

Decolonising war

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Abstract

What would it mean to decolonise the concept of war? ‘Decolonising’ means critiquing the ways in which Eurocentric ideas and historiographies have informed the basic categories of social and political thought. Dominant understandings of the concept of war derive from histories and sociologies of nation-state formation in the West. Accordingly, I critique this Eurocentric concept of war from the perspective of Small War in the colonies, that is, from the perspective of different histories and geographies of war and society than were assumed to exist in the West. I do so in order to outline a postcolonial concept of war and to identify some of the principles of inquiry that would inform a postcolonial war studies. These include conceiving force as an ordinary dimension of politics; situating force and war in transnational context, amid international hierarchies; and attending to the co-constitutive character of war and society relations in world politics.

Keywords

War; Small War; Peace; Postcolonial; Empire

‘Imperialism *was* war’.

Isabel V. Hull¹

Warfare is a cosmopolitan experience, a shared bane of humanity. Yet somehow, in social and political inquiry, war as a concept is imagined primarily in provincial terms, those of the West and its major wars. Real war is interstate war between nation-states, fought between regular armed forces.² All other conflicts are relegated to derivative categories. They are Small Wars, insurgencies, emergencies, interventions, uprisings, police actions, or something other than war proper.³ What would it

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¹ Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 332.

² See, for example, {<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war>} accessed 30 May 2015; J. F. C. Fuller, *The Decisive Battles of the Western World*, 3 Volumes (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957); Lawrence Freedman (ed.), *War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002); Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

³ ‘Practically [Small War] may be said to include all campaigns other than those where both the opposing sides consist of regular troops.’ Colonel C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (3rd edn, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996 [orig. pub. 1906]). See also Keith E. Bonn and Anthony E. Baker, *Guide to Military Operations Other than War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000); Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); David Keen, *Complex Emergencies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); Michael Klare and Peter Kornbluh (eds), *Low Intensity Warfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

mean to liberate the concept of war from such Eurocentric thinking? What can Small War teach us about war?

To decolonise, in my usage here, is to consider critically how Eurocentrism has informed the basic categories and vocabularies of social and political inquiry, across a range of disciplines.⁴ Western histories and societies supply the substantive objects of inquiry in most studies and disciplines. Those histories and societies are conceived in specifically Eurocentric ways that sever them from their constitutive connectedness to other parts of the world, to the histories and societies of others.⁵ In respect of the study of war, the sovereign nation-state, national armed forces, and Eurocentric periodisations of wars and warfare lie behind basic definitions and general approaches. Instead, we could proceed from alternate, postcolonial premises.

To do so requires reassessing the definition of war, its core meanings. Simply recovering the histories and experiences of war in the global South is insufficient for this task. After all, the non-European world already features prominently in existing war and conflict studies. The problem is *not* that the global South and its conflicts are ignored. It is that European histories of war provide the (provincial) basis for the putatively universal concepts and definitions with which we study war in *both* the global South and North. The concept of war requires rescuing from Eurocentric limitation. In this article, I mobilise the histories and sociologies of Small War to reconsider our underlying idea of what war is, and to outline a global and postcolonial war studies.

This involves critiquing the main building blocks of Eurocentric war studies, that is, war studies based on categories derived from Western experience. These are the war/peace binary; an international system of sovereign and national states; and the consequent categorisation of war into international and civil war (with residual categories involving ‘nonstate actors’).⁶ Below, I first tackle the war/peace binary and replace it with a battle/repression schema in which the use of force is an ordinary, not extraordinary, dimension of politics. Second, I turn to the premise that the world consists of sovereign nation-states and two essential types of war. As an alternative, I situate war in transnational context, amid international hierarchies, drawing on imperial wars for archetypes.

The third section outlines some implications of these postcolonial maneuvers for war studies. My idea is not to valorise Small War; or that we should stop studying European wars; nor is it to obliterate important distinctions between types and scales of military operations. Instead, Small War offers new resources for thinking about war’s character and nature, its relations to society and politics, and its core theoretic meanings. We impoverish our thinking in relying on Western warfare as the sole source of core definitions and categories. Attention to global context and postcolonial themes enhances our understanding of even European experience. Accordingly, I propose a research

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁵ For Jack Levy and William Thompson, for example, ‘there are two different worlds of warfare’, the Western and the non-Western, one for the developed world and one for the less developed countries. Jack Levy and William Thompson, *The Arc of War: Origins, Escalation, and Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 186. Cf. Gurinder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected histories: Notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 31:3 (1997), pp. 735–62; Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 [orig. pub. 1982]).

⁶ These are the main categories used to collect data for the quantitative study of war in International Relations and Political Science. Available at: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war> accessed 30 May 2015.

agenda centered on the entwinement of the histories and sociologies of Western warfare with those of North-South relations. The postcolonial critique of the concept of war enables a reassessment of the significance and nature of warfare in both the global North and South. Small Wars have enabled world-order projects like capitalist modernity, and they have shaped politics and society in the global North and South since the early modern era. Moreover, once we look for them, European wars contain many underappreciated ‘subaltern’ characteristics, that is, they have much in common with Small War. These include partisans and guerrillas, the use of indigenous allies and foreign ‘mercenary’ troops, and racial categories drawn from empire and orientalism.

