



Centre français des études éthiopiennes

**The First World War from Tripoli to Addis
Ababa (1911-1924)** | Shiferaw Bekele, Uoldelul Chelati
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Introduction

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Texte intégral



General. Made with Scribble Maps.

- 1 The idea that WWI was a global conflict is now accepted by the academic community, and it constitutes a real leitmotif for most recent literature on this topic.¹ As a consequence of this development, some scholars have started investigating the impact of WWI on Africa, Asia,² the Middle East³ and Latin America.⁴ The Great War, to name it by its other name, deserves to be remembered not just by Europeans, but also by the peoples of the rest of the world whose destinies were shaped by it, or caused by it. The Great War was certainly seen by many Africans and Asians as a white man's war, but their involvement in the conflict was important for both their national development and external relations.
- 2 Historians have started studying the course of the war in

these parts of the world and have established how much of a price was paid, and what the enduring legacies were. All of the Entente powers and most of the Central powers were colonial powers. Consequently most of the world was directly or indirectly at war. This gave the Great War an imperial nature, and many scholars consider it the last phase of the European “Scramble for Africa.”⁵

- 3 A rapidly growing body of scholarship on the global dimension of World War I has resulted in the publication of countless books and articles dealing with many aspects of the war in the Global South. In a book review, Murphy Mahon wrote provocatively: “One may be forgiven for thinking that [it] is actually the conflict on the Western Front rather than in Africa which is in danger of being forgotten.”⁶ The debate about the role played by Africa in the Great War had already begun in the 1970s when the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London organised a Conference on World War One. Some of the papers were later published in a special issue of *The Journal of African History*.⁷ The influence of WWI upon African societies started being analysed by some scholars mainly in a national approach,⁸ but in the 1960s and 1970s African studies largely ignored the issue of African colonial armies. The importance of the war for the history of the continent was nevertheless fully captured by Michael Crowder in a chapter that was published in the prestigious *General History of Africa* published under the aegis of UNESCO. The proper impact of the war on the continent was exposed here.⁹ A couple of years later, another milestone was published: *Africa and the First World War*, edited by Melvin Page.¹⁰ The centenary of the Great War has contributed further to this trend, as the current stream of publications associated with Transnational/Global History shows. The experience of non-white subjects in the war has generated a vibrant wave of new research and helped seeing the war in global

terms “re-emphasising the original 1914-18 definition of the conflict as a ‘world’ war.”¹¹ In the first years of the new millennium some researchers at the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin, started working on the history of the First and Second World Wars, providing this line of research with a solid analytical approach.¹²

- 4 Over the years, writers have pointed out how the first British shot of the land war was fired in Africa, in Togoland, by Sergeant Major Alhaji Grunshi of the British West African Frontier Force.¹³ By September 1914, Moroccan troops were already operating along the Western Front, suffering heavy losses and displaying uncommon bravery to the point that, in 1915, the French President and the King of Belgium presented the Moroccan regiment with an honorary flag.¹⁴ It has been remarked that among the victims of the first gas attack (Ypres, 22 April 1915) were Algerian and Moroccan soldiers, and that in the following counterattack there were also Indian sepoy from the Punjab, Afghanistan, and Nepal among the British forces, while French forces included Algerians and Moroccans. They were part of the thirty-seven battalions of French troops from Senegal, Algeria and Morocco deployed on the Western Front. Two days after Britain’s declaration of war, on 4 August, the country had already decided to dispatch two divisions of Indian troops to the Middle East and Europe (Indian Expeditionary Force, 24,000 soldiers). It has been calculated that all included 2,350,000 Africans were involved in the First World War as soldiers or labourers and that 250,000 of them died, along with 750,000 civilians.¹⁵ In Europe, the Entente powers deployed about half a million African soldiers.¹⁶
- 5 The war in Africa also lasted slightly longer than the war in Europe. General Paul Emil Lettow-Vorbeck, “the Lion of Africa” or “The Hindenburg of Africa,”¹⁷ and his men only surrendered on 25 November 1918 in Abercorn (Mbala, in

Zambia), 14 days after the armistice.

- 5 Inevitably, the conspicuous presence of African and colonial soldiers in the trenches on the Western Front attracts most of the attention. The first wave of studies on Africa's role in World War I has mainly focused on the African participation on European battlefields.¹⁸ Predictably, calculating how many took part in this remains very complicated, and the figures that circulate are often discordant; calculating the deaths and wounded is even more difficult.¹⁹
- 7 The French Army alone deployed some 600,000 colonial troops on the battlefield;²⁰ the largest contingent came from North Africa, with 270,000 recruits;²¹ followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with almost 200,000 men,²² the famous *Force Noire*.²³ Between August and September 1914, 32 battalions from North Africa arrived in France.²⁴ As the use of colonial troops in the French army increased in the second half of the war, from 1915 the French conducted a series of mass recruitment drives in the French colonies that put under severe stress many local communities: rebellions were registered in Mali and other localities; in January 1916 some 900,000 people were affected by the revolt that sparked off in Volta and Bani.²⁵ In 1917, Joost Van Vollenhoven, the Governor General of French West Africa, demanded and obtained a temporary stop of recruitment.
- 3 A large debate has accompanied the use of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* as shock troops. In 1909, Charles Mangin (1866-1925) came out with a patently racist remark when he wrote that West African soldiers had a less developed nervous system that made them stable under fire and immune to the noise of battle:²⁶ the perfect shock troops that the French army was looking for and yet another "born soldiers" group ready to be thrown into the maelstrom of the war. Were the French using *Tirailleurs* deliberately as cannon fodder to save white lives?²⁷ Other

interesting studies focus on African soldiers' experience in Europe through visual records²⁸ and the issue of racism.²⁹

