

The war in East Africa lasted longer than any other during the years 1914-1918 and involved sixteen countries, including colonies. Yet, the extent of the campaign and its consequences are hardly realised. Although peripheral to the main discussions at Versailles, the number of countries involved in one confined territory provides an opportunity to explore the geopolitical rivalries of the main combatants in Europe without being obscured by the complexities of the European conflict. In addition, the behind-the-scenes discussions in Versailles throw light on concerns around South Africa's desire to create an Empire of its own and the realisation of Belgium and Portugal that their status as colonial powers had declined. Not surprisingly, many of the conflicts in East Africa today can be linked directly to the outcome of the Versailles peace discussions, when countries made decisions according to the views of the populace 'back home'.

Drawing on primary and secondary sources from a range of countries, in particular Britain and South Africa, this paper will address the issues raised above. In addition, it will show how the study of what is regarded as a 'side-show' can help shed light on decisions made on a larger scale.