

Situating Empire: The Great War and Its Aftermaths
November 15-16, 2018
Harvard University

Location: William James 1550

November 15, 2018

Breakfast (10-10:15 AM)

Introduction (10:15-20)

Hardeep Dhillon (Harvard University) (5 minutes)

Opening Remarks (10:20-30 AM)

Professor Erez Manela (Harvard University) (10 minutes)

Panel One: Soldiers, Politics, & Violence (10:30 AM -12:30 PM)

Sarah Balakrishnan (Harvard University)

A Riot in Two Acts: Episodes in Police-Military Violence in Colonial Gold Coast

Response: Ben Silverstein (Australia National University)

This essay concerns two riots that occurred 25 years apart, in towns separated by less than twenty kilometres within the British colony of the Gold Coast. The first began on 25 April 1917, at the height of World War I; the second on 25 April 1942, at the height of World War II. Both witnessed the Gold Coast military confronting the Gold Coast police. Both also mobilized long political histories that—despite having resulted in different racial ideals for the officers recruited to the two forces—had never succeeded in dividing the troops completely. In 1892, the Gold Coast Constabulary had been partitioned into the military and the police. But, throughout colonial rule, the forces had nevertheless remained complexly intertwined. This essay locates the riots within a longer history of police-military violence in the Gold Coast. It argues that such violence often arose at moments of "radical fission," where the security forces were forcibly separated, as required during World War. The result was an atmosphere of mutual animosity, suspicion, and distrust.

Sneha Reddy (University of St. Andrews)

North African and Indian Soldiers in Palestine and Syria, 1917-23

Response: Sugata Bose (Harvard University)

In 1917, as the Allies increasingly diverted resources to the Middle East front, they presented the war with the Ottoman Caliph to their colonial peoples as a battle against Turkish oppression and imperialism. While colonial soldiers had in the past fought overseas in expeditionary forces and 'pacification' missions, the First World War exaggerated the pressures on the colonies by imposing huge demands on manpower and testing their loyalties in the face of active 'enemy' propaganda. Essentially an exercise in imperialism, Allied presence in the Middle East following the Armistice was made up of colonial troops, who were themselves Muslims in a significant proportion. It is remarkable, therefore, that in the face of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, colonial troops formed the predominant force occupying the holy grounds in Palestine and Syria. This was, however, not without consequences. While the exigencies of war dictated the dismantling of race and class-based recruitment and transformed colonial armies, imperial endeavours to secure the

Middle East space gave momentum to resistance in the colonies. The paper, therefore, turns the argument put forth by the Allies around to propose that by using colonial soldiers, France and Britain provided agency to anti-colonialism after all, not in the Ottoman Empire during wartime as proclaimed, but in the colonies in the aftermath of the war. Thus, the paper also counters the dominant discourse of collaboration perpetuated in official sources by throwing light on resistance movements in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and India. Based on archival research carried out in France, Britain and India, the paper examines, in comparative terms, wartime military correspondence, postal control records and surveillance reports, from North Africa and India as well as the Middle East front, thus situating empire and the Great War in a transnational context.

Matthew Kovac (Northwestern)

Traitors to the Crown: British Military Veterans in the IRA, 1918-1923

Response: Antoinette Burton (University of Illinois)

This paper seeks to explain how Irish First World War veterans came to join the Irish Republican Army upon their return home, taking up arms against the same British Empire they had loyally served in the trenches only several years previously. By examining veteran memoirs, service records and state pension files, I will argue that these veterans were politicised and then radicalised by the war itself, well before the ‘blood sacrifice’ of the 1916 Easter Rising. Shaken by the horrors of mechanised combat and keenly aware of their dual status as both white men and colonised people, Irish veterans found solidarity in unlikely places as the war brought them into contact with other colonised peoples, sharpening their sense of global anti-colonial consciousness and setting the stage for their revolt against the British crown. From the trenches of France to the jungles of East Africa, I will show how Irish veterans across all theatres of the war constructed their First World War experience as senseless, unjustified butchery, giving them a useful template against which to construct the Irish War of Independence as limited, justified and rational – even if this conflict, too, would ultimately prove similarly brutal and disillusioning. Given the lethal brew of economic austerity and demobilized troops present today in the United States and United Kingdom, understanding the forces that drive veterans into revolutionary versus counter-revolutionary paramilitary formations remains grimly relevant. By exploring the development of anticolonial consciousness among Irish troops and their revolutionary mobilization in the interwar period, this paper will offer crucial insights into veteran radicalisation and reintegration in our present age of war and austerity.

