

REVIEW ARTICLE

## Riotous Lives and Subversive Literatures: New Directions in Global Histories of Resistance

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J. Daniel Elam. *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth: Anti-Colonial Aesthetics, Postcolonial Politics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 208 pp. ISBN: 9780823289806, \$ 31.00.

Madhumita Lahiri. *Imperfect Solidarities: Tagore, Gandhi, Du Bois, and the Global Anglophone* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 232 pp. ISBN: 9780810142664, \$ 34.95.

Mona L. Siegel. *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women's Rights after the First World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 344 pp. ISBN: 9780231195102, \$ 35.00.

Juno Jill C. Richards. *The Fury Archives: Female Citizenship, Human Rights, and the International Avant-Gardes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 344 pp. ISBN: 9780231197113, \$ 35.00.

### Abstract

Over the past two decades, the relatively young field of global history has generated remarkable excitement among students, scholars, and readers who want to read scholarship that crosses borders and brings many worlds to a single methodological framework. Global perspectives have been particularly fruitful for telling political histories that have defined the modern world. Today, there is increasing scholarly interest in writing global intellectual histories of decolonisation and anti-colonialism. In the pages that follow, I consider new work, situated in several disciplines, that pushes the methodological boundaries of historical inquiry into our connected pasts. These works include Daniel Elam's *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth*; Madhumita Lahiri's *Imperfect Solidarities*; *Peace on Our Terms* by Mona L. Siegel; and *The Fury Archives* by Juno Jill Richards.

**Keywords:** global history; anti-colonialism; intellectual history; the British Empire; women's history

One of the most enduring developments in the global political landscape at the turn of the twentieth century must be the growing internationalisation of political movements throughout the world. The early twentieth century saw the rapid expansion of communities that had global dispositions and practised some kind of international politics. These communities featured all sorts of political actors: diplomats, suffragists, revolutionaries, pacifists, workers, and anti-colonialists. The formation of such groups and the various visions they espoused represented a connected world, inextricably bound through ties

of imperialism, capital, and technology, a world where people and commodities moved across oceans in ever increasing numbers and with ever-greater speed, where migrations and travel became more frequent than ever before, where distant people came to share common laws and languages, and where ideologies, epistemologies, and imaginations travelled from one part of the globe to the other with ever more ease. And as the first bloody decades of the new century unfolded, people across all continents imagined and strove to realise their visions of this brave new world.

Over the past two decades, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the making of these past visions of the future. In the pages that follow, I consider new work, situated in several disciplines, that pushes the methodological boundaries of historical inquiry into our connected pasts. Two monographs, written by scholars of comparative literature, focus on anti-colonial writing and its global circulation. Daniel Elam's *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth: Anti-Colonial Aesthetics, Postcolonial Politics* centres around four prominent figures of the Indian anti-colonial movement in the early twentieth century—Har Dayal, M. K. Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar, and Bhagat Singh—to show a “nexus of global imagination available in the 1920s and 1930s.”<sup>1</sup> In *Imperfect Solidarities: Tagore, Gandhi, Du Bois, and the Global Anglophone*, Madhumita Lahiri relates and conceptualises the interconnected world of radical anti-colonial and antiracist thinking in the early twentieth century. She does so by examining the creation of three neologisms that impacted and informed global struggles for freedom and equality: “Gitanjali” by Rabindranath Tagore, “satyagraha” by M. K. Gandhi, and “brownies” by W. E. B. Du Bois.

The other two books reviewed here offer distinct views on the contribution of women to global movements for peace, equality, and liberation. Mona L. Siegel's historical monograph, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women's Rights after the First World War*, tells the story of an international campaign led by female activists across the colonial divide to advance the cause of women's equality at the end of the First World War. In *The Fury Archives: Female Citizenship, Human Rights, and the International Avant-Gardes*, Juno Jill Richards, a scholar of transnational modernist and postcolonial literature, presents an account of the everyday practice of feminist activism from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth and assembles what they call a “transatlantic archive of female citizenship.”

