Book Reviews

A Social History of Knowledge, Volume II: From the Encyclopaedia to Wikipedia

Peter Burke

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, £17.99 pbk, ISBN: 9780745650432, 359 pp.

The man in the Library

Extended review by: *Richard Kilminster, University of Leeds, England*

> 'You're everywhere and nowhere baby,
> That's where you're at.' (Jeff Beck)

The breadth of reading in histories of the sciences and humanities on display in this book is overwhelming. The abundant factual information has been gleaned, Burke explains quoting John Pickstone, from 'raiding, rearranging and sometimes revising' (pp 2–3) the works of other historians. Burke describes the book as a 'distillation', an attempt at a 'synthesis' of their specialist works to build up a 'big picture' or 'bird's-eye view' of mainly academic knowledge production in the period 1750–2000. The book is a continuation of *A Social History of Knowledge, Volume I: From Gutenberg to Diderot,* which he published in 2000. It is an intricate tapestry of names, dates, isms, facts, figures and descriptions of institutions, research groups and clusters, mainly in Western countries. There is a vast bibliography, copious index, 23 pages of endnotes, 17 photographs and figures documented in a full list. On Burke's own estimate there are nearly 800 names of individual thinkers mentioned in the text. This is a book about other books. Burke is the man in the University library browsing in the basement stack, making notes on an A4 pad.

The range of topics across all nine chapters is immense. Burke moves from eighteenth-century French botanists to the geographical knowledge of native Americans, advances in translations of ancient Urartian, Ugaritic and Hittite scripts, the rise of statistics, Walter Scott's *Waverley*, molecular models of methane, centralised planning, business schools in Europe, fingerprinting, disease classification, art history, the discovery of X-rays, and the new universities of the 1960s; via folklore, losses on Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, galleries and museums, the study of comparative religions, research by German chemists into dyes and fabrics, phrenology, the double helix, Herman Hollerith's electric tabulating system, psychoanalysis, the Hubble telescope, detective novels, surveillance, the Norwegian Humanist Association and the Sears Roebuck catalogue.

This random list does not do justice to the diversity of the information woven into the book's dense chapters. Burke's capacity to cover every name, date, fact, angle, nuance of interpretation and counter-example across the many areas of inquiry he defines is truly staggering. He is indefatigable. One of the puffs on the back cover

refers to the book as an 'exhilarating' read. For me, though, the many tightly packed, short, self-contained subsections (Burke calls them 'a sequence of essays') provided not so much a thrilling read as an arduous one. He does provide signposts at the beginning of each Part and in the Introduction but, even so, the probability is that, like me, most exhausted readers will lose sight of the path in the thickets.

A credible evaluation of Burke's analyses, within the framework he specifies, is impossible within the limitations of a book review. In any case, who has read even a fraction of the specialist articles and books that Burke has consulted? Who can confirm or challenge even one per cent of his profuse comparative examples? My way into this volume is therefore to question Burke's basic approach to the development of human knowledge, his assumptions and starting points. This is not to gainsay his achievement, far from it, but to try to bring a different perspective to this ambitious but daunting book. This line of argument takes us into issues of classification, the role of theory, the nature of synthesis and the traditional question of the relationship between sociology and history. The latter controversy is, of course, one to which Burke himself has devoted considerable thought for many years, including again in this book. Hence, I appreciate that in some parts of this review I will be teaching grandmother how to suck eggs.

The Table of Contents provides clues to Burke's approach. It signals the author's attempt to provide structure and organisation to the presentation of his many discussions and interpretations of the materials he has mustered from history books. The Table is worth reproducing in full:

Part I Knowledge Practices

1. Gathering Knowledges

2. Analysing Knowledges

3. Disseminating Knowledges

4. Employing Knowledges

Part II The Price of Progress

5. Losing Knowledges

6. Dividing Knowledges

Part III A Social History in Three Dimensions

7. Geographies of Knowledge

8. Sociologies of Knowledge

9. Chronologies of Knowledge

This Table of Contents is an elegant, economical and visually satisfying arrangement of themes at a certain level of abstraction. It has been carefully wrought. Patterns, orderedness and process are insinuated by the euphonious rhyming gerunds and the repetition of the word knowledge(s). Burke's approach is based on the plausible idea that to understand knowledge production in modern times a conception of knowledge*s* in the plural is essential. He is also committed to *national* comparisons; *groups* and institutions as the carriers of knowledge; an understanding of *processes* such a professionalization, specialization and globalization; and the coexistence of *countervailing* trends in opposite directions, for example specialization with interdisciplinary projects. These working principles provide clear evidence of how much sociology Burke has absorbed into his historian's world-view from debates between the two disciplines over the last 30 years or so in the UK (see my article, 'The debate about utopias from a sociological perspective', *Human Figurations* 3 (2), 2014). It is obvious where his sympathies lie when one notices how many times he quotes Karl

Mannheim. As in the case also of his fellow Cambridge historian of an earlier generation, the late Peter Laslett, Mannheim has been an important inspiration. It is noticeable that Burke does not mention anywhere in the book the more famous philosophers of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, et al., for whom Mannheim was a *bête-noire*; even though they might have collectively been relevant in Burke's subsection on Migrants and Exiles in Chapter 7, Geographies of Knowledge. For a sociologically sympathetic historian, their work is uncongenial to his purposes, compared with that of the Other Frankfurt of Mannheim and Elias, who get the nod.

