

Congo at war(s)

Special issue of *Journal of Belgian History*
December 2016

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As the centenary of the Great War has been offering its amount of manifestations, publications or exhibitions in Belgium and in neighbouring European countries, it must be underlined that the global dimension, included in the qualification of this four-year period as a 'World War', has been largely underrepresented, when not absent or ignored, in Belgium. The diagnostic might sound too categorical, but it reveals the difficulty to imagine the war experience outside specific historical canons. It could be explained by the tradition largely developed in the 1920s (the 'trench experience') and the broader inscription into the memory management under the leadership of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, into the diplomatic negotiations results and conflicting chronological frames. Commemorations raise a lot of attention to forgotten wars: the Congolese battlefields, the Congolese war tributes and its immediate and lasting effects on the making of Belgian imperial project cry for a renewal appraisal.

Since 2013, it has been established that most of what we know of what happened in Congo, what was Congo contributions and what were the consequences of the war on Congo future remain largely dated either to 1980s historical research on archives and oral sources available at that moment, or to the 1920s and 1930s printed material produced by the witnesses of the events. On the same token, the access to new archival series and the development of new research questions beyond military history ask for a recalibrated comparative understanding of the African dimension.

This issue wants to bring into perspective unpublished contributions to document both wars experiences in Belgian Congo (to be extended to Ruanda and Burundi, if needed). It shall address questions such as neutrality, colonial governance, police activities and socio-demographical consequences of recruitment, forced/coerced labour, resistances and revolts, geopolitics in Sub-Saharan Africa. It excludes the discussion of remembrance, memory and commemoration, as the hard facts need to be known and reinterpreted into a frame of analysis that breaks the exceptionality of the Congo & Belgium experience.

Manifestation of interest: December 1st, 2015.

A 2500-sign proposal, related to the issues mentioned above must be sent to the editor.

Note to the authors is available at:

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