The books, reviewed in concert below, contribute to a scholarly agenda of writing global histories of political thought and intellectual histories of anti-imperialism. The task of developing new approaches to the global history of ideas is an urgent one. Increasingly, scholars are also pointing to the need to “decolonise” the academy and rethink intellectual history. As Priya Satia has reminded us, the discipline of history is implicated in the making and maintaining of empire, but at the same time writers used historical scholarship to upend, subvert, and challenge imperialism.<sup>2</sup> The scholarly challenge lies in taking on the task of studying these discourses to find roots and connections with our present moment, engaging critically with them, and laying their limits bare. Analytically, this project entails thinking with and through the literary and philosophic worlds these historical figures occupied. Methodologically it involves uncovering what intellectuals and anti-colonial thinkers read and wrote. Hence, a project for a global history of ideas, like the one outlined in the books under review, provides an opportunity to write new intellectual histories which bring colonial and postcolonial thinkers into prominence as world thinkers, thereby reconfiguring our understanding of our past and present.

Elam, Lahiri, Siegel, and Richards take up the challenges discussed above in different ways. Yet, read together, their scholarship illustrates that a range of political figures,

<sup>1</sup> J. Daniel Elam, *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020).

radical thinkers, and anti-colonial agitators in the twentieth century struggled for the wholesale transformation of the world order and considered the new century to be the harbinger of new times. Each of these books eschews the traditional boundaries of geographically defined fields and instead adopts a global framework. In doing so, these scholars join a vast and growing number of historians who question if the traditional methods of national historiographies enable us to fully grapple with our connected past.<sup>3</sup>

Since the early 2000s, more and more scholars have experimented with new methods of telling histories that transcend national borders. In fact, for many of them, the term “global history” is best understood in terms of what it seeks to oppose, that is, the methodological hegemony of nationalism. The rise of global history has led to a host of new questions and concerns that have pushed historians to go beyond traditional approaches and to reassess the geographical and linguistic boundaries of their respective fields. More than anything, global history serves as a rubric that encompasses many methods and approaches.<sup>4</sup> Hence this corpus of literature boasts immense methodological variety, thematic diversity, and geographic scope.<sup>5</sup> This relatively young field has generated remarkable excitement among students, scholars, and readers who want to read historical accounts that cross borders and brings many worlds into a single methodological framework. Global perspectives have been particularly fruitful for writing histories of political movements that have defined the modern world. Historians have shown how thinkers, campaigners, and activists from both colonies and metropolises occupied common political landscapes. They have illustrated how global cities from London to Mexico City, Paris to Algiers, New York to Berlin, became nodes for the growth of cosmopolitan political

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, C. A. Bayly et al., “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review* 111:5 (December 2006), 1441–64; James Belich et al., eds., *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); David Northrup, “Globalisation and the Great Convergence: Rethinking World History in the Long Term,” *Journal of World History* 16:3 (2005), 249–67; Peter C. Perdue, “Reflections on the Transnational and Comparative Imperial History of Asia: Its Promises, Perils, and Prospects,” *Thesis Eleven* 139:1 (2017), 129–44; Richard Drayton and David Motadel, “Discussion: The Futures of Global History,” *Journal of Global History* 13:1 (2018), 1–21; Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> In his book, *What Is Global History?* Sebastian Conrad has provided a useful discussion on the dual character of this paradigm. Global history is both an object of study and a particular way of looking at history: “it is both a process and a perspective, subject matter, and methodology.” Studies of the global often cover vast histories over large swathes of space and time. Their objective is not just to offer coverage but to bring seemingly disconnected cities, states, and regions into the same framework. Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Timothy Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008); Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 2005); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014); Erika Diane Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Merry E. Wiesner, *Gender in History: Global Perspectives* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2022); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalisation of the New South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012). Major academic publishers feature series on global histories, including the Global and International History Series by Cambridge University Press, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics, the Global History Series at the University of Chicago Press, and Columbia Studies in International and Global History. Academic journals focusing on global perspectives include the *Journal of Global History*, the *Journal of Global Intellectual History*, the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, the *Journal of World History*, and *Itinerario*, among others.

and artistic movements.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars have turned our attention to histories of internationalism and diplomacy to highlight the crucial role of international institutions, global programmes, and diplomatic avenues in creating new spaces for political and social struggles.<sup>7</sup>

The rise of these perspectives in history has also spurred intellectual historians to embrace the global turn. A growing body of scholarship is highlighting the variegated movements of concepts, ideas, ideologies, texts, and translations across the globe through different intermediary circuits, transmission networks, and modes of connectivity. This global turn has led the intellectual dimensions of radical and anti-colonial politics, particularly from marginalised and colonised communities, to become a central concern in the field. Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, Adom Getachew, and Yoav Di-Capua are among several scholars who are showing that global decolonisation and anti-colonial movements were both *defined by* and *constitutive of* the global circulation of political ideas and practices that defined the twentieth century and remain influential in our own times.<sup>8</sup>

Pursuing this scholarly agenda, as Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori have noted, requires methodological variation and epistemological experimentation.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, historians face several conceptual and theoretical questions as they develop new models and approaches to global intellectual and political histories. To begin with, we must define the global and determine if a political movement, intellectual interaction, or exchange of information can be considered as such. Furthermore, we must critically assess the archive itself, especially when telling histories of the less-sung figures of history: those who may not have been chronicled or canonised or those who did not leave archival records. Indeed, we often must rethink research methods, recalibrate reading practices, and create new interpretive techniques when writing new intellectual histories.

<sup>6</sup> Some notable examples of global histories of radical political movements include Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anti-Colonialists in Europe, 1905-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonisation, and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonisation in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Christoph Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World: Decolonisation and the Rise of the New Left in France, c. 1950-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Some examples include Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> See Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonisation* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019). See also Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Raymond B. Craib, *The Cry of the Renegade: Politics and Poetry in Interwar Chile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015). Earlier examples include Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

Daniel Elam centres the latter question in his new book, *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth*. Elam aims to excavate the political thought and practice of actors and thinkers in colonial and postcolonial contexts and invites readers to consider the political as well as aesthetic dimensions of anti-colonial writings. In so doing, he joins several scholars who have turned to the world of aesthetics and literature to write new accounts of the ideas that animated the anti-colonial project.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the scholarly attention to anti-colonial writing, Elam argues that many scholars, particularly in the Western academy, still do not consider anti-colonial thought as intellectually on a par with European philosophical traditions. Some, he argues, find “it to be ‘improperly political,’ too fraught with ethical and moral prerogatives to be of use.”<sup>11</sup> Those who have opposed this view and come to the defence of anti-colonial thought “often fall prey to justifying its canonicity by rendering it roughly equivalent to European forms.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, anti-colonial thought is considered either “too aesthetic to be political or too political to be aesthetic.”<sup>13</sup> Elam rejects either view and instead argues that “many anti-colonial thinkers unequivocally *refused* to think of politics and aesthetics as separate.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, he argues, in order to truly recuperate anti-colonial thought, we must consider it as *critique*—a practice of authorial or authoritative relinquishment.

This connects to his second intervention. Elam argues that aesthetics of anti-colonial thought in the early twentieth century can be illustrated by situating it with comparative philology—an intellectual movement being developed during the same time in Europe. He posits that comparative philology and anti-colonial thought “were both committed to envisioning a new world in response to, and from underneath, the horrors of fascism and colonialism, that a future literature was to imagine, inherit, and create.”<sup>15</sup> Elam emphasises that both sets of thinkers were committed to the anti-authoritarian practice of close reading. For many of them, he contends, reading was a way of eschewing mastery and control. They sought to continuously challenge authority in the world they inherited yet did not seek to dictate the contours of the world that was to come.

