

assess how stakeholders, through norm contestation, have been able to influence and shift the 'meaning-in-use' of these norms (p. 54). Wiener seeks to understand how both the practical implementation and wider global moral reach of particular formal norms are affected by who has access to processes of norm contestation. This question is of particular importance within the context of the wider 'normative opportunity structure', provided by governance institutions (p. 134). Yet Wiener's goal is not to offer specific recommendations to effect more just and legitimate processes of norm change. Instead, she intends to set an agenda and provide a framework for future researchers to explore how practices of participation might be encouraged and engendered to support the moral premise of *quod omnis tangit*.

Overall, this is an extremely interesting and worthwhile read for anyone seeking a better understanding of norm cycles and change within the international system. The agency-focused approach and cycle grid model favoured by Wiener provide valuable interdisciplinary insights into the processes surrounding norm change and how norms work in (or within) practice. This book will be of particular interest to scholars whose research stands at the intersection of International Relations and international law, since it addresses many of the critiques posited by International Relations scholars who suggest that international lawyers ignore the actual meaning-in-use of international legal norms. The discussion of contestation brings to the fore many processes regarding the actual operation and consequences of norm change, which are not often widely understood or discussed within scholarship, and thus the book provides a basis for further normative and empirical research on these ideas.

Wiener, therefore, effectively answers the question of 'whose practices count?' and has opened the way for substantial further research on 'whose practices ought to count'. Such research could start by looking at new or novel ways to increase stakeholder participation within processes of contestation, and how this might lead to more just and inclusive outcomes.

As a result, *Contestation and constitution of norms in global international relations* develops a solid constructivist norm diffusion framework and applies it to key empirical case-studies, a practice from which more normative analysis of global processes could benefit. Although Wiener does not directly engage with global constitutionalism writ large, this book has important implications for our current thinking on the subject and related issues of constituent power, legal autonomy, cosmopolitan democracy and the legitimization of global institutions.

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International history

Eric Hobsbawm: a life in history. By **Richard J. Evans**. London: Little, Brown. 2019. 785pp. £35.00. ISBN 978 1 40870 742 5. Available as e-book.

By the time he died in 2012, Eric Hobsbawm was one of the best-known historians in the world. He had made signature contributions to a range of overlapping historical fields, from labour history to the history of nationalism. Hundreds of thousands of people across the world had read his books. And he had developed an unrivalled network of contacts in the Americas, western Europe and south Asia. Yet for all his fame, there is an astonishing paucity of critical work on his life and his ideas. In his range, ambition and his longtime engagement with Marxism, he conformed almost perfectly to the ideal-type of the twentieth-century European intellectual, but there has been nowhere near the same degree

of scholarly engagement with him as there has been with figures like Pierre Bourdieu, Hannah Arendt or E. P. Thompson.

The publication of Richard Evans's authorized biography of Hobsbawm therefore represents a major milestone. For the first time, a recognized scholar has used newly available archival material to give us an insight into Hobsbawm's inner world and the intricacies of his long career. With the help of a team of research assistants, Evans has delved deep into his subject's papers and unearthed a treasure trove of anecdotes and documents, many of which have been supplemented by interviews with friends and colleagues. It is a testimony to the richness of the material that the book runs to over 800 pages.

Evans's approach to the task of biography is conventional. He presents Hobsbawm's life chronologically and explicitly sets out to analyse his 'personal experiences' (p. ix). Each chapter focuses on a different period, in most cases staying very close to the contents of the archive. This works well where the archive contains exciting material. Not surprisingly, Evans makes much of the diaries, letters and rough sketches Hobsbawm wrote as a teenager during the Second World War and in the early 1950s. These offer an extraordinary glimpse into Hobsbawm's young mind. He shared his anxieties, dreams and his dashed hopes in the pages of his diaries. He also talked about the places he went, the people he observed around him and the lovers he took (or did not). In different hands, this sort of material could have been subjected to a close psychological analysis, or one grounded in the history of emotions, but Evans prefers to let the documents speak for themselves. He quotes from them at length, often with little or no additional commentary. At times, it makes for a compelling read, as we journey from Hobsbawm's teenage bedroom in London to the dingy strip clubs of postwar Soho.