Of course, not every interesting question about war has a global or postcolonial answer. Eurocentric war studies is not wrong about everything – far from it. Global interconnections and comparisons must be established, and their significance assessed. When they are, however, they often force reevaluation of the most fundamental questions war poses for politics and society, as I seek to show below.

War/peace

In Eurocentric thought and inquiry, ‘war’ and ‘peace’ are sharply distinguished.⁷ Of course disagreements about how to draw the distinction between war and peace abound. They range from the idea that ‘structural violence’ lurks behind peace to the proper coding for an instance of ‘war’ in statistical databases.⁸ Nonetheless, the distinction between war and peace works as a basic organising binary. This is evident, for instance, in dominant historical periodisations of major wars as interruptions of the peace. Enclosing the First and Second World Wars between 1914–18 and 1939–45 is the most obvious and significant example. The contrast with peace relies on an implicit image of war: large-scale, organised, and reciprocal violence compressed in time and space.⁹ At a minimum, peace is the absence of such violence.

A multifaceted knowledge infrastructure undergirds this image of war and, consequently, makes the war/peace binary seem self-evident to us. Public education and memorialisation of war establishes and reinforces official dates and places for wars, as memorials for the World Wars make clear throughout the Western world. There is wartime and peacetime.¹⁰ International law distinguishes between states of war and peace, and the rights and rules that appertain to each. So too do the

⁷ See, for example, Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [orig. pub. 1651]), pp. 88–9; Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace* (London: Profile Books, 2000); Immanuel Kant, ‘Perpetual peace: a philosophical sketch’, in Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (2nd edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 93–130.

⁸ Raymond Duvall, ‘An appraisal of the methodological and statistical procedures of the correlates of war project’, in Francis W. Hoole and Dina A. Zinnes (eds), *Quantitative International Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976); Johan Galtung, ‘Violence, peace, and peace research’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 6:3 (1969), pp. 167–91.

⁹ For the Oxford English Dictionary, War is ‘[h]ostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state; the employment of armed forces against a foreign power, or against an opposing party in the state.’ Levy and Thompson ‘define war as *sustained, coordinated violence between political organizations*’. *The Arc of War*, p. 3. For Quincy Wright, war is ‘a conflict among political units carried on by armed forces of considerable magnitude, for a considerable period of time’. Quincy Wright, ‘War: the study of war’, in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 16 (New York: Macmillan-Free Press, 1968), p. 453.

¹⁰ Cf. Mary Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

constitutions and laws of sovereign states. Social and political inquiry reflects this underlying sensibility that war is something distinct from peace. For the widely influential Correlates of War database, war consists of at least 1,000 battle deaths in a calendar year.¹¹ The distinction makes sense because major war between European states serves as the archetype of war. Otherwise, there is peace, or a ‘militarized interstate dispute’ short of war.¹²

A corollary of the war/peace binary is that war happens only in wartime, and that peace is peaceful. Pacific conceptions of societal development have dominated the Western academy since the Enlightenment.¹³ Broadly speaking, war is conceived as an extraordinary interruption into the ordinary processes of society, economy, culture, and politics. The academy largely relegates war and armed forces to specialist areas of inquiry, such as strategic studies, military history, and sociology.¹⁴

A counter-tradition exists, of course. George Orwell was neither the first nor the last to see the war in the peace, to destabilise the distinction between war and peace.¹⁵ In a widely circulated photo, a US marine stationed in Ramadi, Iraq, had written on a whiteboard: ‘America is not at war. The Marine Corps is at War; America is at the mall.’¹⁶ Civilian shoppers might cite in riposte the mall-like food courts that were available in the largest US bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. The larger point is that war and peace are together interwoven into social, economic, political, and cultural life. Whether there is war or peace may not be a question susceptible to a yes or a no; ‘peacetime’ may be shot through with relations of force and war.¹⁷ Such insights have long made effective standpoints for cultural and political critique.¹⁸ But they imply more, that we cannot define war against peace; that war may be in some sense a general condition of political and social life. A good example of this is the pervasive influence of war on gender relations in general, in peacetime and wartime, on warfronts and homefronts.¹⁹ How, then, to make sense of war as a concept if we do not define it in terms of major European wars?

¹¹ Available at: {<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war>} accessed 30 May 2015.

¹² Available at: {<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/MIDs>} accessed 20 January 2016.

¹³ See Sinisa Malešević’s discussion ‘War and violence in classical social thought’, in his *The Sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 17–49. See also Hans Joas, *War and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), ch. 8; John Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London: Verso, 1996); Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), ch. 5.

¹⁴ In recent years, as well as in some significant past interventions, this scholarly division of labour has been called into question. See, for example, Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 4 Volumes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); T. Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War* (2nd edn, New York: Routledge, 2001); Aaron William Moore, *Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Martin Shaw, *Dialectics of War: An Essay in the Social Theory of Total War and Peace* (London: Pluto, 1988).

¹⁵ ‘War is peace.’ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin, 2000 [orig. pub. 1949]), p. 6.

¹⁶ ‘America: At War or at the Mall?’, available at: {<http://www.murdoconline.net/archives/4584.html>} accessed 1 June 2015. Versions of this quip circulated among US soldiers and marines in Iraq and were picked up by various commentators. See, for example, Brigadier General Mitchell Zais, ‘US Strategy in Iraq’, *Military Review*, LXXXVII:2 (2007), p. 107.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Penguin, 2004).

