

continually executed” (pp. 20–21). Balachandran concentrates on these maritime workers, thus complementing academic studies on the rest of the British and Indian shipping industries and on British imperial maritime commerce generally.

This impressive volume greatly expands and deepens our understanding of the complex worlds of Indian seafarers. Balachandran bases his impressive analysis on extensive and thorough research in archives in Britain, India, Australia, and the European continent. Scholars will find rich material and much insight that will enable them to include these workers within social and labour history globally.

Michael H. Fisher

The World in World Wars. Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia. Ed. by Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja. [Studies in Global Social History, Vol. 5.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2010. vii, 613 pp. € 129.00; \$183.00 doi:10.1017/S0020859012000673

In recent years the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin has been at the centre of a series of initiatives aimed at studying non-European experiences of both world wars. This interest has taken the form of promoting research projects, publishing books, and organizing workshops. The present volume brings together the papers presented on two such occasions: a workshop on the social, cultural, and intellectual effects of the world wars on the Middle East, held in 2006, and a subsequent workshop on the “World in World Wars” (2007), the title of which is also the title of the volume under review. The promise of a history of the world wars devoted to their social effects and cultural legacies, and stressing their multi-racial and international nature, is religiously respected, and the present volume clearly manages to go beyond the type of historiography that, even when it attempts to analyse non-Western campaigns, ultimately falls into the trap of becoming caught up in the adventures and deeds of some commander trapped on a far-off, less important front. This is why the book deliberately leaves out the deeds of General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck during the 1914–1918 East African campaign, and similarly ignores the adventures of T.E. Lawrence and the vicissitudes of the Arab Bureau.

The aim of providing a narrative of the two world wars that can overcome the eurocentric angle which has dominated Western historiography so far is definitely commendable, but it cannot claim to be a particularly innovative approach. In fact, this theme started to attract attention among Africanists as far back as the late 1970s, and writing a global history of the world wars is a challenge that has begun to be addressed even by academics with no particular experience in Afro-Asian studies – with, of course, mixed results. For example, in 2010–2011 alone, no fewer than four volumes appeared dedicated to investigating the social and cultural effects of the world wars in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia; other publications have since followed. The volume’s bibliography lists 624 titles, and while this is, in itself, a very persuasive figure, there have been some oversights, and the bibliography could have been even better. Not only is the historiography of the two world wars extremely rich, in qualitative terms it is very interesting, and, frankly, some of the ideas posited in this volume have been acknowledged for some time already.

The nineteen papers included in this volume are organized into three distinct sections. The first deals with the wartime experiences of combatant and non-combatant individuals. Preference is accorded to soldiers and follower-rank groups. The passage from a

world war history written mainly “from above”, i.e. by officers, to a history that attempts to capture the view “from below” is another aspect that must be praised, though, again, this is hardly a new approach, since it has been one of the major contributions to wartime historiography since the 1980s.

The second group of papers focuses on representations of and responses to both world wars. The contributions included in this section attempt to shed light on the debates and propaganda activities that were triggered in Asia and Africa by the two world wars. The aim is to illustrate how the population saw the war and how the wars were presented to them through official channels and in imperial propaganda.

Both groups of papers must inevitably deal with the delicate issue of the most appropriate sources to be used in such a challenging task. One of the major strengths of this volume is the way in which the source issue is tackled. The ambition of presenting the “plebeian experiences of the war” (p. 132) has to face the apparently insurmountable difficulty of finding and interpreting the unheard voice of the “subalterns” of both world wars. The contributors’ ability in using and sometimes uncovering new types of sources must be praised. Besides the use of oral testimonies and autobiographical literature, letters, diaries, and archive documents, the authors attempt also to tap into more unconventional sources, such as songs, poetry, rumours, the military press, and phonograph and radio recordings. As Santanu Das notes, at the end of the day the scarcity of sources can be overcome only by “an interdisciplinary approach making innovative use of available material” (p. 344). The fact that non-Western scholars represent more than one-third of the contributors has greatly increased the capacity of the volume to express the way in which the world wars were experienced and perceived in Africa and Asia. Equally interesting is the questioning of the established periodizations, as demonstrated by the impact of World War I on Ottoman society, which endured much longer than the war itself and can be extended up until at least 1922 (Meouchy and DeGeorges).

