



Mahon Murphy. *Colonial Captivity during the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914-1919.* Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Maps. 256 pp. \$105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-108-41807-2.

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Based on his doctoral dissertation completed under the supervision of Heather Jones and David Stevenson, Mahon Murphy's *Colonial Captivity during the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914-1919* tells "the story of the extension of what was primarily a European war into extra-European theatres and its real and imagined impact on the imperial world order," a story that is "narrated through the experiences of German civilian internees and prisoners of war taken from Germany's overseas possessions by British and Dominion authorities during the First World War" (p. 1). Using archival materials from the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Switzerland but chiefly drawing on the Foreign Office files in the British National Archives in London and the files of the Imperial Colonial Office (*Reichskolonialamt*) in the German Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*) in Berlin, Murphy provides a quite ambitious analysis. He uses the extra-European British camp system to simultaneously analyze intra-imperial interactions and tensions between Britain and the Dominions, particularly Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa; examine colonial Germans' experiences of internment and the effects this captivity had on their sense of national identity both during and after the war; describe the role the extra-European camps played in

the global dynamics of violence against prisoners from 1914 to 1918; and, finally, highlight the unique aspects of internment in the colonial sphere, especially the breakdown of prewar white solidarity in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Unfortunately, the book falls short of its ambitions. While Murphy does address all these subjects at various points and is able to show that they were interrelated, he does not explore any of them in their full richness and complexity nor fully unpack the particulars of *how* each thread tied together with all the others in the numerous settings he discusses.

The monograph consists of three parts. Part 1, "Empire, Internment, and the First World War," contains two chapters that provide context and background for Murphy's subsequent analysis. The first chapter is an overview of the relevant historiographies within which Murphy situates his own work: the literature on violence and First World War internment, the historiography of the non-European theaters of the Great War, and globally oriented histories of empire and nationalism—all three of which have flourished in the past fifteen years or so. Murphy is primarily concerned with the first, which he then extends beyond the bounds of Europe using the insights and tools of the latter two. The second chapter is a colony-by-colony breakdown of Germany's overseas empire and the

camps their various inhabitants ended up in over the course of the war, sketching the scale and complexity of the global camp system.

Part 2, “The Experience of Internment,” is the book’s analytic core, and consists of chapters on violence against prisoners in the colonial camps, the shifting identity dynamics and structures among both captors and captives, and the use of extra-European internees in wartime propaganda, respectively. These chapters foreground the way European dynamics of wartime captivity, most notably the recreation of domestic class structures within the camps (explored by Matthew Stibbe in *British Civilian Internees in Germany: The Ruhleben Camp, 1914-18* [2008]), and the dynamics of reprisal and counter-reprisal (analyzed by his dissertation advisor, Jones, in *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France and Germany 1914-1920* [2011]) found their counterparts in the non-European theaters. Since the only German territories occupied by Britain during the war were the prewar German colonies, the British Foreign Office was keen to assert its control over the camps vis-à-vis the Dominions and prevent overly harsh treatment of German captives, which some Dominion governments, notably New Zealand, pushed for, since such measures could lead to German reprisals against British internees in Europe.

While it is the strongest and most interesting part of the monograph, this section also highlights the unfortunate side effects of attempting such an ambitious undertaking in so short a book. For instance, Murphy devotes a short section in chapter 4 to the “emasculatation” of interned German women, discussing how the more “masculine” roles and duties colonial women took on—including carrying weapons and engaging in manual labor—were stripped away once they were interned and the effects this had (p. 110). This is a fascinating, rich, and complex topic, and one that sits at the intersection of many of the subjects Murphy is explicitly interested in. But instead of an in-depth analysis

to parse these threads, each is given only a brief mention before Murphy moves on—a missed analytic opportunity of a type repeated throughout the book, wherein a number of rich subjects are essentially registered without being explored.

The final section, “Global Connections,” consists of two chapters, and, as its title implies, once again foregrounds the global scale of the First World War internment system. The first chapter sets the British extra-European camp system in a comparative context by situating it alongside short analyses of camps run by the French, Belgians, Portuguese, and Japanese, while the second discusses the repatriation of German colonial captives during and after the war. It thus further drives home Murphy’s primary through line that “in terms of internment the war in the colonies was not a sideshow but an integral part of the whole and reflected shifts in imperial power” (p. 216).

Scholars with even a passing familiarity with any of the historiographies mentioned above will find few if any surprises here, although Murphy’s insistence on the war’s global scale and connections is certainly a welcome and necessary one. Ultimately, *Colonial Captivity* is a solid, but somewhat disappointing, addition to the literature: solid for its capably researched, if modest, contribution to and expansion of Great War historiography, as well as its genuine commitment to comparative historical analysis; disappointing for its failure to do justice to the full complexity of the many immensely rich subjects with which it deals.

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