

Race, Empire and First World War Writing

Edited by Santanu Das



CAMBRIDGE

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Afterword
Death and the afterlife:
Britain's colonies and dominions

Michèle Barrett

Jane Urquhart's remarkable novel *The Stone Carvers* (2002) imagines a young woman, of European wood-carving ancestry, travelling to Vimy in northern France from a village near Hamilton, Ontario. Disguised as a man, she obtains work on the Canadian monument and early one morning she steals into the workshop to carve the face of one of Walter Allward's allegorical figures in the image of her dead lover Eamonn. When Allward discovers her, he is angry that she has 'ruined' his torchbearer, explaining 'he had wanted this stone youth to remain allegorical, universal, wanted him to represent everyone's lost friend, everyone's lost child'. Allward, we are told, 'wanted the stone figure to be the 66,000 dead young men who had marched through his dreams when he had conceived the memorial'. But the face Klara was carving 'had developed a personal expression', it was 'becoming a portrait', and this had 'never been his intention'. Confronted by this determined young woman, Urquhart's fictional Walter Allward realises that she has 'allowed life' to enter his monument and relents: 'you can finish carving his face', he agrees.¹

Klara Becker's desire to impose the face of one particular young man onto the body of Allward's universal young man can be seen as a metaphor for the philosophy of commemoration that prevailed on the Western Front, and in Europe generally, after the war. The Imperial War Graves Commission was attempting to bridge a gap between the universal and national on the one hand, and the personal and individual on the other. Headstones were to be of a standard size, let into the ground on beams that would keep them in perfect rows. Famously, there would be no distinction of military rank, and hence also no distinction of civil rank, or social class. On the body of the blank headstone would be carved the face of the individual – their name, their rank and regiment, their religion, perhaps some personal words from the family. Of these markers of the individual, the name was the most important, a fact that came into its own in the commemoration of those with no known grave – the missing. At Vimy Ridge, the 11,000 names of the

missing, about a sixth of Canada's casualties, form an important element of the design and structure of the monument. For the fictional Klara Becker, too, the name itself is important. As she is being helped to chisel out Eamonn O'Sullivan's name, Allward tells her to 'let it go out of your heart and into the stone'.²

The principle of the individual name forming the basis for modern commemoration is held up as a mark of progress – publicly naming each private soldier or naval rating is democratic.³ The Imperial War Graves Commission's strategy, led by its Vice-Chairman, General Sir Fabian Ware, was based on equality of treatment, which meant uniformity. Fabian Ware, in *The Immortal Heritage* (1937), stressed the general principle, and many early documents of the Imperial War Graves Commission also make this clear. For some while, however, the present Commonwealth War Graves Commission (the name was changed in 1960) has claimed that the principle of equality applies not only to military rank and social class, but also to issues of 'race and creed'. This may be true now, but certainly was not true after the First World War, and given what we know about the imperial context of that war, it would be very surprising if that had been the case.

Britain's self-governing 'dominions' offer examples of memorials on the Western Front, such as Canada's Vimy Ridge and South Africa's Delville Wood, where extensive naming occurred. Whether this is inclusive is a source of debate, since black Africans were until recently ignored at Delville Wood. The colonies were a different matter altogether. How different can be decisively clarified by a letter in the archives of the Imperial War Graves Commission, to be sent to the Governors of the Crown Colonies in 1921 by Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary. Churchill stressed the importance of 'equality of treatment for the graves of all' and advised that local administrations 'should not erect memorials of a different nature from those adopted by the Commission'. Churchill's letter makes clear this policy does not apply to colonial natives; they are not included in 'all'. In a separate paragraph, he unites these excluded people:

The erection of memorials to the memory of native troops, carriers, etc., depends upon local conditions. In ordinary circumstances the Commission would not erect individual headstones but a central memorial in some suitable locality to be selected by the Government concerned.⁴

Important differences emerged in how the dead were commemorated in European theatres of the war and elsewhere in the world; different parts of the empire were treated differently.

BRITAIN'S AFRICAN COLONIES: EXAMPLES OF
THE IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION'S POLICY

In 1922, the Imperial War Graves Commission was in discussion with the colonial authorities in Africa about how to deal with the casualties of the war there. It is estimated that 'upwards of 200,000' Africans died in the First World War, a figure including labourers as well as soldiers.⁵ Estimating how many porters, carriers and soldiers died in the various campaigns in Africa has proved complex; Geoffrey Hodges suggested a figure of 'far above 100,000' African deaths in the East Africa campaign alone.⁶ The files of the Imperial War Graves Commission contain notes of a meeting with the Governor of Tanganyika Territory in East Africa (now Tanzania). The Commission had been canvassing opinion as to whether native Africans who had died should be individually commemorated or not. The Governor was on the side of those who thought this would be a waste of public money:

He considered that the vast Carrier Corps Cemeteries at Dar es Salaam and elsewhere should be allowed to revert to nature as speedily as possible & did not care to contemplate the statistics of the native African lives lost in trying to overcome the transportation difficulties of the campaign in East Africa.⁷

