This is the first of a series of talks I'm giving exploring the African perspective of the First World War. By African, I include those present in Africa at the time who saw themselves as African or who were born or resident in Africa. This includes black, white, Indian and Arab, people whose vested interests and attachments to the war differed, sometimes considerably to those who came in from Europe, Asia and elsewhere to participate in the struggle between the great European powers. It, however, excludes the war in the North which has a greater association with the European and Middle Eastern struggles than sub-Saharan Africa. I should also point out that by impact, I am not only focusing on the post-war consequences of the war, but also on what happened in Africa during the war.

There was and still is some debate about the seriousness of the European powers in keeping the African continent out of the war. British and German documents talk about the clause in the 1885 Berlin Act which agreed the neutrality of the Congo Basin in the event of a conflict between the two countries. However, this clashed with Britain's aim of putting enemy wireless stations out of action as quickly as possible. Neutrality could not be expected even if small aggressions were undertaken.

In addition, neither country issued instructions to their African territories informing them of the home authority's preference for neutrality. Britain had notified its territories of the possible outbreak of war at the end of July advising that no action be taken, although in the early hours of 30 July 1914, the Imperial troops present on African soil in West and South Africa were ordered to mobilise. On notifying the territories that war had indeed broken out, no instructions were given leading to the natural assumption that the Defence Plans had to be put into action. Germany, similarly, notified its territories but not all administrators were informed of the state of war as noted by the correspondence between the German administrator in southern German East Africa and his British counterpart at Karonga in Nyasaland.

The only European country which seemed serious about neutrality was Belgium, which issued instructions on 4 August 1914 that defensive positions were to be taken. The Portuguese were persuaded by Britain to remain neutral for military reasons and the French prepared for action invading Togoland on 6 August 1914.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the first days and weeks were marked by confusion. Locally, it was not believed that the territories would go to war and if so, that black forces would be involved in this struggle between the white powers. There was general agreement, at least in East, Central and Southern Africa, that the Imperial powers had to work together to ensure the superiority of the white man, and that fighting each other would undermine their position.

Despite this feeling, many rushed to enlist. Martial law was declared and enemy aliens rounded up. Friends disowned friends. Although in both German East Africa and South Africa, enemy and rebels were allowed to retain weapons for protection in the event of a black uprising if they gave an oath of neutrality. But as the war progressed, so these concessions were removed. The sinking of the Lusitania on 7 May 1915 marked the turning point in South Africa towards anti-German feeling. Some, such as the consuls, were repatriated to their home countries.

For the white residents in the territories, they were torn as to where their loyalties lay. Should they return to Europe to help defend the mother- or fatherland or should they remain to protect their

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1 Gorges, The Great War in West Africa
2 Samson 59
3 Gorges
5 CS Nicholls
homestead, and if the latter, should they enlist to defend the territory or stay on their newly
developed farms which were just beginning to be productive? In South Africa, contrary to other
African territories, there was a group, the Boers, who saw the outbreak of war as an opportunity to
obtain their independence from Britain.

Action was not long in coming to Africa. Mention has already been made of French troops invading
Togoland on 6 August and this was supported independently by the British forces entering into
surrender discussions with the local German authorities the following day. By the end of August,
Togoland was out of the conflict. On 8 August, the British navy bombed the wireless station at Dar
es Salaam in East Africa and not long after, there were attacks across the borders from German East
Africa into surrounding territories: 15 August into British East Africa, 22 August into Congo,
Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa. There is some question whether all these actions were part
of military strategy or whether some, such as that against Portuguese East Africa, were
opportunistic actions as part of longer ongoing disagreements.

On the German South West Africa - Union of South Africa border, there was a sighting of German
troops on Union territory at Nakob. Whether this was a genuine incursion or whether the border
line, known to be vaguely agreed, was purposefully misjudged for political reasons, will remain one
of the unanswered questions of the Great War for many years to come. When the South African
rebellion erupted in September 1914, the Germans in South West Africa, rather than take the
opportunity to attack their South African neighbour, chose instead to invade Portuguese Angola to
the north, where the main action took place at Naulila.

Where British Imperial forces were present, these were mobilised in anticipation of the outbreak of
war, whilst the local defence and police forces under Colonial Office control were mobilised on the
declaration of war. With the other territories following suite, this brought all races into armed
service: the King's African Rifles in East and Central Africa, the West African Field Force in Gold
Coast and Nigeria, the Force Publique in Congo, and the various Indian and local company police
forces in Portuguese East Africa. In some territories, volunteers eagerly offered their support as in
British East Africa (incl Americans and South Africans), Nyasaland and Gold Coast.

