



## Militarisation, Memorialisation & Multiculture: Muslims and the 2014 Centenary Commemorations of World War One in Britain

by Max Cohen



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### Abstract

*This article focuses attention on the efforts by army officials, peers, politicians, academics, religious leaders and supportive British Muslims to include Muslims from the past and present in the UK 2014 Centenary Commemorations. Through insights from critical military studies I argue that these sites of memorialisation represent complex, multi-layered forms of militarisation that garner support for war and reveal the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the national community. As well as the advocates of these initiatives, I also analyse statements made by British Muslim opponents of the Poppy Hijab, revealing the contested nature of militarism in society.*

**Keywords:** Militarization; Memorialization; Multiculture; UK; Muslims; Centenary; Commemoration; War on Terror

Since 2014, the UK has been commemorating and celebrating the Centenary of the First World War (WWI). Every year, commemorations take place around Armistice Day in Britain and other Commonwealth countries to honour the sacrifice of all who have suffered or died in war. During these events, the poppy is sold by veteran's charities to raise money for the armed forces community. The poppy is an iconic emblem of British collective remembrance of military sacrifice which has been promoted nationally by the veterans' charity, the Royal British Legion, since 1921. During the 2014 Centenary Commemorations, army officials, peers, politicians, academics, religious leaders and supportive British Muslims have spent considerable energy on highlighting the contribution that Muslims have made to the British military throughout history. The legacy of the 'forgotten army' of 400,000 Muslim soldiers who fought for Britain during WWI has been revived after it was revealed that only 22% of the British public knew of their sacrifice (Lockley, 2016). Moreover, the memory of Khudadad Khan, the first Muslim to be awarded the Victoria Cross (the highest accolade of the UK's honours system) in 1914, has been unearthed in a number of official commemorative settings. This memorialisation of Muslim soldiers has been done in conjunction with a series of initiatives to include contemporary British Muslims in the commemorations, including the creation of the Poppy Hijab. The Poppy Hijab combines the Islamic headdress, the hijab, with a poppy motif, giving British Muslim women the opportunity to join in on the Remembrance events. It was supported by a range of veteran's charities, think-tanks, army officials, Muslim models and elements of the right-wing press, including *The Daily Mail* (Doyle, 2014) and *The Telegraph* (Sanghani, 2015). However, the Poppy Hijab has also been divisive and some Muslim women have publicly voiced their opposition to the symbol (Hooper, 2014; Ahmed, 2015).

This article will argue that these sites of memorialisation represent complex, multi-layered forms of militarisation that garner support for war and reveal the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the national community. To demonstrate my argument, I will combine insights from critical military studies with literature concerned with the construction of identity through memorialisation. There are two main insights from critical military studies that I will use in this article. First, I will use scholarly work concerned with the ways in which military power interacts with the boundaries of



national identity. Second, I will use Vron Ware's concept of *militarised multicultural* to understand the military's motivations behind involving Muslims in the Centenary Commemorations. However, in order to apply *militarised multicultural* to the Centenary Commemorations, I will interweave this concept with literature on memorialisation and identity to draw attention to how *militarised multicultural* is being reinforced through sites of memorialisation.

Critical military studies is a field of inquiry concerned with military power in all its manifestations. Critical military scholars insist on remaining 'sceptically curious' about military power (Enloe, 2015, 7) and emphasise that we should not take its 'character, representation, application and effects' for granted (Basham *et. al*, 2015, 1). Importantly, critical military studies challenge the tendency among dominant traditional military studies to conceptualise the civilian and military realms as separate spheres. In contrast, critical military scholars claim that the boundaries between the civilian and military domains are blurred (*ibid.*). This critical literature shares similarities with scholarship that has begun to think about militarism and international relations in 'sociological' terms; a phenomenon that is sustained and contested through social practices by actors at all levels of society (Stavrianakis, 2015; Shaw, 2012). Militarism, by this logic, is understood as a multi-layered and complex form of power.

For critical military scholars, the militarisation of the boundaries of national identity describes the process in which militaries are resituated at the centre of national life (Ware, 2012a, 279). Militarisation involves the 'encroaching of military forms, personnel and practices upon civilian institutions or social orders' (Otley 1978: 322). Critical military scholars shed light on processes of militarisation to acknowledge how military values, institutions, preferences and norms become embedded and normalised in society, presenting militarism and war 'as necessary and natural extensions of nation states' civil society' (Kelly, 2012 723). In this sense, the preparation for war is as important as the conduct of war for critical military scholars. As Woodward (2005, 727) has written, conflict constitutes 'the endpoint of processes, practices, ideas and arguments which make it possible. Armed conflict is only possible if a whole host of things fall into place'. Britain provides a particularly important case-study for critical military studies as the UK's deployment of troops overseas has always been an important and legitimate means of achieving foreign and security policy aims (Fey, 2012, 47). Since 1991, the UK has militarily intervened in Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo, Macedonia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Libya. Only the United States has used its military more often in the service of foreign policy goals (Gaskarth, 2016, 105).

Importantly, scholars have emphasised militarisation to be an exclusionary process. Qureshi and Zeitlyn (2012) have described how in the process of mobilising militarism during the War on Terror, Britain forged and consolidated a militaristic national identity in contradistinction to the Muslim 'Other'. This construction of the Muslim identity as the 'enemy within' has been made easier under a generalising narrative that presumes Muslims to be inherently risky and a threat to Britain's 'way of life' (Qureshi & Zeitlyn, 2012, 4). Since the beginning of the War on Terror, British Muslims have been disproportionately targeted by a series of security measures that use race as a frame of reference for expulsions, incarcerations, surveillance, policing and repression (Pitcher, 2009). Moreover, the media has played a central role in perpetuating this discourse, fostering suspicion and hostility in British society towards Muslims. Against this background of exclusionary militarisation, the complexity of the relationship between British Muslims, the armed forces and British identity is brought into sharp focus. In an environment of suspicion and hostility surrounding Muslims, British Muslims have been drawing on military institutions and symbols during the Centenary Commemoration to authenticate their British identity and prove that 'not all Muslims are extremists'. However, for some Muslims, incorporation into the fold of Britishness is contingent upon their conformance with particular configurations of British identity (Ware, 2010a, 315-6). Moreover, as militarisation



has been predicated on the exclusion of Muslims, the limited modes of inclusion into the national community are relatively precarious for Muslims and are always able to be called into question (*ibid.*).

To explain the military's motivations to include Muslims from the past and present in the Centenary Commemorations, I will use Vron Ware's notion of *militarised multiculturalism*. The concept, *militarised multiculturalism*, is Ware's most important contribution to the literature understanding the military's recruitment of ethnic minorities. Due to legal requirements and allegations of institutional racism, the armed forces have been recruiting ethnic minorities since the 1990s. *Militarised multiculturalism* explains how a visibly diverse army plays a key role in projecting a particular image of Britishness (Ware, 2012a, 256). Ware claims that a visibly diverse and progressive image of the armed forces reinforces militarisation in at least three ways. First, it works as a recruitment strategy to attract more ethnic minorities to join the forces. Second, it helps build support for unpopular foreign policies (Ware, 2012a, 279). Lastly, it conceals the endemic nature of institutional racism in the military and, more broadly, structural racism built into the fabric of postcolonial British society (*ibid.*).

However, there is a gap in Ware's work in connection to sites of memorialisation. Thus, in order to complete this article's theoretical framework I will bring in literature on memorialisation to demonstrate how *militarised multiculturalism* operates through sites of remembrance. Memorialisation is the process by which collectives remember and reflect on memories of the past. Jay Winter (2006) has written about how sites of remembrance and shared loss are pivotal in informing a shared sense of national identity. During the 2014 Centenary Commemorations, Britain's sense of being a tolerant, diverse and liberal nation has been informed by the memorialisation of the Muslim soldiers' sacrifice from WWI. According to Bongiorno (2014, 97), multicultural memories of military history mobilise a pluralistic notion of what constitutes the defence of the nation. One key argument of this article is that in sites of remembrance the strategic representation of ethnic minorities, as noted under *militarised multiculturalism*, is being reinforced through memorialisation. I will demonstrate how progressive values are being interwoven with Britain's military history, giving historical and virtuous legitimacy to contemporary processes of militarisation. By mobilising the memory of the Muslim soldiers' sacrifice from WWI, participants in the Centenary Commemorations are lending historical legitimacy to multilayered processes of militarisation.