9) The United Kingdom followed a different policy regarding its non-white soldiers. African troops were first and foremost deployed to subdue German resistance in the colonies. In Europe, black African troops served as labourers and carriers, and their use on the battlefield was carefully avoided. Clearly, there was a racial and moral question behind the issue of accepting to deploy colonial troops in "white men's wars." The risk of undermining the very principle on which colonialism rested was real, and before compromising on the notion of white racial superiority the British Expeditionary Corps had to suffer heavy casualties in the opening months of the war. A debate followed, and Winston Churchill advocated the use of African combatants outside of Africa. Of a different opinion were both the War Office and the Colonial Office, which succeeded in keeping black troops off the European battlefield.³⁰

10) If the British were reluctant to use Africans in Europe, the Indian Colonial Army had been deployed since the very beginning of the war. In September 1914, the first men of the Indian Expeditionary Force (IEF) arrived in France. The IEF consisted of two infantry divisions, a total of some 30,000 men. They remained in France until early January 1916. Only Indian cavalry and artillery remained on the Western Front up to 1918, before being posted to Palestine.³¹ On the other hand, the Belgian government deployed a small number of Congolese soldiers in Belgium. On the contrary, Germany did not commit African troops in Europe. Nevertheless, with peace, African troops were stationed in the German Rhineland (1919-1930). A German propaganda campaign based on the worst racist stereotypes ensued (*Schwarze Schmach am Rhein* – Black Horror on the Rhine), fomenting racial hatred against African troops.³²

- 11 Other scholars prefer to concentrate on “*la Guerre en Afrique*,”³³ focusing on Africa as a battlefield. In a relatively short period, this area of research has experienced what could be defined as a spectacular development. Only a few years ago, it was common practice to refer to the African theatres of WWI as “forgotten wars” and to treat the Continent as a “sideshow” of WWI.³⁴ Paradoxically, the “forgotten war” definition³⁵ has mainly been used about the East African campaign, allegedly one of the lesser-known theatres of the First World War. In reality, the epic confrontation between Lettow-Vorbeck’s men and the Entente forces has been the favorite topic of loads of literature since 1919. This includes Ludwig Deppe’s book,³⁶ a *Schutztruppe* medical officer; and then Lettow-Vorbeck himself published his reminiscence of the war in 1920.³⁷ In East Africa, the German strategy succeeded in diverting Entente forces from Europe, tying down troops and resources in endless guerrilla warfare.³⁸ The East African campaign also saw the significant involvement of Indian troops, present on the ground from the campaign’s inception to its end.
- 12 Nowadays, it is debatable whether this front was ever truly “forgotten.” Lettow-Vorbeck had already become a sort of legend during the East African campaign, and once back in Germany he was celebrated as a war hero and was a public figure until his death (1964). His stubborn resistance to the British, Belgian, Portuguese, Rhodesian and South African troops became iconic. In a short time a rich literature flourished around his figure and deeds.³⁹ Part of this vast bibliography covers and analyses military operations and the international dimension of the conflict.⁴⁰ Recently the focus has shifted towards the economic, social and cultural turmoil caused by the war in this theatre. The impact of the war has also been analysed in territories that were not directly involved in the fighting

and for a long period considered unaffected by the war.⁴¹

- 13 More than a million Africans served as porters during the military operations, and the study of the “war of legs” has become a very promising field of research.⁴² Scholars have also tried to address WWI in Africa from an African perspective, considering what the different campaigns meant to the ordinary African rank-and-file and civilians and how the war impacted real people.⁴³ These works partly follow pathbreaking works by Albert Grundlingh on South African blacks, Myron Echenberg and Joe Lunn on the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, and Melvin Page on Malawians and WWI.⁴⁴
- 14 During the war, the British Empire extended an effective administration over territories that were previously beyond its reach. Jan-Bart Gewald has dealt with one of these cases, showing how the First World War played a central role in the establishment of colonial rule in Zambia.⁴⁵ Recent scholarship on the East African front has also paid more attention to other European nations’ role, Belgium, and Portugal.⁴⁶
- 15 Interestingly, some scholars have turned their attention to the history of labour and labour migration. With most of the able male population under military service, the war effort generated a scramble for labour that immediately involved colonial territories. In 1916 the French Ministry of War established the *Service de l’Organisation des Travailleurs Coloniaux* (SOTC), which started to organise recruitment centres in the French colonies. Between 1914 and 1918, 222,763 colonial workers arrived from there, becoming part of the *défense nationale*: they mainly worked in arms factories and farms.⁴⁷ The majority of them came from Algeria (75,864), Indochina (48,981),⁴⁸ Morocco (35,000)⁴⁹ and Tunisia (18,500),⁵⁰ setting the first steps towards the creation of a North African presence in France.⁵¹ From 1917, almost 140,000 Chinese arrived in France and Belgium to work behind the lines.⁵²

This mass recruitment was organised by the Chinese Government, with the hope of gaining some influence in post-war negotiations.⁵³