Broadly speaking, the Commission accepted the view of the British colonial authorities that Africans had not reached 'the stage of civilisation' at which individual graves would be appreciated.⁸ They decided to put up 'central memorials' in the towns, commemorating unnumbered and unnamed African lives lost. They differentiated sharply between the graves of whites or Europeans (including their German enemies), and those of natives. What they called 'white graves' have been maintained in perpetuity, often through exhumation and reburial in 'concentrated' cemeteries. Many identified graves of Africans were abandoned; in a move that Commission staff wryly referred to as 'sent Missing', the names were simply reallocated to memorials to the missing. Religion was important as well as race, and there is evidence of converted Christian Africans being treated differently from their pagan brethren.⁹

Several of these 'central memorials' were put up in Africa, perhaps the best-known being the one in Mombasa, Kenya (Figure 7). Situated at the southeastern end of Jomo Kenyatta Avenue, the memorial consists of fine bronze sculptures, by J. A. Stevenson, of four types of men who contributed to the East African campaign. They include *askari*, African soldiers, often in the King's African Rifles regiment (left and centre right); Arab riflemen, usually Yemenis or Hadramouts (centre left); and porters and carriers



7. African War Memorial at Mombasa, Kenya



PA-066815

8. Recruits from the File Hills Indian Colony in Saskatchewan with their parents before the departure of the 68th, Regina, Battalion for England

(right). I use the word ‘type’ advisedly, for the brief was specific in requiring typicality. In 1923 the sculptor sent to East Africa for exact copies of the men’s uniforms and equipment, and J. N. Cormack, the Imperial War Graves Commission’s Deputy Director of Works in East Africa, obtained clothing, headgear, belts, haversacks and water bottles, and had them all shipped to London for Stevenson. For the porters, apparently there was ‘no proper or “fixed” equipment issued’, and ‘when on the march they seldom wore puttees or sandals but protected their feet with such makeshifts of grass, skin, etc. which they could obtain’.¹⁰

The ‘central memorials’ contain no names and no numbers of men killed. Many other troops, notably from the Indian Army, were commemorated ‘numerically’, which meant that lists of names existed on ‘nominal rolls’ and printed registers but it was decided not to put them on the memorial – instead an exact number of deaths was recorded alongside the name of the regiment or military unit concerned. With these African

memorials, however, what appears are general inscriptions. For the plinth below, in several African languages as well as in English, were the specially composed words of Rudyard Kipling: 'This is to the memory of the Arab and Native African troops who fought; to the Carriers and Porters who were the feet and hands of the army; and to all other men who served and died for their King and country in Eastern Africa in the Great War, 1914–1918. If you fight for your country, even if you die, your sons will remember your name.' Kipling was a genius at the finely calibrated epigraph in tricky colonial situations. He was perfectly aware that these men would need to be remembered by their families, as neither the colonial authorities nor the Imperial War Graves Commission would be giving their names an afterlife.

Similar memorials were erected in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and also in western Africa, including one in Lagos (now dismantled). On the present-day Commonwealth War Graves Commission website the figure for native deaths in East Africa is put at 'almost 50,000' and it is stated that 'as no complete record of their names exists, no names appear on the memorials'.¹¹ There is undoubtedly no complete record today, but in the years following the First World War the argument about inadequate records often functioned as a screen for discrimination. Taking the issues of 'race' and 'creed', I will give some examples of systematic inequality of treatment in the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission in Africa. Consider the following policy ruling made at the IWGC on 24 November 1925, and stated by its Principal Assistant Secretary, Lord Arthur Browne. It concerns cemetery memorial registers for natives. Browne begins by adverting to Fabian Ware's view that 'identical treatment' of British and native troops should be accorded so far as 'circumstances permit'. From this he concludes that registers should be compiled, which would include the names of native soldiers, and also followers 'to the extent that satisfactory records may exist'. Browne then sails confidently into the definition of a 'native', which for him includes Indians, Egyptians, Arabs, and East, West and South Africans, 'but not South African coloured people'. As we shall see, although he regarded Indians as 'natives', he was far more sympathetic to Indian cultures and religions than he was to African. Browne continues with a ruling on the position of natives buried in cemeteries but not accorded an IWGC headstone: these names, he says, should be put in the registers of appropriate memorials, but not in the registers of the cemeteries. He concludes: 'if we were to include all the names of the latter class in the cemetery register I think we should be unnecessarily drawing attention to the fact that we have neglected to commemorate by a headstone'.¹² Earlier that year, in discussing graves in Nyasaland (now Malawi), Browne's opinion was

recorded as being that 'in the case of Native African soldiers headstones should not be erected unless obliged to do so'.¹³

The purpose of Browne's policy becomes clear only when one appreciates that native graves in Africa were not usually maintained, that mostly they were not accorded a headstone, and that many of their known occupants were redefined as 'missing'. By and large Africans, whether soldiers or labourers, were not commemorated individually, and their graves were allowed to 'revert to nature'. These decisions were not entirely based on arguments about 'race', but were also about religion (or in War Graves Commission parlance, 'creed'). Some instances can be taken from a summary of decisions given by Browne in an internal memo in 1924. Regarding the policy of the Commission in East Africa, we hear that

at the 159th Management Committee Meeting the P.A.S. [Principal Assistant Secretary, i.e. Browne] stated that the usual policy of the Commission was not to erect headstones on Indians and Natives although identification of Natives might be known, but European Cape Boys would be commemorated.¹⁴

