



GERMAN-ALLIED ENTANGLEMENTS IN WEST AFRICA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Abstract: The African front of the First World War (1914–1918) was not only an aspect of the extra-European theatres of the conflict, but also a “colonial war”, aimed at dispossession and possession of territories. Notwithstanding the magnitude of the colonial campaigns, scholars like W. O. Henderson have dismissed them as ‘side-shows’ that should be relegated to a footnote. This was due to much emphasis on the quantity of mobilization and casualties rather than the quality of the skirmishes. Those that have paid necessary attention to the colonial theaters of the Great War, such as Hew Strachan and Melvin Page, have focused mainly on the spectacular issues, such as the mobilization and battles, conquests and their legacies, with little attention paid to other fundamental aspects of the First World War. This study is, therefore, designed to address this lopsidedness in the historiography of the First World War by accentuating the significance of the Africa theatres and by shifting focus from quantity to quality of the conflict. It deals with the Franco-British transimperial cooperation in unleashing transimperial violence against Germany in West Africa during the First World War, with a view to analyzing the practice of uncivilized warfare by the belligerent powers (which violated the international laws of war) and what they revealed on the nature and the dynamics of the First World War on the extra-European theatres, coupled with the treatment of enemy subjects and properties; women and children; neutral subjects and missionaries, as well as the impact of the colonial theatres on the common European interests and racial hierarchy in Africa. Primary archival materials from the Public Records and Archives Administrations Department (PRAAD) Accra, Ghana; National Archives in Nigeria (Ibadan and Kaduna); and Archives Nationales du Togo (ANT) provided the data for this historical reconstruction. These were augmented with information generated from the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. It argues that fighting an inter-imperial war in Africa exacerbated the concomitant violence and led to the abandonment of alleged standards of ‘civilised’ warfare; and that a critical reading of British discourse in light of British practice tells us something significant about the double standards, racial hierarchies and their effects. The study is an important contribution to historiographies on the First World War and colonial wars.