The role of memory is also important for actors during the Centenary Commemorations who challenge the military's dominant historical narrative. The initiative of the Poppy Hijab, which I will focus on in the end of this article, has polarised opinion amongst British Muslims. Those who publicly reject the Poppy Hijab bring a number of things to light about militarism. For one, their opposition demonstrates the complexity and contested nature of militarism. However, the fear amongst these Muslims of being branded a 'traitor' or, worse, an 'extremist' for rejecting military institutions reveals how the Muslim identity has been externalised during the War on Terror as the boundaries and patterns of Britishness have been drawn along military lines. Moreover, by offering an alternative story of events, these actors are disrupting the idea that Britain's wars have been waged to promote values of diversity and liberty. Their counter-narrative tells a concealed history of racial discrimination of Muslims, which in recent years has been heightened under processes of militarisation during the War on Terror.

This article will be split into two main theoretical and empirical sections. To begin, I will outline my conceptual framework provided by insights from critical military studies and the literature surrounding memorialisation and identity. This section is split into four subsections. First, I will trace how the boundaries of British identity have been militarised during the War on Terror. This includes examples of the increasing presence of the military in civil-society and the equally important role



British society has played in (re)producing militarism. Moreover, scholars emphasising the banality of militarism will provide insights into how we can understand the Centenary Commemorations as sites of militarisation. Second, I will deal with the exclusion of the Muslim identity under processes of militarisation. The available modes of inclusion and exclusion open to Muslims during the War on Terror will provide ideas of how Muslims can exhibit particular configurations of British identity or risk coming under suspicion as an 'enemy' or a 'threat'. Additionally, it will be important to emphasise the UK right-wing media's role in these exclusionary dynamics because of their positive coverage of the Centenary Commemorations which I will cover in the empirical section. Under the third subsection, I will outline Vron Ware's important concept of *militarised multiculturalism*. This will be central to understanding the military's motivations to involve Muslims during the Centenary Commemorations. Finally, in the last section, ideas about memorialisation and identity formation in sites of remembrance will be sketched out. These insights will allow me to demonstrate how *militarised multiculturalism* can be stretched through time through the mobilisation of multicultural memories of British military history.

In the empirical section, I will analyse statements surrounding the 2014 Centenary Commemorations made by public officials, academics and Muslims online and in the media. The combination of Vron Ware's notion of *militarised multiculturalism* and ideas about memorialisation and identity will be used in the analysis. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate my argument that sites of memorialisation represent complex, multi-layered forms of militarisation that garner support for war and reveal the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the national community.

## **The Militarisation of British Identity**

This section will outline how the boundaries of British identity have been militarised during the War on Terror. The close connection between national identity and military service is a long standing Western tradition. As Krebs (2006: 16) affirms, throughout history military institutions have been 'shapers of nations'. This connection between national identity and militarism becomes most visible in times of war when the military and public support is mobilised behind the state. As with all wars, states look to build and consolidate a unitary and coherent national identity in order to sustain support for their efforts (Robinson, 2012).

During Britain's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the military was re-situated at the centre of British national life (Ware, 2010b, 1). As public support for the wars began to wane, the UK government and military embarked upon a considerable project of militarisation to increase the presence of the military in British society. In a 2008 'Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces', the government and armed forces set out 'to identify ways of encouraging greater understanding and appreciation of the Armed Forces by the British public' (MoD, 2008, 28). Recommendations included increasing visibility of the armed forces—including wider use of uniforms in civilian areas – and improving contact between the military and civil society including public outreach programmes intended to build understanding and encourage support (MoD, 2008, 6-14).

Subsequently, the government created Armed Forces Day in 2009 as an annual celebration to celebrate the service of men and women in the British military. The military has also been used in unconventional settings such as providing strike cover for fire-fighters, standing in for private security contractors at the London Olympics in 2012, providing school citizenship classes and paramilitary leisure activities such as boot-camp fitness training (Basham, 2016a, 11). There have also been calls for the reintroduction of national military service to tackle youth knife and gun crime (*ibid.*). During the London 2012 Olympics, after the failure of a private security company to acquire



a large enough workforce, military personnel were deployed to provide security for the event in the biggest ever peacetime operation to protect UK airspace (Booth & Hopkins, 2012).

The military has also increased its presence in educational environments. Dubbed by critics as the 'militarisation of education', the armed forces predominantly target schools in working class areas of the UK, seeking to recruit youngsters (Sangster, 2012). Revealingly, military personnel make around 11,000 visits to secondary schools and colleges in the UK each year (*ibid.*). Moreover, since 2011 the government has spent over £45 million on education initiatives promoting a 'military ethos' in schools and £50 million to expand cadet forces in state schools (Forces Watch, 2015).

Misleadingly, the term militarisation 'often implies something being *done* to society by the military' (Basham, 2016a, 11). However, it is important to emphasise that military values, norms, preferences and institutions are embedded (and contested) by supporting actors in civil society as much as by 'top down' military pressure (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009). 'Militarism', Basham (2016a, 11) rightly stresses, 'is not imposed'. In regards to sites of remembrance, the commemorative events in the UK town Wootton Bassett in 2007 provide a clear example of British society's participation in processes of militarisation through sites of memorialisation. In 2007, repatriated soldiers killed during the war in Iraq were transported through the UK town of Wootton Bassett. After a few months, these repatriations garnered attention in the town and spontaneous gatherings of up to a 1,000 people began to line the streets during the year to pay their respects to the dead soldiers. For critical military scholars Jenkins *et. al* (2012, 357), the unchoreographed and mature ways in which these crowds gathered to show their respect served as a clear example of how 'militarism is a process that also entails non-state actors behaving in non-orchestrated ways'.

For Bernazzoli and Flint (2009, 398) it is the 'banality' of militarism, in the sense of its (re)production in everyday practices and routines, which makes it so powerful. Quotidian celebrations of military institutions and values make militarism 'more than merely an elite ideology, or a set of beliefs with which state institutions indoctrinate the less powerful sectors of society' (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, 398). This includes the intrusion and acceptance of military symbols in popular culture. For instance, Vron Ware has noted how 'the figure of the soldier is ubiquitous throughout the [British] media, constantly visible in news, military bulletins, films, digital games, forums, art and photography' (Ware, 2012b, 11). This diffuseness of militarism helps to normalise the military's presence, presenting militarism and war 'as necessary and natural extensions of nation states' civil society' (Kelly, 2012, 723). In regards to the suggestion that Muslim women should wear the Poppy Hijab we can see that this critical literature is useful for understanding how something as banal as wearing a commemorative piece of clothing can be a form of militarisation. The poppy, as an iconic symbol of British collective remembrance of military sacrifice (Basham 2016b), offers an example of how everyday interactions between people and military institutions can help to organise public spaces and people's bodies in accordance with military interests. In similar fashion, opponents of the Poppy Hijab can be understood as opponents of militarism. Their rejection of military symbols illuminates how militarism is a form of power that is multilayered, contested and constantly evolving.

## ***Militarisation and the Muslim Identity***

Pivotal to this article's discussion of the relationship between Muslims and the British armed forces, it is important to understand militarisation as an exclusionary process. In the process of mobilising militarism at home during the War on Terror, a militaristic British national identity has been forged and consolidated in contradistinction to the Muslim 'Other' (Qureshi & Zeitlyn, 2012). Notably, the contours of inclusion and exclusion under militarisation are constantly shifting. The 'Other' is not a fixed and immutable category, but is 'reformulated according to political circumstances as they vary



over time' (Roberts, 2004, 728). This explains how Muslim communities have been identified as the 'new' suspect community during the War on Terror whilst previously demonised groups such as the Irish community have been re-included into the fold of Britishness (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009).

