

complexity theory, world systems analysis, and historical sociology.

My quibbles about the book stem from its two ‘master concepts’ (p. 3): circulation and transcendence. Neither are as clear as they might be. Circulation implies a return of some kind, indicating flows within a system that is, to some extent, closed. *The crisis of modernity*, however, is at pains to stress the open-ended and non-linear character of historical development (here the relationship to complexity theory is sharply felt). If this is right, circulation means little more than connections. It is puzzling, then, that Duara does not simply use the latter term, or engage with Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s work on ‘connected histories’ (even more so given that he does cite Subrahmanyam’s historical scholarship). There are any number of ways of examining the connections that Duara sees – quite rightly – as generative of historical development: entanglements, flows, interactions, networks, and so forth. He does not explain why circulation works better than these alternatives.

Transcendence is an even thornier concept. For Duara, transcendence is a ‘yearning’ that ‘draws on a non-worldly moral authority’ (p. 6). Much of the second half of the book outlines the systems of dialogic transcendence, derived in pre-modern Asia and refashioned over the past few centuries, which offer sustainable forms of development. But, after reading the book, I remain unclear what ‘non-worldly’ implies, particularly when directed at ecological issues. Most contemporary ecological movements construct coalitions with indigenous peoples, whose cosmologies are founded on the necessary interdependencies between people and nature. Ecuador’s ‘Rights of Nature’ provision within its constitution is one example among many. At the same time – and as Duara acknowledges – all transcendental visions are, to some extent, institutionalized. Ideas do not float freely; they require organizing. They are literally brought down to earth,

whether in the form of social movements or of more regularized sites of political authority.

It is also not clear why we should expect boundless ‘non-worldly’ visions to be benign. As Duara acknowledges, many such visions combine ‘certitude and absolutism’ (p. 186). Indeed, the decoupling of ‘truth’ from time, place, and history has often generated considerable violence – just think of apocalyptic movements of various kinds, the histories of many revolutions, and more. Do we really want to put our trust in visions that claim to be transcendent? Probably not. While I am sympathetic to Duara’s notions of ‘shared sovereignty’, such an ideal surely requires a *worldliness* that stresses the connections between cosmologies and nature. Only then might we restrain the authoritarian wings of these visions. And only then might we generate the ‘sustainable modernity’ that Duara favours, one based on re-appropriating the ‘global commons’ through coalitions of ‘civil society, local communities and their allies’ (p. 288).

The intimacies of four continents

By Lisa Lowe. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. 319. Hardback US\$94.95, ISBN 978-0-8223-5863-3; paperback US\$26.95, ISBN 978-0-8223-5875-6.

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In this study of transnational relations across the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British empire, identified in the book’s title as ‘the intimacies of four continents’, Lisa

Lowe explores the complicated histories of slavery and racial discrimination in relation to modern liberal values of human freedom, rational progress, and social equality. She joins a long list of scholars who have examined the interconnections between these broad, important themes from various theoretical, literary, philosophical, and historical perspectives. Lowe situates her analyses within a framework of interdisciplinary literary studies, drawing upon essays, autobiographies, novels, and philosophical works. She embeds close primary readings of texts within an intellectual framework that provides evidence of wide reading in empirical history – oddly labelled ‘the colonial archive’ – and in political economy, Marxist political theory, and philosophy. The main thrust of the book and the arguments of various chapters are summed up several times on pages 136–9. Readers are recommended to look at those pages first before reading the whole book.

Lowe’s aims in *The intimacies of four continents* are twofold. First, she offers a reading of the transition from slavery to freedom in the British imperial context that eschews a clear linear progress from one category to another. Thus, as she argues, this was a transition in which slavery was never fully left behind, in the sense that indentured or contract labour was soon found as a substitute, in the form of Chinese and Indian servants. Equally, as she also explains, freedom was rarely full freedom because major inequalities in social, economic, and political rights persisted long after laws dealing with abolition or emancipation were enacted. Second, Lowe follows in the wake of numerous scholars who have sought to relate the seemingly hidden relations between domestic life and labour in Britain and the objects and commodities associated with slaves, servants, and their work in the colonies. A specific example is her focus on the transnational context in which the presence of

black servants in English houses, domestic consumption of tea and sugar, and home demand for brightly coloured textiles based on Indian designs were ways in which enforced colonial labour underpinned bourgeois comforts and respectability at home.

