



## **Catastrophe or catalyst? African and African Diasporas' visions arising from World War One**

**Conference at Bayreuth, Germany – October 2nd to 4th, 2014**

**Convenor: Sub-Project “Narratives of the Future in Modern African History”**

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### **Abstract / Call for Papers**

World War One was a critical juncture not only in European History. Despite the renewed interest surrounding the 100th anniversary of the “Great War”, the global and especially the extra-European dimensions of this “seminal catastrophe” of the 20th century (Kennan) are still widely understudied. This is particularly true for Africa, the continent second- most involved in the war, and for the African Diasporas in North America and Europe. Both took a more active part in the fighting as well as in the search for a new Africa than is commonly acknowledged. The previously unimaginable scale of the conflict brought new experiences of warfare, mechanized violence and colonial power. But they also helped to generate new ideas and demands for political, economic and social change; the emergence new religious movements; and, radically altered visions of Africa’s future. For instance, the First World War can be seen as an important catalyst of visions ultimately leading to the end of colonial rule.

The focus of our conference bridges conventional divides in area studies, to bring together the experiences of both Africans and African Diasporas. This transcontinental approach will highlight previously obscured connections and experiences. In the early twentieth century, activists and thinkers conceptualised Africans and African Diasporas as interconnected groups with a stake in a shared future. In the African colonies and in South Africa, labour unions, popular and spiritual movements were also tackling ideas about race, imperialism and social order. Individual and collective experiences of the First World War have shaped and connected as well as disrupted these ideas.

This conference encompasses, but is not limited to, the following themes:

- How were new protest movements, solidarity campaigns and anti-war groups forged in the experience of conflict?
- In what ways did returning African and African Diaspora soldiers shape ideas about post-war societies?
- How did the 'home front in Africa and African Diaspora communities articulate new demands for economic and social rights?
- How can individual biographies and their outlooks on the future that were violently disrupted by the experience of the war shed light on the multiple and diverse impacts of WWI?

- To what extent did collective visions of the future change through the course of the war?

We are interested in both historical and interdisciplinary approaches, to highlight the perspectives of Africans and African Diasporas arising from the First World War. Also unconventional sources such as literary texts, images and films may be included. Please submit a 250 word paper proposal with a short bio-sketch by **31<sup>st</sup> March 2014**. For those accepted, we hope to be able to cover costs for travel and accommodation, pending the results of funding applications.

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