Burke mentions (p. 11) that the names of the four chapters of Part I were inspired by the acronym CADA, that is collection, analysis, dissemination and action. He cites the management consultant Peter Drucker as the source for this model of stages in the ways people acquire, process, spread and employ knowledge. It is not clear, though, whether Burke started with this four-fold schema and then went to historical sources to fill the boxes, or whether his notes from diverse sources naturally fell into a pattern that reminded him of CADA: probably a bit of both. Part II counters the common assumption of the continuous triumphant progress of knowledge, focussing on the ways in which knowledge has been mislaid, destroyed, discarded or divided into subfields. Here Burke covers things like secrecy, concealment, destruction of knowledge, faking, pseudo-sciences such as phrenology, race and eugenics, the rise of disciplines and specialisation (a term which I learned was coined by Auguste Comte). All of these subjects are illustrated with copious international examples across the whole time period within each theme. Part III is synoptic, designed to stimulate discussion of the previous chapters. Burke does this via the three 'essential dimensions', as he calls them, for any inquiry into collective human activities: the geographical, the social and the chronological. In these chapters he brings in yet more examples.

In the Table of Contents each numbered line resembles a link on the toolbar of a website. Click on one and you find a drop-down menu. Each chapter contains further headed subsections, usually around 10. These sub-headings are not included in the Table itself, an omission that belies the intricacy of the subsequent text. For example, as you go through *Chapter 1, Gathering Knowledges* you discover 16 headed subsections, each one a short essay on some aspect of the general focus of the Chapter. The general focus is described as the activity of collecting or gathering knowledge, broadly conceived to include exploring, observing, surveying, experimenting and 'research' generally in all the selected fields, in the period 1750–2000. The subsections are as follows:

Gathering Knowledge

The Second Age of Discovery

Scientific Expeditions

A Third Age of Discovery?

In Search of Past Cultures

The Discovery of Time

Surveys

The Accumulation of Specimens

Varieties of Fieldwork

Varieties of Observation

Listening and Interrogating

Questionnaires

Recording

Notes and Files

Storage

Conclusion

Not all chapters have as many subsections as this one. The average is about 10 and the total number of subsections in the entire book is 92. Each of these subsections is a relatively self-contained, short essay on an aspect of the theme of the chapter based on selected works of historians. This makes for an episodic text and hence a demanding read. The signposting indicates that each *Part* of the book is intended to lead on to the next, but each subsection within a chapter does not always follow that pattern. In many cases the subsections are only loosely connected to each other and to the very general theme of the chapter. They are also almost entirely descriptive, and frequently draw the curiosity of the reader by their unusual and often offbeat content. They encourage the reader to dip into any subject which catches their eye, inadvertently undermining the declared ambition to provide a big picture.

In Chapter 1 the organization and character of the book are established, which sets the pattern for the rest of the study. Like all the subsequent subsections, 'The Second Age of Discovery' is highly compressed. It lists name after name of voyagers to the South Seas and explorers of Russia, North America and Spanish America from about 1750 to 1850 in great detail including the fact that several of the ships were named Discovery. It seems that all players in the drama have to be mentioned, classified and assessed. The familiar names are there – James Cook, Bougainville, Mungo Park and David Livingstone – but unsung heroes also include Meriweather Lewis, Nikolai Przhevalsky, George Schweinfurth and Aimé Bonpland. These names are taken from one subsection of one chapter and in any case are only a selection from many others there. This drive towards encyclopaedic inclusion is repeated in the remaining eight chapters, which gives an indication of the overall factual density of the book. Furthermore, Burke appends, apparently at will, picturesque details or quirky facts about some of the protagonists, such as Henry Duveyrier who explored the Sahara Desert 'at the age of nineteen', or Aimé Bonpland who explored Spanish America and climbed the volcano Mount Chimborazo whilst he was there. Out of the latter expedition came contributions to several sciences, including zoology — notably, Burke playfully adds, to the 'study of electric eels'.

This pattern of naming many names and dates of key figures from different countries over 250 years for each thematic subsection continues throughout the Chapter and the later ones. As do the quirky attributes and recherché findings. In this particular chapter we learn for example that: Hiram Bingham discovered Machu Pichu in 1911 with the help of a local farmer; the archaeologist Aurel Stein presented 40,000 Buddhist scrolls to the British Museum in 1907 for which he had paid only £220 in China; the Italian state archives, established in 1861, contained 3,736,892 items by 1905; the cards used by Melvil Dewey in the first library card catalogue at Harvard in 1861 measured 5 by 3 inches; and Francis Galton's classification of fingerprint types was used by an Argentinian policeman, Juan Vucetich, when he established fingerprint files in 1892.

What is the rationale behind these and the other similar attributions? Can they be justified as anything other than a product of the arbitrary whim of the historian? The practice must be deemed important by Burke because it pervades the entire study relentlessly, right to the last page. It must partly be explicable by his following the historians' code. But a comment in his Introduction may provide a clue to another related reason which might underpin that code. Commendably, he wants to move away from the traditional intellectual histories towards a notion of 'knowledge-bearing groups' but does not want to leave out individuals because they can 'make a difference'. He tellingly writes that the very large number of names in the book is a 'counterpoise to the faceless abstraction of general trends' (p. 3). In other words, giving Burke

the benefit of the doubt, there may be a tacit humanistic justification behind his unflagging insistence on naming names and providing quirky, particularistic details wherever possible. It is possibly a safeguard against effacing individuals through an over-sociological view of intellectual and scientific change creeping into his analysis. It may be a reminder that we are dealing with real, individual people.

