Review forum

Soldiers of empire: Indian and British armies in World War II

Soldiers of empire: Indian and British armies in World War II. By Tarak Barkawi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017. 338pp. £19.99. ISBN 978 1 31662 065 6. Available as e-book.

Introduction

Soldiers of empire is a wonderful book: beautifully written, expertly crafted and mixing high theory with historical detail in a way that is as rare as it is illuminating. All contributors to this forum agree that it is a work of immense scholarship, one that occupies an innovative space at the interstices of military history, historical sociology and post-colonial theory. Curiously for a book that engages relatively little International Relations (IR) scholarship, it also represents the best that IR has to offer, showing how transboundary interactions, as represented by flows of race, class and gender, blended into a cosmopolitan bricolage: the Indian Army. And this army, Barkawi argues, is but one instantiation of a general dynamic. Militaries are the quintessentially cosmopolitan institution, one made cohesive through the systematic incorporation of multiple identities, cultures, cosmologies and histories. As the pre-eminent sites of organized violence, armies are at home anywhere in the world.

The questions that animate *Soldiers of empire* are deceptively simple ones: 'How are soldiers made? Why do they fight?' (p. 1). For Barkawi, the answer lies neither in national traditions nor in the formation of nation-states, and still less in claims to western exceptionalism. To the contrary, Barkawi warns against setting militaries within a nation-state ontology of the globe. Nor can the answer be found in claims about 'primary groups' as popularized in tropes such as the 'band of brothers'. Rather, Barkawi's explanation of why soldiers do 'their bloody work' lies in the structural sources of solidarity that can be found the world over: the use of discipline and ritual, particularly drill, as well as, perhaps most importantly, battle itself. How violence is organized serves as one source of military cosmopolitanism. Battle serves as a second. Solidarity is the product, rather than the origin, of the human propensity for organized violence.

Barkawi allies this account of the cosmopolitan character of militaries to a focus on the generative capacities of war. For Barkawi, war is not an exceptional

International Affairs **93**: 6 (2017) 1453–1470; DOI: 10.1093/ia/iix214

interruption to a norm of stability and order, but something far more regular, even quotidian. Violence is, in this reckoning, an ordinary part of politics and an equally ordinary companion to human history. For Barkawi, there can be no history free of war. It is an ancient institution, a 'will to combat', which serves as the foundation for 'world order projects' that can be found in every era and in every part of the globe.

The contributors to this forum are united in seeing *Soldiers of empire* as a seminal contribution to a number of debates, from what Simon Ball calls the 'new new military history' to post-colonial scholarship. For Ball, Barkawi has 'succeeded as a historian'—and it is easy to see why. On the one hand, *Soldiers of empire* is a detailed, almost microscopic, account of a particular campaign during the Second World War, one that draws extensively on primary sources, as well as memoirs by, and interviews with, those who fought in this campaign. On the other hand, the book engages deeply with what military historians would see as the highest of high theory—figures such as Foucault, Todorov, Durkheim and, especially, Chakrabarty are central to the book's narrative. The reviewers in this forum all agree that rather than inducing altitude sickness, this blend of theory and history should be praised. It is certainly not something that has come easily—Barkawi's acknowledgements trace the origins of the book to a conversation that took place some 25 years ago. *Soldiers of empire* is the product of painstaking academic labour.

Of course, the forum is not all praise. Each contributor raises a number of interesting, and important, critiques. Concerns about how Barkawi attends to the relationship between gender and war are raised by both Patricia Owens and Paul Higate, and are addressed at length in Barkawi's rejoinder. Two further issues stand out: the politics that the book supports, and the variation, both spatial and temporal, within Barkawi's conception of militaries as cosmopolitan institutions.

Three of the contributors push Barkawi to clarify the politics of his project. Robbie Shilliam questions the normative content of the violence implicated in Barkawi's conception of militarized cosmopolitanism. Patricia Owens traces aspects of Barkawi's theoretical scaffolding to 'nineteenth-century Eurocentric bourgeois sociology'. Paul Higate asks whether, albeit unintentionally, *Soldiers of empire* ends up as a 'problem-solving' guide for staff colleges that normalizes and, therefore, legitimates the centrality of both militaries and the wars they fight. Has Barkawi surrendered to the immanence of power? In his reply, Barkawi recognizes this tension, describing his book as a 'classical realist' account that occupies the space where 'violence and culture meet'. This opens up two wider points of interest. First, Barkawi usefully reminds us that cosmopolitanism does not come in singular, liberal form, but is better seen as a bricolage of identities, symbols and histories. Similarly, cosmopolitanism should not be seen as straightforwardly 'pacific' and 'civil', but as something that contains a darker, uncivil valence. Second, almost uniquely in the social sciences, war is a subject in which theory and practice are co-implicated. Writing about war, particularly its ubiquity, is not a neutral act. Barkawi's comments about the relationship between war and critical scholarship have connotations beyond the politics—and responsibilities—

of *Soldiers of empire*; they also raise ethical questions for any and all work that traverses the war–society nexus.

The second question concerns variation within militaries. Robbie Shilliam makes a striking claim when he writes that, sociologically speaking, 'when it comes to the military, there is no modernity'. This is not a comment that Barkawi responds to directly, yet it is possible to find traces of a response in both the book and his rejoinder. In *Soldiers of empire*, Barkawi writes that the military is 'modernity's leading institution' (p. 257). And in his rejoinder, Barkawi differentiates 'the machine and information ages' from the 'eras of muscles and blades'. So to what extent does the military as an institution change over time and place? *Soldiers of empire* identifies a range of mechanisms through which militaries are structurally interrelated—all contain rituals such as drill, all generate solidarities through battle. But do different militaries contain distinct forms of drill? Does drill always produce the same levels of solidarity? And does battle solidarity change when battle itself changes in character—a point raised by Michael Williams when he asks about contemporary terrorism and its use of online techniques. The same can be said of contemporary warfare and its use of robotics and virtual targeting. If war today is being transformed, will the military's sites of institutional solidarity also need to be transformed?

