CROSSING EMPIRES. TAKING U.S. HISTORY INTO TRANSIMPERIAL TERRAIN

Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton (eds.), *Crossing Empires. Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2020, 360 pp.

Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History Into Transimperial Terrain is a welcome addition to the growing literature arguing for a new conceptual framework to address empires and to continue globalizing U.S. history. This book will be of special interest for scholars of U.S. history and imperial history.

The editors have both contributed much to a global understanding of U.S. history. Kristin Hoganson is the Stanley S. Stroup Professor of American History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and is a leading historian on American history and empire. Jay Sexton holds the Kinder Endowed Chair in Constitutional Democracy at the University of Missouri and has done extensive research on the international dimensions of U.S. history in the nineteenth century.

The book is the result of a conference held in May 2016 at the Oxford Rothermere American Institute, of which Sexton was the director between 2015 and 2016. The conference aimed to focus on empire and to place U.S. history within a global and *transimperial* context. The book satisfactorily fulfills its goal of introducing the *transimperial* concept and further examines the United States in a global framework, adding to the works of Thomas Bender, Don Doyle, Ian Tyrrell and others.

The book consists of an introduction written by the editors and thirteen chapters. Contributors include Ikuko Asaka, Genevieve Clutario, Oliver Charbonneau, Anne L. Foster, Julian Go, Michel Gobat, Julie Greene, Margaret D. Jacobs, Moon-Ho Jung, Marc-William Palen, Nicole Phelps, John Soluri and Steve Tuffnell.

In the introduction, Hoganson and Sexton propose *transimperiality* as an analytical tool to explore U.S. history. For over a decade, the term *transimperial* has been used to underline overlapping imperial structures and to rethink empires. *Transimperial* history puts empire at the forefront and formulates an alternative to transnational history because «historians need to be more explicit about political formations and power dynamics that shaped the border-crossing histories they tell. They need to stop using *transnational* as a default term and call out empire when it appears» (p. 11).

While the term *transimperial* is not new, this volume is one of the most important contributions from this perspective. *Transimperial* history seeks to decenter imperial history, overcome the dichotomies between colonizers and colonized, and delve into the imperial constellation, with all its tensions, connections and entanglements. In this vein, the Philippines is one of the book's benchmarks, with references in multiple essays. This is not surprising, since the Philippines represents a paradigmatic case for *transimperial* approaches, as the noted historians Paul Kramer, Josep Maria Delgado and María Dolores Elizalde, among others, have pointed out.¹ However, the book covers a broader range of geographies, from Tierra del Fuego to East Africa.

In the first chapter, John Soluri examines the changes in territorial sovereignty in the North Pacific and the South Atlantic in the long nineteenth century through conflicts provoked by the fur sealing trade. His argument underlines the importance of considering how commercial endeavors and the desire to increase wealth disturbed imperial boundaries. After weaving a network that «cut across and connected empires, indigenous societies, and postcolonial states in South America» (p. 28), from the Pribilof Islands in Alaska to China, Soluri concludes that maritime actors unveil the many ways in which the U.S. projected its power well before the American century.

Stephen Tuffnel explores Anglo-American *transimperial* connections in Eastern Africa, specifically in the Uganda Protectorate, in the construction of railways through the American Bridge Company. He convincingly shows the ways in which the U.S. profited from Britain's unique global position, and the base from which modern global interconnections were created.

Michel Gobat discusses William Walker's intended empire in Central America and the origins of U.S. liberal imperialism. It questions the centrality of slavery to Walker's empire, and instead suggests that he sought to create a liberal empire. While bringing new dimensions of understanding Manifest Destiny, Gobat also helps reshape democracy and republicanism in the mid-nineteenth century Atlantic, since he links the experience of 1848 to the American liberal imperialist experiment in Central America.

Julian Go's article researches the introduction of secret balloting in the Philippines, a system first instituted in Australia in 1856, and traces the circulation of such technology throughout the British Empire and the United States. Go ably demonstrates how the so-called «Australian ballot system» could serve a range of purposes, depending on where it was introduced. His *transimperial* perspective points both to the diversity across and within empires. In the last essay of part two, Anne L. Foster traces the circulation of opium and medical knowledge through imperial contexts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the ambivalent views and rising criticism of opium consumption.

