

Berger, Stefan; Scalmer, Sean: *The Transnational Activist. Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World since the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2018. ISBN: 978-3-319-66206-0.

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This edited volume on transnational social and political activism since the nineteenth century addresses an important research deficit. While there is a growing body of literature on social movements in a global perspective and, more specifically, we know increasingly more about such movements originating in the Global South, individual activists and their impact on these movements have until now received comparatively less attention. The contributors to this very readable and in many ways inspiring collection of case studies join a (meanwhile) broader trend to use biographical approaches for a fresh look at transnational processes in an era of globalising communication and travelling patterns stretching over the last two hundred years or so. The result is a broad spectrum of conceptually stimulating and empirically innovative case studies across the Anglo-World. Although the editors do not further explain this geographical focus, they obviously mean by that the English-speaking world including British colonies such as India. Occasionally, though, the analysis of transnational activists moves beyond this area to cover, for example, the Francophone world (chapter by Talbot Imlay) or Indonesia (chapter by McGregor) to indicate some important facets of connectivity beyond the Anglo-World in a narrow sense.

The central concept of this volume is the „transnational activist“ (p. 7), which serves the contributors as an umbrella term to capture basically two things: the vast ideological range of such personalities between communism and conservatism and the institutional diversity of their movements across national and continental borders. Particularly protagonists of the Right, frequently underacknowledged or entirely left out in the discussion of modern cosmopolitanism, should be integrated better than so far into the biographi-

cal research on transnational activists, whose only common denominator was strong dissatisfaction with the world as they saw it. The chapters create a rich and illuminating mosaic of activism in very different timely and spatial contexts including Quaker Humanitarianism in the 19th century, the global career of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, anti-capitalist and socialist internationalism within and beyond the British Empire, the transnational struggle for environmental protection and animal rights since the 1980s, and the evolving global feminism after the Second World War.

Among eleven individual studies, undertaken by both well-established scholars as well as young academics from Western universities, the editors included four chapters on women, out of which one is on a woman of non-Western origin. One could argue that this arrangement is historically adequate as it reflects the patriarchal character of many modern social movements in the Global South as well as in the West. Nevertheless, the volume's focus on the Anglo-World comes with an attention surplus for white male activism. This restriction is somewhat softened by Hannah Loney's excellent study of Bella Galhos, a woman from East Timor who internationalised her country's independence campaign during the 1990s and successfully connected the local struggle with influential likeminded international organisations. Besides its unconventional character, this case is also illustrative because reflects several facets of transnationalism the volume as a whole seeks to highlight: the dialectic of nationalism and transnationalism, which developed a huge impact particularly in (post)colonial societies; the agency of individuals from the Global South and the manifold ways this agency influenced international agendas; the historically diverse and contradictory interconnectedness between regions with very different status in global power hierarchies; and the relevance of practices, which were historically as formative for such activism as were ideas.

The conceptual framework of transnational activism outlined by the volume editors in the introduction corresponds in many convincing ways with the case studies. It is also refreshing that the editors do not present transnationalism as the answer to every remaining

puzzle in historiography but discuss more in details the limits of this academic practice. As transnationalism has turned in (Western) historiography into such an omnipresent approach, it would have been inspiring to learn more also in the case studies about its shortcomings. In their actual empirical conduct, however, the chapters' main task remains to show how important transnational connectivity and mobility indeed were. Consequently, they are less strong on the (not less relevant) impossibilities and failures of historical connectivity.

Precisely because the case studies are empirically as well as conceptually very rich, a more systematic evaluation of their findings in a comparative perspective would have strengthened the volume's agenda even more. Although Donatella della Porta, a major voice in social movement studies, provides an insightful „Afterword“, which mainly locates the contributions in the broader context of this interdisciplinary research field, a historiographical conclusion of the case studies would have added another useful element. Two short examples. The editors emphasise in their introduction how important it is to bring activism in the context of imperial relationships into dialogue with more recent forms of global activism of the last two to three decades (p. 19). For the rest of the book, though, the reader is left alone with the question how this dialogue actually looks like and which historical insights it provides us with. A second example concerns the connection between the activists' individual biographies and macro-processes such as geo-economic, geo-political, or geo-cultural transformations since the 19th century. Although della Porta briefly indicates in her afterword the relevance of these larger contexts to understand the historical evolution of social activism, the potential of the case studies remains in this respect underexplored. Several chapters can, for example, serve as empirical illustrations to compare and learn more about social activism in manifold contexts such as imperialism, state socialism, or the Cold War and, if examined together, could illustrate which preconditions these contexts provided for such movements. Another option would be to contextualise the case studies within global

patterns of globalisation and de-globalisation particularly in the first half of the twentieth century and/or around armed conflicts.

Also without these more extended historiographical evaluations, this volume is an inspiring read not only for those specifically interested in social activism but also for those who want to learn more about the historical attempts, possibilities and limitations to change the world. Transnationalism was, as the contributors repeatedly demonstrate, a key feature of such activism enhanced by rapidly improving communication and travel facilities across the globe.

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