These issues serve as appetizers for the intellectual feast served up by this forum. Throughout the contributions, the lessons of *Soldiers of empire* come through starkly: no culture of warfare is exceptional, and violence is a routine, necessary accompaniment to both contemporary politics and world history. These are powerful insights. And they provide the foundations for the rich debates that this forum sparks, and that this book provokes.

George Lawson, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

'New new' military history

The history of the Indian Army—the very use of the term without qualifiers is loaded—is fragmented. To oversimplify, there are two traditions that have had relatively little to say to one another. One tradition might be defined as 'imperial', and in its post-1947 manifestations 'imperial elegiac'. For the Second World War, a good starting-point for this tradition would be *The tiger kills: the story of the Indian divisions in the North African campaign* (London, 1944). *The tiger kills* was a substantial and well-researched piece of work created by the India Office and the Ministry of Information. But the title and the producers already tell putative readers what tone to expect. The second tradition is national. Like other belligerents, the Indian state produced an official history of 'its' army during the Second World War. In 1945 plans had been laid for Commonwealth cooperation in the production of official military histories of the Second World War. The post-1947 Indian official historians, however, had little contact with the other official history teams scattered across the globe when they produced their eight-volume history (in titular

cooperation with Pakistan) in the 1950s. The volumes were reprinted in 2012. At the re-launch event Lt-Gen. Satish Nambiar—formerly Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff and commander of UNPROFOR in Yugoslavia, commented 'that as a rising power, India should create awareness about the tremendous role the Indian Army played in the victory of the allied forces'.

Up until now it would have been hard to recommend a good single book on the Indian Army in the Second World War free of strong imperial or national belief systems—now one can, in the form of Tarak Barkawi's *Soldiers of empire*. Barkawi has thus succeeded as a historian in writing a book that other historians of his subject will need to read.

One might leave this discussion with a simple injunction to read the book—it is very good. However, Barkawi is not primarily a historian: he is a scholar of International Relations (IR), who claims to be writing a hybrid of history and sociology for a broader IR purpose. He thus uses his work on the Indian Army to make more general claims about how both armies and the mid-century international system worked. It is worth looking at these broader claims to interrogate if any of them might be of use to other historians of the Second World War or military historians more broadly.

It seems to me that Barkawi advances three substantive claims in his work. First, mid-twentieth-century soldiers and armies should always be situated in cosmopolitan—he finds imperial an unhelpful concept if used analytically—rather than national terms. The cosmopolitan army was the norm, the national army was the exception. Barkawi subscribes to a version of the 'universal soldier' approach. Historians have been taken by the British empire's affection for breaking its soldiers down taxonomically, usually by race or region. Barkawi does not deny that this happened, he merely believes that it serves the contemporary purposes of historians of race, just as it once did those of imperial administrators. In doing so it obscures the fact that the cosmopolitan Indian Army acted in much the same way as the armies of other belligerents, possessed of other colourful traditions of differentiation.

The second of Barkawi's contentions is that battle not only generates common demands of all soldiers, but elicits similar responses both from them and from their institutions. Thus the Indian Army was little different from the Imperial Japanese Army; they just had different material and strategic constraints during different phases of the war. The third of Barkawi's claims is perhaps implicit in the second: the colourful and striking rituals of diverse groups—when situated in a cosmopolitan army—were epiphenomena of modernity rather than of pre-modernity. They were not survivals but the advanced tools of the modern workplace, just as much as the machine gun or the mortar. At this point Barkawi enters a very important caveat. Tradition, ritual, prior affiliation had very little impact on how soldiers behaved in war. They had an enormous impact on how they wrote and spoke about war after the event.

Since Barkawi has various other theoretical fish to fry—he moves on to discuss the 'world order project' in which armies operated—he does not choose to situate

himself in the discipline of military history. If he were to do so, he would likely find many sympathetic readers. Equally, he might have found himself aligned with other practitioners of what might be described as the 'new new' military history. 'Old' military history was all battles, 'new' military history was all society, 'new new' military history understands that one cannot really do politics, society or culture while leaving out the fighting. These cross-currents are relentlessly exposed for Barkawi's period by the new *Cambridge history of the Second World War* (John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley, eds, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Barkawi's focus is on the fighting between the Indian Army and the Imperial Japanese Army, but historians interested in other composite armies and other theatres have reached broadly comparable conclusions. Two examples fairly recently released by Barkawi's own publisher, but excluded by him because they do not fit with his Pacific War focus, make similar points. Allan Converse's *Armies of empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) attempts to understand another composite army, not British–Indian but British–Australian. Converse is equally insistent on the primacy of the 'universal soldier' and enters the same caveat as Barkawi: the differences between armies dominated post-fighting reflection, but the real differences 'become smaller the closer one looks'. Jonathan Fennell comes to similar conclusions again in his study of a cosmopolitan army in 1941–2, *Combat and morale in the North African Campaign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

If we take Barkawi as part of the 'new new' military history of the Second World War, how does that war look? The experience of battle was similar for all soldiers: war was work; all armies had very similar HR departments; they all followed a very similar learning curve; the origins of soldiers did not matter much to the conduct of war; the competence of officers did matter a lot to the conduct of war; armies got good at war by fighting.

