

FIGHTING ON THE EQUATOR. WAR VIOLENCE AND COLONIAL EXPERIENCES AMONG CONGOLESE TROOPS DURING WORLD WAR I

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The Centennial of the First World War provides many new insights on the materiality of the war experience. Although most of the commemorations focus on European battlefields, there is a need to take the opportunity to document war violence in Africa, especially on the front where the *Force Publique*-troops were engaged. Beyond the great figures of the military commandment, this contribution links it to the re-appraisal of imperial history in dialogue with recent exhibitions dedicated to black soldiers of the *Force Publique*. Due to documentation constraints, it attempts to offer a fresh analysis of military history, tracing African presence. It takes a look at the war experiences of European and Congolese soldiers of the *Force Publique* in order to understand why this colonial army was still regarded as very violent on the battlefields by the enemy and local populations of the Great Lakes. Inspired by historiographical perspectives of World War I in Europe, it focuses on modern weapons, wounds, civil populations, cases of rapes and massacres, cultural representations of the enemy and internal dynamics of combat units. It argues that World War I campaigns in Africa were pursuing efforts of colonial pacification inside and outside Congo, and that they resembled colonial warfare with the spreading of small flying columns of African soldiers led by European officers and non-commissioned officers.

I. Introduction¹

In 1920, at the first Belgian colonial congress, Iwan Grenade, who witnessed cases involving atrocities when he was president of the Appeal Court of Boma in the 1900s, lauded the new image of the *Force Publique*, the colonial army of Belgian Congo:²

“The Congolese soldier is our masterpiece. He is no longer a savage dressed in a uniform, an automaton of the gun, a brute obsessed with massacre and pillage: he is a man physically and morally changed by military education, and no inhabitants of his village will get to this stage if they are left alone (...). This soldier, only trained for interior policing, turned out to be a very brave warrior. His loyalty to the flag is a case in point. In comparison with so many armies, no desertion was observed in the campaigning corps. Brave in combat, facing fatigue and deprivation with determination, he suffered from the cold in the mountains, the torrid heat in the grasslands, diseases everywhere, thirst and even hunger, which is, for a black man, the most cruel ordeal. He endured it all but carried on and went through this never-ending war with no sign of impatience or weariness. He is a splendid type of soldier”³.

“The *Force Publique*, our masterpiece”: after decades of colonial scandals regarding the “red

rubber” regime of King Leopold II, this formula contributed to the supposedly new administration of Belgian Congo as a “model colony”, emerging after World War I. In 1951, former colonial officer Léon Anciaux also asserted that no massacres, no pillages and no atrocities were witnessed among African ranked and non-ranked soldiers during the African campaigns of World War I⁴. Anciaux echoed a positive memory reconstruction of the *Force Publique* (FP), which was portrayed as a duly “civilised army” which no longer used unjustified armed violence against civilians.

Official narratives of Belgian Congo have often taken for granted that the elaboration of the *Charte Coloniale* and the take-over of the scandalous colony of Leopold II by the Belgian State in 1908 put an end to an unorganised deployment of violence as a colonial tool to civilise colonised populations of the Congo: violence would then be legitimated and supervised by rational and moderate colonial decrees. FP fighting during World War I in East Africa was considered as a temporary yet justified digression before the advent of paternalistic and humanitarian tools of colonial administration. Such narratives imply that the Belgian Congo was utterly pacified in 1914 and that the absence of massive revolts during World War I was a sign that the colony was all unified against the German enemy. Yet, the warfare, war mobilisation and combats in the Kivu region (East Congo) as well

1. This article has benefited from the comments of anonymous reviewers as well as improvements from the editorial board. I thank them for it.

2. Iwan Grenade was a capital colonial magistrate of the Congo Free State and then of Belgian Congo (1899-1922). He became a prominent figure of the Colonial Council in the 1920s. OCTAVE LOUWERS, “Iwan Grenade”, in *Biographie coloniale belge*, vol. II, 1951, col. 436-439. “Iwan Grenade”, fiche matricule : <http://tethys.sipr.ucl.ac.be:8080/Prosopographie/main.jsp?action=detailler&index=0>

3. “Le soldat congolais est notre chef d’œuvre. Ce n’est pas un sauvage affublé d’un uniforme, un automate du fusil, une brute obsédée du désir de massacrer et de piller: c’est un homme que l’éducation militaire a transformé moralement autant que physiquement et qu’elle a poussé à un point que les habitants de son village n’atteindront pas avant longtemps s’ils sont laissés à eux-mêmes (...). Ce soldat, qui n’avait été instruit qu’en vue du maintien de l’ordre à l’intérieur, se révéla d’emblée guerrier valeureux. Sa fidélité au drapeau peut être donnée en exemple. La désertion qui sévit dans tant d’armées fut inconnue au corps expéditionnaire. Vaillant au combat, stoïque dans les fatigues et les privations, il souffrit du froid dans les montagnes, de la chaleur torride dans la plaine, des maladies partout, de la soif et parfois de la faim ce qui est, pour un noir, la plus cruelle épreuve. Il endura tout, mais il dura et arriva au bout de cette interminable guerre sans avoir donné un signe d’impatience ou de lassitude. C’est un type de soldat splendide”. FERNAND DELICOUR, “Le problème social chez les indigènes de la Force publique congolaise”, in *Bulletin des séances l’IRCB*, vol. XVII, 1946, p. 934-940.

4. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms prestigieux de Tabora et Mahenge : texte de la conférence donnée à Anvers, le jeudi 15 février 1951*, Anvers, 1951, p. 29.

as East Africa campaigns from August 1914 until 1917 did not end the violent era of the colony. It continued and deepened. In important ways, the World War I campaigns in Africa represented a continuation of colonial wars: besides the great battles leading to Tabora and Mahenge, the conflict was also characterised by many forms of colonial repression and pacification of civilians in the Kivu and Tanganyika regions and also of civilians in Ruanda and Urundi when the Belgian occupation troops were stationed there from April 1916. The idea of “a peaceful colony blooming with order and tranquility”⁵ must thus be challenged, as 7,000 to 8,000 FP soldiers were still in charge of law enforcement in all districts. There are continuities between pre-war colonial pacification and the intensification of colonial domination during World War I: pacification from 1914-1918 appears as the peak of the colonial scramble begun in 1885, and the “culmination of the reign of brutal violence” in colonial situations⁶. As with other colonial armies, the FP still faced one of its core difficulties: the use of coercion and violence as a tool of colonial domination.

In order to question the legacy of colonial wars, the combats in the Great Lakes region and East Africa from 1914 to 1916 and the following military occupation of Ruanda-Urundi must be considered within a larger pattern of colonial warfare: Belgian troops had to face civil unrest in the Kivu mountains and were faced with a new stage of colonial conquest when they took control of the territories from

Ruanda-Urundi to Tabora. As the military backbone of the Belgian conquest, the FP has therefore been accused of many war crimes and atrocities with respect to military pacification, rubber exploitation and use of coercion against civil populations.

While military campaigns in East Africa seem to be of a lesser importance than the European trench fights, historians of World War I in Africa have shown how disruptive and violent they were for Great Lakes local societies and chiefdoms⁷. Following previous research on colonial wars and practices of violence⁸, this article aims to document the fighting experiences of Congolese soldiers during the African campaigns of World War I and the military occupation of Ruanda-Urundi with some broad investigation into official and personal archives. The military history of these African campaigns has been written in part with the help of the former Ministry of National Defence, with the publication *Les Campagnes Coloniales Belges, 1914-1918* in three volumes (1927-1932), i.e. more than 1,700 pages of military narrative⁹. Many memoirs of colonial officers also recount the monthly military proceedings of the East African campaigns, highlighting the positive participation of the Belgians in the so-called “fight for civilisation” and the glorification of General Charles Tombeur¹⁰. Yet those military narratives are often disembodied and do not take into account men’s experiences on the battlefields, as George Moulaert reminds us¹¹. In order to understand the war experiences of European

5. *Idem*, p. 29.

