

the significance of cultural brokers and transcultural experiences (including sexual and other relationships) with indigenous people. En route, various historiographical issues are examined, such as the concept of masculinity, the interleaving of race and class, the significance of the development of bourgeois public spheres (in Britain and in colonial cities), and the Robinson and Gallagher Egyptocentric account of the Scramble for Africa (which Kennedy considers can be turned on its head if a peripheral focus is used).

Reviewers love to find weaknesses, but the only one I can come up with is that the treatment of the South–Central African axis of this explorative activity – which embraced missionaries, hunters, rival African states (as well as conflicts among whites), and the search for mineral resources based on historic precedents – is rather inadequate. Other ‘gateways’ could have been found here, notably the one supplied by King Khama of the Tswana, whose help in sending parties into the interior was invaluable and, importantly, was in pursuit of his own objectives. However, this in no way detracts from the fact that *The last blank spaces* is a remarkable book, comprehensively researched, and with a level of analytic sophistication never before seen in the examination of exploration.

The global transformation of time: 1870–1950

By Vanessa Ogle. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2015. Pp. 288. Hardback £29.95, ISBN 978-0-674-28614-6.

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We are used to taking time as a given. Occasionally we may wonder why the prime

meridian goes through London, or why it is one o’clock in Britain when it is already two o’clock in continental Europe. We may moan a little when we set our clocks forward one hour in spring, and perhaps a little less when we set them back again in autumn. Yet we seldom doubt that this is the way things ought to be, and we generally view time – calendar time, clock time, daylight saving time – as natural. However, as always with things that seem so natural, time is nothing but an – admittedly very powerful – social construct.

As Vanessa Ogle’s book *The global transformation of time* demonstrates, the standardization and unification of time – even within one nation-state – is a fairly recent development. Up until the latter part of the nineteenth century it was not unusual for clock towers in neighbouring villages to disagree about the exact time of day. Sometimes different times existed even within the same building as, for example, in the case of many railway stations, where public clocks deliberately ran five or more minutes fast to prompt latecomers to rush to and thus catch their trains. *The global transformation of time* tells the story of how this multitude of contradicting and competing times gave way to the system of unified time zones we know today.

The title and subject of the book suggest a triumphalist history from pre-modern chaotic heterogeneity to twentieth-century unifying homogeneity. To Ogle’s credit this is not the story she tells. Indeed, she is dissatisfied with an ‘uncritical global history’, which, so enamoured by tracing border-crossings, interconnections, and exchanges, ignores everything that stands in the way of globalization. In her eyes this makes it ‘the mouthpiece of an ideology’ and its representatives ‘heirs to nineteenth-century visions of hegemony’ (p. 204). Instead, Ogle wants to show ‘how uneven, slow, and full of unintended consequences interconnectedness was’ (*ibid.*). Time reform provides an ideal subject, first because it was a ‘global

phenomenon' (p. 12) and second because it was everything but smooth, straightforward, or unopposed.

The global transformation of time is history on a truly global scale. The book begins with German and French debates about the introduction of nationwide mean times in the late nineteenth century (Chapter 1). Although this contributed to and was part of the state-building process, the impetus often emanated from the local rather than from the national level. Globalization did not simply supersede nationalism and regionalisms but often evoked or strengthened them. On all levels, voices objecting to standardization could be heard: for religious reasons, or because of the inability to view time as abstract, or because abstract time was seen as conflicting with solar time, or because time was held to be a private matter, with which the state had no right to interfere. Yet this was nothing compared to the prolonged opposition against the introduction of summer time (Chapter 2). Nevertheless, once enacted in the world, the idea of uniform time spread across the globe and especially to the European colonies (Chapter 3). Here Ogle counters the common view, according to which the metropolitan centre hoped to use 'mean time ... to tighten the grip of the colonial state over its native subjects' (p. 75). Colonial administrators were in fact often reluctant to introduce mean time and the process was much delayed. This was particularly true in the case of British India, where the introduction of 'Indian Standard Time' was strongly opposed by Indian nationalists (Chapter 4). Only as recently as the 1950s was it finally possible to speak of 'a system of uniform, mostly hour-wide time zones girding the globe' (p. 96).

The finest chapter in the book (Chapter 5) is set in Beirut, where 'a plurality of time was always within eyesight or earshot' (p. 120). Here the to and fro between the advocates of standardization – usually scientists, railway administrators, government officials, and

employers – and their rather heterogeneous opponents gives way to a discussion of time management and, thereby, concrete time practices, allowing Ogle to interweave her usual (often rather dry scientific and bureaucratic) sources with autobiographical material and even a poem. Beirut serves as an example because, thanks to the cosmopolitan make-up of their city, its inhabitants lived in a multi-temporal universe in which they constantly and elegantly switched between different times. From Beirut the focus shifts to the Arabic world in general, where, at the same time as Europeans and Americans were discussing mean time, a controversy over the Islamic calendar was flaring up (Chapter 6). This leads Ogle to detect 'surprisingly similar reflections on time originating in different parts of the world in widely different societies' (p. 176).

Despite the book's impressive scope, detail, and concision, there are places where it hints at other far-reaching questions without following them up. It stresses, for example, the importance of time as an 'intellectual and institutional device for imagining the world as global and interconnected' (p. 206), but then hardly discusses how a world unified by time was actually imagined. Oddly enough, there is no account of time zone maps and not a single illustration in the whole book. What is more, through examining many instances of multi-temporality and competing times, the book demonstrates that time is a social construct. Yet this point is never made explicitly. Ogle also does not ask how the attempts to reform and standardize time relate to larger contemporary concepts of time. It is revealing that, while E. P. Thompson, David Landes, Carlo Cipolla, and Jacques Le Goff are referenced, there is no mention of Reinhart Koselleck's work on temporality and changing perceptions of time since the 1800s. Perhaps these two strands of research – the practical problem of how to standardize time and the philosophical

conceptualization of time – were unconnected. This is, however, hard to believe, and repeated references to ‘progress’, ‘historical time’, the opposition between ‘modern’ and ‘archaic’, and so on suggest otherwise. Not to bring these two strands of ‘time talk’ together seems like a missed opportunity. Yet, to be fair, *The global*

transformation of time is a history of standardization not of temporality. It wants to advance global history, a global history that, importantly, does not celebrate globalization but rather accentuates its slowness and unevenness. In this regard, the book is an undoubted success.