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“Demilitarization in the Contemporary World”, University of Illinois Press (2013)

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By Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark¹

Book reviews are often written when a book has very recently appeared. While it is now nearly four years since this edited volume appeared, the review argues that the book deserves continued attention and discussion and that it can function as a source of inspiration for many years to come. There are many reasons for this assertion. Firstly, as argued by the editor of the book, ‘[d]emilitarization merits both renewed attention and wide assessment as a significant, if still somewhat unexpected, facet of contemporary world history’ (p. 250). Secondly, the book indeed makes such a ‘wide assessment’, as it gathers several important contributions which address issues of demilitarization from the historical, sociological, international relations and political perspectives. Thirdly, the volume makes an important theoretical and conceptual choice in looking primarily at state-wide regimes of demilitarization, with a clear focus on Germany and Japan after the Second World War, in addition to several thought-provoking contributions on Central and Latin America. Finally, several of the contributions offer unique insights into the history and past and present-day politics of countries holding varying positions of importance in the contemporary world.

In addition to the introduction and the afterword written by the editor of the volume, professor of history Peter Stearns, we find four sections dedicated to: conceptual, sociological and historical perspectives (Chapter 1 by Andrew Bickford); demilitarization in Germany in two chapters (Chapter 2 by Jay Lockenour and Chapter 3 by Holger Nehring); demilitarization in Japan (Chapters 4-7 written respectively by Yoneyuki Sugita, Glenn Hook, Christopher Hughes and Stephanie Trombley Averill); and, finally, the fourth section of the book which deals with Central America and especially the case of Costa Rica in a comparative and contradistinctive mode (Chapter 8 on Costa Rica and Honduras

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by Kirk Bowman, and Chapter 9 on the role of a pendulum between militarization and demilitarization in the Central American Civil Wars by Philip J. Williams and J. Mark Ruhl).

The book is meant to compensate for the fact that ‘history tends to privilege war and war makers’ while less attention is paid by historians in general to ‘commitment to peace or innovations that seek peace’ and ‘peace history’, unless, ‘of course, like the famous Pax Romana, they depend on a strong military infrastructure’ (p. 2). Reference is then made to international law and Oppenheim’s work from 1906 defining demilitarization on the basis of agreement between states and the fact that ‘anachronistically, demilitarization may refer to recurrent practice by states that are victorious in war to require a reduction in military capacity from their defeated rival without any regional specifications’ (p. 3). Many of the cases explored are, indeed, country-wide imposed demilitarization regimes coupled to strong presence by the armed forces of the victorious powers, in this case the United States. In this sense, there is no anachronism occurring when the notion of demilitarization is employed in these cases, but rather an expansion and deepening of imposed demilitarization regimes. Such expansion and deepening have a profound impact not only upon military presence and capacity as such, but also on the constitutional profile as well as the fundamental political choices of the countries and regions concerned. This account of countrywide effects of demilitarization follows the lines of an encompassing conceptualisation of the demilitarization – militarization continuum as offered by Bickford in a previous chapter of the book. Imposed demilitarization can be coupled with imposed militarization affecting the ‘desired forms and visions of the state and the moral universe of the state’, argues Bickford (p. 23).

One of the intriguing, but tacit, themes of the book is the difficulty to draw a clear line between imposition and choice in the cases studied. Not only is there often at play an entanglement of political, historical, military, legal and economic aspects, as amply illustrated by Kirk Bowman’s discussion of the case of the 1957 constitutional reform and elections in Honduras. There is also the contingency and complexity of self-perceptions, identity formation processes and the role of civil society, as in the case of Germany, illustrated in three distinct chapters (respectively by Bickford, Lockenour and Nehring) as well as in a more comparative chapter looking at the linkages between demilitarization and democratization (Trombley Averill). This link is also an important element in the analysis on El Salvador and Guatemala by Williams and Ruhl. While the armed forces dominated political life in these countries for much of the 20th century, demilitarizing processes were part of the peace accords negotiated and monitored by the United Nations, for example with a multilateral involvement which ended the civil wars (p. 239).

The role of multilateral involvement is otherwise not much discussed in the book; one

obvious possibility would, for instance, have been with regard to the role of NATO in Germany, including the discourses and processes leading first to NATO membership for West Germany in 1955 and then to the expansion of the geographical scope of that membership by including East Germany in 1990. This is, by necessity, only marginally mentioned in the chapter by Nehring, who focuses on the roles of peace movements in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s.

