

*Review Article: World War I Centennial Series**Belonging to the Imperial Nation: Rethinking the History of the First World War in Britain and Its Empire[†]

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INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the First World War in 2014–18, the British government set aside funds for a range of commemorative activities.

* Articles previously published in this series include John Deak, “The Great War and the Forgotten Realm: The Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War,” and Larry Wolff, “The Western Representation of Eastern Europe on the Eve of World War I: Mediated Encounters and Intellectual Expertise in Dalmatia, Albania, and Macedonia,” *Journal of Modern History* 86, no. 2 (June 2014): 336–80, 381–407; Peter Gatrell, “Tsarist Russia at War: The View from Above, 1914–February 1917,” *Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 3 (September 2015): 668–700; Leonard V. Smith, “France, the Great War, and the ‘Return to Experience,’” *Journal of Modern History* 88, no. 2 (June 2016): 1–36; Roger Chickering, “Imperial Germany’s Peculiar War, 1914–1918,” *Journal of Modern History* 88, no. 4 (December 2016): 856–94; and Hasan Kayali, “The Ottoman Experience of World War I: Historiographical Problems and Trends,” *Journal of Modern History* 89, no. 4 (December 2017): 875–907.

[†] My thanks to Roger Chickering, Alison Fell, Tom Laqueur, Lucy Noakes, Tammy Proctor, Joe Ward, and members of my UM writing group, especially Vivian Ibrahim, for their comments on earlier versions of this essay. The works discussed here include: Margaret Bonfiglioli and James Munson, eds., *Full of Hope and Fear: The Great War Letters of an Oxford Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. xlix+392, \$39.95; Santanu Das, ed., *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. xiv+334, \$99.00; Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. xiv+278, \$92.00 (cloth), \$32.00 (paper), \$10.00–\$32.00 (e-book); Rosie Kennedy, *The Children’s War: Britain, 1914–1918* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. x+190, \$90.00 (cloth), \$85.00 (paper), \$69.99 (e-book); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity in the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. xii+216, \$110.00 (cloth), \$32.00 (paper), \$24.99 (e-book); Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. xvi+308, \$120.00; Parya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xiv+458, \$71.00 (cloth), \$33.95 (paper); Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World*

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These included a number of “engagement centres” that aimed to bring together academics and local community members in addition to providing separate arts-related programming.¹ The Imperial War Museum reworked its main First World War galleries, which opened with great fanfare at the centenary’s start. This denotes a kind of publicly sanctioned interest in a war that Britain had won, after all, but that popular memory had enshrined as something quite different, something that required solemn reflection about the costs of war and reckoning of sacrifices rather than celebrations of victory and service.²

Amid the flurry of activity that accompanied the arrival of the centenary came prominent artistic projects that seemed to reinforce these dominant notions about the meaning of the war for modern Britain. One example that captured the public imagination was 2014’s “Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red” by artists Paul Cummins and Tom Piper. To create this installation, 888,246 ceramic poppies gradually appeared on the walls and in the moat of the Tower of London between July 17 and November 11.³ This was an iconic place for this piece of art: a de-

War: Race, Masculinity, and the Development of National Consciousness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. x+180, \$80.00 (cloth), \$29.95 (paper); Laura Ugolini, *Civvies: Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914–18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. viii+340, \$110.00 (cloth), \$50.00 (paper); Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots, and the Vote: The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism in Britain during the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. xvi+228, \$120.00 (cloth), \$115.00 (paper), \$89.00 (e-book); Timothy C. Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. xviii+312, \$113.00 (cloth), \$32.99 (paper), \$26.00 (Adobe eBook Reader).

¹ For more information, see the main website for the Arts and Humanities Research Council World War One Engagement Centres: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/funded-themesandprogrammes/worldwaroneanditslegacy/worldwaroneengagementcentres/>. These include Gateways to the First World War, University of Kent, <http://www.gatewaystfww.org.uk/>; Everyday Lives in War, University of Hertfordshire, <https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/>; Voices of War and Peace, University of Birmingham, <http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/>; Living Legacies 14–18, Queens University Belfast, <http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/>; and the Centre for Hidden Histories, University of Nottingham, <http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk/>. It’s notable that they are largely centered in the south of England (none of the sites are based in the north or in Scotland).

² For the key works that address popular memory of the war, see Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, 2005); and summation of this consensus in Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008). That this impression of unjustifiable loss had contemporary political overtones can be seen in the controversial statements by then Education Secretary Michael Gove in January 2014. See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532923/Michael-Gove-blasts-Blackadder-myths-First-World-War-spread-television-sit-coms-left-wing-academics.html>.

³ For an official summation, see <http://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/tower-of-london-remembers/about-the-installation/>. The number used for the ce-

cidedly English castle and home to the crown jewels transformed now into a powerful if temporary memorial for the dead of the entire United Kingdom. The red poppies also evoked the familiar English-language poetry of the war, perhaps most notably John McCrae's "In Flanders Field":

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

This 1915 poem written by a Canadian doctor appears repeatedly in anthologies of First World War verse and, like other poems that reference the red poppies that grew along the Western Front, uses them to symbolize the dead and their sacrifice.

In the 2014 installation in the center of London, red poppies dripped down the side of the Tower itself as the ceramic petals swelled to fill in the moat. Was this the nation crying tears of blood? Each bright flower was positioned in stark contrast to the bleached grey stone—each one standing in for the body of one of the war's seemingly innumerable but now apparently quantifiable dead, as official statements about the project stressed that each blossom represented a military death. This was reinforced by the ability of the public to pay a set amount for each poppy and to have the monies distributed to charities for service men and women. Thus did each blossom become a reminder of loss—conveying a moral lesson about the quintessential "bad" war, one that wasted young lives to no purpose. And the unanticipated popularity of the Tower's poppies, despite some pointed criticism, also suggested a popular consensus in 2014 Britain—seemingly indifferent to historical arguments and research—about this war as nothing more than a tragic mistake.

ramic poppies reflects the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report 2010–11 of the identified war dead of the United Kingdom and its colonies excluding dominions; academic historians such as Todman have tended to use the statistics developed by Jay Winter in 1986, that around 722,785 Britons died in military service over the course of the war—roughly 12 percent of those who served. See Todman, *The Great War*, 44. A more recent, perhaps definitive estimate can be found in Antoine Prost, "The Dead," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2014), 3:587. Appendix table 22.1 lists 761,000 dead from Great Britain. However, the National Archives lists the number of British military casualties from the First World War as 886,000. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/deaths-first-and-second-world-wars/>.

