

**Thoralf Klein, Frank Schumacher.** *Kolonialkriege: Militärische Gewalt im Zeichen des Imperialismus.* Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, HIS Verlag, 2006. 369 S. EUR 35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-936096-70-5.



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## Militarized “Civilizing Missions”: Colonial Wars and Globalization

Thoralf Klein and Frank Schumacher’s anthology, which originated at a conference at the University of Erfurt in 2003, promises a comparative look at colonial wars beginning in the 1840s with the Indian wars in the United States and concluding with the Algerian War from 1954 to 1962. To explain their focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the editors argue that during the modern era, colonialism became associated for the first time with the direct rule of foreigners. Previously, the word “colony” was assigned to outlying territories incorporated within empires. Moreover, as industrialization broadened the aims of colonialism to include the acquisition of markets and raw materials, imperialist powers discursively cast colonial wars that accompanied those objectives as “civilizing missions.” To assure the consistency of the collection, each contributor addresses four themes to varying degrees: the causes and course of each war; the “face” of each war as reflected in military strategy, tactics, technological experimentation, and the degree of collaboration from the local population; the discourses and semantic strategies each conflict produced; and the memories of the war in the metropole and colony both. Written mainly by younger

German historians, the contributions cover Imperial Germany in East and South West Africa (Thomas Morlang and Susanne Kuss), the American war in the Philippines from 1899-1913 (Frank Schumacher), the Boxer Rebellion in China (Thoralf Klein), the Boer War (Cord Eber-späcker), the Spanish War in Morocco from 1921 to 1927 (Ulrich Mücke), the Italian Fascist invasion of Ethiopia (Giulia Brogini Käzner), and Japan’s conquest of Manchuria (Reinhard Zöllner), in addition to the Indian wars (Michael Hochgeschwender) and the Algerian War (Daniel Mollenhauer).

Aside from the editors’ brief introduction, Dierk Walter’s essay, “Warum Kolonialkrieg?,” provides the theoretical ballast for the collection. Arguing that the term “colonial war” is more comprehensive and accurate than others that historians have deployed (“overseas war” or “asymmetrical war,” for example), Walter builds on the durable contributions of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher to define “colonial war” as a small, asymmetrical conflict fought on the periphery to force the integration of a colony into an expanding global economic system.

Because colonial armies proved unable to defeat colo-

nial peoples decisively, colonial wars dragged on interminably. The reasons for this include the tenacity and creativity of “native” resistance, as well as the underdeveloped and often “pre-modern” apparatus of colonial states, which left only the colonial army to assert control, thus militarizing the interaction between agents of empire and subject peoples. Yet contrary to recent suggestions as to the “boomerang effect” of such wars on metropolises, Walter argues that although colonial conflicts did encourage new technologies that empires ultimately used against each other, and obliterated the distinction between combatants and civilians, colonial wars bore little resemblance to the total wars of the twentieth century. They commanded neither the total mobilization of resources and labor power, nor did they engage public attention to the degree achieved by the First and Second World Wars. To be sure, Walter suggests, the Nazi conquest of *Lebensraum* bears comparison to previous German and European colonialism. He cautions, however, that although nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonial wars could be latently or structurally genocidal in their destruction of livelihoods and lives, such actions did not constitute a premeditated decision at the very top to destroy entire ethnic groups. “Total war,” Walter concludes, more accurately describes the practices of the highly developed industrialized nation-states of North America, Europe, and Japan.

The essays confirm Walter’s argument as to the protracted character of colonial wars. Initially “decisive” victories, which depended on conventional military tactics, these conflicts evaporated with the regrouping of indigenous resistance, prompting in turn escalating violence and more deadly means of “pacification” against civilians and their villages. Not surprisingly, increasingly draconian and ruthless military tactics spawned even more resistance. Cast as “civilizing missions” against benighted “natives,” colonialist discourses resorted to racial stereotypes that justified punitive action, whether launched against “fanatical” Boxer rebels in China, “uncivilized” Ethiopians, who required “necessarily surgical operations” to root out “disease,” (p. 284), or the Filipinos, who were “religious and moral degenerates,” in the words of the American commander Leonard Wood (p. 124). Despite their duration, however, the colonial wars under discussion ended, many of them unsuccessfully for the colonizers. The Algerian conflict resulted in bitter internal divisions and the wrenching final transformation of France from an empire to a medium-sized continental power under Charles de Gaulle, albeit a modernizing one. The brutal Japanese invasion of China ultimately

