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Dominique Kalifa, ed., *Les noms d'époque : De « Restauration » à « années de plomb »*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2020. 349 pp. Notes. €23.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-07-276383-0.

Review by Michael Scott Christofferson, Adelphi University.

Les noms de l'époque examines chrononyms, which are, broadly speaking, terms used to designate historical periods. As Kalifa explains in the book's introduction, chrononyms are one of a number of designations of periods that have recently been identified by linguists. Others include toponyms, such as Auschwitz in which a place references a broader history, hemeronyms, in which a date such as September 11 stands in for a history much broader than the specific event that occurred on the date, and praxonyms, which designate temporarily sustained events or actions. Examples of the latter given by Kalifa include the Crimean War, the Great War, and the Great Depression. Chrononyms designate periods that exceed events in their scope and often their duration, are deemed by a given community to be coherent, and, as a consequence of their presumed coherency, are given a specific name. As Kalifa himself notes, the line between chrononyms and praxonyms can be fine as the names of some events like the Great War convey a mix of "événementialité et temporalité" (p. 13).

Beyond the introduction and epilogue by Kalifa, the book consists of fourteen essays by European and North American scholars on chrononyms that designate periods of *l'histoire contemporaine* beginning with the Restoration. They are divided into two sections, one called "Nommer son temps," on chrononyms that emerged during the period in question, and another entitled "Remémorer, réinventer le temps," discussing chrononyms that came into existence only after the period they designate. Whereas the former can convey the consciousness of the period itself, the latter are "toujours lourdes d'appréciations anachroniques" (p. 15).

As can be seen from the list of essays at the end of this review, the inquiry is largely limited to Europe. The essays focus on France, France's most prominent immediate European neighbors (Britain, Germany, Italy, and Spain) as well as the quasi-European superpowers that bookend Europe (the United States and Russia). Some of the chapters stray a bit beyond these geographic constraints to say a few words about the use of these chrononyms elsewhere, but broader geographic forays are limited and do not engage in systematic comparison outside of these geographic limits and only rarely within them. As for the authors, they are mainly academic experts on the history of the periods discussed in their essays. All but four of the historians are employed or emeritus at French academic institutions. The four who are not are two American, one British, and one Italian university professors.

For Kalifa, the purpose of these essays is neither to denounce the artificiality or anachronisms of chrononyms nor to correct their representation of history. Kalifa also rejects adopting a nominalism opposed to the use of chrononyms because of the distortions that they inevitably introduce. Rather, in uncovering the complex history of the origins, appropriations, use, and abuse of chrononyms, Kalifa seeks a sort of historical mindfulness born out of a more profound understanding of history as a dialogue between the present and the past. Kalifa eloquently explains this in the last sentences of his epilogue: “Prendre au sérieux ce que nous disent les chrononymes permet de considérer le passé pour ce qu’il est : une réalité mobile, changeante, « historique », travaillée par les hommes et les femmes qui l’ont habité, mais aussi par les regards, les lectures ou les déplacements que les époques ultérieures lui ont fait subir. C’est admettre que l’on n’écrit jamais que dans cet enchevêtrement rhapsodique et presque kaléidoscopique de temporalités qui est constitutif de l’histoire” (p. 346).

How well do the essays fulfill the promise of Kalifa’s ambitious program, and what do they reveal, perhaps, about its limits as well as possible directions for future scholarship? While the evaluation that follows is more critical than celebratory, it bears mention that all of the essays in this collection are more than competent and well worth reading for anyone interested in the periods they discuss. Still, some develop Kalifa’s program better than others. Perhaps the most successful chapter is, unsurprisingly, Kalifa’s own on “L’entre-deux-guerres.” The remainder of this review focuses on Kalifa’s essay as an exemplary implementation of his program before commenting on some of the missed opportunities in other essays. The review concludes by arguing that the approach adopted by Emmanuelle Retailaud’s essay on the 1920s potentially points the way forward for the further development of Kalifa’s program to expand our understanding of history through the study of chrononyms.

