

Bromber, Katrin; Lange, Katharina; Liebau, Heike; Wetzel, Anorthe (Hrsg.): *The Long End of the First World War. Ruptures, Continuities and Memories*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag 2018. ISBN: 9783593508627; 296 S.

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This book is the result of the eponymous symposium held in Hanover in May 2017 which explored the links between experience, historiography and commemoration of the First World War in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. In this sense, this collective work perfectly fits within the recent tendency in First World research towards a 'Greater War' as advocated by Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela.¹ These leading scholars plea to break out of the traditional chronological and geographical boundaries to include the non-western world and to extend the field of research into the pre-war and post-war periods. And this is exactly what the historians of the Leibnitz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin have been doing for many years, and have done again by editing this volume.

They do so by focusing on two broad themes, accounting for the two parts of the book: 'new approaches, methodologies and sources', and 'historiographies and remembrance'. As often in a collective work, the contributions are somewhat uneven, though generally innovative and of high quality. If there is one major deficiency to the book in my opinion it is the lack of an index, which is always regrettable for academic publications as it is a major obstacle for quick reference.

The *Long End of the First World War* starts with a particularly strong overview of Marxist inspiration in which Radhika Desai presents a long-term analysis of the First World War as the beginning of the crisis of imperialism, reminding the reader that there was not only a 'Wilsonian moment' but also a 'Leninist moment' which impact went deeper and lasted much longer. Without driving the comparison too far, her conclusion draws attention to striking similarities between the multipolar moment of the decades leading up to 1914 and our contemporary multipolar world.

The other four contributions of the book's first part have a more direct geographical focus, on respectively South Asia (by Iftekhar Iqbal), the Ottoman Empire (by Chris Gratien), East Africa (by Felix Brahm) and Tunisia (by Christopher Rominger). Yet, despite the more restricted focus on particular polities, the subjects treated in each article as a matter of fact are true to the book's calling of offering new approaches in a transnational vein, and they offer excellent material for future comparative studies. While Iqbal demonstrates how the extraction of timber, water hyacinths, and jute for the allied war effort in the Bengal delta had a devastating impact on the environment which could result in famines even decades later, Gratien considers the post-war occurrence of malaria in the former Ottoman empire as a consequence of the war years.

Felix Brahm draws attention to the question of arms control following the enormous influx of weapons during the war. This was of particular concern to the imperialist states, and in particular the British Empire, who did not wish this surplus to fall in the hands of „savage or semi-civilised tribes“. Despite mobilizing hundreds of thousands of non-European subjects of the Empire into the British Army, it had been a policy of the British not to deploy armed Africans (or other non-European colonials with the exception of the Indian Army) in Europe, not only to prevent them from gaining modern combat experience but also because this was considered detrimental to the image of the white man. While he elaborates on the war in East Africa, it is a pity the author did not elaborate the link between the British war-time policy of excluding non-whites to bear arms on the European battlefields and the question of arms control after the war, for it is a matter that gets to the very core of colonial imperialism whereby non-Europeans were always considered inferior to the white 'master race'.

The French colonial policy was somewhat different – more aimed at assimilation. Serving in the army and fighting in Europe was considered an appropriate method to tie colonial subjects to the French colonial project. Christopher Rominger's contribution on po-

¹ Robert Gerwarth / Erez Manela (eds.), *Empires at War, 1911-1923*, Oxford 2014

pulation flows in Tunisia not only stresses the brutality that was involved in this mobilisation, but also the existence of minorities such as Jews within the North African contingents. He rightfully assesses how (temporary) migration (to Europe) as a consequence of the war exposed the limits of colonial, racial, and civilizational thinking correspondingly was a catalyst for political and social change. It is something also noticed by other scholars of 'subaltern' transnational history of the Great War, such as Santanu Das in his recent book.²

The second part of the book largely reflects on who remembers and who is being remembered. Both in focus, quality, and structure, this part is more uneven than the first part of the book. It offers some 'good practices' such as the 'Carnival of Hell- The First World War and the Senses'-exhibition that was held in Stuttgart in the first year of the centenary, and the international contemporary art project 'Digging Deep, Crossing Far'. While undeniably interesting, they offer the scholar little more than an account of exhibitions that once were. Moreover, it struck me that while Franziska Dunkel's report on the 'Carnival of Hell' elaborates on the 'sensuous turn' in historiography, she strangely misses out to mention the international and multidisciplinary 'Conflict and the Senses'-conference that was held in the Imperial War Museum in September 2013.³

In my opinion the broad overview offered by Bromber, Lange and Liebau on new research, commemoration and debates regarding the First World War in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia should have opened the second part of the book. It has the largest scope of all contributions in this part and clearly raises the point that is central to all articles : on the one end the tension between scholarly research and public history, and on the other end the existing tensions within public history - who is doing the remembrance and who is being remembered. In other words: cui bono ?

That the past and the history of the First World War was and is all too often instrumentalised for identity politics is demonstrated by some of the other contributions in this part of the book such as Oksana Nagornaya's critical assessment of the heavily state-directed mu-

seum exhibitions on the First World War in Russia in 2014, and Veronika Hager's article on historiographical discourses in the consolidating Republic of Turkey. Hanna Smyth's contribution on identity politics and the remembrance sites of South Africa, India, Canada and Australia is somewhat a missed opportunity in the context of this book. As at the time of writing her PhD was ongoing she refrains from making clear statements, and limits herself to a very general overview of her fascinating research project, and as such leaves the reader wanting for (much) more. However, her advocacy for treating memorials, cemeteries and their landscapes as a primary source is pertinent, and highly relevant to the books aim of introducing new sources.

Least convincing and rather disappointing is Barbara Christophe and Kerstin Schwedes' contribution on school textbook accounts about the First World War. The authors lead a comparative research project involving history manuals from 17 different countries, which is perhaps too much. Moreover they do not specify enough what kind of textbooks they looked into: only contemporary textbooks or also older ones, and for which age group(s)? And while they stress the importance of linguistic specificities, this is not further explained. In a federal state as Belgium for instance, French language curricula are different from Dutch language curricula, and this accounts for the contents of manuals. It is an important question the authors do not raise: who determines the curriculum and hence the content of textbooks: the state, the providers of education (church, private), or is it left to individual publishers/authors? By consequence the authors' conclusions are on the one hand rather meaningless and obvious: „we have come to the conclusion that there are clearly recognizable national differences in textbook narratives“ (p. 230), and on the other hand essentialist (French textbooks are x, British textbooks are y) without taking into account differences within countries.

But this is an odd one out of what otherwise is an excellent volume offering much food for

²Santanu Das, *India, Empire and First World War Culture*, Cambridge 2018.

³Nicholas J. Saunders / Paul Cornish (eds.), *Modern Conflict and the Senses*, Routledge 2017.

thought for those involved in remembrance and commemoration. While it can be remarked that some 'new' sources and auxiliary disciplines (such as conflict archaeology) are not included, and that – among others – there is nothing to be found on China, the Caribbean or South Africa (to name just some geographical entities on which the First World War also had an enormous impact), this book is another stepping stone towards a more inclusive global and transnational new approach to the Great(er) War. Therefore it should be applauded and not be missed out of any reading list focusing on extra-European and transnational aspects of the First World War.

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