

Crailsheim, Eberhard; Elizalde, María Dolores (Hrsg.): *The Representation of External Threats. From the Middle Ages to the Modern World*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers 2019. ISBN: 978-90-04-39015-7; 466 S.

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I would like to begin with some general information first: The present reader comprises 457 pages plus index, available in print or e-book version.<sup>1</sup> 13 figures and tables complete and support the text. The book is volume number 123 of *History of Warfare* (edited by Kelly DeVries, John France, Michael S. Neiberg et al.), a series which, according to the self-description of its editors, „presents the latest research on all aspects of military history [...] related to warfare in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East from ancient times until the mid-twentieth century“. Affiliated with the *Spanish National Research Council* (CSIC, Madrid), the history of the Spanish empire is the focus of expertise of the two editors of this book, in particular early modern colonial Philippines. The volume is an outcome of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Project *Phil-Threats: The Representation of External Threats in the Configuration of Spanish Power in the Philippines, 1600–1800* and a conference in 2017 on the topic.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent to this meeting, the historical view and scope of (the meaning of) „threat“ in theory and practice were expanded beyond the original case study to build the groundwork for the conference proceedings.

The 19 authors (6 female, 13 male) are mostly Europeans and affiliated with European academic institutions. A mix of early career starters and established researchers, they delivered as many contributions to the volume. In geographical terms, the outreach is global: Six studies may be allocated to the European and Asian arenas of conflicts respectively; three authors study the Americas; two contributions have an explicitly transnational character – a quality that may be attributed, in one way or another, to most of the articles as well. With regard to periodisation, we can count seven articles dealing with the early modern times, seven exploring the nineteenth century, and two have a *longue durée* approach. Finally,

two articles are of a conceptional and theoretical nature. Obviously, the effort taken in preparation for the volume was determined, and the selection looks convincing.

The self-imposed task of the editors is twofold: Theorising threat and testing theories using historical case studies. The authors understand politics and mentalities in continuum with warfare, armed conflict, or militant repression. This is in accordance with the series, which gives ample leeway to broaden the view on warfare. Consequently, the development and representations of external threats as „ultimate source“ for war and militant civil struggle is studied within what might be called a „constructivist conflict paradigm“. Concentrating on the effect of „threat communication“ as prime mover for political actors and societies, for collectives and their conflicts, Eberhard Crailsheim offers an introductory state-of-the-art overview of approaches and concepts for the representation of external threats in the first part of the book („Conceptual Approaches“). In the end, any investigation of „representation“ in social and historical sciences leads to the question of „social production“ (and semiotic triangles of reference as analytical tool), in other words: Who is constructing meaning for whom, why and when. As Crailsheim puts it: „Dealing with an external threat forces us to reflect upon the point of view from which the threat is perceived. Who is observing a threat? Who is expressing an observation of a threat? And what is the intended audience? These considerations make it clear that an external threat is considered here not as an ontological value, but as a social construct, mostly created by people with clear intentions“ (p. 17). Beside „representation“, „external“ is the second key-component of the design, because it implies the differentiation between „in“ and „out“ or „the self and the other, the own and the alien, the known and the foreign“ (p. 17).

The volume's innovative contribution is, in Crailsheim's view, the focus on the audience/addressee in the process of threat communication. This view on this particular part of the semiotic triangle, which research in

<sup>1</sup> See <https://brill.com/view/title/38076> (16.09.2020).

<sup>2</sup> See the call: <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-82275> (16.09.2020).

the past has more taken for granted than put under scrutiny, is the USP of the volume. Six theoretical approaches are discussed: „The Art of Communication“ (System Theories and Theories of Communication); „Threat at Communication“ (Niklas Luhmann, Karl Schlögel, Werner Schirmer); „Heuristics and the Problem of the Addressee“ (as challenge by the available sources); „Conflict Sociology and the Consequences of Outside Threats“ (starting with George Simmel’s *Formen der Vergesellschaftung*); „International Relations, Security Studies, and Securitization“ (with its various schools); and „Fear – Cause and Effect“ (biological and psychological perspectives or in political communication).

