

**Santanu Das (ed.)**, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ISBN: 9780521509848.

The publication of *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* marks a growing academic interest into the global dimensions of one of the landmark conflicts of the twentieth century. Historians of the First World War are increasingly exploring the meaning, representations and consequences of the war for its 'colonial' participants. This was largely set in motion by the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) conference 'The World in World Wars' held in 2007. Santanu Das' edited work supplements such a movement; its sixteen contributors come from a broad range of disciplines and provide widespread analyses of various colonial forces, from New Zealand to China and from German East Africa to French Indo-China.

The organisation of the articles into three main sections succinctly encapsulates the main aims of this work. The first of these aims is to recover and recount the 'voice' or experiences of particular minorities who participated in the war, either as combatants or non-combatants. For instance, Paul Bailey skilfully uses Chinese journals published in Europe to chart the experiences of the 140, 000 contract labourers recruited by the French and British between 1916 and 1918. Elsewhere, Joe Lunn describes the exploits of Dema Mboup, a young Senegalese carpenter recruited into the French Army in 1915 to fight on the Western Front. However, with Lunn drawing on his previous historical research of the 1980s, and his reliance on recorded oral interviews with veterans, is the first indication that Das' emphasis on 'First World War Writing' does not necessarily permeate the articles of this edited publication. This, perhaps, is owing to the perennial difficulty of finding such written material.

Das' second goal is to engage with the conceptual framework of 'race', by examining perceptions of difference and 'Otherness' during the First World War. The fascinating investigation of prisoners of war in Germany and the Ottoman Empire by Heather Jones analyses the relations between white and non-white captives, as well as the surrounding racial 'anxieties' that abounded in Europe before and during the war. Similarly, Christian Koller studies an array of memoirs and letters to explore how colonial troops perceived their European comrades and vice-versa. Such analysis builds on prior work by George Robb and Philippa Levine, suggesting the importance of 'race' to our critical understanding of the war. This section is perhaps the most important and exciting contribution of Das' volume to current historical study.

The final aim of this work links with a parallel strand of First World War historiography, that of memorialisation. In seeking to uncover the variety of memories of war, contributors debate the meaning of post-war sites of memory such as Keith Jeffrey's examination of Sean O'Casey's Irish play *The Silver Tassie* (1930) or Richard Smith's interpretation of the Kingston memorial to the Jamaican war dead. Furthermore, Michèle Barrett demonstrates how such issues continue to be pertinent today, with increasing numbers of memorials erected to those 'forgotten' until now, such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) recent attention to the 616 South African Native Labour Corps who died when the SS *Mendi* sank off the Isle of Wight in 1917.

The range of sources used in this collection demonstrates the astonishing efforts of many historians to provide an alternative narrative of First World War, mirroring the similar academic and popular shift of the 1960s to uncover the story of the 'poilu' and 'Tommy

Atkins'. For example, Christopher Pugsley studies the depiction of Maori labourers in previously overlooked films, dissecting images of them playing sport in overseas operational theatres. Pugsley's analysis, like Lunn's Senegalese case study, shows how historical work on colonial subjects often lies beyond written sources. The focus on textual sources implied by the title of Das' work therefore overlooks the breadth of source material available, and indeed necessary, for the study of race and the First World War.

Whilst such edited works can naturally seem piecemeal to the reader, Das' searching and informative introduction brings synergy to a potentially disparate collection of articles, advancing debates particularly on the meaning of 'difference' within the colonial armies. Nevertheless, the historical discipline still awaits a more comprehensive global history of the First World War and the role of 'race' within it. Indeed, Das' contributors rather neglect theatres beyond the European battlefields, with comparatively little attention paid to Africa for example. The impact of the First World War on this continent should not be overlooked, as over two million men (and sometimes women) were recruited to serve as *askari* or in the infamous Carrier Corps. Overall therefore, this fascinating collection, edited by Das', complements the increasing number of global studies of the First World War, but also shows the extent of the work that remains to be done.

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