But the poppies symbolized only some of the British losses of the First World War: the military death toll. Could we imagine, for instance, a figuring of this war in which the responsibility for all the dead of the dominions could not be laid at the feet of the United Kingdom? So why not include them all? More significantly, there were no poppies for the almost entirely overlooked noncombatant dead. Nor was there space for perhaps even more hidden figures, those injured whose lives were shattered by their war service, who died later or who survived to continue a compromised existence. What would it mean to acknowledge the wounded and disabled, let alone their caregivers, who often sacrificed their health and their opportunities in order to perform a vital yet invisible task? Who could begin to count these among other imperial lives affected by war-related disease and hunger and malnutrition? And what would a representation of such costs look like? Would millions of poppies suffice? A monument that captured the complexity of loss and suffering would require a fundamental shift in the ways in which we understand, let alone calculate, the enormity of the damages sustained by modern Britain and its empire as a result of this war.

The government's investment in multiple and promising engagements with local and familial history and creative expression clearly was meant to foster new attention to the conflict, but the enduring power of a narrow vision of the war merits attention. Through his study of the evolving myth and memory of the First World War a decade ago, Dan Todman predicted a renewal of interest in the war during these hundredth anniversary years.⁴ Yet that interest does not seem thus far to have readily embraced the larger shifts in understandings of gender, sexuality, race, and the imperial state that recent scholarship has provided. Coming to terms with the Great War for many historians of modern Britain and its empire has meant addressing a different set of concerns than those emphasized in the official and quasi-official mournful evocations in art, music, exhibitions, and spectacle of 2014–18.

If we turn from the mythic story of futility and sacrifice shared across national borders, we find that what may unite some of the most exciting historical research on Britain and the war is a focus on rethinking what belonging to the imperial nation might mean and how the war marked a focal point for such conversations. Work on what I would like to call “greater Britain” (a term used here to connote concern with the entire British Isles and its global territories, whether formal colonies or not) shares a historiographic space with recent scholarship on the “greater war,” including such enterprises as the 2014 three-volume *Cambridge History of the First World War*. This ambitious multiauthored work explicitly calls itself a product of the transnational generation of First World War scholars, defined here as occupied in studying the war in a global sense and taking as self-evident that there are “multiple levels of historical experience . . . both

⁴ Todman, *The Great War*, 229.

below and above the national.”⁵ The similarly collaborative study *Empires at War* (2014) explicitly insists on a 1911–23 chronology for the conflict. Both of these efforts seek to reshape our understanding of the war by integrating case studies into a global history that lays claim to the war’s deeper roots and immediate aftermath as well as profound legacies. In what follows, I engage with a spate of new work on Britain, its Empire, and the Great War in this vibrant and still emerging field. My aim is to assess what this work may tell us about where we might go from here in order to see the war in a messy complexity that extends beyond the red poppy-covered corner of a mythic Western Front where Britain sent its sons to die.

BRITAIN’S WAR/EMPIRE’S WAR

One of the most potent claims made in the 2014 volume *Empires at War* is that examining the war “within a frame that is both longer (temporally) and wider (spatially)” allows us to understand the war as one of “multi-ethnic, global empires.”⁶ While this is not a new observation—Lenin himself claimed that imperialism was the key basis for the war—such a notion runs counter to how the war has largely been treated in Britain. The history of Britain’s colonial subjects and their war remains vastly understudied compared to that of British (largely English) endeavors and their impact on domestic soldiers. The history of Britain’s longer war in *Empires at War* occupies two separate chapters: one on British imperial Africa and the other on the dominions, Ireland, and India. In each essay, the authors trace the complex ways in which the war affected mobilized soldiers and populations at home; both are excellent synopses but—not surprisingly, given the nature of the volume—regrettably succinct.⁷ In addition, given the purview of this work, the experiences of metropole and empire remain disentangled. Folding these types of perspectives back into a broader study of the United Kingdom as an empire at war is a task not yet fully realized and sorely needed.

One potential starting place emerges in the essays in Santanu Das’s *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing*, which begin to show us how to write about the war as one that reshaped meanings of belonging to an imperial state. Das asserts in the introduction to this volume that the very “contours of the ‘Great War and modern memory’ start to look different if, instead of the writings of an or-

⁵ Jay Winter, “General Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2014), 1:6.

⁶ Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela, “Introduction,” in *Empires at War 1911–1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford, 2014), 2–3.

⁷ See Bill Nasson, “British Imperial Africa,” and Stephen Garton, “The Dominions, Ireland and India,” in *Empires at War 1911–1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford, 2014). The experiences of Ireland and India both deserve fuller explorations on their own and in conjunction with broader imperial concerns and experiences.

dinary European soldier, let alone a Wilfred Owen, we take the memories of an Indian sepoy.” For the war ushered in “an unprecedented range of interracial and cross-cultural encounters, experiences and intimacies.”⁸ These could extend from violent combat to the comradeship of men in arms and could also include the connections (despite some of the state’s concerted efforts) between European women and colonial, especially nonwhite, men.

The complexity and diversity of the British colonies and dominions preclude a generalized account of “war experience.” Thus, individual case studies in *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing* flesh out some of the shapes of the vast endeavor that was the British empire at war. In Das’s chapter on Indian experiences of the war, he insists on avoiding any monolithic notion about Indian service on the Western Front, in Mesopotamia, and at home. There was no singular experience or result; there was no predictable through line from facing abuse and racism in the British army to embracing Indian nationalism and rejecting empire or even to protesting the war.⁹ Instead of a reductive analysis that equates war experience with the production of anticolonialism, his broad and skillful excavation of sources, including folk songs, pro-war poetry by celebrated women such as Sarojini Naidu, and oral histories, demonstrates how both the mythmaking of war and its intense trauma reach deep into the empire.¹⁰

Such insights are reinforced when looking at work on the specific challenges faced by Britain’s colonial troops and laborers. Dominion troops—those from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada—occupy a particular place in the history of Britain at war, as they do in the national storytelling of these countries. Despite the well-established national literatures on the military service for the empire of men from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, they have

⁸ Santanu Das, “Introduction,” in Das, ed., *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, 1–2, 4. Other crucial work on these issues has been produced on France by Tyler Stovall, “The Color Line Behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War,” *American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (1998): 737–69, and “Love, Labor, and Race: Colonial Men and White Women in France during the Great War,” in *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race*, ed. Tyler Stovall and Georges Van Den Abbeele (Lanham, MD, 2003); Joe Lunn, “Les Races Guerrières: Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 4 (1999): 517–36; and Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore, 2008); on Germany by Michele Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH, 2014); and on Britain by Gajenda Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (London, 2014). These are just starting points in an emerging and significant literature.