After an introductory chapter that presents the main lines of argument, four substantive chapters offer detailed explications of primary texts related to the book’s broad themes. In chapter 2, the former slave Equiano’s *Interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself* (1789) is analysed to highlight the tensions and contradictions of liberal emancipation. Lowe concludes that Equiano’s frequent references in his autobiography to the pain and suffering of slavery show that ‘the liberal remedy of emancipation has not resolved the injustices of slavery and its subsequent inequalities’ (p. 61). The comforts of bourgeois domesticity and a black servant depicted in Thackeray’s novel *Vanity fair* (1847–8) are related in chapter 3 to the work of Africans and Asians who produced the material fabrics and furnishings of the middle-class bedroom. Chapter 4 considers liberal government in the publications of John Stuart Mill and in the writings of British colonial administrators during and after the First Opium War (1839–42). The focus is on the impact of liberal ideas on ‘rationales for the innovation of new forms of imperial sovereignty for managing ports, seas, and population’ (p. 108). Chapter 5 examines historical philosophies in Hegel’s *Lectures on the philosophy of world history* (1837), C. L. R. James’s *The black Jacobins* (1938), and W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black reconstruction* (1935) in order to discuss ‘the coloniality of received histories, and to specify their engagements with and departures from earlier dialectical forms’ (p. 140).

Providing a convincing historical context is sometimes the Achilles’ heel of

The intimacies of four continents. Lowe argues erroneously that the Chinese replaced convict labour in colonial Australia. This was not the case. Convict transportation to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land ended in 1840 and 1853. Most Chinese emigrants to colonial Australia came to exploit the gold rush of the early 1850s, and arrived voluntarily, principally in Victoria: they were not a substitute for convict labourers. Lowe states that the British Atlantic slave system was in decline by the late eighteenth century, which is not the commonly accepted view: most historians argue that this did not occur until after 1815. She further argues that the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and slave emancipation in 1834 resulted from the potential of black revolution and attempts to resolve difficulties in the Caribbean sugar economy. However, most historians would argue that staving off black rebellion was not a prominent reason for the abolition of the British slave trade, and that slave emancipation was only partially related to problems arising in the international sugar economy.

The intimacies of four continents will join the list of sophisticated attempts to consider the limitations of liberal thought in relation to the tangled history of racial discrimination, slavery, contract labour, and the expanding British imperial possessions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Progress and development associated with the liberal norms of the modern world are subject to critical analysis in this account. Potential readers will need to be familiar with the work of Foucault, Hegel, Quijano, and others, and the use of concepts such as 'biopolitical', 'sublation', and 'coloniality', in order to understand the discursive material presented in the book. This is not to suggest, however, that *The intimacies of four continents* is difficult to read; on the contrary, it is lucid, cogent, and succinct in the development of its ideas.

The global transformation of time, 1870–1950

By Vanessa Ogle. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. Pp. 279. Hardback £32.95, ISBN: 978-0-674-28614-6.

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In 1891, the chief of staff of the German military, Count Helmuth von Moltke, spoke to the German parliament to persuade officials to adopt uniform time, an effort he viewed as critical to national security. Universalizing time would create a more precise railway system and facilitate the mobilization of military forces and resources. Like Moltke, many European and American political leaders and scientific 'experts' pursued universal time, which they believed would facilitate both military and economic modernization and offer a way to establish greater political influence. Examining the contested nature of global time reform in her book *The global transformation of time, 1870–1950*, Vanessa Ogle reconsiders the universal nature of global time reform and argues that the emergence of universal time was largely inspired by political motivations.

The emergence of globalization in the late nineteenth century and the consequent 'time conscious' were grounded in European efforts to strengthen the relative influence of nation-states. While the advent of uniform time came to be viewed as objective and universal, Ogle writes that it was a Western 'ideological formation' which consolidated Western cultural and political influence (p. 204). She considers the Western perception of time and how these temporal values shaped and extended both national and cultural borders. European and American public officials considered their relative political positions within an