The final section discusses the social and political implications of the two world wars on African and Asian people. This is by far the most sensitive part of the volume because it tackles a subject that has given rise to considerable debate and stimulated conflicting viewpoints. All the authors involved in this project appear convinced that the war experience had a significant social and political impact on non-European soldiers, and all the occasions on which former soldiers participated in political activities and disturbances have been carefully identified and presented as clear examples of the process of social change triggered by that experience. The main target of such an assertive position is the idea adduced by other equally reputable scholars that “Africans and South Asian soldiers and world war participants were fundamentally apolitical” (p. 21). In this respect there is no conciliatory attitude and the introduction is adamant in stating that “The wars under review should also be perceived as world wars because they influenced and accelerated *social and political movements worldwide* and led to fundamental *changes in popular mentalities*” (p. 21).

This is a bold statement that will probably drive some to point out that we are looking at situations that are so different from one another, both in spatial and temporal terms, as to make such bold generalizations rather problematic. Certainly, many world-war veterans joined the ranks of the nationalists, but there were also cases in which the same group gave more or less open support to the demands of the colonial powers. In Eritrea, for example, the gunshot that led to the fight for liberation was fired by an *askari*, but *askari* also figured significantly in the Partito Eritrea Pro Italia (Party of Shara Italy), a party with a rather unrealistic manifesto for independence under the ambiguous protection of Italy. If it had taken this type of situation into account, the book might have been more convincing and perhaps more moderate in some of its conclusions.

This publication suggests that to write a social history of war, there is no need for a good grounding in the more technical and military aspects of each conflict, which is certainly true. However, it does no harm to have such expertise, and it might even prevent

some of those factual errors that horrify “classical” military historians, such as claiming that, in 1940, the Egyptian army used anti-aircraft missiles against German planes (p. 225). These marginal notes do not detract from the fact that this volume is profoundly stimulating and, in some places, thought-provoking, as well as suggesting new areas for research and methodological approaches that will certainly be taken on board and developed in other research. It will undoubtedly contribute to the emergence of a new global social history of the world wars.

Massimo Zaccaria

DE VRIES, DAVID. *Diamonds and War. State, Capital, and Labor in British-Ruled Palestine*. Berghahn Books, New York [etc.] 2010. xv, 351 pp. Ill. £56.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859012000685

The diamond industry has traditionally been located in a handful of places worldwide, each specializing in a specific type of stone or cut. These cutting and polishing centres may shift quite easily, a process De Vries elegantly describes as the “winding path that the spread of diamond-polishing centres in the modern era has taken”. These shifts are usually determined by one or more changes in the global diamond commodity chain: the supply of rough diamonds, the availability of well-trained cutters and polishers willing to work for competitive wages, as well as the development of consumer markets – including changes in consumer tastes. These shifts are facilitated by the transnationality of the traders and their (ethnic) networks, as well as by the availability of a financial infrastructure for loans and insurances. The relocation of the industry from Antwerp, the major diamond finishing and trading hub before the outbreak of World War II, to Palestine, however, was a very different kind of relocation. This shift was directly influenced by Nazi rule and war, and Palestine was deliberately picked by the British government in close cooperation with the De Beers diamond mining and trading monopolist as a temporary alternative to Antwerp. As such, the shift was not a translocation but a transplantation, as De Vries aptly calls it.

Diamonds and War describes this transplantation in great detail, well-written and meticulously researched and following several story lines. On the one hand, it is the narrative of an urban, capitalist luxury industry being established in a society dominated by Labour Zionism and its ideals of agricultural development based on cooperative production methods. Within this context, De Vries describes the principal actors of the transplantation: both those establishing the industry and the workers and their labour protest. The other story line associates these local developments with three global phenomena: World War II, colonialism, and the power of De Beers.

As early as the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of Antwerp-based Zionists and *diamantaires* tried to set up a diamond industry in Palestine, but as rough stones could not be imported easily, and not many diamond merchants and cutters were ready to exchange their comfortable position in the Low Countries for an insecure life in the developing Mandate territory, this industry remained small. When the Nazis rose to power in Germany things began to change. First, the Nazi regime encouraged the development of a diamond industry in Germany, which started to compete with the one in Antwerp. Then, in the late 1930s Jewish merchants and finishers in the Low Countries started to feel threatened by the anti-semitic policy of the Nazis. Finally, when the Nazis occupied the Low Countries they seized control of the diamond industries, threatening the lucrative diamonds mines in Belgian Congo as well.