¹⁸ As for example in the idea of a ‘military-industrial complex’ profiting from war or preparation for it, or in feminist critiques of war films as sustaining an aggressive, militarised masculinity in society at large. See, for example, Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1958).

¹⁹ See, for example, Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Vintage, 2005); R. Claire Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republican Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

Not without reason, many see Carl von Clausewitz as a theorist of such big wars.²⁰ But for Clausewitz, the politics of war cloud and confound any clear distinction between peace and war. In discussing the political nature of war, Clausewitz notes that many people assume that war ‘suspends’ normal intercourse between states and ‘replaces it by a wholly different condition’. Here is the war/peace binary: either normal intercourse appertains or there is a state of war. ‘[O]n the contrary’, Clausewitz writes, ‘war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means.’²¹ Those ‘other means’ are of course violent, but they may take the form of large-scale warfare – a ‘terrible-battle sword’ – or that of more finely-applied force – a ‘light, handy rapier’.²² It may be necessary, Clausewitz says, to wage ‘minimal wars, which consist in *merely threatening the enemy with negotiations held in reserve*’.²³ He considers the play between active and passive phases of wartime operations, and the continual, always on-going calculations of relative advantage coupled with threatening maneuvers and positioning of forces. He concludes that the *duration* of war cannot be limited to periods of active hostilities. Peacetime and wartime are not necessarily distinguishable from one another. War threatens to ‘shrivel into prudence’ in its passive phases, and is sometimes ‘just a foil for the exchange of thrusts, feints and parries’.²⁴ ‘This poses’, Clausewitz goes on to say, ‘an obvious problem for any theory of war that aims at being thoroughly scientific.’²⁵ The political character of war confounds efforts to establish what war is and when it is or is not happening. War is a more general problem for social and political thought than at first seems the case, if we limited the concept only to the ‘active hostilities’ of major wars.

These passages of Clausewitz’s can be developed in a number of directions, and have been in various literatures. One direction takes note of the relational ontology at work, the ‘intercourse’ between war and politics, shaping one another. This insight extends to war and society, war and economy, war and technology, war and culture, and so on, as co-constitutive fields.²⁶ A second direction for inquiry arises from the recognition that the threat of war overhangs the ‘peace’: shapes it, threatens to disrupt it, and orients it towards war. What emerges is not a distinction between peace and war, but one between armed force and its use, between the threat of force and its employment. The political cannot be thought of separate from relations of force; rather, it is framed by the possibility of its use.²⁷ Realism takes this insight most seriously, but does so in a tradition burdened by Eurocentrism, particularly in respect of the sovereign and national state and its near-exclusive focus on the great powers.²⁸ Similarly, for some strategists, nuclear weapons spelled the end of conventional distinctions

²⁰ See, for example, Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kaldor, *New & Old Wars*, ch. 2.

²¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 605.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 606.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 604, emphases in original.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 604, 606.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 604. Clausewitz’s position can be compared to Hobbes’s notion of a state of war: ‘So the nature of War, consisteth not in actual [*sic*] fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary.’ *Leviathan*, pp. 88–9. But see Foucault’s critique in *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 89–93.

²⁶ David Edgerton, *Britain’s War Machine* (London: Penguin Books, 2012); John Gillis (ed.), *The Militarization of the Western World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

²⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), ch. 9.

²⁸ Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, ‘The postcolonial moment in security studies’, *Review of International Studies*, 32:4 (2006).

between peace and war. They explored implications for superpower policy during the Cold War, ranging from civil defence at home to coercive diplomacy and low intensity conflict abroad.²⁹

These lines of thought converge on an initial observation: the war/peace binary is inadequate to the West's own experience of war. Little in modern social life has not been shaped in one way or another by war, the possibility of it, the preparation for it, the consequences of it, its economies and technologies, and, not least, by histories of it. In the last few decades, this recognition has produced significant new interdisciplinary studies of the co-constitution of war and society.³⁰ What emerges collectively from such studies is the dense texture of war and society relations, and the long reach of the shadows of war, particularly in the realm of gender.³¹ War works deep effects into social and cultural contexts, in past and present times.³² Under the spell of the war/peace binary, we often fail to see all around us wars and their consequences.

War and peace in the global South

Hold in mind both the distinction between force and its use, and the density of the co-constitution of war and society, while turning to the histories and sociologies of warfare in the global South. Here we can find new, global resources for thinking about war in general. Consider, in this vein, the manner in which wars demarcate eras in Western history. What would a global South periodisation of wars and eras look like? It would involve placing force and war at the center of the encounter between the West and the non-European world, in much the same way that war and peace serve as periodisers in Eurocentric history (for example, the Long Peace of the nineteenth century, interwar years, Cold War, etc.).

