

Mark-Thiesen, Cassandra: *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital. Mechanized Gold Mining in the Gold Coast Colony, 1879-1909*. Rochester: Boydell & Brewer 2018. ISBN: 9781580469180; 230 S.

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Cassandra Mark-Thiesen provides a highly detailed account of labor schemes and the role of African actors within those in the emerging mechanized gold mining industry in the Wassa region of the Gold Coast. She follows a strictly labor-centered approach throughout the book and thereby contributes to the recently increasing number of publications in mining studies which put labor in the center of their research agendas. The historical perspective, however, makes Mark-Thiesen's book stand out from other current books and plays a crucial role regarding her aim, namely paying attention to actors whose relevance has all-too-often been played down. In doing so, the author manages to challenge the general assumption of extractive industries being imposed externally in colonial contexts and provides an alternative narrative to the prominent studies of labor migration in the Rhodesian and South African mining industries. Since the topic and approach of the book are very specific, it addresses a respective audience, interested in Africa, colonial history, mining, labor and particularly African agency in colonial contexts.

The book, divided into five chapters plus introduction and conclusion, attempts to outline the emergence, development, and transformation of labor regimes between 1879 and 1909. The first chapter comprises an outline of relevant historical and contextual information, whereas the remaining four are dedicated to different actors and transitions in labor regimes and recruiting schemes. In these chapters, Mark-Thiesen focuses on labor agents as middle-men and intermediaries between mining companies and workers, and their relationships to both parties in great detail. Chapter two discusses the recruiting of contract labor, mostly Liberian Kru, by Liberian labor agents, its setup, challenges, and regulations. Building upon the crisis of the Liberian sche-

me, chapter three focuses on the actors seeking opportunities in sourcing and providing labor, namely independent recruiters including women and Europeans. Chapter four addresses the belated attempts of the colonial government of the Gold Coast to get engaged in and regulate labor recruitment and resolve labor shortages by importing Asian workers. The final, and unfortunately very short chapter (12 pages) looks at the expansion of recruitment schemes to the newly territorialized northern parts of the Gold Coast that became welcome labor reserves.

Mark-Thiesen throughout the book successfully accomplishes to bring out the crucial role African labor recruiters played in shaping the emerging mechanized gold mining industry in the Gold Coast. The accounts of individual labor agents such as the Hausa Madam Mariam particularly add to the lively and dense descriptions. Overall, the detailed outlines provide fertile ground for further investigation and comparative studies to labor migration schemes in Southern Africa within the same period. The multitude of archival material used for the book, ranging from company records, correspondences between African miners and their rural families, court records, private records and travel accounts of European miners, enables Mark-Thiesen to stray from the normative, 'official' version of the history of mining in the Gold Coast and the role that Africans played in its development. The author addresses crucial factors shaping the recruitment schemes such as labor hierarchies and gang structures, the role of stereotypes, ethnicity and their strategic use, as well as daily routines. Particular credit needs to be paid to Mark-Thiesen's effort to elaborate on and strengthen the role of African women in mining during the colonial period, who have been marginalized so far in manifold ways in colonial histories in general, and those of mining in particular.

Despite being a great read and enriching multiple disciplines and interdisciplinary fields, *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital* leaves some things to be desired. Its strength on detail and confinement on labor is the book's biggest weakness, as the author tends to get lost in details when the use of direct citations from the material extensi-

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ve descriptions become too dense. Deeper discussions especially in the fifth chapter would have been instructive. Moreover, some interesting topics, such as the failure of forced labor, are only peripherally touched upon, leaving the reader vainly waiting for more information.

Overall, Cassandra Mark-Thiesen delivers a readable and insightful study of African-run labor recruitment schemes in colonial Ghana's emerging mining industry. It enriches the current trend of labor-centered studies of mining with its historical angle and provides a welcome addition to established narratives of mining-related labor migration schemes in Southern Africa and colonial dominance in the mining business.

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