As the war progressed, more men were needed to replace those lost, to expand the fighting forces to
cover wider terrain and to support those fighting. Where volunteers could not be obtained, other
means were resorted to. Interviews with twelve KiKamba veterans undertaken by Gerald Rillings in
the early 1980s but only translated this year, 2014, give some insight into how local blacks found
themselves in the armed forces. These resonate with what Melvin Page discovered in Nyasaland in
1973 when he interviewed veterans in Malawi, David Killingray's study of the carriers in West
Africa and Albert Grundlingh in South Africa.

Kilonzo Mbeva says 'I did not volunteer. We were rounded up here.' In contrast, Ntheketha Nyete
noted: 'A white man came here and recruited us. ...We were called by name. They had rounded up
the young men who paid taxes and we were told that married men were not desirable, that they
wanted those who were not married. They said a married man would escape from KAR because his
woman would always be on his mind. There were one hundred of us from Ngovi’s area.

Those joining the King's African Rifles had varied experiences too, which can be linked to when
they joined. Daudi Musyimi Muthwa joined 4/2 KAR Headquarters; one of the battalions formed
before the outbreak of war. 'I joined KAR in Machakos. I was not forced. They said that there was a
letter from KAR that had asked for strong young men to join the war effort. So, they called us and
asked if we wanted to join. I was strong and so I was the first volunteer. There were about eighty
of us. So we were then taken to Nairobi.'

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6 D Killingray & J Matthews, Beasts of burden: British West African carriers in the First World WarCanadian
Journal of African studies vol 13. no 1/2 (1979)
Muindi Muindi: 'We volunteered to be employed because of poverty. ... So I said I would go and try to get in even if I died because I did not have any wealth. I went there because I did not have anything. When we started, we were ready for work so we passed the shooting accuracy test quickly and let the fools get fired and go home. We were hired in Nairobi before the war.'

During 1916 and into 1917, the King's African Rifles were expanded and new battalions formed. One of these was 1/7 KAR into which Mwanga Mbiti was recruited. He accuses the District Commissioner, John Ainsworth, an Englishman of lying to black people. 'Ainsworth had been pushed by the Germans so he told the sub-Chief that he had a visitor from Europe who wanted to see Kamba music performances. ... he would then give the locals aid. ... Then Ainsworth came with four vehicles full of police and doctors. The doctors performed tests. Those who were too young or too old were separated and those young men who did not have the energy to qualify were put in their own group. We thought we were being grouped to get aid. Those who did not qualify to go were told that they would receive aid and then the police surrounded us. ... With police on both sides of the group, we took the road that goes through Komarock as we sang the same song we sang at Mitaboni.'

Those working for missionaries were also involved in war work. Musyoki Nzyima worked for a Scottish Missionary and did not get involved in the war other than supervising building work. He says 'I only worked for the church, praying for the war until we came back home. After the war, I came home. We prayed for the war, not the sick or wounded. We prayed for the war to end and for the British to win.'

Apart from giving insight into how the men came to be enlisted, these interviews provide insight into the relationships between groups. They continue with general overviews of the campaign - not in as much detail and end with how the men were demobilised - either being shipped to Mombasa or marching back to Nairobi whichever appeared easiest based on their location. A few mention payment for their services. The men may not have known much of what was happening concerning the war, but they were aware of why they were involved. This was no different to many of the white accounts especially as the war in East Africa dragged on.

One of the unusual features of the West and East African campaigns was the interchange of black troops between British and German forces. This was first recognised when the British disbanded a KAR unit for economic reasons in 1911. During the war, it was found that these men had subsequently enlisted with the Germans, such as 2 KAR soldier 103 Juma. As German askari were captured or realised they were on the losing side, they volunteered to fight for those who captured them. Gorges comments on this in his *The Great War in West Africa* and 6 KAR was specially formed of captured German askari. Similarly, blacks in the Portuguese armed forces deserted to the Germans when Lettow-Vorbeck invaded into Portuguese East African territory. This technically contravened Article 6 of the Hague Convention which stated that prisoners could not be employed in acts directly supporting the war. But, it was seemed accepted practice recognising that black troops gave their allegiance to the the strongest force and those who paid them. Kaziibule Dabi, a German askari who was prisoner in Nyasaland, told Page in 1972: 'They said that we should become soldiers. We did not want to enlist for them but the colonel forced us to enlist. We asked them how much they would pay us if we enlisted. They said one pound, one shilling and four pence. We told them that we would not accept that. We told them that when we were on the German side we used to receive three pounds and ten shillings'. Diarists of the time record instances of surrendered soldiers willingly taking on other tasks such as stretcher-bearing. As an aside, this movement of men makes ascertaining exact numbers of those who served rather difficult.

