

Long, Roger D.; Talbot, Ian (Hrsg.): *India and World War I. A Centennial Assessment*. Abingdon: Routledge 2018. ISBN: 9781138558588; XI, 212 S.

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As is common with jubilees, the centennial of World War I in 2014–2018 has led to a sparked increase in research, conferences, workshops and publications related to the topic. This has also provided an opportunity to approach this momentous and defining conflict of the 20th century from new perspectives. As a result of the spatial and global turns that left their mark on historiography in the last few decades, various newer studies finally made justice to the conflict's given name and analysed World War I as the global event it was.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this also sparked a new interest in the role the war played in and on locations beyond the Western Front and outside of the „Western“ sphere. *India and World War I. A Centennial Assessment*, edited by Roger D. Long and Ian Talbot, provides such an example. In an introduction and nine research essays the collection casts light on a region that, while geographically distant from most of the battlefields, was heavily affected by the war.

The book opens with an introductory essay by co-editor Roger D. Long. He presents us with an extensive overview on the war and India's – meaning especially the Indian Army's – involvement in it. Written in an engaging prose and a commemorative tone, the introduction's focus lies mainly on topics like recruitment, the course of the war as well as Indian soldiers' participation in the various war theatres, while the home front and the war's impact on Indian civil society play only a minor role.

The first research essay is authored by Nick Lloyd. It deals with the British Indian province of Punjab which for long had been the most important recruiting ground for the Indian Army. Lloyd recounts the efforts of Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab (1912–1919), in keeping revolutionary tendencies at bay, consolidating loyalist forces, and maintaining the province's extraordinary share in military recruitment. For

this work O'Dwyer is lauded by Lloyd as a small but nevertheless important factor in the eventual victory of the Allied Powers. Recent work has shown that there can be much historiographical merit in retracing the rationale, motivations, and feelings that lay behind the actions and policies of colonial administrators.<sup>2</sup> However, Nick Lloyd's approach goes way beyond the necessary reconsideration of accounts from older Indian nationalist historiography, but instead completely whitewashes the controversial figure of O'Dwyer who was criticized by contemporaries for his authoritarian administrative style and in 1940 was assassinated by an Indian revolutionary in London. As such, Lloyd's essay, unfortunately, provides little new besides a recoated reiteration of imperial(ist) history that uncritically retells the point of view and arguments of the colonial agents. Tellingly, Lloyd's essay concludes with two longer quotes from contemporary assessments of O'Dwyer published in the London press, to which Lloyd sees no necessity of adding anything.

The following two essays focus both on the war's effect on a particular region. Sarah Ansari analyses the Bombay Presidency in Western India and especially the harbour cities of Karachi and Bombay (today's Mumbai). She describes them as places of interconnection and exchange in which the home front and the contact zones of a total war became blurred. Through both cities Indian soldiers left for the war, which together with the considerable presence of prisoners of war transformed the Presidency „into a massive transit camp“ (p. 73), as Ansari argues. The city of Calcutta (today's Kolkata) is the subject of Suchetana Chattopadhyay's article. Through the analytical lens of class, Chattopadhyay paints a picture of a city that during the war was held captive by a ubiquitous apocalyptic mood. The period saw an increase in crime, communal conflicts, and racist and

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Marc Segesser, *Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive*, Wiesbaden 2010; Lawrence Sondhaus, *World War One. The Global Revolution*, Cambridge 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Condos, *The Insecurity State. Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India*, Cambridge 2018; Harald Fischer-Tiné (ed.), *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings. Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, Houndmills u.a. 2017.

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colonial repression. Fuelled by an already existing sense of decline after the city had lost its status as the capital of British India to Delhi in 1911, Calcutta's middle classes experienced and lamented an economic and political loss of importance during World War 1. As Chattopadhyay elaborates, this led to a rather paradox attitude among these classes who longed for pre-war colonial „law and order“ while simultaneously utilising the war distress as an opportunity to critique the colonial order.

Salman Bangash's essay elaborates on the internal and external threats British authority had to face in British India's North-West Frontier Province, a region bordering to Afghanistan and inhabited by Pashtun tribes. Bangash traces the steps of a Turko-German mission sent to the Amir of Afghanistan in late summer 1915 that tried to capitalize on Pan-Islamist sentiments fuelling anti-British activism in the border region. The article – thankfully without the triumphant tone of Lloyd's essay – provides a description of the British-Indian policies that eventually successfully prevented the outbreak of significant unrest in the North-West Frontier Province during the war. As Bangash shows, this success stemmed from a bundle of measures not too different from the Punjab example; pressuring the Amir to wield his influence on both sides of the border, reorganise military recruitment in the region, and foster the loyalism of the traditional leaders of tribal society.