Werner Schirmer’s approach appears to be favoured in particular by Crailsheim and seems to fulfil the requirement of providing the most integrative theory, applicable to historical case studies as well.<sup>3</sup> In this constructivist’s view, conflict and threat communication accomplish not only the „construction of a threat“, most likely as the collective personification of an „enemy“ („enmification“), but has reflective qualities as feedback for group building, too. A kind of double-bind circular model is at work: My enemy makes my group; my enmification produces/supports the group building (cohesion) of „the other“ as reflective process which may lead to feedback loops and (further) intensification (of „their“ and „our“ identities, conflict-potentials etc.). Analysing the Pan-Slavism movement, Vladimir Belous, the author of the first case-study (which is the second contribution to the theory chapter), argues in favour of this reciprocal model as „alienation of own and appropriation of alien“ (p. 64).

Parts two to seven organise the other case-studies under the following titles: (2) „Threat at Communication“; (3) „Representation of the Internal/External Other“; (4) „The Creation of Threats in the Old World“; (5) „Contested Conceptions in the Atlantic World“; (6) „Threats in the Colonial Context of the Pacific World“; (7) „Perceptions of the Other: Chinese-European Encounters“.

A notable positive aspect is the thematic juxtaposition of the articles either as confrontation of encounters, as in part seven with

two contributions covering the Chinese view on Europe and vice versa; or as complementary „bundle“, like the three articles dealing with Spanish colonial experiences in the Pacific (part 6). Thus, this reader could be recommended as a topic-specific introduction to global history. And yet, all these contributions, as such, could stand alone or be part of another collective volume, because they hardly reflect on the theoretical groundwork laid in the first part.

What I strongly miss as a military historian is – even allowing for the volume’s explicit self-limitation to „representation“ – the continuum of the „threat“ with warfare. It is barely analysed when the (only imagined?) threat becomes „lethal“ practice. What dampened my curiosity most, however, is the fact that the authors use the introduced vocabulary for describing historical events rather than applying the provided theories as investigative tools for historical conflicts. Stephan Steiner’s presentation of the „Gypsies‘ as EX/INternal Threat in the Habsburg Monarchy and in the Holy Roman Empire, 15th–18th Century“, is a case in point, because the author restricts himself to depicting an ethnocliché well-researched within the literature on marginal groups, as a „threat“.

To be sure, the volume is a valuable undertaking for interdisciplinary research, as it brings this very vocabulary and theoretical models into historical research – or to put it in idiosyncratic German: It has a high potential of „Anschlussfähigkeit“. But my main critique is the following: The circular-reflexive model of any constructivist theory has the major ‘inbuilt’ shortcoming that it produces another narrative, which might lead to circular conclusions – and tautologies, instead of deconstructing the existing ones. The portrayal of arrogant Chinese in British travel writings of the nineteenth century (Qiong Yu, Shanghai), for instance, did not actually produce a „threat“. At most, it is a micro puzzle of an enmification-process which could lead to a colonial mind, its imagination of a civilising mission and of the right of „the West“ to wage war against „the others“.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Schirmer, *Bedrohungskommunikation: Eine gesellschaftstheoretische Studie zu Sicherheit und Unsicherheit*, Wiesbaden 2008.

My expectations were probably too biased with regard to a volume series dedicated to *warfare* (i.e. engagement in or activities involved in war or conflict such as military operations between enemies or an antagonistic state of action). In this context, the contributions assembled in the volume show the potential for further research that brings war back in, instead of highlighting „background noise“. However, the paradox is that this „black-boxing“ of warfare itself sheds light on the latent „background noise“. In history, the latter has been accentuated whenever it seemed advantageous to whatever party – as the case studies demonstrate.

*Cui bono?* Notwithstanding the volume's shortcomings, its authors offer new perspectives on how to bring concepts and theories from political science, sociology, and 'constructivism' into the study of history. That is the pioneering ambition and the great achievement of this book. It should inspire and stimulate future endeavours and theory-testing.

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