From the KiKamba and other accounts it is clear that the stage of the war and the role one fulfilled...
determined one's experiences of the war, chances of survival and memories. Geoffrey Hodges notes that there were four phases of recruiting: the pre-war system where labour was partly voluntary and partly compulsory, general compulsion through the 1915 Native Followers Recruitment Ordnance which enabled Europeans and Asians to be conscripted, the mass levy from March to November 1917 and then a return to the pre-war system. More work needs to be done on the local accounts which do exist in terms of when/where they enlisted as I am sure this will accord with the phases of compulsion demonstrating that there were other reasons for individual involvement in the campaigns and not purely pressure from the coloniser. For the South African coloured, it was a case of king first, then Britain and Empire and finally, South Africa they were fighting for. Of the armed forces in East Africa, it is estimated that 11,189 died, compared to 95,000 carriers and labourers.

Reactions to the war varied. On the one hand, there was complete support as evidenced by the Mossi warriors in the Gold Coast who volunteered their services, and when those were declined, they provided gifts to defray the cost of the war. By the end of the campaign in West Africa, they had contributed £60,000 covering the total British cost of the campaign, and the monthly administrative cost of £3,000. Similarly, chiefs in the southern African protectorates made contributions to the King's Fund and towards purchasing aeroplanes, as did white settlers. Mzee Ali, an ex-slave raider who had been commandeered by the Germans in their occupation of German East Africa, said of the outbreak of war. 'It was difficult to rest. The scale and horror of this war had magnified out of all proportion in our minds. Instead of comfort my mind was hurled back many years, when the Germans had first conquered our lands... Breathing deeply to control my nervousness, I determined to put my life in my training and in our officers.'

However, pressures on the men and environment where food was requisitioned led to rebellions and uprisings. Mention has been made of the South Africans who rose in revolt at the start of the war to obtain their independence. Others, such as John Chilembwe in Nyasaland rose in February 1915, Murray's British South African Police at Christmas 1916 over conditions and the Makonde in Portuguese East Africa in 1917. Other political rebellions took place in West Africa, in Somaliland, Congo and further north. These latter, though, were part of on-going long-term struggles between coloniser and colonised.

In Nyasaland, the outbreak of war led to confusion and rumours of punitive expeditions. This resulted in communities such as at Nkhotakota 'deserting to the bush' around Zomba, the news of war brought fears of "the old horrors of war" which were remembered from the last days of the slave raiders. The fear and terror that 'this war would wipe out all the human race' resonated with the missionary and Watch Tower preachings of the time and led in part to the Chilembwe uprising. An old mzee (man) I met in Tanzania near Holili on the Kenyan border told me in 2011 that his family did not suffer in the war as they fled to the mountains. Later he recalled the returning men desperately wanting bananas. We estimated that he was about four years old at the time.

Despite the horrors of war, there were positives. The war brought opportunity for work, as some of those who volunteered for service noted. 'Even quite small boys were able to find odd jobs', a UMCA missionary recorded - They did it for the money. Although encouraged to stick to their own, mixing with men from other countries and areas allowed a sharing of ideas. This was to have repercussions after the war with the development of political movements. In 1928, RW Hemstead noted that the war had taught blacks the 'power of organisation'. Jomo Kenyatta had served in the Public Works Department and Harry Thuku had learned 'how to print maps and sketches of war

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8 Hodges, 35
9 Paice
10 Gorges
11 Mzee Ali
12 M. Page, thesis 29
13 Page 197
14 Hodges 188-189, 197
positions’ in his role as compositor and machine man with *The Leader* in British East Africa. These skills were to assist with later political activities. Other senior political figures of the 1920s had also served in various capacities during the war. Jonathan Okwirri, a head man who had been involved with the Carrier Corps in Mombasa, summed it up: ‘When the word began to go round that Kenya was to become a colony, those of us who had some understanding, at least could read and write, [knew that] a colony means a settlement containing foreigners [and that] finally the land would fall into the foreigners’ hands’.16

White settlers in British East Africa (Kenya) were able to leverage power through committees councils, and commissions. 'The Native Registration Ordinance of 1916 introduced the *kipande* or identity token, which was enacted, and became a major grievance [in 1919]. Ironically, it was vital to the running of the Carrier Corps, particularly in ensuring the men got their pay'.17 The settlers also pushed for Crown Colony status, which led to conflict with the Indian population.