Lindsay Frederick Braun writes on „India and the African experience“ during the war and shines light on Indian merchants, settlers and soldiers in Eastern and Southern Africa, a venue that so far has been rarely covered. The essay starts with a promising attempt to situate its topic among recent historiographical notions of a decentralized British Empire, transcending Euro-centric perspectives and conceptualizing the Indian Ocean as a web of interactions. Unfortunately, the article delivers only partially on this premise, but presents its subject eventually rather cursorily. The essay, accordingly, remains somewhat open in its conclusion, as Braun herself acknowledges. Santanu Das' subsequent article similarly abstains from making a distinct argument. Instead, the essay captures

the reader with intimate insights from the Indian Army during the British military campaign in Mesopotamia. Das presents us with hitherto overlooked source material: letters and autobiographical accounts from two educated Bengali non-combatants whose memories of war and captivity in Mesopotamia show a disenchanted worldview critical of both imperialism and Indian mainstream nationalism. The campaign in Mesopotamia provides the backdrop also of the article of Rachel Constance, which must be deemed one of the stronger pieces of the collection. Constance uses the devastating outbreak of cholera among the Indian Army during the siege of Kut-Al-Amara in late 1915 and early 1916 as a vehicle for conceptualizing both cholera and the Indian Army as parts of a bigger „web of Empire“. As Constance shows, the foundation of imperial knowledge of cholera built on Indian bodies, as the progress of cholera prevention went hand in hand with the British's experience on the Indian subcontinent and the imperial need to prevent soldiers from getting sick. Cholera was both a legacy of and travelled through networks of empire that Indian soldiers maintained, as Constance sees culminating in the case of the siege of Kut-Al-Amara.

One of longest articles of the edition is provided by Marc Jason Gilbert who presents us with a dense account of war-time Indian politics and the role played by British activist and member of the Indian National Congress Annie Besant. As Gilbert's essay makes clear, the contingencies of the war facilitated diverse political possibilities and expectations. It simultaneously halted and accelerated the fragile concessions toward Indian claims of representation indicated by the British in the years before the war. As the articles shows, the war period made possible the rise of M. K. Gandhi as a leader of the nationalist movement, while the influence of Annie Besant – who was not convinced of Gandhi's ideas and schemes during and after the war – declined. M. K. Gandhi, his war-time activities and their legitimization are the topic of the final essay of the edition. As Gandhi-biographer Faisal Devji shows, the Mahatma's views in this regard were not always completely without contradiction, yet were held together by the mo-

tifs of „sacrifice“ and „voluntarism“. During the war, Gandhi held to the conviction that support for the British and Allied war efforts must be unconditional to be morally correct and a true expression of Indian sovereignty and self-rule (Swaraj). This would eventually, and morally necessarily, lead the British to concede to Indian political claims.

In sum, the collection leaves a somewhat chequered impression. Although the book's title promises an „assessment“, the collection does not seem to convey any specific point or intend to make a broader statement. There do appear some reoccurring themes throughout the individual essays like captivity, colonial control and contention, and various contact zones and encounters during the war. Yet, the eclectic composition of the essays, their diverse approaches, and inconsistent quality and analytical value do not suggest a poignant assessment to be made with the collection. Consequently, the introduction by Long does not bother and engage much with historiographical or methodical-theoretical questions. This is a missed opportunity and raises the question what the collection as a whole can contribute to the existing scholarship on India and World War I, especially in the face of the considerable (mainly monographic) competition that has been published in the wake of the centennial.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the diverse nature of the collection can also be considered one of its strengths. Several of the individual essays provide innovative material on geographical and thematic areas that hitherto have not received the attention that, for example, the experience of Indian soldiers in Europe and at the Western Front had.<sup>4</sup> Hence, while the scope of the collection is far from comprehensive, it offers selected insights to readers interested in diverse fields such as South Asian social and political history, (new) imperial history or war studies.

HistLit 2019-1-122 / Michael Philipp Brunner über Long, Roger D.; Talbot, Ian (Hrsg.): *India and World War I. A Centennial Assessment*. Abingdon 2018, in: H-Soz-Kult 25.02.2019.

<sup>3</sup> Vedica Kant, 'If I die here, who will remember me?'. India and the First World War, New Delhi 2014; Kaushik Roy, Indian Army and the First World War, 1914-18, New Delhi 2018; Santanu Das, India, Empire, and First World War Culture. Writings, Images, and Songs, Cambridge 2018.

<sup>4</sup> George Morton-Jack, The Indian Army on the Western Front. India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War, Cambridge 2014; Shrabani Basu, For King and Another Country. Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914-18, New Delhi 2016.