Such a periodisation, in outline terms, would begin in the sixteenth century, with the Iberian conquests of the Americas, and the wars, genocides, and repressions that followed. It would move on to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century expansion of Western European powers, through trading companies and settler colonies, accompanied by more wars of conquest and extermination. A long cycle of Small Wars, failed local revolts, and colonial repression followed over the long nineteenth century. The first half of the twentieth century brought the World Wars, which violently undid the old formal empires, wars that spilled over their typical Eurocentric periodisations and geographies (cf. 'interwar years').³³ Wars of national liberation followed, and with formal independence, a new series of repressions and wars: the era of 'internal security' in its East and West bloc forms, along

²⁹ Bernard Brodie, *War & Politics* (London: Cassell, 1973); Alexander George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1991); Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007 [orig. pub. 1960]).

³⁰ See, for example, Basil Dmytryshyn *Modernisation of Russia under Peter I and Catherine II* (New York: Wiley 1974); David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (London: Penguin Books, 2013); Katherine Epstein, *Torpedo: Inventing the Military-Industrial Complex in the United States and Great Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Roy Rosenzweig, 'Wizards, bureaucrats, warriors and hackers', *American Historical Review*, 103:5 (1998), pp. 1530–52; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³¹ See, for example, Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*.

³² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 [orig. pub. 1975]); Homer, *The Iliad* (London: Penguin, 2003 [orig. pub. c. 700 BC]).

³³ See, for example, Peter Liddle, John Bourne, and Ian Whitehead (eds), *The Great World War 1914–1945*, 2 Volumes (London: HarperCollins, 2000; 2001); S. C. M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia 1911–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

with proxy and guerrilla war. This is the period known as the Cold War in the West. Independence in the formerly colonised world also meant endemic modern state-on-state warfare, as in the Middle East and South Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the era of globalisation brought the New Wars of failed states, with ethnic legitimations and devious innovations in private and criminally organised violence.³⁴ Our own times find the formally colonised world a primary battleground of the War on Terror, which has involved invasions, wars of occupation, and new forms of air, remote, and special forces warfare on a global scale.

I intend this broad periodisation to be suggestive, and it plays out differently and partially in various historical geographies. (Eurocentric periodisations work similarly: not all states were continuously involved in the Napoleonic Wars, even though that phrase names the period 1803–15). Latin America was precocious, with wars of independence in the nineteenth century, Haiti more precocious still. Much of East Asia managed to escape the series of wars by the time of globalisation, at least for now. The Middle East largely missed out on the wars of failed states until its state system was undone by the catastrophic consequences of the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Two general points emerge from this effort at a global South-oriented periodisation of war. First, from 1492, the encounter between what we now refer to as the global North and South has engendered near continual, if geographically dispersed, warfare and violent repression. Instead of war and peace, we have permanent war: as Isabel Hull remarks, ‘The colonial situation itself was identical to war.’³⁵ Force has been an ordinary dimension of politics, writ large. The relevant distinction at work in terms of force and politics, and this is the second point, is that between battle and repression: is the violence in question warfare, with organised, reciprocal fighting, or is it the everyday operations of the security apparatus in surveilling and enforcing order? The ambit is not between war and a beatific state of peace, but between armed resistance and the reign of punitive expeditions, police, spies, and death squads. War shades into coercion when violence is not reciprocated. A short step further and violence sublimates into the coercive threat behind lawful governance.

These histories and sociologies of violence and warfare in the global South prompt a reorientation from a war/peace distinction to a battle/repression schema. As Frantz Fanon reminds us, in their exigency the oppressed peoples of the colonised world dreamed of battles, of one day fighting their very own *Adwa*, *Tsushima Straits*, or *Dien Bien Phu*.³⁶ Repression entails, most fundamentally, the threat of force, the knowledge that surveilled and repressed subjects apprehend if they step out of line they will suffer violent fates. This is true whether the threat is delivered by settler posses and their rifles, colonial police and their batons (the era of formal empire), or death squads and their shotguns (neocolonialism, globalisation). In postcolonial perspective, Clausewitz’s reflections on the problem of the infinite duration of war help reveal this state of permanent war in political life more generally: domestic, international, and otherwise. Once we look for it, as does the counter-tradition mentioned above, this same state of war is visible in European and Western histories.³⁷

³⁴ Mike McGovern, *Making War in Cote d’Ivoire* (London: Hurst, 2011); Kaldor, *New & Old Wars*; William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 1999).

³⁵ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, p. 332.

³⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1967 [orig. pub. 1961]), p. 55. See also Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), ch. 4; Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2011); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), pp. 1–4.

³⁷ See, for example, David Edgerton, *Warfare State Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

One derivation of the war/peace binary is disorder/order, with disorder being associated with war. But war also sustains orders, certainly in the sense of permanent war being sketched here (for example, ‘low intensity conflict’ sustaining US hegemony in Latin America or the notion of a ‘war-system’ in society and economy that benefits from militarisation and war).³⁸ The contrast between battle and repression helps highlight this eventuality, that force and war together make and sustain social orders. Whether or not it is being actively resisted at any given point, force is an essential part of the domain of politics. Contra realism in IR, the order-making properties of force are not restricted to the domestic sphere, on the one hand, and the balance of power among sovereign states, on the other.³⁹ There is also an imperial dimension, the use of force to create and sustain orders transnationally. These require for their maintenance complex mixes of pacific and coercive means, police and military, spies and torturers, propaganda and prisons.⁴⁰ All of this can be orchestrated in foreign societies through international hierarchies. Wars can be conducted by proxy, informally, by deniable means, defeating the armed representatives of alternate political orders and possibilities in other peoples’ countries.⁴¹