Possibly the greatest service Barkawi has done his peers is by taking the term 'imperial army' off the table. The cosmopolitan army looks a lot more interesting and worthy of exploration. Unwittingly the 'new new' historians might have done something else too. If there was not much difference between armies, then the most important factors in understanding military effectiveness appear to be material. The same insight might be ported across to the international system. One does not wish to intrude on other people's arguments: but are we all neo-realists now?

Simon Ball, University of Leeds, UK

A challenge to the moribund western orthodoxy of why soldiers fight

Tarak Barkawi's *Soldiers of empire* is an instructive text on a number of levels. Not only is it a compelling read, rich with thick descriptions of the everyday experiences of Second World War imperial soldiers, but more than that, it is a system-

atic and important challenge to the moribund western vantage point from which militaries are typically conceived. Written from a post-colonial perspective, the book grapples with a core problematic that has animated scholars for decades: how troops are made, and in turn, why it is that they fight. These key questions are nested within a far more ambitious remit—to understand the role of cosmopolitan armies to secure world projects.

The book is organized around three key themes challenging prevailing military–sociological orthodoxies. The first of these is that the dichotomized civil–military gap around, and through which militaries are typically conceived should be reconceptualized. For Barkawi, this is a question of thinking through the co-constitutional dimensions of army–society relations that hitherto have been theorized through the lenses of sovereignty, territoriality and national politics with (alleged) consequences for soldierly subjectivity, motivation and beyond. Not only is difference stressed over similarity in these mainstream renderings but more than that, they are imbued with the 'chauvinism of military studies' that fuels 'Western triumphalist' (p. 257) approaches in the field. In contrast, Barkawi argues that the social and cultural forces generated in the articulation of these two dynamic, fluid and reified realms can be transformative in ways that challenge for example the idea of the martial races and the exercise of colonial power this makes possible. Indeed, it is in the pragmatics of war and its instantiation through face-to-face violence that these potent cultural schema begin to unravel, and are subsequently transcended and arbitrarily reconfigured in the name of military effectiveness. Barkawi is astutely attuned to processes of meaning-making and privileged positionality. For example, he skilfully shows how the Japanese 'Banzai' charge (p. 260) does not flow from an essentialized Japanese identity generating distinct social practice, but rather is characterized by a good degree of similarity in form to infantry assaults used by western forces. He does so by drawing attention to the colonizer's racialization of the enemy other, which has over the decades crystallized into commonsense ideas about who or what soldiers are thought to be.

Attendant to the 'anthropological moment' is the thoroughgoing challenge to military sociological frameworks that accord agency excessive influence in the form of fighting spirit on the battlefield, the wellspring of which is traditionally understood to be the particular character of the individual or collective military unit (p. 11). Yet troops' geographical origins, ethnic identities or, in heuristic terms, the influence of either the army or society as explanatory variable are shown to be little more than colonial hubris with ritual and drill appropriately foregrounded.

The third and final discussion turns on an explicitly post-colonial frame where the coding of tactics, strategy, class and caste through national–cultural tropes is forensically challenged in the case-study of fighting at Donbaik (pp. 261–9). Barkawi quite brilliantly overturns the key tenets of an enduring, yet wholly unreflexive mainstream scholarship privileging the West through the vector of the colonial soldier. Here race has been axiomatically and variously deployed by the powerful as a vocabulary of motive, organizing principle and largely unquestioned legitimating narrative. I learned an awful lot from *Soldiers of empire* and

relish the opportunity for students to lose themselves in the fascinating archival material and its provocative framing; the book's place on the reading list is assured. However, while Barkawi's scholarship is exceptional, some brief reflections and critical commentary are called for.

Barkawi argues that 'what makes armies work are their ancient techniques' (p. 257) and there is little to disagree with here. The importance of military drill, symbol and ritual is accorded its rightful explanatory place in subsequent analysis. Yet, given the importance of this observation—in many ways the volume's linchpin—it is perhaps something of a missed opportunity that the author overlooks insights generated from within the phenomenological literature, particularly the work of existential philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Here, Barkawi would find a conceptual toolbox well disposed to explaining the embodied dimensions of military socialization that adds a good deal of depth and breadth to the rather thin concept of automaticity to which he refers. Aided by a framework that illuminates the deeper formation of habit, embodied disposition and pre-reflection, dimensions that enable soldiers to act in ways they themselves may struggle to give voice to, Barkawi would be equipped with a sharper sense of the foundational drivers of military atrocities that play out largely beyond culture. The treatment of gender has also been somewhat schematic and atheoretical, and while I would largely concur with Patricia Owens in this forum, it is worth adding that the wider masculinities/race literature (modest though it is), in its explicitly intersectional, intra-masculine and hierarchical analysis of gender and power, could have been more effectively mobilized by the book.

Some contemporary possibilities which the book might speak to include concerns over so-called third country nationals in the private military and security sector and indigenous soldiers central to security sector reform. Although the work only alludes to them, these actors are of growing importance to the current world-ordering project that ultimately attempts to secure global markets through driving down (private) industry costs. To be sure, these latter comments can be read not so much as a critique, but rather as a vindication of Barkawi's achievements. This historically focused book has indisputable analytical pertinence to current social transformation through exposing how processes of racialization chime with the use of violence across the globe in both the private and the public sphere.

