Miguel Alonso, Alan Kramer, Javier Rodrigo, ed., *Fascist Warfare, 1922–1945: Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). – vii, 336 pages. – ISBN 9783030276478.

This fascinating book is an important contribution to the debates on the historical relationship between war and fascism. Contemporaries of the interwar period believed in an intimate link between the two. The First World War experience was seen as the origin of fascist movements, with fascist parties often presenting themselves as political forces comprised of war veterans. Paramilitarism was an essential factor in their rise. Moreover, fascism was also directly or indirectly responsible for the outbreak of wars: The Second Sino-Japanese War, the Ethiopian War, the Spanish Civil War, and of course, the Second World War. The continuum of violence that characterized the interwar period has prompted historians to call this period the ‘European Civil War’, yet today we know that this historical process was not exclusively European. In fact, the circle of postwar violence emerging from the end of the Great War can be considered to have reached an end with Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and with Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, which some historians have seen as the start of the Second World War. The wars of this period, and particularly the Second World War, were characterized by a radical form of warfare which massively targeted civilians as fascist and fascist-inspired powers aimed to exterminate their enemies. In short, as the subtitle of this edited volume puts it, aggression, occupation and annihilation were inherent to the wars conducted by fascist regimes.

This volume is the result of a collective effort to determine the extent to which there existed a specifically fascist form of warfare. Edited by Miguel Alonso, a researcher at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Alan Kramer, Professor of History at Trinity College Dublin, and Javier Rodrigo, Associate Professor at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, the book spans diverse aspects of the fascist conduct of war in widely different scenarios, ranging from Spain in 1936 to the Caucasus in 1943, and from Italian-ruled Albania to the Japanese-invaded Malay Peninsula. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the volume is global in scope. Mass violence against civilians as well as military strategy, tactics, and technology are the key foci of the analysis. War crimes and the so-called *Blitzkrieg* or *guerra celere* figure prominently in the eleven contributions. Other dimensions of fascist warfare that the volume endeavoured to cover, such as the ideological roots of the phenomenon, are not sufficiently discussed, but the discussion of the reality of war on the ground is illuminating by itself.

The theoretical and conceptual basis of this study deserves close attention. The volume builds on the concept of 'fascist warfare' as put forward by Alan Kramer in his celebrated book *Dynamic of Destruction* and further developed by Javier Rodrigo.¹ This notion emphasizes that war waged by fascist powers was marked by genocidal drives, speed, brutality, and the glorification of destruction, particularly by air power; the striking similarities in how different powers conducted war warrants a systematic comparison on the premise of the existence of a single type of fascist war. Yet the working definition of 'fascist warfare' in the volume remains cautiously descriptive: it was 'war waged by states or armed forces that were fascist by self-definition or which oriented themselves by the example of fascist states and armed forces' (p. 2). The objective of the editors, however, was to prove that there was a specific type of warfare that can be defined as fascist. This approach recalls historians' attempts to define fascism as a distinct historical phenomenon and the debates around the ideal type of 'generic fascism'. In a similar way, the volume attempts to define 'fascist warfare' as a coherent, distinguishable system of organized violence. The unspoken implication of this approach is that if we are to define the specific conduct of war as 'fascist' based on a set of characteristics, we might define regimes waging such wars as 'fascist' also.

As revealed when historians wielded concepts of 'generic fascism', empirical reality rarely fits seamlessly within pre-existing theoretical models. We encounter the same problem in this book. An ideal-type of 'fascism' and 'fascist warfare' may exclude as much as it includes. Rodrigo's chapter on the Italian intervention in Spain concludes that 'clearly, there is no single model of fascist war' (p. 115). Paradoxically, war waged by fascist and fascist-inspired regimes not always fitted within the ideal model of 'fascist warfare'. Nicholas Virtue's chapter highlights that the use of military technology should be considered a component of an 'ideal-type fascist warfare', but this author cautions that there was a gap between the ideal visions of fascists and what was achieved in practice (p. 146). Franziska Zaugg admits it to be an 'open question' whether the Italian campaign in Albania and Greece was 'a fascist war' (p. 274). Amadeo Osti is more successful in his systematic comparison of the Italian, German and Japanese counterinsurgency wars. Their common patterns of behaviour and their respective political contexts would distinguished them from counterinsurgency conducted by liberal or democratic regimes (pp. 135–138). But this type of warfare was also modulated depending on the strategic interests

1 Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Javier Rodrigo, "A fascist warfare?" Italian Fascism and War Experience in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), *War in History* 26 (2017): 86–104.

of the army on the field, as the work of Jeff Rutherford reminds us. We should therefore conclude that there is no ideal type of 'fascist warfare' beyond the descriptive understanding that it was warfare conducted by fascist and fascist-inspired powers and regimes.

In the same volume, however, some chapters transcend the obsession to define 'fascist warfare' on the basis of an unlikely one-size-fits-all model. Historically, it does not matter whether certain tactics or practices fit or not in an ideal type; historians should consider all the evidence and explain it as a whole. This research approach proves to be more workable and productive. Observing fascist warfare as an epochal transnational phenomenon illuminates the mechanisms by which the glorification of air power, mass violence against civilians, counterinsurgency methods, and the implementation of *Blitzkrieg* tactics manifested themselves in different contexts. The chapters by Daniel Hedinger on the Japanese appropriation of the *Blitzkrieg* model and the work by Takuma Melber on the transfer of violence and strategic ideas from one scenario (China) to another (Malaya and Singapore) demonstrate the best way of understanding why certain elements of 'fascist warfare' became a common feature across time and space. Sven Reichard's chapter on Nazi perceptions of warfare in Abyssinia, Spain and East Asia, is a good example of how to apply a transnational methodology, although considering the thinness of its empirical basis, its conclusions are tentative. But it is clear from the volume that transnational actors, perceptions, recontextualization, and mutual inspiration were crucial mechanisms in the development of fascist warfare as a transnational historical phenomenon.

Whereas the theoretical exercise of giving concrete content to the concept of 'fascist warfare' only yields partial results, the volume succeeds in demonstrating how widely radical methods of warfare were adopted by fascist and fascist-inspired regimes around the world in the 1930s and 1940s. The volume also convincingly debunks any remaining claims of exceptionality regarding the German conduct of war in the Second World War. The book is path-breaking in showing how a transnational understanding of warfare is needed to explain the destructive paths of development of military strategy and tactics at the time. Ideology is highlighted as the origin of such radical expressions of warfare, yet further transnational analysis should be undertaken to follow this lead. Conspicuously missing from the volume, however, were issues related to the history of international law and the laws of war. How fascists viewed the Geneva conventions and other international standards for the conduct of war still stands as a neglected question in the field. Engagement with the relationship between war and genocide, a current matter of discussion among genocide scholars which only Lovro Kralj's chapter on the 'wild' Ustasha touches

upon, would add deepness to our understanding of fascist warfare. But these are only some possible venues for research that emerge from the text. The book broadens substantially our knowledge on the historical relationship between fascism and war, and the editors and contributors should be praised for this achievement.

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