This transformation of Muslims into the mould of the 'enemy within' occurred, in part, through a range of security measures implemented to counter the threat of terrorism in Britain. The threat of 'home-grown' terrorism came to be acknowledged by UK authorities after it was revealed that three of the four bombers involved in the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London in 2005 were British-born males of Pakistani immigrants. However, under a generalising narrative that presumes Muslims to be inherently risky and a threat to Britain's 'way of life', these security measures disproportionately targeted Muslim people by using race as a frame of reference for expulsions, incarcerations, surveillance, policing and repression (Pitcher, 2009). In the initial stages of the war, the security services systematically built up 'widespread intelligence about particular groups or communities deemed potential security risks', rather than specifically targeting activities against individuals with demonstrable links to terrorist organisations such as Al Qaida (Fekete, 2004, 8). At each juncture of the Terrorism Act 2000, with amendments made in 2001, 2005 and 2006, the definition of terrorist offences and the police's powers expanded (Klausen, 2009, 404). Under the Anti-Terrorism Act, which granted the Home Secretary increased powers to outlaw suspect foreign terrorist groups operating within the UK, 31 out of 40 proscribed described themselves as mainly Islamic in inspiration (Birt, 2006, 695-6). By September 2004, 664 persons, nearly all of whom were Muslims, had been taken into detention without trial under anti-terrorism legislation (Modood, 2006, 47). Moreover, Muslims were disproportionately targeted in the upsurge of police stop-and-searches. Between 2001-02 and 2003-04 there was a 393 percent rise in stop-and-searches of Asians and Asian people were stopped nearly twice the frequency between 2003-04 and 2005-06 (Pitcher, 2009, 148). The result of this racially framed security policy is that by merely 'belonging to a particular community or group is, in itself, a security threat' (Fekete, 2004, 8).

In the UK, a racially charged narrative that demonised 'cultural representations' of Muslims and Islam ran alongside these security measures (Amin-Khan, 2010). In this narrative, Muslims have been aligned with 'backwardness' and 'barbarism'; a people 'obsessed with praying, veiling, intolerance towards others, demands for special treatment, regularly testing the tolerance and goodwill of 'host' countries' (Williamson & Khiabany, 2010, 86). This discourse, propagated in the media and by public officials, has homogenised all Islamic people as one, monolithic group. Islamic culture is constructed as static, immutable, fixed and cabined whilst 'pluralisms, contests and dissent that exist within the tradition' are closed off (Kapur, 2002, 217). These cultural representations have been key to the War on Terror, confirming the ways in which this discourse permeates through different levels of militarisation. This is connected to the ways in which the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been justified in language reminiscent of Britain's colonial era, with an 'enlightened' Western realm seeking to 'save' Muslims from 'barbaric savages' (Mutua, 2001). This narrative works to reinforce militarism by formulating the War on Terror into a Manichean format of 'good' versus 'evil'. Moreover, as Edward Said (1997, xxii) has written, the central role of the nation in producing sentiments of alienation amongst minority communities (e.g. through security measures) is eradicated in this exclusionary discourse:

'much of what one reads and sees about Islam... represents the aggression as coming from Islam because that is what "Islam" is. Local and concrete circumstances are thus obliterated. In other words, covering Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what "we" do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are'.



The British right-wing media (including *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Telegraph*) has played a central role in perpetuating this narrative. Tellingly, in a report by the European Council against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in 2016, the UK's right-wing press was damned for using 'offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology' in relation to Muslims (Dearden, 2016). Moreover, in 2017 British media organisations were forced to retract and correct a 'consistent stream' of inaccurate and misrepresentative stories in the news which predominantly associated Muslims with violence and extremism (Sherwood, 2017). It is worth noting the powerful influence which the right-wing media has on British political and social discourse. *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Telegraph* are amongst the most read newspapers in both print and online in the UK (Ponsford, 2015). Indeed, according to a 2016 poll by YouGov, the British press is said to be the 'most right-wing in Europe' (Dahlgreen, 2016).

In this context of exclusion, how have Muslims been expected to integrate during the War on Terror? Crucially, the construction of the Muslim 'enemy within' contains within it an important dichotomy that distinguishes between 'moderate' and 'extremist' Muslims. As Mamdani (2002, 766) has written, after 9-11 the discourse surrounding Muslims shifted from one associated with Samuel Huntington's famous *Clash of Civilisations* theory, which 'demonized Islam in its entirety', to a more moderated discourse which distinguished between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims'. By the same token, this good/bad Muslim dichotomy is similarly expressed in the notion of the 'moderate' versus the 'extremist' Muslim. For instance, in 2006 Michael Gove (2006), the ex-Secretary of State for Justice, wrote in *The Guardian* newspaper that the government should do more to 'engage with moderate Muslims' in order to tackle extreme Islamist ideology. For Gove, engaging with the 'moderate' Muslim would broaden the debate 'beyond the agenda of the most theologically conservative and politically militant [Muslims]'. As Back et. al (2002, 450) argue, 'the injunction to be moderate is ultimately the precondition for inclusion within the space offered to minority communities'. This dichotomy between 'moderate' and 'extremist' offers Muslims a choice of endorsing a particular kind of (militarised) British national identity or to come under suspicion as 'obscurantist and isolationist, or rejectionist, anti-West and possibly a supporter of violence and terrorism' (Birt, 2006, 693).

These modes of inclusion and exclusion are useful for thinking about British Muslims who either join or publicly venerate the military as a way to demonstrate their British identity. As an institution at the centre of British life, sites of remembrance offer a symbolic and institutional apparatus for Muslims to exhibit their British credentials and prove they are not an enemy of the state. As we will see in the discourses surrounding the 2014 Centenary Commemorations, acts of remembrance frequently give way to discussions of Muslims using sites of memorialisation to prove their Britishness and steal attention away from extremists. On the other hand, opponents of the Poppy Hijab who reject military institutions are anxious to not be labelled an 'extremist' for their unorthodox position.

## **Militarised Multiculture**

Focusing attention on the military, I will explore Vron Ware's concept of *militarised multiculture* to understand the military's motivations to include Muslims in the Centenary Commemorations. In relation to the armed forces' recruitment of ethnic minorities, *militarised multiculture* helps us to understand how a visibly diverse army plays a key role in mediating a progressive image of British identity (Ware, 2012a, 256). *Militarised multiculture* captures the ways in which ethnic minority soldiers are presented by the military to the public, for example through advertisements. In this way, *militarised multiculture* speaks to a superficial form of multiculturalism where ethnic minorities are used in a tokenistic manner to uphold a progressive, liberal image of Britain.



To illustrate her concept, Ware (2012a, 280) uses the example of an image in an exhibition opened by the Ministry of Defence in 2002, entitled, 'We Were There'. The exhibition was intended to be a tribute to the contribution made to Britain's defence by ethnic minority communities over the past 250 years. The image that Ware draws attention to showed a British Muslim soldier 'giving thumbs up to a Chinook helicopter delivering aid, explained by a caption that read: 'Flight Lieutenant Sohail Khan in Pakistan where he helped with the earthquake relief effort' (Ware, 2012a, 281). For Ware (2012a, 282), by celebrating how a Muslim uniformed man was 'bringing aid to the vulnerable in the interests of British security', the image suggested that 'military service was not about *fighting* Muslim antagonists, it was about *helping* them'. This sort of strategic representation does work for militarisation in at least three ways. First, by posturing a multicultural image with a commitment to cultural diversity, the military is 'repositioned in the centre of national life' (Ware, 2012a, 279). Second, this process works as a recruitment strategy to attract more ethnic minorities to join the forces. Third, it helps to build support for unpopular foreign policies, 'or at least allaying public unease at the horrific costs entailed in endless deployments' (*ibid.*).