Yet, in taking a step back, we might pose an altogether more inflammatory question—and we should—that turns on how best to understand the politics of the book. What of Barkawi's broader normative message? Though clearly critical and ground-breaking in its healthy disregard for the usual divisions of academic labour that mask normalized and thus insidious power relationships that configure the racialized dimensions of military studies, Barkawi's scholarship can be seen as an (albeit critically) nuanced problem-solving piece. By no means emancipatory in approach, it is actually informed by a social engineering perspective where processes of racialization could be ultimately read as hindering operational effectiveness. Consequently, and perhaps something of an irony given that Barkawi

recognizes the ideological inflections of the military sociology literature, the implications of the work are to leave *undisturbed* the institution of the military as a legitimate actor tasked to conduct (foreign) policy by violent means. To put this differently, we might imagine the book slotting effortlessly into military staff college curricula, or featuring as a lively discussion point during 'diversity training' for military officers in line with its liberal framing. In the section dealing with politics, obedience and violence (pp. 276–9), Barkawi tantalizes with his argument that 'it is from the political world that … willingness to engage in … violence arises' (p. 277), noting that 'one effect' of this politicized or ethnicized narrative is 'to preserve the idea, that ordinarily speaking, human beings are pacific' (p. 277). If not politics, then what explains violence? Is it simply an inevitable dimension of the human condition and as such a 'black box' best avoided? Maybe this is not the point, yet many of Barkawi's critical insights resonate closely with the emerging field of Critical Military Studies focused on an agenda that sees military power as a key problematic animating socially radical, transformative interventions. While he pushes analyses well beyond the civil–military binary in a highly illuminating manner through stressing the relational dynamic characterizing these apparently discrete entities, perhaps unsurprisingly violence tends not to be exceptionalized in the volume. Rather, it is imbued with a universality that further reinforces the inevitability of war not so much as a phenomena to be challenged, but one that just *is*.

Paul Higate, University of Bath, UK

The limits of military sociology

Many readers of *International Affairs* will be familiar with Tarak Barkawi's frequent skewering of International Relations (IR) theories and debates, from his demolition of liberal peace and so-called 'schools' of critical security studies to his elevation of empire and critical war studies. In each intervention, Barkawi engaged directly with core IR debates and ruthlessly exposed their flawed premises, establishing a new agenda for research in the process. In doing so, he has shaped at least two generations of IR scholarship. The influence of *Soldiers of empire* could be of a totally different order. It will come less from the book's main arguments than from the quality of the scholarship and style of intellectual engagement. This book delivers something far more urgent than a new agenda for research. It is a yardstick for those in our field interested in producing scholarship that is critical, but also of real substance and originality; work that is historically rich, theoretically engaged, well written, multi- and inter-disciplinary and that pays no heed whatsoever to the debilitating distinctions between IR subfields.

However, as one would expect of a book of real substance, there are problems that will limit its intellectual reach. In this review forum, I focus on two. The first relates to the book's main claims about rituals, military socialization and the structure of war. Barkawi argues that it is not the politics of any particular war, but

the conditions of military service that matter most to how soldiers behave. 'What was immediate and present', he writes, 'deprivation, fatigue, fear for life and limb, for oneself and others—was often far more important in shaping action than the distant high politics of the war. In this, colonial soldiers were little different from national ones' (p. 83). In addition to concern for basic life needs, Barkawi points to the significance of ritual systems. Military drills, he writes, 'dispose people toward acting in particular kinds of ways, those intended by ritual experts' (p. 185).

In *Soldiers of empire*, these two claims that are quite obvious at first have an extremely surprising intellectual and political origin. It is a great irony that a landmark book of post-colonial war studies relies so heavily on nineteenth-century Eurocentric bourgeois sociology. Specifically, Barkawi's main claims about the conditions of military service and rituals draw on Emile Durkheim's functionalist and apolitical account of how French working classes could be bound to the nation, refracted through his racist account of Australian aboriginal clans. Durkheim's agenda was less to understand than to bring about and rationalize workers' subordination under capitalist modernity, to explain and then curb popular rebellions. For Durkheim, working classes could be made to behave in particular ways given particular structures of incentives. For Barkawi, 'soldiers acted in comparable ways when caught in similar straits during the Burma campaign' (p. 193). Neither of these sentences is exactly wrong. But one of them certainly, and the other one potentially, risk misdescribing and therefore naturalizing how these conditions are produced. Taking control of the exigencies and necessities of life is the oldest and truest form of coercion and discipline. Of course, colonial soldiers, like national soldiers and all human beings, tend to behave in certain ways when directly confronted by extreme structural powers of life and death. To understand this, we don't need to elevate Durkheim and other prophets of social engineering more interested in naturalizing rather than fully interrogating the production of this form of power (see e.g. Patricia Owens, *Economy of force*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The second point is that in a book about how soldiers are made and why they fight, of how military solidarity, hierarchy and authority are instantiated, it is surprising that there is no sustained *theoretical* account of gender difference. There is plenty of discussion of one aspect of its significance. There is a great deal on 'military masculinity', how it was instrumentally used to bond together soldiers within and across cultural divides; that the theory of martial races manufactures war-like and 'effeminate' races (p. 21); that 'soldiering is a strategic site for the production of masculinity' (p. 276). In addition, women make brief appearances, usually through the eyes of soldiers as 'prostitutes'; disloyal wives (p. 237); wives of British officers barred from dancing with or swimming near Indian officers (pp. 96, 99); victims of rape; as mothers and wives sending pleading, complaining, ignorant letters to their sons and husbands serving abroad even as they are apparently the real beneficiaries of men's military service (p. 91).

