

BOOK REVIEWS

Georges-Goulven Le Cam, *L'Australie au-delà du rêve*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, August 2011, 374 p., rrp 19 €, ISBN 978-2-75351-421-8.

General and thematic histories, once called 'SHIST' (short histories), are often a mixed bag of reiterated summary narratives and specific themes. While all students of society and history study other groups, other places or other times, studies written from a different culture can also gain and lose from that outsider perspective. The French, perhaps even more than other Europeans, have always been fascinated by the difference of new world cultures and the utopian and dystopian prospects of their futures, from Alexis de Tocqueville on the USA to Albert Mélin's study of 'socialisme sans doctrines' regarding Australasia around the turn of the 19th-20th centuries.

Georges-Goulven Le Cam's book transcends the clichés of short history. As it interrogates whether the lucky country is now facing the other side of the dream, it also manages to avoid the broad brush strokes that question might invite.

This is a work of great subtlety and complexity, with a strong (and typically French?) interest in the themes of the experiences of Indigenous Australians and women. One example suggests its capacity to transcend cliché (even clichés common in Australian academic discourse). In investigating the nature of frontier, colonialism and white Australia, it locates the history in the contexts of both the invasion/frontier and the ideologies of Christianity, Social Darwinian thought and Herbert Spencer and eugenics (it might have elaborated the latter). It then recognises the retreat of this pseudo-science in the years after World War 2, and the initially unofficial and then official retreat of the racial immigration policy which had been partly shaped by those ideologies. If only the often history-free and time-free discourses on 'Australian racism' had such subtlety.

The study works through four historical chapters and nine historically informed thematic chapters. Le Cam is particularly sharp in his delineation of the transition from colonial-provincial Australia to a modern and national Australia. He also explores the changing forms of the persistent colonial cultural cringe, even as it is challenged, in culture and in foreign policy. Given the wider brief of 'civilisation' in language departments in France, he is more

aware than most contemporary Australian historians of the New Zealand aspect, the connections, comparisons and contrasts.

I looked particularly at two subjects on which I have recent expertise: sport and immigration/multiculturalism. In the latter sphere, Le Cam is aware of the nuances and the contradictions, the Howard movement backwards on multiculturalism, the Labor movement forward, the problem of Australian attitudes to boat people and the fact that the Cronulla conflicts of 2005 constituted an exception. Implicit in the book, and occasionally explicit, are French comparisons, as in the much more serious French urban conflicts of 2005. In considering this sporting nation, he notes the gap between interest and participation. The analysis of the battle of the sports, particularly the football codes, for supremacy in the 21st century is handled with subtlety. Like the book as a whole, it is up to date. In a small error, quite common in Australia, he accepts the erroneous Hallinan et al. cultural cringe analysis, their argument (pp. 173–174) that a kind of positional racism applies in the selection of Aboriginals in Australian Football, superior positions being denied to Indigenous footballers. In fact, the predominant build and speed of most Aboriginal footballers and the changing game invalidate this sociological misapplication of American Football selection patterns to Australian Football.

The book has some errors in naming (for example, Nickolls not Nicholls) and one recurring place name error which apparently happened in production. However, notwithstanding these occasional weaknesses, it is a beautifully presented book, from cover and binding to text.

In Le Cam's analysis, as Australians have woken up from their New World dream, the result has not been a *cauchemar*, a nightmare, but a society of complexity, with all the tensions, costs and benefits that involves. Australia, like France and Western Europe, is not only shaped by its history and geography. All face the rise of the Chinese economy and offshore manufacturing, the cultural threat of militant Islam and extreme expression through terrorism. This book helps understand the resultant complexities.

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Ian Coller, *Arab France: Islam and the Making of Modern Europe, 1798–1831*, Berkeley, University of California Press, November 2011, 288 p., ISBN 978-0-520-26065-8.