This last point, about proxy war, is obscured by the image of major war and the ‘horizontal’ world of sovereign states it presupposes. Small War leads us to think about the imperial and hierarchical organisation of world politics, and the complex ways in which this hierarchy is entwined with the international system of states.⁴² Moreover, if we take seriously the insight of the dense co-constitution of war and society, then imperial war and other kinds of Small War loom large as historical forces in the making world politics, fundamentally shaping societies in the global North and South over the modern era. Small Wars and the forms of violence they entail are very rarely thought about in this kind of way or with this kind of significance in social and political inquiry.⁴³

From sovereign states to empires

Across a range of disciplines and perspectives, the relationship between politics, force, and society is explicitly or implicitly conceived in ‘trinitarian’ or nation state terms: state, army, and society come in a territorially-bounded, sovereign package.⁴⁴ Examples range from and the ancient city state, with its phalanx of citizen soldiers, to the sovereign nation-state ontology of world politics that dominates the discipline of International Relations (IR). At the core of this trinitarian vision is a political leadership, a people, and ‘their’ army – an army raised from the people of the polity to fight for its

³⁸ See, for example, Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Owl Books, 2007); Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*.

³⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

⁴⁰ See, for example, James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerrilla Warfare, Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism, 1940–1990* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).

⁴¹ Timothy Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government 1955–1975* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala 1952–1954* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁴² See Tarak Barkawi, ‘Empire and order in International Relations and security studies’, in Robert Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopaedia, Volume III* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 1360–79.

⁴³ Although Cf. Michael Burleigh, *Small Wars, Far Away Places: The Genesis of the Modern World 1945–65* (London: Macmillan, 2013).

⁴⁴ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), pp. 35–42.

causes and purposes. (Any other arrangement is constructed as exceptional, abnormal, or mercenary).⁴⁵ The sovereign and national state with its national armed forces is the archetype, but the same logic is at work in thinking about the armed power of ethnic groups, national liberation or secessionist movements, or any entity in which politics, ‘the people’, and force are collapsed together, imagined as territorially co-located, as socially isomorphic.

A characteristic indicator of trinitarian thinking about force is its invocation of Max Weber’s definition of the state.⁴⁶ This involves an administrative staff that successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a given territorial area.⁴⁷ For IR, political science, and historical sociology, the monopoly of violence is the essence of the state-force-territory relation, underpinning sovereign power. Coercive bureaucracies secure the state’s rule over population and territory, creating domestic order or ‘peace’. Territorial control over force makes the state a ‘social-territorial totality’ (Fred Halliday), or a ‘bordered power container’ (Anthony Giddens).⁴⁸ In turn, international politics revolve around relations among trinitarian states: a world of ‘units’ in Kenneth Waltz’s language from 1979.⁴⁹ These national and sovereign states produce a basic typology of war, one that organises social scientific inquiry as well as political thought: civil and international war, or intra- and inter-state war.⁵⁰ Evolving residual categories such as colonial wars, wars with nonstate actors, internationalised civil wars, and militarised interstate disputes, attempt to contain phenomena of organised violence within a sovereign state ontology of world politics.⁵¹ War and other uses of force are trimmed to fit the international system of states, with its formally equivalent units, or ‘states under anarchy’.

It is difficult to underestimate the extent to which the idea of war as violent conflict between national peoples, each with ‘their own’ national armed forces, has organised thinking about war. If the nation state dominates history-writing, it practically totalises military history.⁵² Military sociology also is organised around inquiry into the armed forces of sovereign and national states, its founding studies based on the armed forces of the major Western states.⁵³

⁴⁵ See, for example, Sarah Percy, *Mercenaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Cf. Tarak Barkawi, ‘State and armed force in international context’, in Alex Colas and Bryan Mabee (eds), *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires: Private Violence in Historical Context* (London: Hurst, 2010), pp. 33–53.

⁴⁶ ‘By definition a state should enjoy a monopoly of legitimate and organized violence within its territorial boundaries. When that monopoly is seriously challenged, by external aggression or by an internal threat such as a rebellion or secessionist movement ... it can consider itself at war.’ Lawrence Freedman, ‘General introduction’, in Lawrence Freedman (ed.), *War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 3. See also John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics* (6th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 107, 500.

⁴⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 54.

⁴⁸ Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p. 120; Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994), pp. 78–9.

⁴⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 79.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Melvin Small and J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816–1980* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982).

⁵¹ See, for example, Frank Wayman, J. David Singer, and Meredith Sarkees, ‘Inter-State, Intra-State, and Extra-Systemic Wars 1816-1995’, paper presented at the International Studies Association annual meeting, 16–21 April 1996, San Diego, California.

⁵² Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Stephen Morillo, *What is Military History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 30–7.

