

Reviews

The Atlantic in global history, 1500–2000

By Jorge Canizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman, eds., *Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007. Pp. 258. ISBN-13: 978-0-13-192714-8, US\$30.80.*

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DOI:10.1017/S1740022807215013

There are many reasons to support the thesis that after 1500 the Atlantic became more of an integrated area than the Indian Ocean, the Chinese Sea, and the Pacific. The colonization of large sections of the New World, the intercontinental migration movements of 2 to 3 million Europeans and 11 million African slaves before 1800, the creation of large-scale plantations and the transportation of bulk products, the production of precious metals and their insertion into the Atlantic economy as well as the conversion of sizeable groups of Amerindians and Africans to Christianity were all unique, and so was the stream of more than 50 million migrants who crossed the Atlantic during the nineteenth century in order to settle in North and South America.

On the other hand, major parts of the three continents bordering on the Atlantic were not integrated at all and produced and consumed in isolation. Most people did not migrate and when they migrated, they did not do so by moving across the Atlantic but to a nearby town or neighbouring region. Even the Atlantic slave trade affected only a relatively small percentage of the African population. Around 1800, after 300 years of Atlantic history, Europeans, Amerindians and Africans still had radically different ideas about religion, government and administration, the education of their children, the role of women in society, food, taste, drink, pleasure, art, marriage, and what not. A quantum leap in the integration of the Atlantic took place during the nineteenth century when the emigration of people and capital from

Europe to the New World exploded. Finally, interest rates and wages in the Old and the New World started to move in the same direction. On the other hand, Africa's link with the Atlantic declined after the ending of the slave trade, and after the Second World War even the integration of Latin America seemed to stagnate. These are sobering caveats when writing about the growth of the Atlantic world.

In spite of the fact that the Atlantic might not be as integrated as is sometimes suggested, several essays in this collection convincingly show that at least in the cultural domain the Atlantic did exist. In the first section 'Comparing Atlantics', several authors discuss the role of Christianity on both sides of the Ocean and point to the common elements in the missionary activities among the *Bretons* in France and the Amerindians. Comparisons within the New World also offer new perspectives on the never-ending debate as to whether the national origins of migrants and institutions or local conditions were the decisive factor in shaping the new Atlantic societies. The latter view is represented in a contribution pointing out that the different geographical origins and opposing theologies notwithstanding, there were similarities in thought between both Catholic missionaries in South America and Puritan ministers in New England as both groups were convinced that before Columbus the fauna, the flora and the inhabitants of the Americas were in the hands of the devil, and that the European invaders had the duty to deliver them into the hands of God.

The last section of this collection features the 'evolving Atlantic' during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A contribution on slavery in the Iberian world makes the point that there were many continuities between the slave Atlantic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, albeit that the centre of gravity moved away from the plantations in the French and British Caribbean to those in the US, Cuba and Brazil. That view clashes with a more convincing contribution arguing that the nineteenth century created a radically different Atlantic, as the slave trade and the importance of slavery were dwarfed by the explosive increase in the number of

free trans-Atlantic migrants as well as by the volume of goods and services produced by free labour.

For global historians, the second section ('Beyond the Atlantic') is the most relevant one, as its contributions suggest that the study of the production of rice, of the trade in slaves, and piracy in the Atlantic yield a set of general conclusions that can be fruitfully applied outside the region. The essay on the slave trade does an excellent job by pointing out that the slave trade to the New World was by no means uniquely Atlantic, and that Africa's internal slave trade as well as the Arab slave trade were each of similar magnitude, but had started earlier and lasted longer. Finally, the twentieth century, the most Atlantic of all, seems short-changed as it is served by only two contributions, one focusing on the importance of eighteenth-century Atlantic racial constructs for the identity of US blacks today and another on the transfer of the theology of liberation from Latin America to Ireland.

There is no doubt that several of the trans-Atlantic comparisons in this volume provide us with new and sometimes original insights in both Atlantic as well as in global history and these may well become points of departure for further study. Yet, it hardly seems surprising that the intensity of the links across the Ocean was most pronounced between western Europe and those sections of the New World where the European impact was strongest. In contrast, Africa remained virtually untouched by the Atlantic. The slave trade took Africans out of Africa in exchange for a limited range of European and Asian goods, but it did not confront Africans with new Atlantic ideas or values. That is why the economics of the Atlantic slave trade remained quite different from those of the internal African and Arab slave trades. In the latter two the volume of the trade was far less responsive to changes in the price of the human merchandise. A similar point can be made about the Haitian Revolution, in spite of the introduction by Thomas Bender with a passionate plea to 'Atlanticize' the only successful slave rebellion in the New World and to put it on the same footing as the French and American Revolutions. The Haitian Revolution was not Atlantic in nature and hardly had any impact elsewhere, let alone the worldwide appeal of the French and American Revolutions. Its disastrous outcome made it a revolution to be avoided, and not one to be repeated. Like the word 'slave trade' a 'revolution' can have multiple meanings and that is why this collection shows that doing Atlantic and global history is difficult, challenging and rewarding at the same time.

War and state formation in ancient China and early modern Europe

By Victoria Tin-bor Hui, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 308. ISBN-13: 9780521525763, ISBN-10: 0521525764, £16.77.

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DOI:10.1017/S174002280722501X

The political scientist Victoria Tin-bor Hui compares the state systems of Ancient China [656–221 BCE] and early modern Europe [1495–1815 CE] in the light of modern security theory. This tradition derives from Hobbes and Machiavelli, but Hui shows that ancient Chinese knew all of its principles very well. In both periods, many states contended for power, mobilizing wealth and military force in accord with strategic doctrines. Yet Chinese rulers, following strategists like Sun Zi and Shang Yang, applied the ruthless logic of *realpolitik* more consistently and thoroughly than did the European states. As a result, China ended its Warring States period with one dominant empire, the Qin, while Europeans failed to break out of a multi-state system. Others have alluded to the similarity of these two state systems, but no one has compared them so systematically. This is a brilliant example of how to use comparative history to undermine models based only on the European experience.

She adopts the principle of symmetrical interpretation advocated by R. Bin Wong in *China transformed*: look at the Asian case through a Western lens, but also look at the West through Asian eyes. She uses the classical Chinese concept of 'self-strengthening', or 'wealthy country, strong army' (*fuguo qiangbing*) to analyse European state competition. Western theorists have focused mainly on the logic of balance of power, because it predominated in early modern Europe, but the 'logic of domination' – the drive for uncontested rule by a single state – also exerted powerful attraction in both China and Europe. Self-strengthening served not only to defend one state, but to support the ambitions of a powerful state determined to conquer everyone else. Compared to the ancient Chinese, European state makers seem half-hearted in their drive for power. They used 'self-weakening' expedients instead of genuine self-strengthening reforms. Therefore in Europe the logic of balancing won out over the logic of domination, while in China the opposite happened.