Thus, we have 'military masculinity' on the one hand, and clichés of women on the other. Clearly, this reproduces rather than interrogates the gender relations that

make 'military masculinities' possible. While the central arguments of the book completely depend on it, there is nothing on the mutual imbrication of war and the constitution of binary sexual difference. Barkawi argues that military education in the imperial army 'required less expert cultural knowledge than might be thought' (p. 157). Yet the British Army in India could get away with a minimum of ethnographic knowledge *because* gender was already doing much, if not all, of its work. Of this, we hear virtually nothing. The British Indian Army was able to adapt so well after defeat, 'to modularly reconstruct difference and rearrange group identity', because pre-existing and flexible gendered relations of power could be harnessed to its ends (p. 50). The sole focus on military masculinity and clumsy treatment of women is a missed opportunity. As many feminist scholars have shown, war is parasitic on gendered relations of power. The gender binary, in turn, is almost unimaginable outside war. We could even say that the very origin of the binary—one that makes little sense given the diversity of bodies—is preparation for war, in how soldiers are made and why they fight.

To think through these relations would not just be an add-on to an otherwise excellent book, which Barkawi may respond 'is not about gender'. Its absence distorts and contorts *Soldiers of empire*, reducing its intellectual and political power in a manner comparable to non-feminist analyses of 'gender' in social constructivism. For example, 'ham-fisted' is used to describe the practice of forcing new recruits to wear women's clothing if they discharge weapons too soon. The British effort to instil anti-Japanese hatred by telling them that 'Jap fathers sell their daughters into brothels' is called a 'contrivance' (p. 235). Most troubling of all, 'kept busy' is used as a euphemism for soldiers raping women in what is called a 'lurid' 'escapade' (p. 59). That the women were sex workers does not contradict the point; they are among those most vulnerable to rape. These moments betray *Soldiers of empire*'s discomfort with gender. Terms like 'ham-fisted', 'contrivance' and 'lurid' imply that we all already know what it takes to make soldiers but we can pass over it quickly because there are other, more important things to discuss. The frequent acknowledgement of 'military masculinities' is no substitution for a full and proper accounting of how they are produced.

It is only because *Soldiers of empire* is so important that such fundamental issues are at stake. Barkawi has produced an outstanding work of original scholarship that is an inspiration. It fully succeeds in its most important intention of 'strip[ping] away not only some of the chauvinism which governs military writing, but also the Western triumphalism' (p. 257). And more broadly it sets a new benchmark for book-length original scholarship that has a shelf life of more than three years and a multidisciplinary readership beyond one section of the British International Studies Association or the International Studies Association. Yet battle's structure and war's power have not yet been fully captured. But Barkawi can hardly be blamed for that.

Patricia Owens, University of Sussex, UK

War and cosmopolitanism in the post-colonial world

How are soldiers made and why do they fight? This is not a common question asked by post-colonial theorists. True, much of the substance of post-colonial critique in International Relations (IR) pertains to violence and conflict, whether that be in terms of broken treatises, raids, conquests, genocides, economic subjugation or political dominion. Also true, we are presently blessed with many worthy theses on the causes and consequences of the global 'war on terror'. And yet, excepting some scholars working in normative theory, few post-colonial investigations of IR directly address the conduct of war itself and, even less so, the making of soldiers.

By meticulously and comprehensively bringing military history and sociology to bear on the formation and transformation of the British Indian Army during the Second World War, Tarak Barkawi has opened a significant area of inquiry for those of us interested in the colonial and imperial constitution of our contemporary global order. Barkawi's book might be usefully read alongside and through cognate feminist engagements. I am thinking, for instance, of the current post-colonial determinants of Fiji women soldiers recruited to the British Army, as discussed by Teresia Teaiwa in 'What makes Fiji women soldiers?' (*Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 37, March 2015), and of the mythology of modern fighting men engaged with by Megan Mackenzie in her *Beyond the band of brothers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015; reviewed in *International Affairs* 93: 3).

Barkawi mounts two fundamental post-colonial challenges to the study of the military. First, he refutes the Occident/Orient binary that ascribes modern, rational warfare to European and western armies and traditional, ritualistic conflict to the warriors of Asia, Africa and Oceania. Second, and concomitantly, Barkawi makes the convincing argument that colonial sites of warfare—in his case, specifically, the war between the Indian Army and Japan—are also sites of general edification when it comes to the relationship between the military and society. Nonetheless, while situating his contribution as a 'post-colonial perspective', Barkawi's intervention is principally situated *vis-à-vis* military history and sociology. And so, in what follows, I would like to dwell on some of the suggestive elements of the argument, in so far as they directly pertain to post-colonial critiques of IR.

Recent historiographical work has taken up the presumption that the nation, rather than empire, is the fundamental building block of global order. One of Barkawi's main critiques of military studies is its assumption that the modern army is formed in and through a national container. Crucial, in this respect, are the assumed motivations that bind men into fighting units willing to make collective sacrifice and honour the blood debt. Barkawi amply demonstrates that lacking any national ideology, subjecthood or even citizenship, it was still eminently possible for such units to be forged from the diverse ethnic demographics of Britain's Raj. Indeed, even the racialization of India's male populations into martial and effeminate classes by British officers and administrative structures did not rule out such

a process. This was also the case later in the war when such imperial divisions of the population had to be suspended due to the practicalities of recruitment. By the latter part of the world war, soldiers of different ethnicities, faiths and castes had combined into fighting units.