⁹ Das, “Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914–1918,” in Das, ed., *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing*, 77.

¹⁰ Das, “Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914–1918,” 72–75.

tended to center on white settler populations and thus exclude the experiences of indigenous troops from these states.¹¹ In *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War*, Timothy Winegard carefully restores their place in the narrative of the war, tracing how the empire came to see the value of their contributions, from haphazard solicitation of their aid to active recruitment over the course of the conflict.¹² As the literature on racial minorities in the war has demonstrated for such populations as African Americans and French colonial troops, racialized subjects could be motivated by the overarching aim of using their wartime service as the basis for demands for equal treatment from the state. Winegard talks of the “elevated participation of Dominion indigenes during the war” as a “potential catalyst” for equal rights. But, much like the experiences of African Americans, it remained more potential than actual.¹³ Nor, as was the case with other populations, was it restricted to men. Winegard briefly discusses noncombatant populations, including indigenous women who, like their female counterparts across the empire, contributed to a span of patriotic organizations (218–19).

For those from the dominions deployed on the battlefield, the war brought about mobility and the exposure of isolated populations both to the wider world and to each other. And there were some concrete gains as a result. As Winegard explains, “a benefit of war service was the interaction of whites and indigenes, something not common within their home nations” (215). Such encounters were clearly restricted by language; for Canadian Indians and Eskimos who spoke little English, dispersed across units of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, loneliness and isolation ensued. Overall, Winegard insists that “the exposure of indigenous soldiers to those from other nations . . . influenced their perception of

¹¹ For some key works, see Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914–1916*, vol. 1 (Toronto, 2007), and *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917–1918*, vol. 2 (Toronto, 2008); Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers and the Great War* (Carlton, 2010); Bill Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War, 1914–1918* (Johannesburg, 2007); Robin Prior, *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth* (New Haven, CT, 2008); Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia, and Empire in the First World War* (2004; repr., London, 2016); and Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver, 1997). For a recent comparative analysis of India and Ireland, see Sonya O. Rose, “The Politics of Service and Sacrifice in WWI Ireland and India,” *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 3 (2014): 368–90.

¹² Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples*. Further references will be made parenthetically.

¹³ Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples*, 259. See Chad Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), and Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2009) on this parallel in the United States and Tyler Stovall; Fogarty, *Race and War in France*; and Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH, 1999) for French colonial troops.

whites, their home Dominions and themselves. Their inclusion influenced the perception of white soldiers, politicians and governments with regard to indigenes as peoples and soldiers” (217). Thus is the war rescripted here as cultural exchange, with long-term legacies for both sides of a racial and geographic divide.

Yet more than race separated these groups of participants. Not all colonial subjects were deemed fit for combat, and the nature of the war work that the British state allowed such participants to perform affected how they viewed themselves. Members of the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) expressed their resentment at not being granted the right to serve in combat. As one member—H. M. Tiyali—wrote, “we should be trained in the art of carrying arms that we may do our bit. . . . We do not wish to be treated like women” (167). While gender is not an operative category of analysis for Winegard, it is striking how much military service as an expression of masculinity mattered to his subjects.

As Peter Stanley explains in his essay in Das’s collection, the encounter between white and nonwhite Australian troops could lead to new understandings of a potentially shared manhood. Stanley juxtaposes the statement of white Australian Henry Raine about his comrade Mick that “although he was black, he was a white man, and a dinkum Aussie,” with the statements of wartime prime ministers who insisted that the war had been fought to “keep Australia free and white.”¹⁴ Shared service and sacrifice thus potentially turn the racialized and marginalized other into an acknowledged member of the national community, but only at the level of the individual. In the greater British empire, few if any indigenous participants received recognition akin to that meted out to white troops.

The intersections of race and gender for another set of racialized troops, West Indians, animates Richard Smith’s *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity, and the Development of National Consciousness*. Smith puts masculinity and race at the center of a study that highlights how “the military body was the territory on which the desires and ideals of nation and empire were mapped out.”¹⁵ In this account, the war created a space for the renegotiation of racial and gender norms, but the persistence of preconceived notions of the limitations of West Indian blacks led to their contributions being focused on labor rather than combat. Such restrictions had everything to do with beliefs among British officials that “coloured men would . . . be most dangerous to the efficiency . . . of the armies in France”; they remained a group that General

¹⁴ Peter Stanley, “‘He was black, he was a white man, and a dinkum Aussie’: Race and Empire in Revisiting the Anzac Legend,” in Das, ed., *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing*, 226.

¹⁵ Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, 7. Other references will appear parenthetically.

Douglas Haig described as “supplementary” (79). Yet, like the members of the SANLC described by Winegard, these men engaged in noncombatant military work that was vital to the efficiency of the war effort on the Western Front—work that even earned the grudging respect of members of the white Jamaican elite (83). Outside of this iconic battle zone, West Indian troops saw action in both Cameroon and Palestine, and Smith makes extensive use of the few records of their voices to show how they utilized these experiences to prove their worth to the empire. Gaining a sense of their own value, Smith argues, in turn shored up postwar claims to national sovereignty apart from the empire.

Perhaps no place in the extended empire provides a clearer example than Ireland of how the war could create a space for rethinking the possibilities of being part of greater Britain. For in efforts to comprehend how the war helped reshape meanings of belonging to the imperial state, Ireland emerges as a unique case. Long overshadowed by the violence of the Easter Rising and the immediate postwar years, as well as that of the civil war that followed the postwar creation of the Irish republic Eire, Ireland’s First World War history is only now becoming “more nuanced and complete,” as Keith Jeffrey’s essay in *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing* reminds us (261).

Two competing versions of the war—a nationalist and a unionist one—seem fundamentally at odds. Yet in *A Kingdom United*, Catriona Pennell emphasizes continuity not only between Irish and English responses to the outbreak of war—the crucial twenty weeks from August to December 1914—but also among Irish reactions themselves.¹⁶ Pennell’s study is thus an exemplar of the new, nuanced works that bring the experience of Irish civilians as well as military participants into a common story. Most significantly, Pennell challenges the notion of war enthusiasm across the United Kingdom, tracing instead an evolution of responses that coalesced around an established war culture by the end of the first year of the war. While acknowledging the influence of nineteenth-century imperial conflicts in shaping expectations of what war entailed for those in the British Isles, she asserts that such wars “seemed remote” (16) and that the outbreak of war came as a surprise, responses to which were carefully charted.

