

Situating the Belgian Congo in Belgium's First World War Centenary

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As in other countries, the surge of interest in Great War commemoration in Belgium has taken many by surprise. Public engagement in 2014 was undeniable: exhibitions were visited, special newspaper editions were bought, documentaries were watched and elaborate commemorations attended. Public demand for knowledge of the First World War was driven by a desire to situate family and local history within wider themes of the War. In the course of such commemoration, Belgians rediscovered the horror of the trenches, the massacres of civilians in 1914 and the harshness of the German occupation, whilst attempting to situate their own family histories in the grand narrative of the conflict. In contrast, it is clear that the participation of the Belgian Congo in the First World War received neither official nor media attention. Only modest private initiatives saw the light of day during the Centenary. But with a significant Congolese diaspora resident in Belgium, how can we explain the 'forgetting' of the Belgian Congo in the Centenary commemorations? What indeed was the Belgian Congo's actual contribution to the War? Who organised those rare initiatives of commemoration and for whose benefit? These are the questions that will frame this chapter, which examines the two major issues that pertained to the Belgian Congo in 1914-1918: the question of the colony's neutrality and then the major military operations in central Africa. In light of this, the chapter then examines and explains the lack of commemorative activity in Belgium concerning its former colony. This chapter concludes that the regional administrative division of commemorative organisation combined with the historical conditioning of Belgian colonial memory created this absence in Belgium's Centenary commemorations.

The Outbreak of the War and the Question of Belgian Congo Neutrality

This official and public forgetting belies the fact that the Belgian Congo was heavily involved in the First World War. When war broke out in Europe, the

Belgian Congo was in a delicate situation. Rendered theoretically neutral by Article 10 of the Berlin Treaty signed in February 1885, this dispensation had technically carried over when the Belgian state assumed control of the colony in 1908.¹ Initially the government in the colony attempted to maintain a strictly defensive position. According to the guidelines issued by the Belgian government and dated 30 July 1914, the Governor General Felix Fuchs, based in the capital Boma, had orders to take whatever measures necessary to safeguard the neutrality of the territory. Such measures were essentially designed to ensure the freedom of the mouth of the Congo River and to safeguard common land frontiers with French, German and British colonies. As such, the Governor General issued orders granting free movement to Germans as well as the Allies.

However, the situation changed after 4 August 1914. With the declaration of war between Belgium and Germany having led to the intervention of the Great Powers in support of Belgium, the Belgian government found itself incapable of assuring the neutrality of the Belgian Congo. Given the urgency of the situation as war unfolded across Europe, Africa and the Pacific, the Minister of Colonies, Jules Renkin, in accordance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, instructed Governor General Fuchs 'not to apply the rules of neutrality to the French, British and Russian navies and – on the contrary – to lend assistance to these forces if necessary'.² But that same day, the Belgian government, wishing at all costs to avoid the extension of the conflict onto African soil – and thereby endanger its colonial possession – proposed a restatement of the neutrality of all the colonies in the Congo basin to the British, French and German governments in accordance with Article 11 of the Treaty of Berlin.³ The neutrality of these territories would have meant that no British or French warship would have been able to enter Congolese waters, that the Allies would not have been able to use the Matadi and Leopoldville railways to transport troops and munitions and, finally, the strict application of the Laws of Nations concerning warships for those crossing or entering Congolese territorial waters.⁴

This Belgian request was made repeatedly but it was some time before the Great Powers provided a response. The idea of benefitting from the conflict by seizing the opportunity for further expansion – even if not initially a war-aim – was now in play.⁵ Germany, initially motivated that the war should

1 Guy Vanthemsche, ed., *Le Congo belge pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. Les rapports du Ministre des Colonies Jules Renkin au roi Albert Ier 1914-1918* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 2009), xv.

2 Public Federal Service Foreign Affairs, Brussels (PFS FA), Diplomatic Archives (DA), AF 1.2. Pierre Orts to Ministry of Colonies about the declaration of neutrality in the Belgian Congo, 7/08/1914.