Ware also situates *militarised multiculturalism* in the context of the rise of Islamist extremism and the threat of British Muslims being vulnerable to radicalisation. Against this background, the recruitment and representation of Muslims in the military is used to counter extremist ideology and, as Ware (2012a, 282) asserts, 'to manage the risk of 'home-grown terrorism''. As I will delineate in the empirical section, the memorialisation of Muslim soldiers during the Centenary Commemorations involved mobilising multicultural representations of the armed forces to counter extremist ideology in the War on Terror.

Another important feature of *militarised multiculturalism* is how this virtuous image of Britishness conceals the endemic nature of institutional racism inscribed in British institutions. Following public allegations of racist bullying and discrimination in the armed forces, since the 1990s the British military has been undergoing significant changes to increase the role of ethnic minorities in its ranks. Steps taken by the armed forces to be a more accommodating employer for ethnic minorities have included introducing religiously sensitive dress codes and food preparation, increasing outreach schemes and specialist recruitment teams that target ethnic minority communities and monitoring race relations activities (Basham, 2013, 113). Furthermore, in 2005 Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu chaplains were appointed to provide a support network for soldiers of religious minorities.

As well as adapting to wider normative changes in society, a range of regional and domestic equality legislation has placed responsibilities and obligations on armed forces across the Western world to better represent their respective populations. These include, on a national basis, 'The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Equality Act 2006, and the Equality Act 2010', and regionally, 'a number of European Union Directives in the area of E&D and human rights (Hussain & Ishaq, 2016, 36). Furthermore, not only does Ware point out how ethnic minorities serve as a strategic asset at home, but also how they are used strategically abroad. After a decade of disastrous military expeditions, Britain learnt that 'a better knowledge of 'culture' and specifically of 'cultural difference' was an essential tool in modern warfare' (Ware, 2012b, 10). The deployment of Muslim soldiers in Afghanistan to operate as intermediaries between the military and Afghan people is a clear example of this (Ware, 2012a, 21-22). Indeed, the UK government would not have been able to conduct military operations in the War on Terror without recruiting soldiers from Commonwealth countries (Ware, 2012a, 280). However, despite these efforts the military has continuously been struggling to gain more Muslim recruits. As of 2016, there are 650 Muslims serving in the UK armed forces, representing only 0.33% of the armed forces as a whole (MoD, 2016). Moreover, only 42% of ethnic minority personnel are from the UK, with the remaining 58% coming from foreign and Commonwealth countries (*ibid.*).



Paradoxically, institutional racism is both a motivation and an obstacle for the armed forces to recruit more ethnic minorities. In an important study, Hussain and Ishaq (2002) provide polling data on British Pakistani Muslims' perceptions of the Armed Forces. Importantly, the authors find that the majority of those questioned believe institutional racism to be the main reason why Muslims would not join the military (Hussain & Ishaq, 2002, 604). Victoria Basham (2009a; 2013) has also written extensively on the issue of institutional racism in the armed forces. Through interviews with sexual and ethnic minorities in the military, she reveals the realities of bullying, harassment and discrimination in the ranks. The conclusion she draws from her fieldwork is that despite the military's efforts to recruit minorities, the armed forces 'continues to privilege white, heterosexual male ways of being over those of 'others'' (Basham 2009a, 412). This is largely because the institutional racism within the military is a reflection of structural racism in wider British society. Paraphrasing Cynthia Cockburn (1989, 217), Basham states that the armed forces' diversity policy may 'give disadvantaged groups a boost up the ladder' but the 'structure of that ladder and the disadvantages it entails' remain in place' (Basham 2013, 113). Against this background, it is clear what kind of work a visibly diverse army can play in constructing a progressive, liberal veneer for the British military.

As we have seen, Ware's notion of *militarised multicultural* is useful for understanding the intentions of the military during the 2014 Centenary Commemorations. However, a gap in Ware's work is applying *militarised multicultural* to sites of memorialisation. In sites of memorialisation, the role of memory in producing shared national experiences is crucial to processes of militarisation. Before turning to the empirical section, I will outline the powerful role of memory in sites of remembrance to complete this article's theoretical framework. As I will discuss, memorialisation reinforces Vron Ware's notion of *militarised multicultural*, in relation to the military's strategic representation of ethnic minorities to inform a progressive sense of national identity.

## Memorialisation

The role of memory in processes of militarisation is significant because of the powerful role it plays in forging a shared sense of national identity. Following Jay Winter (2006, 18), we can understand 'collective memories' as powerful social constructions: key to the formation of identities, both personal and national. In sites of remembrance, a sense of 'collective memory' is created 'when collectives come together to recall significant events, events which tell them who they are as a group' (Winter, 2006, 154). This conceptualisation of memory is useful for understanding Britain's annual remembrance commemorations which involve mutually inclusive rituals, symbols and stories of remembrance, subscribed to widely in British society (Mycock, 2014, 107). British war commemoration typically draws upon shared experiences and memories of past conflicts, encouraging sites of shared loss (*ibid.*).

According to Paul Gilroy (2005, 2006), the memories of Britain's previous wars play a central role in mediating the relationship between British identity and Muslims during the War on Terror. Gilroy has discussed how a 'melancholic' memory of Britain's lost imperial stature continues to shape the dominant cultural and psychological dynamics of British society. Through his notion of British 'postcolonial melancholia', Gilroy explains how the UK has come to terms with its loss of imperial status through an assertive and discriminatory British nationalism along racial lines. For example, expressions of a 'thwarted desire for greatness, for the need to retain a place at the top table, and to the pleasures of punching above our weight' are explained as aftershocks of the nation's loss of Empire (Gilroy, 2006, 30). Moreover, Britain's longing for greatness reproduces an 'imperial impulse' directed towards inferior subjects like immigrants and Muslims (Roberts, 2008, 164). Importantly, postcolonial melancholia diverts British culture into the 'arid pleasures of morbid militaria' (Gilroy,



2005, 434), in part, through the memorialisation of war. In contemporary negotiations of identity during the War on Terror, Gilroy (2006, 30) focuses our attention on how 'a heavily filtered and simplified projection of plucky British struggle against Nazi Germany has been brought back into the centre of our embattled public culture':

'Why is that war celebrated as the very core of national identity by people too young to be touched by living memory of it? Why do all of Britain's subsequent conflicts acquire irrefutable legitimacy if they can be presented as its analogs or extensions? Why has life in that wartime been moulded to represent the last occasion on which authentic, undiluted, monocultural Britons were absolutely certain as to who they were and what they stood for?'

Here, we can extract an important idea from Gilroy's work. His notion that Britain's subsequent conflicts can 'acquire irrefutable legitimacy' through memory of past conflicts is pertinent regarding the Centenary Commemorations and the War on Terror. As I will highlight, the remembrance events have featured discourses which attempt to universalise certain values across British military history, lending legitimacy to Britain's contemporary efforts in the war against extremism and terrorism.

However, contra Gilroy, rather than presenting an 'authentic, undiluted, monocultural' notion of Britishness, the 2014 Centenary Commemorations have involved a considerable effort to shed light on the contribution of Muslim soldiers to Britain's efforts during WWI. These efforts can be seen as attempts to mobilise ideas of Britain as a tolerant, liberal and diverse society. As Bongiorno (2014, 97) has written, regurgitating multicultural memories of military history mobilises a pluralistic notion of what constitutes the defence of the nation. In this way, sites of memorialisation bring historical context to Ware's notion of *militarised multiculturalism*. By stretching *militarised multiculturalism* through memory, the liberal image of Britain takes on timeless proportions. As a matter of comparison, Australia has also attempted to recover a kind of multicultural history of its armed forces in recent years during its version of remembrance commemorations. These efforts have focused on reviving the contribution ethnic minorities made to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps during WWI, which has been largely neglected in history. Commenting on these attempts in Australia, historian John Hirst has called this mode of argument 'contribution history', in which a seemingly timeless history of multiculturalism lends validity to the contemporary situation surrounding national identity:

'In its continuing search for legitimacy multiculturalism has declared itself ancient. Australia, it is claimed, has always been multicultural. Its population has always been diverse.... Its society is the summation of the 'contributions' made by the various ethnic groups which have constituted its population' (Hirst, 2006, 68).