Once war began, the “high diction of 1914,” justifying Britain’s participation in the war by using terms such as “honour, justice, defence, righteousness,” spoke to the national mood rather than creating it (64). Pennell claims that a new moral order began to emerge as a result, citing evidence that crimes decreased and civilians (especially women) strived across class lines to contribute to the war effort as best they could (72–73). When evidence of limited dissent came into public view, such as the formation in September 1914 of the Union of Dem-

¹⁶ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*. Her work builds on insights explored in Adrian Gregory and Senia Peseta, *Ireland and the Great War: A War to Unite Us All* (Manchester, 2002).

ocratic Control or the personal evidence of those adhering to prewar socialist antimilitarism, those professing such alternate views were aware they were in the minority. As the damage and violence of the war became visible via the naval bombings of the English coast in Scarborough or Whitby, the appearance of refugees and the wounded, and the lists of the dead or missing, the consensus around rallying to the flag and taking up arms also increased.¹⁷

Even in Ireland, support for the war and its new moral order grew fairly rapidly, although the war negatively affected the Irish economy almost immediately (167). While unemployment in many trades, such as textiles, rose sharply, Pennell also finds evidence that this economic uncertainty did not hinder the “voluntary work in Ireland [that] drew support from all classes, religious denominations, and political affiliations” (168), although there was also some unrest. She highlights evidence, for example, that empathy with the plight of small, Catholic Belgium could prove a powerful motivation to support the war (179).

Across the stark divide between Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists, Pennell finds compelling instances of a softening of antagonisms in these first months of war. She points out the shift that took place in two short months. In June 1914, police filled their reports with accounts of intense mistrust and hatred between the two communities in Ulster. By August 1914, the two sides “were turning out together with their bands to escort the troops leaving for the front” (177). Yet, she is also careful to point out the seeds for future divisions in these early months of unity, for mutual recognition of the justness of Britain’s cause “obscured the nuances that divided unionist and nationalist opinion on the war’s importance,” especially for the future of Ireland itself (180).

Those Pennell depicts as advanced nationalists, such as James Connolly, rejected the idea that there was anything to be gained by supporting the British empire in the war and began a clandestine antirecruiting campaign. They argued that no Irishman should “sell himself body and soul to the only enemy Ireland has in the world—ENGLAND” (185). Despite such actions, the limited extent of their effectiveness is illustrated in Pennell’s analysis of 1914 volunteers from both sides of Ireland. Carefully comparing Belfast not only with Dublin but also with Cardiff, Birmingham, and Glasgow, Pennell demonstrates that all three of these latter examples had a higher recruitment level than Belfast. What mattered for this early recruitment, she asserts, was the divide between rural and agricultural workers and urban and industrial ones, as the former predominated in southern Ireland. Like their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom, men involved in agriculture had lower enlistment rates, in part because they saw their contribution as increasing the food supply (191–93). Marshalling her evidence thoughtfully, Pennell concludes that while the situation in Ireland would change over the course of the war, the responses of Irish men and women in 1914 were

¹⁷ This is a point that Pennell emphasizes in chaps. 4 and 5.

very similar to those across Britain rather than diverging from them, “despite the fragility of the relationship between Britain and Ireland” (229).

What does this suggest about how to understand the extended empire at war? Among other things, it indicates that by the time war broke out in 1914, the Irish could perhaps be more effectively integrated into notions of British national belonging than could inhabitants of other colonial spaces. However, this could not last long beyond Easter 1916, when nationalists’ danger to the war effort and the kingdom could not be denied. Initially, there were other scapegoats for those looking for an enemy within—namely, German immigrants, often associated with Jews, as seen in the anti-German riots that occurred after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the early air raids of 1915.¹⁸ And there were other anxieties about more clearly racialized participants from the overseas empire. While calls for support and participation appeared across Britain and its dominions and colonies, calculations of whose contributions most mattered and would be most effective weighed class, gender, race, ethnicity, and geography. Such unity as could be forged relied on the elevation of a potentially common, imperial identity that elided differences, often at the expense of marginalized groups.

RACE, GENDER, AND AGE: CONTESTING WARTIME IDENTITIES

The recent scholarship on empire and colonial participation has also brought to light intertwined connections with gender. In the broader imperial context, one can see how (in Santanu Das’s words) the war produced, in a variety of British imperial settings, “a complex dialectic between retrenchment and realignment of gender and racial roles” (84). Such new perspectives insist, for instance, that masculinities are complex and defy easy categorization solely linked to participation in the violence of combat. For sepoys, concepts such as *izzat* (an Urdu word meaning “honor” or “reputation”) could serve as profound markers of their war effort. Caring for their *izzat* proved a stronger priority in some cases than rejecting the racism in the military that might more predictably lead to colonial war service providing the vehicle for questioning imperial duty itself (82–83).

In her essay in Das’s collection on white British women nursing the other, Alison Fell notes that Smith and others have detected a special anxiety about intimate encounters between white women and colonized men, as they served to “disrupt the binary assumptions upon which white imperial masculinity was

¹⁸ See Gregory, *The Last Great War*, and Pennell, *A Kingdom United* on this as well as Nicoletta F. Gullace, “Friends, Enemies and Aliens: Fictive Communities and the Lusitania Riots of 1915,” *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (2005): 345–67, and the discussion by Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914–1918* (New York, 2010), chap. 3. For an eyewitness account, see E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front* (1932; repr., London, 1987), 196–98.

constructed.”¹⁹ Fell uses the memoirs of nurses to problematize such interpretations by investigating how these women depicted colonial troops. While some of her subjects repeat gendered and imperial ideas that exoticize and/or infantilize these men, others “reveal more ambiguous attitudes, simultaneously mirroring and revealing the limitations of dominant stereotypes” (170).

Yet stereotypes based on gender as well as race persisted in other ways both during the war and in how the history of such encounters was told. While gender and women’s historians have traced the complicated ways in which women experienced the war, the literature that places masculinity at the center is of more recent vintage. In part this stems from the war years themselves, when volumes extolling the contributions of women served as both propaganda and historical record. The male war story remained central to the broader narrative of the war focusing on operational military experiences, but the new significance of women qua women that the war unleashed captured the initial attention of historians of gender.²⁰ More recently, key works like Michael Roper’s *The Secret Battle* have done an impressive job of linking the gendered spheres of battle and domestic fronts by analyzing the letters sent from soldier sons to families, especially mothers, and the extent to which such epistolarily sustained ties enabled emotional survival.²¹

Another contribution to our understanding of how the men who fought constructed their versions of masculinity appears in Jessica Meyer’s *Men of War*.²² Meyer analyzes several different types of discursive practices in order to explore the varieties of ways in which men defined themselves *as men* based on their wartime experiences. Her main sources include diaries and postwar memoirs alongside three specific types of letters: those written home from conflict zones, those written to offer condolences, and those written by ex-servicemen to the Ministry of Pensions. For instance, she finds a blurring of heroic and domestic self-conceptions in letters home, citing a passage from officer C. S. Rawlins where he laments that “our best and fittest men are daily being killed & wounded . . . & our race is bound to suffer terrible depreciation in consequence,” only to conclude that “every single man will have to marry ‘after the war’” (45).