6. BILL FREUND, *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, quoted in Bill Nasson, “Chapter XVI...”, p. 476. This contribution focuses only on Belgian sources in order to provide a case study that sets the ambiguities and internal contradictions of post-1908 management of Congo. Further research in German, British and Portuguese sources would assess these first explorations.

7. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *Gitega, capitale du Burundi: une ville du Far West en Afrique orientale allemande, 1912-1916*, Paris, 2015.

8. LANCELOT ARZEL, “À la guerre comme à la chasse? Une anthropologie historique de la violence coloniale dans l’État indépendant du Congo (1885-1908)”, in CATHERINE LANNEAU, PIERRE-LUC PLASMAN AND PATRICIA VAN SCHUYLENBERGH (eds.), *L’Afrique belge aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles. Nouvelles recherches et perspectives en histoire coloniale*, Bruxelles, 2014, p. 145-159.

9. Ministère de la Défense nationale, Etat-Major Général de l’armée, Section historique, *Les campagnes coloniales belges, 1914-1918. Tome I. Introduction, les opérations du Cameroun, les opérations en Rhodésie, la période défensive à la frontière orientale* and *Tome II. La campagne de Tabora (1916)*, Bruxelles, 1927 and 1929.

10. Charles Tombeur was a prominent figure in World War I colonial battles on the Congolese side. He became general in 1916 and led the battle of Tabora. FERNAND DELICOUR, “Tombeur (Charles Marie Ernest)”, in *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer*, vol. IV, 1968, col. 1022-1026.

11. GEORGE MOULAERT, *La campagne du Tanganyika*, Bruxelles, 1934, p. 9.

officers – and to a far lesser extent of Congolese soldiers – personal accounts of the fighting are of great interest. Some memoirs were officially published, such as Pierre Daye's *Avec les vainqueurs de Tabora* (1918) or Puck Chaudoir's *Dans la brousse du Kivu* (1919)¹². Unpublished memoirs or personal papers of prominent Belgian colonial figures during World War I (Félix Fuchs, Josué Henry de la Lindi, Philippe Molitor and Pierre Ryckmans) may also be taken into account in investigating the violent practices of World War I¹³. This comprehensive understanding of World War I colonial battles is added to the Catholic diaries of the White Fathers Congregation, analysed by Jangu Candaciri in 1986: many settlements were located around Lakes Kivu and Tanganyika¹⁴. On the whole, historians should be very cautious about the colonial bias contained in these testimonies: they sometimes glorified their own experiences and often remained quiet about some violent aspects of the war, and the motivations and experiences of Congolese soldiers are thus harder to understand.

Besides photographs¹⁵ from this period – officially taken or staged by the new *Service de Propagande coloniale* of the Belgian Ministry of Colonies with Alphonse Cayen at its head¹⁶ – oral histories would be a final means to learn about Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian memories of the conflict. Recent academic meetings and the intervention of Congolese historians in the remembrance of World War I – campaigns are welcome in the writing of an *African* history of this period¹⁷.

II. World War I as a colonial war dealing with modernity

Since the late 19th century, the Great Lakes region has witnessed smaller colonial expeditions, some being peaceful such as in Ruanda, some being more aggressive such as in the Kivu region. However, the military operations led by the FP and its officers in 1914-1918 reached another level in terms of organisation and military services. The mobilisation of the Belgian colonial troops in 1914-1915 constituted a milestone. As early as September 1914, the European command had to organise many new services for the FP, such as rear services, logistics, health system, chaplaincy and a military justice system. They were aimed at making military expeditions more efficient and mobile during the invasion of Ruanda-Urundi and Tanganyika. Considering the vast territories of Belgian Congo, it is not surprising that there were many difficulties in achieving a well-organised system of supplies and rear services. It took more than a year and a half to make the military conquest of Ruanda-Urundi possible. At the beginning of the war, the FP was made up of 17,000 soldiers, with 178 officers and 235 non-commissioned officers (NCOs), but no major changes were implemented in its organisation. Legacies of colonial pacification were still at work in the military actions of Congolese soldiers. What may be said of the colonial fighters themselves? More than 800 Europeans served during the conflict, many of whom were transferred from the metropolitan army after Vice-Governor of the Oriental Province,

12. Pierre Daye's papers kept at the Museum of Literature contain, for example, photographs of his war experience and his memoirs besides his own published memoirs. The CegeSoma Pierre Daye papers are less interesting for the period of his life between 1914-1918. BERNARD DELCORD AND JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *Inventaire du Fonds Pierre Daye*, Bruxelles, 1989. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs de Tabora*, Paris, 1918 and PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse du Kivu*, Bruxelles, 1919.

13. PATRICIA VAN SCHUYLENBERGH, *La mémoire des Belges en Afrique centrale. Inventaire des Archives Historiques Privées du Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale de 1858 à nos jours*, Tervuren, 1997, and JACQUES VANDERLINDEN, *Inédits de P. Ryckmans avec une introduction et des notes*, Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, Mémoires, Bruxelles, vol. 49, 1988.

14. JANGU CANDACIRI, "L'effort de guerre (1914-1918): coup de grâce porté à la résistance des Bashi", in *Les réactions africaines à la colonisation en Afrique centrale. Actes du Colloque international d'histoire, Kigali, 06-10 mai 1985*, Ruhengeri, 1986, p. 222-241.

15. Regarding photographs of the Belgian military campaigns in German East Africa, see the article of Anne Cornetin in this issue.

16. ALPHONSE CAYEN, *Les campagnes belges d'Afrique 1914-1917. Cameroun-Est africain allemand*, Bruxelles, 1918, 24 f.f., F. BERLEMONT, "Cayen (Alphonse Louis Joseph)", in *Biographie coloniale belge*, vol. V, 1958, col. 136-139.

17. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTEN, *Gîtega....*

Justin Malfeyt, called for more white supervision of the FP in 1915. Many of the top-ranked officers had a solid colonial experience of war and pacification. Charles Tombeur served in the Uele district when Josué Henry was one of the prominent figures of the Afro-Arab campaign¹⁸. Armand Huyghé was a member of the Hanolet expedition in 1893-1894 and Danish Lieutenant-Colonel Frederik Olsen was already operating in the Ruzizi-Kivu region in the 1900s¹⁹. Less well-known European agents took part in the transition from the Congo Free State era to the Belgian Congo period, such as commander Lucien Hérion, who was in charge of the Luvungi post in the Ruzizi-Kivu region in 1905-1909, the Uvira post in 1909 and the Lulua section in the Tanganyika-Moero area in 1912-1914. During the offensive campaign he was at the head of the 9th Battalion of the North Brigade²⁰.

In itself, the colonial army was a coercive structure, which prevented any mutiny or disobedience. As soon as they entered the FP, Congolese soldiers were submitted to a very strict military regime. During the war itself, they experienced brutal "training" of their minds and bodies. To maintain the internal cohesion of the fighting groups, European officers used violent acts and few desertions were observed. According to Pierre Daye, he was quickly forced to "be harsh with them, even brutal"²¹. Puck Chaudoir, comparing Congolese soldiers to children, mentioned many times the very blurred morale of the troops: stationed in Kibari, he complained about Josué Henry's loosening paternalistic measures for soldiers and called for severe actions with them. In his opinion, the use of the *chicotte*, the local hippopotamus whip, was the only punishment Congo-

lese men could understand with no complaints²². Brutalised soldiers thus became more familiar with everyday violence and brutal management of other soldiers, porters and civilians.