He further states that 'coloured South Africans are not reckoned as Natives. They are half castes and should be treated as European Christians and commemorated precisely as British soldiers.' Similarly, as regards West Indian Natives 'i.e. Negroes in West Indian Regiments', they were 'commemorated individually where buried in East Africa - Christians'. The general rule for African natives, however, was 'no individual commemoration'.¹⁵

Commission officials went to some lengths to administer these policy decisions. Clerk of Works Milner, overseeing the 'concentration' of graves into selected cemeteries in East Africa, engaged in a 'close scrutiny of the remains' that he found in a common grave at Salaita Hill. He identified the remains, by shape of skull and other anthropometric devices, to be those of 14 Europeans and 6 Indians.¹⁶ On the same trip he found another common grave, near the railway station at Taveta. He reports that 'on 15th May 1923 I excavated the 11 graves at this place and gathered 11 remains who were undoubtedly not Europeans as the shape of the skulls, leg and arm bones, were different, also the teeth were in perfect condition.'¹⁷ The image of Imperial War Graves Commission employees picking through human remains in order to 'race' them is unexpected and disturbing.

Religion was an important issue. Following the widespread practice among British travellers in Africa, the natives were regarded simply as 'pagans', as seen in the blunt memo that 'Director of Works on tour stated that Pagan Natives have no regard for graves, . . . and Graves would revert to Nature.'¹⁸ In 1925 the Commission was working on the cemetery at Rufiji

River in East Africa, with Mr Cormack again in charge. Captain Miskin, the IWGC Registrar, wrote in June that year to the Director of Records, attempting to rescue two graves of Christians from the 'revert to nature' policy being applied to African natives: 'The burial book shows that Hospital Boy Zensuriguiza was a Roman Catholic, and 13050 Cape Boy William was evidently a Christian too. I think Major Cormack should be asked about those two cases, and whether their bodies could be found and removed to Morogoro' [cemetery].¹⁹ The headstone decision was, on the ground, an evaluative one. Major Cormack would have been sympathetic to the request. In a 1922 report he had noted that among 'numerous other natives who died in the vicinity', only nine had been buried in the Christian cemetery, and he concluded, 'the inference I draw is, that they may be regarded as Christians and *worthy of commemoration* by the standard type of Headstone' [my italics].²⁰

By 1930, these policy decisions had become routinised. Arthur Browne, summarising the position for West Africa [Gold Coast (now Ghana), Nigeria and Sierra Leone], was able to state that

so far as I know nothing has occurred to alter the policy of the Commission under which all known European graves in West Africa will have headstones and all Natives (whether buried in known graves or not) will be commemorated on memorials.

He added that 'for statistical purposes I should imagine that the only course practicable for the great majority of West African natives is to count them as missing'.²¹

INDIAN CULTURAL MATTERS AND THE MEMORIAL AT BASRA

In comparison with African native troops, the soldiers of the Indian Army were highly regarded by the men of the Imperial War Graves Commission. A perhaps unexpected side to Lord Arthur Browne emerges here in his knowledge of Indian cultural forms – it transpires that his father had been in the Bengal Civil Service. In September 1923 Arthur Browne explained to the Director of Works that 'the religion of natives of India can always be told from their names except perhaps in the case of some of the followers'; he even offered to get involved personally: 'if you will send me down names I will probably be able to say what they are', adding that 'Bhagwan Tikkum would be a Hindu'.²² Earlier that year Browne had written to Sir Frederick Kenyon, the Director of the British Museum, for information on a point on

which he had drawn a blank at the India Office – what religious emblem to use on the headstones of Indians buried in France, ‘whose religion is given as “Animist”’. In the African context, such people would simply be ‘pagans’ (and there would be no headstones to worry about), but Browne takes a far more relativist stance here – ‘as far as my experience goes Indian Animists appear to worship the spirits of the jungle, water, mountains, etc’, he says chattily – and wonders if it might be best to put up a headstone without any religious emblem.²³ By the end of 1925, Browne was getting frustrated at the fact that the India Office was not willing to take responsibility for the spelling of Indian names, which he said ‘does not absolve the Commission from doing their best to engrave inscriptions at which no one with a knowledge of India can reasonably cavil’.²⁴

The Imperial War Graves Commission was aware that many mistakes had been made during the war in the disposition of dead Indian soldiers and followers. After the war a policy was worked out, attempting to reduce some of the damage (or, more accurately, the evidence of what had happened). The circumstances at Gallipoli, where many Indian soldiers died, led Lieutenant Colonel Hughes (the IWGC’s Director of Works there) to discuss the matter with General Cox and determine a policy. One simple principle was that ‘in the case where Hindoos and Moslems are mixed up together, and are unidentified, a decision should be made as to which shall be ignored’.²⁵ Similarly, ‘where individual Moslems are buried in Christian Cemeteries, these graves should not be marked, or action taken’. The policy regarding Moslems was no exhumation: ‘Mussulman graves should not be touched or bodies removed’. The policy for ‘Hindoos’ included Sikhs and Gurkhas, and was directed at redressing the proscribed burial of Hindu soldiers: ‘where it is known *for certain* that Hindoos have been buried, their remains should be exhumed, burnt, and taken out to sea to be scattered on the water by Hindoo soldiers, under a Hindoo officer, or if a Hindoo regiment is returning to India, they should be given an opportunity to take the ashes back with them’. After that, a tablet was to be erected near where the remains were burnt, naming the soldiers who ‘fell near this spot’.²⁶