Lunch (12:30-2:30 PM)

Panel Two: Labor, Care & War (2:30-4:30 PM)

Ian KumeKawa (Harvard University)

Imperial Seeds and British Forests

Response: Charles Maier (Harvard University)

In the summer months of 1916, 15,000 Canadian soldiers landed in Great Britain. Bearing not guns, but axes and saws, these members of the Canadian Forestry Corps had crossed the Atlantic to fell British forests for the war effort. In Britain, they were directed by hastily-assembled departments staffed by colonial officials who had served in India, Ceylon, Malaya, and West Africa. Forest work in Britain required Canadian labor and colonial expertise because before World War I, Britain had neither a state forestry policy nor a developed timber industry. By 1920, it had the former, and the makings of the latter. Both depended on the exigencies of World War I, during which hundreds of

thousands of acres of British forests were confiscated and felled. Out of the war, a brand new British forestry policy – centered on figuring forests as imperial economic assets – developed with the active participation of scientific experts concentrated in centers for training probationers of the Indian and Colonial Forest Services.

Forestry, then, was a site in which colonial and imperial expertise drove the expansion of the British domestic state. It did so because the turmoil of World War I drew resources from across the empire to Europe. Expertise learned around the Bay of Bengal, skilled labor developed in the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland, and seeds grown in British Columbia combined in the forests of Scotland and in the committee rooms of Whitehall. During World War I, one form of imperial system replaced another. Before U-Boats began their harassment of the British merchant marine, Britain depended on a system of far-flung imperial forests for its timber. But during the war, human expertise, rather than physical commodities, moved toward the metropole. The result was an imperial forestry program – both scientific and political – for British forests.

William Lyon (Humboldt University)

Redefining Namibian Migrant Labor: War and Workers in Transition 1914-1925

Response: Laura Rademaker (Australia National University)

Namibia's history from the late 19th century up to independence has been defined by migrant workers. While detailed research has been conducted on the largest migrant labor group, Oshiwambo speakers from northern Namibia and southern Angola, especially during the period of South African rule from 1920-1989, little research has occurred on other migratory laborers. This project aims to do just that through a comparative social history examining the experiences of not only Oshiwambo speaking workers but also South Africans, West Africans and Italian speakers who comprised the very diverse migratory work force in the colony. This paper explores the labor transitions which resulted from the defeat of German forces in the colony during the First World War and the subsequent South African occupation and administration of Namibia. The employment of these laborers includes mining, railway construction, military transport, longshoreman and farm hands. Their stories were varied and confirm that there was not a monolithic experience of labor in the transitional period from German to South African rule. Through examining their interactions with one another in early colonial Namibia, a global migrant labor community comes into focus, where ideas were shared and transferred. These include the Garveyist black nationalist concepts brought by Liberians and forms of organized labor and protest practiced by Italians and Cape workers. The paper utilizes sources collected from across southern Africa and Europe most notably those of the "Native Estate" records in the National Archives of Namibia, which were thought to have been destroyed but discovered recently by Dr. Ellen Ndeshi Namhila. The backbone of the project is a large data set compiled from these records from 1917 to 1925. This detailed economic picture of workers during and after the war forms a quantitative foundation giving depth and perspective to the social history of worker experiences and perspectives drawn from legal cases, letters home, and war damage claims. This paper argues that the First World War had a great impact on not just the macro economics of colonial Namibia but also its labor force.

Austin Cooper (University of Pennsylvania)

Muslim Migrations, Scientific Circulations: Training Doctors and Nurses at the *Hopital Franco Musulman* Between the Wars

Response: David Jones (Harvard University)

Factory and construction workers comprised the vast majority of North Africans who migrated to Paris in the aftermath of the Great War, but the municipal government ensured that some doctors and nurses from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia came, too. This paper complicates a familiar story about the Great War's role in catalyzing the circulation of colonized labor through attention to medical expertise. French physicians and ethnologists posted in the colonies had convinced powerful police officials in Paris that limiting the spread of disease among North African migrants demanded knowledge of the Islamic faith, Muslim culture, and the Arabic language. Men and women with "native" fluency in these fields became the targets of imperial recruitment, their skills earning them passage to the metropole as well as medical training and a living stipend. These North African doctors and nurses worked alongside French colleagues at the Hôpital Franco-Musulman, which opened just outside Paris in 1935 with 300 beds all reserved for working-class migrants from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. The patient population embodied the importance that the police officials who had founded the hospital placed on Islam, as well as the police's interest in leveraging medicine's powers of surveillance and confinement to monitor nascent anticolonial nationalism. Drawing on hospital records, municipal archives, and medical theses written by physicians who trained at the hospital, this paper explores how North African medical practitioners negotiated professional roles as caregivers, researchers, and agents of the imperial state. Ultimately the interwar enrolment of North African doctors and nurses as the vanguard of public health in the metropolitan capital signals the profound ways in which the Great War reconfigured labor conditions and networks of expertise across the French empire.