16 The men of the Chinese Labour Corps became specialists, among other things, in digging trenches and repairing tanks.⁵⁴ Another 50,000 workers came from French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos). Most of them remained in France up to the end of the conflict, engaged in post-war reconstruction. This colonial presence contributed to the radicalisation of the French working class and tested to the limits the supposedly colour-blind nature of French national identity.⁵⁵

17 The British did more or less the same: 48,000 Indian labourers were dispatched in 1917 to form the Indian Labour Corps.⁵⁶ The armies of labourers also included a Fijian Labour Corps (100) and a Cape Coloured Labour Battalion (1,200 men). By the end of the conflict the British had recruited 215,000 workers.⁵⁷ The Italians too experimented with the use of Libyan workers in their factories in the North of the motherland.⁵⁸

18 On the African fronts, the work of carriers has been scrutinised to the conclusion that, for the most part, their work conditions were far worse than those endured by the soldiers. In East Africa, when in 1916 the war against the German troops transformed itself into a war of movement, the British were quick to create a Carrier Corp. The British forced almost a million men to work on the British supply lines. At least 100,000 of the one million carriers recruited by the British died. This number is confirmed by Michael Pesek who estimates that the war provoked the death of between 100,000 and 300,000 carriers.⁵⁹ During the war, France experienced grain shortages and turned to its colonies. In Morocco, in order to meet French wartime needs, greater production was pushed for.⁶⁰ Between 1916 and 1917, Britain seized the entire rice crop in Nyasaland.⁶¹ Marc Michel is probably one of the few scholars to have

paid adequate attention to Africa's material contribution to the war effort.⁶²

19 Hunger and disease caused further deaths in many parts of Africa: weakened by four years of war the people of many African territories were easy prey for the influenza pandemic.⁶³ Loss of life and hardship over the war years was quickly followed by the catastrophe provoked by the "Spanish" influenza. Even if it is difficult to make an accurate account of the devastating effects of "Spanish" influenza, it is calculated that in Africa nearly 2.4 million people (i.e. 1.8 percent of the population) fell victim to the disease.⁶⁴ In the Horn of Africa, the flu pandemic struck in late 1918 and early 1919, but lack of sources and research has left a void that awaits to be filled.⁶⁵ Other topics have only been timidly explored, like the role of women.⁶⁶

20 Recent scholarship has covered an expansive set of issues, but there are still many blind spots in the historiography on Africa during the First World War; among them one of the most evident is the economic and socio-political consequences of the war. Colonies in Africa and elsewhere were an important source of commodities, and this led to shortages in supplies, rationing, price increases and profiteering. There is still no comprehensive analysis of this aspect of the war. Many authors refer to "material resources" as one of the contributions provided to the war effort by African countries. But in general this claim is rather cursory and usually not corroborated by evidence or case studies. The issue of sources is crucial. For long, most of the studies on WWI have relied on European and American archives. Recently, non-Western sources have started to be used, leading to a more nuanced and realistic evaluation of the impact of the Great War on Africa and Asia.⁶⁷

21 The primary object of this edited volume is to contribute to this growing field of research. Most of the articles included were presented at the international conference

The First World War from Tripoli to Mogadishu (1911-1924) held at Addis Ababa University in 2016.⁶⁸ The conference could ideally be included in the long list of initiatives that have marked the Centenary of the First World War. Therefore, our Conference fitted into this global cultural activity of remembering a major event in world history.⁶⁹

- 22 The conference was in many ways a departure from the way historical conferences had previously been organised in Addis Ababa. In the past, focus had always been on Ethiopia as a unit of analysis, where participants looked at various aspects of the history of the country. Even in the case of an international historical conference, the focus remained on the nation-state.⁷⁰ During this conference however, the nation-state was not expected to be the central unit of analysis, with some papers dealing with the experience of different colonies in the First World War. The conference rather aimed to look at a large swathe of African territory stretching from Tripoli in Libya to Mogadishu. Within this geographical space, participants were expected to examine the place and impact of the First World War on the various peoples of the region. As one can see from the papers, this objective has not always been met because scholars have fallen back to the nation-state as a measure, and the comparative perspective is not widely adopted. Nevertheless, it is a good beginning, and it needs to be taken up in the future because the First World War is an early example of a huge global event. It speeded up the process of profound transformation that was taking place in the regions under investigation. Since then globalisation has taken huge strides forward, which calls for a greater comparative analysis of the nature of the transformation underway in this part of the world. As conference organisers, we regret the fact that there was no participation from specialists in the history of Somalia; we certainly need more research on the experience of this

country during the Great War. One of the legacies of the First World War led to the readjustment of the boundary of Italian Somalia when the British agreed to transfer the territory known as Jubaland (the basin of the River Juba) from the colony of Kenya to Somalia. The birth of modern Somali nationalism, as we all know, is traced back to the religious-political movement led by the Sayyid Muhammad ‘Abd Allāh al-Hasan which took place from 1899 to 1921.⁷¹ Apart from inducing a slight revision of the title of the book, we are aware that the lack of proper treatment of the Somali case reflects a flaw of this book and a limit to the current scholarship on the Horn of Africa.