¹⁹ Alison S. Fell, “Nursing the Other: The Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs,” in Das, ed., *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing*, 159. For more on such encounters in the British imperial context, see Philippa Levine, “Battle Colors: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldierly in World War I,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9, no. 4 (1998): 104–30.

²⁰ For a recent overview of the gender history of the war, see Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor, *Gender and the Great War* (Oxford, 2017), chap. 13.

²¹ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009).

²² Meyer, *Men of War*.

The solution to blood-letting and the problem of the national (imperial) future is thus domestic: marriage and, implicitly, reproduction.

Letters to the Ministry of Pensions by disabled soldiers similarly show efforts to promote at once the heroic nature of their wartime contributions and the centrality of domestic life. The latter is epitomized by their stated desire to have the economic means to maintain families and, above all, to avoid dependence.²³ Condolence letters reveal other ways in which British soldiers viewed their martial masculinity, including particular stress laid on “cheerfulness” and “coolness” under fire, to construct a national heroic ideal. Finally, Meyer demonstrates how postwar memoirs reflected writings produced during the war in terms of showing the war’s horrors and damages, and the changes they inflicted on both the mind (emotions) and body. What saves the soldier and, to an extent, becomes the essence of a collective wartime masculinity is comradeship.²⁴ Whether such comradeship effectively cut across class, racial, or ethnic lines remains questionable and worthy of further research.

If masculinity was complicated for men in uniform, then it may have been demonstrably more so for civilian men, a topic that has received relatively little scholarly attention. Assumptions about the war’s masculine experience and, indeed, about which war stories count (e.g., those of combatant men) have been more fundamental to literary analysis, perhaps best enshrined in James Campbell’s notion of “combat Gnosticism,” the idea that participating in combat carries with it a fundamentally untranslatable experience inaccessible to anyone who has not shared it.²⁵ The sustained privileging of this position as the only authentic way to speak of war on behalf of all men has contributed to the neglect of civilian male war stories. *Civvies*, by Laura Ugolini, aims to remedy this absence by focusing on noncombatant men, albeit those who are white and middle class.²⁶

Her subjects include men who by their own volition or other limitations (physical fitness, exemptions, or family) did not participate in the military masculinity available to those men who put on the uniform. This version of the British war story thus becomes another variation of one about loss—of privilege, prestige, and even the routines of daily life. As she elaborates, the bulk of men in such circumstances tried to compensate for their loss of stature by involving themselves in civilian and even quasi-military contributions to the war effort. Theirs was a war of often quiet disruptions to core senses of self, including as heads of households and families (268–69).

Ugolini also evokes the ways in which fatherhood itself could be remade by having sons at the front lines. She notes the fraught emotional balance between

²³ Meyer, *Men of War*, esp. chap. 4.

²⁴ See Meyer, *Men of War*, chap. 5.

²⁵ James Campbell, “Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism,” *New Literary History* 30 (1999): 203–15, see definition on 203.

²⁶ Ugolini, *Civvies*.

paternal roles as protectors, even nurturers, and as patriots with the new and painful duty of sending beloved children to war. She cites the moving and complicated response of W. J. Dawson to news of his sons' desire to enlist: "the occasion crushed me and drew forth no answering courage . . . [yet] if I allowed my fear for them to interfere with the natural energy of their desires . . . was I not guilty of the emasculation of their manhood which must ensue?" (280). Fatherhood has been an overlooked subject for this war, and this book offers tantalizing glimpses of some of the sources that might allow it be written.

Ugolini complicates the discussion of wartime white masculinity by focusing on displays of what strike the reader as class-bound anxieties. For instance, her sources seem more concerned with the war as a personal inconvenience than as a threat to their livelihoods. In addition to highlighting the ways class inflects her subjects' relationship to the war, Ugolini implicitly evokes age as another category of analysis since, overwhelmingly, the middle-class men at home represented an older generation. The particular hardships and challenges of the elderly across class lines and geography, both on their own and in relation to a younger generation in their families and communities, seem worth further study.

Another group of age-defined noncombatants, namely, children, is also slowly coming to have its own history in Britain. Rosie Kennedy's account of children at war brings Britain into a preexisting continental literature on how childhood figured into total war.²⁷ Like authors of other studies, Kennedy finds children imagining and participating in a war to which they felt they could contribute, asserting that the war "entered every aspect of children's lives" (19). In addition to presenting us with how cultural mobilization operated via school texts, toys, games, and organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, she is careful to show that children developed their own understandings of the war on their terms.

She finds evidence for this in a careful reading of an admittedly small sample of letters to and from children. These letters merit fuller analysis, but the glimpses provided in the book show combatant men frankly portraying a harsh version of war framed within heroic adventure stories: "you should have seen us retreating. . . . Jerry was over the top of us with airplanes dropping bombs and firing his machine gun at us. We brought one down with our rifles. It was fine sport" (46). This father included this kind of frank description in pages stuck into a letter to his daughter after it had been passed by a censor, cautioning her "don't

²⁷ Kennedy, *The Children's War*. The most influential works have largely but not exclusively focused on France, starting with the influential study by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La guerre des enfants 1914–1918: Essai d'histoire culturelle* (Paris, 1993). See also, more recently, Manon Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie: Génération Grande Guerre* (Paris, 2012), as well as her essay "Children," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2014). For Germany, see Andrew Donson, *Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism and Authority in Germany, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

tell anybody what I have told you in this letter. . . . This is the first time I have had a chance to send a few exciting lines" (47). Kennedy uses Joanna Bourke's work to situate this letter as a possible example of soldiers' ambivalence about killing and their need to place such actions in a mythic frame. While the intention of the soldier-father letter writer in depicting such "exciting" actions for his child remains obscure, such evidence supports a view of this war that insists on connections across its borders, in this case those of geography, gender, and age. Above all, Kennedy shows that children invested in war as members of families whose lives were directly affected by the mobilization of men, especially of fathers.