⁵³ See, for example, Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, ‘Cohesion and disintegration in the *Wehrmacht* in World War II’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 12:2 (1948), pp. 280–315; Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, 2 Volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

The sovereign and national state, and the concept of war as major war, work together as a Eurocentric package. The histories and sociologies of European nation-states at war provide the conceptual apparatus for the study of war, state, and society.⁵⁴ These begin with the role of warfare in state formation, through early modern absolutism and mercenary armies, and on to the French Revolution and the *Levée en masse*. They culminate in the industrialisation and totalisation of warfare in the first half of the twentieth century. This trajectory of the history of warfare frames how we think about war in world politics generally. This is most visible in the connection between interstate war and ‘states under anarchy’ sketched above. The problem of war becomes the central question for IR only in a certain kind of way, as major war between sovereign nation states. That is the kind of war on which liberals, realists, and constructivists stake core positions.⁵⁵ It is also at issue in the Democratic Peace, in debates over offensive and defensive doctrines, the destabilising effects of technology, arms races, etc.⁵⁶ The histories and sociologies of Small Wars are not denied. Rather, they are frequently in vogue as objects of study because there are so many of them. But Small Wars lack discipline defining, ontological significance.

Crucially, the point is not that histories and sociologies of Western warfare are somehow intrinsically wrong or misguided. Nor is it that we must all study wars in the global South, or that these are insufficiently studied. The claim is that Western warfare represents a provincial set of resources from which to think through the concept of war in general, or to develop the terms of analysis for the study of war *anywhere*, in or beyond the West. As in the discussion of the war/peace binary, a turn to the histories and sociologies of warfare in the global South helps us to rethink the package of assumptions that frame the study of war and world politics. From the perspective of Small War, how might we critique the entwined logics of major war; a system of sovereign and national states; and the categories of civil and interstate war?

Weber warned us that his definition of the state applied only to the European states of his day.⁵⁷ State, force, society, and territory relations vary historically; they do not necessarily take trinitarian form, even in a world formally organised around the sovereign state. Small Wars and, more broadly, imperial military relations make this clear. For example, European imperial states fielded large colonial armies recruited from distant, colonised societies.⁵⁸ Britain could get away with such a small, painfully unprofessional army for much of the nineteenth century because the British Empire could mobilise the Commonwealth and Indian armies and many other military and police forces.⁵⁹ In addition to securing and expanding its empire, France sought with its North and West African troops to redress its demographic imbalance with Germany in its great European contests.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992); Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); William McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁵⁵ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); David Mitran, *A Working Peace System* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966 [orig. pub. 1943]); Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), ch. 9.

⁵⁸ See, for example, V. G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies 1815–1960* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998); David Killingray and David Omissi, *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c.1700–1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army Its Officers and Men* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974); F. W. Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

⁶⁰ Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa* (London: Brassey's, 1988); Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991).

In addition to fighting in great power war, these foreign forces expanded and secured empire in the non-European world, serving as extensions of the military power of metropolitan states. Imperial and patron-client relations determined questions of politics and force, of who had repressive power, of who was the victor and who the defeated. Local armed forces were raised and controlled or influenced by foreign powers, in past and present times. The United States and the Soviet Union made sure to wage the hot parts of the Cold War with Korean, Vietnamese and other Asian soldiers, as well as Latin American and African ones.⁶¹ Today, and for over a decade now, US military trainers cycle through cohort after cohort of Iraqi and Afghan infantry, while its allies as well as Russia and others operate extensive programmes of military training and assistance around the world.

This imperial constitution and use of force is conceptually distinct from civil war. In a civil war, international involvement seeks to assist or ally with one of the local parties. The primary combatants are 'domestic'. They are assumed, in an essential sense, to pre-exist 'foreign' involvement. This matter should be an object of inquiry, not theoretic presumption. The sovereign nation state is not necessarily an adequate guide to the past and present organisation of force in world politics. The civil/interstate war binary risks obfuscating the very nature of the entities that wage war in imperial context, with specific regard to precisely the international elements that should be of interest to IR. Instead of assuming international politics consists primarily of trinitarian entities that threaten and wage war on one another, variation in state-force-society relations should become a principle object of inquiry for the study of war and world politics.

It might be argued that the reason major European warfare occupies central attention is that it is the most significant, in terms of the scale of operations, the numbers of dead, or the political consequences. But most of the world's people historically have lived in what we now call the global South. For the greater part of modern history, they have been on the receiving end of empire's Small Wars, repressions, and client security forces. The political military dynamics of central interest to them were of a transnational, imperial nature. Of course, there are also imperial rulers, as well as subjects, to be found in the global South. Likewise, Western polities have complicated histories, mongrel histories of nation and empire. Decolonising war highlights 'subaltern' dimensions of Western experience. It makes them available for inquiry and for assessment of their significance.

For example, Napoleon set about creating subordinate republics across Europe whose armies were dragooned into his imperial forces.⁶² Hitler's *Waffen SS* had more foreigners in it than Germans by 1945, part of his failed imperial project in Europe.⁶³ Most of the Warsaw Pact states are now in the EU, their militaries reorganised on the NATO model instead of that of the USSR.⁶⁴ A foreign-born

⁶¹ See, for example, Robert Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁶² Michael Broers, *Europe Under Napoleon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015 [orig. pub. 1996]); Alan Forrest, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002).

⁶³ Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire* (London: Penguin, 2009); George Stein, *The Waffen SS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 137.