Barkawi's explanation as to how and why martial solidarity and the 'will to sacrifice' could be cultivated in lieu of the modern national container is provocative. Effectively, he argues that it is drill and battle that do the work rather than nation or politics. While this might seem a simplistic response, pithy even, its profundity arises from the way in which Barkawi mobilizes the argument to refute the pretensions of modernity as an organizing narrative. For instance, rather than identifying modern military drill as a rational technology that historically comes to replace traditional ritual, Barkawi argues that drill is ritual. Lacking any 'special western properties', drill works 'for nearly anybody'. Hence, instead of a diffusionist sociology that identifies modern military discipline as an avatar of the western nation, Barkawi presents said discipline as 'cosmopolitan', in so far as it can be created almost anywhere, albeit always with local inflections.

'The regular military is a cosmopolitan institution': I am interested in Barkawi's mobilization of this term. In one sense, I can see why 'cosmopolitan' has an attraction for him, especially in terms of describing the diverse constituencies that form the Indian Army in ways that produce cultural, religious, linguistic and normative bricolages rather than strict categorizations of identities, values and practices. However, cosmopolitanism—at least in political theory—connotes a fundamental normativity, and more, a desire for an expansive, unrestrained normativity instead of the attenuations demanded by community, nation, etc. In this respect, I am reminded of Barkawi's comments at the closing roundtable of a recent *Millennium* conference on 'Racialized realities in world politics'. There, Barkawi suggested that cosmopolitanism did not necessarily work for the 'good life', but could also work for violence and warfare. So, if there is an underlying normative argument to Barkawi's strategic mobilization of the label 'cosmopolitan', I would like to know what it is, and why it is.

On this note, while Barkawi does not explicitly pursue the line of argumentation, implicit in this book is a contribution to the critique of modernization theory, and especially its current iteration as the 'liberal peace' promised by state-building interventions, ably critiqued in Meera Sabaratnam's recent book, *Decolonizing intervention* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017). I am thinking especially of Samuel Huntington's influential critiques in the 1960s, where he ascribed to the military a leading role in the modernization of Third World (predominantly 'peasant') societies in so far as it was the only modern institution that could guarantee order amid social transformation. On the one hand, Huntington's was a devastating critique of the *doux commerce* precept of post-colonial modernization that accompanied the rise of US hegemony in the Cold War. But on the other hand, Huntington entirely and repeatedly subscribed to the uniqueness of the West in terms of its cultural, social and political formation. Therefore, the modern military, for Huntington, had a 'special' role to play in the backward, traditional milieux of the Third World.

Sociologically speaking, Barkawi's argument entirely destroys Huntington's reformulation of the military as an institution that bridges the traditional and the modern. Indeed, once we conceive of drill *as* ritual, not even the critique of modernization theory makes sense, because—again sociologically speaking—when it comes to the military, there is no modernity. Nonetheless, Barkawi does prescribe a specificity to social organization within India's army which, even if it drew on the village hinterlands of culture and practice, provided a paradoxical space for cosmopolitan relations to be forged despite empire's constraints. As Barkawi puts it at one point, communalism in the army and communalism in civil society had 'different valences'. I read him to be suggesting that the specific sociality of the 'barracks' was not modern, but nonetheless it was at least partially distinct from that of the 'villages'. I want, then, to ask Barkawi to comment on the temporality of this cosmopolitan excess. Was it a more advanced sociality? Did it (want to) 'go' somewhere? Were the villages re-animated on the return of soldiers? And ultimately, what was the relationship between this militarily-induced sociality and subsequent decolonization?

Robbie Shilliam, Queen Mary University of London, UK

A historical sociology of why soldiers fight

It is virtually a cliché to say that war eludes us. Despite its role as one of the most significant shapers of human destinies, the subject of countless studies and the object of endless speculation, war continues to escape our attempts to understand it. In many ways, the more we seem to know about it, the greater our awareness of the limits of that understanding.

Tarak Barkawi's *Soldiers of empire* is remarkable both for what it teaches readers and for making them aware of what they do not know. While paying due respect to the rich literatures on modern militaries and war, Barkawi argues that the obstacles to understanding war are legion. Methodological and ideological nationalism too often assumes (and reinforces) the idea that soldiers fight only for or primarily for their nations, while the competing vision, that they fight for each other as members of 'primary groups', too often cuts important interpersonal loyalties off from their wider social and institutional environments. Each explanation, through its focus on the extraordinary nature of war, obscures the fact that human beings are willing to fight and die in organized groups for a remarkably wide range of reasons and in myriad forms beyond the modern 'national' military.

To redress the balance, Barkawi develops a historical sociology giving the colonial imperial armies their rightful place in history and drawing out the important wider implications arising from doing so. The western focus of most studies and theories obscures the histories and lessons of colonial war, which are vital both in themselves and for their wider insights into the relationship between war and society and the nature of military organizations. One of the most challenging of these insights is that it may not be 'ideas' or even 'beliefs' in the conventional

sense that provide soldiers' primary motivations. Instead, the author argues that it is experience—the experience of battle—that generates allegiances and (often racialized) enmities, alongside the more mundane institutionalized routines and rituals of military organization that generate comradery and commitment. Here, the example of Indian troops who fought well for an empire that the few of them felt strong, if any, allegiance towards (and that many actually opposed in the name of Indian nationalism) is especially revealing. In this and numerous other areas, the book demonstrates the insights that colonial and post-colonial historiography and theory can generate.