3 *Acte général de la Conférence africaine signé à Berlin le 26 février 1885*: chap. I. Déclaration relative à la liberté de commerce dans le Bassin du Congo, ses embouchures et pays circonvoisins, et dispositions connexes, Art. 1, p. 30; chap. III. Déclaration relative à la neutralité des territoires compris dans le bassin conventionnel du Congo, Art. 11, p. 34.

4 PFS FA, African Archives (AA), AE 355. Summary of discussions between England and France, 08/1914.

5 Andrew Tait Jarboe and Richard Forgarty, 'Introduction: An Imperial Turn in First World War Studies', *Empires in World War I* (London, I. B.: Tauris, 2014), 10; Jean Rumiya, *Le Ruanda sous le régime du mandat belge (1918-1931)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 37.

remain between Europeans, chose not to oppose the prospect of neutralization.⁶ In contrast, Britain and France, whose African colonies appeared to be valuable assets menaced by German troops, were of a different opinion.⁷ The French decided to wait for a British response before making their decision known: if the British were disposed to attack German colonies and requested the aid of French troops, France could not refuse.⁸ The Belgian proposition remained on the table until 8 August, when the British bombarded Dar es-Salaam, the capital of German East Africa, which resulted in a German reply in Kenya and against Belgian outposts established on the banks of Lake Tanganyika at Mokolubu on 15 August and at Lukuga seven days later.⁹

Once the policy of neutrality was obsolete, the Belgian government changed course. On 28 August 1914, Belgian colonial authorities ordered the Governor-General Felix Fuchs and the vice-Governor of the province of Katanga, Charles Tombour, to take all military measures necessary to secure the defence of the colony. In exchange for a guarantee of the territorial integrity of the Belgian Congo and assistance in maintaining this integrity, allied troops were authorised to enter the colony. Belgian colonial troops, the *Force Publique*, were mobilised and military operations were decided in cooperation with French and British commanders. But such participation was to remain entirely within Africa, in contrast to French and British deployment of African and Indian troops in Europe. Yet, in the summer of 1916, discussions about the use of African soldiers as 'shock troops' and to reinforce the metropolitan army, were undertaken. However, the ambient racism required to ensure that the prestige of the whites and the fear of the threat to the colonial social order that might arise from contact between Congolese and whites on European soil were so strong that no Congolese troops were sent on the Western Front.¹⁰ Both factors can be found in the words of Renkin and those of the Governor-General Henry: 'I am not sympathetic to the use of colonial troops outside of Africa', wrote Renkin, noting that the war had already disrupted life in the colony and depleted the labour force through loss of life. He added that exposing what he called 'our blacks' to the struggles between Europeans 'can be fatal to civilisation and to the prestige of the white race in Africa'.¹¹ For his part Governor-General Henry wrote that:

6 Dick van Galen Last and Ralf Futselaar, *Black Shame: African Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1922*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

7 Baron Wahis, 'La participation Belge à la conquête du Cameroun et de l'Afrique Orientale Allemande', *Congo* (avril-mai 1920), 7.; Delpierre, Georges, 'Tabora 1916: de la symbolique d'une victoire', *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine* 3-4 (2002), 353.

8 Jonathan E Helmreich, 'The End of Congo Neutrality, 1914', *The Historian*, 28/4 (August 1966), 614.

9 Georges Delpierre, 'Tabora 1916: de la symbolique d'une victoire', 354.

10 Dick van Galen Last, and Futselaar, *Black Shame*; Laura Rice, 'African Conscripts/European Conflicts: Race, Memory, and the Lessons of War', *Cultural Critique*, 45 (2000), 109-149; Rudolf von Albertini, 'The Impact of the Two World Wars on the Decline of Colonialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4/71 (1969), 17-35.

11 PFS FA, AA, AE 372. Ministry of Colonies to Belgian officials, Le Havre, [1916].

...while appreciating the positive outcome, in a certain respect, of transporting an indigenous division to Belgium, I'm too aware of the consequences that would result from promiscuity between our indigenous peoples and our compatriots to not see great danger. How would we, on the other hand, maintain within indigenous society the respect for the European way of life and the prestige necessary for it, if we send them to fight white troops in Europe and perhaps defeat them? [...] This will test our racial prestige; our biggest – I would have said, our only – power in the still barbaric environment where we live. To subjugate our natives we will from now on have to rely upon force, that same force that we will have taught them to use against us.¹²

From this we must conclude that, unlike the Great Powers, the Governor-General did not think that Belgium had the capacity to quell a major colonial revolt.