This leads to the third and biggest argument of the book. While most studies of anti-colonial writing are concerned with its consequence and impact on revolutionary outcomes, Elam declares that anti-colonial political aesthetics were committed to “inconsequence.”<sup>16</sup> He identifies and subsequently problematises a paradoxical quality in anti-colonial thought. Anti-colonialists, like Har Dayal, M. K. Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar, and Bhagat Singh, imagined postcolonial futures knowing full well that they might not live to see them. Yet despite the uncertainty of the times to come and the unlikelihood of fulfilling their mission, they remained committed to the cause of emancipation. Rather than relinquish their seemingly impossible task, Elam argues that these figures embraced their Sisyphean agenda and developed new aesthetic forms to “imagine a worldwide egalitarianism rooted in the unlikelihood of any future at all.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Sanjukta Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2020); Akinwumi Adesokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Peter J. Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Elam, *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

In each chapter, he presents different figures and articulates their vision for anti-colonial politics: Har Dayal developed the idea of a “World State of friendship”; Ambedkar believed “fellowship” to be a worldwide mission; Gandhi was committed to humanitarianism that had a universal ethos; and Bhagat Singh imagined a “universal brotherhood.” Hence, they represent for him an “anti-canon” of literary thought, featuring “disorderly histories, promiscuous modes of thought, impossible transformations, and improvisational adjacencies.”<sup>18</sup> Liberated from the burden of the implementation of their visions, they developed alternative modes of thinking, reading, and writing, argues Elam. This stance may seem incommensurate with the historical fact of their actual political practice, which entailed active organisation against the colonial state. However, Elam argues that such acts were not incompatible with their alternative mode of thinking. In fact, imperial subjects had to live with and constantly reconcile consequence with inconsequence.

Elam’s is an imaginative way of approaching the world of anti-colonial letters. Anti-colonialists often visualised limitless worlds, despite the uncertain reality in which they lived. However, one cannot but wonder if such an ephemeral state of being is not a universal condition for radical thinkers imagining new futures throughout history.

Moreover, inducting anti-colonialists into a literary canon—or assembling them into an anti-canon—also means reading *them* critically. Elam’s suggestion that the contradictory, problematic, or incommensurate parts of his protagonists’ political thought were part of a deliberate project to undermine the supposed premise of imperial or Western thought almost seems like an evasion. When Har Dayal asks his readers to juxtapose 1857 with 1914, he may be “re-mixing history by way of a reading practise,” but this was far from a novel exercise.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, Har Dayal’s fantastical rendition of historical narratives was and remains foundational to the creation of national movements, including anti-colonial ones. Similarly, discrepant, or erratic thinking is a phenomenon in no way limited to anti-colonial thought (or for that matter to comparative philology). Elam may be right that someone like Gandhi was aware of “losses, inconsistencies and apologies” within his own thinking, but such awareness is not unique to anti-colonialists.<sup>20</sup> Even the most canonised writers have changed positions over time. By the same token, not all anti-colonialists eschewed systematic thinking. A great number of Indian intellectuals considered themselves scientific and structural thinkers and would not have accepted the claim that their political thought exhibited some sort of subversive inconsistency, ambiguity, or equivocation.

Similarly, it is curious that readers do not feature at all in the book. In fact, Elam suggests that “actual” readers and reading are irrelevant because anti-colonial thought as presented in the book “theorised the subject position as unintelligible, unrecognizable and unanswerable to the colonial state’s desire to render its subjects identifiable and knowable.”<sup>21</sup> I remain unconvinced by this suggestion. Ideas survive because people choose to read them and reproduce them. Anti-colonial ideas were meant to be read and propagated, which Elam would acknowledge, and these figures were actively thinking about their subjects. The literature published by the Ghadar movement, the insurrectionary effort led by Har Dayal, was directed towards Indian soldiers; Gandhi meant to speak to the masses of India; Ambedkar spoke for and to the Dalit community; Bhagat Singh lives on not because his story was unique but because it was read and mythologised by

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

subsequent readers and writers.<sup>22</sup> Elam wants us to read anti-colonial thought creatively, even disruptively. But his lack of engagement with the social lives of the ideas, as they circulated among readers and were reproduced, mobilised, or transfigured, limits the book's impact.

