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Book review: the politics of anti-Westernism in Asia: visions of world order in pan-Islamic and pan-Asian thought

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***The politics of anti-Westernism in Asia: visions of world order in pan-Islamic and pan-Asian thought*, By Cemil Aydin. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Pp. xi +299. Hardback £27.50/US\$40.00, ISBN 978-0-231-13778-2.**

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The book's comprehensiveness is definitely its first merit, and it reveals Woolf's deep commitment to a *global* presentation of historical writing. In his preface, Woolf explains that he decided to write this book because he intends to exercise 'a conviction that students ought to be exposed to the "historical cultures" of other civilizations than their own'. He strongly believes that 'there is a story to be told about the development of historical thought, historical writing and the modern historical discipline, and that it relates directly to some of the larger movements of world history (in particular the global engagement of different peoples and cultures over several millennia)' (p. xix). This commitment to global history and historiography is rare among many historians even today, as the number of people interested in historiographical study is small in the first place. In addition, since the late nineteenth century, when the study of historiography began to receive attention from historians, the primary concern has been to summarize and evaluate the works of historians in Euro-America. This Eurocentric emphasis has led to many of its practitioners looking down upon, if not downright ignoring, the practices of history elsewhere. If some of them attempted a comparative approach, such as J. H. Plumb, a Cambridge historian who authored *The Death of the Past* (1969; 2004), their purported goal seemed to create an 'other', against which the European historical consciousness was pitted and extolled. In Plumb's case, the 'other' was the Chinese tradition of historical writing, which, incidentally, had been preserved as arguably the largest body of historical literature before history became a profession in modern times. If Chinese historiography was no match for the European experience, other cultures fared worse. The people in Africa, for example, were considered as history-less, as were the South Asians, despite their splendid and superb cultural achievement in many other areas.

Viewed in this context, we can probably appreciate more fully what Woolf has done for all of us as members of the historical communities across the world. He has demonstrated a genuine interest in *all* historical cultures in the world and made a painstaking effort to present them fairly and truthfully. I cannot delve into the many fascinating details found in the book, but suffice it to mention just some of the chapter headings to prove Woolf's effort. For instance, Chapter 6 deals with historical writings mostly in the eighteenth century, in which the European Enlightenment would have figured centrally in other texts. But as its heading, 'Progress and history in the Eurasian Enlightenment', shows,

Woolf instead calls attention to the accomplishments in regions and continents in addition to and outside Europe. The following chapter, as one might expect, is devoted to the nineteenth century. Dubbed 'the century of history' before, it was customarily the place to celebrate the accomplishment of European historians in writing national history, arguably the most representative genre in modern historiography. However, that chapter's heading reads 'The broken mirror: nationalism, romanticism and professionalization in the nineteenth-century West'. While giving due credit to the boon that professionalization has brought to the study of history, Woolf also reminds us of the detriments occasioned by the alliance between history writing and national governments. Indeed, if history writing did advance markedly in the nineteenth century, what historians scored was perhaps only a Pyrrhic victory.

In sum, this is a valuable book, marking a worthwhile attempt to re-imagine and re-present the study of historiography. It deserves to be read not only by history students taking courses on historiography and historical methods but also by all practising historians interested in knowing more about their profession.

The politics of anti-Westernism in Asia: visions of world order in pan-Islamic and pan-Asian thought

By Cemil Aydin. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Pp. xi+299. Hardback £27.50/US\$40.00, ISBN 978-0-231-13778-2.