- 23 The volume consists of 15 articles that have been divided into three main sections. The first section – “International and Regional Politics/Developments” – focuses on the effects that the war had on international and regional balances of power. In particular, this part analyses the impact that the Great War had on political alliances and geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa region (Gilkes and Plaut) and the Nile Valley (De Gayffier-Bonneville). Other papers in this section focus on the interrelation between WWI and the development of nationalist and transnational movements in the Middle East and Africa (Erich) as well as in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Vezzadini). This section also discusses the impact that the conflict had on international law and diplomacy at large (Zollmann).
- 24 The second section – “Colonial Policies” – examines the impact that WWI had on colonial strategies and policies. Contributions in this section address issues such as the causes that led to the Italian invasion of Libya (Ungari) as well as the impact on the recruitment of colonial troops (Volterra and Jolly), the transformation induced in the manufacturing sector (Zaccaria) and perceptions of the Great War from remote peripheries of colonial empires (Imbert-Vier).

- 25 Finally, the third section – “Local Agencies and the War” – investigates the different shapes that local agency has taken when dealing with the variety of challenges offered by the conflict. Chapters in this section dissect the role played by the local agency from the perspective of claims of religious authenticity (Bruzzi), positioning of local polities with regard to colonial powers (Dewière and Hiribarren), the rise of new prospective dynasties (Honvault), the realignment of settlers’ ambitions and strategies (Montalbano), as well as the way African voices vented their concerns and feelings towards the ongoing conflict and colonial rule in general (Uoldelul Chelati Dirar).
- 26 This book aims to suggest an analysis of the conflict that focuses on three crucial points. The first is related to space. It is now evident that the framework of the nation-state is too circumscribed and does not capture the complexity of the relations that came into being at local, national and international levels. In this regard, we find particularly penalising the conventional approach that tends to investigate WWI in Africa and the Middle East as two separate settings, a view that unfortunately is still prevalent. Also, WWI studies have tended to examine the conflict within the geographical contours created by the area studies paradigm.⁷² Adopted in the 1950s, the area studies model has been under scrutiny since the mid-1990s.⁷³ The artificial disjuncture between Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East reveals all its inadequacies when we deal with the Horn of Africa, an area strongly connected to the neighboring regions. Our choice to focus on a territory which stretches from Libya to Ethiopia and encompasses the Yemen and Middle East is an attempt to overcome this hiatus. Erasing the artificial lines that divide the Horn of Africa from the wider Red Sea region allows approaches that offer a greater understanding of the dynamics at work during

WWI. Ours is only a partial attempt to address this methodological limit. But we are aware that Sharīf Husayn's break with the Ottomans and the volatile situation in Yemen and along the Red Sea deserves more attention from scholars of African history.

27 The second methodological purpose of this book is related to time and, more precisely, to chronologies. After a long and vibrant debate, it is now taken for granted that there is not just one military chronology – probably not even the most effective – of the possible periodisations of WWI.⁷⁴ In effect, taking a longer time frame than the classical 1914-1918 period offers us the possibility to see more clearly the complexity of the dynamics at work in many contexts as well as the large-scale transformations unleashed by the war.⁷⁵

28 The Great War contributed to destabilising colonial rule worldwide, greatly undermining the long-term stability of the colonial system. Some of the consequences of the War stretched over a longer period: the 1919 Egyptian revolution and subsequent independence in 1922, the nationalist movement in Sudan in the 1920s, the political change in the Hejaz and the British decision to hand over Jubaland to Italy in 1924, are all events that are partly due to the changes that occurred during the war years. Though all these situations need to be carefully contextualised, it remains certain that the transition from peace to war and from war to peace in the region lasted well beyond the conventional framework of 1914-1918, and that the ensuing political turmoil that engulfed the region partially redrew the political map of the area.

29 The third and final focus of the book is on agency and local reactions. Of course, resistance was the most immediate answer to the war's demands: recruitment, the rise of the "*impôt du sang*," fuelled the outbreak of the revolt among the Bambara in Beledougou, Mali (Feb. 1915)⁷⁶ and then of the Volta-Bani uprising between 1915 and 1916, the largest

armed movement of resistance to French colonial expansion in Africa.⁷⁷ But resistance was only one of the many possible reactions. Indeed, it is important to shed light on how different local powers negotiated their involvement in the conflict. In this way they provided ample evidence of their autonomy of judgment and of their independence in taking action. Tensions ignited by WWI interacted with the complex pre-existing balance of power which, in many cases, influenced the positioning and choices of the local actors. For this reason, special attention is paid to the agency of African elites and populations involved directly or indirectly in the conflict. “How, because of two wild beasts the world was set alight” is the title of a poem written by Sengal Workeneh and published at his own expense in Rome in 1915. This poem, written in Tigrinya, one of the most widely spoken languages in Eritrea and one of the languages of Ethiopia, is completely devoted to the description of the devastating impact of WWI. It can be considered one of the first public voices on the conflict coming from the Global South. What attributes a special value to Sengal’s poem is the fact that he himself was an officer in the Italian army and had taken active part in the conflict. Sengal’s work witnesses the existence of a range of local points of view on WWI. Regardless of their contradictions and differences, they contribute to a more choral and inclusive representation of the Great War.

An arc of tension

- 30 The adoption of a wider geographical and temporal perspective is an element increasingly accepted by various historiographies. In this volume, a similar approach also allows us to go beyond the usual way of analysing the First World War in Africa as having as its exclusive reference the various theatres of war and the war fought on them. This is not a matter of launching the classic controversy

against military history, a discipline that remains fundamental for all studies on the Great War, but it is clear that even scholars who are most distant from diplomatic and tactical approaches always pin their work on a theatre of war. In this way, the study of WWI in Africa ends up inevitably connected to the five major campaigns skillfully outlined by David Killingray: Togo (1914), Kamerun (1914-1916), South West Africa (1914-1916), East Africa (1914-1918), and Suez-Sinai (1915)⁷⁸.