In terms of violence, the industrialisation of the war in Africa also had an impact due to new gun equipment. In comparison with 'small colonial wars' of the early 20th century, battles in World War I involved many sophisticated arms, such as Hotchkiss machine guns, 47mm Nordenfeldt canons and 75mm Saint-Chamond mountain howitzers. This implies that European engineers were required, such as George Moulaert or Puck Chaudoir. While hand-to-hand fights were still experienced on the battlefields, many novelties, e.g. the deployment of seaplanes by lieutenant De Bueger on Lake Tanganyika, were changing the face of battles in Central Africa²³. These improvements in the use of modern weaponry gave birth to new types of combat in the air and on lakes, which the FP troops had never experienced before. The destruction of the 1200-ton *Graf von Götzen* steamer in July 1916 and the storming of Kigoma from Albertville base on 28 July 1916 are evidence of this. While the massive industrialisation of war had an impact on the bodies and minds of soldiers in Europe, the same applied to Africa, where local populations were terrified by the new sounds of air battles and shells, as well as by the wounds the soldiers got on the battlefields²⁴. While the modernisation of weaponry added another level to warfare in the Great Lakes region, the conflict can still be related to any other colonial war because of its slowness and the difficulties encountered. Military columns were facing environmental hardships in the Kivu region, and the Cameroon progress:

18. FERNAND DELICOUR, "Charles Tombeur", *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer*, Tome VI, 1968, col. 1022-1026; ARLETTE THURIAUX-HENNEBERT, *Inventaire Papiers Josué Henry de la Lindi, Lieutenant Général, Géologue (1869-1957)*, Tervuren, 1964, 235 p.

19. PAUL VAN DEN ABEELE, "Chevalier Armand Huyghé de Mahenge", *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, vol. IV, 1955, col. 415-422; ANDRÉ LEDERER, "Frederik Olsen", *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer*, vol. VI, 1968, col. 783-790.

20. MARTHE COOSEMANS, "Lucien Hériot", *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, vol. V, 1958, col. 418-420.

21. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 169.

22. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 94.

23. THÉOPHILE WAHIS, "La participation belge à la conquête du Cameroun et de l'Afrique Orientale Allemande", in *Congo*, 1920, p. 1-45.

24. JANGU CANDACIRI, "L'effort de guerre (1914-1918)...", p. 222-241; JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *Gitega...*

single files in bamboo forests on the Sabinio trail for Pierre Daye²⁵; 700-kilometre march in 41 days for Pierre Ryckmans²⁶; and mountain warfare in the Sebea passage. There were many direct battles during the four-year period such as the Kato battle on 2-3 July 1916, but all witnesses recall the ambush tactics they went through in the siege warfare of 1914-1915 when military posts of South Kivu were harassed by the troops of the *Hauptman* Max Wintgens, along the Ruzizi in the Luvungi camp, as well as later on in the concentric march towards Tabora in summer 1916 and in the military chase in Mahenge in October 1917.

This modernity implied an increase in violence and all-new war injuries to soldiers. According to Belgian authorities, the use of sophisticated arms and especially the expanding bullets such as “Dum-Dums” by the Germans, made the war worse than colonial wars, which were more accustomed to Albin guns and bullets. Puck Chaudoir was struck by the injuries, which his FP soldiers faced. In similar trench warfare experienced on the western front of Europe, the section of Lubafu and Khama mounts became a very explosive area between the Germans and the Belgians, who used machine guns and canons extensively. Chaudoir treated six wounded soldiers. One had a bullet in his head and fell into a coma: “his brain slowly leaked onto his neck; without the movement of his eyelids which rise and drop from time to time, we assumed that he was dead”. Another one had severe injuries: “Another, with blood on his lips, fierce, insisted on sitting down, retaining his guts which were falling out of a horrible wound with his hands”²⁷. Despite the very positive portrayal of military healthcare during the war, which was provided by the authorities, Chaudoir could only

bandage them very basically and treat them with a tiny flask of iodine, being too far away from immediate aid. In his report of 29 October 1914, doctor Sirigu, member of a flying hospital, treated the wounds inflicted by machine guns on lieutenant Karl Arrhenius and 29 FP soldiers²⁸. However, the deployment of violence did not keep the Belgians from showing some respect for dead bodies, as they buried the corpses of their fellow European officers Jacques de l'Épine d'Hulst and Robert Terlinden in October 1914, as well as the corpses of Tutsi warriors in the Kivu region in 1915²⁹.

The African campaigns of World War I also implied the quest of intelligence. The search for information on the enemy's side gave rise to many false rumours and involved violent dealings of suspicious individuals. This tense situation led to increased panic among FP soldiers and European officers and disregarded the supposed rule of protecting civilians from battles and combats. During the Kivu mountain battles, until April 1916, the use of spies was decisive and many killings occurred in order to prevent the diffusion of military progressions. Belgian authorities were creating bonds with the missions of the White Fathers, such as shown by the confidential notes of Father Pierre Colle from the Nya-Ngezi mission³⁰. This “rumours and legends” situation on the stationing of German troops in the Bugoyi plain created tension with presumed African spies and European civilians from both sides. Puck Chaudoir recalled the suspicions he had regarding two Greek traders in Kissegnies, “fearing this race of merchants like the plague”³¹. In June 1916, he threatened a Greek trader with hanging when he complained about the pillaging in Kissegnies: “And no one is aware that this small business is

25. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 88-92.

26. JACQUES VANDERLINDEN, *Pierre Ryckmans...*, p. 54.

27. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 161-162.

28. MATHIEU ZANA ETAMBALA, “Les attaques allemandes et incursions tutsi : le Kivu dans la Grande Guerre (septembre 1914 à mai 1915)” in ISIDORE NDAYWEL É NZIEM, PAMPHILE MABIALA MANTUBA-NGOMA (eds.), *Le Congo belge dans la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1918)*, L'Harmattan, RDC, 2015, p. 174-176.

29. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 150.

30. MATHIEU ZANA ETAMBALA, “Les attaques allemandes...”, p. 163.

31. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 113.

full of spies!"³². In Niondo, Chaudoir also became suspicious of the two White Fathers and the five nuns he encountered. He finally discovered that one White Father of German descent, Father Knoll, fled the mission when his troops arrived, whereas the two Dutch Fathers were asserting that there were only two of them. The two fearful priests were thus arrested and taken as prisoners for fear of any information they would give to the Germans³³. In the trench war on the Kivu borders, the fear of local spies, paid by the Germans, led military authorities to order shootings of any suspicious 'indigenous' person roaming around military columns after one warning to leave³⁴.

After the invasion of German territories, FP soldiers experienced guerrilla warfare, as German troops, though less in number, had a better knowledge of the battlefield. Military columns acted as "pacifying" expeditions in new territories. According to Pierre Daye, the situation became a tiring exercise: "the evasive enemy is getting on our nerves. I know nothing more exhausting than this progress on hostile lands where each step feels like a trap, as a desperate opponent with powerless arms only beats us with fatigue and deprivation after escaping"³⁵. Colonial newcomers from the Yser front became desperate about these small skirmishes, recalling "small wars" of the 19th century. While military authorities tried to distinguish conventional war and guerrilla war, the colonial aspects of military operations in 1914-1918 were of a greater importance, especially in 1916, when FP troops were living in occupied territories. Compared with the British, who were experiencing these African campaigns with large troops from abroad and an organised system of supplies,

Belgian troops were embracing the *Bewegungskrieg* (manoeuvre war) of the Germans, in strict repetition of what they experienced in their own colonial pacifications. Quoting Lieutenant-Colonel Viala, French military attaché at the Allied headquarters in German East Africa:

"The Belgians have progressed with almost no supplies to reach localities. They were hoping to find some and they did. This "revolutionary" method for the British mind was not a misfortune. It gave them a marching speed, which was far more effective than the British troops. In their field of operations, it allowed them remarkable success. Belgian troops are an excellent tool of "colonial" war"³⁶.