According to Kalifa, it is at the beginning of the Second World War that the term “entre-deux-guerres” imposed itself around the world as a self-evident term to refer to the period between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II. This, though, was not the first use of the term, which had previously been employed in France to describe the interval between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I and at least once in the United States to reference the period between the Civil War and World War I. Kalifa addresses multiple potential objections to the term. One is the chronological scope of the most relevant chrononym. Some would encapsulate the interwar period in a longer second Thirty Years War or a European civil war of 1914-1945. Others would separate the 1920s from the 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression dividing the two, an approach more common in Germany and the United States than in France. Another chronological complication is recent scholarship that highlights the drawn-out conclusions of World War I and World War II, which extend well beyond the conventional end dates of 1918 and 1945.

In considering the use of the term “entre-deux-guerres” outside Europe, Kalifa suggests that it is open to criticism as Eurocentric. Kalifa notes, for example, that while its use in Argentina, which was neutral in both world wars—declaring war on Germany only in March 1945—expresses an Argentine assertion of a European identity, elsewhere it might be contested as historians, following the lead of Dipesh Chakrabarty, seek to provincialize Europe.[1] Following this broad temporal and geographic contextualization of the term “entre-deux-guerres,” Kalifa focuses on its usage in France. He criticizes its use in histories that assign blame for France’s 1940 defeat, an effort which often employs teleological arguments to reach anachronistic conclusions. To escape this use of the term, Kalifa proposes an alternative understanding of the chrononym inspired in

part by Marc Bloch's observation in *Strange Defeat* that France's failure in the run-up to World War II was less one of lack of preparation than of having been unable to see beyond the precedent of World War I in its preparations. From this, Kalifa suggests an expanded definition of the interwar period in France: "De fait, « l'entre-deux-guerres » des Français du milieu XXe siècle constitue une très étrange séquence étendue quelque part entre 1870 et 1940 et dont l'épicentre est indéniablement la Grande Guerre" (p. 276).

By uncovering the ambiguities and limits of the chrononym and then incorporating its original meaning in his expanded understanding of the term, Kalifa reopens issues of historical interpretation potentially closed down by recent usage of the term "*l'entre-deux-guerres*." To the extent that this and the other essays in this volume free us to reconceptualize the past through a critical analysis of chrononyms, *Les noms de l'époque* has done Clio a service.

The success of the other essays in carrying out Kalifa's program is mixed. A number of them place the emphasis on the anachronisms or distortions introduced by uses of chrononyms. Although pointing out such problems is always a worthy task and nearly all of the essays comment on the matter, this is, as Kalifa suggests, a rather limited exercise and not the purpose of the book. Venita Datta's essay "The Gilded Age," for example, after ably explaining the origins and later use of the term, concludes by focusing its anachronistic deployment in recent American public discourse, a usage that ignores the nuances of recent historical scholarship on the period. To be sure, Datta is not wrong, but her essay's emphasis on anachronistic usages seems to fall a bit short of Kalifa's ambitions.

A similar focus on debunking the anachronistic uses of a chrononym appears in Miles Taylor's essay "L'ère victorienne." His analysis is well developed, but it comes at the expense of a more thorough investigation of the history of the critique and defense of the Victorian era from Strachey to Himmelfarb and Thatcher. To be sure, Taylor does not fail to mention the key moments, but his coverage of the twentieth-century use of the term seems rather thin in comparison to his excellent discussion of how nineteenth-century Britons understood themselves in contrast to the anachronistic uses of the term "Victorianism" that followed. In short, Taylor remains within the agenda of a historian of nineteenth-century Britain and not the broader historiographical program of Kalifa.