The difficulty with this rather empirical approach to the archival material is that it does not allow Evans to ask important questions about Hobsbawm's life. What sorts of social, cultural and gendered formations made it possible for him to emerge as a prominent intellectual? Why did he become so famous? Why did he remain a card-carrying communist, despite being so intellectually heterodox? These issues are inadequately dealt with in the book, especially as the narrative moves forward chronologically and the archival material becomes less introspective. As many reviewers have noted, the final chapters consist largely of discussions of royalties, book deals and high-powered intellectual encounters. This reflects the kind of documents to be found in Hobsbawm's archive and the image he himself nurtured in his reminiscences and memoir. It is a shame that Evans did not interrogate the archive more closely and push back against the self-fashioning of the 'great' intellectual.

One of the ways Evans could have done this would have been by engaging with Hobsbawm's ideas, and the networks, influences and conceptual styles that made him such a persuasive writer. Unfortunately, there is very little of this in the book. Evans's discussions of Hobsbawm's writings are confined to short synopses of each one of his major publications and a survey of book reviews. He quickly passes over several crucial moments in Hobsbawm's intellectual development, such as the intense peer learning in student reading groups in late 1930s Cambridge and Paris, the shared intellectual camaraderie of the Communist Party Historians Group, and Hobsbawm's encounter with specific clusters of British, French, Italian, Peruvian and American scholars. This gives the impression that Hobsbawm was a uniquely brilliant student and scholar ploughing a lone furrow. Such a view is misleading. While he clearly had, as Evans persuasively argues, a highly individual and idiosyncratic mental universe as a teenager, he was profoundly shaped by the intellectual contexts and personalities he encountered from the late 1930s onwards.

This biography, then, offers a comprehensive and extremely well-documented account of Hobsbawm's life. It will no doubt serve as the standard reference for years to come, if nothing else because of the sheer range of material Evans has been able to marshal into a single volume. But, despite some startling revelations about Hobsbawm's teenage fantasies and his unhappy sex life in the 1950s, it leaves many questions unanswered. In the end, this is a book that tells us much about *what* Hobsbawm thought, but too rarely tells us *why* he thought it.

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Vietnam: an epic tragedy, 1945–1975. By Max Hastings. London: William Collins. 2018. 752pp. £18.50. ISBN 978 0 00813 299 6. Available as e-book.

When the Second World War ended, France easily could have left Vietnam, a departure that would have given independence to a country it had formally colonized in the late 1880s. 'Instead', as Max Hastings so memorably puts it, 'the French chose to draft a long suicide note, declaring their ironclad opposition to independence' (p. 6). That 'colonial intransigence', Hastings says, conceded to Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam's emerging guerrilla leader, 'the moral high ground in the struggle that now began to unfold' (p. 6).

A few years earlier, that moral high ground might have seemed an elusive goal for the would-be Vietnamese leader, returning to his country after nearly three decades of self-imposed exile. At first, he was a stoker and galley boy aboard a French freighter; this led to a year in the United States, as well as time spent as an assistant pastry chef in London's Carlton Hotel. He became 'increasingly politically active' in the 1920s and 1930s, eventually becoming a wanted man, 'pursued through the European powers' colonies' of Indochina (p. 6).

By 1941, when he returned to Vietnam as a 50-year-old, Ho Chi Minh was accepted as 'Uncle Ho' by young guerrillas, who were told he was 'an old man, a native of this area, a farmer who loves the revolution' (p. 7). But the young fighters quickly understood that he was no local and no farmer. Instead, he drew maps of Hanoi for those who had never seen it, and advised them to dig latrines. Hastings cites a former guerrilla who recalled: 'We thought to ourselves, "Who is this old man? Of all the things he could tell us, he gives us advice about how to take a shit!"' (p. 7).

It must have been good advice, for it helped secure Ho's leadership and, more importantly, put him in the position to capitalize on the moral high ground created by France's determination not to let its colony go. This worked well for Ho over the course of 30 years or more, long after the French had left the scene. Indeed, it was that moral high ground that Ho occupied in the eyes of student dissidents and leftists who opposed US involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. When one US official addressed students, Hastings writes, 'he was dismayed to find that they took for granted the legitimacy of the struggle waged in the name of Ho Chi Minh' (p. 328).

Hastings himself does not share that view of Ho. 'For all the adulation heaped by the Western Left on Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan, they presided over a fundamentally inhumane totalitarian regime', he argues (p. 641). Still, while rejecting the adulation of Ho, Hastings unequivocally does recognize the truth in the left's effort against the war, which eventually led to its end. 'Even though the anti-war movement's younger zealots flaunted their naivete by proclaiming the virtues of Ho, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara', he writes, 'its supporters correctly identified Vietnam as a catastrophe' (p. 645).

And catastrophe it was, among other things, setting back the Great Society—the ambitious dream of civil rights launched by US President Lyndon B. Johnson. That setback,