

extended reproduction in Part 7. This is a fundamental mistake because, as I argued in my 2015 monograph,⁴ it is precisely in those chapters that Marx develops his analysis of capital expansionism and global reach. Stedman Jones's acknowledgement that Part 8 on the so-called primitive accumulation shows that "capitalist development had been decisively assisted by political intervention" and thus its worldwide expansion "could be resisted or avoided" (p. 430) contradicts his criticism of Marx for supposedly depicting capital as an "impersonal and inevitable process, detached from the actions of human agents" (p. 425).

These shortcomings explain the hiatus characterizing Stedman Jones's interpretation of Marx's theoretical and political positions in the 1860s and 1870s. In his view, Marx was most effective when he abandoned assumptions about the centrality of the party and the concern to push the International Working Men's Association towards a socialist agenda (p. 472), "and put his faith in trade unions as the means of the formation and consolidation of class identity and activity" (p. 471). In the 1860s, Marx would have changed his "conception of revolutionary change" (p. 467), focusing not upon "the violent seizure of power associated with twentieth-century communism but [...] a social-democratic process propelled by 'pressure from without'" (p. 468). But Stedman Jones does not provide sufficient evidence for this interpretation, which he seems to contradict by quoting an 1868 letter to Ludwig Kugelmann in which Marx relates his own activity in the International to the broader goals of the "workers' party" (p. 481). It is also unclear how this position could be sustained given the increasing indifference on the part of British trade union leaders towards workers' struggles not only in Paris – Stedman Jones criticizes Marx for the political isolation in Britain to which his defence of the Commune condemned him – but also in the colonies, starting with Ireland. As a rich scholarship maintains, rather than expressing, as Stedman Jones claims, the dreams of a pre-1848 generation of intellectuals and an escape from his economic work, Marx's late studies of communal social formations reflected his continuing attempt at developing his revolutionary critique of capitalism as a global system.

The overall conclusion of Stedman Jones's biography is that Marx's illusion largely overshadows his greatness. More successful in founding the new field of social and economic history than in developing a compelling critique of capitalism (p. 430), Marx himself deserves to be confined within the nineteenth century. And yet, one cannot but wonder whether this verdict is grounded in a scholarly analysis of Marx's achievements or in a game of mirrors still largely informed by twentieth-century concerns.

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PELZ, WILLIAM A. *A People's History of Modern Europe*. Pluto Press, London 2016. xiv, 273 pp. \$100.00 (Paper \$28.00); £58.50.

It takes gumption to write a large book about a controversial and difficult subject in a limited number of pages. William Pelz's recent overview, a people's history of Europe from

4. Lucia Pradella, *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings* (New York, 2015).

mediaeval inquisitions of the twelfth century to the current moment's proliferating socio-economic and political crises, is just such an exercise in audacity.

Pelz's understanding of the people is undeniably orchestrated by an accent on political tension and overt confrontation. He constructs out of the jumbled chaos, calamity, and routinized bouts of calm of everyday lives, a history "moving through conflicts between contending groups" (p. viii). He alludes to Brecht, drawing inspiration from "A Worker Reads History", and wants, predictably, to address how common people thought about the major events they lived through, what they did to influence them. The history chronicled in Pelz's elegantly ordered narrative is a presentation of what workers and peasants, women and protesters, the poor and the dispossessed made, albeit not always as they chose. This is an ambitious undertaking.

What is best in Pelz's account is indeed the order he manages to develop out of a disorderly history. In scaffolding his narration of a people's history on familiar landmarks of Europe's political struggles, Pelz presents the reader with an unfolding battleground. People's history, for Pelz, emerges at the interface of historic oppositions: heretics against Churchmen; peasants against lords; aspiring and rising classes, such as the nascent bourgeoisie, against feudal autocrats, aristocrats, and the divine rights of kings; exploited workers against the machinery of the Industrial Revolution, be it technological or human; women against patriarchal power; advocates of socialism and class collectivity against the regime of property and acquisitive individualism; communists and their revolutions against capitalists and their resilience; fascism and its war crucible against defenders of democracy and champions of peace; the Soviet Union against the United States, and the Cold War's consequent deformation of global relations; and the contemporary clash of a Europe caught in the vise of complicated and fragmented struggles over unity versus division, in which generational, class, gender, national, and racial/ethnic differences all play their part.

Discerning readers will find much that is familiar amid a great deal that is provocative and insightful. Those less familiar with the hindsight of historical expertise will be introduced, intelligently and informatively, to the *longue durée* of the trials and travails the common people have experienced over centuries of European history. Pelz does an admirable job of covering this complicated ground, which involves identifying general trends as well as pausing to linger over differences that marked out the particularities of specific regions, such as why Sweden's path to industrialization differed from that of England. He thus sees *both* the forests and the trees, cognizant of the importance of dominant trajectories as well as idiosyncratic happenings, the consequences of which might well manifest themselves in significant developments. And on integrating women into his people's history, Pelz has written into the record of the past a pivotal group unduly marginalized in much writing.

None of this is easily accomplished, and Pelz is to be congratulated for putting so much into so little easily digested space. As with any history of this kind, carping about what is covered at the expense of what is not addressed would be unfair and small-minded. Any scholar with a modicum of reading under his or her intellectual belt could no doubt quibble with much in this book, and it would not be difficult to identify specific texts that might well have been cited productively, their arguments engaged with in ways that widened the vision of Pelz's account. Acknowledging Pelz's accomplishment, it may however be productive to raise some questions about what constitutes a people's history, reflecting on how this genre is developed in this particular account.

