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## BOOK REVIEWS

OSTERHAMMEL, JÜRGEN. *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Patrick Camiller. Princeton University Press, Princeton [etc.] 2014. xxii, 1167 pp. \$39.95. doi:10.1017/S002085901500053X

“To know all there is to know is not the key qualification of the world historian or global historian”, Jürgen Osterhammel points out in the Introduction to his 1,000-page tome. While world historians must “try to keep abreast of the best research” in particular specializations, for him the crucial point is to “have a feel for proportions, contradictions, and connections as well as a sense of what may be typical and representative” (p. xvii). As uncontroversial as this statement may seem at the beginning of a book that promises to offer “a centralized organization of issues and viewpoints, of material and interpretations” of the global nineteenth century (p. xvi), its limits become clearer as one reads on.

There is a lot to read, of course. The eighteen chapters of the book are organized into three distinct parts: Approaches, Panoramas, and Themes. The three chapters of Part 1 present some of the general concerns of the project: “Memory and Self-observation”, “Time”, and “Space”. Part 2, rather like the nineteenth-century form of panoramic painting, offers wide-angle views of eight major “spheres of reality” (p. xxi). Two competent chapters on “Mobilities” and “Living Standards” inaugurate this section, deftly weaving up-to-date statistical figures and good old social histories. Then appear three pairs of chapters: “Cities” and “Frontiers”; “Imperial Systems and Nation-States” and “International Orders, Wars, Transnational Movements”; and finally, “Revolutions” and “The State”. Arranged in this manner, the chapters work through a tactful logic of contrasts and connections, mixing narrative descriptions with point-wise summaries of broad trends, typological comparisons (a very teaching-friendly one between empires and nation-states on pp. 422–424), and historical variants. This style is maintained in the relatively shorter, supposedly more analytical, and certainly less comprehensive seven chapters of Part 3. To describe them in a makeshift and somewhat imprecise way, they proceed from the material-infrastructure themes (“Energy and Industry”, “Labor”, and “Networks”), through the societal-institutional themes (“Hierarchies” and “Knowledge”), to the ideological-cultural ones (“Civilization and Exclusion”, and “Religion”). The distribution of themes across the three parts is not explained. In fact, it will be a source of relief to some and of disappointment to others that Osterhammel does not explicitly advance an overarching proposition about the century: “I doubt that it is possible, with the historian’s cognitive tools, to fix the dynamic of an epoch in a single schema” (p. xix).

However, even the most disappointed reader cannot be but impressed with the breadth of Osterhammel’s erudition. His acquaintance with a wide range of region-specific, source-based historical research across the world is exceptional. He is usually cautious in formulating generalizations, sensitive in tracing connections, and often insightful in making comparisons. For the most part, his elegant narrative absorbs the shocks of what could otherwise have been a very bouncy ride between the macro and the micro. Above all, one must admiringly acknowledge the sheer courage, along with the immense academic labour, that this book embodies.

We all understand that it is almost impossible in a work of this kind to cater evenly to readers' individual interests and preferences. Given the absence of a clearly articulated central thesis, it is not productive to ask why the book contains so little on legal regimes, financial speculations, and sports – to pick three random examples – compared to what Osterhammel identifies as his “personal idiosyncrasies”: animals, opera, and international relations. It is also understandable that specialists may disagree with the author's readings or evaluations of certain historiographical situations. The ease with which he blends Frederick Turner's understanding of frontier with Owen Lattimore's (p. 329), for example, may be unacceptable to many. Some will again be irritated by the way that he entirely sidesteps Benedict Anderson's influential arguments about nationalism and print-capitalism along with the powerful postcolonial critiques by Partha Chatterjee in India or Claudio Lomnitz in Mexico. Sympathetic readers may even be ready to overlook small (and very rare) mix-ups of facts or glaring omissions. The Australian “bushrangers”, for instance, were not “suppressed by government action after 1820” (p. 330); in fact, they flourished in the approximate period from 1860 to 1880. Also, it will raise a few eyebrows that Marie Curie or Sigmund Freud or the character of Sherlock Holmes are not even mentioned once in a book that rightly refuses to stay within the formal confines of “the calendar century” (p. 47). More difficult is to explain the absolute invisibility of Cuvier and Wöhler, aluminum and cocaine, or for that matter, *Ivanhoe* and *Punch*.