The trouble is, though, that Burke's solution – which overburdens the text with surplus details – is an overreaction to the admittedly reifying and abstract character of a good deal of sociology. But it courts the understandable accusations of whimsical indulgence and arbitrariness. In the book under review, at any rate, Burke seems to be caught on the horns of false dilemma. Surely it is possible to deal with social-psychological processes and interdependencies which surpass the scope of individual action whilst simultaneously retaining a grasp of real, corporeal people. A good example of how this can be done is Elias's use of manners books, poems, hymns, correspondence, novels and other sources to recreate people's real experiences and to develop concepts to describe them out of the materials themselves. This is done whilst *at the same time* maintaining a keen sense of structured change and social constraint. The chapter on duelling in Elias's book *The Germans* would provide a suggestive model of what it is possible to achieve in this direction, as would *The Quest for Excitement*. The problem is that the overwhelming insistence on citing names, dates and other particularities, however well-intentioned, can easily shade over into individualism.

Burke says that his book is a 'synthesis' of selections from specialist works by historians in order to build up a 'big picture' or 'bird's-eye view' of mainly academic knowledge production in the period 1750–2000. However, it is not a synthesis at all. In the social sciences a synthesis is a way of bringing together concepts and perspectives together in such a way that the recombination produces a novel fusion, structurally distinct from any of the combined components (in recent sociology the attempts of Parsons, Lenski, Collins and Elias come to mind). Burke's sociological concepts form at best an aggregate, a part of his descriptive narrative. The notion of synthesis presupposes a principle of empirical testability against evidence of the balance of social forces across society as a whole. For this, one needs a theory of society. Burke's analytic approach, on the other hand, occupies a different universe. The historical materials gleaned from the raids on selected specialist works are given pattern and structure only analytically in the highly abstract groupings he specifies in Chapters 1–6 (gathering, analysing, disseminating, losing, dividing, etc.) further differentiated by the many subsections. The result is a kind of catalogue, a loose, plausible classification based on the author's choices. The 'big picture' is inside Burke's head.

Burke's terminology bears the marks of a tension between his historian's world-view and the sociological concepts such as specialisation, professionalisation, institutionalisation that he has absorbed. These concepts are not so much integrated into his overall perspective as stapled on. He can describe vividly trends and movements and locate temporal clusters of thinkers and institutions (for example, of voyages of discovery, library building, zoos and botanical gardens, museums, scientists helping governments in war, time and motion studies in management, etc.) The list is endless. He locates these sometimes using or assuming the sociological categories and then describes trends, tendencies, rising fields and the like. Reading about all these groupings, institutions and clusters I found myself asking all the time, but what is the societal undertow driving these trends forward? I could find no answer to this question. A promising answer is to search via a theory of social development, to which Burke is reluctant to commit himself. Neither is there any acknowledgement that sciences developed out of non-scientific ways of connecting up events in the natural world. In this book developments in folklore, astrology and phrenology for example, are given equal weighting with astronomy, engineering, chemistry, economics, etc. This produces an eerie levelling of the cultural and scientific realms.

Burke is highly sensitive to the disciplinary allegiances and nationalities of all the named innovators, pioneers, writers and the rest of the protagonists alluded to in the book. He always mentions these identifying

labels. However, there seems to be some confusion in Burke's book about disciplines in the social sciences. He remarks that the term 'social' is 'obviously a problematic one' (p. 3). Oh? It is only problematic if, like Burke, you are wanting to distance yourself from the dyed-in-the-wool old-fashioned intellectual historians who were reluctant to leave their lofty realm of ideas and cut to the hurly-burly of social life fully to understand the ideas and trends they were analysing. Writing a book called 'A *Social* History of Knowledge' presumably signals that you are one of the new wave of historians ready to embrace with Mannheim that knowledge is 'situated'. In sociology, since we have always been committed to doing just what Mannheim recommended, there is very little at issue with the word 'social' at all, outside the nitpicking of philosophers.

In his Chapter on Sociolog*ies* of Knowledge, though, Burke includes the Economics of Knowledge and the Politics of Knowledge, presumably because those two disciplines deal with different aspects of the 'social'? In examples of episodes in various governmental contexts he talks about the interplay *between* the economics and the politics of knowledge. Then he states that sociolog*ies* of knowledge 'in a narrower sense' (p. 231) deal with institutions and groups. The wider sense seems to cover work in the sociology of science on Big Science, patronage and the connection between science and warfare which he discussed earlier. Still further on, we find in a discussion of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and Mannheim's understanding of forms of knowledge and social situation, Burke provocatively attempts to turn the tables on him by trying to 'situate the sociology of knowledge itself' (p. 261) in the mood of disillusionment after the First World War which undermined old certainties. He leaves this rejoinder hanging in the air.

However, from what standpoint is Burke able to undertake his 'situating' of Mannheim? The answer can only be: from the perspective of a 'social history'. In spite of his hope of producing a 'polyphonic' history of knowledg*es* (p.7) and commitment to knowledg*es* in the plural giving multiple perspectives, in the end Burke speaks from social history, which he tacitly privileges. The man in the Library has grown wings and can provide the bird's eye view. Given his identification, Burke's description of the book at one point as a 'historical sociology of knowledge' (p. 4) is contradictory, if not incoherent. To state the obvious, this book is the work of one man, a personal, selective, gloriously idiosyncratic survey of Western academic knowledge over 250 years. It deals with all things academic, using cross-national comparisons of clusters and institutions in great detail and complexity. But because of his historian's sensibility and inhibitions, he is unable to access a central theory of society to explain what deeper social interdependencies shape and change them. Everything is described but nothing is explained. Without a dynamic theory, the book stands there like an elegant, but jammed, grandfather clock, chiming, squeaking and whirring, with its pendulum stuck.