Another issue worthy of commentary is the use of comparisons between national histories. To some degree the amount of comparison reflects the geographic and temporal limits of the chrononym in question. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the essays on the Restoration, the fin-de-siècle, the interwar period, and the 1920s have a strong comparative dimension, or that such a perspective is less prominent in discussions of chrononyms with little resonance beyond a national history. This is the case for the chapters on Italy's Risorgimento, the United States' Gilded Age, Spain's *Transición et movida*, Russia's Silver Age, France's *années noires*, and Germany's *Stunde Null*. There are, however, some surprises. The article on the Victorian era has some interesting comments on the use of the term in the United States and the British Empire, showing how the chrononym escapes the narrow bounds of British history. By contrast, the article on "Le printemps des peuples," although acknowledging the use of the term in multiple East European languages, focuses almost exclusively on one people: Germans. Thus, the article, while emphasizing how the term downplayed the social dimension of the Revolution of 1848 in Central Europe by putting the focus on the national struggle, obscures the history of the Revolution of 1848 in its own way by saying nothing of the conflict between different

nationalisms in 1848. One imagines that including Polish, Czech, or Hungarian historiography would have required attention to this part of the story. If Kalifa's book deserves praise for contributing to the expansion of French historical consciousness beyond France's borders, this otherwise excellent article and the selection of national histories covered by the book also show that expansion's limits. Surely the inquiry would have been richer if had given more attention to areas beyond the Cold War West and its Russian foil.

Emmanuelle Retillaud's article on the 1920s arguably points forward to a future agenda for the study of the names of historical periods. Whereas all of the other articles are focused on a single chrononym, Retillaud's focuses on a period and examines the different names that have been given to it across space and time. The result is more thoroughly comparative because no single chrononym or national space is given analytical priority. Thus, while the naming of the 1920s in France gets the most attention (about twelve out of chapter's twenty-six pages), the different designations of the decade in the United States (Roaring Twenties, Jazz Age, etc.) are discussed in depth with close attention to their history and implications. Likewise, although discussed more briefly, the chapter's consideration of the naming of the twenties in Italy and Germany in contrast to the overlapping periods of Italy's *ventennio fascista* and Germany's Weimar Republic is illuminating. To be sure, most other chapters in this volume give some attention to how a period is named in different national spaces, but this one differs from the rest insofar as its focus is not on one chrononym, which is considered the term to be explained, but rather on a period, leaving open the question of its naming. Such an approach is potentially more illuminating because it assumes less and is more open to the contingency of the naming of historical periods.

Allow me to give an example of how the adoption of Retillaud's approach might have benefited one of the other chapters. Pascal Ory's essay on France's *Trente Glorieuses* includes two pages that consider the post-World War II economic expansion and its naming in other countries. Although those pages make some interesting observations, the main focus of the chapter is on France, and the main concern of the article's author is to criticize the term "*les Trente Glorieuses*" for reading the post-World War Two period through an economic lens. The term is doubly distorting as it obscures the temporalities of non-economic history while also reading history from the anachronistic perspective of the post-boom period of economic stagnation during which Jean Fourastié coined the term. Beyond the issue of anachronism, one might say that Ory's objection to the term is that it is less a chrononym than a praxonym; in other words, it is more the designation of a temporally extended economic event than of a more broadly coherent historical period.

How different might this article have been if it had not been on the *Trente Glorieuses*, but rather about naming the great post-World War Two economic expansion? In such an article comparison between, for example, the use of the term "*Wirtschaftswunder*" in German history and of *Trente Glorieuses* in French history would be more sustained. Invented during the period itself, the former is arguably closer to being a chrononym than is *Trente Glorieuses* and for that reason is more deserving of a chapter in this book than the *Trente Glorieuses*. By giving pride of place to neither term and making the focus more resolutely comparative, the investigation could have better illuminated the differences between praxonyms and chrononyms, as well as the specific stakes of each term in its national context. For similar reasons, one might criticize Kalifa's determination that the Great Depression is not a chrononym. From the perspective of France--where the economic downturn's impact was less sharp than in the United States or Germany and the term is rarely used to designate a period--he might be correct, but from that of the United

States he is probably not. A comparative examination of naming the economic crisis of the 1930s would be interesting, but by preemptively excluding it from consideration on the basis of the peculiarities of French national history, an opportunity was arguably missed.

Regardless of a few missed opportunities to expand the historiographical horizon, *Les noms d'époque* remains a smart and thought-provoking book that is highly recommended to anyone interested in the naming of historical periods.

NOTES

[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

LIST OF ESSAYS

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