⁶⁴ Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, 'Hierarchy under anarchy: Informal empire and the East German state', in Thomas Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

security and military apparatus is not the model of ‘war and state formation’ that dominates historical sociology.⁶⁵ Yet it is arguably the more common experience, when the totality of empires and imperial relations in world history are taken into account.⁶⁶

These variations in state-force-territory relations have a classical heritage. Realism invokes Thucydides in Eurocentric fashion, in order to understand and draw lessons for great power conflict. Athens and Sparta become stand-ins for Cold War bipolarity. But efforts to build and maintain imperial orders – Small Wars – played major roles in the wars Thucydides participated in and chronicled.⁶⁷ The Melian Dialogue occurred in just such a context.⁶⁸ Imperial power involved the purposive reshaping of state-force-society relations abroad in the form of ‘world order projects’. In Thucydides’ case, these involved competing projects of democracy and oligarchy, partisans of which vied for power in nearly every city in Greece, with assistance from Athens or Sparta or their allies. Furthering such projects involved efforts at reconstructing state-force-society relations abroad, in other peoples’ cities and polities. The full panoply of techniques of imperial control and inter-imperial warfare were on display in the struggle between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians: inciting rebellion and counter-rebellion; hosting exiled parties from cities and reinserting them at opportune moments; building up the military power of allies; sending contingents of ships or hoplites to keep clients in line; and so on.⁶⁹ Rather than international or civil wars, at work here is the hierarchical articulation of the international and the local. Imperial power reshapes local forces of order, often through violence, and empowers or constitutes clients, across many territories in connected ways. Such imperial and world ordering projects conjoin the histories and sociologies of the global North and South.

I have sketched out, however broadly, a research agenda for war and world politics centered on variation in state-force-society relations and competing projects of ordering them. Possibilities open up for refiguring understanding of historical periods like the Cold War or the Long Peace of the nineteenth century. Not only would dates shift, but so too would geographies and the social and political relations that traversed them. Constitutive connections among the histories and sociologies of the global North and South come into view, histories connected by violence.⁷⁰

More generally, the decolonising move opens up the possibility of refiguring understanding of the relationship between force, politics, and other social and historical processes. In recent decades, we have come to see capitalist modernity as a joint project of the global North and South from the beginning, of the West together with its others. The first factories were in Caribbean sugar plantations. Slavery and empire lie at the origins of capitalism, which continued to develop in uneven

⁶⁵ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; cf. Christopher Cramer, *Civil War is not a Stupid Thing* (London: Hurst, 2006).

⁶⁶ Frederick Cooper, ‘States, empires, and political imagination’, in his *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 153–203.

⁶⁷ Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Mynott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶⁸ Barkawi and Laffey, ‘The postcolonial moment in security studies’, pp. 345–6.

⁶⁹ For specific examples, see Donald Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), ch. 6.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Eqbal Ahmad, ‘The Cold War from the standpoint of its victims’, in his *Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and combined ways around the world in succeeding centuries.⁷¹ Since its inception, capitalist modernity has required a great deal of internationally-organised ‘security’, to use one of IR’s favoured euphemisms. The historical sociology of capitalism needs to be read through imperial military histories; economy and force must be thought together in postcolonial terms. Arraying brown and black men in warlike order to kill and violently repress other brown and black people has been central to the making of the modern world. We do not ordinarily think about the relations between force and capitalism in this manner, nor appreciate the world-historical significance of something like a colonial army or a military ‘advice and support’ programme in the global South. They provided the order that made possible capital accumulation and globalisation, that is, they made possible modernity, and continue to do so.

War and society in world politics

What are the implications of the critique of the Eurocentric concept of war? One is that histories, sociologies, and geographies of major and imperial warfare qualify and implicate one another. Small Wars have had major consequences, while major wars have imperial dimensions and effects. A second implication is that the concept of war acquires inherently ‘imperial’ traits. Absent Eurocentric periodisations, war becomes something that carries on into the ‘peace’, long after the last big battle. Questions like who fights war, why they fight, and for whom, no longer have stable, Eurocentric answers provided by the model of the sovereign nation-state.

Empires were in fact the principal combatants in the World Wars of the twentieth century, as they were in those World Wars curiously uncounted as such, like the Seven Years War and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In all of these wars, colonial troops and other subaltern combatants played major roles; military operations were interconnected across continents; and battles determined the fates of faraway peoples. In the First and Second World Wars, colonial troops numbered in the millions. Versailles laid the seeds of revolt around the colonised world and reshaped the practice and character of empire.⁷² Inter-imperial struggles and nationalist uprisings in Asia and elsewhere straddle the period of the World Wars, and became central to both conflicts. The Second World War ushered in a range of anti-colonial conflicts, and gave rise to new forms of informal empire and the bloc system of the superpowers in and beyond Europe. Correctives of this sort to Eurocentric histories of war are well under way, even if they have yet to alter dominant impressions.⁷³

Of course not every aspect of the World Wars was global or imperial. But even the study of tank operations on the Russian steppe must contend with the imperial character of the Red Army, the multinational legions of Hitler’s army, and the raging partisan and peoples’ wars being fought

⁷¹ Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2015); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994 [orig. pub. 1944]); Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁷² Cooper, ‘States, empires, and political imagination’; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷³ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2005); Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain’s Asian Empire* (London: Penguin, 2008); Paine, *The Wars for Asia*.

behind the lines, amid violent repression and ethnic cleansing.⁷⁴ Once we start looking in earnest, empire, its wars, and forms of warfare, are a constitutive presence in the modern world, in and beyond Western warfare. Fundamental objects of inquiry in the study of war begin to shift.

