upon the globe, as if demonstrating its flattened poles, and a Venetian painting by Pietro Longhi: titled “The Geography Lesson.” Here a young woman holds a measuring compass to a globe, with an atlas splayed open on the floor. Withers suggests that “the globes on display are not instructional-conversational pieces but the swelling breasts of the young woman herself, as the standing instructor’s gaze reveals. Here, partially, glimpsed, lies a forbidden ‘merryland.’ The globe at once material and symbolic is an instrument of secular learning, of Newtonian principles, and an object of private desire” (p. 232). This particular interpretation of the painting is consistent with the whole book’s attempt to represent the omnipresence of geographical ways of thinking in the eighteenth century, including the philosophical and metaphorical. At the same time, alongside his attention to the scientific and material aspects of Enlightenment geography, Withers clearly recognizes that sometimes a globe is just a globe.

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With historians increasingly examining the relationship between military service and citizenship in different European countries, it is a timely moment for Thomas Hippler’s transnational study comparing the very different experiences of France and Prussia in the period dominated by the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Both countries turned from small professional armies to systems of conscription linking army service to rights of citizenship. Each did so against a backdrop of war when the state was endangered and the call to arms was associated with national liberation. It was a way of channeling or, in the author’s words, “appropriating” popular violence, and so redefining the relationship of the individual, the state and the nation (p. 3). That both France and Prussia underwent something of a nationalist awakening in these years gives the comparison plausibility: France through its identification with the revolution and the cause of the sovereign people, Prussia through romanticism and the spread of a German cultural identity. The comparison seems strong, and is supported by official discourses, philosophical and literary texts, and the writings of army officers involved in the conflict. It is reinforced by the history of conscription in the two countries and by their tendency to learn and to borrow from each other ever since the Seven Years’ War.

And yet, the circumstances in which the two states opted for conscription were starkly different. France was a revolutionary nation that spoke in the name of its people, whereas Prussia was an autocratic monarchy, its institutions dominated by a landowning Junker elite and infused with a militarist tradition. France declared its people to be citizens, offered the Rights of Man, and then demanded duties and services from them on the basis of their citizenship. Prussia imposed conscription before rewarding its conscripts with rights derived from their service. Both nations had a history to overcome of periods when militia service was opposed and resisted by large sections of the population or when mercenary regiments were feared by civilians and denounced by pamphleteers as violent and immoral. Public confidence had to be rebuilt after centuries of distrust, and it is striking that many of the intellectual arguments for conscription were about morality and the relationship of the army to society rather than about military effectiveness. It was assumed that citizen-soldiers would identify with their families and civil communities, the communities to which, when the war or campaign was over, they would ineluctably return. In Joseph Servan’s writings of 1780 we already see the figure of the soldat-laboureur so beloved of nineteenth-century French military reformers, while in Prussia the claim was repeatedly made that mercenaries were indifferent to the country’s goals and did not see their opponent as their enemy.

Both countries embraced an almost philosophical belief in the benefits of conscription. The French stressed the value of a spontaneity and ideological commitment that led men to rush into battle and throw themselves at the enemy—the idealized representation that left traces in French battlefield tactics and in the enduring republican myth of the levée en masse. For their part, Prussian military theorists sought to replace French élan with strict and repeated drill that would discipline them into a machine-like obedience. Bravery, they argued, could only be acquired “mechanically,” and could not be “the effect of an ecstatic identification of the individual with a community but passively cultivated through habit and obedience” (p. 137). By the 1870s in France, following the debacle of the Franco-Prussian War, there were many who agreed.

But Hippler’s purpose in this book is not just to trace the intersecting histories of conscription in two neighboring European states, or to investigate the soldier’s experience of conscription through letters, diaries, and memoirs. The book’s principal claims to originality lie elsewhere, in the examination of the necessary tensions that exist between democracy and authority, and the perceived dangers that a conscript army posed to society as a whole. One of the major debates in both France and Germany was about the longer-term effects of conscription. Should it imply the militarization of society or the socialization of the military? And what role should be given to popular enthusiasm, the right to insurrection that the French had listed among the fundamental rights of man? Prussia was always more resistant to this, seeing it as an invitation to anarchy and disorder. Yet we find traces of it during the Wars of Liberation, especially in the raising of the Landwehr by the East Prussian estates. This was not, as Hippler shows, a simple case of popular arming. Rather it should be seen as a compromise “between the insur-
rectional popular arming and partisan war of the Landsturm on the one hand and the standing army on the other” (p. 205).