Keynote (5:15-7 PM)

Heather Streets-Salter (Northeastern University)

Responses by:

Antoinette Burton (University of Illinois)

Henna Mistry (Queen's University)

Day 2: November 16, 2018

Breakfast (10-10:30 AM)

Panel Three: Mobility and War (10:30-12:30 PM)

Chris Szabla (Cornell University)

Demobilization and Remobilization: Internationalizing Settler Colonial Emigration from the Ruins of Post-WWI Europe

Response: Sana Aiyer (MIT)

In the wake of the First World War, much of Europe – defeated Germany and newly emerging states of Eastern and Central Europe in particular – faced a rash of interrelated demographic, economic, and security concerns. The demobilization of hundreds of thousands of soldiers into sputtering new (or newly hampered) economies, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Russian refugees from the escalating civil war to the east, and fears longer-term population growth would exacerbate the grievances of irredentist states dissatisfied with the postwar settlement led officials and intellectuals alike to see Europe's "surplus population" as a ticking time bomb likely to release a new global conflict in the absence of radical solutions.

The emerging complex of international organizations headquartered in Geneva appeared to offer a way out of this impasse. In the 1920s and 30s, Geneva institutions – above all the International Labour Office (ILO) – coordinated large-scale schemes to construct a comprehensive global regime aimed at improving the conditions of international migration and otherwise facilitating the distribution of emigrants outside overcrowded Europe. The technocratic regimes proposed and, in some instances, actually created in the course of these efforts served – sometimes explicitly – as an internationalized means of providing Central and Eastern European states with the “outlet” they lacked for their populations in the form of settler colonial territory. Such programs both sought to employ funds from wealthier states to channel migrants to destinations outside Europe – primarily British dominions and Latin American states – and use international legal and institutional oversight as tools to ensure they were not reduced to the status of “natives” in these societies. Destination states, for their part, bought into and even led the creation of such schemes out of racial enthusiasm for European population growth or a desire to develop – or, the word they more often used, “colonize” – sparsely-populated frontiers.

Heena Mistry (Queen’s University)

Envisioning Imperial Reformism in the Aftermath of the Great War

Response: Christopher Capozzola (MIT)

The aftermath of the Great War saw the rise and institutionalization of liberal internationalism, and colonial subjects’ espousal of it in response to imperialism. Liberal internationalism brought the reform of imperial racism closer within the realm of possibility. This paper unravels the different ways in which British Indian subjects settled across the empire made the case for their equality with white British subjects globally. Those making this case, whom I describe as “imperial reformists,” saw India’s contributions to the Great War, and the ensuing nominal privileges, which included India’s inclusion within the Commonwealth Councils, Imperial War Cabinet and the Paris Peace Conference, as steps towards their idealistic understanding of empire. Imperial reformists, which included leaders and activists in the Servants of India Society; Indian subjects who held prestigious positions in the Indian Civil Service; and even Indian Princes who worked extensively with Indians overseas, believed the entirety of the empire should be open for gentlemanly subjects like themselves to traverse and settle freely. They frequently alluded to an imagined benevolent, civilizing, and imperial ancient Indian past, which they used to draw boundaries between the ex-indentured diaspora, and black and indigenous subjects globally, in the push for the full privileges of British Imperial citizenship. In global academic circles, they drew on this allegedly civilizing Indian antiquity to challenge the notion of Western civilization’s superiority, which the Great War’s catastrophic violence had sullied. Understanding imperial reformists helps us move away from the methodological nationalism of the collaborator/resistor binary, thereby illuminating why many Indian subjects wanted to maintain but reform British subjecthood.

Hardeep Dhillon (Harvard University)

War & Necessity: Law, Mobility, and the Itinerant Person

Response: Juliet Nabolon (Harvard University)

This paper explores wartime laws that were constructed to detain, deport, and control the movement of imperial citizens and foreign subjects in India. It highlights how the laws developed by colonial officers to contain mobility built borders beyond the perimeter of colonial India moving from Sindh southwards around the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts and northeast through the Bay of Bengal. Instead, the British imperial government focused on curtailing mobility at the sites of ships, port cities, prisons, and within villages. By focusing on the development of borders and curtailed mobility at these sites, the imperial government could monitor the flow of itinerant subjects

to ensure that they would not rebel or stoke rebellion against the state. This paper focuses on the logics that contributed to the construction of wartime law, the conditions these laws facilitated, and how imperial subjects negotiated them.

Lunch: William James 1305 (12:30-2 PM)

Plenary Panel (2-4 PM)

Professor Antoinette Burton (University of Illinois)

Professor Heather Streets Salter (Northeastern University)

Professor Erez Manela (Harvard University)