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Meghan Tinsley, *Commemorating Muslims in the First World War Centenary: Making Melancholia*. London: Routledge, 2022. xi + 182 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. £120.00 (hb). ISBN 9-78-0367551858.

Review by Dónal Hassett, University College Cork.

Meghan Tinsley's new book offers a timely and engaging analysis of the variety of commemorative discourses surrounding Muslim participation in the First World War that have emerged in France and in Britain during the Centenary period. While the so-called imperial turn in First World War studies has seen a surge in academic and popular publications on the involvement of colonial soldiers in general—and Muslims in particular—in what was a truly global conflict, the scholarly research on the mobilisation of these histories in contemporary commemorative discourse is much more limited. And yet, the emergence of competing narratives of the Muslim contribution to the war and contested visions of its relevance to contemporary politics was a novel feature of Centenary discourse on both sides of the English Channel. This book thus represents a valuable contribution to the fields of memory studies, postcolonial studies, and First World War studies, notable not only for the richness of the analysis it presents but also for the potential avenues of further research it highlights.

Seeking to build a comprehensive account of the variety of views of Muslim participation in the war, Tinsley combines analysis of large-scale official commemorative ceremonies with the close study of eleven specific sites of memory (six in Britain, five in France) that were the focus of some form of grass-roots memorialisation. Careful to avoid a simple binary interpretation of top-down or bottom-up dynamics in the construction of memory narratives, her analysis explores the relative power, access to resources, and audiences of those seeking to craft and promote different visions of this past and its presents. The specific memorial practices they adopted are tied into a broader interrogation of how the mobilisation of Muslim contributions to the war impacted wider societal and national narratives about the Great War as an historical event and Muslims' and Islam's place in the contemporary national community. The result is a rich and critical account of the tensions at the heart of memory-making during the Centenary that speaks to the contested nature of commemoration in multicultural postcolonial societies.

Over the course of five chapters, the author exposes how the fact of the participation of Muslim colonial subjects in the First World War and its mobilisation in contemporary commemorative discourse unsettle not just the national narratives that are built up around the war but the very category of the nation-state itself. Where once the predominant commemorative discourse of the Great War as a European civil war or a struggle (on the Western Front) between democracies

and tyrannies reinforced French and British visions of the discrete, ethnically homogenous and heroic nation-state, the re-emergence of the figure of the Muslim colonial soldier in memories of the war destabilises the symbolic and geographic borders of the imagined national community. While some commemorative acts and sites consciously seek to mobilise French and British society behind a reconfigured, but still reified, vision of the national community that has room for (some) Muslims, others are defined by what Tinsley, drawing on the work of Paul Gilroy, terms melancholia. Melancholic memory discourses, she argues, expose the enduring instability of national projects and the impossibility, and indeed the undesirability, of singular and unitary national narratives of pasts and presents.

The first chapter provides an overview of the processes underpinning the construction of national memory narratives, as well as a detailed account of the participation of Muslim colonial soldiers in the Great War and its historical commemoration in France and Britain. Tinsley effectively underlines the stakes of the contested commemorative discourses around the experiences of Muslim soldiers by analysing the clashes between radical Islamists and far-right extremists at the 2010 Armistice Day commemorations and the reactions they provoked in the media and among the British political class. The chapter also introduces the eleven sites of memory she plans to analyse and provides the reader with a broad summary of her overall argument.

Chapter two focuses on the specificities of how national narratives have been constructed in France and Britain and the evolving role the memory of the First World War has played in them. Tinsley argues that the bulk of the Centenary period was marked by a perhaps surprising inversion of the traditional modes of memory making in both countries, with a French commemorative culture increasingly decentralised and less tied to official grand narratives standing in contrast to a more overtly nationalistic British vision of the war. Turning her attention to the local sites of commemoration, she highlights the discursive diversity and polysemy of each *lieu de mémoire*. Her exploration of the competing narratives of mourning, mobilisation, and melancholia within these sites points to the limits of overarching national narratives and the commonality in the tensions generated by the commemoration of imperial pasts.

In the book's third chapter, Tinsley delves into the impact of the different modes of memory she identifies on the way the national community and the nation-state are configured. She draws a clear line between discourses of mourning and mobilisation--celebrating the model of the loyal and worthy Muslim--and discourses of melancholia, critiquing the exploitative and coercive systems of rule that gave rise to the participation of colonial Muslim troops in the war and subsequently obscured its memory. While sites that cultivated melancholic memories of the war did receive support from both states and positive coverage from the media, their exposition of the violence and discrimination that underpinned the British and French imperial polities had limited impact on the broader representation of the nation in commemorative discourse.

