” of the *askari*, negative instances were almost always attributed to the “fear and ignorance” of the “average Ceylonese”. Thus, the civil and military authorities organized lectures on the *askari* given by East African officers to Ceylonese audiences assembled by government agents. As reported,

⁵⁷ “Kama wageni katika Ceylon tusifanye kitu kibaya cha kuharibu heshima yetu.”, Kwa Wasomaji, Heshima 4th August 1943, 3

⁵⁸ Editorial, Heshima 29th September 1943, 2.

⁵⁹ „Kwa nini napenda Ceylon. Kwa nini sipendi Ceylon.”, Shindano la barua, Heshima 11th August 1943, 5.

⁶⁰ Waafrika ni wageni hapa na Wasilon hawajawazoea . Wazungu walipofika mara ya kwanza Afrika Waafrika walitoroka ama kupigana. Sasa weusi wamewazoea wazungu, hawatoroki Vilevile mkifanya mambo vizuri hapa Wasilon watazoea na hawatakimbia tena.”, Barua za Askari, Heshima 8th December 1943, 6.

even petty government officials were not beyond believing that East African *askari* are cannibals, marry by capture, have tails, and perpetually indulge in black magic. In order to “dispel this ignorance” and improve relations, the authorities organized sport sessions, plays and dances as a medium for “exchanges of talent”.⁶¹ HESHIMA argued in the same direction and, backed up by photographs, reported on cultural and sport events or about Islamic festivals where East African soldiers as believers were included.⁶²

In addition, Progress Report No. 3 points to the fact that some petty government clerks “looked with such contempt on their now numerous African visitors” that they were ready to draw a small emolument by renting out their womenfolk for prostitution.⁶³ However, prostitution never became an explicit topic and was merely hinted at in reports about the low VD rate or repeated reminders that most *askari* had good wives at home.

Apart from the subject of (good) relations off duty, the *askari* enquired about the war effort of the Ceylonese. Allegedly for security reasons, the editors revealed nothing about the existence of the Ceylon Light Infantry, which grew from 1 to 5 battalions during the Second World War, when the total number of troops in uniform increased to 12, 000.⁶⁴ A joint action was reported only once and then in a more egalitarian mode – the photograph of a bridge built by European, Indian, Ceylonese, and East African Pioneer Units.⁶⁵ Instead, HESHIMA emphasized the contribution by the civil population, especially with regard to cash crops and rubber.⁶⁶

Although the editors addressed various questions relevant to relations between *askari* and the local population and even gave space to critical voices, the editors carefully avoided burning issues, thus prevented frank discussion. This might explain the gradual disappearance of the relevant texts and the growing invisibility of the Ceylonese in the newspaper.

By way of conclusion

The paper argued that apart from providing the *askari* with information about the war and about home, its primary aim was to discipline them. Repeated references to the good reputation of The King’s African Rifles were combined with the East African (coastal) cultural concept of *heshima*, which not only includes a code of good behaviour but above all mutual respect. In pursuit of this course, an increasingly egalitarian mode of discourse was introduced, whereby soldiers were addressed as an integral part of the Allied Forces. They were not only invited to voice their concerns and participate in the discourse, but were reminded first and foremost of their duties. Apart from the editors, these reminders were voiced by military superiors, civil authorities and, in growing numbers, by the soldiers themselves. Although this inclusion of disparate voices seem to indicate a ‘democratic change’ in the propaganda directed towards the services, the content and verbal strategies employed reveal its ultimate aim – disciplined, well-trained African soldiers and a lessening of the problems that might arise from the opposite. Substantial changes had to wait until 1945, when the African

⁶¹ 11th (EA) Division Progress Report No. 3 (8th September – 7th October), PRO WO 172/3985, 4-5.

⁶² Since the Army only provided services for Christians, Muslims were taken care of by the local Imams. The 1943/44 issues of HESHIMA concentrated far more on news about Muslim soldiers than about their Christian comrades.

⁶³ 11th (EA) Division Progress Report No. 3 (8th September – 7th October), PRO WO 172/3985, 5.

⁶⁴ www.regiments.org/milhist/srilanka.htm

⁶⁵ Heshima 11th September 1943, 7.

⁶⁶ Barua ya Askari, Heshima 24th November 1943, 6.

soldier was primarily addressed as a 'civic soldier', well-educated and the bearer of hope with regard to the construction of 'new' post-war African societies.