The major casualties of the Indian Army in the First World War occurred in Mesopotamia, and are commemorated there on the Basra Memorial. This was unveiled in the late 1920s, standing on the bank of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. In the early 1990s it was removed, by Saddam Hussein, and re-erected in the desert near Nasiriyah. Invading British forces found it in 2003, and took great interest in finding their regimental comrades of the First World War (particularly of the Black Watch) and in helping to restore the dilapidated monument. Approximately 8,000 British soldiers were

commemorated there, by name, in the usual way. But for the Indian soldiers, the Commission had eighty years earlier taken a decision that departed significantly from the principle of equality of treatment. A telegram sent on 4 August 1928 from the Commission to the Indian Army in Simla states the facts baldly: 'Basra Memorial. Total number of missing from Indian Army commemorated by name officers 665[,] numerically other ranks 33,222'.²⁷ Put plainly, the Indian casualties were differentiated by rank: the 665 Indian officers were commemorated individually by name, as were British casualties of all ranks, while the huge number of Indian 'other ranks' were recorded on the monument merely as the number of men killed from each military unit.

To take an example, consider the wording from a photograph of Panel 55 of the Basra Memorial, on which the deaths of men from the 36th Sikh Regiment are commemorated.²⁸ On the left at the top of this panel are the names of two British officers, Captain J. Grey and Captain A. D. Martin. Ranging to the right of them are six Indian officers, Subadars Gurmukh Singh, Harnam Singh, Jagat Singh and Jaimal Singh, and Jemadars Hakim Singh and Harnam Singh – and underneath is a line that reads 'AND 149 OTHER INDIAN SOLDIERS'. The pattern is repeated below for the two units of the Garwhal Rifles, the first naming one subadar (as spelt here) and 51 'other Indian soldiers' and the second naming two subadars and 65 'other Indian soldiers'. The journalist Fergal Keane, visiting the Basra Memorial in 2003, commented that the inscription to 'Subhadar Mahanga and 1,770 other Indian soldiers' was 'a sentence as sad as any I've read in war'.²⁹

The names of the dead 36th Sikhs other ranks are not engraved on the memorial, but they are in the Register. Generally, cemeteries and memorials have a published register available to visitors in a box at the entrance, listing more particulars, including family details, than is possible to put on a memorial. Registers for the memorial at Basra were compiled in the usual way, so we can see the names of those men who were commemorated numerically: the first entry reads 'Amar Singh, Havr., [Havildar], 2645. 1st Feb, 1917. Son of Ram Singh, of Sherpur Gobind, Hoshiartpur, Punjab'.³⁰ But if one looks for the name of Singh, A. in the online Debt of Honour Register of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, one will not find it. If you enter the name Singh – the common Sikh family name – in the CWGC database, for all forces, for the entire duration of the war, a total of 12 records appears, 6 of whom are on the Basra Memorial.³¹ Captain Martin, on the other hand, is easily found, with his military and personal details, and is 'remembered with honour' and 'commemorated in perpetuity' by the CWGC. The 'certificate' that appears for printing shows an unusual image:

a display table containing two large books, a map and pictures of Iraq, some text and a caption reading (note the precise wording) 'The Rolls Of Honour held at the Commission's Head Office commemorating by name all the Commonwealth casualties who died in Iraq during the two World Wars'. Closer inspection of these Rolls, held in Maidenhead, reveals that the names of the Indian rank and file do indeed appear in them – the printed registers of the Basra Memorial rather than the memorial itself have been used as their basis.³² The text indicates that it is difficult to go to Iraq at the moment and so the Commission has erected this memorial here.

Why are so few Singhs on the database?³³ Unlike the native Africans of the interwar period, these Singhs have not been deliberately 'sent missing' by the present Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Since the early 1990s the policy has been to 'correct the anomalies' of the past.³⁴ The original registers for the Basra Memorial adopted the usual practice, for the British names, of putting a surname or family name first, followed by the given name (mostly Christian names). For the Indian names, however, the order was reversed. Page 307 of the Basra register shows the switch from British to Indian casualties, reading WOODWARD, Lt Edward Seymer; WOODYATT, Capt NGR; WYNNE, Capt. Eric Ralph Lovall; WYNNE, 2nd Lt W, then ABDUL ALI, Follr [Follower]; ABDUL GHANI, Dvr [Driver]; ABDUL HAQ, Havr [Havildar]; ABDUL MAJID Follr.³⁵ It is not clear what the logic for this reversal was, although there may have been good reasons for it. Its consequences are, however, odd. The only way to find those men is to type the names in the wrong boxes. So, for example, the details of Ajab Singh will come up if you search for [Surname] Ajab, [Initial] S. Even the Indian officers whose names *were* actually engraved on the memorial are hard to find in the modern database. Then, there was discrimination by military rank (and no doubt also by social rank). Now, that discrimination has been, inadvertently we assume, reversed. It is easier to find an Indian follower or mule driver who only had one name recorded in the register, for example driver Anokhi. The CWGC database makes it unlikely that anyone searching for an ancestor who died in the pre-partition Indian Army in Mesopotamia would find the information sought. The Basra Memorial continues to pose the problem of how to present an appearance of equal treatment when differences of rank, race and creed have determined whether or not any given individual is commemorated. As Director of Records Chettle put it when handpicking the wording of an inscription at Mosul, 'it is the only method I can think of by which to avoid the difficulty that the British names will be recorded on the Basra memorial but not the Indian names'.³⁶ A certain casuistry is an element of the