The Belgian Congo and Military Operations in Central Africa

From the end of August 1914 until February 1916, a detachment of the *Force Publique*, estimated at 570 soldiers plus an unrecorded number of Congolese porters, joined British and French forces in a combined attack on German Cameroon. Throughout this campaign, the system of porting was crucial. Sometimes the want of adequate porting required troops to retreat for lack of ammunition. Moreover, it also raised many problems with regard to food supplies. Captain Marin of the *Force Publique* reported that porting was the main difficulty facing the column:

Of the 3,000 carriers recruited in the Middle Congo, only 1,000 remain. The rest have died or deserted. It is easy to imagine what the 1,000 porters who are still reduced daily by death or desertion, must face to supply and operate a column of nearly 1,400 soldiers (including non-Europeans) with supplies of food and ammunition.¹³

This eighteen-month campaign resulted in the capture of Yaounde on 1 January 1916 and the rout of German troops into Spanish Guinea (today's Equatorial Guinea).¹⁴

The *Force Publique* also assisted the British in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) at the request of Rhodesian authorities to secure the capital Abercorn (today's Bulawayo). But when Belgium accepted this request for help and sent a contingent towards Abercorn, the British government intervened to stop this collaboration as unnecessary. Accordingly, on 17 September 1914, the Belgian troops returned northwards towards Tanganyika in order to secure Belgian Congo's borders against a threat from German troops under the leadership of Lettow-Vorbeck based in German East Africa.¹⁵ Only days later however, a series of German attacks on Abercorn led the British to request Belgian help

¹² PFS FA, AA, AE 372. General governor Henry to Ministry of Colonies, Boma, 26/07/1916.

¹³ PFS FA, AA, FP 2649. Captain Arthur Marin to Colonel Auguste Marchant, Lomie, 25/09/1915.

¹⁴ Jules Renkin, 'Le Congo et la Guerre mondiale au point de vue politique et administratif', Franck, Louis, *Le Congo belge*, t. 2 (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1928), 164.

¹⁵ PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. Telegram from Colonel Tombeur, Elisabethville, 17/09/1914.

after all.¹⁶ Following Belgian intervention, Abercorn was definitively secured in June 1915.

If at first the operations of the *Force Publique* on African soil were designed to repel Germany's colonial troops, secure the colony's frontiers and assure the sympathy of the Allies, the Belgian government eventually decided to 'abandon passive defence' and launch an offensive against German East Africa – a colony which extended over the current territories of Rwanda, Burundi and parts of Tanzania – in collaboration with British Imperial forces.¹⁷ At this stage in the war, Belgium quickly adopted the idea of territorial aggrandisement with the aim of strengthening its place in the post-war negotiations with the hope of exchanging conquered German territory for parts of the left bank of the lower Congo river, giving the Belgian Congo a certain commercial independence and reinforcing Belgium's position as a true colonial power.¹⁸ Thereby, contrary to preceding operations launched with joint commands, the colonial authorities insisted that the operations of Belgian and British troops must be distinct. This was because according to the principles of military occupation, each nation should exclusively administer the territory it occupied.¹⁹

As it existed in August 1914, the *Force Publique* could protect the borders or participate in offensive operations, but it was absolutely not prepared to face reputedly numerous, well-organised and well-equipped German force. Additional organisational work was required to recruit soldiers and porters, the latter to transport materiel. If the recruitment of soldiers responded to the Royal Decree of 30 July 1890, concerning voluntary commitments and annual enlistments, it is more than likely that some of the men were selected by their *chef investi* [native chief], possibly as means of paying taxes, and were therefore forced to enlist. More than 5,000 men were recruited in this manner.