In colonial circles, such war tactics and strategies of skirmishes and ambushes with no major military confrontations were sometimes badly perceived by newcomers, who were more accustomed to European ways of war. Chaudoir's order to retreat in Kibati in May 1915 was felt by Commandant Pauwels to be an outrage to Belgium's sacrifice during the war. He accused their way of fighting with an African approach: "As it occurs on African soil, it seems that we consider this war to be like the Arab campaign and the old fights against rebellious chiefs. We act as if it was a simple police operation, without considering it as an important episode of the Great World War"³⁷. Former colonial figures Théophile Wahis and Léon Anciaux often compared World War I - battles to heroic colonial wars of the late 19th and early 20th century³⁸, while Charles Tombeur presented his officers and Congolese soldiers as the "honourable successors of the tradition of glorious soldiers who conquered Congo"³⁹.

32. *Et personne ne s'avise que ce petit commerce suinte l'espionnage. Idem*, p. 127.

33. *Idem*, p. 173-176.

34. *Idem*, p. 151.

35. *L'insaisissable ennemi nous énerve. Je ne connais rien d'épuisant comme cette avance dans un pays hostile ; où l'on se sent un piège à chaque pas et qu'un adversaire désespéré ne nous abandonne que pour nous vaincre par les fatigues et les privations, alors que ses armes sont impuissantes. Pierre Daye, Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 177.

36. "Études sur les opérations...", p. 379.

37. *On a l'air de considérer cette guerre, parce qu'elle se passe en Afrique, comme la campagne arabe et les anciennes luttes contre les chefs rebelles. On agit comme s'il était question d'une simple opération de police, sans se rendre compte qu'ici se jouera un épisode important de la grande guerre mondiale. PUCK CHAUDOIR, Dans la brousse...*, p. 124.

38. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms...*, p. 29.

39. Ministère de la Défense nationale, État-Major Général de l'armée, Section historique, *Les campagnes...*, vol. II, 1929, p. 491.

III. The “pacification” of the Kivu region

When World War I broke out, pacification of the Kivu region remained unachieved and the entire Belgian colony was still facing trouble and disobedience in many parts. Colonial anxieties rose to a higher degree when the first attacks by Germans occurred on Lake Kivu in September 1914. The Belgian colonial authorities were so sceptical about the loyalty of possibly “rebellious populations” who could make treacherous plots, that chiefdoms and populations faced an immediate and direct occupation of their territories⁴⁰. No risk could be taken: colonial authorities were still very anxious about would-be revolts in the former Azande region, as were French and British authorities in the south Sudanese region. Sultan Mopoïe Bangezegino had been under Belgian supervision since 1894 and had fuelled an insurrectional sentiment among his population until 1911, when he escaped to French Congolese territories, whereas Sultan Sasa was exiled to the Eastern Province. Sultan Mopoïe decided to lead a greater revolt in February 1916. This led French colonial authorities to call on Belgian and British troops to help repress the revolt and calm colonial borders forever: 282 Congolese soldiers led by Captain-Commandant Fredrikssen, 80 French *tirailleurs* and 90 Sudan rifles hunted down Mopoïe before he was captured and killed on 15 April⁴¹. This joint pacification is one example of the continuation of colonial pacification throughout the war. World War I was also the occasion to brutally impose a colonial order with legitimate objectives, such as the fight against internal enemies and traitors, supposedly paid by

the Germans. In 1915, more than 8,000 FP soldiers were stationed in Kivu, with almost 2,800 in Nya-Lukemba (Bukavu)⁴². The building of military camps and halts strengthened the control over territories and populations, as local chiefdoms were asked to contribute to the war effort. Therefore, FP soldiers were seizing militiamen, porters and supplies by force. Rebellious villages were occupied, such as Luhwindja (South Kivu) in late 1915, before many *Bami* bowed down. During the siege warfare at the Kivu borders, colonial authorities became highly suspicious of local headmen. Such suspicions led to increasing violent acts against reluctant chiefs such as chief Bilali, who died after being arrested and relegated⁴³, and chief Kabare who was under an arrest warrant⁴⁴. Puck Chaudoir also described the many local chiefs who submitted to the colonial state after the storming of their villages. Chiefs such as Mitoko or Bowanga were caught between a rock and a hard place: faced with the threat of being hanged by the Germans, they also faced many types of looting by the FP soldiers⁴⁵.

The Kivu region was one of the last outposts of the long colonial gridding during the Congo Free State era, as FP troops were fighting against mutinous soldiers escaping in this region. Small political entities such as the Bashi in South Kivu had led both open and passive revolts against colonial domination since the beginning of the 20th century. Under state inspector Paul Costermans’ orders, many military marches and police operations were conducted to impress reluctant populations and impose the domination of the colonial state. In 1902, FP soldiers were assembled to

40. See *Rôle du Kivu dans l’occupation définitive de la frontière orientale (1914)*. (Musée Royal d’Afrique Centrale, Fonds Molitor, 53.23- boîte II, farde V). MATHIEU ZANA ETAMBALA, “Les attaques allemandes...”, p. 156-157.

41. PIERRE SALMON, *La dernière insurrection de Mopoïe Bangezegino (1916)*, Mémoires de la Classe des Sciences Morales et Politiques de l’ARSOm, vol. XXXV, Bruxelles, 1969.

42. JANGU CANDACIRI, “L’effort de guerre (1914-1918)...”, p. 222-241.

43. Regarding the relegation system in Belgian Congo, see AMANDINE DEWULF, “*Exilés dans leur propre patrie*”.

Autour de la relégation au Congo belge (1919-1960), master’s thesis in history, Université libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, 2015.

44. MATHIEU ZANA ETAMBALA, “Les attaques allemandes...”, p. 168.

45. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 162-168.

hunt down the warriors of *mwami* Kaziba, who escaped in the bamboo forests with the villagers⁴⁶. The period until 1908 saw other military operations to make local chiefs such as Kabare submit to colonial authorities, and the transition to the Belgian Congo did not stop the pacifying missions among those fleeing *Bami*. Belgian occupation of the Kivu remained very scattered, as described by Major Philippe Molitor in his report to the Ministry of Colonies in 1913-1914 after an inspection of the area in 1912⁴⁷. At the same time, the Kivu region became a bone of contention between the British, the Germans and the Belgians, as colonial borders were unsettled. The Congo Free State had already created military posts such as Nya-Lukemba by Danish Commandant Olsen in July 1900, but in 1909, an incident occurred around Mount Mufumbiro when British troops claimed this territory by occupying it⁴⁸. After ten months face to face with more than 2,000 stationed FP soldiers, a treaty was finally signed on 14 May 1910, but this situation led to a growing military occupation of North Kivu.

Imposing greater pressure on local societies for portage services, agricultural needs and capitulation tax, meant increasing the annual levy from 3,750 to 5,000 men in 1915⁴⁹. At the same time, local troubles were arising and many headmen were arrested or dismissed, which led some former colonial figures such as Alexandre Delcommune to raise criticism on this brutalised form of colonial domination. After decades of guerrilla war

against the FP, Luba headman Kasongo Nyembo, in the Southern part of Congo, was deported to Nouvelle-Anvers (present-day Makanza) and then to Buta in 1917⁵⁰. At some point, this situation of rising violence between contested colonial authorities and populations led to the appearance of religious movements which tried to give this anticolonial disobedience an ideological meaning. This is what the story of Maria Nkoi, *Marie aux Léopards*, recounts when it happened in 1915. Marie (Sombe) was born in the 1890s under the rubber regime in the Ekonda land (equator). Stories said that following a mystical experience; Marie received healing powers and contested colonial authorities by calling off liberation from the *Djermani* (the Germans). Her followers were struggling with colonial representatives and she was finally arrested, put in jail and deported to the Uele region⁵¹. This religious movement marked the political upheaval of Congolese peasantry: it was a sign that Congo was not a peaceful colony as it was portrayed and showed that the colony was also characterised by increased anxieties towards law, order and seditious situations.