Commission's impression management here. At the 143rd meeting of the IWGC the Vice-Chairman, Fabian Ware, 'asked the meeting for suggestions as to an inscription indicating that the names of those commemorated were in the register' (but not on the memorial). After discussion, a proposal was agreed: 'Mr Kipling suggested that a Persian word, which meant "The Book of the Dead" might be inscribed on the Register Box, with the English words "Their names are in the Book".'³⁷

The decision taken about Basra was in line with other memorials in the Middle East. In 1924, Arthur Browne had a discussion with General Cobbe of the India Office about the memorial at Port Tewfik, on the Suez Canal. Cobbe thought that 'the engraving of the names of all Indian soldiers would have little interest', and that 'they would never be seen by the relatives'.³⁸ (The policy was inconsistent: at Gallipoli, for instance, it was belatedly realised that Indian names might be added to the Cape Helles memorial, and they were.)³⁹ In line with its later thinking, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission replaced the Port Tewfik memorial, when it was destroyed in Israeli–Egyptian fighting in 1967, with a memorial near Cairo on which the four thousand names in the registers were actually engraved. It appears that the present-day Commission is intending, after the war in Iraq, to do something similar.

VIMY RIDGE AND FIRST NATIONS CANADIANS

Perhaps the finest of the national memorials on the Western Front is Walter Allward's Vimy Ridge: a successful collaboration between architecture and sculpture, it is a modernist masterpiece. The memorial was the object of an enormous pilgrimage when it was opened in 1936. The ninetieth anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge, 2007, was marked by the restoration of Allward's magnificent memorial, and another pilgrimage from Canada. The memorial's importance as a marker of 'monumental history' sits hand in hand with its aesthetic modernism, exemplified in the soaring twin pylons, representing France and Canada: the twin peoples of anglophone and francophone Canada. Attention focuses repeatedly on the twin pylons, on the figure of Canada mourning her fallen sons, and on the 11,000 or so names of the missing carved into the base at the back. Less attention is paid to the complex, sometimes troubling, allegorical figures, with names such as Truth, Charity and Sacrifice. Laura Brandon has recovered their history, material and iconographic. The allegorical meanings are in an explicitly Christian register – they meditate the relation of individual and collective suffering and redemption. These figures came to Allward in a dream, he

said, and dreamlike they remain. The easiest to grasp, and the one constantly reproduced, is that usually entitled *Canada Mourning Her Fallen Sons*, otherwise *Canada brooding over the graves of her valiant dead*, or *Canada 'Bereft'*. This figure, modelled by a young Englishwoman in Allward's London studio, had, he thought, 'shoulders wide enough to carry the sorrows of dead sons'.⁴⁰ The resolutely Christian iconography – faith, hope, charity, the winged angels of knowledge – are central to Allward's original conception. What does this Christian view of the world exclude? Vimy Ridge, with its twin pylons representing Canada and France, replicates on a more minor scale the central exclusion of the South African memorial at Delville Wood. There the twin races of the Anglos and the Boers, represented in a statue of Castor and Pollux and 'expressing Anglo-Africaner racial unity',⁴¹ exclude all native Africans, an exclusion that the present government of South Africa has recently done its best to correct at the site. At Vimy Ridge the symbolically excluded group are the First Nations Canadians.

Canadian historians such as Fred Gaffen and James Dempsey have researched the involvement of First Nations Canadians in the First World War,⁴² and official publications such as *Native Soldiers: Foreign Battlefields* have also recently drawn attention to this issue.⁴³ It is estimated that approximately 4,000 First Nations men volunteered, and that approximately 400 were killed. Accounts of their participation in the war show that these native men were disproportionately admired as snipers and as despatch runners. Henry Norwest, with an outstanding sniper's tally of 115 officially observed hits and winner of the Military Medal and Bar, has been described in the trope of an animal hunting stereotype: 'frequently in the darkest hours of the night he actually penetrated the enemy lines, where he waited and watched, finally making his kill at early dawn, and then returned safely to his own lines'.⁴⁴ The most detailed account remains Duncan Campbell Scott's long official 1919 essay on 'Canadian Indians and the Great World War'; Scott was the Deputy Superintendent for Indian Affairs in Ottawa.⁴⁵ There are also first-hand accounts, such as Mike Mountain Horse's chapter on the war in his memoir *My People, the Bloods* (1979) and the visual 'war deed' that he had made of his experiences.⁴⁶ Mountain Horse was insistent that 'the fighting spirit of my tribe was not quenched through reservation life', that the bravery of 'our warriors of old' was shown in the numbers of them who volunteered to fight. But he asked himself, as he listened one night to an enemy bomber over the lines in France: 'where is the God that the white man taught the Indian to believe in? Why does He allow this terrible destruction?'⁴⁷