As Barkawi is well aware, the implications of this history are by no means limited to understanding the past; and of the lessons that abound in this book, two strike me as having particular contemporary relevance. Although the author does not engage with them in detail, his arguments go to the heart of the contemporary politics of state- and military-building that focus on beliefs—on winning or creating willing 'hearts and minds', as the increasingly tired mantra has it. If the argument in *Soldiers of empire* is correct, the models guiding these enterprises, particularly those focused on building strong national or ideological loyalties and beliefs, may be profoundly misguided. If we are to understand how to successfully build cohesive and disciplined militaries that exhibit loyalty to political authorities, as well as the failures of such attempts evidenced in the very chequered record in recent decades, the oft-obscured history of imperial militaries is a fertile place to begin. Similarly, these questions are crucial if we are to understand the motivation and cohesion of less structured groups, such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and its followers, who often have little of the interpersonal or economic connections that Barkawi finds in imperial armies, but that seem capable of generating a willingness to kill and die nonetheless.

Here, one sometimes wishes Barkawi had delved a little more deeply into the importance of shared myths, structured military identities, affinities and affects that he identifies. To what extent are these dynamics limited to specific historic conditions? What is the impact of contemporary social and communication structures—the internet, social media, globalization in general—on the kinds of socio-military dynamics and solidarity he identifies? And how might these be connected to the changing character of war itself? It is a mark of the value of *Soldiers of empire* that it prompts such contemporary questions even as it forces us to rethink our understanding of the past and the central place of war in making the world.

Michael Williams, University of Ottawa, Canada

Author's response

Books have their own lives. I am gratified and appreciative to see *Soldiers of empire* get its start in the hands of such capable scholars. They begin fascinating conversations about the book's findings and claims. In my space here, I try to take these conversations forward in an initial kind of way with respect to gender, soldiers

and war; villages, cosmopolitanisms and critique; and myths, military history and world politics.

I designed the critical apparatus of *Soldiers of empire* to take on race and nation, my particular targets in military sociology and history. Patricia Owens and Paul Higate are right to identify gender as a relative absence in the text and weakness in my interpretative framework. There is, however, some slippage in Owens's critique between the much larger field of gender and *war*, and my particular subject, the making of infantry soldiers and their combats. By way of response, I want to explore some of the connections between these two topics. War has multiple and complex relations with the production and reproduction of patriarchy and other gendered relations of power, many of which operate through representational practices (official memorialization, news and other media, popular culture). On this larger matter, I think it is wrong to claim as Owens does that 'war is parasitic on gendered relations of power' or that gender does 'much … if not all' of the work (p. 1462 in this forum). Rather, patriarchy and war occur conjuncturally, and should be conceived in historically variable relations of co-constitution and reproduction, intersected by other vectors of power such as race and class.

Representations and mythologies of warrior masculinity, especially in western society in the twentieth century, often stand in some tension with discourses of gender and sexuality in actual combat units. The soldier may embody an unvarnished masculine heterosexuality in imagination. In practice an infantry platoon demands a combination of putatively masculine and feminine traits if it is to be effective, even if the former remains dominant. Squad leaders are not constructed as mothers for nothing. The gendered regimes of armies and the sexual practices of soldiers, past and present, form a complex subject for inquiry, one that requires reading against the representational and heterosexist grain.

These points raise the question of how might the critical apparatus of *Soldiers of empire* interrogate gender and sexuality. Owens suggests that gender did work in bonding together Indian soldiers and British officers, helping to overcome cultural divides. I would make the more general claim that just as armies can rework ethnic and political identities to form new solidarities and myths, so too can they draw on, and play with, cultures of gender and sexuality when they decide to do so, as when they incorporate women. The Indian National Army formed a Rani of Jhansi Regiment of women, using a heroine of 1857 for an organizational myth and female vision of warrior masculinity. Units women serve in, from Soviet mortar batteries in the Great Patriotic War to the US Army's military police battalions in Iraq (an occupational specialty colloquially referred to as the 'female infantry'), have their own *esprit de corps*, which can challenge and queer masculine warrior myths, or reinscribe them. Although it stands outside modern sexualities, the Theban Sacred Band offers another example of the military possibilities here, as do contemporary efforts to incorporate LGBT soldiers.

I refer here to gender constructions around female and LGBT military service not to conflate women with sexuality or gender, cis or otherwise, but to converse

with Owens's apparent emphasis on male–female sex difference. While I like her formulation of the 'mutual imbrication of war' and sex difference, I do not think sex difference offers any necessary obstacle to military service in the machine and information ages (as it may have done in eras of muscles and blades) (p. 1462 in this forum). War's powers to reshape gender relations may operate in future through increased space in myth and imagination made by and for female and queered combatants. War and gender, war and sexuality, war and sex difference, all have more radically unsettled potentialities than generally realized, as martial glimmerings in contemporary popular culture make evident.

Robbie Shilliam presses on my use of the term 'cosmopolitan'. What is the connection between the army's cosmopolitanism and political cosmopolitanism? The army's cosmopolitanism in *Soldiers of empire* refers to the adaptability of discipline across peoples and places, its powers of cultural incorporation and change, as well as the often—but not necessarily—hybrid and travelled identities of officers, soldiers and their units. How might this relate to a politics of the cosmopolitan over the local or the chauvinistic, of the citizens of the world over those of nation-states? Shilliam uses an arresting global divide to pose this question: that between barracks and village (cf. Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, pp. 183–7). Am I saying that the army, although not modern, may have some kind of advanced sociality over the village? While I think I can at times be read this way, I intend my invocation of the army's cosmopolitanism to have a darker valence, one Shilliam senses. So too does Higate, who worries (correctly) that for *Soldiers of empire* violence is not exceptional.