The Importance of Being Civil: The Struggle for Political Decency

John A. Hall

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, $29.95 hbk, ISBN: 9780691153261, 272 pp.

Reviewed by: Andrew Linklater, Aberystwyth University, Wales

The conventional wisdom is that the idea of civility was widely employed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to describe the 'orderly society' that depended on specific human qualities such as self-restraint, politeness and the desire to accommodate others. According to Boswell, Dr Johnson, when compiling the fourth edition of his folio Dictionary in 1772, admitted 'civility' but not 'civilization'. Boswell, it has been argued, was quicker to understand the importance of the latter term and its other side which was the notion of barbarism (see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*). But the idea of civility

had long been contrasted with wildness – with the uncouth behaviour of rural dwellers when contrasted with the refinement of those who lived in towns (see various chapters in Peter Burke et al (eds) *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*).

The concept of civility has remained in vogue perhaps because it is a convenient way of referring to the foundations of order and stability in societies where communities of sentiments have lost much of their power (see the chapter by John Darwin in *Civil Histories*). The term has been used not only to reflect on the preconditions of order within states (an example is Edward Shils' 1997 book, *The Virtue of Civility*) but also on relations between independent political communities in the post-European society of states (see Robert Jackson's 2000 work, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States*). The latter work prefers civility to civilization which is regarded as being contaminated by earlier ideologies of Western progress and triumphalism. Such works stress the need for principles that bridge the differences between peoples.

John Hall is in a long tradition then of stressing the virtues of civility (although there is no reference to Shils' earlier volume) in diverse, multicultural societies. Useful profiles of Montesquieu, Smith and Tocqueville acknowledge a debt to some of the classic discussions of civility. Hall takes issue with recent work on civility, including John Cuddihy's *The Ordeal of Civility*, which regards civility as a second-rate virtue when compared with stronger communities of sentiment (see pp. 6–7, and chapter 6). He is emphatically opposed to framing the discussion in terms of a civilising process, and accuses Elias of defending an evolutionary theory which was immediately falsified by 'war, ethnic cleansing, and mass murder' (p. 5–6).

The relationship between civility and the civilising process will be considered later. Suffice it to note that Hall is against political ideologies that are used to organise people according to any single vision of the good society or good life. He takes a clear position on what have been described as the 'culture wars' in the United States but does not analyse them in detail (see p. 97). The selected route is to provide a sociological refutation of conceptions of national or cultural homogeneity – to show that they are out of step with current realities and trends rather than to criticise them on ethical grounds. Likewise, the defence of civility is set within an empirical account of multicultural societies with significant migrant populations. A core theme is that the state's ability to arouse national emotions has declined sharply in societies where people no longer live in fear of inter-state war. But clearly, various political movements are powerfully opposed to what they perceive as the threats to national identity and well-being that migration is presumed to pose. Moreover, as the US response to 9/11 demonstrated, national governments have not lost the capacity to invoke patriotic or nationalist symbols in response to combined internal and external threats, and they are not beyond setting civility to one side when dealing with the 'enemies of civilization'.

Curiously, Hall is silent on the significance of the 'war against terror' for his account of the challenges facing contemporary societies and for his panacea. His description of civility rests very heavily on the argument that other 'collectivist' standpoints have had their day. But the reality is that the idea of civility which is employed to set out the foundations of the 'orderly society' has a distinctively ethical flavour. The classic ideas of self-restraint, politeness and the desire to accommodate others are defended not just because they are the best fit for complex multicultural societies but because they are crucial to the liberal 'struggle for political decency'. On that standpoint, being civil involves respect for the other's right to freedom of self-expression and freedom from 'arbitrary subordination' (p. 251). It demands the pursuit of private ideals rather than the quest to impose collective ideals – an ethos of tolerance in other words in which peoples agree to differ, but within clear limits (p. 27). Being civil means embracing certain attitudes and principles that enable 'several nations to live under a single but necessarily more liberal political roof' (p. 242).

Hall may not provide an ethical defence of civility that will satisfy the communitarian and other critics of liberalism, but he does recognise that ethical appeals to civility are not enough. It is necessary to consider the

social conditions that favour moralities of that kind and the social conditions that stand in their way. Crucial is the role of the state, and the extent to which it stands up for principles of civility or defends one or other conception of a community of sentiment. As noted earlier, some patterns of state development are criticised, and others are admired, albeit conditionally. India belongs to the second camp and reveals that non-Western societies can follow a path that breaks with state formation in the 'North' where too much emphasis was placed on encouraging national homogeneity (p. 76–7, p. 103–4). As for the West, some societies have fared better than others in moving towards an orderly society based on tolerance and diversity. Notwithstanding strongly conformist tendencies, the United States has been more successful than most European societies in managing the social integration of migrant communities (see chapter 4).