The lack of roads and railway lines in the Belgian Congo meant that the bulk of porters, men and women, were intended to transport food, weapons and equipment essential to the success of military operations to the battlefields. Other porters were also recruited to quickly improve communication lines, which in turn allowed easier access to the troops and the delivery of military equipment. From January 1915, men were recruited massively from every part of the Colony by Belgian authorities. Missionaries may have also played a role in supporting efforts to recruit Africans for wartime service as in other Sub-Saharan colonies. By April 1916, after months of preparations, the *Force Publique*, organised into an armed force of about 18,000 combatants accompanied by an even greater number of porters (12,000 is the commonly accepted official data but due to imprecisions, this figure should be treated with care) engaged in combat against the forces of German East Africa.

Having seized the previously German-administered territories of Ruanda and Urundi (present-day Rwanda and Burundi) the *Force Publique* marched on

¹⁶ PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. Telegram from Colonel Tombeur, Elisabethville, 19/09/1914.

¹⁷ Roger Wm. Louis, *Ruanda-Urundi 1884-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 78-97.

¹⁸ Roger Wm. Louis, 'Great Britain and the African Peace Settlement of 1919', *The American Historical Review*, 71/3 (1966), 887.

¹⁹ PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. Ministry of Colonies to Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Le Havre, 21/04/1916.

Tabora, the seat of German government in East Africa during the war in present-day Tanzania. On 18 August 1916, with the capture of Tabora imminent, the Belgian government suggested that the offensive go no further than Tabora and the administration of the captured city be given over to the British. For the Minister of Colonies, Renkin, the acquisition of a territorial pawn with Ruanda, Urundi, Udjii, Karema and the southern part of the province of Bukoba, had in effect met Belgian expectations of securing the borders of the Belgian Congo and emphatically secured Belgian participation in post-war negotiations over the future of Africa.²⁰

On 6 September the Belgian suggestion to move no further than Tabor was reiterated to its British allies. The *Force Publique* continued its advance and on 19 September it occupied Tabora.²¹ For the Belgian government, this marked the end of operations for the Belgian military in Africa and it began to withdraw its troops. However, the British government saw things differently and the following October, it signalled to the Belgian foreign ministry its wish to prolong military collaboration in east of Tabora towards Mahenge where German troops remained dangerous.²²

Renkin, however, was not favourably disposed to this idea. Instead he sought to negotiate each new participation of the *Force Publique* against the formalisation of Belgian administration of the territories conquered by Belgium in German East Africa and that of Tabora, administered by General Tombeur's forces in the absence of consensus between Britain and Belgium. Until the end of January 1917, Britain and Belgium engaged in a protracted and bitter struggle over the administration in Tabora. Belgian aspirations in central Africa were finally denied: not only was the administration of Tabora taken from them, but the British government refused to enter into any sort of definitive position regarding the fate of the captured German territories.²³ In a last attempt to regain the initiative, the Belgian government announced that it was ready to deploy its forces in German East Africa in exchange for an agreement to maintain its position administering Tabora. The British refused. Their response was clear and unequivocal: without British material assistance the Belgians were incapable of launching any more offensives in German East Africa and as such the Belgian government was in no position to make any demands.²⁴ Abandoning the demand for additional military aid was preferable to losing Tabora.

At the end of January 1917 the Belgian government, no doubt fearing the loss of crucial British support ahead of the post-war negotiations, accepted that it must evacuate Tabora and decided to participate in new military operations

20 PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. Ministry of Colonies to Foreign Affairs (of Belgium) about the East African Campaign, Le Havre, 18/08/1916.

21 Gann, Lewis H. and Duignan, P., *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1919* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 83.

22 PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. Sir H. Villiers to Foreign Affairs (of Belgium) about the East African Campaign, London, 04/10/1916.

23 PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. « Mémorandum du 8 novembre 1916 » handed to Foreign Affairs of Belgium and Ministry of Colonies, London, 16/11/1916.