However, certain silences are more telling, more expensive, and more structural than others. The complete erasure of the question of sexuality in a gigantic volume on the nineteenth century is bewildering, to say the least. There is a quick and explicit acknowledgement in the Preface of the “serious drawback” of the book's “pervasive disregard of gender issues” (p. xiii). Are these issues not adequately “nontrivial” or well-researched, to use the evaluative criteria introduced by Osterhammel himself (p. xii)? Or, is there an implicit logic to Osterhammel's particular “feel for proportions, contradictions, and connections”? One may not get rid of this disturbing thought as quickly as Osterhammel rushes past certain possibilities of world history. Right at the beginning, Osterhammel warns the reader that he is “perhaps a little more ‘Eurocentrically’ inclined than [C.A.] Bayly” (p. xvii). The implications of this candid admission go far beyond the nonchalance with which it is made. As far as I can discern, Osterhammel's Eurocentric inclination is organized in, at least, four different levels.

The first one is, of course, the familiar tyranny of European categories. Is it not sad that even in a twenty-first century world history that aims to surmount all “forms of naïve cultural self-reference” (p. xx), not a single non-European category makes entry into the analytical repertoire? Elaborate discussion and repeated invocations of “*Sattelzeit*” (“transition period”; pp. 59–63, 75, and 457) in the Koselleckean tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* (“history of concepts”) go on; whereas “*al-nabda*” (usually translated as “the awakening”), one of the most central categories of periodization across the west Asian and north African Arab world since the nineteenth century does not even manage a citation. When on p. 351 a non-European category of periodization does secure a throwaway reference in the context of southern African “*Mfecane*” (contentiously translated as “the crushing”), it is taken as settled, purely descriptive, and bereft of any analytical charge, in spite of a rich, alive, and critical academic tradition in the continent that argues otherwise.

Indeed, the second level is historiographical. Explicitly and understandably, Osterhammel builds upon “the best research” from different parts of the world which, he rightly reminds us, “is not always necessarily the most recent” (p. xx). It is important to identify which

historiographies make the world's-best list and which do not, and why. I find it curious that Osterhammel thinks that "it is time to decenter the Industrial Revolution" (p. 637) while he is not ready to decenter Turner's expansionist frontier thesis. Much in the manner of older comparative histories, he continues to apply Turner in Africa or in South America as the discursive benchmark, completely ignoring the well-known critical displacements of the Turnerian schema in, say, Igor Kopytoff's histories of "the internal African frontier", or in Mary Louise Pratt's formulation of "contact zone". Again, in an overlapping field of research, Willem van Schendel and James Scott's much-debated thesis on non-state space (*Zomia*) in south and south-east Asia is not recognized by Osterhammel. The collective intervention of Subaltern Studies, which has not only radically transformed the problematic of the nineteenth century in south Asian history, but also left formidable methodological impact on historiographies across the Global South, is similarly bypassed. The fate of Caribbean historians such as Verene Shepherd or Hilary Beckles is no different. Osterhammel's disregard for any historiographical position that has attempted to place popular culture, experiential questions, non-state space, and non-European modes of modernity centrally in the nineteenth century seems more than accidental.

Sometimes his Midas touch quickly takes the political-intellectual life out of such historical texts to leave them as inert nuggets of empirical gold, as his cursory treatments of C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins* (1938) (p. 99), or David Chidester's *Savage Systems* (Charlottesville, VA, 1996) (p. 887n) will testify. But mostly he is just silent. Even the Australian "history wars" about the nature of European colonization over the long nineteenth century leave no trace in the book, although a curt line on p. 125 does say that "[i]t is likely that just before 1788 some 1.1 million Aborigines were living in all parts of Australia; by 1860 there were no more than 340,000". In fact, however strange it may sound to the readers of Michael Connor or Lauren Benton, only once the doctrine of *terra nullius* finds a mention in these eighteen chapters, and that too in a sufficiently distanced description of its being a "seventeenth-century Puritan doctrine" (p. 327). One cannot stop suspecting that there is a method in the apparently erratic mix of ad- and omissions.