While this is in keeping with the existing scholarship's sense of this war's broader impact, Kennedy is stronger on the ways in which war culture permeated children's culture than on the ways in which children themselves responded. And there remains the vexing absence of the children of, and children connected to, greater Britain, including the dominions and colonies. How did those children both closer and farther away from the "adventure" and "excitement" of military operations experience the war? What role did the geographic placement of combatant relations and children play in their perception of the war?

The other category of analysis that has shaped ongoing research into the cultural, social, and emotional impact of the war on Britons is sexuality, going back to the focus on the homosocial and homoerotic military world described by the most famous war poets and memoirists vividly presented in Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.²⁸ The provocative work of Laura Doan uses the Great War as a potent setting for a "queer critical history" that insists on our inability to describe any of the actions and experiences of 1914–18 as "gay" or "lesbian." Such "systems of categorization," she persuasively insists, would have baffled contemporaries and "may not be the best guide in explaining how ordinary Britons made sense of gender variance" at this pivotal moment.²⁹ However, the very fact that celebrated cases about gender variance emerged during and around the war, including cases of women who found themselves fighting for their reputations and livelihoods in the face of presumed affronts to conventional sexual morality, suggests that the war may be a (not the) key moment for the emergence into public of still evolving notions of sexuality and gender identity.

The second half of Doan's *Disturbing Practices* provides a series of case studies of British women who served in the war that illuminate how wartime experiences revealed the instability of the very notion of sexual identity. Doan explores how for particular women "the circumstances of war reaffirmed prior understandings of selfhood and granted agency in developing new forms of in-

²⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1976).

²⁹ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 21.

trosppection” that did not include sexual knowledge.³⁰ Doan’s excavation of the representation of women in uniform and then of the trials of wartime heroines for “perversion” illuminates how much the war became a place where “Victorian” and “modern” notions of the moral and respectable came into conflict, especially when it came to sexuality.

The aftermath of the war, coinciding with the publication of Marie Stopes’s *Married Love* in 1918 that helped shift the parameters of public discourse about female sexuality, has long fascinated historians of sexology. The emergence in interwar culture of sensationalized cases that pivoted around female pleasure and autonomy—some alluded to by Doan and others illuminated by Lucy Bland in *Modern Women on Trial*—may well signal, as Bland reminds us, “a series of concerns about destabilizations in addition to that of gender, namely those of modernity, mass culture, class, race, ethnicity and the sense of what it meant to be British or English.”³¹ If we put queer history’s insistence on the instability of roles and identities at the forefront, what might it do to our understanding of the war and its legacies for greater Britain politically as well as socially and culturally?

BRITAIN’S WAR AND REDEFINING THE POLITY AT HOME AND ABROAD

That the state expanded during the war, with long-term consequences, has been well researched by scholars. A significant corollary to that story has been the extension of political citizenship that the war made manifest. While the reform of the franchise during the war has long interested historians of women’s suffrage, exactly how the war offered opportunities for new types of service to the state or the repurposing of older practices remains to be integrated fully into a broader narrative. Such wartime developments took place against the backdrop of the vigorous prewar campaign for women’s suffrage illuminated by historians like Sandra Holton, Martin Pugh, and Laura Mayhall, among others. And Nicoletta Gullace’s pivotal work on the renegotiating of citizenship during the war shed crucial light on how the 1918 Representation of the People Act laid bare assumptions about what should make an individual a citizen, a full political actor.³² For Gullace, this embodied a fundamental shift in defining full citi-

³⁰ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 144.

³¹ Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester, 2013), 10.

³² There is an extensive literature on the British suffrage campaign, but see esp. Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914–1928* (Houndmills, 1989); Sandra Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1986); Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women’s Movement, 1918–1928* (London, 1997); Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930* (Oxford, 2003); Mar-

izenship from something restricted to men as men, rooted in ideas about gender and class, to something tied to patriotic service, seen in the removal of suffrage from conscientious objectors until 1926 and in the partial enfranchisement of women.³³

In *Pacifists, Patriots, and the Vote*, Jo Vellacott examines the “erosion of democratic suffragism” and contributes to ongoing research that seeks to understand the intersections between women’s suffrage and the war.³⁴ Her book provides a succinct exploration of how feminists responded to the outbreak of war that complements work by Gullace as well as Pennell and Adrian Gregory, who are not focused on how gender as such influenced these responses. Vellacott’s account emphasizes how the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies dove into relief work from the outset for a variety of constituents: poorer women seeking news of mobilized men and the economic support they required for survival, Belgian refugees, and women workers displaced by the war’s disruption of the regular economy. Taking issue directly with historians such as Susan Kent who have painted the organized suffrage movement’s focus on meeting the immediate needs of family life (especially motherhood) as “anti-feminist,” Vellacott defends their early wartime actions: “helping women . . . to retain their independence and their ability to support themselves and their families . . . was also a statement of solidarity” (32).

Sharpening our understanding of both the nonmilitant suffragists and other movements pushing for increased democracy, Vellacott carefully distills the wartime actions of feminist activists and their allies. She enables us to see that the war helped uncover the “several different feminisms” in operation in 1914 that were united by the common goal of suffrage. Over the course of her analysis, she argues that the war fundamentally changed the nature of British feminism in a less expansive direction. Her work traces how alliances between class-based and gender-based organizations committed to widening the franchise frayed by 1918. This leaves open further exploration of the legacies of this shift both for the women’s movement and for British politics.

What historians such as Gregory who are more focused on the overall intersections between politics and society have shown is that the maintenance of a consensus that the war had to be fought involved not just manipulation from above but also agency from below. Understanding such unity, however fragile,

tin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914–1959* (Houndsmills, 1992), *Electoral Reform in War and Peace* (London, 1978), and *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women’s Suffrage 1866–1914* (Oxford, 2000); and Harold Smith, *The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign: 1866–1928*, 2nd ed. (London, 2007).

³³ Nicoletta Gullace, *The “Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, 2002), 198.

³⁴ Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots, and the Vote*.

requires attentiveness to important regional distinctions, including the greater enthusiasm overall in Scotland as measured by the rate of volunteering for military service.³⁵ Perhaps most significant, wartime led to a concerted willingness to accept state intervention to sustain the war in terms of personnel and resources.³⁶

There were other concrete legacies of state expansion and new modes of policy making beyond national borders. A number of recent works have commented on the rise of modern humanitarianism as a result of the war. In one of the most ambitious accounts, Bruno Cabanes stresses that we must understand the evolving language of “human rights” as stemming from the traumas of the Great War. As he summarizes it, “the suffering body . . . served as a starting point for thinking about human rights.”³⁷ This included, of course, the suffering body of the combat veteran, but also the bodies of those affected by total war’s indiscriminate explosion of violence.