In the context of Britain's Centenary Commemorations surrounding Muslim soldiers from history, memorialisation strives to counter the effects of time by perpetuating 'a static and eternal image of an idealized and polished past' (Renard, 2008, 296). A timeless memory of British *militarised multiculturalism* 'enshrines the past and sets it in stone' (Renard, 2008, 303). This remaking of military history along multicultural lines manages to construct 'a history that is immutable, sacred and free of rancour and political division, a history that can justify the existence of the nation and remain relatively uncontested' (Mckenna, 2014, 167).

However, memorialisation must also be understood as a contested process. As Winter has written, memory today is 'a source of fractured national, ideological, and cultural forms, forms which are resistant to linear reconstruction' (Winter, 2006, 19). This contested nature of military memories is underlined by how sites of memorialisation can be used in different ways for different political



agendas. For instance, British pacifists use the annual remembrance commemorations to shed light on the horror, waste and tragedy of WWI to legitimise their anti-militarism stance (Winter, 2006, 287). Similarly, in Rwanda memorialisation has been key to contemporary methods of conflict prevention after the brutal civil war and genocide which tore the country apart in the early 1990s. Williams Nkurunziza, the Rwandan High Commissioner, claimed that memorial sites remind Rwandans of the 'failure' of 1994, helping the Rwandan nation to defend itself 'against a recurrence of genocidal ideology' (quoted in McCann, 2013).

Who or what group has the greatest control over memories is important in defining dominant historical narratives. In the context of Britain's remembrance commemorations it is clear that military preferences predominantly infuse sites of memorialisation. Notably, Mycock (2014, 101,) has linked the memorialisation of WWI during Britain's 2014 Centenary Commemorations to the military's desire to recruit more soldiers, arguing that the promotion of commemorative acts and patriotic national myths has been 'driven by a need to justify the scale of losses in [WWI] in the name of the British nation... not least so that others might risk their lives in future wars'.

The construction of dominant historical narratives can subjugate alternative memories which pose a different story of events (Noon, 2004, 341). In other words, the rhetorical construction of memory can be 'concocted at the expense of other historical narratives and to the actual detriment of other humans' (Noon, 2004, 342). Moreover, Bongiorno (2014) has highlighted the danger of including everyone in participating in national commemorative rituals 'if the terms of that inclusion remain unequal'. As he states, 'it becomes easier to criticize as ungrateful those who remain aloof, and as disloyal or even dangerous those sufficiently bold to offer critique' (Bongiorno, 2014, 96). These points are relevant in regards to British Muslims' relationship to the British military and commemoration. In the final part of this article's empirical section, I will give voice to Muslims who contest the dominant narrative instituted during the Centenary Commemorations.

## **The 2014 Centenary Commemorations**

In this empirical section, I will explore the initiatives intended to draw positive connections between Muslims and the British armed forces during the 2014 Centenary Commemorations. These initiatives coincided with an intensification of the War on Terror including the rise of the extremist terrorist organisation Isil in the Middle East and the controversies surrounding young British Muslims travelling to fight in the Syrian civil war alongside enemy jihadists. In this context, there was increasing pressure on Muslims to challenge stereotypes associating them with extremism and to demonstrate their contribution to British society.

These sites of memorialisation reveal militarisation to be a multilayered form of power that plays an important role in drawing the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion in the national community. In order to demonstrate my argument, I will begin by looking at a statement surrounding the Centenary Commemorations by the head of the British army. Subsequently, statements supporting the memorialisation of the esteemed Muslim soldier Khudadad Khan will be reviewed. These examples shed light on the military's exploitation of sites of memory to gain more recruits and to legitimise Britain's campaign in the War on Terror. The combination of Vron Ware's notion of *militarised multiculturalism* and the powerful role of memorialisation will be used in the analysis. Thereafter, I will look at the case of the Poppy Hijab. This section will be split into two parts. First I will explore the arguments of 'advocates' of the Poppy Hijab, followed by the opinions of 'opponents'. Both these Muslim voices reveal the multilayered and contested nature of militarism, the power of memorialisation in military settings and the ways in which military institutions and



symbols act as markers of British identity. I will also show how the coverage of the Poppy Hijab by the right-wing media reinforces the limited modes of belonging available to British Muslims.

As an indication of the desperate times of under-recruitment in the military, military officials have been candid about the use of the Centenary Commemorations to attract more Muslim soldiers. In an interview with the BBC (Malik, 2017) surrounding the military's relationship to British Muslims, head of the British Army General Sir Nick Carter acknowledged the role of memorialisation in the military's recruitment strategy. In the context of the military's endemic recruitment difficulties during the War on Terror, Carter (quoted in Malik, 2017) responds to a journalist's question asking what the army needs to do to recruit more British Muslim soldiers:

'It comes back to understanding what we share in common. It comes back to understanding that the British Army, in support of our government's policy [the War on Terror], stands for values and standards which are I think common to all of our society and particularly the Muslim society that we're seeking to recruit from. I think it's about reminding ourselves that we've got this extraordinary shared historical legacy and that's very resonant as we commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First World War where many Muslim soldiers lost their lives in support of what the British Army and our government was trying to do at that stage'.

In this quote, the role of values and memory prove to be a central component of the armed forces' recruitment strategy. Indelible values associated with military power are constructed in Carter's attempts to blur the boundary between recruitment and remembrance. Carter universalises unspecified 'values and standards', which underpin the government's War on Terror, across British society. Moreover, he claims these values to be compatible with the apparently monolithic 'Muslim society', disregarding the 'pluralisms, contests and dissent that exist within' Muslim communities (Kapur, 2002, 217).

The memorialisation of Muslim soldiers from WWI is central to Carter's strategy to attract more Muslim soldiers. He highlights how the memory of the Muslim soldiers who died during WWI can be re-invoked as a powerful reference point of the contribution which Muslims have made to Britain in the past, and therefore can make in the future. In line with Ware's notion of *militarised multiculturalism*, Carter discloses the military's strategic representation of ethnic minorities as a central part of its recruitment technique. In this context, however, *militarised multiculturalism* is given historical validity as the close relationship between Muslims and the armed forces is framed as an 'extraordinary shared historical legacy'. In the words of Hirst (2006, 68), the military has declared multiculturalism 'ancient'. This mythology of amity between Muslims and the military distorts the vexed history of exclusion Muslims have suffered in Britain. Moreover, to the benefit of the military's recruitment aims, such a progressive image of British-Muslim relations conceals the institutionalised racism that plagues the armed forces. This rhetorical strategy is indicative of Renard's (2008, 296) conception of the capacity for memory to 'stop time': '[a] static and eternal image of an idealized and polished past' is projected, bestowing the values of diversity and exceptionalism on British military history. Moreover, values underpinning the UK's wars are constructed as essential qualities of Britishness, serving to legitimise both the military's attempts to recruit more Muslim soldiers and their efforts in the War on Terror.

## **Khudadad Khan**

The memory of the British Muslim soldier Khudadad Khan who served during WWI has provided the military with a heroic protagonist to personalise this narrative. In October 2014, army officials,

peers, MPs, historians and religious leaders signed a letter in *The Telegraph* calling for greater recognition of Khudadad Khan, the first Muslim to be awarded the Victoria Cross (the highest accolade of the UK's honours system) in 1914. This letter was written on the same day as the Minister for Communities led formal tributes to Khudadad Khan. And on the following year, on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015, MP Eric Pickles presided over the laying of a memorial paving stone for the soldier's sacrifice. The supporting actors in these various sites of memorialisation eulogised Khan's service to the nation by retelling the Muslim soldier's bravery and heroism on the Western Front. For example, in the letter written in *The Telegraph*, it begins with the story of Khan's courageous activities on the battlefield:

'As the line was pushed back, the machine gunner, badly wounded and massively outnumbered, held off the German advance long enough for Indian and British reinforcements to arrive and prevent the enemy making the final breakthrough. He was the sole survivor of his team' (Dannatt et. al, 2014).