At the core of military sociology, and in Eurocentric thinking about armed forces, lies the ideal of the citizen soldier who fights for his own people. The nation state frames inquiry into armed forces, as for example in studies of conscription, military service and the extension of the franchise, and of the conditions under which black, female, gay and lesbian citizens serve.⁷⁵ But the military power of major Western states like France, the UK, Holland, and the US has had both national and international dimensions, whether in colonial armies of formal empire or the advised and supported forces of clients. Debates about citizenship and the armed forces in Eurocentric military sociology rarely indicate awareness of the soldiers who were not national citizens, or of the kind of foreign and imperial armed forces discussed in this article.⁷⁶ To conceive the military service of African Americans, for example, only through the discourse of the progress of civil rights, as in most military sociology,⁷⁷ is to sever them from the histories of other black troops in metropolitan service and from the global histories of empire that brought them to the Americas in the first place.⁷⁸ It is to take a black Atlantic phenomenon, which would not have existed without the slave trade that fuelled capitalist modernity, and render it as a US sovereign and national subject.⁷⁹ Civil-military relations needs to be reinvented as an inherently transnational field if it is to be adequate to its object of analysis, armed forces and society in modern world politics.

That the constitution of armed force is not just a national or civil matter, but has transnational and imperial dimensions, challenges assumed answers to core questions in the study of war, such as who fights for whom and why. In strategic studies and much of IR, the international appears as a relatively 'thin', or spare, social space, especially when contrasted with domestic orders. But the war and society tradition suggests that combatants are in a dense field of co-constitution. The international becomes a 'thick' social space, traversed by multiple relations. Armed forces of diverse type are raised and used in this space, subject to the command of diverse authorities, from joint-stock companies to the officials of a distant king-emperor.

The Small Wars in which these foreign soldiers often fought had consequences beyond conquest and security in the colonies. With the extension of the franchise from the mid-nineteenth century, these

⁷⁴ See, for example, Rolf-Dieter Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010).

⁷⁵ See, for example, Morris Janowitz, 'Military institutions and citizenship in Western societies', *Armed Forces and Society*, 2:2 (1976), pp. 185–204; Ronald Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). Cf. Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷⁶ Although cf. Vron Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁷⁷ See, for example, Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes & Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). Cf. David Kilggray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010).

⁷⁸ See, for example, George Lipsitz, "'Frantic to join ... the Japanese Army": Black soldiers and civilians confront the Asia Pacific War', in T. Fujitani et al. (eds), *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 347–77.

⁷⁹ Cf. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

wars developed a tendency to play outsize roles in metropolitan politics, especially when colonial adventures went awry. The political fortunes of Benjamin Disraeli, William Gladstone, Jules Ferry, Francesco Crispi, and William McKinley, among others, revolved in some measure around Small Wars. As the twentieth century advanced, the severity and consequences of setback and defeat began to mount. Anti-colonial, nationalist wars in the Third World led to regime change in France and Portugal, while the Vietnam War was the most significant moment in American politics and society between 1945 and 9/11 (which initiated a new cycle of imperialised wars and their consequences at home and abroad). War against non-European others generated political, social, and cultural reaction and change in Western societies. The term Small War turns out to be an ironic, disdainful attempt to name and contain energies that would come to overwhelm Western governments and transform politics less than a century after its coinage.

One such case was the violent entwining of Vietnamese and American histories. For the US, the war in Vietnam shaped everything from novels and movies, and the structures of feelings they imply, to the nomination of presidential candidates for decades after the fall of Saigon.⁸⁰ Susan Jeffords shows how the rewriting of the history of the war in US popular culture through fiction and film, helped recoup the counter-cultural challenge of the 1960s, and prepared the cultural terrain for the Reagan years.⁸¹ Through a long chain of action and reaction, amid the co-constitutive relations generated by war, insurgent Vietnamese peasants helped elect Ronald Reagan. The revolutionary government put in power by Nicaraguan peasants nearly unseated him; Reagan's efforts to defeat it embroiling his country in a constitutional crisis.⁸² In these ways, Small War remade the most powerful contemporary Western state.⁸³

These sketches are intended to be suggestive of the possibilities for a postcolonial war studies. They identify some of the ways in which imperial political-military dynamics lie at the center of modern world politics. They point also to the redefinition and expansion of war as a concept in social and political inquiry, of war beyond wartime, a constitutive presence in society, politics, gender relations, and other domains of life. Throughout this article, I have relied on past and present scholarship pushing in these directions. I showed how the Eurocentric concept of war helps order our image of world politics – as a system of nation-states – in ways which occlude the imperial and its use of force. But this system also orders our thinking about war. What if the study of war lets go of the Eurocentric paradigms that have governed it? What will we learn about war and wars? These are the questions I have tried to open up.

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⁸⁰ Milton J. Bates, *The Wars We Took to Vietnam: Cultural Conflict and Storytelling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁸¹ Jeffords, *Remasculinization of America*.

⁸² Stephen Engelberg, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: Times Books, 1988).

⁸³ Cf. Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating & Empire Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

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