Nicole Phelps analyzes the U.S. consular service in the long nineteenth century and argues that it was central to the emergence of American global power. Phelps is effective at tracing the history and relevance of the consular service and its activities, and, as a re-

1. Elizalde, María Dolores and Josep Maria Delgado (eds.), *Filipinas, un país entre dos imperios*, Barcelona, Edicions Bellaterra, 2011.

sult, consular correspondence constitutes a valuable asset for *transimperial* research. Marc-William Palen's essay shows how economic theories of free trade shaped Anglo-American anti-imperialism from the mid-nineteenth century to the opening decades of the following century. Oliver Charbonneau's text considers *transimperial* connections in the Philippines under American colonial rule and, more specifically, in the Muslim South, which the Spanish had not been able to colonize successfully.

Part four consists of three essays. Ikuko Asaka investigates the language used for Liberian colonization in the 1830s from the standpoint of climatic essentialism, and the role of the Wilberforce Colony, a Canadian settlement, in shaping this discourse and African Americans' response to it. Julie Greene's chapter deals with migration and Caribbean laborers in the Panama Canal Zone and claims that they fostered the existing tensions between the British and Americans for their own advantage. Genevieve Clutario's essay explores the Japanese attempts to create a new normal in the Philippines through the accounts of middle-class Filipino women during World War II. She draws attention to the difficulties the Japanese faced in doing so due to the layering of imperial power and the several experiences of Filipino women with imperial regimes, such as the Spanish, American and Japanese.

Moon-Ho Jung's essay uncovers South Asian Revolutionaries' anticolonial resistance in the early twentieth century and the links between the Anglo-American alliance in fighting them. He exposes strategies by which «the growing authority of the modern state» secured «nation and empire from racialized and radicalized subjects» (p. 272) before the end of World War I and highlights the colonial roots of the U.S. and Great Britain.

While the editors point to the fact that the book «focuses on the years before the United States could call itself a superpower» (p. 14), readers might be surprised with the last contribution to the volume, which addresses the post-World War II era. Margaret D. Jacobs stresses the dynamics of indigenous resistance across settler colonial empires in the late twentieth century. Jacobs' contribution sheds light on the logic of elimination and the decisive role of activist women regarding indigenous child welfare.

Taken together, these case studies provide an insightful examination of aspects of U.S. history and an extension of the *transimperial* approach primarily put forward by scholars of the Philippines. The book skillfully navigates between topics of business history, race, and diplomacy, among others. It adopts both microhistorical practices and larger scales of analysis, demonstrating the adaptability of *transimperial* history.

In sum, this volume undoubtedly opens new lines of inquiry with the prospect of deconstructing empire, just as *transnationalism* has done with deconstructing the nation. A rethinking of empire that shall strengthen current efforts to de-exceptionalize and internationalize U.S. history and bring empires to the fore of historiographical debates. Besides pointing to the legacies of imperial rule, *transimperial* history challenges most traditional historiographical periodization, emphasizing the political units that have dominated history.

For obvious reasons, the British Empire has traditionally occupied a central place in nineteenth-century narratives. While this volume heavily relies upon Anglo-American ex-

periences, it also addresses other empires and communities. In the necessary attempts to incorporate other empires into this account, a *transimperial* perspective offers many possibilities. For instance, building on Michel Gobat's essay, further research may be done regarding rivalries and collaboration with the Spanish Empire in the Americas, the prominence of Cuba in the U.S.' imperial project and the coexistence of several imperial projects in Central and South America, such as the Panhispanism of Spanish Republicans led by Emilio Castelar.

Tracing *transimperial* connections, however, is not easy. To emphasize how empires both cooperate with and compete against one another, and to integrate societies generally excluded from historical discourse, *transimperial* historians must be able to tackle sources in a variety of languages. Despite the thirty-page bibliography, mostly in English, the book could have benefited from a more diverse range of sources. Nonetheless, these are minor points compared to the overall contribution of the book.

This volume breaks new ground by introducing the concept of *transimperiality* to a broader public and opens up new lines of research. One of the most promising could involve the use of tools from the digital humanities, such as geospatial analysis, network analysis, and information retrieval technology. The book persuasively brings together historians of several subdisciplines to make a coherent case for *transimperial* history. It sets the stage for more theoretical and methodological studies that enhance the implications of *transimperiality* and distinguish it further from transnational history. The book is handsomely produced by Duke University Press, and the editors should be commended for making these studies, originally presented at a conference, available to all.

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