24 PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2. Sir H. Villiers to Foreign Affairs (of Belgium) about Tabora and Anglo-Belgian cooperation, London, 17/01/1917.

envisioned against Mahenge.²⁵ At the end of this last campaign, Belgian colonial troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Armand Huyghé under the leadership of British High Command were able to push the German forces back towards Portuguese-controlled Mozambique, where they finally surrendered several weeks after the signature of the Armistice on the Western Front.²⁶

Belgium emerged victorious from its battles in eastern Africa even as Belgium itself remained for the most part occupied. Once the Armistice was signed and the peace negotiations began, Belgium claimed financial and territorial compensation in regard to operations launched in the Allied cause and the numerous losses caused during the conflict, thus absolutely guaranteeing its colonial possessions. In signing the Treaty of Versailles in July 1919, Germany was compelled to renounce all of its colonial possessions, handing them over to the Allied and Associated powers.²⁷ In accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and within a geographic delimitation presaged by the 'Orts-Milner' Treaty of 30 May 1919, German East Africa became 'mandated territory' governed in the name of the League of Nations, by Belgium and the United Kingdom. On the 24 October 1924, at the end of almost five years of Anglo-Belgian negotiations, Belgium assumed official responsibility for the mandate of the entire territory of Ruanda-Urundi on behalf of the League of Nations.²⁸

In contrast to Belgium's status as victor, the Congolese lost out in the First World War. Despite their multiple engagements, the Belgian government did little to commemorate their contributions to the war. During the inter-War period, the Congolese war dead, officially numbering 26,975 from 1915 to 1918,²⁹ were granted several racially distinct memorials in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. These monuments were erected by colonial governments as testimony to the large Belgian investment in Africa and were intended as a statement by the Belgian colonialists against barbarism. But unlike Britain and France, no memorials were erected in Belgium itself, where the 44,000 Belgian dead occupy all the memorial space. In fact, Belgian officialdom has never integrated the Belgian Congo and its contribution to the war into commemorative ceremonies, whether as a source of primary materials to European economies or as colonial forces fighting against Germany. Even if the *Force Publique* was represented among the other troops at official ceremonies until 1960, the porters, the main victims of the war, remain unrecognised by Belgian officials.

25 PFS FA, DA, AF 1.2, Ministry of Colonies to Foreign Affairs (of Belgium) about the evacuation of Tabora by the Belgian administration, 27/01/1917.

26 H. Weber, 'La Campagne de Mahenge (1917)', *La Belgique militaire*, 64 (1967), 13-17.

27 'Belgian Mandate for East Africa', *The American Journal of International Law*, 17/3, Suppl. Official Documents (1923), 149.

28 Louis de Clerck, 'L'organisation politique et administrative du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi', *L'ordre juridique colonial belge en Afrique centrale. Éléments d'histoire* (Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 2004), 177.

29 Jan de Waele, 'Voor Vorst en vaderland: zwarte soldaten en dragers tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog in Congo', *Militaria Belgica*, (2007-2008), 128.

The 'Forgotten' Belgian Congo During the Centenary Commemorations

The institutional complexity of the Belgian state provides part of the explanation for the forgetting that attends the Belgian Congo in the Centenary commemorations. Belgium is a federal state divided into three Communities and three Regions: the Flemish, French and German-speaking communities of Belgium and the regions of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.³⁰ Given that culture and tourism are the competences the Communities and Regions, it was logical that these domestic entities should organise the commemorations and focus on themes and issues of direct and immediate importance to themselves. Thus from 2006, the government of Flanders placed its emphasis on the Ypres Salient and the international character of the troops who fought there, numbering more than fifty nationalities. Conversely, the government of Wallonia chose to emphasise the violence of the invasion of 1914, the massacre of civilians and the resistance around the great fortresses of Liege as well as the misery of the occupation. Responsibility for commemorations relating to the Belgian Congo fell to the federal government which began preparations for the centenary relatively late in 2012, and moreover with the goal of easing tension between the Flemish and Walloon governments that was harming Belgium's image internationally. In such a situation, there was hardly any room for commemoration of the Belgian Congo's role in the First World War.