Supportive statements surrounding Khan's memorialisation underscore the multi-layered processes of militarisation infusing these sites of memory. For instance, returning to the letter of support for Khan's memorialisation, according to the writers the sacrifice of Muslims for the nation must be recollected in order for contemporary multiculturalism to be realised:

'It is important today that all of our children know this shared history of contribution and sacrifice if we are to understand fully the multi-ethnic Britain that we are today. The gallant Sepoy Khan embodies that history' (Dannatt et. al, 2014).

Again, 'the shared history of contribution and sacrifice' is mobilised, evidencing *militarised multiculturalism* through memorialisation. The Muslim identity of Khan is used as a reminder of Britain's history of accepting and promoting diversity in the 'on-going battle of Britishness' (Ware, 2012a, 279). In this way, the memorialisation of Khan is used to characterise Britain's attachment to multiculturalism as a historical and ongoing commitment. Both Britain's troubled history of domination and exploitation which typify the colonial experience for many ethnic minorities (Bongiorno, 2014), and the contemporary circumstances of marginalisation of Muslims in the UK during the War on Terror, are washed over. Through memory, Britain's military and its wars accumulate an eternal image of progressive diversity and causal justness.

Importantly, the memory of Khan's heroism has also been used in support of the government's fight against Islamist extremism. Against the backdrop of young British Muslims leaving to fight for extremist groups like Isil in the Middle East, Muslim academic and one of the signatories of the letter in *The Telegraph* Dilwar Hussain (quoted in Malnick, 2014) explains how Khan's memorialisation can be useful to counter extremist ideology.

'the quiet dignity of our commemoration of Khudadad Khan's bravery and service is perhaps the most powerful riposte we could possibly send to the sickening extremism of Isil' (Hussain quoted in Malnick, 2014).

Memorialisation in this context serves to transport Khan's heroic soldiering from the Western Front to the febrile streets of contemporary Britain where young British Muslims are turning over to enemy lines. Effectively, Khan is transfigured into a symbolic recruiting sergeant for the contemporary armed forces. As Ware has written, his memory is mobilised to 'manage the threat at home' (Ware, 2012a, 282). A wider point can also be made here in relation to the legitimacy of the War on Terror. By recollecting the memory Khan's heroism, an essential national spirit is mobilised in favour of Britain's contemporary efforts in the War on Terror. The twin notions of diversity and just cause are



tactfully laced through Britain's military history, attaching 'irrefutable legitimacy' (Gilroy, 2006, 30) to Britain's contemporary 'good' versus 'evil' fight against Islamist extremism.

Intriguingly, in this comment Hussain also makes use of the atmosphere of respect and peacefulness ('the quiet dignity') inherent to Remembrance settings as a rhetorical device to counter the 'sickening extremism' of Isis. Consequently, not only is the memory itself useful, but the very act and performance of memorialisation is weaponised to counter extremist ideology. In this example of militarisation through memorialisation, the threat of extremism is countered and the War on Terror is refuelled.

## ***The Poppy Hijab***

The interactions between militarism and the boundaries of British identity are elucidated most forcefully in the case of the Poppy Hijab. These interactions shed new light on the complex ways in which militarisation processes work through sites of remembrance. Before exploring the coverage in the right-wing media and the opinions of opponents to the initiative, I will begin my analysis by focusing on the advocates of the Poppy Hijab.

### ***Advocates***

By listening to advocate Muslim voices the deeply complex and multilayered nature of military power is revealed. In an environment of suspicion and hostility surrounding Muslims, these British Muslims have been drawing on military institutions and symbols during the Centenary Commemoration to authenticate their British identity and prove that not all Muslims are extremists. For advocates, the Poppy Hijab provides Muslims with a symbol to disrupt and break free from stereotyping narratives that question their contribution to British society. As Maxwell (2006, 738) has written, the 'acceptance of national symbols, institutions, and tangible involvement and investment in the community' are powerful forms of political and civic participation that will increase the likelihood of minority communities identifying with the nation. In other words, the Poppy Hijab offers alienated Muslims a powerful tool to assert their Britishness.

Tabinda-Kauser Ishaq, the Muslim arts student, who worked with British Future and the Islamic Society of Britain to design the Poppy Hijab endorsed the message behind the garment to challenge notions of 'self-segregating' Muslims who do not want to take part in 'normal' British society:

'It's to send out the message that Muslims do care about Remembrance Day and it's to tackle a lot of the misconceptions that are out there. There's a lot of misconceptions that Muslims don't commemorate those that we lost at war and we really want to tackle that' (quoted in Ahmad, 2014).

Moreover, Ishaq (quoted in British First, 2014) validates the idea that the armed forces are the epicentre of British identity and endorses the Poppy Hijab as an embodiment of multiculturalism:

'It's a simple way to say that you're proudly British and proudly Muslim'.

In similar terms, the British military's official Imam, Asim Hafiz outlines how the Poppy Hijab provides Muslims with a symbol of national identity. His approval of the clothing is justified by its potential to destabilise extremist narratives – propounded by both the far-right of British politics and radical Islamists – which claim Islam and British culture are incompatible:



'[T]o ensure that [Muslims are] not tarnished with an unfavourable brush, it's only right that we do as much as we can... that we raise awareness that the vast majority of Muslims just want to get on with their everyday life, that we're just as British everyone else. We need to shut out radicals and extremists on all sides of the divide, so that they are a minority and they are no longer heard' (Hafiz quoted in Sommers, 2014).

In these examples, the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are overlapping with processes of militarisation. In the UK, 'one can't draw sharp lines any more between military and other types of power' (Selby quoted in Stavrianakis & Selby, 2012, 65). These advocates reinforce the idea that military institutions are the 'index of true Britishness' (Qureshi, 2013, 402). Consequently, from a critical perspective it is important to pay close attention to these processes of militarisation and question whether alternative modes of identity are in danger of being marginalised through the Poppy Hijab.

Sughra Ahmed, president of the Islamic Society of Great Britain, has been a main proponent of the Poppy Hijab. In her comments in the media, she has been more forthcoming about refiguring the Muslim identity to counterbalance disproportionate coverage apportioned to Islamist extremists. However, Ahmed's comment demonstrates how easy it is for these supportive discourses of the Poppy Hijab to slip from revering Muslims' contributions to British society to reinforcing processes of militarisation. Moreover, in her support for militarised forms of multiculturalism Ahmed (quoted in Doyle, 2014) leans to sidelining different kinds of engagement with British society:

'It's also a way for ordinary Muslim citizens to take some attention away from extremists who seem to grab the headlines.... This symbol of quiet remembrance is the face of everyday British Islam – not the angry minority who spout hatred and offend everyone'.

This statement does work for militarism in two ways. First, by constructing a false dichotomy between extremists and 'ordinary' Muslim citizens, Ahmed reinforces the limited identities available to British Muslims constructed during the War on Terror. Second, by saying Remembrance 'is the face of everyday British Islam', other forms of British and Muslim identity, such as opposition to militarism, are struck out of existence.

Memorialisation has also been key for supporters of the Poppy Hijab. Advocates have been keen to draw connections between the Muslim soldiers of WWI and British Muslims today. For example, Sughra Ahmed (quoted in Doyle, 2014) has insisted on connecting the Poppy Hijab initiative to the memorialisation of Khudadad Khan:

'We're launching this today as it's exactly 100 years since the first Muslim soldier was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery – Khudadad Khan from Pakistan, who was fighting for Britain on the Western Front in the First World War'.

Along similar lines, one anonymous model of the Poppy Hijab connects her and other models' support for the Poppy Hijab with her reverence for the sacrifice of Muslim soldiers from the past. She is mindful of the Islamophobic context in which the events have gained significance, highlighting the ways in which the Poppy Hijab can challenge perceptions that Muslims are antithetical to Britishness. Again, in this comment, sites of memorialisation reveal the ways in which military institutions patrol the parameters of national identity:

'This whole anti-Muslim feeling that everybody has, I think it would be a really good way of Muslims showing that we are British, we are proud of everything that Muslims have done and contributed to the war' (quoted in Ahmad, 2014).