IV. Excessive violence towards the populations

The military conduct of the war in Kivu during the defensive phase (August 1914 - April 1916) was also experienced as another colonial war. German authorities were suspected of using Tutsi warriors

46. *Mwami* is the title of king in the Great Lakes region, especially in Rwanda, Burundi, North and South Kivu and in some parts of Maniema. The plural is *Bami*.

47. See A. SINDAYE, *L'occupation coloniale de l'ancien district du Kivu (1885-1914)*, Louvain, 1975, 2 vol, ROGER LOUIS, *Ruanda-Urundi...*, JANGU CANDACIRI, "L'effort de guerre (1914-1918)...", p. 222-241 and CHUBAKA BISHIKWABO, "Les petits Etats occidentaux du Sud-Kivu, foyers de résistance prolongée contre l'occupation au Congo (Zaire) (1894-1936)", in *Les réactions africaines à la colonisation en Afrique centrale. Actes du Colloque international d'histoire, Kigali, 06-10 mai 1985*, Ruhengeri, 1986, p. 163-191.

48. ANDRÉ LEDERER, "Incident de frontière au Kivu", in *Civilisations*, no. 41, 1993, p. 415-426.

49. LÉOPOLD REUL, "L'effort militaire belge au Congo", *Le Mouvement Géographique*, no. 3, 19/01/1919, col. 28-32.

50. ALEXANDRE DELCOMMUNE, "Politique coloniale", *Le Mouvement Géographique*, n° 42, 19/10/1919, col. 493-501 ;

THOMAS REFE, *The Rainbow and the Kings: A History of the Luba Empire to 1891*, Berkeley, 1981, p. 193.

51. Regarding Maria Nkoi, see ARMAND COLLIGNON, *La véritable histoire de Marie aux Léopards*, Paris, 1933 ; JEAN-LUC VELLUT, "Résistances et espaces de liberté dans l'histoire coloniale du Zaïre avant la marche à l'indépendance (ca. 1876-1945)", in CATHERINE COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, ALAIN FOREST AND HERBERT WEISS (ed.), *Rébellions Révolutions au Zaïre, 1963-1965*, Paris, 1987, p. 36-37 and NANCY ROSE HUNT, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies and Reverie in Colonial Congo*, Durham, 2016, p. 61-94.

of Ruandan *mwami* Musinga to harass Congolese soldiers on the borders of the Belgian colony. Considered as a “horde of bandits”, only aiming at looting, they were “in a state of frenzy due to the enemy”⁵², massacring villages and burning huts⁵³. As the Afro-Arab slavers of the 1890s, Tutsi warriors were then described as “committing serious abuse towards peaceful populations” and operating cattle ransacks⁵⁴. The violence of the Congolese troops was justified by the non-respect of conventional methods of war by the enemy as they used irregular warriors under no white command. According to the Belgians, The Hague Convention of 1907 could not be applied to the “savage bandits” from Musinga’s kingdom⁵⁵. In a strict, but ambiguous, mirror of the German atrocities which occurred in Belgium in August 1914 against the alleged presence of *Francs Tireurs*, Belgian authorities justified their own use of summary executions and massacres as a legitimate tool of unconventional war for the same period. As fighting the Tutsi raids could not be inscribed in the European ways of fighting, Tutsi warriors and rebellious chiefs were to be treated in the way colonial wars were conducted. Historian Mathieu Zana Etambala showed, from military reports, how brutal the Belgian response was towards Tutsi warriors and how many harassing skirmishes were involved in the security of the border, particularly in the months of November and December 1914 until April 1915⁵⁶.

During the Belgian campaigns of World War I in Africa, the lines between soldiers and civilians became blurred in important ways, which opened the possibility of retaliations against former German-dominated and unfaithful populations. Catholic diaries of the White Fathers ana-

lysed by Jangu Candaciri helped to overcome war taboo and understand the FP behaviour – at least according to the White Fathers. In January 1915, the Idjwi Island on Lake Kivu was for a great part under German authority and *mwami* Mihigo was struggling against Congolese soldiers. While Iko Island was still supposed to be in Belgian hands, its population decided to stay on the *mwami* side, so they murdered two FP soldiers who were trying to escape in September 1914. In response, a military expedition with 210 soldiers and six European officers with machine guns, canons and local auxiliaries was sent to retaliate. In the Katana diary, priest Bové’s secret report related that no FP soldiers were killed but that more than 100 villagers were murdered, 60 women and children were taken hostage and 200 cows were taken⁵⁷. Another headman was put in charge of the village.

The stationing of the FP troops during World War I disrupted local economies and led to major displacements of populations. FP soldiers were deemed cruel when they were requisitioning supplies, cattle or men. In his research, Candaciri notified the burden of portage on local societies of Kivu and the rising troubles, which marked the area. Disobedience and fleeing populations led to major violence between FP soldiers and civilians. On 6 April 1916, porters of the military camp of Kabugizi decided to revolt after being starved for three days. They refused to obey orders and received the *chicotte* penalty⁵⁸. As white officers intervened, they hurt Captain Duckers and Commandant De Place, killed two Congolese soldiers and threw firebrands at another officer. The FP reaction was immediate: reluctant porters were put in jail in a warehouse before it was set on fire.

52. CHARLES STIÉNON, *La campagne...*, p. 25.

53. Report from Josué Henry to Justin Malfeyt, 26/09/1914, in MATHIEU ZANA ETAMBALA, “Les attaques allemandes...”, p. 161-163.

54. Ministère des Colonies Belges, *Correspondance...*, p. 37.

55. See *Correspondance diplomatique et politique relative à la guerre en Afrique. Rapports du Haut Commandement. Violation des lois de la guerre par l'ennemi*, Bruxelles – Paris, 1919, p. 95-97.

56. MATHIEU ZANA ETAMBALA, “Les attaques allemandes...”, p. 151-199.

57. JANGU CANDACIRI, “L'effort de guerre (1914-1918)...”, p. 235.

58. During colonial times, *chicotte* was the name given to the whip made from a strip of hippopotamus hide. By extension, it symbolises the arbitrary violence of colonial rule. MARIE-BÉNÉDICTE DEMBOUR, “La chicotte comme symbole du colonialisme belge ?”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1992), p. 205-225.

“Facing certain death, porters pierced the walls to try to escape but unfortunately few got out, and were shot immediately by soldiers guarding the flaming hut”⁵⁹. More than 45 porters were shot or burnt alive. While this was not a common situation during the war, violence against civilians was clearly amplified as well as legitimised by the necessity to keep the colonial order powerful.