However, these institutional reasons do not fully explain the forgetting of the Belgian Congo in centenary commemorations. Indeed, the public demand for more knowledge about the First World War did not really include the Belgian Congo in large part because the colonisation represented a contested and contentious aspect of the past. The history of Belgium's major colony in equatorial Africa has a slightly surreal air and was contentious even at the time. The Belgian government of the late 19th century did not wish to acquire a colony. This was the aim of King Leopold II who, faced with the refusal of his government to enter the so-called 'Scramble for Africa', acquired the Congo in 1885 with the intention to offer it one day to the Belgian people. For a long time his efforts were in vain. In 1901, at a moment when the King's colony had become profitable, the Belgian government still refused what they saw as a poisoned chalice. It was not until the British-led international campaign against King Leopold that the Belgian government was forced to accept responsibility for the Belgian Congo and began to put an end to the abuses of the Leopoldian system.³¹

30 Olivier Luminet, Laurent Licata, Olivier Klein, Valérie Rosoux, Suzan Heenen-Wolff, Laurence van Ypersele and Charly Stone 'The interplay between collective memory and the erosion of nation states: the paradigmatic case of Belgium', *Memory Studies*, 5/5 (2012), 3-15; Chantal Kesteloot, and Mélanie Bost, 'Les commémorations du centenaire de la Première guerre mondiale', *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2235-2236, (2014).

31 Pierre-Luc Plasman, *L'État indépendant du Congo et Léopold II (1876-1906) : étude sur le paradoxe de la gouvernance léopoldienne* (Louvain-la-Neuve : thèse de doctorat de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 2015).

The endgame of the colonial adventure was even more surprising and equally as brutal as its start. In the context of worldwide decolonisation, the Van Bilsen Report of 1955 proposed a thirty-year plan for the Belgian Congo's transition to independence, but this was considered too daring by authorities. However, the pace of events accelerated and the demands made by Congolese nationalists and Belgian anti-colonialists increased. Faced with riots in Leopoldville in 1959, the Belgian government agreed to roundtable talks with Congolese nationalists in January 1960. The Belgians still believed that they could dictate the course of events; however very the Belgian government washed its hands of its former colony with incredible alacrity. Independence was declared on 30 June 1960 in the presence of King Baudouin, President Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who established his notoriety with an unexpectedly virulent speech.³² From that moment, relations between Belgium and its former colony rapidly declined. The assassination of Lumumba in 1961 and the question of Belgium's implication in this event hardly improved matters.³³ Belgo-Congolese relations remain ambivalent to this day. On the one hand, the diplomatic relations between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) oscillate between tension and easing. The very strong Belgian desire to interfere in Congolese affairs is opposed by the refusal of Congolese officials and citizens to take lessons from the former colonial power.³⁴ In addition to this, Belgian authorities have difficulty including the controversial colonial past in national history without raising questions about compensation or giving rise to demands for an apology. Proof of this official silence can be found in the near absence of the eighty-five years of colonial history in the Belgian school curriculum. This form of official forgetting is not well received amongst the part of the Belgian population with links to the former Belgian Congo. They see in such attitudes a refusal by Belgian authorities to shape the telling of their own history and a refusal to create a plural Belgian identity with which the Congolese diaspora, estimated in 2012 to be 55,000 people out of a Belgian population of 11 million, can identify.³⁵

Even before the difficult post-colonial relationship, the place of its major colony in Belgian First World War memories after 1919 was never significant, neither at the official nor at the individual level, with the exception of colonial associations. If, as in the colonial period, the street names and monuments of the largest cities and towns in the Belgian Congo bore the memory of Belgian heroes and battles of World War One, the reverse was hardly the case. Only the 1916 Battle of Tabora and its victors, mainly General Charles Tombeur and also General Molitor, found their way, as colonial heroes, into Belgian school

32 Guy Vanthemsche, *La Belgique et le Congo : l'impact de la colonie sur la métropole* (Bruxelles : Le Cri, 2010); David Van Reybrouck, *Congo, une histoire* (Arles : Actes Sud, 2014).

33 Anne-Sophie Gijssels, *Le pouvoir de l'absent : les avatars de l'anticommunisme au Congo (1920-1961)* (Louvain-la-Neuve : thèse de doctorat de l'UCL, 2014).