Chapter four examines the complex practicalities of memory-making at historical sites. Relying on extensive fieldwork, the author considers the multiple factors that influence the commemorative meaning attached to certain sites, illustrating how the intentions of those leading commemorative work are often reshaped by the requirements of official bodies that provide funding, by the significations already embodied in the structures of the sites themselves and by the cultural and historical understandings of those who visit the site. Here we see memory making as a dialectical process where outcomes cannot be clearly foreseen or controlled.

The final chapter reflects on how the evolution of the political situation in both countries, marked by the surge of right-wing populist nationalism, impacted the commemorative discourse in the closing stages of the Centenary. Tinsley asserts that the controversies surrounding Brexit in Britain meant that the final official acts of commemoration were relatively muted and deliberately divorced from contemporaneous political debates, anchored in bland platitudes about national unity and the commitment to peace. In contrast, France's new president Emmanuel Macron mobilised the memory of the First World War to denounce the dangers of nationalism and promote European cooperation in a clear refutation of the political vision of his primary opponents, the extreme-right. The figure of the Muslim soldier receded from official commemoration, she argues, as the imperative of political discourse shifted away from debates over Islam's place in the imagined national community and towards broader conflicts over national sovereignty and Europe that could easily be related to the traditional, Eurocentric narratives that had long surrounded the war.

While the extension of the imagined geographies of First World War commemoration during the Centenary has been widely lauded in the press, the kind of critical analysis that runs throughout this book has been marginal to public discourse. And yet, as Tinsley convincingly argues, the incorporation of the figure of the Muslim soldier into official commemorative discourses has typically been predicated on obscuring the violence of the colonial system and its enduring legacies in the present. Folding the deaths of Muslims into the ranks of the national war dead erases the specificity of the conditions of their service and the compensation (or lack of same) offered to those they left behind. Recasting the participation of Muslim and other colonial troops as a cosmopolitan enterprise that prefigured contemporary multiculturalism negates the coercion and repression that underpinned the colonial system and minimises the persistence of discrimination. While the focus has often been on how these discourses expand the imagined national community, the book instead highlights their role in recalibrating the boundaries that police belonging in the post-colonial state. Melancholic modes of memory, in contrast, expose and explode those same boundaries, simultaneously deconstructing and transcending the borders of the national. Although, as the book acknowledges, they may be limited in their capacity to unsettle the grand narratives of the state, they do constitute a vital commemorative counter-hegemony grounded in ethical and honest visions of the past and present and hopeful aspirations for the future. *Commemorating Muslims* provides us with a framework through which can disentangle these different discourses and decipher their broader significance to the post-colonial polities that generated them.

Tinsley is an engaging and reflective writer. She has mastered the art of using the illustrative anecdote to draw her reader in and introduce her broader analysis. While the transitions between the analysis of the high politics of state-led commemoration and the discussion of the specific sites of memory could be smoother, the combination of both is vital to avoiding an overly institutionalist vision of memory-making during the Centenary. The author's embrace of auto-ethnography is effective, especially in the opening of the book's conclusion, and lends nuance and credibility to her argument. Although the key concept of melancholia and its expression in what Tinsley describes as cultivated and latent forms is explained in detail in the body of the text, it would have been useful to forearm the reader from the very outset with a clear and concise exposition of the book's conceptual framework. This book should find an audience beyond those with expertise in memory studies and postcolonial studies, so a little more attention to guiding the reader through its intellectually sophisticated theoretical approaches would have enhanced its potential impact.

While the density and nuance of the argument developed in the less than 200 pages of this book are impressive, it does leave some questions open as potential avenues for future research. The book's analysis deconstructs the concepts of national memory and the nation-state, but there is less engagement with the reified and decontextualised category of the Muslim as deployed in commemorative and political discourse throughout the Centenary. It would be fascinating to see a detailed study of the extent to which the Muslim represented in the centenary mapped on to contemporary society's hegemonic racialised understandings of who Muslims are (South Asians in Britain, North Africans in France) and to what extent they reflect the diverse origins, cultures and practices of the Muslims who actually participated in the war. The role of minorities in the broader Muslim communities that have historic political and cultural ties to the imperial polity and/or the Armed forces (the *harkis* in France and the Ahmadiyya in Britain spring to mind) also merits further attention. The presence in both countries of significant diaspora communities from Turkey and other regions that provided troops for the Ottoman Empire also raise the question of if and how the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who fought on the Axis side were commemorated in France and Britain. Finally, an analysis of the elision between the categories of colonial and Muslim in elements of the commemorative discourse has the potential to enrich our understanding of the shifting processes of racialisation over the course of the last century in both France and Britain.

The sign of a good first book is that it not only answers novel questions but also opens many more. *Commemorating Muslims in the First World War Centenary* does exactly this. Meghan Tinsley has contributed one of the foundation blocks on which scholars will build a broader critical history of the role of race and empire in the Centenary commemorations.

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