The end of the war saw towns destroyed. Mzee Ali says of Tabora: 'Many old houses and landmarks were gone. The boma we had built so long ago still stood. The German flag now replaced by the British flag that fluttered above. On the hills west of Tabora were a large number of war graves - Belgian, German and British soldiers... The advent of the British in our country caused much confusion. They took over the administration and introduced British rule, once again with strange new laws and customs.' Ali's account continues setting out how the more relaxed British regime impacted on life, leading to illegal activities as men tried to survive economically.

There were strikes across the continent as pointed out by Yoshikuni in his article on Zimbabwe in the post-war years. He notes there was a sharp increase in prices from pre-war days and a stagnation in wages during the war led to a drop in the real-wage to less than half the pre-war level.18 Black workers were unable to purchase blankets and clothing which led to unrest whilst whites fought to retain their skilled labour positions. In all territories, German and Austrian businessmen forfeited their businesses. In German South West Africa, half the German population was repatriated. The decision to retain the other half was to maintain some sort of white numerical superiority. The process by which men were selected for repatriation was based on reputation and complaints received which opened the floodgates for local scores to be settled.19

It was also decided to settle demobilised British soldiers in occupied territories and the colonies. Overall this was not successful, as little had been done to prepare both sides for the new challenges and many had no idea of farming. The distribution of land to white soldiers had a negative impact on local blacks which added to their political developments.

In West Africa, the absence of men as carriers in East Africa had a mixed impact. In some places, food shortages were experienced due to the lack of manpower on the farms, whilst in others such as Freetown, the war itself had seen unemployment fall, but this returned with demobilisation.20 The employment situation was worsened by the flu epidemic which was greater in the industrial centres.

Tomkins has traced one of the early instances of the flu epidemic to Sierra Leone in West Africa. It is believed to have arrived on HMS *Mantua* on 15 August 1918 where it morphed into its virulent form. This instance occurred almost simultaneously with one in New England and Brest (France). Freetown alone lost four per cent of its population in three weeks, one and a half per cent of Lagos died, Gold Coast lost four per cent of its population and the Gambia suffered 10,000 deaths from

15 Hodges, 197
16 Hodges, 198
17 Hodges, 200
18 T Yoshikuni, 'Strike action and self help associations: Zimbabwean worker protest and culture after World War 1’ in *Journal of South African studies*, 442
19 German repatriation
20 Killingray
influenza. In September and October, the virus reached South Africa and moved up the supply and communication lines with devastating speed. An estimated seven per cent of black mine workers in Southern Rhodesia died, as did over five per cent of the population of Bechuanaland and East Africa. The higher figure for Southern Rhodesia was due to its 'unexpected' nature, 'where official and press reports conveyed a portrait of complete social and economic dislocation'.21 It should be noted that Southern and Northern Rhodesia were managed by the British South African Company rather than an Imperial power. A repercussion of the flu outbreak was a reduction in mining output adding additional pressure to economic recovery.

Whilst the epidemic was working its worst, the politicians were meeting in Versailles. At these discussions, the borders of Africa were determined as we know them today with the German territories becoming mandates split between Britain, France, Belgium and South Africa. Portugal received a small piece of land it had long desired. The most significant change was perhaps the formation of Rwanda and Burundi, territories split off from German East Africa.

As part of this arrangement, Britain was given a stretch of land to complete the Cape to Cairo Railway which had been started in the 1880s. However, due to the advances made in air power in Africa during the war, and that the first cross-Africa flight occurred in 1922, a decision was made to forego completing the rail link.

The war in Africa was regarded as insignificant - sideshows of lesser importance than those in the Balkans and Asia. A few participants wrote their memoirs but many did not. With those in Europe paying little attention to what had happened and the overarching need to survive following the droughts which ravished areas already devoid of food, the campaigns in Africa all but disappeared from collective memory. This is one of the lasting impacts of the war on Africa - the voices of those whose territories were affected remain largely hidden. Moving forward, it is clear that people who have until now been regarded as 'puppets' should be recognised as participating for specific reasons of which they were fully aware.

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21 S Tomkins, Colonial administration in British Africa during the influenza epidemic 1918-19 in Canadian journal of African studies, 1994 28:1 71