31 The attention of historians has been much more sporadic towards those territories where, instead, there were no clashes between the two opposing alliances. Blockades, revolts, riots, hunger, disease and famine: even countries far away from the major battlefields could be deeply affected by the Great War. The danger inherent in this approach is that of not being able to grasp the deep implications that the war also had in the territories where there were no direct military confrontations, that is to say, in most of the territories analysed in this volume. If we look away from the theatres of war for a moment, it will immediately become clear how the repercussions of the conflict were felt even in areas that are not usually associated with the First World War. It does not take long to realise that the region stretching from Tripoli to Mogadishu experienced, in the period 1911-1924, profound upheavals at all levels: “minor” conflicts, more or less peaceful coups, insurrections, the militarisation of entire societies and revolutions. From Tripoli to Mogadishu, an arc of tension was created that did not spare anyone. Therefore, it is worth analysing this “arc of tension” even cursorily.

32 The natural starting point for this bird’s eye view can only be Libya, as Ottoman scholars and politicians attached great importance to it. The loss of Libya influenced the Ottoman decision to enter the First World War.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the war deteriorated the solidity of the Triple

Alliance while Germany improved its relations with the Port.⁸⁰ Therefore some scholars suggest that the Libyan war of 1911-1912 could be taken as the real beginning for WWI. For them, the Great War stemmed from a series of regional conflicts that began with the Italian invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and then evolved into the Balkan Wars, before the final and most dramatic page that was turned in Sarajevo.⁸¹ From November 1915 an Anglo-Italian blockade was imposed on the Western desert. The Sanusi, led by Ahmad al-Sharīf, declared a *jihād* on Egypt and in November conquered Sallūm. They were then confronted on three fronts by Italian, French and British troops, and finally defeated in March 1917.⁸² The defeat of the Sanusiya did not mean the triumph of Italy, on the contrary, Italian forces met fierce resistance in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and for most of the war its possessions were reduced to a few coastal towns.⁸³

33 The war had a tremendous impact on Egypt: the country was transformed into the most important British base of operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Egyptian population went through hardships, and the resources of the country were placed at the service of the Entente's troops. Shortages of basic goods became frequent. In 1915, an Egyptian Labour Corps was raised; throughout the war, about 23,000 of its 98,000 men served abroad (France, Palestine and Mesopotamia).⁸⁴ From a political point of view, Egypt was declared a British protectorate and effectively ruled by a British High Commissioner. At the end of the war, anti-British feelings erupted: a request for attending the Paris Peace Conference was initially rejected by the British. They had arrested Sa'ad Zaglūl, the leader of the Wafd Party, and exiled him to Malta. This ignited civil protests against the authorities in many parts of Egypt. People took to the streets and started what has passed into history as the Revolution of 1919. Eventually, an Egyptian delegation was allowed to appear before the

- Paris Peace Conference. In 1922, the British issued a unilateral declaration of independence.⁸⁵
- 34 Even if Sudan did not play a direct role in the war, its political and social foundations were shaken by WWI. In 1915, there was a Mahdist rising at Jabal Qadir, and in March ‘Alī Dīnār, the sultan of Dārfūr, declared a *jihād* against the British. Reginald Wingate, the Governor-General of Sudan, became convinced that ‘Alī Dīnār had fallen victim to Ottoman and German propaganda and, in May 1916, he was authorised to invade the country. ‘Alī Dīnār was killed on 6 November 1916 and Dārfūr fell prey to the British.⁸⁶ Alongside Dārfūr the echoes of the war reached and impacted Bornu.
- 35 Tension between Ethiopia and the Italian colony of Eritrea had already arisen before the start of the war. In March 1914 *Ras Wäldä Giyorgis Abboyye* with an army of 50,000 men moved toward ‘Adwa and menaced *Däğğazmač Gäbrä Šellase Barya Gabər*, accusing him of pro-Italian sympathies.⁸⁷ In Eritrea, the Italians hastily recalled some askari battalions from Libya. By May 1914 the crisis was over.⁸⁸ In February 1915, the renowned German ethnologist and anthropologist Leo Frobenius landed in Massawa to lead a scientific expedition into the interior. At that time Italy was still a neutral country, but after two months of negotiations, Frobenius was unceremoniously sent away on the grounds that his was an espionage mission.⁸⁹ Tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia remained high, and in 1916 a new movement of troops along the border province of Tigray alarmed Asmara. It took a flurry of diplomatic activity to calm the situation and to assure the Italians that Ethiopia did not have any claim on Eritrea. The recently created Ethiopian consulate in Asmara played a decisive role at this juncture.⁹⁰ The handling of this tense international situation awaits further investigation, presently only the Italian side is being adequately studied.⁹¹