spawned peasant resistance that redounded to the benefit of the Kuomintang and especially the Chinese communists under Mao Zedong. The conflict in Morocco, which ended badly for the Spanish, indirectly aided the Nationalist Forces under Francisco Franco, who triumphed over the Spanish Republic in 1939. Other wars, however, proved successful over the long run, notably the Indian wars in the United States, which Hochgeschwender sees as analogous to the French incorporation of Algeria and the continental expansion of the tsars. The defeat of indigenous peoples also enabled the incorporation and settlement of the American West.

Nevertheless, even if they did not demand the total mobilization of metropolitan populations and resources, colonial wars did claim public attention. Such conflicts often generated vehement opposition. The Indian wars spawned proposals for more the humane treatment of indigenous peoples by means of assimilation through education. The conduct of the British during the Boer War aroused furious domestic and international criticism. The annihilation of the Herero and Nama in South West Africa undertaken by the German *Schutztruppe* and their commander, Lothar von Trotha, resulted in a furor in the Reichstag, especially from the SPD and the center. Similar opposition to the conduct of the war in the Philippines developed in the United States. Although opponents of colonial wars often endured contempt and calumny, their objections usually did not challenge colonialism root and branch, and just as frequently their disagreement betrayed racial stereotypes of the people whose interests they claimed to advocate. Nevertheless, dissent and the public engagement that it entailed suggest that colonial wars proved more disruptive to the public arena than Walter allows.

The relevance of this volume for the German history field extends beyond Morlang’s and Kuss’s chapters on Imperial Germany’s wars in Africa, and Thoralf Klein’s essay, which includes an assessment of its role the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion. As a whole, the anthology calls into question the validity of the new “continuity thesis” between Germany’s prewar colonialism and the Nazi variant later, even as it affirms the recent trend to incorporate the German experience within the larger of history of European imperialism. Synchronically, the placement of the essays on German colonial wars with others of the same era encouraged me at least to conclude that little distinguished Imperial German wars from the others in their violence and ruthlessness—notwithstanding Lothar von Trotha’s explicit extermination order in the war against the Herero in South West

Africa. Thus, according to Frank Schumacher's essay, American observers found the British conduct during the Boer War to have been an acceptable model for the American suppression of Filipino rebels. "Guerrilla warfare," according to one such commentator referring to the Filipinos, "is inconsistent with civilization. Whoever resorts to it compels his adversary to appeal to the ancient tactics of extermination" (p. 135). Diachronically, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonial wars that played out in the context of a globalizing economy and required fewer resources to prosecute than the world wars, were, as Walter acknowledges, a different breed than the Nazi *Lebensraum* project. Despite its ruthless expropriation of raw materials and labor, the Nazi regime pursued its expansionism to break free of the global economy, not to integrate its empire within it. The "Final Solution," which it launched against the Jews who personified Germany's adversaries, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, achieved the proportions that it did because it took place in the context of total war. It was pursued by a regime that, through a combination of repression and cultivated consent, faced minimal dis-

sent at home. Although an essay on Nazi colonialism in eastern Europe might have furthered the discussion over the extent to which Nazism belongs to a broader history of imperialism, it is arguably appropriate that this example was not included.

More problematic, however, is the absence of contributions for the period after the conclusion of the Algerian War. The editors' introduction, which invites comparisons between the present "global war on terror" and the "civilizing missions" of the past two centuries, and Walter's comment that colonial wars are, historically speaking, more the norm than the exception, whet the reader's appetite for entries for post-1960 period, particularly the Iraq War. Moreover, the introduction provides little follow-through with the volume's comparative promises, as if the editors expected that broader comparisons would speak for themselves. Although it is appropriate to encourage readers to draw their own conclusions, a summary statement would have helped to advance the current discussion. Despite these reservations, Klein and Schumacher have compiled an important collection that has special value to the German history field.

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