



Book Review

La guerre de Sept Ans. Edmond Dziembowski. 2018. Paris: Éditions Perrin. 672 pages, ISBN 978-2262035297. Paperback (\$39.95).

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Edmond Dziembowski's *La guerre de Sept Ans* offers an interesting and highly readable overview of the Seven Years War, a conflict that has spawned significant new academic renderings in English as well over the past decade (Danley and Speelman 2012; Baugh 2011; Szabo 2013). For readers of World Systems theory, the Seven Years War marks the emergence of Great Britain as the pre-eminent commercial and geopolitical power. Dziembowski gives us a glimpse of the contingency of this emergence, and how it was also wrapped up in other ways of seeing the emerging world order.

Dziembowski begins by pointing out that the Seven Years War was a global conflict, both in terms of its scope—with military theatres on multiple continents—and its aims. He leaves one with the impression that prior to the war, the policy elites of European states saw their rivalries primarily as European, and their colonies as extensions of these metropolitan jealousies. But the Seven Years War marked an important turning point, in which both France and Britain confronted their global economic interests and shifted the focus—too slowly for the French—towards their global empires. The global scope of the French-British rivalry brought these global powers into the orbit of other, regional conflicts with other regional or local powers, with their own interests: the Moghuls, the Nawabs of Bengal, the Cherokee, the Iroquois, the Prussians and the Austrians.



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Dziembowski's book is an excellent French-language introduction to the conflict, providing the student of the 18th century an excellent window for further study of its different themes, from the diplomatic revolution, to the world of letters and the global scale of the conflict itself.

The book is clearly written in a French that is engaging and lively. Moreover, while the conflict itself takes up the bulk of the book, Dziembowski also attends to the centrality of literary and public debates, which played out in the pamphlets, poems, songs, and literature of the 1750s and 1760s. His attention to how the public sphere framed the conflict in France and Britain is valuable to readers of World Systems, since the colonial, commercial interests were most forcefully asserted there. The sugar baron, William Beckford, and his parliamentary allies used public criticism—particularly criticism of the conduct of the war—to assert imperial interests against the Crown's focus on European objectives. This criticism marks a prelude to the democratic public sphere of the 20th century, and, perhaps, a demonstration of its colonial roots and interests. The courts of both major powers cared about public opinion, shedding light on new notions of citizenship that took root in the 1750s and 1760s. Dziembowski further provides a picture of a divided British establishment, one just beginning to catch a glimpse of itself as a global empire, oriented towards colonial trade. While King George II begins the war fixated on defending his Germany territories in Brunswick, William Pitt the Elder knew (thanks to his friendships with West Indian sugar magnates) that Britain's real interests were in the Americas. A similar split can be found within the French administrations of Bernis and Choiseul.

The question remains whether Dziembowski provides an actual global narrative or another retelling of the Seven Year's War mainly from a European angle. There are instances where the book nods strongly towards a global angle, considering the conflict from multiple perspectives, including ones outside of Europe. The war is acknowledged to have begun as the result of disputes between Native American nations in the Ohio Valley, which later suck in French and British territorial ambitions. However, Dziembowski focuses much more attention on the tension between the Marquis de Montcalm and Vaudreuil, the Governor of New France.

Dziembowski makes an attempt to center non-European geographies of the conflict, especially New France, Acadia and India, which would help overcome the Eurocentric notion of the war as an inter-European rivalry. Yet, we receive only scant view of the conflict from the vantage point of other powers engaged in regional conflict outside Europe. For instance, while Dziembowski still gives too much place to European reactions to indigenous fighting techniques, the Cherokee interests in the Seven Years War and how they articulated them remain absent. The book provides little perspective on the war from the vantage point of Native Americans (for books that do this well, see: Ward 2012; Oliphant 2001). The tensions and commercial competition between different Native American nations were formative in how they approached squabbles between European nations (Ward 1992), yet these angles are missing.

This lacuna is also evident in Dziembowski's presentation of the British-French rivalry in the Indian subcontinent. The book provides an excellent overview of French and British military movements and commercial interests in India, but never quite gets into how this rivalry was seen from the perspective of competing Indian states. The book underscores the importance of the Battle

of Plassey and the overthrow of the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj ud-Daula, but mostly in terms of how it led to British victory. The calculations from the vantage point of Mir Jafar, however, are overlooked, and along with it, a perspective on how the Seven Years War overlapped regional calculations and alternative global designs during the breakup of the Mughal Empire.

To be fair, Dziembowski's main interest remains in Europe, despite the potential scope of his book. The global remains a hook upon which to hang a history of European imperial rivalry. Nonetheless, in a penultimate chapter dedicated to the new world order ushered in by the Seven Years War, Dziembowski shows how the war preformed the conflicts that were to come, in both Europe and in the Americas. Most tellingly, his discussion of Pontiac's War highlights the strategic disaster the Seven Years War posed to France's Native American allies. The loss of their main European partner meant that the full force of European militarism would soon fall upon them, despite the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

Dziembowski's *La guerre de Sept Ans* provides a fascinating picture of the importance of the conflict, encompassing literary and civil society debates, as well as the diplomatic manoeuvring of the two major imperial powers both in Europe, the Americas and India. But our understanding of the conflict as mostly a European conflict, whose contours are provided primarily by a colonial rivalry whose significance was not yet entirely clear to either major power. It is, thus, certainly too soon to close the book on the Seven Years War, despite all the ink that has been spilled on it. Dziembowski's book provides an interesting starting point to consider trajectories of the creation of a global economy and society, and is especially notable for its addition of archival material concerning public and literary debates. But it also leaves more questions than it answers with respect to the stakes of the conflict from non-European angles. Recovering these angles is of importance in order to historicize the world economic system that was consolidated after 1763, largely under British, and later American leadership. Without diminishing the centrality of the European theatre of the war, the alternative global projects that the war helped extinguish or integrate remain mostly outside the frame.

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