Investigating the implications of this humanitarian impulse for Britain in particular has led historians like Michelle Tusan back to prewar origins as well as wartime transformations. For Tusan, the role of Britain as an imperial, international power with a vested interest in the Near and soon-to-be Middle East remains vital to the post–World War I story. She has observed that this territory resonated with Britons for both strategic and humanitarian reasons, including a desire to support a Christian population against what it characterized as a barbarous Muslim “other.” Tracing how charitable relief work combined with imperial obligation in the late nineteenth century elucidates how that work fell apart during the crucible of 1915, unable to prevent or adequately respond to the mass killings and mass deportations of minority populations in the Ottoman Empire. The crisis in this war zone confronted British officials with the most severe humanitarian challenge of the war, yet its most immediate legacy was less about politics than about bringing home “the inhumanity of modern war that made civilians victims.”³⁸ This insight would animate a variety of postwar political activists, from feminist antimilitarists concerned with the violence that modern war now unabashedly bestowed upon “women and children” to advocates of disarmament against the devastating modern weapons of war such as airpower.

New means of war making as well as of controlling the empire lie at the heart of other work that complicates the “rise of humanitarianism” narrative found in such studies. For the impulse toward articulating human rights as part of inter-

³⁵ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 82–87.

³⁶ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 111. For the impact of the war as undergirding the welfare state, see Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State in Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1993).

³⁷ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge, 2014), 309.

³⁸ Michele Tusan, *Smyrna’s Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide, and the Birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley, 2012), esp. 6–8 and 113–43, quote from 143.

national law and toward ameliorating localized humanitarian concerns was not the only result of the war. The war was also fought to defend British power, and Allied victory contributed to an extension of that power in territories in Africa and in the Middle East that paid scant if any attention to the rights of those local populations.

The vital role of war for establishing a “covert empire” in the latter territory informs Parya Satia’s compelling study about the intersections of culture, technology, and geopolitics in the emerging Middle East. As Satia explains, Britain’s “covert empire” in the area arose from a precise set of wartime and postwar circumstances. In particular, the war “bestowed . . . an official legitimacy” on the actions of intelligence agents, who parlayed their wartime expertise in the region into increasing military and administrative influence and power. She shows how the war’s legacies for Britain extended well beyond the borders of the United Kingdom, and especially how “imperial expansion in and development of the Middle East helped blunt the sense of rupture with the prewar past,” one where concerns about democracy and transparency proved less acute.³⁹

Satia traces the evolution of a group of agents whose role was to inform the British government and sway policy in the region, and who also found in an imagined Arabia a place to come to grips with the disappointments of modernity. Much more so than the Western Front, an “epic and mythological sensibility shaped the entire British war effort in the Middle East.”⁴⁰ As they confessed their fundamental inability to “know” the territory and its peoples, their record of wartime work included myths, references to the Bible, ethnography, history, rumor, and accounts of the fantastical alongside empirical evidence.⁴¹ This sense of the region as unknowable (and its corollary, as dangerously ungovernable) shaped both the war experience and its postwar legacies.

For the campaign in the Middle East bore little resemblance to that on the Western Front, and its participants came to see themselves as engaging in a more authentic type of war, one that remained glorious and one where intelligence and military operations coalesced. Most significantly, this battle zone became one where older ideas about warfare (including a belief that the best commanders needed to rely on “intuition”) met the new utility of air power. Given the vast terrain and seemingly inscrutable populations, “control of the air gave control over this enciphered space.”⁴²

Thus did air power come into its own as a pivotal force reshaping modern war. As Satia elaborates, “Appearing from nowhere like magic, denying the enemy a target and focusing on wearing the enemy down, their [aircrafts’] power

³⁹ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*; the phrase “covert empire” is hers, see 7.

⁴⁰ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, chaps. 1–2, quote on 81.

⁴¹ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, chap. 3.

⁴² Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 156, 158–60, quote on 161.

stemmed as much from the actual destruction they wreaked as from the awesome and ubiquitous threat they embodied" (162). In combination with a new strategy in the areas that fell under British purview, air power helped both to control the territory efficiently and to maintain "the adventure and romance of the past" (178). Air control became the modern equivalent of the "small wars" of the British imperial past, widespread and designed to squash dissent without escalating into a conflict that required broad support. Aircraft could be used to terrorize populations without distinction, for the "moral" effect was as important as the actual destruction of lives and homes.⁴³ Air power in Iraq arguably saved the Royal Air Force, justifying ongoing expenditures on its military hardware during the 1920s and into 1930s and, just as importantly, creating "a space for empire at time when imperialism was no longer at home in the world" (264).

That this had consequences for Britain's ability to develop air power and eventually the policy of strategic bombing for the Second World War is obvious. Less so are the implications of this new means of waging and imagining war for thinking about senses of belonging to a greater Britain's imperial state. Satia's study focuses on the architects of new policies of imperial control and on how their cultural attitudes shaped the struggle for power over the Middle East from the Great War through the interwar years. What impact did this have on those on the ground? For example, the role of the Indian troops who fought in Mesopotamia and the question of what such cross-imperial subjects might have gained (or lost) from these encounters lie beyond the scope of her study. So too do the reactions of those who lived beneath the planes in Iraq and those who had just done so at home in Britain, where some were horrified by the abuses of imperial air power and protested vigorously. Bringing such dissenting voices into the mix would be an interesting way to gauge the durability of this project. Alongside the development of new weaponry to control imperial populations came the arrival of imperial civil defense to protect them. The development of this set of policies to safeguard civil populations from external threats rooted in air power offered another way of justifying and thus maintaining "a space for empire" in a world increasingly resistant to it.⁴⁴ Satia has helped us to see the importance of this region and this technology; there is more work to do to show the complicated legacies of both for the metropole and the empire.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Perhaps the theme of Oxford University's engagement with the war during the centenary, "localising and globalising the Great War," may best capture where

⁴³ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 241, 246–54.