The role of memorialisation is important here in regards to Muslims and British identity. By identifying with the Muslim soldiers who came before her, the anonymous model conflates the identities of the Muslims who served Britain during WWI with Muslim identities in contemporary British society. Muslim contributions to Britain are framed as a linear progression, from military sacrifice to acts of Remembrance. Memorialisation, in this context, lends legitimacy to the models' claims to Britishness and refashions Britain's military history as a benign sort of multiculturalism. Accordingly, advocates of the Poppy Hijab are simultaneously declaring multiculturalism 'ancient' (Hirst, 2006, 68) whilst performing it as a perennial feature of British society. Furthermore, the military garners an enduring progressive image, reinforcing *militarised multiculturalism* through sites of memorialisation.

Despite these advocates' positive attitudes, the Poppy Hijab has been contentious for some British Muslims. In the final section below, the multilayered and complex characteristics of militarism are further revealed. This opposition to the Poppy Hijab sheds light on alternative forms of British identity which reject military institutions. However, the anxiety amongst some of the opponents of being associated with 'extremism' for rejecting the Poppy Hijab illustrates the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in processes of militarisation.

Before turning to the voices of opposition to the Poppy Hijab, it is worth shedding light on the coverage of the events by the right-wing media. This coverage reinforces the limited modes of belonging available to British Muslims and helps us to gain a sense of how some of the opponents perceived the initiative. *The Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph* have played a central role in promoting the Poppy Hijab (Doyle, 2014; Sanghani, 2015). Due to their history of demonizing Muslims in Britain, it may appear puzzling for this section of the press to highlight positive contributions made by British Muslims to society. However, as Ware (2012a, 279) states, anyone who shows affiliation with the armed forces is 'qualified to sit at the high table of patriotism, as long as they [are] supervised by their hosts who [are] renowned for condemning anything that smack[s] of multiculturalism'.

The language used by the papers in their coverage of the Poppy Hijab is also revealing. In their headlines publicising the Poppy Hijab, the press belie an implicit tone of pressuring rather than of acceptance of Muslims' contributions to the Centenary Commemorations. *The Daily Mail* (Doyle, 2014, emphasis added) promoted the headdress with the headline: 'The Poppy Hijab that Defies the Extremists: British Muslims Urged to Wear Headscarf as Symbol of Remembrance'. Similarly, *The Telegraph's* (Sanghani 2015, emphasis added) coverage of the Poppy Hijab ran with the headline: 'Why British Muslims Need a 'Poppy Hijab' to Remember World War One'. The uses of the words 'urged' and 'need' in these headlines suggest that Muslims *should* or are *required* to wear the Poppy Hijab in order to show they are not a threat to British society. This sort of coverage reiterates the pressure on Muslims to demonstrate their British values. Moreover, as some of the opponents suggest, it also exposes the Poppy Hijab as a proxy for reinforcing Muslims' exclusion under militarisation.

## Opponents

The opponents of the Poppy Hijab have expressed their discontent with the garment via statements and opinion pieces in the media. In their rejection of the Poppy Hijab, these Muslims are contesting two layers of power operating under processes of militarisation. In the context of the Muslim as the enemy 'Other', Muslims who reject military symbols are not only denying a particular configuration of Britishness, but also risk falling into the trap of being labelled an extremist. Their opposition can be perceived, at best, as being at odds with British society, and at worst, as Islamist extremism. As Allen (2014) has written, the Poppy Hijab is a 'shrouded loyalty test': '[n]ot only do Muslims have to prove they're not the enemy but so too that they're not a traitor either' (Allen, 2014). Consequently,



other important forms of political engagement with British identity, such as opposition to war, can be suppressed and vilified.

Writing in the British newspaper *The Independent*, British Muslim Sofia Ahmed (2015) angrily rejected the Poppy Hijab in an article titled, 'No, I Won't Wear the "Poppy Hijab" to Prove I'm Not a Muslim extremist'. Rather than a powerful multicultural symbol, the Poppy Hijab represents a marketing tool for the British military that puts pressure exclusively on Muslims to demonstrate their allegiance to the nation. As she states:

'No other religious group is pressured to prove their allegiance in the same way. Somehow I don't think we'll be seeing a budding Jewish designer marketing a poppy kippa anytime soon' (Ahmed, 2015).

In a similar vein, Faeza Vaid, executive director of the Muslim Women's Network UK, questions why it is specifically Muslim women who are expected to demonstrate their British credentials:

'The idea is to show that we all care about the same things, but why is the burden on Muslim women to prove that sense of shared identity? We wouldn't expect... Sikh men to wear poppy turbans. If you look at it like that it is just ludicrous' (Vaid quoted in Hooper, 2014).

For some, the positive coverage by the right-wing media exposes the Poppy Hijab as a test of allegiance to the nation. Raising scepticism over the initiative's association with elements of Britain's right-wing press, Faeza Vaid casts doubt over the particular formation of British identity offered by the Poppy Hijab, viewing it as a tool for assimilation rather than multiculturalism. Vaid claims the Poppy Hijab provides a way for Muslims to be incorporated into Britishness, but on the condition of conformance to some predetermined criteria. In this way, the Poppy Hijab does not offer Muslims a conduit for inclusion into the nation; rather, it reinforces Muslims' exclusion from British society:

'The fact that it is being promoted by the likes of the Daily Mail, part of the thinking is, 'Okay, you are a little bit British but not British enough. We will accept you, but on our terms'' (Vaid quoted in Hooper, 2014).

Opponents of the Poppy Hijab also shed light on the marginalisation of alternative modes of British Muslim identity under militarisation. Sofia Ahmed affirms that her decision to not wear the poppy is a rejection of militarism. She perceives the Poppy Hijab as part of a wider militarisation strategy to garner Muslim support for the War on Terror. As she writes, the Poppy Hijab is 'nothing but a cynical PR campaign to co-opt Muslim opposition to aggressive foreign policy'. However, in her piece, Ahmed expresses anxiety that without buying the Poppy Hijab, she risks being labelled an extremist. Here, she tries to dissociate her anti-militarism stance from being conflated with extremism, revealing the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion under processes of militarisation. Moreover, she highlights what she perceives as the racial undertows pervading British society through the exclusive attention on judging Muslim behaviour:

'Refusing to wear the poppy is not an 'extremist Muslim' stance; it's an ideological position based on anti-war sentiment. Nobody would accuse a white person of extremism for refusing to wear one' (Ahmed, 2015)

To reinforce the point, Ahmed focuses our attention on occasions of racial profiling and anti-Muslim hatred that she has suffered. These experiences are clear examples of everyday forms of inclusion and exclusion constructed under processes of militarisation. Her contention is that the Poppy Hijab



might be able to provide her with an emblem to better represent herself as non-threatening to society:

'Admittedly, I almost thought I should buy one - because it might make walking through security checks at airports a little easier. I could get on a train without being accosted by a fully uniformed soldier, drunkenly telling me he joined the army to "kill dirty Muslims"' (Ahmed, 2015).