34 Vanthemsche, *La Belgique et le Congo*.

35 Jacinthe Mazzocchi, ed., *Migrations subsahariennes et condition noire en Belgique. À la croisée des regards* (Louvain-la-Neuve : Academia - L'Harmattan, (Coll. Investigations d'anthropologie prospective, 8 (2014); World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/belgium>, accessed 25 April 2017.

textbooks of the inter-War period and were consecrated with two street names in Belgium and one memorial in Brussels. Thus the *rue de Tabora* was inaugurated on 7 February 1919 at the same time as eight other streets named after battles fought on the Belgian front. There are four other *rue de Tabora* in Belgium (Bonheiden, Knokke-Heist, Namur and Ostend). A *rue General Tombeur* was inaugurated in October 1936 at Etterbeek at the same time as a *rue du Ruanda*. A memorial to Lieutenant-Général Baron Tombeur de Tabora was inaugurated at the Église Saint-Gilles in Brussels in 1951. And a *rue Général Molitor* was inaugurated at Etterbeek in 1952. It was not until 1970 that a monument to the colonial combatants of the Congo Free State and to Belgian and Congolese veterans of the *Force Publique*, who had fought with distinction between 1885 and 1960, was dedicated at Schaerbeek, one of Brussels' nineteen communes. Intended to symbolize the 'commitment of Belgium to fight against all oppressions' and Belgian-Congolese fraternity, this monument has been the site of commemorations by colonial associations.³⁶ A similar monument was erected in Kinshasa in 2005 and there is now a lane, a street or a boulevard 'Tabora' in every major city of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Despite this, and given that the Brussels region alone has almost six hundred *lieux de mémoires* to the First World War, we can conclude that the Congolese contribution to the war has limited visibility and occupies a limited position in Belgian war memory.³⁷ To rectify this situation, in 2010, two Congolese women resident in Belgium – Letty Bunga and Anne Georgine Dibua Athapol, president of the Bakushinta Association – took the initiative to commemorate 11 November in front of the monument to the *Force Publique* in Schaerbeek. Chiekitanews.com, the website of the Congolese community in Belgium, reported that 'On November 11, Belgium and Europe remember their dead on the battlefields of the Great War from 1914 to 1918'. The report continued:

But did you know that thousands of brave Congolese soldiers and Congolese people living in Belgium engaged as volunteers fought, gained hard victories and died for Belgium on the front lines in Belgium, Africa and Asia? They fought at the battles of the Yser and Tabora, Saio, Dodoma, Mahenge, Kigoma, Kitega, Nyanza Kabambare, Assosa, Ethiopia, Gambela, Burma and the Middle East in the wars of '14-'18 and also in '40-'45. We too want to remember the bravery of our parents and grandparents from the Congo and we will deposit a wreath in their honour.³⁸

Each year since then, a group of men and women has gathered to remember the sacrifices of those who died for Belgium and Europe during the two world wars. A report of the event captured some of the atmosphere:

Five moments punctuated the event: the singing of the Congolese National Anthem; a prayer for the valiant fighters of the day; the address read by Mr. Joseph Mbungu Kandamana, head of the Congolese community in Belgium and himself a veteran;

³⁶ 'Rendez-vous à Bruxelles avec Tombeur, Chaltin et autres soldats de la Force Publique', *Mémoires du Congo* 32 (December 2014), 44.

³⁷ Laurence van Ypersele, Emmanuel Debruyne, and Chantal Kesteloot, *Brussels, Memory and War, 1914-2014* (Waterloo: Renaissance du Livre, 2014).

³⁸ <http://www.cheikfitanews.net/2015/11/bruxelles-hommage-aux-anciens-combattants-congolais-de-la-force-publique.html> accessed 6 July 2015.

the reading of names of former fighters who died for Belgium and Europe; and the laying of a wreath. Before departing, the participants in the tribute shared a drink in a local bar.³⁹