The suspicion is deepened at the third level by the spatial strategy of the book. Historiographical interpretations are strategically emphasized in certain parts of the world so as to create the effect that complex, seminal, and debate-worthy processes unfolded in the nineteenth century only in those regions. The rest of the world, by implication, either fitted into these types or were different in such a simple and insignificant way that critical analysis can be happily substituted by flat description or a whistle-stop tour. Evidently, there is a hierarchy here – almost a nineteenth-century hierarchy – that can justify itself only by referring to its own "feel for proportions". In the chapters of the third part, which are admittedly "more selective" (p. 637), it becomes even easier for Osterhammel to exclude whole regions and entire sets of issues which may challenge this "asymmetrical reference density" (p. 911), his own name for nineteenth-century cultural imperialism. I agree with the author that it is indeed more sophisticated than that "crude term".

Quite like the nineteenth century he wants to portray, his work too is more inclusive in its territorial spread than the older Eurocentric canons, more generous in spirit, more ambivalent in gesture, and more ready to learn from outside Europe – but only insofar as we all agree that on the whole, unlike the eighteenth or twentieth century, "[t]he history of the nineteenth century was made in and by Europe" (p. xx). It is unsurprising, therefore, that the readers will never encounter even the names of Yoruba or Quechua anywhere in this dazzling display of scholarship; that the polity of Asante will be mentioned only

fleetingly in a broad context of slave trade (p. 153), and the entire significance of the nineteenth-century Andean highlands will be reduced to their incredible fortune of having been associated with Alexander von Humboldt's "extraordinary" expedition "which took the German naturalist to heights at which no European had ever before stayed for long" (p. 376).

At the final, semantic level, then, the moral to take home is that "history prefers to remember the victors" (p. 916). Having self-consciously purged the histories which try to do otherwise, having explicitly refused to ask the question "Why Europe?" (p. xxi), and having skillfully avoided the thorny question of "modernity" (p. 905), Osterhammel, in spite of his distaste for rash generalizations, in the last pages of this monumental volume finally, if only with a couple of qualifications, pronounces the nineteenth century to have been "a century of emancipation" (pp. 915–918). "For whom?", it may not be very polite to ask.

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BECKERT, SVEN. *Empire of Cotton. A Global History*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2015. xxii, 615 pp. Ill. \$35.00. (Paper: \$18.95.) doi:10.1017/S0020859015000553

Beckert's global history of the rise and fall of the European-dominated empire of cotton is, above all, about the march of capitalism through history. Cotton was not the only the crop to have accompanied this journey, as cereals or sugar were prominent as well, but the author's justification of his choice for this fibre seems, to me, fairly convincing. Cotton accelerated global capitalism: through a unique confluence of mercantile logistics and technological skills, north-west England was catapulted to the economically most advanced stage. There is some irony of history here, because northern Europe was rather peripheral to cotton until its trading companies started to import cloth from India. In this part of the world most people wore monochrome woollens or linen. Southern Europe was a slightly different story since contacts with the expansive Arabic world had acquainted Spain and Italy with cotton centuries before. Thanks to the busy trade route from Venice to Augsburg, cotton crossed the Alps, where the Fuggers became prominent textile industrialists. But this was all rather insignificant compared to the flow of cotton goods from India to Europe in the eighteenth century.

While India and China were still by far the world's most important industrial producers, peripheral Europe succeeded in changing the trade patterns through superior military power. The argument is well-known: thanks to the military-fiscal state, as well as maritime and financial technology, Europe was able to control territories all over the world, and eventually to recast the web of global connections and to position itself at the centre of this