The point has been made that Hall sets civility against the civilising process. Non-European societies would do well to avoid emulating the course of the European civilising process. Some optimism that they will succeed where European states failed can be found in what is described as 'the marvellous growth of civility in the non-European world' (p. 16). Interesting questions arise about the relationship then between civility and civilisation or civilising processes. China, it is argued, was a civilisation in which high value was attached to 'mannered self-restraint' (p. 34). Non-occidental civilizations did not lack conceptions of civil behaviour but 'civil society' did not develop 'endogenously' (p. 33ff). Part of the argument is that commercial society, significantly autonomous from state power, is one achievement of Western civilisation that has made its contribution to 'political civility' not only in the West but in the wider world (p. 31). Much more might have been said however about the relationship between civility and civilisation.

Hall perpetuates the 'Elias myth' that maintains that he was committed to some variant of the nineteenth-century grand narratives that held that Europe was the summit of human achievement, and that other societies consisting of 'social inferiors' simply lagged behind. Various books and essays over the years have shown that the 'Elias myth' is plainly wrong. There is no reason to discuss the details here. But, to return to the themes with which this review began, Elias explained that the idea of civility was something of a bridge between two concepts that gave expression to distinctively European self-images – the notion of courtesy favoured by members of the medieval courts and the idea of civilisation that took over from civility in the late eighteenth century in giving shape to Europeans' conceptions of themselves. As already noted, civility was not divorced from images of the 'savage' or 'barbarian'; nor did it stand apart from convictions about the right to colonise and enslave, or to liquidate, other peoples. The European civilised self-images that Elias set out to explain were complex in nature. They were integral to the internal pacification of the societies involved, but they did not eliminate war from Europe or prevent genocide there. Moreover, various forms of colonial violence were justified in the name of civilisation.

The reality is that Elias was no apologist for the European civilising process. Significant developments had occurred in widening the scope of emotional identification between those who belonged to the same state-organised society. But understanding how people – and independent political communities – could live together non-violently and amicably was still limited. One of the main purposes of sociological inquiry was to shed light on how societies could reach a condition in which people succeed in living together non-violently. Hall's analysis of civility can be interpreted in that light. Although the two are opposed in the argument, the plea for civility, which has been advanced in many recent texts, is best understood in processual terms. It conveys the normative aspiration to steer modern societies towards a condition in which diverse people who cannot be bound together by any single ideology work out how to co-exist non-violently.

The Importance of Being Civil is an interesting and thought-provoking book. Two of the chapters are reprinted from major journals. The other chapters have not been published previously but some – the chapter on Raymond Aron's perspective on international relations, for example – have the appearance of older essays that have been only slightly adapted for this book. The chapters are not integrated into a coherent whole. At

times, the discussion has a meandering quality and devotes too much space to matters of secondary concern to the overall argument. The discussion of Gorbachev's failed attempt to reform the Soviet Union and the section devoted to authenticity are two examples. But it is well worth engaging with this work, as this review has tried to show.

How English Became the Global Language

David Northrup

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, £17.99 pbk, ISBN: 9781137303066, 220 pp.

Reviewed by: Tim William Machan, University of Notre Dame, USA

It is a fact that two hundred years ago nearly all the speakers of English lived in the United Kingdom, the United States, and outposts of the British empire. And it is a fact that today English is the world's first truly global language, spoken primarily as a second or third language by at least one fourth of the Earth's nearly 7 billion people. How one fact leads to the other is question David Northrup addresses in *How English Became the Global Language*.

As Northrup points out in his Introduction, many linguists and sociologists already have addressed this question, and they necessarily have done so from varying perspectives. Some have framed the spread of English as a manifestation of colonial politics – a kind of linguistic imperialism, in the words of one scholar. Others have framed it as merely the vehicle for the history of English literature. And still others have emphasised the diversification of the language over time, speaking today not of English but of Englishes.

Northrup claims a special vantage for himself: that of the historian. His concern is not to advocate for one political view or another but to trace the historical contexts in which the rise of global English has taken shape. And so relying on works like Baugh and Cable's *A History of the English Language*, Tom McArthur's *The English Languages*, and Robert McCrum's *Globlish*, he summarises the events first within England, and then without it, that led to the historical ascendancy of English-speakers. There are chapters on language in North America, Asia and Africa, and the modern international world. Throughout, the emphasis is on the speakers who acquire English rather than on the changing and varying structure of the language or on the dynamics among varieties of English and other languages within the linguistic repertoire of any Anglophone community. None of this is original, but for the general reader the book provides a useful synthesis of historical events.

Since none of what Northrup describes is new information, the dichotomy he draws between a historian's perspective and a linguist's rings a little hollow. In fact, sociological approaches to English and its history have approached the contexts of globalisation with a great deal more subtlety than does *How English Became the Global Language*. It is true enough that the axe of linguistic imperialism has been wielded indiscriminately, and Northrup is right to question its usefulness. But it is also true that historical linguists increasingly engage – rather than itemise – the complex social issues in which the spread of English is embedded, looking, for example, at relations between language and hiring practices, legal action, education, popular entertainment, and settlement patterns. Northrup's approach is a kind of Whig historiography: whatever is is right, in an inexorable progress of facts to the present. And so he emphasises the willingness of speakers in Africa, North America, and Asia to adapt English as their own language and uses the increase of Anglophones as statistical proof of the language's acceptance. But if Native Americans and Polynesians willingly accepted English, they did so because English speakers, through economics, military activity, and the introduction of disease, often put them in positions where their other choice was annihilation. Yes, Native Americans learned English in

boarding schools, and, yes, many were grateful for the experience. But even many of these were in the schools because they had been forcibly put there and punished for speaking their own languages. Their acceptance of English, like the acceptance of English by later European immigrants to northern industrial cities, was a strategic necessity, and the dynamics of both strategy and necessity require intellectual and even moral engagement. So, too, does the fact that first-language Anglophones, even as they spread around the globe and cultivated use of their language, have marginalised new indigenous varieties as 'bad English'.