Yet there was still work to be done. Amongst the thousands of events, exhibitions and seminars that took place throughout Belgium in 2014, less than a dozen were uniquely devoted to the Belgian Congo. Certainly the exhibit *C'est Notre Histoire* that was displayed in the Royal Museum of the Belgian Army in Brussels dealt with the conflict in equatorial Africa, as did the documentaries produced by the state broadcasters RTBF and VRT. But these treatments were embedded in the presentation of the global dimensions of the war. There were two travelling exhibitions in Flanders and Wallonia: one of photos entitled *Loopgraven in Afrika* [Tombs in Africa] that was exhibited first in Ostend and then in Brussels; and the other on *The Congo and the First World War* organised by the Institut National des Invalides de Guerre (INIG) [Veterans' Institute] and inaugurated in Brussels but then installed and exhibited in Charleroi. Despite their quality, these two travelling exhibitions, which continue to tour, represent only a modest commemoration of the Belgian Congo in the First World War. As further evidence of this official support one could also mention a doctoral thesis sponsored by the Walloon government as part of the Centenary commemorations on the impact of the First World War on the Belgian Congo. We have found no mention of Congolese soldiers and porters in any official speeches. Finally, we could add two symposia, one in Charleroi organised by the Centre d'Action Laïque on 25-26 October 2014 called *Les oubliés de la guerre 14-18: la Force Publique du Congo* [The Forgotten Soldiers of 14-18: the Force Publique in the Congo] and the other organised in Brussels by the Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles and the Université Libre de Bruxelles on 16-17 December 2014 entitled *Congo, Guerre oubliée?* [Congo: the forgotten war?]. These titles tell us much about the absence of the Congo in Belgian war memories. The Centenary has done little to change this.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that despite the considerable part played by Congolese soldiers and porters in the Belgian war effort and this effort's value in Belgium's post-War negotiating position at Versailles, there has been little commemoration of this contribution in Belgium. This can in part be explained by the administrative division of commemorative activities in Belgium between the regional and federal levels of government. It can also be explained by the relatively small size of the Congolese diaspora in Belgium itself. But beyond that there are historical reasons for the low profile of such commemoration. The history of decolonisation meant that relations between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi have been uneasy, which does not allow for the type of international diplomatic collaboration that characterised Belgium's commemoration during 2014. Above all, in contrast to

³⁹ <http://www.cheikfitanews.net/2015/11/bruxelles-hommage-aux-anciens-combattants-congolais-de-la-force-publique.html> accessed 6 July 2015.

French actions, the refusal of the Belgian authorities to allow African troops to fight on European soil for fear of undermining post-War colonial order meant that the Congolese contribution to Belgium's war remained largely forgotten, a situation hardly changed by the Centenary commemorations.

Maori and Great War Commemoration in New Zealand

Biculturalism and the Politics of Forging National Memory

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When Lord Liverpool, the Governor of New Zealand announced from the steps of Parliament in Wellington on August 5, 1914 Britain's declaration of war against Germany, there was no sign of doubt among the large crowd gathered that the former colony would enthusiastically support the campaign. Prime Minister William Massey had a few days before offered London a New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and announced to Parliament that he had 'no fear of volunteers not being forthcoming.'¹ New Zealand was the smallest and most recent of the British settler societies, with formal Dominion status granted only seven years before, and the overwhelming majority of its population in 1914 of just over a million people were of British origin, and regarded themselves as British subjects. The term 'New Zealander' had been used through the nineteenth century, the period of the colony's European settlement, but referred specifically to the indigenous Maori, and a sense of distinct national identity for the dominant Pakeha or white European population was only beginning to emerge in the early twentieth century. While Massey was only initially correct in his confidence in volunteers – conscription was applied in 1916 – ultimately, around 100,000 New Zealanders served in the War in the New Zealand forces, over 16,000 of whom died. 2,200 of those who served were Maori, almost half of whom lost their lives.

In New Zealand as in the other Dominions, popular experiences of the First World War, both at home and overseas have become retrospectively suffused with cultural and ideological meaning, and closely intertwined with the construction, articulation and deployment of national identity. In New Zealand, this has particularly been the case in the twenty-first century, and there has been

¹ William Massey, Speech to Parliament, 31 July, 1914. Reported in *The New Zealand Herald* LI/15676 (1 August 1914), 8.

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Commemorating Race and Empire in the First World War Centenary

Edited by
Ben Wellings and Shanti Sumartojo

2018

PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DE PROVENCE
LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS