

# Global histories

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**Review: Remaking the Modern World 1900-2015: Global Connections and Comparisons -  
By C.A. Bayly**

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2019.312>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May 2019), pp. 162-166  
ISSN: 2366-780X

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Publisher information:

'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

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*Remaking the Modern World 1900-2015:  
Global Connections and Comparisons –*  
by C.A. Bayly, Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018.  
Paperback \$49.95, Pp. 424, ISBN: 978-1405187169

*Reviewed by:*

**PAUL SPRUTE**

Following his magisterial *The Birth of the Modern World*, the study of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which has been so influential in re-focusing historiographical perspectives towards global interlinkages, Christopher Bayly leaves us the complementary *Remaking the Modern World*. Published in 2018, three years after the author's sudden death, the preface points out that Bayly had left an "unfinished, though in effect complete" manuscript, which the editor prepared for publication in an "exceptionally demanding production process" (p.xi) with the help of several colleagues who were close to the author. Any reader of this book will be left wondering how Bayly would have revised this work himself and fleshed out certain parts of it. Yet, there should be no doubt that all readers also benefit greatly from the editor's decision to finalize and publish this manuscript despite not having the possibility to further develop it in dialogue with the author. With *Remaking*, the reader gains an insight into Bayly's perspectives on the genealogies of today's world. The late author draws compelling conclusions on its emergence in his reflection on the *Global Connections and Comparisons*, which he has offered to historians around the world as a stimulus for their work. At the same time, Bayly has suggested a perspective that focuses on the relations between individuals, their actions and identities, and greater global processes. Christopher Clark points out in his introduction to this volume that Bayly "saw a piece of agency, a spark of resilience and hope, in everyone who entered his field of vision" (p.xiv). Taken together, this book suggests to me a study of history that does not shy away from following historical processes up to their preliminary conclusions in the present. It also seeks to identify greater changes and links them with a closer focus on the local or individual without simply subordinating the complexities in these smaller units of analysis to grander narratives. The fact that this book is again convincing and illuminative in this quest surely is a testament to Bayly's excellence as a historian, as well as it may be an inspiration to any student of history.

As a companion volume to *The Birth of the Modern World*, Bayly takes a similar approach in organizing *Remaking* by including a number of narrative chapters that enclose the more conceptually focused ones. After the first part of this volume chronologically revises the long twentieth century, eight thematic chapters analyze different changes that Bayly understands as central to the era. The volume is concluded by another broader chapter recapitulating as well as synthesizing historical processes "Between Two Centuries" leading up to 2015, and a short conclusion. The thematic chapters are roughly divided between two foci: The first is the question how the human experience was shaped by the expansion of knowledge on a social, but also more personal level. A chapter on religion serves as the point of transition to the more politically oriented chapters on 'Killing' and 'Crime,' 'Internationalism and Transnationalism,' the 'Shadow of Empire,' and the 'Pressure of People.' Still, it is evident throughout those later thematic chapters, that Bayly sustains his focus on the broad question how people reacted to and interacted with the influences of fundamental historical

changes on their lived experiences.

Despite its neat fundamental organization, its clear concerns and focus, *Remaking* is quite imbalanced. This is the most (and somewhat banally) obvious in the length of the chapters varying from 7 to 25 pages. More importantly, however, these imbalances extend to the contents of the book. Bayly was a historian of South Asia and the British Empire by training and this volume strongly reflects his specialization. While the book reflects the author's concern to incorporate events and processes from around the world, his analysis is at its liveliest when presenting cases from his area of expertise. One example is the attention that Bayly dedicates to the British settler colonies in their own right. Such preferences should not be understood as deficiencies, however, but can instead inspire the reader to draw their own "global connections and comparisons"—whether in support or contestation of Bayly's positions. Given the unfortunate circumstances of this volume's publication, it is also quite certain that Bayly would have added more color to certain parts of his picture, reconsidered some accentuation and maybe even changed specific proportions. All this would not have changed the clearly visible overall image, however.