By relying on handbooks and rejecting historical linguistics, the book also can claim that English today is more homogeneous than it has ever been. As hundreds of studies of regional variation and language indicate, however, exactly the opposite is true. The present we have progressed towards is in fact one of extreme linguistic variaïion among speakers who nonetheless all claim to speak the same English language. And they use the language for distinctly different purposes: some to carry on ordinary activities with other first-language speakers, some second-language learners to attend schools and universities that use English and not their own native tongue, and other such speakers as a lingua franca with speakers of still another language. More significantly, as recent critics have argued, the variation that the book bypasses raises some of the most pressing of all theoretical and practical questions. By what means, and with what consequences, can we distinguish English from various English-based creoles? Can this be done structurally or must it be done socially? How do the dynamics of English usage vary according to region and speaker? In a context of linguistic variation and perhaps one billion speakers of English as a second or third language, what are the cultural and historical consequences of defining English on the basis of usage and history in the United Kingdom and the United States?

The strengths of *How English Became the Global Language* are its readability and assembly of a wide-range of historical material. The story it tells will be a familiar one to speakers in the United Kingdom and the United States, and that familiarity for its audience is also one of the book's strengths. It is of course a story that is also familiar to the vast majority of global English speakers who do not reside in these regions. For their linguistic story and point of view, readers will look elsewhere.

La Guillotine au Secret: Les Exécutions Publiques en France, 1870–1930

Emmanuel Taïeb

Paris: Belin, Collection 'Socio-histoires', 2011, €25.40 pbk, ISBN: 9782701156965, 320 pp.

Reviewed by: Johanna Siméant, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France

This book is derived from a PhD completed in 2006 at the Université Paris-I Panthéon Sorbonne. Emmanuel's Taïeb's researches concern body and biopower as well as information and public sphere. *La Guillotine au Secret* (*Hiding the Guillotine; Public Executions in France, 1870-1939*) makes these two issues converge in dealing not only with the violence of the capital execution, but also with the spectacle that the execution constitutes. The book questions the shift of French executions from publicity to secrecy. It examines how, in the France of the Third Republic, the capital execution is, to borrow from Foucault and from Elias, a '*dispositif* (apparatus) of power', a technology that favours the deployment of sensibilities and sensitivities. The book is about the mystery that the abolition of capital punishment in 1981 in France has eclipsed, that is to say the end of its public character in 1939. How had it been possible to give death publicly until then, and why and when did it begin to become problematic?

The book begins in 1870, the year of the proclamation of the Third Republic. 1870 was also the year Jean-Baptiste Troppmann was executed. It is indeed a particular period, due to the crimes committed by that murderer who assassinated a whole family, but also due to the media coverage, which contributes further in defining the narrative and controversy patterns about capital punishment. Troppmann, who never seemed to show any kind of remorse, is depicted as a 'monster of modern times', maybe embodying a sort of democratic criminality related to the diffusion of disturbing readings. What is also at stake is the folklore around the scaffold (some refreshments, assassin's portraits, even some facsimiles of the murder weapon). As the execution is very codified and as little can thus be said about it, from then 'the journalistic coverage steps into the breach that the public attitude constitutes, … the only element that escapes from the legal apparatus' (p. 52). It is really the public behaviour that causes a problem in what seems to have become an urban show deprived of majesty (p. 56). 'What embarrasses the press with the execution of Troppmann is that it creates an occasion of scandals and clashes with the police … the popular classes' behaviour is criticised as not being in concordance with expected social conduct, that of the educated classes, which, in negative, would be more in the range of respect, silence, reverence, mourning' (p. 57). To put it briefly, 'the execution creates scandals, thus it is scandalous' (p. 52); the book tells the story of that scandal and of the means to relegate it.

The book describes how the visibility and the public character of the punishment diminished, as well as the controversies about them, and what visibility and publicity reveal about the transformations of sensitivity towards violence. Nevertheless, sensitivities are not accorded a causal value; in an Eliasian perspective, they are as much shaped by the power organisations as they contribute to the reconfiguration of the power organisations. Far from an idealist approach of the social world, Emmanuel Taïeb's book pays central attention to the practices that constitute capital punishment, and to everything that reveals and encourages the de-publicisation of the execution, translated into law (acted by *décret*) in 1939. It is first of all a matter of place and time: looking at plans, one can see that the idea that a part of the urban space could be dedicated to an execution becomes more and more problematic. The execution tends to be detached spatially and socially from the place where the crime was committed, and displaced to the place where the crime was judged. Quite sinister and peripheral places are increasingly chosen, until the point when the execution takes place in front of the prison. This point marks the disjunction between public space and urban space, and reveals how much the public character of the execution now constitutes awkwardness.