One image stands out as emblematic of the complex and powerful social, cultural and political relations in play: a photograph of First Nations recruits posed in uniform with their parents and tribal leaders (Figure 8).⁴⁸ It forms the cover image of a Veterans Affairs booklet entitled *Native Soldiers Foreign Battlefields* and was included in Scott's original essay. These men volunteered from the File Hills Colony in Saskatchewan, and the white man in the centre of the photograph is William M. Graham, an Indian Commissioner, who had set up the File Hills Colony in the period 1901–4. File Hills has been described as 'a model agricultural colony', made up of 'progressive young Indians [who] appreciate[d] their share in the advantages of civilization and were ready to fight for it when the test came'.⁴⁹ William Graham was an ambitious man and a key figure in selling off Indian land.⁵⁰ One of the heavy ironies of this period is the fact that the Indian land was sold for post-war veteran settler land schemes, for which the Indian veterans of the war were not usually eligible. Graham's personal memoir of his 'treaty days' contains a selection from the letters written to him by Indian soldiers who were fighting in France. Graham declares that these letters 'indicate the spirit of patriotism, loyalty and endurance that filled these boys and men from the reserves, these wards of the Government who went so willingly to war when they could so easily have remained at home'.⁵¹ There is much in the letters to warrant Graham's judgement. But how could he select and print, in this context, the following from Harry Stonechild, in France?

Mr Graham, did you ever think for a moment and say: Are we White people witnessing the vanishing of a great race full of integrity and promise, and letting them come over here and be cleared off the map? If so, put a stop to it and have me claimed back to File Hills where I will make the best man you ever had in that Colony. Could it be possible, Mr Graham, I wonder?⁵²

Some of those First Nations Canadians who were 'cleared off the map' in the First World War are recorded in the registers of the War Graves Commission and in the Canadian virtual war memorial. The name of Lieutenant Cameron Brant, who was killed in 1915, is 'commemorated in perpetuity' on the Menin Gate (at Ypres in Belgium). But the official commemorative coverage is very patchy. The roll of honour associated with the 'Six [First] Nations' on the Brantford war memorial lists 40 names, many of which are not in the CWGC database. After the war, the British Prince of Wales visited the town of Brantford, Ontario, to unveil a bronze tablet containing the names of the Six Nations soldiers who had made 'the supreme sacrifice in France'.⁵³ The tablet, donated to the Six

Nations, remains enigmatic; its present whereabouts are unknown and a photograph of the ceremony appears to be the only image of it.⁵⁴

REFLECTION

It is difficult to make many generalisations about this complex set of attitudes and practices. The contrast between how the native dead of Britain's African colonies and dead Indian soldiers were treated is a striking one. In the case of the colonies I have looked at in Africa, the Imperial War Graves Commission clearly did not apply any principle of equality of treatment. These instances provide the most egregious cases of an acknowledged 'policy' based on unequal treatment of 'whites' and 'natives'. Graves of Africans were simply abandoned, and left to 'revert to nature', and the names of those buried in them were not commemorated. This was the case even where adequate records existed. Similarly, African religious or cultural beliefs were attributed no value, and a sharp distinction was made between 'pagans', and those Africans who had adopted Christianity and were treated as honorary whites. (Ironically, according to one missionary in East Africa, many Africans jettisoned their Christian attachments and Western clothes, and reverted to their previous cultural identities, in order to avoid being pressed into military service.)⁵⁵

The casualties of the Indian Army were treated with far greater respect. In many instances (though not all) in the aftermath of fighting in Africa, Indian soldiers were commemorated individually when native African soldiers were not. Officers of the Imperial War Graves Commission were notably more interested in, and respectful of, varying cultural and religious traditions with regard to the disposition of the bodies of Indian soldiers in many different locations around the world. In many cases, however, pragmatic solutions were found for errors made through haste or ignorance, or for whatever other reason, resulting in transgression of key precepts, such as the decision to commemorate on the Basra Memorial numerically, rather than engrave the names of, the 33,000 Indian 'other ranks' who died in Mesopotamia.

In both the African and Indian cases, the Imperial War Graves Commission was working in tandem with local colonial officials on the ground, or with the India Office and other authorities in London. The IWGC's formal commitment to equality, presented publicly through the views of its Vice-Chairman Fabian Ware, appeared liberal and progressive in relation to the attitudes evinced by the other players on these colonial scenes. The IWGC, founded in 1917, was unlikely to have been able, had it wanted in

that colonial context, to mount any radical challenge to established attitudes and practices concerning native peoples.