- 36 Historians have demonstrated that this great global event impacted the economy of Eritrea. The Italian colony had already sent thousands of its men to Libya to fight a long colonial war which had started before the global event but went on to feed it.⁹² In a similar manner, French Somaliland (what would become Djibouti) sent a military force, *Le 1er Bataillon de Tirailleurs Somalis* to France. British Somaliland, which had been the scene of a protracted religious-nationalist anti-colonial movement long before the outbreak of the war, saw an active Ottoman engagement to get involved during the war. Ethiopia too found herself ensnared in the diplomatic tug-of-war between the two warring sides. This ended up profoundly affecting her political system in 1916.
- 37 The conference that inspired this edited book coincided with the centenary of a significant event in the history of 20th-century Ethiopia. It was on 27 September 1916 that Iyasu, the uncrowned ruler of the country, was overthrown by an insurrection of Šäwan lords. They had been egged on by the governments of Ethiopia's three colonial neighbours – Britain, France and Italy. He was replaced by two people, Zäwditu, the daughter of Menelik II, who became Empress (or more formally the Queen of Kings) and Täfäri Mäkonnen, who became the Heir Apparent. It was the first time that a woman sat on the throne as monarch of the Christian kingdom since the 4th century, an event of considerable significance in its own right. The two went on to rule in uneasy collaboration until the death of the Queen of Kings in 1930. Täfäri succeeded her with the regal name of Haile Selassie. He ruled the country with a firm hand until 1974, with the brief exception of the five-year rule of Italy from 1936 to 1941.
- 38 The political changes of 1916 were intimately connected to the events of the First World War, which makes this book highly relevant to the historiography of Ethiopia.⁹³ It is also worth bearing in mind that at the end of the war the

Horn of Africa was ravaged by the “Spanish” influenza pandemic, which claimed the lives of countless civilians.⁹⁴

39 A common thread in the history of the region on which this book partly focuses is the hegemonic centuries old presence of the Ottoman Empire in all but one of the countries. The one exception was Ethiopia, but this country’s independence too had repeatedly been challenged by the Ottomans since the 16th century. During the First World War, the Ottomans tried to play a role in the country’s domestic politics in the hope of drawing it in on to their side in the global war. In the Arabian Peninsula, the Ottomans maintained a military presence up to the end of the war. In this, they were partly assisted by Germany. It is therefore quite proper that three of the fifteen chapters examine the impact of the Ottoman presence from different angles in the region as a whole, and how this affected the history of the war. When the war came, as pointed out above, the Ottomans (backed by the Germans) calculated that they could use the movement as an entry point into the politics of the region. The idea was, in the best of scenarios, to mobilise the Muslim populations of the Horn against Britain. This international intrigue brought to the forefront the militant movement of Somaliland, giving it international visibility until the end of the Great War.

40 An important feature of the war, as pointed out above, is the role of troops from French Somaliland and Eritrea, taking part in the fighting in Europe and Libya. It further calls into question the suitability of an analytical framework that treats North Africa as separate from the Horn of Africa. In their native country, the Ethiopian volunteers who enrolled in the Eritrean askari force fighting for Italy in the suppression of the fierce Libyan resistance came to be known as *Trenbulli* (an Amharic corruption of “Tripoli”). After discharge, some *Trenbulli* settled in Eritrea, and some went back to their native

country. The government decided to use their military skills by recruiting them into the newly established Addis Ababa police force. They were soon deployed to take part in the civil war of late 1916 that erupted between the loyalists of Iyasu and the people who deposed him, most notably at the battle of Sägälé of 27 October 1916. Their training as professional soldiers and their experience in the Libyan war stood them in good stead, and they distinguished themselves in the fighting. In Djibouti in February 1915 the French also formed a small military contingent called the *Compagnie des Tirailleurs Somalis*. In June 1916 it was renamed the *Bataillon des Tirailleurs Somalis* (because it was mainly made up of Somalis) in which Yemenis, Comorians and Ethiopians were also enlisted.⁹⁵ The unit was taken to France where they fought very bravely from 1916 to 1918. These two cases bring out the powerful force of change that emerged in the colonial era. People often volunteered for very perilous jobs even in distant lands because of benefits regarding pay and prestige (being part of the modern military with all its attractive uniform, other accessories and the like) that service in the army brought.

41 Finally, another outcome of the war was the intense competition that arose between, on the one hand, Britain, France and Italy (Ethiopia's neighbouring colonial powers) and, on the other, the Ottoman Empire and Germany, to win over to their side the large Empire of the Horn of Africa. By 1914 a German presence in the royal court in Addis was already growing more and more noticeable. German-educated Ethiopians surrounded the teenager Iyasu, who had as a tutor a German teacher. Some Germans and half-Germans were re-becoming confidants of the young ruler.⁹⁶ This situation did not escape the watchful eyes of the diplomats (secret agents) of the three colonial powers, who constantly complained about the presence of Germanophile elements

surrounding the prince. The situation was further complicated by the ambition of the Ottoman Turks, who sought to influence the Muslim population of Eastern Ethiopia to rise up against British and Italian rule. Iyasu's attempt to obtain the support of the Muslim population of Eastern Ethiopia was interpreted by Istanbul – and ominously by Ethiopia's political class and the allied powers – as a signal for a future alliance between the two empires. Thus was set in motion a period of intense international intrigue which culminated in the deposition of the ruler on 27 September. A bloody civil war followed, fought in several parts of the country until August 1917 between the loyalists and the coup makers.⁹⁷ At the end of the war, the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was for a while seduced by an idea that never materialised: the hiring of 200,000 Ethiopian mercenaries for the Western Front.⁹⁸ In the Horn of Africa, relations between Italy, France and Great Britain were never easy. During and in the aftermath of WWI the situation became even more complicated and Italy's unrealistic expectations made disappointment inevitable.⁹⁹

42 It is hoped that this book will encourage historians of the countries of the region from Tripoli to Mogadishu to broaden their scope to look at social, cultural, economic, political and religious processes and events in their regional context, because most of these forces cut across the national boundaries of the nation-state. Working on this book has shown us that it does not come easy to examine processes of transformation across countries and within the framework of regions. Historians encounter methodological challenges because they have to draw upon sources produced in different cultural contexts and expressed in different media, not to mention the multiplicity of languages involved.

