

Lawrence, Mark Atwood; Logewall, Fredrick (Hrsg.): *The First Vietnam War. Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*. Cambridge/ MA: Harvard University Press 2007. ISBN: 978-0-674-02371-0; 384 S.

**Rezensiert von:** Attila Melegh, Demographic Research Institute, Budapest

This book on the transition from a colonial conflict into a major cold war crisis and tension is an excellent collection of studies, which in most cases provide extremely well written, clearly argued analyses to be used not only by interested scholars, but by anybody maintaining a general interest in global political history. And it is a must for all those who are interested in the links between colonial history and the cold war right after the second world war.

Nonetheless, this book cannot be handled as breakthrough of postcolonial criticism as promised by the subtitle and in the study of Bradley within the book on 'Making Sense of the French War': as we cannot gain a complex picture about the relationship between colonizers and the colonized. Beside some analysis on Vietnamese historical perspectives and that of China the „colonized“ perspective is restricted and the book is dominated by the political developments of the Western powers. We can just sense these colonial encounters from the studies provided.

But it is a major step forward for writing global history as it does work out some relationships within the complex web of manoeuvring of global powers in and around Vietnam. This picture is also not complete as no study analyses effectively and systematically the Soviet policies which would have been essential in case we would like to build bridges between cold war studies, studies on the state socialist „Eastern Europe“ and postcolonial criticism as promised by the subtitle of the book. This should not be a surprise as this link is basically missing in global historiography and there is much to be done in this respect (for instance to analyse sentences and attitudes like the one made by Stalin in front of Ho Chi Minh asking for help: „Oh, you Orientals. You have such rich imagination.p 290). This link clearly appears in the book only

when Vietnamese policies are evaluated in the first chapters and when excitingly the Geneva talks and the Chinese participation is analysed. This can be a promising start for further analysis of contact between East European socialism and previous colonial and would be socialist countries.

Nonetheless, as mentioned above the book is great advantage in the sense that a detailed insight is gained into the policies of the concerned Western powers, the United States, United Kingdom and France of course. Here we can observe several political processes embedded into some very important national political scenarios. We gain a lot of insights on the shifts in US policies around the issue of colonialism, especially at the end of the war (chapter 4) around the early 1950s (chapter 6, 7, 10) and the picture we gain is the way how a supposedly anti-colonial huge power is getting integrated into colonial exercises in a more and more cold war scenario. Actually this is one the greatest advantages of this book that it is able to follow this paradoxical process without falling into some easy traps. Concerning the colonial paradoxes the book clearly hints that East/West discourses and identities did go through some changes with the rise of the cold war tensions and it was re-configured as rivalling modernities between the West and state socialism (communists versus anticommunists), but at the same time it maintained a racist/Orientalist/colonialist structure. One of the most exciting outcome of the book is that we can follow the discussion between colonial, excolonial, anticommunist and newly rising communist powers within one story. Just the reading of quotes is a data archive for cultural anthropologists interested in some cultural contacts mainly above the heads of the Vietnamese.

At the same time the anthology successfully gives back the whole dynamic of the triangle between the United States, Great Britain and France (especially chapter 6, 7, 9, 10). Actually the reader can amuse himself or herself by the amazingly arrogant comments made by all kinds of politicians being involved or being observers in the processes in which they explained what „Europe meant“.

The British attitude in the whole scenario is in itself a parody as we can closely follow how

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they offered their services to the newly emerging power referring to their colonial „expertise“, how they tried to „invite“ the United States (and its resources into a „Great Combination“ and how they abandoned it as soon as it was established, while they maintained their image of a world power.

Or we can closely follow the French developments in which country, due to the loss of the national pride in all different ways (Vichy period, collaboration, occupation, the rise of Germany again), there was an almost complete colonial consensus as they wanted to maintain the colonial image to secure other possessions mainly in Africa, they stuck to less and less important colonial resources by securing American aid for their fight based mainly on local soldiers, while they were afraid of loosing toward Germany in Europe and they were involved in building European supranational institutions. Actually once it would be nice to establish a link between the later „EU process“ and colonial history. Books like „The First Vietnam War“ are important contributions to our understanding of these global games, or more ironically geopolitical Molière comedies. But the many victims in the colonies and former colonies from Madagascar to Vietnam is what we cannot forget.

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