



There Came a Time 2 ...

Essays on the Great War in Africa

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Introduction

The assumption of good faith is dead. What matters is not goodness but the appearance of goodness. We are no longer human beings. We are now angels jostling to out-angel one another. God help us. It is obscene.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

This volume deals with the impact of the First World War in Africa, a continent largely overlooked by the historiography on the conflict. Africa was the longest running campaign in the war, starting with the first shots fired on Dar es Salaam on 8 August and in Togoland, on 12 August 1914, and the final laying down of arms on 25 November 1918. It introduced brutality and human cruelty at an unprecedented level: the war was the first among industrialized global powers, it blew away the faith in progress, uncovered global dehumanized violence and engulfed soldiers and civilians alike. Horror and despair daunted civilian populations, as fear, uncertainty, and the carnage, provoked by modern warfare technologies, transformed battlefields into killing fields, creating a world that was unrecognizable for those in power in 1914 and, in doing so, opening a period characterized by mass death and landscapes of industrial destruction.

In 1918 except for the territories under Spanish rule, Africa was fully involved in the war. It is true that in the summer of 1914 the great powers still tried to reach an agreement aimed at securing the continent's neutrality in the face of war. Generally, it was expected that the Treaty of Berlin (1885) concerning the neutrality of the conventional basin of the Congo would prevent the war from spreading to West and Central Africa. On 23 August 1914, the German under-secretary for Foreign Affairs had tried, through the American Ambassador in Berlin, to achieve neutrality of Cameroon, French Equatorial Africa, German East Africa, Uganda, Nyasaland, part of Rhodesia and German East Africa, but the proposal was rejected by both the British and French.

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