After the defensive phase, the offensive phase in German East Africa also provoked controversies over FP war violence, some of which were publicised. In April 1916, FP troops started to invade Ruanda and Urundi from North and South Kivu. Few battles were fought in these territories, as the Germans were quickly retreating. Yet uses of violent practices by the FP during the Ruanda-Urundi progression and the battle of Tabora spurred many discussions with German authorities. Cases of rape of Ruandese women, massive pillaging and ransacking of cattle were the main formulated complaints. Such discourses were obviously a political means for Germans to undermine the military conquest of the Tanganyika area by the Belgians through further diplomatic negotiations. Far from the peaceful colony presented by the colonial authorities, the behaviour of Congolese soldiers revealed the culture of violence at stake during the East African campaign. After the victory of Tabora, bitterly perceived by the British troops, some former Belgian officers argued that British pastors, “most likely colleagues of Morel and Casement”, led a smear campaign against the FP, re-enacting the anti-Congolese propaganda of the 1900s during the Congo Free State “atrocities”⁶⁰. As conceptualised by Marc Bloch, rumours and false news played a role in documenting the image of the FP during the Ruanda-Urundi campaign and in understand-

ing the growing violent practices⁶¹. The arrival of the Congolese soldiers on the hills of Ruanda and Urundi represented cannibalism and mutilations to local populations. While Pierre Daye accused the Germans of “spreading so many horror legends of our Congolese men”⁶², another clear-sighted witness of the military occupation, Pierre Ryckmans, legitimately recalled the “terror” inspired by the arrival of the FP, when the offended officer Léon Anciaux could not but recognise the “uncontrollable fear” Congolese soldiers inspired among civilians and chiefs with “their scarred faces and filed teeth”⁶³. Even Pierre Daye conceded the “terror they inspired” as a key element of their victory⁶⁴. Such a representation might be a post-war reconstruction of their own experience to explain the superiority of their men, but it also indicates how vivid this terrifying portrayal of the FP soldiers was⁶⁵. Yet, most explanations had a very Eurocentric and racialised perspective: Puck Chaudoir explained the deployment of violence as the result of “love of pillage” by the Africans who thought that this was the only purpose of every war⁶⁶. According to this representation, FP soldiers and auxiliaries were the only ones responsible for the spreading of violent acts, whereas the colonial state was no longer accountable for such excesses.

While historians of the Great Lakes region have shown that the violent military culture of Congolese soldiers was a reality during the offensive campaign of April-May 1916 after many months of siege warfare at the Kivu border⁶⁷, recent historical analyses have moderated this racialised perspective by explaining that violent acts by Congolese soldiers were the result of insufficient stock and equipment, which led them to acquire clothes and blankets in order to face the cold in the Ruandan

59. JANGU CANDACIRI, “L’effort de guerre (1914-1918)...”, p. 236.

60. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms...*, p. 23.

61. MARC BLOCH, *Réflexions d’un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre*, Paris, 1999, [First edition, 1921].

62. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 97.

63. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms...*, p. 20. Xavier Dierckx, *Quarante-cinq...*, p. 75.

64. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 162.

65. This conference was given in Antwerp on 15 February 1951. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms...*, 30 p.

66. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 62-63 ; PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 101.

67. JEAN RUMIYA, *Le Rwanda sous le régime du mandat belge (1916-1931)*, Paris, 1992 ; JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *Gitega...*

hills⁶⁸. However, local mentalities still associated the FP with the memory of the Congolese atrocities of the late 1890s, and some war massacres seemed to have maintained this image of the Belgian colonial army. According to Muyaga mission's diary in Urundi⁶⁹, FP soldiers killed German Sergeant Burwig (Bingongo, the "tough") on 22 June 1916 and then mutilated his body, removing his hands and his head. These mutilations were a reminder of the cut hands of the Congo Free State era. It pinpointed the brutal image affiliated with the FP and showed how white bodies could be re-sacralised as political resources⁷⁰. On 16 June 1916, the diary of Nanyinya noted the hunting practices of the FP soldiers with cattle and women, comparing them with "real bandits in disarray whom no one dares to object or call to order", whereas the Mugeru's diary related "the very strong cult for the weaker sex", coming from the "devilish Congolese [soldiers]"⁷¹.

Pillaging was a key element of colonial wars at the end of the 19th century: as a result, it seems that Congolese soldiers did not act differently during World War I than what they were authorised to do before the Belgian takeover of the colony. The Belgian strategy of living off the country when going on a military campaign was re-enacted by General Tombeur who preferred to raid than wait for food resources. Such pillaging behaviour by Congolese

soldiers was both accepted and justified by European commanders and officers. The low supervision of troops provided big opportunities for soldiers to ransack and kill. For the sake of military victories, European agents were willing to accept violent acts against unarmed populations and irregular soldiers as long as they were not eyewitnesses. In 1919, Joseph Muylle⁷², colonial magistrate and member of the military justice system of the FP, praised the Belgian authorities for having fewer condemnations of soldiers for breach of war rules than in Europe. He insisted on the severity of military justice in cases of rape and murder, showing that there was no permissiveness from Europeans with respect to their African subordinates⁷³. Yet such assumptions concealed the fact that, in order to go on trial, a European ranked soldier should have witnessed these violent acts on the battlefield. With one European officer commanding 43 Congolese soldiers on average, this was most unlikely⁷⁴. At the Bineï fight, first sergeant Bunza was on his own and in charge of a redoubt against sixteen German officers and 260 *askari*. Assisted by other ranked sergeants such as Ebi, he faced the enemy with no European commander. According to Léon Anciaux, embarrassed Europeans finally had to interfere in order to make him stop his "daring" enterprises⁷⁵. Léon Anciaux himself had difficulties in recognising cases of rape, recalling only the sympathies of civilians towards the Congolese sol-

68. JAN DE WAELE, *Voor Vorst en Vaderland : De situatie van zwarte soldaten en dragers in dienst van het Belgische leger (Force Publique) tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog in Centraal-Afrika*, Master Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, 2001, p. 113-131.

69. Muyaga was the oldest Christian mission in Burundi, created in 1898, in the far eastern region, on the Bugoyoma plateau. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEU, "Conversions et crise de légitimité politique : Muyaga, poste missionnaire catholique et la société de l'est du Burundi (1896-1916)", in JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEU (ed.), *L'invention religieuse en Afrique : histoire et religion en Afrique noire*, Paris, 1993, p. 347-370.

70. I deeply thank Jean-Pierre Chrétien for this information on the Burwig case. With respect to dismembering in Central Africa, see Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *Gitega...*, p. 219; FLORENCE BERNALTY, "Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa", in *The Journal of African History*, no. 47, 2006 (2), p. 207-239.

71. *Idem*, p. 224.

72. Joseph Muylle began his colonial activities in 1910 in Katanga as a magistrate. Serving as a soldier on the Yser front, he finally went back to Congo and became a military prosecutor attached to the operating troops in the East Africa campaign. FERNAND DELICOUR, "Muylle Joseph", in *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, vol. V, 1958, col. 629-630.

73. JOSEPH MUYLLE, "La justice belge près les troupes belges dans l'Est africain allemand", in CHARLES DEJONGH AND VICTOR YSEUX, *Le droit et la guerre. Revue de législation, de doctrine et de jurisprudence belges*, Paris – Bruxelles, 1918, p. 319.

74. LEWIS H. GANN AND PETER DUIGNAN, *Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914*, Princeton, 1979, p. 69.

75. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms...*, p. 10; Ministère de la Défense nationale, État-Major Général de l'armée, Section historique, *Les campagnes...*, vol. I, 1927, p. 267.

diers, especially among the “invaded” female sex⁷⁶. Puck Chaudoir described the disorganisation of his Congolese soldiers on the battlefield and often lost sight of them⁷⁷. Of the 33 military squads of the Kivu column, white officers and NCOs commanded only 17⁷⁸. This lack of white supervision was obviously a complaint by European agents and was used as an argument for cases of pillage, atrocities and massacres. But it was also a Eurocentric and racially stereotyped argument, which linked war violence to the “inner inclination” for brutality of Congolese soldiers. Such an argument exonerates European officers in the pillaging and subsequent casualties. Facing difficulties in obtaining food resources, Pierre Daye certainly thought that, like colonial veterans, he was forced to be harsh, or even brutal with his soldiers and porters due to the so-called Congolese respect for men of power. But he was also forced to recognise that the ranked soldiers under his command had to obtain a certain autonomy and advantages as justified in every war of conquest⁷⁹. This autonomy of Congolese ranked soldiers is also recognised as a major advantage by Lieutenant-Colonel Viala in his report on the East African campaign, making them very skilled scouts who would go beyond the enemy’s lines and cause many casualties.