I was nonetheless left wondering about potential omissions in *Remaking* compared to alternative approaches exploring the fundamental historical changes from which our present has emerged. Notably, Bayly barely mentions the rapprochement between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America as a decisive rupture in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The central importance of this swift change and its consequences for the history and the eventual end of the cold war, but also for current international politics, recently underlined by Odd Arne Westad,<sup>1</sup> would surely have warranted some attention. Yet, I found Bayly's fundamental take on the international conflicts after the Second World War quite illuminating, as he situates the 'Global Cold War' convincingly in longer histories of internationalism and the demise of European empires. Here, as elsewhere, I found the background of Bayly's perspective in the analysis of long-term changes over centuries very beneficial. Considering the strength of *Remaking* in its rootedness in Bayly's clear argument of our world converging—notwithstanding, but still accounting for local specificities or heightened antagonisms, it works best as a companion volume to his earlier works. In fact, it is illuminating to read certain chapters from both books, such as the ones on religion, alongside each other, as the respective chapter in *The Birth* exemplified this book's contribution so well and reflects a core theme of Bayly's overall work. *Remaking* provokes the reader to think about historical changes at the greatest scale available to the historian (who does not buy into either 'deep' or 'big history'). In that context, I found it quite amusing, but entirely appropriate to see Bayly unexpectedly reflect on the place of contemporary phenomena like K-pop within the greater scheme of things. I hope that this

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<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 395–422.

attention and the name drop in *Remaking* is appreciated by *Gangnam Style*'s Psy, whose music Bayly presents as an expression of the rise of youth culture around the world which sets itself apart from the moral values of older generations. Not only, but also due to such turns, Bayly's sober prose, and the clarity as well as poignancy in his conceptual discussions, this book is a great read.

Nevertheless (and hopefully not narrow-mindedly), I would like to note that it is beyond my understanding how certain egregious errors—entirely dispensable hurdles for the reader to stumble upon—were overlooked in editing. The gravity of these errors varies: Often, they are actually negligible, for example when a later position of an individual is predated (p.254) or a historical event is postdated by exactly a decade (p.255).<sup>2</sup> Yet, if awkward copyediting leaves the impression that George W. Bush and Tony Blair decided to intervene in Rwanda to stop the genocide of 1994—when no international power did—instead of invading Iraq almost a decade later (p.256), this inadvertently changes historical facts and is annoying at least. Once these errors become part of the argument by, for example, highlighting the relevance that Hutu and Tutsi were groups “of similar size” (p.256)—when they were not—and all these errors occur over two pages, the editorial process has to be questioned. While I fully acknowledge the difficulty of handling a manuscript for posthumous publication, these and many more errors and cases of awkward editing suggest that even more care should have been taken. Such neglects seem all the more regrettable as they could have been easily corrected without doing injustice to the original manuscript. Apart from these awkward flaws, the abrupt writing process seems to have affected this work on a more fundamental level. *Remaking* includes specific characterizations, as well as certain “connections and comparisons” that fail to convince because they are overly eclectic, seem imprecise, or lack important detail and nuances. Several examples can be found in the chapter on *The Pressure of People* (e.g. p.291), including an unconvincing generalized reference to Nazi *Lebensraum* ideology (p.295), while the discussion of environmental pressures fails to mention the challenges of climate change. It is safe to assume that Christopher Bayly would have revised his manuscript in such a way that many of these issues had been resolved. Yet, at the same time these issues mirror easy criticisms against approaches of global history and represent actual challenges to writing global histories. This is why it is so unfortunate that this book could not fully reflect the author's excellence as a global historian in successfully handling such concerns.

Overall, the great value of this last of Christopher Bayly's books is nonetheless beyond question: *Remaking the Modern World* is truly thought provoking and speaks to many different discussions, be it on the approach of global history—for example the entanglement of different layers of history

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<sup>2</sup> The first example refers to Ariel Sharon's position during the 1982 Lebanon War, the second to the year of Patrice Lumumba's assassination.

writing—or the problems and possibilities of presentist history writing. The work also shows in exemplary fashion how historians can help us understand changes in individual perceptions, impressions, and the human experience itself. In his preface, the author graciously acknowledges that “[w]riting world history ... can only be a flawed activity. But I argue that it adds value to other forms of historical writing and to public debate more generally” (p.xx). In this sense, *Remaking* serves as an excellent springboard for students of history to actively engage with the opportunities that the author has left us to contribute our own multitude of voices to the field.