In structuring his people's history around a chronological narrative of political conflict, for instance, Pelz orders his book in specific ways. Premising this narrative on the ruptures that marked transitional moments associated with uprisings, rebellions, revolutions, and

struggles, this people's history emerges out of a wide-ranging engagement with interpretive works of history addressing large-scale developments such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the making and unmaking of revolutionary possibility, and war and its impact. As deft as Pelz is at situating ordinary people within these world historical developments, the choice to arrange their history in this way has a number of consequences.

One of these is that the sweep of the political narrative of events, as enticing as it is in both its familiarity and obvious importance, tends to sometimes leave the actual people in its wake. In spite of Pelz's bow to Brecht, we are often at a loss to know what common people felt and thought about developments that, over generations of experience, structured their lives. This problem is exacerbated by the harsh reality of histories made in the streets and fields of particular times, with ordinary people making monumental contributions, but the consequences of their struggles leading, decades later, to unforeseen outcomes, the assessment of which is often, for the real and metaphorical offspring of such common folk, illusive.

A case in point is the degeneration of the world historic Bolshevik Revolution, which Pelz addresses, and which was made in part on the strategic acumen of the astute leadership of Lenin, Trotsky, and others; in part through the actions of the workers and peasants who constitute the architects of Pelz's people's history; and in part by the confluence of events and developments that were in some measure a conjuncture determined, indeed overdetermined, by a range of structural realities in which the people figured forcefully, but by no means always decisively. How did these people think and feel about Stalinism's reconfiguration of their agency?

New developments and determinations, layered on previous outcomes and achievements, make such questions quite difficult to pose, let alone answer. The old and difficult dialectic, addressing the relative weights of determination/agency in the making of history, is doubly vexing to parse when the issue is what a people's history actually looks like through time. Pelz is unambiguous that, in his analytic and political understandings, Stalinism registers in the history of the people as a negative development. But, it is difficult to ascertain what people living with Stalinism actually thought, let alone how, in Brechtian terms, they felt, especially if we are exploring such questions throughout history, as opposed to within that moment of the past when the tide finally seemed to turn, as it did in 1989. This substantive issue is not unrelated to a host of other developments and phenomena that animate Pelz's overview, from the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 and the French Revolution of 1789, to the rise of fascism in Germany's 1930s or the New Left upheavals of 1968.

There is no easy answer as to how to overcome this issue, complicated as it is by the scale and range of Pelz's centuries-long and geographically expansive treatment. It may be that layering an unambiguously political narrative, marked as it is by discontinuities, in the continuities of everyday life, as articulated in expressions of material culture, population dynamics and demography, shifting contours of consumption and changing technologies of social relations, leavened by judicious recourse to reflections and representations of ordinary people, as they appear in memoir, art, fiction, and genres such as popular music, might go some way toward giving the people more of a voice in their own history. This could well enhance the revelations possible about what people thought and felt, although, in the end, it must also be recognized, as Pelz does, that *the people* neither lived in one common state of being, nor spoke with one unadulterated common voice. Writing history in ways that convey this would no doubt up the level of audacity and gumption necessary in tackling the writing of people's history.

Pelz, to his credit, takes a stab at this. He does introduce some of the kinds of material gestured to above. But his narrative is unerringly shaped by the interpretive monopoly of major political events. It is the people's necessary destiny to challenge the drift of a political

trajectory made, at least in part, out of their agency, but always pressured in ways opposed to their needs. “Only one thing is certain”, Pelz concludes, “Without a vision of a better world and the will to struggle for it, the people are lost” (p. 217).

This book gives us hope that such a vision is indeed possible, demonstrating as well that struggles to realize it are an undeniable component of a long and complex history. As the politics of the moment seem depressingly constrained, Peltz’s people’s history reminds us of an important historical reservoir of active struggle and humane commitment. This past posed alternatives to powerful social constituencies that have always stood quite apart from the people, however much they have been willing to speak on their behalf. Such a challenge is a provocation to resist that can be marshalled to refuse the limiting outcomes, registering in loss, that are currently being orchestrated by those for whom the people stand, always and unequivocally, as a threatening force to suppress and silence or deflect and defeat.

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KEESE, ALEXANDER. *Ethnicity and the Colonial State. Finding and Representing Group Identifications in a Coastal West African and Global Perspective (1850–1960)*. [Studies in Global Social History, vol. 22.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2016. x, 377 p. ill., maps, €135.00; \$175.00.

In the 1980s and 1990s, studies on ethnicity were popular among historians and political scientists working on Africa. Since then, the debate between the proponents and opponents of the “colonial invention of ethnicity” thesis has waned, but the significance of ethnicity as a locus of group formation and a political argument has not. Alexander Keese’s comparative study on ethnicity as a resource for political mobilization in three West African coastal areas represents a highly welcome contribution to an old debate, and it is rich in sources and theoretically ambitious. Drawing on the cases of the Wolof in Senegal (and Gambia), the Temne in Sierra Leone, and the Ewe along the Ghana-Togo border, Keese analyses how, since the mid-nineteenth century, European and African actors have used (or omitted) ethnic labels and arguments in their political actions. This study goes beyond the dichotomy between “primordialists” (who see ethnicity as a trans-historical, natural basis of group formation) and “constructivists” (who emphasize the situationally specific and politically informed “invention” of ethnic groups and the role of the colonial masters specifically) in that it convincingly analyses under what conditions and in what manifold ways African chiefs, educated elites, or merchants, as well as European missionaries and colonial administrators invoked ethnicity, or favoured other modes of group identification, such as membership of local, regional, or national political structures.

Keese regards ethnic groups as “self-declared communities whose spokesmen define them as groups with a common history and traditions, and who cling to this common identification independently from state structures and institutions” (p. 48). Although he points out that cultural markers for ethnic identifications are flexible and can vary both between and within