⁴⁴ Susan R. Grayzel, "Protecting Which Spaces and Bodies?: Civil Defence, the British Empire and the Second World War," in *An Imperial World at War*, ed. Ashley Jackson et al. (New York, 2016), 66–83.

the scholarship stands at this juncture. Although this conceptual framework is one that invites study beyond the borders of Great Britain's wartime empire, it encompasses the dual impulses collectively evident in the works under consideration here. The first is a desire to bring out the still less known stories of this war, such as those of Jamaican volunteers and Indian sepoy. Another is the willingness to use the lenses of new types of analysis that challenge standard approaches to the war, highlighting the Western Front, with its specific parameters of catastrophe and sacrifice, by instead making gender, sexuality, race, age, and geography (including the local and even familial) more central.

Case studies such as Richard Smith's excavation of the experiences of Jamaican volunteers or Timothy's Winegard's detailing of the role of the indigenous populations of the dominions in conducting this war shake up the comfortable image of Bruce Barnfeather's caricatures and the myth of the Tommy on the Western Front. Prya Satia and the contributors to Santanu Das's *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing* extend the borders of where this war took place beyond the realm of the British popular imaginary and demand that we question the long-term consequences of this. Taken together, Catriona Pennell's and Jo Vellacott's latest works build upon the scholarship of Adrian Gregory, Senia Peseta, Nicoletta Gullace, and others in order to reveal how politics and citizenship itself could be renegotiated during the conflict. Emphasizing sexuality, gender, class, and age as categories of analysis, as do Laura Doan, Jessica Meyer, Laura Ugolini, and Rose Kennedy, encourages us to expand our understanding of the war's impact on British lives and communities.

What is striking is how few of these more recent works are interested in placing the British story into a European context. In contrast to a set of scholars who sought in the 1990s and 2000s to place Britain's war in the light of the experiences of its allies or enemies (Deborah Cohen, Laura Lee Downs, John Horne, and Susan Pedersen, to name a few of the most significant), these authors treat greater Britain within a more self-contained universe.⁴⁵ While the motifs of loss, sacrifice, and service may aid in tying together the histories of all participant states, transnational and comparative studies that place Britain in the context of the major European powers have helpfully showed the particularities of certain British policies and practices ranging from mobilization, labor, and gender norms to cultural demobilization and philanthropic relief.

⁴⁵ Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley, 2001); Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, NY, 1995); Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); John Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914–1918* (Oxford, 1991); Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare*.

Our inability to understand fully the impact of the war on the empire may well begin also with our lack of appreciation for “the state of England” at its onset. When popular memory/history/commemoration enshrines loss and sacrifice as the dominant experience of the war, it rarely looks back to what Britain was like before the war: to the grinding poverty, ill health, and lack of resources faced by much of the population. Using *Round about a Pound a Week*, that crucial survey of working-class life that he deems “required reading for anyone intending to write about the First World War,” Adrian Gregory highlights that the death toll for children of the generally employed working class profiled in this study was 25 percent. He reminds us that this was more than twice the mortality rate of adult men serving in the British armed forces between 1914–18, most of whom came from such backgrounds.⁴⁶ So buried is our understanding of working-class life before and during the war that the shifts in lived experiences affected by the war—including those of laborers, the poor, women, and children—must all be contextualized across Britain, let alone its imperial outposts.

Yet we find that a postwar version of Britain’s role in the Great War as a quintessential national, even nation-building story that bound together men across class lines—not a European story, not a global story, and decisively not an imperial story—persists. It certainly helps explain how the “great war letters of an Oxford family” could be marketed as telling us about “how war was experienced at the time” with a wrenching “departure of a beloved son to the Western Front” without highlighting the role of the father of this son as part of the British imperial enterprise in India.⁴⁷

In any case, the letters themselves provide all the anecdotal evidence that one could wish for sustaining the impulse to tell a particular English, if not British, war story. Writing to his wife from India in August 1916, Gilbert Slater hoped that “all the romance and false glamour has gone out of war now—I do really think that there is a good chance that this is the war to end war—if only we can get Germany well beaten.”⁴⁸ At the moment of the war’s end, his wife Violet was far less optimistic and far less willing to blame one state: “It is ghastly—an awful finish. I suppose we shall all rejoice but it is like the tearing down of a beaten animal by other animals for we might have saved many thousands of lives . . . I cannot help thinking of those defeated nations, how appalling it all seems. . . . It is staggering to think of the heaped up dead, all the result of definite action

⁴⁶ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 278.

⁴⁷ Excerpts from marketing blurb on back jacket, Margaret Bonfiglioli and James Munson, eds., *Full of Hope and Fear: The Great War Letters of an Oxford Family* (Oxford, 2014).

⁴⁸ Letter, Gilbert Slater to Violet Slater, August 4, 1916, in Bonfiglioli and Munson, eds., *Full of Hope and Fear*, 30.

not the result of any one nation alone.”⁴⁹ The “heaped up dead” of the war haunt any attempts to make sense of its scope. And there were ceramic poppies enough in the Tower’s moat in 2014 to convey the sacrifices that war imposed. As historians of the Habsburgs, the Ottomans, the Kaiserreich, and the Russians in relation to the First World War have shown, this war was about the clash and destruction of empires. That the British empire expanded after 1919 should not obscure that some of the key catalysts for the imperial unraveling that followed another world war crystallized here. Just as important, perhaps, Antoinette Burton’s recent account of the British empire demands that we pay attention to the constant presence of resistance and dissent rather than seamless rule, and the First World War in the empire could and indeed should be fruitfully reexamined in light of this perspective.⁵⁰

There may not be a simple explanation for the disjuncture between some of the most interesting academic versions and the public versions of this war during the centenary, where the latter continues to highlight the tragic sacrifice of English men amid mud, barbed wire, and poison gas. All of these new works have shown us that the time may be ripe for a new synthetic history of this war for Britain and its empire. Reframing the British war experience as inherently global would seem a necessary if not easy task. It would require attention to a different chronological structure, one that focused less on British voluntary mobilization in 1914 and more on the deeper roots of cultural (and ongoing military) mobilization in defense of empire. Such a chronology would also assuredly extend beyond 1918 into the postwar period and incorporate colonial spaces and populations into the sum of losses and legacies. A history of greater Britain would take seriously how the war’s dislocations opened up conversations about gender, sexuality, race, family, community, nation, and empire that had short- and long-term impacts on culture, society, and politics. The building blocks for such a project will continue to appear as the centenary winds down, but the possibilities for such history should encourage students as well as scholars to look beyond the frustratingly incomplete vision of the war evoked by the red poppies of Flanders fields.

⁴⁹ Letter, Violet Slater to Gilbert Slater, November 7, 11, and 12, 1918, in Bonfiglioli and Munson, eds., *Full of Hope and Fear*, 214.

⁵⁰ See Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford, 2015).