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Cemil Aydin was researching Japanese pan-Asianism when, he tells us, amid the flurry of public angst about the roots of a supposed 'Muslim rage against the West' that ensued in the wake of 11 September 2001, his attention was drawn to parallels between these contemporary debates and earlier ones focused on anti-Westernism in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century (p. 1). He positions the important book that emerges from this nexus in part as a challenge to two kinds of explanation that have been put forward in recent years for this putative 'Muslim rage'. One set of arguments has it that the problem is rooted in religion, as either an expression of an atavistic rage at 'Christian-dominated globalization'

or as a product of a basic incompatibility between some identifiable set of Islamic values and an opposing set of quintessentially modern, Western counterparts. The alternative position is that anti-Western sentiments are the 'natural' response of persons and peoples long subjected to colonialism and neo-imperialism (p. 1). Aydin's contribution to breaking through these stale debates, which are so often flawed at the level of the most basic assumptions that underlie them, is to offer a comparative perspective on political antipathies directed at a variously imagined 'West'. He achieves this through mutually informative discussions of anti-Western critiques elaborated in the context of pan-Islamic and pan-Asianist thinking from the 1840s up to the end of the Second World War.

The structuring of the book is primarily chronological. The author traces a generation of Ottoman and Japanese reformist thinkers from the first half of the nineteenth century who tended to imagine an Occident built on liberalism, civilization, and Enlightenment, and aspired to promote such values within their own polities. Towards the end of the century, he contends, racial and religious particularisms that lurked behind Western claims to universal humanistic values encouraged a turn to pan-Islamic and pan-Asian solidarities as 'the means to attain a new world order in which regional blocks ... would regain their autonomy and dignity from Western hegemony as equal members of the global commonwealth of modernity'. This vision was often still framed with reference to 'the proclaimed enlightenment values of the West' (p. 69). From here on in, Aydin traces the vicissitudes of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism through a chronology marked by further blows to the Eurocentric world order with first the Japanese military victory over the Russians in 1905 and then World War One; the Ottoman state's wartime embrace of pan-Islamism as a basis for mobilization, swiftly followed by the collapse of its empire; unofficial pan-Asianism against the background of the Anglo-Japanese alliance; the rise of new visions of world order offered by socialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and the Wilsonian principle of self-determination; and the endorsement of pan-Asianism from the 1930s through to the end of World War Two by a Japanese regime seeking to legitimize its own regional imperialism.

Key points that the author wishes to highlight along the way include the mutability of 'civilizational geographies', not least the category 'the West' as applied by actors who see themselves as standing outside the entity it denotes. He also wishes to draw

out the suggestion that, where critiques of a Eurocentric world order have been mounted, they have often coexisted with or even been constructed upon frameworks drawn from Western discourses. Such frameworks include not only the fundamental East-West dichotomy itself but also certain liberal post-Enlightenment ideals that played an important role in grounding critiques of Western realities. In the contexts in which he is studying, Aydin argues, 'anti-Westernism often reflected the global legitimacy crisis of the international system rather than a clash of civilisations' – a key driver of the phenomenon was not a primordial revulsion at Western values so much as dissatisfaction at 'the violation of so-called Western values by the Western powers' (p. 203).

As this overview suggests, notwithstanding the title of the book and the uneasy equivalence that it sets up between anti-Westernism, on the one hand, and pan-Islamism or pan-Asianism, on the other, the author's ambitions are in differing senses both narrower and broader than a consideration of 'the politics of anti-Westernism in Asia'. They are broader insofar as his treatment of the histories of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism goes far beyond the anti-Western stances taken by representatives of these modes of thinking. This is arguably a book about the rise and fall of certain transnational political imaginaries – which lend themselves to the identification and critique of a Western other as part of their own processes of self-construction – as much as it is about antipathies towards an imagined West.