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Notes

1. D'Andurain 2016; Gerwarth and Manela 2014a, 1-16; Kramer 2014; Janz 2013; Neiberg 2005. See also the special issue 'Les colonies de l'Océan Indien dans la Grande Guerre', in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 255 (2014).

2. Djik 2007; Streets-Salter 2017; Vu-Hill 2011; Xu 2005 and 2017.

3. Aksakal 2008; Fawaz 2014; Johnson 2017; Rogan 2015; Ulrichsen 2014.

4. Albert 1988; Compagnon 2013; Rinke 2017.

5. Strachan 2004, 184; 2010, 7.

6. Mahon 2013. The best-known and most frequently used reference is Cordfield 2008. Recently, this reference has been supplanted by the excellent Schulten 2018.

7. See *The Journal of African History*, 19/1 (1978); the conference was held in 1977.

8. Osuntokun 1979.

9. Crowder 1985.

10. Page 1987.

11. Jones 2013, 876.

12. See Liebau et al. 2010.

13. Strachan 2004, 1.

14. Maghraoui 2004, 6.

15. Lunn 2015.
16. Koller 2014a.
17. Paice 2007, 390.
18. For a bibliographic outline see Koller 2014b.
19. Lunn 2015.
20. Antier 2008a; Michel 2014, 192-193.
21. Arnoulet 1984, 48.
22. Michel 1982.
23. Koller 2008, 114; Lunn 2015; Michel 2014, 191; Strachan 2004, 4. As is quite imaginable, different sources rarely coincide; we have mostly relied on Koller 2008 and 2014b.
24. Gastaud, Yahi and Blanchard 2014, 121.
25. Joly 2009, 201.
26. Fogarty 2008, 289.
27. Olusoga along with Lunn says that “the evidence for this policy is overwhelming.” (Olusoga 2014, 194-195) According to Lunn the West African soldiers’ casualty rate was two and a half times higher than that of French soldiers (Lunn 1999, 140-147). A view also shared by Koller 2008, 119-122. Marc Michel believes these conclusions debatable (2016, 26-27).
28. Antier and Le Corre 2008; Galic 2013.
29. Mann 2006; Fogarty 2008.
30. Killingray 1979, 421-427.
31. Das 2011 and 2014; Morton-Jack 2015.
32. Collar 2013; Koller 2001; Le Naour 2003; Wigger 2017.
33. Michel 2016, 26.
34. Koller 2014b; Moyd 2016.
35. Ross 2002, 2004; Samson 2012.

36. Deppe 1919.
37. Lettow-Vorbeck 1920; English translation: *My Reminiscences of East Africa* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1919). For a critical appraisal of English language literature on the East African war see Vandervort 2009.
38. Strachan 2004, 182-183.
39. Mabilia Mantuba-Ngoma and Ndaywel Nziem 2015; Mitchell 2014.
40. Samson 2012.
41. See for example the special issue of *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 255, 2014/3, dedicated to the French colonies in the Indian Ocean during WWI.
42. Hodges and Griffin 1999; Pesek 2015.
43. Stapleton 2006; Moyd 2016; Pesek 2017.
44. Grundlingh, 1987; Echenberg 1991; Lunn 1999; Page 1999.
45. Gewalt 2015.
46. Lucas 2014; Chrétien 2016.
47. Maghraoui 2004, 17; Aldrich and Hilliard 2010, 528.
48. Le Van Ho 2014.
49. Koller 2008, 113; 38,000 according to Cornwell 2014, 257.
50. Aldrich and Hilliard 2010, 528; Gastaud, Yahi and Blanchard 2014.
51. Gastaud, Yahi and Blanchard 2014.
52. Ma 2012; Xu 2017, 6.
53. Xu 2005.
54. Xu 2005.
55. Stonvall 2003.
56. Markovits 2010, 34.

57. Nasson 2007.
58. Di Girolamo 1995; Mozzati 2006; Di Pasquale 2009 and 2018.
59. Pesek 2017.
60. Cornwell 2014, 256-257.
61. Falola and Ezekwem 2014, 95.
62. Michel 2013, 2014 and 2016; see also Barjot 2016.
63. Phillips and Killingray 2003; Gewald 2007.
64. Phillips 2014.
65. At present, the best studies still remain Pankhurst 1975, Jama Mohamed 1999 and Patterson and Pyle 1983. Some references to this event are also found in Uoldelul Chelati Dirar 2006.
66. Bambona 2012.
67. Freitag, Pétriat and Strohmeier 2016.
68. The conference was held on Sept. 30th-Oct. 1st 2016 and was organised by Addis Ababa University, the Centre Français des Études Éthiopiennes, the University of Macerata, the University of Pavia and the University of Roma Tre.
69. Without taking into consideration the even more numerous initiatives dedicated to the global dimension of WWI, the list of recent conferences on Africa and the First World War remains impressive, as can be seen from the following non exhaustive list: Berlin, Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from the South*, 7-9 Jun. 2007; Kew, London, The National Archives, The Great War in Africa Association, *The Great War East Africa Conference, 2012*, 14 Jul. 2012; Reims, Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, *Les Troupes Coloniales et la Grande Guerre*, 7-8 Nov. 2013; Kew, London, The Great War in Africa Association, *The Great War in Africa Conference, 2013*, 8-9 Nov. 2013; Lisbon, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, The Great War in Africa Association, *The Great War East Africa Conference, 2014*, 14-15 Jul. 2014; Bayreuth, Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, *Catastrophe or Catalyst? African and African Diasporas' Visions Arising from World War One*, 2-4 Oct. 2014; Paris, Musée de l'Armée, *L'AFN dans la Première Guerre Mondiale*, 15 Oct. 2014; Kinshasa, Palais du