This work by Philip B. Minehan is one of the most ambitious reconstructions extant of European history between the 1930s and the 1940s. The author provides a comparative analysis of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the ethnic and religious conflicts in Yugoslavia before and during World War II, and the civil war in Greece between communist and anticomunist forces, following the liberation of the country from German occupation (1944–1949). Minehan maintains that the ideological and social conflicts and the open wars that swept these three countries between 1936 and 1949 were manifestations of a broader international war, of which Spain, Greece, and Yugoslavia represented the battlefields.

What was this war? In the author’s opinion, the struggle for power between liberal capitalism, Soviet communism, and fascism/Nazism exploded between the 1930s and the 1940s, peaking during World War II (p. 5). In this international conflict, the civil wars that broke out in the three European countries should not be seen as domestic and independent events but as phenomena strongly conditioned by the evolving dynamics of the international situation. In Minehan’s estimation, before the 1930s in none of the three countries were the social, economic, and political conditions such as to foster revolutionary change, despite their strong internal tensions. In order to draw this conclusion, the author devotes the first part of his book to reconstructing the societies and state forms of Spain, Greece, and Yugoslavia before World War II.

The description of the economic and social context between the early twentieth century and the 1930s highlights strong similarities between the three countries, all characterized by backward and poor socioeconomic structures and by a great wealth divide between the privileged and the low classes. The situation of the public system was marked by the weakness of the liberal and democratic models, by frequent military coups d’etat that aimed to establish authoritarian regimes (Primo De Rivera in Spain in 1923, General Theodoros Pangalos in Greece in 1926), or to strengthen the centralistic absolutism of the monarchic power (King Alexander’s coup in Yugoslavia in 1929). All this occurred in contexts characterized by severe ethnic and nationalist unrest (Croats against Serbs in Yugoslavia, Basques and Catalans in Spain). However, despite this destabilizing combination of factors, which seemed to mark (although in different degrees) the three Mediterranean countries in the 1930s, Minehan affirms that neither in Spain, nor in Yugoslavia, nor in Greece was the pressure for radical change such as to justify the breaking out of revolutionary civil wars so devastating and long-lasting as those that flared up between 1936 and 1949.

What led to the radicalization of domestic conflicts, exasperating their violence and prolonging their duration, was the intervention of external forces, which Minehan identifies with the great powers that at that time were struggling to establish their hegemony in Europe: on one side, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, on the other side, the USSR, and lastly the liberal powers, such as the United States and Great Britain. Without the support of the German and Italian military forces, as Minehan maintains, the Francoist coup would have exhausted itself, or at least it would not have led to the long and harsh Spanish civil war, which was also fostered by Soviet support as well as by that, much milder, of the democratic countries.

As the author affirms, it is not coincidental that among the main actors responsible for the radicalization of conflicts in Spain, Yugoslavia, and Greece were the communist parties and their militias, increasingly more organized and efficient than their allies and rivals, as the cases of the Communist Fifth Regiment for the defence of Madrid and of ELAS (the Greek People’s Liberation Army) amply show. Such forces, in fact, were fighting not only for historical motives, but also on the fuel of external ideological projects unconnected with the class and ethnic conflicts that were shaking Spain, Greece, and Yugoslavia, and which were manipulated according to the schemes of international politics dictated by the Moscow government.

Thus, even the victory or the defeat of revolutionary forces was not determined by the mere equilibrium of internal forces, but by the support of external powers, which decided on Francisco Franco’s victory in Spain, Josip Broz Tito’s eventual triumph in Yugoslavia, and the final defeat of the attempted communist coup by ELAS in Greece, with the success of the anticomunist repression backed by British troops in 1949 (pp. 246–251). There are no doubts about the importance of such observations on the relevance of international support as the decisive factor of some European revolutionary situations between the two World Wars. In this respect, Minehan’s book certainly provides a very stimulating, comprehensive interpretation of the connection between internal events and the developments in the international context of twentieth-century European history.

The book, however, has also questionable aspects, and the author’s main argument raises some doubts. In the first place, one can legitimately question the opportunity of schematically comparing the social, economic, and cultural conditions of three countries characterized by extremely different historical developments, as the author himself recognizes (p. 36). Despite a number of similarities concerning the political developments, such deep differences greatly complicate the overall picture; however, they are less stressed and accounted for than they should be, perhaps also due to the