As suggested in the first part of this essay, writing global intellectual histories demands methodological innovation and experimentation. Elam's mission in developing new hermeneutics for reading anti-colonial thought is to decolonise the Western political and literary canon. Throughout the book he emphasises that anti-colonialists were not only activists but also readers and writers. His work shows that figures like Gandhi, Dayal, Singh, and Ambedkar were embedded in global conversations about politics and ethics. Curiously however, Elam does not want us to think too much about these global interactions while considering the writings of these figures. "A focus on reading and the practise of critique moves us away from the frustratingly simplistic view that a history of ideas must be a history of influences (a narrative that often privileges the European 'origin' of a philosophical encounter)," he writes.<sup>23</sup> This seems a little contradictory to his other objective of showing anti-colonialists as purveyors of world literature and philosophy. Moreover, the figures in his book openly accepted the influence of other indigenous and foreign intellectuals on the formation of their respective ideas and ideologies. Elam himself shows that Har Dayal developed a vision of anti-colonialism by reading Herbert Spencer and William Morris; Bhagat Singh remained committed to reading Marxist thought throughout his short life; Gandhi was heavily influenced by Christian philosophy, and Ambedkar's thought was shaped by his interactions with John Dewey.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Elam's work actually shows the necessity for more scholarship on this global exchange of ideas and influences that shaped the modern discourse against imperialism.

Madhumita Lahiri, another scholar of literary studies and postcolonialism, tackles the challenge of writing the history of radical ideas in a global age in a different way. In *Imperfect Solidarities*, Lahiri highlights how activists from across the Anglophone world used print networks to connect with one another and foster new language against racial inequality.<sup>25</sup> Lahiri does not simply present a biographical account of these thinkers and their interactions. Instead, in an innovative methodological approach, she examines the creation of three neologisms that impacted and informed global struggles for freedom and equality: "Gitanjali" by Rabindranath Tagore, "satyagraha" by M. K. Gandhi, and "brownies" by W. E. B. Du Bois.

These neologisms, she argues, were part of a new conceptual vocabulary created by radical writers imagining political futures for the marginalised of the world. Lahiri makes an original and important methodological and analytical intervention about the language of global anti-colonialism. Historians often associate the rise of the English language as the international lingua franca with the expansion of the British Empire and a manifestation of Anglophile hegemony in the world. But Lahiri turns this on its head and instead invites us to see how the spread of English created the conditions of possibility for the formation of an *anti-imperial and antiracist* global community in the twentieth century. Lahiri emphasises that anti-colonialists not only wrote in their vernacular and regional languages but also contributed to a lexicon of liberty that travelled throughout the English-speaking world.

<sup>22</sup> See also Chris Moffat, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Elam, *World Literature for the Wretched of the Earth*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 55, 95–100.

<sup>25</sup> Lahiri, *Imperfect Solidarities*.

The book focuses on the history of each emancipatory neologism. Using pamphlets, books, correspondence, letters, and other print sources, Lahiri shows how each of her protagonists came up with his respective concept. She shows how each of the terms took an older concept and radically reconfigured it into an altogether new signifier. Thus, Tagore used the word *gitanjali*, which literally means “song offering,” to denote a devotional conception of Asian aesthetics. The word *satyagraha* translates to “holding to truth,” but in Gandhi’s usage the term came to mean passive resistance. And W. E. B. Du Bois took the imperial and racist epithet “brownies” and transformed it to depict a mixed-race child with magical prowess.

The author’s choice to focus on these three well-known figures is deliberate. Not only were they all influential, but they were also contemporaries—they spoke with each other, debated ideas, and discussed their works. Through in-depth consideration of the genealogy of these neologisms, Lahiri tells a story that is global in more ways than one, and it is her conceptualisation of this interaction of radical ideas that readers of history will find particularly thought provoking. Lahiri’s account of intellectual thought operates on the global scale in three distinct but interrelated ways. First, she highlights how the rise of this radical terminology arose with the emergence of the “global Anglophone,” which she defines as “an elastic space of discussion and exchange: thus, for instance, it includes writers from the Anglophone countries usually excluded (such as the then-U.S. based W. E. B. Du Bois) as well as Anglophone writers from decidedly non-Anglophone regions (such as the Chinese intellectual Liang Qichao).”<sup>26</sup> She shows that while other European and non-European literary and linguistic spheres certainly existed, English was already becoming a global language in the first half of the twentieth century. But as more and more of the colonised world came to speak English, the ability to connect across locations and to forge non-national forms of solidarity also increased.<sup>27</sup>

Second, these interactions relied on the existence of technologies that fostered global communication. Unsurprisingly, the printing press is crucial to Lahiri’s story. The dissemination of periodicals, pamphlets, and related ephemera was important for the production and circulation of anti-colonial thought and served as a conduit for social movements and political thinkers to connect. New media technologies and access to a common language gave rise to what Lahiri describes as “print internationalism”: a practice that was meant to create alternative geographies and new forms of community within the global Anglosphere through the creation of new words and terms. She argues that contrary to the “individualized reader” of the imagined community theorised by Benedict Anderson,<sup>28</sup> the reader of print internationalism is necessarily “a social creature” and was part of an interpretive community.<sup>29</sup> For her, the “paradigm of an interpretive community emphasizes the role of implicit understandings, acquired through social participation, that inform every act of reading and render any text intelligible.”<sup>30</sup> Print internationalism relied on “networks of people having common norms, political dispositions, and objectives, who share in the reading of texts.”<sup>31</sup> In this case, the figures Lahiri studies shared “a general disposition” against racism and imperialism. For example, she follows the reception of Tagore’s texts in China. Though they were reading translations

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–7.

<sup>28</sup> For Anderson, the newspaper and the novel created a sense of temporal simultaneity that was crucial to the creation of national consciousness. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2016 [1983]).

<sup>29</sup> Lahiri, *Imperfect Solidarities*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Lahiri, *Imperfect Solidarities*, 5–15.



of his writings in English, Asian internationalists were able to use the book *Gitanjali* to find “both new insights and a reassuring commonality.”<sup>32</sup>

Third and most importantly, each of these neologisms reflects a distinct type and formulation of internationalism. Tagore believed in and espoused a pan-Asian identity rooted in an idea of common aesthetics. He was a staunch anti-imperialist, but he also sought to eradicate national boundaries to create broader forms of community. By contrast, Gandhi remained tethered to the idea of national liberation. The universality of the principle of satyagraha did not for him diminish the centrality and specificity of an Indian nation. Du Bois conceived his politics in a global frame. The movement against racism, for him, was necessarily an international one.

The subversive capacities of these neologisms, together with the connective practices of print internationalism, create for Lahiri new forms of international solidarity. However, as the book’s title suggests, such solidarities are imperfect. Lahiri is attentive to the complex, knotty, and challenging nature of the discourse fostered by print internationalism. She problematises Tagore’s exoticisation of “the East” in his art and writing, criticises Gandhi’s refusal to fully include South African suffering in his quest against imperial injustice (and his use of stereotypical imagery when discussing Black South Africans), and questions Du Bois’s conflation of race and caste. Lahiri’s attention to the limitations of internationalist thinking and recognition of its pitfalls as much as its potential makes her book a particularly valuable intervention for people interested in reading and writing histories of internationalism.

Elam and Lahiri show that turning to the study of literature and aesthetics can challenge historians to develop new understandings of where and how international politics took place. This approach can be fruitful for understanding key moments in global history, especially when paired with an emphasis on noncanonical or understudied figures and movements. For example, it can prove generative when writing on women’s contributions to global political movements.

Since the early 2000s, women’s international political activism has become a critical area of scholarship not only for women’s history but also for international and global history.<sup>33</sup> Scholars have highlighted the key role played by women and feminist politics in international organisations, radical transnational movements, and global campaigns for political freedom, gender equality, and human rights. Mona L. Siegel’s new book *Peace on Our Terms* adds to this conversation and locates the origins of global feminism to 1919, the year of the armistice. The spectre of change surrounding the Paris Peace Conference afforded women the opportunity to demand changes to their political position and to seek guarantees for their civil and political rights. Women’s delegations from the United States, France, England, Egypt, China, and Japan arrived to participate in the peace process. When they were not given a seat at the table, they organised their own grand meeting: the Inter-Allied Women’s Conference. They passed resolutions, sent delegations, made petitions, wrote articles and stories in newspapers, and gave interviews to bring global attention to the “women’s question.” These activists, argues Siegel, tied the question of women’s equality to prevailing political agendas for pacifism on the one hand and national liberation on the other. For European and North American feminists, the object of enduring peace could not be met without the recognition of women as equal citizens

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>33</sup> Some notable examples include Ian Christopher Nym et al., eds., *Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race* (London: Routledge, 2000); Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, “Women’s International Activism during the Inter-War Period, 1919–1939,” *Women’s History Review* 26:2 (2017), 163–72; “Special Issue on Circling the Globe: International Feminism Reconsidered, 1920 to 1975,” eds. Ellen Carol DuBois and Katie Oliviero, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 1:32 (2009).

and their meaningful inclusion in the polis. At the same time, many women from colonised countries not only demanded self-determination and the end of Western imperialism but also insisted on assurances of political parity for women in the postimperial future, hence tying the question of national liberation to that of female citizenship.

In the book, Siegel assembles a diverse cast of characters, some well-known, others less so, and tells a story about their political lives. This cast includes people like German activist Marguerite de Witt Schlumberger, American feminists Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman, and the African American activists Mary Church Terrell and Ida Gibbs Hunt. Siegel also devotes attention to non-Western figures, namely the Egyptian feminist and nationalist Huda Shaawari and the Chinese activist Soumay Tcheng. She relates their work and contributions to the international politics in the interwar era: Schlumberger and Chapman were organisers of the Inter-Allied Conference,<sup>34</sup> Addams was one of the founders of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Tcheng was part of the Chinese delegation to the Versailles conference in 1919,<sup>36</sup> Terrell and Hunt participated in the pan-African movement,<sup>37</sup> and working-class activists, such as Rose Schneiderman and Jeanne Bouvier, influenced the establishing principles and direction of the International Labour Organisation.<sup>38</sup> Through this compilation, Siegel shows that elite women across colonies and metropolises mobilised on the question of female citizenship and sought new futures.

Thus, if we take global feminism to mean either the simultaneous rise of the women's movement in various countries or a synchronous concern with the women's question around the world, then the book is successful in proving that global feminism as such did emerge. However, if we conceptualise global feminism as a normative project—based on an understanding of feminism that was non-national, universal, stateless, or otherwise *global* in imagination—we will have to conclude otherwise. Even as they organised internationally and took their concerns to international forums, the actors Siegel presents ultimately demanded guarantees from their respective national governments. This work leaves room for thinking of feminist politics that transcended the nation-state. Writing such histories that capture the global nature of ideas and actions that animated modern feminist politics requires epistemological experimentation and new interpretative gestures. Methodologically, it necessitates going beyond the archives of international institutions, foreign offices, and diplomatic missions.

Juno Jill Richards does precisely this in their exciting new work, *The Fury Archives*. The book presents a history of the everyday practice of feminist activism from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. By capturing a repertoire of practices and actions taken by feminists over the years—arson campaigns, riots, rebellions, hunger strikes, underground birth control clinics—as well as the less dramatic bureaucratic work of everyday organising, like writing petitions or running magazines, Richards assembles what they call a “transatlantic archive of female citizenship.”<sup>39</sup> The focus on the everyday work of organising, whether spectacular or otherwise, is deliberate and is meant to provoke the reader to read the history of first wave feminism beyond the demand for the vote. Rather than focusing on the success or failure of political campaigns for the vote, Richards asks us to think critically about the social and imaginative worlds created by women through the articulation of this demand.

<sup>34</sup> Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 26–32.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 171–7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–5.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 206–16.

<sup>39</sup> Richards, *The Fury Archives*, 1.