Peuple, *Les Congolais et la Première Guerre mondiale*, 17-20 Nov. 2014; Rabat, Archives du Maroc, *Le Maghreb et l'Afrique Subsaharienne dans la Grande Guerre: sources et archives*, 28 Nov. 2014; Paris, Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, *La guerre des Autres: les colonies dans la Première Guerre mondiale. Traces, récits et mémoires*, 1-3 Dec. 2014; Aix-en-Provence, IMAf, *La Première Guerre mondiale et l'Afrique*, 5 Dec. 2014; Bruxelles, Université Saint-Louis, *Une guerre oubliée? Les colonies d'Afrique Centrale dans la Première Guerre mondiale*, 16-17 Dec. 2014; *Markaz Tārīkh Miṣr al-Mu'āṣir, Miṣr fi al-Ḥarb al-Ālamiyya al-Ūlā* [Egypt in the First World War], 18 Dec. 2014; St Cross College, Oxford, *Africa in the Great War: Comparative Perspectives*, workshop, 27 Feb. 2015; Paris, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, *Aux marges du conflit? L'empire colonial dans la Première Guerre mondiale. Terrains, hommes et propagande*, 4-5 Jun. 2015; Ouagadougou, Centre National des Archives (CAN), *Le centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale. Le recrutement des Tirailleurs Sénégalais, leur retour au pays, le mythe*, 12 Jun. 2015; Stellenbosch, *The Great War in Africa Conference, 2015*, 29-30 Jun. 2015; London, SCOLMA-UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa, *There Came a Darkness: Africa, Africans and World War I*, 17 Jul. 2015; Dakar, Institut des mondes africains, *The Great War in Africa: Economic, Cultural and Political Consequences of the World War I on African Societies*, 19-24 Oct. 2015; London, Great War in Africa Association, *Great War in Africa Conference, 2016*, 3-4 May 2016; Paris, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, *Afrique du Nord et Afrique subsaharienne dans la Grande Guerre (1918-1918)*, 12-14 Sep. 2016; Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University, *The First World War: from Tripoli to Mogadishu (1911-1924)*, 30 Sep.-1 Oct. 2016; Paris, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, *Sortie de guerre et colonie*, 8-9 Dec. 2017; Pavia, Università di Pavia, *La Prima Guerra mondiale nelle colonie italiane*, workshop, 17-18 Dec. 2017.

70. The Department of History of Addis Ababa organised two fruitful conferences on the history of Greater Eastern Africa in the 1980s by bringing together African historians from universities of the regions, as well as a big international conference on African history in the 2000s together with the African Historical Association. Each time the unit of analysis was the nation-state.

71. On these topics, see Calchi Novati 1985 and 1992; Erlich 2014; Goglia and Grassi 1981; Nicolosi 2002 and 2017.

72. Andurain and Drieu 2017; Compagnon and Purseigle 2016.
73. Manning 2013.
74. Bley and Kremers 2014, 17-18.
75. Gerwarth and Manela 2014a, 2; Freitag 2014, 24.
76. Dramé 2016.
77. Şaul and Royer, 2001; Royer 2003.
78. Killingray 1998 and 2010.
79. Hock 2017, 23.
80. Wringley 1980, 332.
81. Aksakal 2008, 77; Caccamo 2015; Cardini and Valzania 2014; Chiti 2017; Vandervort 2015, 1124. For a recent contribution on WWI in Libya see also Dumasy 2017.
82. Slight 2014.
83. Berhe 2016 and 2017; Labanca 2012.
84. McGregor 2006, 217; Ruiz 2013/2014; Fawaz 2014, 1976.
85. Manela 2001.
86. Slight 2010.
87. Ciasca 1938, 353.
88. Colosimo 1959, 68-69.
89. Da Riva and Biocca 2016.
90. Uoldelul Chelati Dirar 2011.
91. Berhe 2018; Monzali 1996 and 2017; Malgeri 2003.
92. Volterra 2005; Zaccaria 2012.
93. On Ethiopian history during WWI see Ficquet and Smidt 2014.
94. Pankhurst 1975.
95. Champeaux 1997.

96. The German-educated Täsäma Ešäté, one of the junior officials of the government, eventually became close to the young prince. The half-German Hall family, mentioned in the chapter by Gilkes and Plaut, was close to Iyasu. For a brief profile of the Hall family, see Holtz 2005. The half-German Adolf Mayer (ዳዕቶ-ብግር in Amharic) was also a well-known confidant of the ruler. For his brief profile, see Makeda Ketcham and Wolbert Smidt 2007.

97. Shiferaw Bekele 2014.

98. Poincaré 1946, 14-15; Watson 1974, 307.

99. Hess 1963.

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