In recent years European museums and galleries have begun to rediscover North Africa and the Middle East. The many examples range from the ‘*Rue du Caire*’ exhibition in Helsinki (exploring the second most popular exhibit of the 1889 Paris Exposition, the most popular being Gustave Eiffel’s ‘monstrous’ tower) to art exhibitions including the nineteenth century paintings of the Maghreb at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.

Underlying this rediscovery is an interest in the origins of ‘France Arabe’. Ian Coller’s book takes the story back earlier. He demonstrates the roots of the Arab presence in France in the post-revolutionary era from 1798 until the revolution of 1830. *Arab France* delineates three aspects of that interaction: ‘Orientalist’ ideas which romanticise the ‘Orient’ (Asia, including Asia Minor and the Middle East) as Edward Said has shown; cosmopolitan realities in Paris and Marseille in which diverse populations lived together; and the opposition between ideas of citizenship and ideas of race and racial difference.

As often happened with empires, subjects were at times integrated more into the wider polity than would happen later in the formally documented ‘citizenship’ era of the nation state, even given Napoleon’s conception of the latter’s utility to his regime. Colonial Australia’s diversity dates from the First Fleet and the gold rushes. France had a long tradition of diversity, even before it became one of the great immigrant nations of Europe, from Polish miners to North African workers.

Coller demonstrates the complexities of French conceptions of citizenship. While they are often differentiated from ideas of race and nation in the Social Darwinism-inflected citizenship created by New Imperialism in the British tradition, at times they also acquired racial characteristics. These were based on more than the recurrent European assumption of the superiority of their version of Western civilisation over other civilisations. Legat (1831) and Bory de Saint-Vincent (1825) conceptualised ‘race’ in ways not completely unfamiliar to students of those later Anglophone ideologies influenced by Social Darwinism which shaped citizenship ideas from the 1880s to the 1940s.

At the same time, Collier demonstrates the everyday realities of cosmopolitan diversity found in Paris and Marseille and also found in North African cities, particularly Alexandria, as a result of the intercourse around the Mediterranean.

An Australian researcher into French history, Collier demonstrates that inclusiveness, as well as perceptions of difference, is not new. He delineates aspects of openness in the first empire period; such openness, it might be observed, was sometimes found, similarly with qualifications, in colonial Australia before Social Darwinism and state citizenship. His detailed research into post-revolutionary France is valuable at a time when, even as Europe puts up what might be called the 'great Western walls', diversity within national borders persists and grows.

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BOOK NOTE

Richard Travers, *The Tennis Courts of Lyon: Les Jeux de Paume de Lyon*, St Kilda, Oryx Publishing, January 2012, 160 p., rrp AU\$ 69.00, ISBN 978-0-98074-354-8. (Available from 13 Marlton Crescent, St Kilda, Victoria, 3182.)

Richard Travers, in his work on the royal (or ‘real’) tennis courts of Lyon, writes as both a tennis enthusiast and a careful and original historian, and in doing so, establishes an important Australian-French connection. Until now, the history of the game in Lyon has been almost completely neglected by the French themselves, despite the importance of that city in France’s cultural evolution, so that the book is something of a coup for an Australian writer. In order to gather his material, Travers has unearthed previously unused archives, and deciphered ancient manuscripts. To construct his story, he has combined his passionate detective work with a talent for dramatic development and a wry sense of humour. The reader meets some heavy-weight players of the ancient sport: Kings of France (François 1^{er}, Louis XIV), and great figures of the cultural world such as Rabelais and Louise Labé. And the city of Lyon itself, as it develops across the ages, is a key presence in the narrative. The book is an elegant and brilliantly illustrated object, and will certainly attract collectors; as a text, it transmits at every turn the infectious excitement with which the author has combined his knowledge and experience of the game, his enjoyment of Lyon and the French language, his desire and skills as a researcher, and his pleasure as a writer. For those who do not know the mysteries of the *jeu de paume*, it is hard to imagine a livelier or more agreeable initiation.

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Editor’s note:

*350 numbered copies of this book were printed, of which copies 1–50 are hors commerce. Although *The Tennis Courts of Lyon* is not strictly bilingual, it contains much of the original French of the resource material.*