The book brings human rights history and the history of women's movements into the same analytical framework. One of the book's main objectives is to expand the scope of histories of female citizenship by going beyond the more established accounts to show that the "narrative of human rights that foregrounds the League of Nations and the United Nations is not the only one to be had."<sup>40</sup> This method allows Richards to present women and queer activists as more than representatives of national interests. In so doing, they also avoid the dichotomous lens of colonial versus colonised women. Instead, they show that visions of feminist solidarity were not bound by the nation-state. Richards argues that many feminists were deeply suspicious of the universalising and homogenising tendencies of liberal internationalism and developed new conceptual vocabularies to articulate different types of associations and alliances.

Building on and speaking to multiple fields, from human rights history to literary studies and postcolonial theory, legal theory, and art history, the book is an interdisciplinary tour de force. It is also a global history. Richards opens with the tale of two trials involving feminist insurgents, one in the wake of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the other in the aftermath of a rebellion in French Martinique in 1870, to consider the tension inherent in the construction of the female citizen at once active but not recognised by the state. It moves to examine the cyclical nature of arson and riot campaigns by female suffragettes in England and South Africa and turns to the discourse on reproductivity and birth control strikes within proletarian political circles across Europe. It takes us from debates about racial intermixing in the Rhineland at the height of the German Empire to the surrealist articulations of the feminist form on the other side of the Atlantic, and to the theatre of UN committee meetings at Lake Success in 1947. As such, the book is an ambitious and impressive assemblage spanning a range of sites, spaces, characters, and movements. But its bigger achievement lies in capturing the global and capacious character of feminist politics. Richards deftly brings together histories of colonialism, race, sexuality, war, and revolution as well as gender and sexuality to showcase new genealogies of juridical and social ideas about womanhood. Simultaneously the book shows that radical discourses on female rights and liberation developed dialogically and were inextricably connected to feminist imaginations and positions on biopolitics, labour, and imperialism.

Through such analysis, Richards can uncover and dive deeper into the substance of feminist politics. They capture in this work not only the imaginings of solidarity but also the subtle and more far-reaching consequences of the global flow and interplay of vocabularies, stories, events, testimonies, memories, words, and images that informed and continue to inform radical politics. The book is global in two ways: not only are the visions of its characters often universal in scope, but the content of their thought and action is contingent on the dialogues across time and space, something that was only possible by the end of the nineteenth century and was explicitly modernist in its orientation.

In different ways, Siegel's and Richards's works illustrate the significance of women's and gender history to the study of global intellectual history. Women's activism, as Siegel shows, was at once shaped by and crucial in shaping international as well as national politics in the early twentieth century. Their intellectual and political work transformed questions of peace, anti-colonial liberation, and political sovereignty into women's questions. But as Richards's work shows us, female and queer activists and thinkers also challenged hegemonic discourses about international order and provided alternative imaginations and new visions of the future—some of which continued to influence activists and intellectuals for generations to come.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

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Over twenty years of scholarship on global history has equipped us to better understand the formation of the modern world. But much work is yet to be done, particularly when it comes to understanding “the global” as a normative project. As the authors discussed in this essay have shown, thinkers of the twentieth century certainly struggled for the transformation of the world and believed that the new century would herald new times. Their works highlight how a global historical approach can be applied to the history of reading and writing, to the world of print and the world of art, to the interconnected history of political campaigns and the transnational history of political concepts—indeed this lens is important to our understandings of the imaginations, epistemologies, and radical strategies of people who defined modern times. The world we inherited may not mirror, exactly, their visions, but that makes our work even more important. The future of the global intellectual history of empire and its aftermath lies in discovering and explaining the historical exigencies and conditions that account for the evolution of political ideas, their myriad applications and reclamations, their circulation and dissolution, and at times their mutation and rebirth.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to acknowledge Rohit De for encouraging me to write this essay and providing valuable insight. I am also grateful to the editorial team at *Itinerario* for reading early drafts of this article and providing generative feedback and commentary.

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**Cite this article:** Aziz Z (2024). Riotous Lives and Subversive Literatures: New Directions in Global Histories of Resistance. *Itinerario* 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000323>