The Canadian memorial at Vimy Ridge invites us to consider the cultural politics of a memorial holding a central place in the national affect of an erstwhile self-governed, white-settled 'dominion' of the British empire. Vimy Ridge poses questions, related to the insistently Christian content of its iconography, about who is included and who is excluded. Interestingly, at the end of the approach to the memorial is the site of the memorial to the Moroccan division, and around this, splintering away from the dominating presence of the Vimy memorial's white stone for a white Canada, there have accreted many other small and specific memorials of ethnic and national minorities. Beneath France's memorial 'Aux Morts de la Division Marocaine', itself a very modest affair currently situated at the exit of the Vimy Ridge car park, are small plaques paying tribute to others who died for France – 'volontaires Hellènes' [Greek volunteers], 'volontaires Juifs' [Jewish], 'volontaires Suédois' [Swedish], 'volontaires Arméniens' [Armenian], 'volontaires Tchécoslovaques' [Czechoslovak], 'volontaires étrangers' [generic foreigners] and to some of France's colonial troops, including the 4th and 7th Tirailleurs and the 8th Zouaves. These small tablets, which you have to stoop to read, create a commemorative melting pot of nationality, ethnicity and religion, at ground level, in the shadow of Walter Allward's imposing, soaring, modernist triumph.

As far as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is concerned, their policy has been where possible to 'correct the anomalies' caused by the unequal treatment of the interwar period. At a cautious pace, new memorials are being constructed in which the names not engraved on memorials after the First World War but held in registers are being engraved. Indicative of the current commitment to equality, Director General Richard Kellaway sent me 'Let Us Die Like Brothers', a CD-ROM educational resource revisiting the tragedy of the sinking of the SS *Mendi* in 1917, in which more than 600 members of the South African Native Labour Corps died on their way to serve in France. Through the story of a Xhosa boy named Samuel, the presentation recalls the failure of the authorities to notify the bereaved families of their loss, and emphasises the poor treatment of these labourers at the time. Endorsed by the High Commissioner for South Africa in London, this Commonwealth War Graves Commission resource, we are told, 'redresses some of the imbalance' caused by lack of information available to young people about the sacrifices made by black people during the two world wars. The programme focuses at some length on the care taken by the Commission to reproduce correctly the names of the victims of the tragedy on its memorial at Hollybrook, near

Southampton. In line with the Commission's respect for the individual name of even the most humble casualty, the lists have been checked and some names have been recarved, in a recent restoration of the memorial. One piece of information not given is that when the SS *Mendi* sank, native casualties outside Europe were generally not commemorated by name (if at all). If that ship had sunk earlier on in its voyage from South Africa, those names would have joined those of the other Africans in the care of the Imperial War Graves Commission – and be lost for good. Perhaps, in silently 'correcting' inequalities rather than frankly admitting the exclusions of the past, the Commission is still concerned with projecting an *appearance* of equality.

NOTES

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- 1 Jane Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 336–40.
- 2 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 377.
- 3 Thomas Laqueur suggests that the need to name all these names ('commemorative hypernominalism') arose because there was no agreement on what had been achieved. Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Memory and Naming in the Great War', in John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 150–67.
- 4 Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archive, Maidenhead, UK (hereafter CWGC Archive), File Reference WG5 (Catalogue number 221, Box 1001). The archive's catalogue was published in 1977, compiled by Alex King, and is available at the British Library (Manuscripts Room).
- 5 Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. I *To Arms* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 497. See also Melvin Page, 'Black Men in a White Man's War', in M. Page (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 14.
- 6 Geoffrey Hodges, 'Military Labour in East Africa and its Impact on Kenya' in Page (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, 148.
- 7 CWGC Archive, File WG122 Pt 2. The carriers' death rate was much higher than the death rate of African soldiers: Hodges puts it at over 20 per cent for Nigerian carriers (many of whom were drafted to East Africa), compared with an average death rate among the military of 7 per cent. Approximately half the deaths of carriers were from dysentery, caused by them being given the wrong food, which was not cooked properly. 'Military Labour', 143.
- 8 The original (1921) report to the IWGC from Major Evans in British East Africa asserted that 'most of the Natives who died are of a semi-savage nature and do