At the same time, Aydin's goals are narrower than the book's title might imply, in that the anti-Westernisms that he discusses are of course of a very particular kind. His spurning of abstraction in favour of historicized consideration of particular critiques of an imagined West, grounded in particular intellectual and political conjunctures, is a strength. However, the tight focus excludes a great many modes of politics that might otherwise be readily understood as relevant to the puzzle that he seeks to tackle. While Aydin's nineteenth-century Ottoman reformists were celebrating Western liberal ideals, for example, 1858 saw the murders of twenty-two people – Europeans and their protégés – in riots in Ottoman-controlled Jidda, possibly linked to political and economic rivalries between these outsiders and local elites. Episodes of this kind might perhaps be dismissed as expressions of mere 'anti-foreignism' rather than anti-Westernism, the latter requiring a coherently articulated conception of an abstract Occident towards which antipathies

might be directed. But something important is surely lost in so exacting a definition of anti-Westernism, and it is surely a limitation of Aydin's particular brand of global intellectual history – populated by academics, politicians, bureaucrats, and poets, and with its leaning towards idealism and elitism – that it can make little room for such alternative antipathies, extemporized and acted out at a local level in relation not only to cultural and political ideals but also to the brute forces of global capitalist expansion.

Such points do not in the least detract from the fact that, taken on its own terms, this is an impressive work. Aydin can count himself one of a fairly select circle in his ability confidently to navigate the histories of his two chosen transnational political imaginaries with thoroughgoing reference to secondary and primary materials in Turkish and Japanese, and other languages besides. The comparative perspective that this affords him is quite unique, and important. Furthermore, neat chapter summaries and the author's lucid style help to ensure that a text that covers a great deal of ground remains digestible and easy to navigate.

Die Souveränität der Schwachen: Lateinamerika und der Völkerbund, 1920–1936

By Thomas Fischer. *Beiträge zur Europäischen Überseegeschichte* 98. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012. Pp 459. 39 b/w illustrations, 2 tables. Paperback €68.00, ISBN 978-3-515-10077-9.

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Thomas Fischer's *Die Souveränität der Schwachen* is a long, well-researched book of international history that traces Latin America's role in the League of Nations from its foundation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 to its dissolution during the Second World War. Fischer offers a new look at the arena of global politics of the interwar years, in which Latin America initially constituted one-third of the membership of the League, but had limited power in the European-dominated organization. He convincingly uses Latin America's intertwined history with the United States to illustrate why their membership in the League of Nations – whose proclaimed goal was to protect the sovereignty and independence of its members, and to solve future conflicts through

peaceful resolution – was so important. Within the context of the organization, some of the stronger Latin American nations, such as Argentina and later Brazil and Mexico, used their limited power to provoke the European-dominated League to adhere to its own ideals, while the weaker Latin American nations, such as Cuba and Nicaragua, used the forum to demand protection from continual direct threats from the United States. As the United States policy toward Latin America changed with the proclamation of the Good Neighbor Policy by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, many Latin American nations felt that their membership in the League of Nations had become obsolete.

While the book title seems to suggest a homogenous Latin America, Fischer never presents the region as a monolithic bloc. Instead, he carefully evaluates attitudes and reactions individually, based on evidence from primary sources from archives in Latin America, Europe, and the United States, and evaluates a broad range of secondary sources to present a more complex picture. He makes clear that Latin America was divided by distinct socioeconomic needs, cultural compositions, and political developments and characterized by conflicts, competition, and diversity in perceptions and attitudes. This heterogeneity impeded regional unity within the League of Nations and thus decreased Latin America's political leverage. Although many attempts were made to create a more unified regional perspective in Geneva and to strengthen the continent's position vis-à-vis the United States (for example, by invoking nineteenth-century ideals such as *bolivarianismo* and *hispanidad*), unification efforts only had limited success. The incapability of Latin American delegates to collaborate on overarching regional goals, paired with their lack of diplomatic experience, led to the result that many Latin American nations that had placed high hopes on the League stopped believing in its effectiveness and eventually left it or retreated from it. However, as Fischer points out, participation in the organization taught Latin American delegates many lessons that helped them to present themselves better in global fora thereafter and taught them effective techniques such as strategic voting to reach their political goals.

Fischer examines the development of the League of Nations and the relationship between delegates from the Old and New Worlds by including global politics as well as country-specific political, socio-economic and cultural factors into his analysis. Fischer mainly looks at official interactions of the delegates during meetings, but he also allows a glance