The time of the executions is moved back: 'the power wants to hide the execution in the heart of darkness' (p. 142). When it comes to the execution as a reported topic, the press is permitted, but photographs and recordings are not. And it is indeed due to the scandal of an execution which was photographed because it was delayed, and which took place in broad daylight, that this phase ends in 1939. At the same time, as the journalistic description gets more and more routinised, the place given to the executions in the press diminishes. Finally, and above all, just like for the Troppmann case, Taïeb's book tracks all that creates scandal and problems, e.g. the ceremony, the behaviour of the audience. It shows how the idea emerged in public debate that public execution is incompatible with social habits and standards of behaviour. Inside the French Parliament, by invoking this idea, the French *Sénat* suggested three times to remove the public character of executions, but the proposition was not accepted by the *Chambre des députés*. Even though publicity is still claimed as a legal obligation, arguing that an 'impersonal public' (p. 173) testifies that the execution did really take place, the evolution of the technical apparatus as well as the destiny of the photographs and recordings shows the decoupling between publicity and public place. The press claims to play the role of the public, more than a real, physical audience. In the same way, the execution loses its prestige: the executioner is progressively desecrated, his functions are codified, they even become civil service functions, and punishment is simplified.

The book is impressive in its practice of a kind of unity of social sciences, and in the breadth of its field. In addition the book reveals a great ingenuity through its apparatus of demonstration: legal archives at different levels of power (department or county, city, police), archives from the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*, detailed submission files for acts of grace, executioner Anatole Deibler's notebooks, press sources material, and so on. The work on a corpus of documents related to 566 executions from 1870 to 1939 is particularly impressive. Taïeb demonstrates that the publicity of the execution becomes what is to be fought, or the argument that serves the criticism of the execution itself. In this way the book is a central contribution to an Eliasian approach to sensitivities, considering both sensitivities that this technology of power actually uses, and sensitivities that are opposing this technology of power, or against which this technology of power is fighting.

However, one cannot ignore that sensitivities are unevenly distributed among people. But what about people more precisely? What about the popular practices around the execution spectacle? This is the classic problem that concerns the possibility of inferring from the journalistic narratives how individuals in the lower classes felt. Another regret that one can have, in reading this very beautiful book, concerns the temporal delimitation, restricted to the Third Republic when the reflection on sensitivities evidently overflows the period. Of course, one can easily imagine the titanic fieldwork that would have been necessary to extend the chronological period. One can also point to some less relevant theoretical passages, while it would have been fascinating to concentrate on revisiting Foulcault's and Elias's legacies that are used in the book.

In this respect, Emmanuel Taïeb opens a really captivating dialogue with Norbert Elias's work. But 'which' Elias is at stake? Taïeb evidently evokes the 'civilising process', which 'seems linear' and at the same time 'remains marked by opposite forces' (p. 67). For instance, the conservative representations concerning execution are attached to capital punishment as much as to the exemplarity supposedly based on its public character, and theses representations require the convicted person to be able to die 'beautifully'. The possibility to identify with the torture victim corresponds as well to a transformation of sensitiveness. People in towns are less used to death by the end of the nineteenth century. Execution is considered a violent, cruel show, and the civilising process would then be a de-publicisation process. However, one cannot consider the book only as another contribution to the study of civilising processes in general and of the repressing violence processes in particular. What characterises it first and foremost is its Eliasian approach of sensitiveness. Sensitivities are 'at the same time the medium and the place of emergence of feelings of ease and unease in the perception of the sensible. And their evolution in time allows the historicisation of self-awareness, of the feelings, and further of the reflexive discourse that go with these feelings and condition them' (p. 19).

This perspective indeed marks the book, which rarely refers to the 1939 *Civilising Process*. Above all Taïeb's book demonstrates that if one wants to understand the historical transitions from one kind of sensitiveness to another (p. 79), one has to understand how 'power affects the form of sensitivities, allows some of them and erases some others, which contributes further to the production of the law and of the political events that law provides with signification' (p. 79). In the same way, Christophe Traïni's recent study about the fight against animal cruelty shows how the look is a means of education and contributes to '*démopédie*' (*La cause animale, 1820–1980)*. At the end, an even more Eliasian approach would have investigated further the dynamics of the relations between social classes as far as transformations of sensitiveness are concerned.

La Seconde Vie des Bébés Morts

Dominique Memmi

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Reviewed by: Emmanuel Taïeb, Université Lumière – French University Institute, France

The historiography of death remains characterised by the paradigm of its 'denial' and this is particularly clear in France. Many authors were quick to follow in the wake of Anglo-Saxon works published in the latter half of the 1960s (Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning*; Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*). They underlined the symbolic violence of dying alone in hospital and of what Philippe Ariès (*The Hour of Our Death*) has referred to as an 'invisible' death (*mort inversée*); a death that is skirted around and no longer known to society, a death that occurs without rituals or prayers, sometimes even without the presence of loved ones. This paradigm, already of initial heuristic value, was then reinforced in the early 1980s by Elias's work (*The Loneliness of the Dying*) describing how the dead or dying body was removed from the sight of the layman. According to Elias, the civilising process resulted in repression and an increasing disgust with regard to the dying but also with regard to human remains.

How then should we consider the very real revolution in practices that has come to bear on the treatment of the bodies of babies who have died just before or after birth? This is the process described by Dominique Memmi's book *La Seconde vie des bébés morts*. During the 1990s, in all Western countries, whenever a child died in hospital just before or after birth, mother and father were strongly encouraged to look at and touch the baby's body. More generally, a new theory of bereavement – strongly out of step with Freudian theory – spread like wildfire. Everyone was supposed to 'go through the mourning process' and this would be 'difficult' or even 'impossible' if they were not confronted with a body or, failing that, at least with 'traces'. This therefore led to a protocol devised by healthcare workers that consisted in showing parents photographs of the dead baby, who was first washed, dressed and put in a little bonnet, just like a viable newborn.