V. Fighting on the equator: images and practices of war violence

World War I was the occasion for the Belgian Congo to display a new colonial model. Breaking up the 1885 neutrality of the colony, Germans became the

bad imperialists who were already threatening eastern colonial frontiers in the early 1910s. Belgium was no longer the only colonial power, whose aptitude was being contested. Such views contributed to creating a new narrative about the Congo as a “model colony”, far from the German genocide among the Herero and the Nama and the Maji-Maji Revolt in the early 20th century. Violence was thus a key parameter in distinguishing the “good” civilising nations from the “bad” savage powers, such as the German empire.

On the battlefield, such willingness to fight in “civilised” manners was repeated by colonial top-ranking officers. General Charles Tombeur insisted on creating a military justice system for his troops, as he did not want “to act as a vulgar head of gangsters”: as head of command he had to “respect, during the war, the rules which civilised countries observe”, i.e. mainly the Hague Convention of 1907 on laws of war and war crimes. This was one of the reasons why Fernand Dellicour, his judiciary advisor, was dispatched to Lake Kivu to investigate incidents between troops and porters, seemingly provoked by a reckless officer⁸⁰. As requested by Dellicour in a report from December 1916, the Belgian authorities also insisted on respecting The Hague Convention on the protection of civilians and prisoners of war in order to avoid the supposed perpetrated German atrocities in Belgium and East Africa⁸¹. Official instructions were also repeated on 6 April 1915: “if the enemy does not observe these laws and customs, they will be the ones to be ashamed. It is our honour to obey these rules”⁸². The observance

76. The use of the term “invaded” by Léon Anciaux is a half confession that these sympathies were sexual and probably experienced unwillingly. LÉON ANCIAUX, *Oh ! Ces noms...*, p. 20.

77. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 62.

78. *Idem*, p. 136.

79. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 169.

80. FERNAND DELLICOUR, “Hommage au lieutenant général baron Tombeur de Tabora”, in *Bulletin de l’IRCB*, Bruxelles, vol. XIX, 1948, p. 382-410.

81. “La justice militaire en campagne”, in FERNAND DELLICOUR, *Les propos d’un colonial belge (études et portraits)*, Bruxelles, 1954.

82. “Le gouvernement entend d’ailleurs que les opérations soient conduites en observant toutes les règles du droit de la guerre. Le règlement concernant les lois et coutumes de la guerre sur terre (Convention de La Haye du 18 octobre 1907) a été publié dans le *Bulletin administratif et commercial* du Congo belge, n°17, du 10 septembre 1914, pages 539 et suivantes. Si l’ennemi n’observe pas ces lois et coutumes, il faut lui en laisser la honte. Ce sera notre honneur de nous y conformer”, Ministère de la Défense nationale, État-Major Général de l’armée, Section historique, *Les campagnes...*, vol. I, 1927, p. 185.

of The Hague Convention became a leitmotiv for official instructions and diplomatic dealings with the British and was compared with “German atrocities” which had occurred in the first months of the First World War in Belgium.

The post-war illustration of hanged Africans around the Saint-Michaël mission, probably porters, was used as visual proof to justify German bad colonialism. Although it is impossible to prove the veracity of this scene, it reveals much about the way Belgians tried to stigmatise the unconventional German way of fighting⁸³. While Belgian colonial authorities wanted to embody “civilised” ways of fighting, they also pointed out the blurred lines between the enemy and civilians in Kivu, Ruanda and Burundi. Violence thus became justified, as civilians were considered to be treacherous to their cause.

According to European witnesses, the colonial aspects of warfare during World War I also created problems in terms of discipline and desertions among Congolese soldiers. As for the Congo Free State period, European officers denounced the disorder sometimes experienced on the battlefield or in the rear. For example, they complained of the liberties taken by FP soldiers during observation or raid. Their lootings were denounced in particular. On 19 June 1915, Puck Chaudoir observed soldiers leaving their positions to go and raid and burn villages⁸⁴. In his opinion, the war violence was the fault of Congolese soldiers who were too inclined to retaliate against unwilling civilians and chiefdoms. “Needless to say, they slaughter whoever resists them”, added Chaudoir. The treatment

of porters was also an example of violent practices among Congolese soldiers. While they brutalised them on the spur of the moment, many colonial veterans such as Pierre Daye restaged their emotional memories of porters to the point of glorifying their fate during the war:

“Soldiers, who are often responsible for the requisition of indigenous people, who take back from those hunts piteous human beings who could not flee their villages quickly enough, the painful treatment we impose on them, those long marches of naked men, barely fed, who keep moving for relentless hours, in one line, tied down when they rebel, carrying heavy loads, escorted by watchful, even brutal sentinels, this way of parking them up outside so that they do not escape, what is the point of all of this?”⁸⁵ ?

Chaudoir and the justice system of the troops presented councils of war as a way to contain such violent practices. Yet as Joseph Muylle notified in 1919, the complex organisation of councils of war in battalions and brigades often led white officers and NCOs to leave some affairs untreated by colonial magistrates⁸⁶. Judiciary investigation of cases of pillage, rape and murder were also sometimes put on hold because of the remoteness and the reluctance of some local witnesses to go to court. Lastly, during the offensive phase of 1916, colonial magistrates were often unable to follow troops or to enquire into new cases, although after the storming of Tabora in September, more than 133 new cases were opened⁸⁷. While Joseph Muylle congratulated the efficiency of councils of war during military campaigns, he forgot two fundamental conditions:

83. Pierre Daye testified to the many dead porters he encountered on his way to Saint-Michaël mission in August 1916.

Pierre Ryckmans also saw some hanged people in Urundi. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 183; JACQUES VANDERLINDEN, *Inédits de P. Ryckmans...*, p. 44.

84. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 155.

85. *Des soldats qui s'appliquent périodiquement à la réquisition des indigènes, qui ramènent de cette chasse des êtres piteux, n'ayant pu fuir leurs villages assez vite, le traitement pénible dont on accable ceux-ci, ces longues marches d'hommes nus, à peine nourris, qui avancent durant d'implacables heures, à la file, retenus quand ce sont des rebelles par des cordes au cou, portant de lourdes charges, escortés de sentinelles vigilantes, sinon brutales, cette manière de les parquer en plein air pour qu'ils ne s'enfuient pas, qu'est-ce que tout cela ?*, PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs...*, p. 169-170.

86. JOSEPH MUYLLE, “La justice belge...”, p. 316-320.

87. FERNAND DELICOUR, “La justice militaire en campagne...”, p. 25.



*Engraving of Africans hanged by the Germans for refusing to fight against the Belgians, next to Saint-Michaël mission (August 1916). The drawing may represent an actual situation but no further information was provided by Alphonse Cayen, the director of the Service for Colonial Propaganda. Alphonse Cayen, "La guerre en Afrique et l'effort colonial belge", in *Bulletin de la Société belge d'Etudes Coloniales*, no. 1-2, 1919, p. 31.*

that any white officer or NCO had to witness the transgression and that he had to be willing to go on trial against his own soldiers.

In most cases, the internal problems of discipline were often treated by disciplinary sanctions such as the *chicotte* or chains for the FP soldiers. European officers also did not consider the treatment of local prisoners a priority. For instance, Chaudoir noted the weakened, famished and skeletal bodies of seven harmless prisoners in May 1915, forced to accomplish the worst duties. "At night, I heard them howl like slaughtered beasts". "Outraged, I intervened, although I was not officially supposed to", recounted Chaudoir⁸⁸. Helpless and morally offended, he notified with joy the escape of the local prisoners. Local chief Kayembe nevertheless took one of them back. Congolese soldiers did not spare him, and on 19 May, Chaudoir saw his corpse tied to a bamboo stick, probably beaten to death by the soldiers the night before. The same discrepancy between official orders and the reality of the military columns was thus testified during the siege warfare of 1914-1915 in the Kivu region. This does not imply that no cases involving white officers were judged, such as the involuntary deaths of 117 porters caused and admitted by Captain D. in front of a war council⁸⁹. Yet it shows that the reality of fighting on African battlefields during World War I often led to many unconventional violent practices, far from the "civilising mission" Belgian authorities put forth.

