Romain Fathi et al., editors, ***Exiting war: The British Empire and the 1918-20 moment***

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The British Empire's involvement in five years of gruelling, global conflict saw it reap enormous territorial rewards. Never before had so much of the world map been painted red. Yet, the First World War also left the Empire drained; the coffers lay bare and the will to engage in prolonged struggles to hold on to its gains was greatly diminished. Romain Fathi, Margaret Hutchison, Andrekos Varnava and Michael J. K. Walsh's *Exiting War* offers readers a fascinating dissection of the Empire at this crucial and rather paradoxical juncture in its history. While the period between the signing of the armistices in 1918 and the peace treaties in 1919 and 1920 has hardly been overlooked, the originality of this volume lies in its simultaneously narrow chronological focus–the '1918-20 moment'–and the wide geographical expanse of the British Empire it covers. It is not the metropole that is central to the chapters presented in this volume, but the margins. Another novelty of *Exiting War*'s approach is its mobilisation of the *sortie de guerre* ("coming out of/exiting war") framework. This approach, not to be confused with "the Greater War" framework, complicates the overly simplistic war/peace dichotomy by drawing attention to and analysing the complex and active processes underpinning transitions from war to peace.

The first of *Exiting War*'s three sections, "Facing the challenges of peace", includes contributions by Hannah Mawdsley on Australia and the wider imperial response to the 1918-19 influenza pandemic; Trevor Harris on the repatriation of British and dominion soldiers; and Panikos Panayi on the expulsion of Germans from the Empire. In her chapter, Mawdsley takes apart the notion that the 1918-19 influenza pandemic was "forgotten" in Australia while going on to show how it "contributed to the Dominion's emerging national self-image" (p. 30). This was due to the fact that Australia was able to put in place relatively successful containment measures that tamped down on the spread of influenza, saved lives and received international praise. Pride in the nation's achievements provided an opportunity to differentiate the Dominion's place within the Empire. After its experiences of the First World War, Australia once again proved itself to be a better Britain. In the following chapter, Harris expands on the theme of differing approaches to imperial post-war challenges with his analysis of repatriation. On the surface, the demobilisation of three out of four million British soldiers within a year of the Armistice can be viewed as a success story for the British Empire during the 1918-20 moment. However, Harris argues that repatriation also highlighted "British administrative and

economic impairment" (37), which resulted in greater autonomy for the Dominions. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the responses to attempts to have returned soldiers from the British Isles resettled on farms in the Dominions; they were not prepared to have British veterans foisted upon them, and those that did make it to the Dominions received cool receptions. In keeping with the theme of mass movement, Panayi's chapter considers how the Empire dealt with Germans living within its boundaries. The policies of concentration and internment established during the war could not be continued *ad infinitum*. The result was the mass deportation of nearly all Germans from British territory. This was made possible thanks to Britain's history of forced migration as well as the specific circumstances of the First World War and its aftermath, which saw imperial and local networks mobilised to handle the logistics of such an operation and the elaboration of a British policy that reflected similar policies of "ethnic cleansing" (70) in the former German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires.

While the first three chapters introduce the key threads running through *Exiting War*– movement, nationalism, race, expansion and control–the middle section, "Controlling and exporting a military tradition", knits these threads together more tightly. Samraghni Bonnerjee's micro-historical contribution proffers a particularly intimate perspective on the 1918-20 moment. Her meticulous critical and postcolonial analysis of two coloniser-soldiers' experiences in British colonies shows how these officers reaffirmed colonial agency "by employing the tropes of orientalism, othering and violent colonialism" (82). However, this chapter is about more than two officers seeking to dominate the human and non-human in colonised spaces. As Bonnerjee asserts, the life-writings she examines were not created in a vacuum. Rather, they are representative of the wider imperial system of the time that was working to reassert control after its grip on the colonies had loosened during the war. Kate Imy's following chapter dovetails neatly here, as it explores how the British sought to maintain control over the Indian Army during this precarious period for the empire. While the sources Bonnerjee analyses illustrate the contempt the imperial system had for colonised peoples and the modes of discrimination and violence it brought to bear on them, Imy's contribution makes clear that these elements were not sufficient to ensure the loyalty of local soldiers: concessions had to be made "to cultivate the illusion of an inclusive colonial-military state" (99). These were not minor either. A particularly telling example is the organisation of military Hajjs, which demonstrates the lengths officials were willing to go to win over Muslim soldiers, especially when one considers that so many others–returned soldiers, the bereaved–were clamouring for imperial support for their own pilgrimages.

Exiting War's final section, "Contesting and strengthening empire", begins on the margins of the Empire, both in terms of geography and influence, with Charles-Phillipe Courtois' chapter

tracing the roots of Quebec nationalism. Courtois demonstrates how the 1918-20 moment was the first time the idea of a distinct *Quebecois* nationalism began to seep into the wider political discourse in French-speaking Canada, undermining the French-Canadian nationalist movement, which backed the idea of pan-Canadian identity. While the ideas espoused by the Quebec nationalists ultimately failed to sway the most influential promoters of pan-Canadian nationalism at this time, it laid the intellectual foundations for the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. The last two chapters then take us to the imperial corridors of power, shedding light on British policymakers' struggles to manage the Empire's expanded borders. Andrekos Varnava's chapter scrutinises the back and forth between British Liberal philhellenes and Tory imperialists over the question of *enosis*, the cession of Cyprus to Greece. That the Liberals failed to obtain their colleagues' backing on this question was indicative of their inability to formulate clear justifications for *enosis*. Their position also ignored the reality on the ground, where *enosis* was not overwhelmingly supported by the local population and would have likely threatened the Muslim/Turkish Cypriot minority living on the island. That said, the rejection of *enosis* was also emblematic of an inflexibility on the part of imperialists to relinquish their hold on territories where the British presence was established. And yet, such inflexibility was not an option elsewhere in the Empire, notably the newly-acquired mandated territories of the Middle East. As Clothilde Huout's contribution demonstrates, the British were forced to implement a policy of "expedient imperialism" (165) to secure and maintain its gains in the region. This form of imperialism pointed to the lack of a wider, cohesive policy and was largely reactive when responding to local challenges, such as Arab nationalism. As Huout argues, the result of this expedient imperialism during the 1918-20 moment was "almost as decisive in the 'making of the modern Middle East'" (175) as the First World War itself.

The strength of edited collections often resides in the variety of views presented, but this can also be a weakness when the overarching theme is ultimately too broad. *Exiting War* avoids this pitfall. At first glance, the range of subjects tackled may appear somewhat disparate, but the individual chapter authors adhere to the volume's clearly delineated heuristic framework– "the 1918-20 moment"–and, just as importantly, the collection's co-editors make significant theoretical, historiographical and contextual contributions in the introductory and concluding chapters. Indeed, it is not always the case that edited collections include a final, summarising chapter penned by the editor(s), but *Exiting War* greatly benefits from it, as Fathi, Hutchison Varnava and Walsh weave together even more tightly the volume's guiding threads. This permits the reader to step back and take stock of a wider, highly nuanced picture: that of an empire that has reached its zenith but is also beset by a multitude of internal and external pressures. Perhaps the only major quibble that can be levelled at this volume is its length. Its ten chapters make up less than two hundred pages and, although the inclusion of a select bibliography is a welcome addition for those who wish to delve further into the "war exit" of

the British Empire, many of the individual contributions could have benefitted from a little more space to breathe. Conversely, the fact that *Exiting War* achieves so much in spite of its brevity makes a compelling case for future studies of the British Empire's 1918-20 moment.