This protocol was not based on a clear social demand nor was it rooted in the Freudian tradition, which leaves no room for a voluntarist approach to mourning. It was in fact the product of several factors. Historically, new legitimate figures were promoted in the public space: there was the figure of the child, of course, but also, and above all, that of the female inner self – and the respect it should command – in the face of the vicissitudes of procreation (the 'suffering' of childbirth, of infertility, and of the death of children wrought by nature). However, this protocol also stemmed from the social role played within the hospital institution by clinical psychologists and above all by midwives, whose profession was increasingly identified with these forms of suffering. Finally, skills that are socially constructed as being feminine – listening, compassion, and empathy – were promoted within the hospital space and this took care of the rest.

At the very heart of the rejection embodied by the 'civilising' of the corpse, agents appeared who were determined to fight this – 'decivilising' agents, as it were. As abortion for personal or medical reasons became increasingly commonplace and lead to the dead foetus being discarded as quickly as possible, these agents constantly re-exhumed the latter. Similarly, today, where adult corpses are concerned, others resist the exponential rise of cremation by pushing loved ones to go and see the body and to place the ashes in a fixed place. The urgency of acting in this way is so strong that it produces what I would suggest labelling a 'local biopower' – in other words, close interactions between patients, relatives, families, healthcare workers and doctors within a dedicated closed space. Much is played out in these ultimate extremities of the system, in the words and gestures of the doctors, healthcare workers and midwives. These words and gestures represent the moment when state public policy is applied to its ultimate target and, above all, is transformed through the effects of improvisations, makeshift solutions, frames of mind and motivations that are specific to each agent in charge of the administration of bodies. This local biopower has emerged as an essential form of biopower today, strongly delegated to professionals and institutions.

The persistence of these agents who resist the repression of the dead body stems also partly from another process: the individualisation of the foetus, which has so far proved irrepressible. The new protocol aims at

making the baby's body exist and bringing it back in its very materiality, but by *avoiding* any reification. As the title of a successful medical work in the 1980s put it: 'the baby is a person' (Bernard Martino, *Le bébé est une personne*), a notion that has been extended to the stillborn child. It is no longer accepted for the latter to be seen as 'anatomical remains', thrown out by the hospital with the rubbish. On the contrary, this body becomes almost a subject, endowed with the same identity and dignity as a human being who has lived. It is not, of course, a question of bringing this body back to life, but rather of giving the illusion that he or she was nonetheless a real little baby. Whereas the aborted foetus remains something repulsive – a 'tumoral foetus' to coin Luc Boltanski's eloquent expression (*The Foetal Condition*, 2013) – the foetuses condemned to die for medical reasons or due to a handicap, which were previously something to hide, are now legally recognised as 'anatomical parts of human origin'.

The hospital protocol therefore now makes provision for *showing* the dead child to his or her parents. The most intriguing aspect is that the child's social visibility occurs through his or her *physical visibility*. However, this physical display is not uncontrolled as it is caught up in a dual constraint: the move towards individualisation, on the one hand, and towards civilisation, on the other. In contemporary societies, it is rare to see a corpse directly, except in a mediatised form in fiction or on the television. Even then, the dead body is rarely shown in its crude form (images are blurred, scenes will be cut before the death inflicted on an individual, etc.). Viewing the dead baby must therefore not create the opposite of the desired effect by shocking the parents. Nor must it 'fix' the foetus' individuality too much by 'freezing' its existence onto a physical medium. In this respect, the power of the photograph is twofold: the absent can be made present and yet the child can be shown without physically exhibiting the body. The foetus as individual is therefore duly displayed but within certain limitations; although the act of showing the parents the foetus serves to make the latter into an individual, the aspects that are too shocking for our 'civility' are banished and remain part of the 'unshowable' (for example, if the foetus is too deformed, this will be masked).

The clinic of dead babies thus became a locus for compromise and this is also the case where the expression of emotions is concerned. The hospital functions as an in-between space, just like in Elias's analyses of the sanctioned release of drives – and above all the scopic drive – within circumscribed and instituted arenas (such as sports' stadiums, for example). Indeed, the hospital is both the space behind the scenes where the act of showing the dead body is possible and a semi-public space where it is impossible if it takes too crude a form (see, for example, the scandal surrounding the collections of anatomical foetuses secretly conserved in a Parisian hospital). It is the locus for the provisional intimacy established between families and healthcare workers, and also a space where the expression of parental suffering is socially accepted without constraints or excessive moral judgments. The whole enterprise seems to rest upon the belief that it is preferable to show something rather than nothing. The hospital thus becomes a space for the controlled release of self-control.

Will this way of displaying the corpse remain an exception, inspired for example by the American tradition of showing the body of the deceased in its coffin? Or does it prefigure a tendency towards a lesser repression of the corpse? Can these agents fighting against the 'excessive' civilising of the dead body be seen as standing at the vanguard of a new stage in this history? Gunther von Hagens' exhibitions met with considerable success, but the exhibition of other plastinated corpses in several French towns was eventually prohibited by law due to doubts about the origin of the bodies (were they executed Chinese prisoners?), but also in the name of the respect owed to individuals after their death. Showing a corpse remains something that is fundamentally intolerable and this prohibition can only be lifted tentatively. The act of exhibiting dead babies brings into play the contemporary definition of the fragile and shifting zone between what can and cannot be shown, when flesh is dead and vanquished.