Only the case of Costa Rica, an exceptional case – all the more so since it was located within the remit of the US Monroe doctrine – deviates from this paradigmatic understanding of what demilitarization is all about, either as the outcome of agreement or as an imposed regime. Demilitarization is most often treated as a deviation from a paradigm; the paradigm, which is also an intersubjective belief, that strong militaries have always been there and are 'necessary and normal' (Bowman, p. 209). For example, Costa Rica initiated its constitutional self-proclaimed demilitarization in 1948 through a unilateral act, behind which, we learn, are found complex factors and processes.

Several of the chapters make materials and knowledge that is otherwise difficult to obtain available to the wider public. Yoneyuki Sugita gives a fascinating account of the multiple stages and contradictions of US-Japanese relations in the aftermath of World War II. The interviews used as empirical materials in the case of Costa Rica and in Germany, including East Germany (by Bowman and Bickford respectively) offer us insights which can hardly be obtained through other research methodologies. Max, a former East German army artillery officer, described the enduring experience in an interview conducted in 1999, almost a decade after the reunification of Germany: 'Whenever I go on vacation, I still study the lay of the land, where the hills and trees are, and try to decide where I would place my artillery battery, where I would place my observation post, and where I would place my command post. I still think this way, and I can't help it' (p. 27).

Several of the contributions in the book address the constitutional role of the military and of the legal and political relation between what is military and what is civilian. Constitutional revisions and innovations are recurring themes in the book and evolve often along the tensions shaped by the relationship between domestic legislative processes on the one hand and international involvement and international law on the other (see the insightful discussion on the Japanese constitution and its interpretation by Hughes).

Surprising connections appear for the reader, as when Philip C. Jessup, now known as a great American international lawyer and adviser during the Bretton Woods negotiations, then US ambassador-at-large in Japan, argued in 1949, so during the time of the occupation of Japan by the allies, that the establishment of US bases in Japan would be 'politically acceptable if Japan asked the United States to retain US security forces' (p. 92). Issues of speed and timing are crucial throughout the analysed examples of militarization and demilitarization.

The editor of the book offers in the afterword the outline of possible future research agendas. He argues for three main possible tracks (pp. 249-250). Continuity and change in the different countries and parts of the world need to be monitored and discussed regularly. Comparison of cases is another needed methodology to this effect. Finally, increased attention to the geography of demilitarization is the final analytical track identified by professor Stearns. Those are the tracks prioritised by a historian, but there are many other possibilities and arguments to deduct from the book.

The role of law in general, and of constitutions in particular, in efforts of demilitarization/militarization becomes clear to the reader in many of the book chapters. Future deepened analysis would need to have such an agenda explicitly outlined and bring together lawyers and social scientists from many other disciplines. Historically informed and comparative constitutional history is becoming an increasingly urgent project for us to understand and reflect upon the conditions and contingencies of democratization and the role of the military-civilian nexus in it. Deepened conceptual analysis of what is 'military' and what is 'civilian' and their many links to power, law and the idea of sovereignty could open new avenues allowing for future remoulding of this idea of sovereignty and move us beyond 'heteronomy', as has been argued by Dieter Grimm.²

Furthermore, analysis of the processes, actors and effects of the early years after the second World War, leading to the chilling effects of the Cold War, becomes a priority as the generations who lived through these periods of history are growing older, but their experiences and efforts have not always been passed over to younger generations. Cold War studies are now becoming common features in various academic institutions, and should encompass the demilitarization-militarization-democratization dimension. Finally, while this volume focuses on state-wide militarization-demilitarization trajectories, it is argued that limited geographic demilitarization, today often situated on islands, such as in Svalbard/Spitzbergen, the Åland Islands, or in the Ionian and Aegean seas, while limited geographically, have equally profound effects in the mind-sets, politics and legal universes of the countries concerned.

What is an essential conclusion of the book is formulated by Peter Stearns in the afterword: '[D]emilitarization in recent history involves significant and deliberate innovation' (p. 249). The same obviously holds true for the opposite, militarization, too. As we learn through the book, while underlying factors can evolve slowly and barely perceptively, the implementation of radical changes can occur with great speed.

² Dieter Grimm, *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Originally in German, *Suveränität*, Berlin University Press, 2009).

