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Book review: the Palgrave dictionary of transnational history: from the mid–19th century to the present day

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The Palgrave dictionary of transnational history: from the mid-19th century to the present day Edited by Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pp. xli + 1226. Hardback £160, ISBN: 978-1-403-99295-6.

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too would be dampened, by 1928, by the turn within, by the doctrine of building 'socialism in one country'. But, even as the USSR turned away, the ideological basis of proletarian internationalism took hold of those who had once been moved by or who used Wilson's 14 Points. They met in Brussels in 1928 under the auspices of the League Against Imperialism, a gathering that set them up to meet in Bandung in 1955. But that is another story.

The Palgrave dictionary of transnational history: from the mid-19th century to the present day

Edited by Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pp. xli + 1226. Hardback £160, ISBN: 978-1-403-99295-6.

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Approaching the publisher with the proposal for a dictionary of transnational history in 2004, Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier would have been under no illusions about the scale of the task that they were setting themselves and the particular challenges inherent in creating an original reference work of this kind without any close precedents from which to develop a blueprint. What they have achieved since that time is in itself a remarkable feat of transnational academia, marshalling over 350 contributors from 25 countries and gathering ideas for 1,500 topics before whittling the list back down, finishing with more than 400 entries on subjects requiring a grasp of countless languages and expertise in disciplines from history to ecology, anthropology to economics, politics to gender studies, and much else besides.

The resulting *Dictionary* is authoritative, accessible, and highly readable. Besides the expected list of entries and separate indexes organized by name and subject, navigation is also assisted by a functional series of tree diagrams mapping out the contents of the volume into related themes and sub-themes, particularly helpful for readers with a general interest in browsing rather than a specific topic in mind. Each article is accompanied by a list of cross-references to other related entries, as well as a short but gener-

ally very useful bibliography, offering an important jumping-off point for further research.

The editors take a catholic approach to the notion of transnational history, asserting in the introduction their interest lies in the full range of 'people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between polities and societies', consolidating and subverting national and other units in the process (p. xviii). The picture that emerges from the volume on the back of this inclusive ethos defies categorization according to any of the narrow sets of hopes or fears so often attached to perceptions and predictions of an increasingly interconnected globe, whether neo-liberal prophecies of global prosperity underpinned by free flows of capital across national borders; culturalist celebrations of mobility, hybridity, and forms of identity and agency liberated from arbitrary constraints imposed by states; or warnings of globalized economic exploitation and a sterility engendered by growing standardization and cultural homogenization. Instead, the mosaic formed by the wide-ranging entries – taking in topics from ecumenism to eugenics, love to language diplomacy, Maoism to McDonald's, the World Bank to world music – highlights dynamics that pull in all these different directions, underscoring the complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions that lurk behind buzzwords such as globalization and transnationalism.

The volume is similarly inclusive in the range of individual and collective actors that its editors and contributors are concerned to take into account, from multinational banks to peripatetic jazz musicians. The world it presents is not one in which nation-states themselves are necessarily withering into redundancy or even retreating to skeleton functions such as security and criminal justice. While the editors are at pains to emphasize that they do not view the *Dictionary* as a statement of any grand claims about the nature of transnational history, it seems fair to suggest that the vision that emerges has much in common with Ron Robin's characterization of polycentric historiography in his entry on historians and the nation-state, decentring rather than erasing the role of state institutions, acknowledging their historical significance without necessarily endorsing the nation-state framework (p. 491).

There is also a frequent and welcome emphasis on the intersection between the global and the local, reflecting a refusal to dissolve the latter into the former. This is coupled with an insistence that, as Saunier notes in his own entry on globalization, 'not everything transnational or even long-distance is

global'; that 'many if not most of the connections and circulations that cross national borders do not embrace the whole planet, they do not by nature add to the interdependence or integration of the world, nor do they connect to integration processes regardless of circumstances of birth' (p. 457). While the volume includes entries engaging critically with sweeping concepts such as modernity, Westernization, and globalization, the reader is more often directed towards the specificities of particular transnational connections and modestly encouraged to share in 'a passion for [the] nuts, bolts and pipes' (p. 462).

The *Dictionary* might have benefited had much of the material from Saunier's entry on globalization, which explicitly draws out many of these points, been incorporated into an extended introduction rather than being somewhat lost in the middle of the volume. It is here that the reader comes closest to finding a suggested framework for the study of transnational history, alongside some discussion of the lessons learnt in the process of compiling the volume.

Most other objections to the *Dictionary* are in fact anticipated by Iriye and Saunier in their introduction. They note that their approach to the project and their search for contributors was inevitably steered by factors such as 'personal availability, documentation facilities, visibility and command of the English language' – all impacted in turn by the inequalities and divisions that characterize contemporary academia at the global level – as well as the editors' own locations and existing networks (p. xix). Such issues surely played a part in ensuring that of the hundreds of contributors, less than a dozen are affiliated with institutions outside the Americas, western Europe, South Africa, and Australasia. This in turn no doubt helps to explain a general tendency to pay somewhat more attention to North America, Latin America, western Europe, Japan, and China than, say, Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

As the editors also underscore, there is a degree of variation in approach between the entries: some are theoretical in focus, others more empirical; some give an overview of topics that are frequently explored from a transnational perspective, while others seek to present a new angle on issues that are more often discussed with reference to particular national contexts; some are fully developed essays offering facts, figures, and detailed historical narratives, while others are more tentative and impressionistic forays into new territory. While this variety is

generally very welcome, making for a more readable and stimulating volume, it is also the case that certain entries are slightly less satisfying than others. The selection and division of topics in some cases also seems a little idiosyncratic (cappuccino rather than coffee; articles on Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam but not on, say, Hinduism or Judaism; a full entry on Argentinean psychoanalysis in addition to a separate piece on psychoanalysis; and so on).

Such minor caveats do not detract from the fact that the *Dictionary* is an important new resource, strongly recommended for libraries catering to students and scholars at all levels. The editors humbly assert that, as a novel reference volume in a research field that is itself in its relative infancy, the *Dictionary* is 'not intended to be canonical', that there is 'no disciplinary brief included in its text, subtext or paratext'. Rather, it represents 'a step, a prop for further research to develop' (p. xx). As first steps go, it is an impressive one.

The bottom billion: why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it

By Paul Collier. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 224. Paperback £9.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-537338-7.

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Paul Collier is an Africa expert and a former director of the Development Research Group of the World Bank. At the core of the argument in his bestselling *The bottom billion* are four 'traps' that lock Africa into poverty: the conflict trap, the natural resource trap, the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbours, and the trap of bad governance in a small country. Compared to what used to be 'development economics', Collier represents a new economic genre.

Collier and his colleagues Jeffrey Sachs and William Easterly – all former employees of the Washington Institutions – are the forefront of today's thinking about economic development. It is interesting to compare this literature to what, until about thirty years ago, was 'classical development economics'. In spite of a good track record of promoting economic development during the decades following