

**Thomas Adam.** *Intercultural Transfers and the Making of the Modern World, 1800–2000: Sources and Contexts.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 158 S. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-230-24353-8.



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To describe his study of historical intercultural transfers, Adam employs the metaphor of an archeological excavation, uncovering the complex paths that influential ideas have travelled. In his work “Intercultural Transfers and the Making of the Modern World, 1800–2000: Sources and Contexts”, Adams contends that most of the elements of western culture have not developed through national contexts, but are rather the end results of elaborate networks of intercultural transfers, with multiple transformations and modifications occurring along the way.

Within his work, he focuses on the history of five social reform movements around the world: consumer cooperatives and credit unions; housing reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; eugenics and sterilization policies; Montessori and early education reform; and change through nonviolence. The approach that Adam uses is heavily actor based, focusing largely on the travels and influences of individuals who Adam refers to as “agents of cultural transfer.” He argues that before the age of modern communications technologies, intercultural transfer was pri-

marily facilitated by members of the so-called “leisure class,” who had the financial resources to travel, and who were personally motivated by the ideas they helped to spread. Building off existing theories of cultural transfer, Adam posits that a transnational study of history provides the only viable course for truly understanding social movements that have transcended borders. Adam notes that there is currently relatively little writing about cultural transfer in English, and points to Michael Werner and Benedicte Zimmerman’s 2006 work “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisee and the Challenge of Reflexivity” as well as Matthias Middell’s edited volume “Kulturtransfer und Vergleich” as two sources which inspired his own approach. In his work, Adam challenges the use of the nation state as a unit of analysis, and instead promotes a study of history that follows the paths of ideas and explores the interconnected nature of human history.

Chapter one focuses on consumer cooperatives and credit unions, beginning with the 1844 founding and success of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, an association of textile work-

ers in northern England. Adam then follows the actors and forces that helped to facilitate the spread and evolution of the concepts through the cultural contexts of the US, Germany, Japan, Russia, India, Canada, and Italy. A recurring theme throughout both the chapter and the book is the recontextualization of concepts within the receiving culture. Drawing on specific examples from an impressive number of cooperatives and credit unions, Adam stresses how actors adapted concepts from one culture and modified them to make them fit better within their new cultural context.

Chapter two deals with housing reform in the late 19th century. As industrialization and urbanization became global phenomena, so too did the crisis of housing conditions for urban factory workers. This chapter explores social reform movements that developed in major cities around the world to try and alleviate abject housing conditions for the urban poor. Adam focuses especially on the worldwide influence of English social reformer Octavia Hill, whose housing management system in London served as an inspiration for reform movements in cities around the world, including Leipzig, Philadelphia, Cape Town, and Osaka. Within his analysis, Adam explores the cultural context of Victorian England in which Hill's theories were developed and implemented, specifically concerning the use of female volunteers for rent collection and housing management.

Chapter three deals with what Adam calls the "dark side of intercultural transfer," exploring the spread of eugenics and sterilization policies. In contrast to other themes, Adam focuses here less on movements of actors, and more on studies, books and pieces of legislation. His analysis of the spread of the concept of eugenics is much less extensive, focusing on only a few publications, namely Francis Galton's 1869 book "Hereditary Genius", which used a statistical approach to argue that intelligence is an inherited trait, and

Henry Goddard's 1912 study "The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness". Adam focuses primarily on how one piece of legislation, a sterilization law in the US state of Indiana, went on to serve as a model for subsequent sterilization laws in multiple other US states and European countries.

Chapter four deals with education reform and the spread of the Montessori method, analyzing specifically Montessori's attempts to maintain control over her educational system. In this chapter, Adam deals with how cultural concepts are difficult to maintain control over, and how they often end up becoming either diluted or infused with other competing concepts, in this case with the competing educational reforms prescribed by German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel.

Chapter five focuses primarily on the ideals of Satyagraha and nonviolent change espoused by Gandhi. After analyzing the early development of Gandhi's ideas, the chapter explores how nonviolence was interpreted and adapted within the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the African-American civil rights movement, the Mexican-American farm workers movement, and finally various non-violent revolutions in the 1980s.

Currently a professor of history at the University of Texas, Arlington, Adam's work focuses heavily on the areas of the United States, Germany and England. Having received his PhD in modern history and literature from the University of Leipzig, Adam displays a strong regional expertise in the German region of Saxony, often employing Leipzig and its surrounding areas as examples for local contextualization of global social reform movements. However, perhaps as a consequence of his regional areas of expertise, Adam's work only lightly touches on cultural transfers in non-western contexts, and does not reference cultural transfer within Latin American or East Asian contexts.

While Adam does not directly address theories of space or territoriality, his work provides

plenty of material for scholars to further explore how space and territoriality can be applied within a framework of cultural transfer. The self-styled archaeological approach used by Adam allows for an impressive reconstruction of the historical journeys that these movements have taken, but does not necessarily explore the lasting influence that these concepts may have left on the modern world. In the case of the social movements that Adam explores, future studies might focus on what Matthias Middell refers to as the final step in the cultural transfer process, namely that of complete integration, wherein a cultural concept is perceived by the receiving culture as an original element of their culture. See Matthias Middell, *Cultural Transfers, Encounters and Connections in the Global 18th Century*, Leipzig 2014, pp. 19–20.

Due to the relative newness of the study of intercultural transfer, in particular in the English speaking world, Adam's work provides a valuable addition to a growing body of work on transnational history. The approach that he has employed, tracing the pathways social movements have taken, may serve as a useful model for historians attempting to recreate the complex webs of interconnectivity that comprise the global history of ideas.

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