The role of memory is also important to Ahmed's contestation of military power. In this final quote, Ahmed challenges the military's attempts to construct and weave values of diversity and tolerance through British history. She uses her grandfather's experiences of UK race-relations since the end of the British Empire. Before emigrating from India to Britain, Ahmed's grandfather was 'one of the 2.5 million Indian men' to fight for Britain during the Second World War. Despite his service to the nation, Ahmed cites the racial hatred her grandfather suffered after he returned to Britain, because of discourses propounded by far-right politicians and political organisations. In similar ways to antecedent speakers, Ahmed lends historical legitimacy to her argument by unifying her experiences of Islamophobia with her grandfather's experiences of discrimination. Her conclusion that Muslims have suffered racist abuse throughout the 20th Century stands to counter the positive narrative of British diversity and tolerance constructed during the Centenary Commemorations. 'Confronted with the memorial laziness of collective memory, or with the oppressive force of official memory', opponents of the military's narrative such as Ahmed reclaim their own version of history 'which is concealed in the official and collective versions' of events (Renard, 2008, 299). In this way, Ahmed is disrupting the dominant historical narrative laid down by military authorities:

'Only a few decades after the war, this man, who survived bombings, ground invasions and prison camps for the sake of Britain, arrived on these shores to be met with racial hostility and discrimination that he would have to endure until he went to his grave. He lived in the UK through the speech by Enoch Powell, and groups like the National Front telling him to 'go back where he came from". The sad fact is that our forefathers laid down their lives for this country and they were rewarded with nothing but humiliation and degradation. Things haven't changed much, the rise of Islamophobia means their grandchildren and great grandchildren suffer new hues of abuse and negative stereotyping' (Ahmed, 2014).

In summary, opponents of the Poppy Hijab have demonstrated that militarism is an exclusionary form of power that garners support for war. War is supported through the recruitment of new soldiers and the attachment of certain values associated with progressiveness to the armed forces. However, in the last example, Sofia Ahmed uses history to her own advantage. The memory of her grandfather's discrimination in Britain coupled with her own experiences sends ruptures through the dominant historical narrative of British exceptionalism promoted during the 2014 Centenary Commemorations.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that the 2014 Centenary Commemorations in Britain represent complex, multi-layered forms of militarisation that garner support for war and reveal the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the national community. Specifically, this article focused on the efforts by army officials, peers, politicians, academics, religious leaders and supportive British Muslims to include Muslims from the past and present in these events. The analysis throughout this article was informed by critical literature in relation to militarisation and memorialisation.



At the beginning of the first section, insights from critical military studies illustrated how the boundaries and patterns of British society were drawn along military lines during the War on Terror. It was important to emphasise militarisation as an exclusionary process in these circumstances. The construction of the Muslim as the 'Other' was shown to be integral to the consolidation of Britain's militarised identity. A narrative that relied upon racial and cultural stereotyping of Muslims fed into processes of militarisation and facilitated discriminatory security measures. Thus, by tracing the footsteps of military power, we can find some answers as to why and how categories of people become the enemy 'Other' in times of war. Moreover, the exclusionary effects of these militarisation processes revealed the limited modes of identity available to Muslims under processes of militarisation.

In the third sub-section, I sketched out the strengths of Vron Ware's concept, *militarised multiculturalism*, as a conceptual tool to understand and explain the relationship between the military and ethnic minorities. The strengths of Ware's concept lie in its encapsulation of the many complex issues surrounding ethnic minorities and the military under the broad categories of militarisation and multiculturalism. However, this article recognised a gap in Ware's work in connection to sites and processes of memorialisation. Thus, an important contribution of this article was to draw together Vron Ware's concept of *militarised multiculturalism* with literature concerned with processes of memorialisation in nations with complex, multicultural histories. By combining the literature on the memorialisation of multiculturalism with *militarised multiculturalism*, this article indicated how processes of militarisation can be reinforced through sites of memorialisation. Importantly, by allowing these different bodies of academic literature to speak to each other, this paper provides an excellent starting point for further lines of research concerned with the relationship between militarisation, memorialisation and multiculturalism. Indeed, such research will be essential in the coming years as the Centenary Commemorations will come to some sort of culmination in 2018. The manner in which these, and other, sites of remembrance continue to operate in the UK and elsewhere should hopefully be the source of much academic intrigue.

The blurring between sites of memorialisation and processes of militarisation was brought to light by the armed forces' explicit intentions to use the remembrance commemorations to recruit more British Muslim soldiers. This article elucidated how the memorialisation of Muslim soldiers from WWI played into and strengthened processes of militarisation. For the armed forces, the revival of the historical legacy of a multicultural military served to legitimise the military's image and their contemporary efforts in the War on Terror. Furthermore, the memorialisation of the heroic Muslim soldier Khudadad Khan was shown to be a form of mobilisation to counter extremist ideology in the War on Terror.

At the same time, this article analysed statements made by a number of contemporary British Muslims who have either been supportive of the initiatives or have explicitly opposed them. For participant British Muslims, commemorative activities provide an opportunity to validate their British credentials in an atmosphere where their identity is constantly called into question. To legitimise their claims to British identity, advocates of the Poppy Hijab constructed the military-Muslim relationship in the UK as a harmonious bond that stretches throughout history. This revealed the ways in which military power and processes of memorialisation interact with the contours of British identity. It has been important to note how the military has benefited from initiatives such as the Poppy Hijab, also. The Poppy Hijab works to reproduce militarism in everyday settings. The military stands to gain from these processes as allegations of institutional racism are obscured behind a veneer of a visibly diverse army. Revealingly, the right-wing media's pressuring style of reporting confirmed the limited forms of inclusion available to Muslims in military settings. Furthermore, it was noted how alternative forms of identity can be at risk of being marginalised under militarisation. All in



all, this demonstrates the complex ways in which processes of militarisation, memorialisation and multiculturalism overlap through banal acts of remembrance.

On the other hand, this article shed new light on the opponents of the Poppy Hijab. These actors contest militarism by rejecting the Poppy Hijab and by posing alternative historical accounts of British multiculturalism. For them, the Poppy Hijab is a marketing tool for the armed forces, reducing multiculturalism to banal acts of militarism. The limited available modes of identity to Muslims in the War on Terror were illuminated through the opponents' attempts to disentangle their opposition to militarism from allegations of 'extremism'. However, by advancing an alternative story of racial discrimination and anti-Muslim hatred in Britain, some Muslims have challenged the official narratives of the Centenary Commemorations. According to this paper, through the description of her grandfather's experiences, Sofia Ahmed (2014) is doing two important things in this regard. First, in similar ways to critical analysts, she is seeking 'to return historical memory to its proper place, as one dimension of an ongoing social struggle over the meaning of the past' (Noon, 2004, 342). Second, her counter-narrative disrupts the military's portrayal of history, thus undermining the legitimacy of their attempts to gain more recruits and garner support for war.

The complexity of the relationship between Muslims and the British military means there is ample potential for further lines of research on this topic. One strong possibility is for the application of critical security studies. As this article demonstrated, security measures were central to the exclusion of Muslims during the War on Terror. Moreover, through a critical military studies lens this article perceived Muslims' use of military institutions to prove they are non-threatening to society as banal acts of militarisation. However, from a critical security studies standpoint, these activities could also be observed as 'de-securitising' moves through militarisation, or even as 'acts of resistance to banal securitisation' (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2013, 358). These are just some preliminary ideas, exemplifying the great potential for these events to be located at the intersection between critical military studies and critical security studies.

Another possibility for research is in regard to the Poppy Hijab, which is well disposed for further semiotic analysis. My argument around the opposition to the headdress claimed that Muslims who reject the Poppy Hijab were in contestation with two layers of power under processes of militarisation. These layers of power referred to how opponents risked denying a particular configuration of Britishness, but were also vulnerable to being labelled an extremist. Yet, there are also important gender politics flowing through this initiative that situates Muslim women at the epicentre of the fight against radicalism and extremism (Allen, 2014). More critical analysis intent on deconstructing the multiple layers of power behind the Poppy Hijab would be fruitful, especially as the hijab continues to be at the heart of political controversy in the UK and other Western liberal democracies.

One limitation of this article is that the main source for the Muslim voices has been from the media. Without undermining the importance of the statements made in these settings, more research involving interviews with Muslim participants would be rewarding. Interviews could allow interested scholars to gain a better understanding of Muslims' relationship with the armed forces. This would give voice to more British Muslim citizens, whose voices and identities have been severely restricted since the onset of the War on Terror. My final section on the voices of opposition to the Poppy Hijab has sought to listen to, and think critically about, some of the alternative modes of British Muslim identity that have been sidelined under processes of militarisation. The intention has been to illustrate how military institutions and processes of militarisation are constantly evolving, never fully resolved and should always be open to question.



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