That the army is cosmopolitan means that organized, militarized violence is at home in the world, a common historical experience and an ever-present possibility. Army discipline and ritual and their ability to generate the will to combat and the cycles of blood debt which ensue arise from capacities humans share across time and place. Soldiers the world over, like death squads, do and have done their bloody work. Yet we often code violence as local, or as chauvinistic and national. The dark cosmopolitanism of the army invites us to reflect on this situation, pointing us towards a more profound apprehension of the ubiquity of war in human histories. I would not, then, valorize army over village. Indeed, demobilized Indian Army veterans helped organize the slaughter of their former neighbours in the ethnic cleansing of Partition, making use of tactics and solidarities developed in the army (Saumitra Jha and Steven I. Wilkinson, 'Does combat experience foster organizational skill', *American Political Science Review* 106: 4, 2012).

Villages have their own multivalent relations with cosmopolitanisms and empires, classes and polities, intersected by war and military service in and beyond Europe. Dialogue between village and barracks offers a post-colonial site from which to rethink the global politics of war and peace, civilian and combatant. It is a conversation to which Spartan as well as south Asian mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, might contribute. Correspondence and other communication between homefront and warfront offer historical materials with which to begin this rethinking.

But what more might be said about the politics of *Soldiers of empire* and its conception of critique? Higate notes that it might find a useful place on the library shelves of staff colleges, a problem-solving text to help make better soldiers, even if for United Nations peacekeeping missions or, as Michael Williams suggests, as a guide for revamped security sector reform. Owens expresses concern that 'Eurocentric bourgeois sociology' should find its way into a post-colonial text (p. 1461 in this forum).[1] Where is my emancipatory project?

Humans know no histories without warfare. This poses profound challenges for critical thought and left politics. Those who take war seriously find it difficult to subscribe to narratives of human progress, of a march only occasionally interrupted or diverted, towards some brighter future. Soldiers in wars past and present know better: they often invoke the primitive to account for their situation. War is a ubiquitous, oft realized possibility, one that can recur in its most elemental and total forms. It is a conceit of the twentieth century that there have been only two world wars. Whatever the number, only those who place faith in some combination of nuclear weapons, moral progress and rationality think that we will not add to it, sooner or later.

In the face of war, critical thought must travel circuits of tragedy and regression, say from nineteenth-century imperial globalization to the killing fields of Port Arthur and Verdun, and back round again. When it occurs, war can rip out from underfoot imaginings of progress, while reshaping conceptions of peace and emancipation (as the First and Second World Wars did). We may today go from the era of Facebook to some newfangled Stalingrad quicker than we think proper or right, as did those who started out in the Arab Spring only to end up in the Siege of Aleppo. If it is to help us make sense of such retrograde journeys, critique can never rest, in Theodor Adorno's formulation. From such perspective, *Soldiers of empire* disenchants the vocation of soldiering, found on all sides in war, and tells readers something about the nature and character of organized violence and its relations with society and politics.

I conclude with thoughts on why students of world politics should study more military history, intended to engage with some points raised by Williams and Simon Ball. My book departs from a 'material' view, and qualifies an institutional or 'universal soldier' perspective, in situating soldiers historically and attending to culture and society. If anything, I am a classical, rather than neo-realist: one has to make a good army, not assume its existence. That said, Ball is surely right to try and find me somewhere between the 'universal soldier' and the 'new new' military history, at the place where violence and culture meet. What I take from Williams's remarks is the need to continually historicize this encounter and the social context on which it occurs.

[1] As I understand it, post-colonial thought is an engagement with, and not a rejection of, Eurocentric sociologies and histories (Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). In my view, the onus is on Owens to show how my use of Durkheim and the concept of ritual naturalizes, rather than exposes, how the army generates solidarity. If we start discarding great thinkers on grounds of racism and unsavoury politics, we will have few left to think with.

Soldiers of empire charts some of the ways battle shapes myth and imagination via soldiers' accounts, from after-action reports to memoirs, as well as through the official and popular histories they write or inform. In future work, some of it with Shane Brighton, I hope to develop more fully an account of some of the historic ways in which battle shapes social and political imaginaries, and does so through narrations by and about soldiers and other combatants. Participants in war, at all levels, have to make sense of events and enemies, both ultimately beyond their control. How they do so, and what gets picked up from their accounts, form important vectors along which wars reshape imagination and identity. This is not a matter of 'memory' versus historical truth, but of war and battle radiating out into culture and society.

In recent decades, International Relations scholarship has begun to investigate popular culture. People make sense of, and react to, world politics and events in part through science fiction and fantasy, among other genres, in literature and on television, and through social media. At the same time, events, and the geopolitical conjunctures that give rise to them, shape entertainment and myth, and along with them the politics and identities of the populace. The Star Trek universe resembled, and naturalized, that of the Cold War, with the United Federation of Planets standing in for the US and its allies (Jutta Weldes,'Going cultural: Star Trek, state action, and popular culture', *Millennium* 28: 1, 1999).

In these terms, popular military history, by which I mean to invoke a vast and changing field of imagination and media, from Homer and other campfire tales to YouTube, is a site of extraordinary significance. Through it, publics and elites, soldiers and officers, have sought to make sense of the wars in which they and their polities and societies were caught up. At the same time, wars, their grinding moral and material attrition, their shocking events and tragedies, shape popular tellings, but they do so through machinations difficult to trace. Fantastic myths about battles and wars inform public and elite constructions of historical and contemporary wars. How might these processes work, with what effects? Here is a rich domain for bringing together military history, popular culture and world politics, and for taking forward the kind of critical war studies to which *Soldiers of empire* seeks to contribute.

Tarak Barkawi, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK