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The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950. By Vanessa Ogle. Harvard University Press, 2015. 288 pp. \$43.50.

The “global” part of Dr. Vanessa Ogle’s “global Europe” expertise is no gimmick, and her 2015 book *The Global Transformation of Time* truly showcases her commitment to global historiography. At the same time, she challenges the ready-made tales of globalized interconnectedness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by tracking changes in the perception of time. Ogle tells a story of both integration and fragmentation, a story that was written from the outside-in and the bottom-up despite the preconceived narratives of European national hegemony. In doing so, she rejects the supposed linear movement of the long nineteenth century from regional to national, from imperial to hyper-capitalist, and instead paints a picture of coexisting and competing temporal systems that were slow to reach mainstream adoption. For Ogle, time itself is a multifaceted metaphor: it captures rhythms, calendars, clocks, meridians, leisure, productivity, nature-based or abstract conceptions; it can also be a tool to measure “civilizational progress.” What all of these facets have in common is the idea that time is never neutral, absolute nor universal. It is however, always political. Ogle’s intervention is intelligent and thought-provoking: she argues that time reform is not a simple narrative of western domination, but rather a longer story of debate, adjustment and amalgamation of different worldviews.

One of the ways she reaches this thesis is by rebutting previous scholarship about globalization and nationalism to draw a fuller, more nuanced picture of time history. Her project came out during a time of peak interest in transnational studies in academia, which transpires in her theoretical framing: the idea of nation in the nineteenth century, she argues, was always imagined as “part of a global community of societies and other nations, all positioned in historical time” (7). One of her more original contributions, however, is how she complicates the supposed link between capitalism and nineteenth-century imperialism: she argues that a time-consciousness rooted in infrastructure predates railways, and that a commercial market society already existed in medieval Europe through the presence of churches’ bell towers. Ogle takes this argument further when she critiques E. P. Thompson. She adds several caveats to Thompson’s theory that European time reform was designed to maximize

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productivity and discipline society. She explains through the example of debates about daylight saving that mentalities were much more resistant than Thompson envisaged (71) and also continued into the twentieth century. She adds that non-Western, early-modern societies were already time-oriented and disciplined. In other words, the role of European capitalism in reforming time had been overemphasized, and she reaches this conclusion through her primary sources: “As convincing as such conjectures about controlling colonial subjects are on the surface, they do not hold up to the scrutiny of archival research.” (76). Therefore, the narrative of a swift global uniformity propelled by the West is not evident from local archives. Besides, where time reform was ultimately acted, it was driven as much to maximize “leisure time” as to maximize productivity.

“Time reform” takes shape as the choice of nation-wide “mean times” in chapter 1 and the adoption of “summer time” in chapter 2. Ogle historicizes these debates as deeply political and contentious. Focusing on Western Europe, she shows how dissimilar German, French and British perceptions and motives were. For example, while Germany focuses on social engineering, France saw time homogenization as a tool for industrial and scientific achievements. Therefore, the concept of Europe or Western hegemony is not operative in this history of time since various visions of reform competed both within and between nations. Chapter 1 and chapter 2 are loosely chronological; chapter 3 looks at the implications and applications of these reforms in the colonies. Both in Europe and Latin America, these debates included the choice of the prime meridian and the initial rejection by Catholic scientists of Greenwich time in favor of Jerusalem. Many Irish, for instance, called Greenwich universal time an “instance of Saxon tyranny” (52). The First World War further disrupted previous progress of universal standardization; it was a catalyst for battling worldviews *about* time. Eventually, mean times, summer times and time zones crystalized around the globe, but other projects like a universal world calendar ended up a failed utopia. The first three chapters work very well together, and confirm that Ogle’s choice of “time” as a lens through which to look at history was fruitful.

After going over broad swaths of land and jumping between different decades in chapter 3—see for example her contributions about German and British imperialism in East Africa—, Ogle zooms in on specific cases in the rest

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of the book. Chapter 4 focuses on Bombay and a specific train incident that changed a governor's policy, while chapter 5 looks at another fascinating and complex situation: the "polyrhythmic" city (123) of Ottoman Beirut circa 1900. In all of these situations, despite how detail-oriented she is in chapter 4 and 5, Ogle's view remains very aerial, and it is sometimes hard for the reader to imagine how the different policies affected the local life of colonial subjects on the ground, especially in the places mentioned in chapter 3. At a time in the academe when many historiographies are localized and eye-level, Ogle's project stands out as both monumental and detached from the realities of some situations she depicts. I would argue however that this is also a strength of this ambitious book: it acts as a seminal work which opens the doors to further research. Besides, since her archival sources mostly include official documents, it is understandable that she describes perceptions and political visions—not daily life. The breadth of her sources is moreover impressive: Ogle draws from letters and testimonies by citizens, astronomers; pamphlets by journalists, publicists, editors or public intellectuals; accounts by agricultural workers, jewelers, stocks brokers and nutritional experts; as well as poems and fatwas.

Chapter 6 takes the topic of time and religion tackled in previous chapters further by focusing on transnational Islam. Ogle dedicates most of the chapter to technological mediations like the telegraph in the Muslim debates about calendar reform. She notes the collective rejection of universalism from all three Abrahamic religions, but does not offer a deeper look at religious dogma and diverging conceptions of time—which could have been worthwhile. In the end, Ogle's argument about Islam does fit the central idea of the book: reforms took time, were the subjects of heated debates, and mainly materialized from the bottom-up. Her emphasis on the coexistence of different temporalities within the so-called Orient is pertinent and further debunks the myth of the "timeless East." Still, I would have appreciated more deconstructing of ideologies like "globalization" as opposed to "mondialisation" (in French) or "universalism" (which is the same root as "globalization" in Arabic and which carries an economic meaning).

Overall, this book delivers on its promise of rewriting the global history of time. The conclusion itself is excellent—I urge every graduate students and scholars using the word "global" in a paper to read it closely. The introduction

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and the first three chapters, or individual area studies snapshots (like chapter 4 or 5) would be great additions to an advanced undergrad syllabus. Ogle's prose is absolutely clear; and whenever she mentions a concept outside of the scope of the book, her contextualization is succinct and helpful. This monograph is also a great fit in graduate seminars on Space and Place, or Technology and Infrastructure. Ogle's research shows how politicized and fraught different concepts we take for granted can be. Her contribution to nineteenth-century historiography is crucial: behind the veneer of uniformization, she contends, lied a world more fragmented than ever. And in the end, this project is relevant to us all, since narratives of a globalized interconnected world persist unchallenged in most discussions, and since this history is still unfolding: as societies transition into working from home, and as the boundaries between leisure and work become ever more blurry, Ogle's expertise is as welcome as ever.

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