- not attach any sentiment to marking the graves of their dead'; his report, including a proposal for central memorials in towns, formed the basis of the IWGC approach there (CWGC Archive, File wG122 Pt 1). In 1923 Lord Arthur Browne, writing to consult the Governor of Nigeria, explained the decision not to commemorate British East African natives individually: there was the problem of poor records, and 'also because it was realised that the stage of civilisation reached by most of the East African tribes was not such as would enable them to appreciate commemoration in this manner' (CWGC Archive File 243/1 Pt 1).
- 9 Detailed examples of all these steps, drawn from the CWGC archive, are set out in Michèle Barrett, 'Subalterns at War: First World War Colonial Forces and the Politics of the Imperial War Graves Commission', in *Interventions*, vol. 9 (3) 2007, 468–70.
 - 10 CWGC Archive File wG 219/12, Letter sent by J. N. Cormack
 - 11 Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, www.cwgc.org, accessed 19 August 2008.
 - 12 CWGC Archive, File wG 290, 'Rulings'.
 - 13 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/12.
 - 14 *Ibid.*
 - 15 *Ibid.*
 - 16 Barrett, 'Subalterns at War', 467.
 - 17 CWGC Archive, File wG 122/8/2.
 - 18 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/12.
 - 19 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/12/Pt1.
 - 20 CWGC Archive, File wG 122/8/2.
 - 21 CWGC Archive, File wG 243/1.
 - 22 CWGC Archive File wG 1267 (27/9/1923).
 - 23 CWGC Archive File wG 1267 (4/4/1923).
 - 24 CWGC Archive File wG 219/16/1.
 - 25 CWGC Archive, File wG 909/5.
 - 26 *Ibid.*
 - 27 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/19.
 - 28 Photograph supplied by The War Graves Photographic Project, www.twgpp.org
 - 29 Fergal Keane, 'Basra's "lost" imperial war grave' 20/9/2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3124828.stm (accessed 24 May 2009).
 - 30 *Register of the Basra Memorial, Iraq* (London: Imperial War Graves Commission, 1930), 980 (consulted in the Department of Printed Books at the Imperial War Museum, London).
 - 31 As at February 2009.
 - 32 There are many Singhs in the online database but Singh is not recorded as a 'surname' there; to find them you must enter a common Sikh given name in the surname search box.
 - 33 To make the new Rolls of Honour displayed at Maidenhead, the Commission has presumably digitised the registers of the memorial. It seems unlikely that they would type out or scan 33,000 names into the computer and not include

- them on the Debt of Honour database. A look at the Basra Memorial's register, housed at the Imperial War Museum in London, showed that all but two of the 153 casualties from the 36th Sikhs carried the name Singh. Many thousands of those names are Singh.
- 34 Personal correspondence: letter 20 November 2007 to the author from Mr Richard Kellaway, Director-General of the CWGC – 'when names have been recorded in registers, there was the option to correct the anomalies. In 1995 my predecessor therefore took the decision that these inequalities should be corrected . . .'
- 35 *Register of the Basra Memorial, Iraq*, 307.
- 36 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/19 Pt 1 28/4/25.
- 37 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/19 Pt 2.
- 38 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/16/1, 7/3/1924.
- 39 CWGC Archive, File wG 219/16/1, 30/1/1925.
- 40 The maquette of 'Canada' is on permanent display at the Military Communications and Electronics Museum in Kingston, Ontario. See Laura Brandon, *Art or Memorial? The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art* (University of Calgary Press, 2006), 7–16; see also Laura Brandon, 'Making Memory: Canvas of War and the Vimy Sculptures', in Briton C. Busch (ed.), *Canada and the Great War: Western Front Association Papers* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill and Queen's University Press, 2003), 203–15.
- 41 Bill Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914–1918* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2007), 229.
- 42 Fred Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1985); L. James Dempsey, *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1999).
- 43 Janice Summerby, *Native Soldiers: Foreign Battlefields* (Ottawa: Veterans Affairs Canada, 2005).
- 44 Dempsey, *Warriors*, 52.
- 45 Duncan Campbell Scott, 'The Canadian Indians and the Great World War', in 'Various Authorities', *Canada in the Great World War* (Toronto: United Publishers of Canada Limited, 1919), vol. III, Appendix I, 285–328.
- 46 Mike Mountain Horse, *My People The Bloods*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute and Blood Tribal Council, 1979). Mountain Horse's 'war deed', recording his First World War experiences in visual form on cow hide, is copyrighted to the Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Canada, and reproduced in Dominiek Dendooven and Piet Chielens (eds.), *World War I: Five Continents in Flanders* (Ypres: Lannoo, 2008), 94.
- 47 Mountain Horse, *My People The Bloods*, 143, 144.
- 48 The image appeared in the fascinating exhibition 'Man–Culture–War' in 2008 at the In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, about the presence of troops from five continents in Ypres.
- 49 Scott, 'The Canadian Indians', 307–8.
- 50 See E. Brian Titley, 'The Ambitions of Commissioner Graham' in Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986).

- 51 William M. Graham, *Treaty Days: Reflections of an Indian Commissioner* (Calgary: Glenbow Musuem, 1991), 112.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 53 F. Douglas Reville, *History of the County of Brant* (Brantford, Ontario: Brant Historical Society, 1920), 200–1. The Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs gives a little more detail, referring to ‘a bronze tablet inscribed with the names of eighty-eight members of the Six Nations Indians who had given their lives . . . headed by the names of Lieutenant Cameron D. Brant . . . and Lieutenant J. D. Moses, an Indian Aviator, who died in a German prison camp’ (Ottawa: Dominion of Canada Sessional Paper, No. 27, 1919), 7–8.
- 54 ‘The Prince of Wales at the Brant memorial’, available through the website of the Brantford Public Library: <http://Brantford.library.on.ca/genealogy/royalvisits.php#1919> (accessed 23 May 2009).
- 55 Elizabeth Knox, *Signal on the Mountain: The Gospel in Africa’s Uplands before the First World War* (Brookvale NSW: Acorn Press, 1991), 205–6. ‘The army needed porters. For this they preferred mission people to pagans . . . The fear of being caught for war service made people revert to native dress, and burn their books . . . The recruiting officers would come to a village on Sunday in order to catch the Christians easily.’