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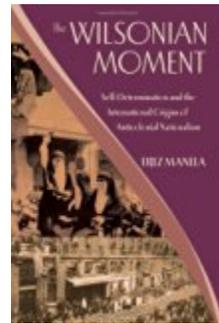
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Erez Manela. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 352 S. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-517615-5.

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Wilsonianism beyond Europe

Erez Manela's new book offers a perspective long missing from accounts of Great Power diplomacy and colonialism. He asks what Woodrow Wilson's wartime critique of the European system and advocacy of self-determination meant for colonized peoples around the globe. This is a worthy and overdue project, since libraries are full of detailed studies of what this or that statesman said and did, but the same libraries are nearly silent on what such actions meant to the hundreds of millions in the colonized world. The strange silence extends to today, when an American senator (Joseph Biden, among others) can publicly discuss the partition of Iraq without presuming to consult any citizen of the country in question. The upside-down injustice of such discussions generally passes without notice.

Manela goes a long way to addressing this historical blind spot, and while he has used the adjective "Wilsonian" in his title, he is at pains to make clear that his book is not about Wilson, or his speeches, or his supposedly tragically incomplete mission to save the world. "Despite the title of this book it is [mobilized nationalists], and not Wilson, who are the main protagonists of the story that follows" (p. 13). Manela promises to tell us something really worthwhile: what a moment of literally earth-shattering historical change meant outside Europe, and how people used the language of the moment to pursue their dreams and goals. Does he deliver on his promise?

In the first two chapters, Manela unearths the foundations of Wilson's ideas and the language used to express them. He argues convincingly that Wilson's origins in the Jim Crow south and his inability to seriously consider the aspirations of African Americans was a defect that extended to his considerations of the indigenous citizens of Europe's colonies. Wilson believed that equality between peoples could only be based on the gradual tutelage of non-Europeans within a human hierarchy—a theory that found substance in the mandate system.

What accounts, then, for the enthusiasm with which colonized peoples greeted Wilson's words? Manela argues, again convincingly, that colonial intellectuals harnessed Wilson's words and vision to their separate anti-colonial struggles, often moving far beyond what Wilson or any other liberal reformers intended. Colonized intellectuals saw the outlines of a new universal equality of nations in Wilson's speeches.

Manela also traces the evolution of two terms that came to characterize Wilsonian liberalism: "self-determination" and "consent of the governed" (p. 22). Drawing on earlier Wilson scholars, Arno Mayer and Thomas Knock, Manela offers a masterly excavation of how Wilson's call for the "consent of the governed" came to be synonymous with "self-determination." While the first was a standard feature of Wilson's earlier American political campaigns, calls for self-determination emerged when Leon Trotsky, immediately after the Bolshevik

Revolution, used it to denounce the imperialist plans of the Great Powers. British Prime Minister Lloyd George used Trotsky's expression in a speech in January 1918 when he collapsed Wilson's "consent of the governed" into Trotsky's "self-determination" (p. 50). Wilson followed Lloyd George's example in his famous Fourteen Points speech before Congress one month later. Wilson's wartime propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information, used telegraphic news wire services to publish his speeches around the world.

After the war, and during the weeks of the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson grew alarmed at the expectations and hopes his earlier proclamations had provoked. Wilson's advisors noted that such expectations would make "dissatisfaction permanent" and challenge the legitimacy of the British Empire in India and Africa (p. 61). Wilson drafted the covenant of the League of Nations with no mention of self-determination.

The book's second part is more ambitious and fulfills the promise of Manela's approach. The section examines and compares Wilson's reception in Egypt, India, China, and Korea. In each of the four countries, Wilson's speeches were widely reported and wildly popular among the literate public. By comparing the specifics of each and drawing on the Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, and Korean press, among other contemporary sources, Manela argues that Wilson's calls for self-determination

inspired and radicalized many colonial intellectuals. Nationalist activists began to see the world through the lens of universal rights and equality between nations. French and British colonial functionaries moved quickly to stamp out such arguments. The disappointment that followed was greatly intensified by the hopes that Wilson had stoked.

The book's final section, "The Failure of Liberal Anticolonialism," chronicles the results of Wilson's failure. There were several fatal defects in the settlement that emerged: the inability to trim the appetite for imperial conquest among Europe's great powers, the failure to satisfy the newly inspired dreams of the colonized, and the failure to engage American politicians and citizens in the wider world. Uprisings against colonial rule erupted all over the globe in the years after the Treaty of Versailles, and Manela devotes the remainder of the book to these radicalized movements in Egypt, India, China, and Korea.

The brilliance of Manela's book is that he succeeds in drawing a direct line between Wilson's promise, the failure of liberal internationalism, and nationalist rebellions throughout the world. Historians of China, Egypt, or American diplomacy may quibble with various details of his interpretation, and some will find elements of the story familiar, but Manela succeeds in drawing people, places, and the anti-imperialist struggles of the twentieth century together in a new and utterly convincing way.

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