In May 1916, the *Corps d'Occupation* under the command of Gustave Stevens⁹⁰ was set up to manage millions of inhabitants and almost 200,000 km² of territories (Ruanda and Urundi).

While public views recalled the need to act for the good of local populations in order to secure a just reward for the Belgian contribution to World War I during post-war negotiations, the constraints of military occupation and the risk of local revolt quickly led European officers to act more brutally. Pierre Ryckmans, stationed in Gitega (Urundi) as post chief, witnessed this ambiguous trait of colonial occupation. The conduct of the distant military operations in German East Africa forced more pressure on headmen and populations to obtain food resources as well as to acquire more and more porters⁹¹. While a commission was installed to settle disputes regarding military requisitions, Ryckmans faced many political problems and sudden attacks by Urundi populations⁹². The occupation mission quickly became another colonial pacification against civilians deemed to be traitors of the Allied cause, as Ryckmans had to organise police operations in order to "bring the natives to their senses"⁹³. Dreaming of a romantic military epic, he was disappointed by his role as policeman but finally got the young *mwami* Mwambutsa to submit in August 1916.

In Ruanda, European officers noticed the same rebellious situations in May 1916 with many tensions with respect to the *mwami* Musinga who was suspected of sabotaging the pacification and of working for the Germans. After the disastrous retreat of German troops, Ruandan lands were subject to many scenes of violence and pillaging by FP soldiers, as testified by Catholic missions⁹⁴. Ruandan populations also experienced the brutal work of portage. While some headmen resisted Congolese soldiers, such as Rukara from the Abasinga, killed in the Ruhengeri region, others provoked

88. PUCK CHAUDOIR, *Dans la brousse...*, p. 94.

89. The name is, of course, anonymous. FERNAND DELICOUR, "La justice militaire en campagne...", p. 26.

90. Gustave Stevens took part in the repression of the Batetela rebellion in 1897 and was then commissioned for the Equator District. Back in Europe in 1905, he returned to Congo in 1916 to organise the occupied territories. M.L. COMELIAU, "Gustave Stevens", in *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, vol. III, 1952, col. 824-827.

91. JACQUES VANDERLINDEN, *Pierre Ryckmans, 1891-1959 : coloniser dans l'honneur, avec un libre propos de J. Stengers*, Bruxelles, 1994, p. 60.

92. Idem, p. 70.

93. Idem, p. 70.

94. JEAN RUMYA, *Le Rwanda...*, 249 p.

quarrels and desertions among newly hired porters, and others found shelter in the forest or in Catholic missions. At the end of 1915, the *Rumanura* famine was partly caused by the military occupation by the Germans and then by the arrival of FP soldiers like a “cloud of grasshoppers”⁹⁵.

VI. World War I as traumatic as the colonial conquest

The end of World War I gave the impression that a phase of problems and resistance to colonial authorities had come to an end. Indeed, the war had helped to consolidate colonial order in many regions where pacifications were still unachieved and added new colonial lands to the Congo.

During the inter-war period, colonial anxieties were nevertheless still an issue as regards unexplored areas and populations, such as the region of the Mitumba in the Beni Territory, next to Lake Edward, pacified in 1922, or the western region of Lake Albert where Walendu farmers were also submitted in the early 1920s⁹⁶. Bigger anticolonial revolts were also organised, from prophetic Kimbanguism in the 1920s to the Pende People uprising in South Kivu in 1931. Colonial relations were also more segregated and racialised, provoking more intense daily violence between the Europeans and the Congolese. Public voices called for a stricter racial hierarchy and a renewed prestige of the white man. The 1920s and 1930s were decades of increased anxiety regarding the stability and fragility of colonial order, as shown by historians Amandine Lauro and Nancy Rose Hunt⁹⁷.

When Belgium was given two mandates on Ruanda-Urundi from the *League of Nations* in 1919,

the “spectre of the redeployment” of the almost 10,000 Congolese soldiers, as conceived by Minister of Colonies Jules Renkin, was still worrying colonial authorities. No further historical works have investigated the role of demobilisation in FP troops after the war, when these soldiers were perceived as would-be rebels in the colony. Renkin invited European agents to keep unruly soldiers in their companies, whereas General Charles Tombeur thought that the war experience of Congolese soldiers would make them lose their respect for the white man and hit him as soon as possible⁹⁸. Tombeur was echoing racial prejudices regarding the fighting instincts of Congolese soldiers, which were supposed to be awakened by the war itself. Colonial authorities were now working on getting them to be re-accustomed to colonial peace and *pax belgica*. Colonial figures therefore wanted to accentuate the social role given to the FP. A new commission was formed under the aegis of Commandant Philippe Moliator and the 10 May 1919 decree reorganised the colonial army⁹⁹. The division between Encamped Troops in charge of the defence of borders and Territorial Troops in charge of law and order was officially established, but on the colonial field, the main objective of FP soldiers was still to police potential problems.

War in central Africa should not be viewed as an entirely distinct phenomenon but rather as the continuation and deepening of longstanding colonial violence; trivialisation and brutalisation were two common features of the violent military culture of Congolese and European soldiers of the FP during World War I. The reality of fighting on the African front in World War I often led to many unconventional violent practices, far from the “civilising mission” Belgian authorities put forth. Many Belgian

95. *L'arrivée des soldats congolais affamés eut l'effet d'un nuage de sauterelles*. Ibid, p. 71.

96. JEAN-LUC VELLUT, *Résistances...*, p. 33.

97. AMANDINE LAURO, “Maintenir l'ordre dans la colonie-modèle. Notes sur les désordres urbains et la police des frontières raciales au Congo Belge (1918-1945)”, in *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies*, vol. 15, 2011 (2), p. 97-121 and NANCY ROSE HUNT, *A Nervous State...*

98. GUY VANTHEMSCHÉ, *Le Congo belge pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. Les rapports du ministre des Colonies Jules Renkin au roi Albert I^{er}, 1914-1918*, Bruxelles, 2009.

99. “La réorganisation de la Force publique congolaise”, in *Le Mouvement Géographique*, n° 23, 08/06/1919, col. 272-273.

colonial officials were convinced that colonial violence had largely come to an end following the reforms after the 1908 *reprise* by Belgium, whereas 1914-18 reveals that this was not the case. Moreover, the war brought military organisation and campaigning to a new level in the Great Lakes region, including the use and effects of more powerful and different weaponry (e.g. “Dum-Dums” bullets), yet fighting also suffered from the “traditional” difficulties of fighting over long distances with limited infrastructure. The colonial domination during the

Great War represented a continuity from the pre-war era. It offered an opportunity for repression; this included violence against non-combatants, as the line between non-combatants (colonial subjects) and soldiers was blurred during the war. Rampant white supremacy gradually implemented the so-called “model colony” in which multifaceted violence would guarantee peace. However, Congolese memories were expressed through popular culture and traditions, which delivered alternative narratives¹⁰⁰.

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100. BOGU MIL JEWSIEWICKI, “Esthétique de la représentation et de la violence comme mode d’action politique en République Démocratique du Congo : la peinture comme théâtre du politique”, in CHANTAL CHANSON-JABEUR AND ODILE GOERG (dir.), “Mama Africa” *Hommage à Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch*, Paris, 2005, p. 231-242.