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James Livesey, *Provincializing Global History: Money, Ideas, and Things in the Languedoc, 1680-1830*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. ix + 214 pp. Figures, notes, and index. \$45.00 (hb). ISBN: 978-0-3002-3716-0.

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Readers of James Livesey's third monograph, *Provincializing Global History: Money, Ideas, and Things in the Languedoc, 1680-1830*, should not be deceived by the book's compact size (168 pages from introduction to conclusion). This work has broad and occasionally vertiginous ambitions that extend deep into the minutiae of daily life, from disgruntled medical students to peasant plow contests, and far into the most charged debates of French, European, and world history. Livesey uses the Languedoc, characterized as an utterly unexceptional province, as a case study for investigating an eighteenth-century revolution in "knowledge culture" that cut across provincial society as well as across economic, scientific, agricultural, and political domains (p. 2). This new knowledge culture allowed not only for universalism, but also for the creation of "dynamic stability" wherein elites were not able to coopt the gains of innovation (p. 4). Livesey does no less than argue that it is in the highly local contexts of provincial eighteenth-century France (and, by extension, the West), not in interactions forged by colonialism and trade, that we find the origins of truly global history. While readers may disagree with some of the leaps undertaken to prove his case, the resulting book undoubtedly makes for stimulating reading.

From its title and first page, Livesey situates his story of the Languedoc within "global history." But what does he mean by that? What does anyone? Sebastian Conrad's helpful primer *What is Global History?* argues that there are three different camps regarding its definition: "global history as the history of everything; as the history of connections; and as history based on the concept of integration." [1] Indeed, some scholars have pointed out that the field's sheer breadth, combined with its emphasis on circulation and connectivity, leads to a superficial, boosterish globalism. [2] Concerns about the possible erasure of place-based knowledge, coupled with the desire to rethink national, regional, and local histories in light of the global, has recently resulted in a move towards microhistory. [3] Here the macro-level trends of global history are mapped onto the lives of individuals and families, or the confined space of localities. This last "provincial turn," in particular, has proven fertile in French history, where scholars including Emma Rothschild, Julie Hardwick, Michael Kwass, and Elizabeth Heath have showcased the impact of global networks, commodities, credit instruments, and ideas on ostensibly isolated regions of the eighteenth-century metropole. [4]

Although not explicitly acknowledged, Livesey's definition of global history does not resemble these other interventions, nor does it fit easily into one of Conrad's three camps. Indeed, the Languedoc's connections to the world beyond France, let alone the world beyond Europe, appear only in passing. Otherwise, the action, as the saying goes, is all local. Livesey seeks to "rescue global history from the problem of circularity," by which he presumably means defining global

history as that which involves different parts of the globe, through understanding the creation of a “provincial cosmopolitanism” (p.165), an ostensible oxymoron that refers to the ability of inhabitants of peripheries to understand the world in universal terms. Provincial cosmopolitanism, in turn, is produced by the interplay of local contingencies and structures rather than state-initiated modernizing projects. Global history then consists of the “entanglement of local cosmopolitanisms” (p.146). One might argue that this reading of “global” is closer to conventional understandings of “modern” or “universal,” terms similarly both loaded and empty, than it is to current iterations of global history. If the resulting construction will come off to some historians as Whiggish, it would nevertheless be a mistake to interpret Livesey as merely reinvigorating the *idée reçue* of the West as the birthplace of modernity.

Historiographical context proves key to understanding Livesey’s definition of global history. As a recent issue of *Past and Present* has argued, before global history became focused on connectivity, the lens was comparative, driven by an interest in explaining the rise of European economic hegemony during the Industrial Revolution.[5] Livesey’s global history seems rooted in this still vital conversation. In the introduction’s opening pages, Livesey situates his project within what he rightfully calls the “glaring contradiction” between the “literature which focuses on innovation and growth, which stresses social capital and institutional capability” and the literature on “global expansion, which emphasizes coercion and a violence” (p. 4). On the former side of this contradiction lies work, today dominated by trained economists (and to a limited extent political scientists), that has grown out of the debates about the Industrial Revolution and which focuses, in part, on the role of institutions and culture.[6] Recent work by historians, however, particularly those nebulously affiliated with the New History of Capitalism, generally situates coercion, slavery, and conquest first and foremost in explaining the origins of the modern world. These two camps do indeed talk past each other, reflecting in part a deeper disciplinary divide.[7] Livesey’s abrupt insistence that there is “no credible body of work that asserts that long-term social innovation based on the most coercive kinds of looting and rent-seeking” followed by his declaration that Europe’s innovation “must have been despite, rather than because of, imperial expansion” is bound to startle and even anger many historians (p. 4). Largely unfamiliar with or unpersuaded by the way economists see the world, many historians do not take innovation’s escape from cooptation by elites as the defining feature of modernity, let alone of global history.[8] At the very least, in not explaining this pronouncement more carefully, Livesey missed a valuable moment to prove why his definition better defines global history than does the literature that falls into Conrad’s three camps.[9]

Understanding *Provincializing Global History*’s investment in economic history literature helps cultural and social historians understand some of its language (rent-seeking; innovation and growth) and the nature of its historiographical intervention. It also makes Livesey’s declaration in his conclusion that “the cultural changes in the provinces made a global world, they did not make a capitalist world” somewhat ironic (p.165). However, the book’s introductory discussion of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*, from which Livesey’s title presumably derives, not only provides economic history with an unlikely interlocutor in post-colonial studies but also deepens the book’s theoretical engagement.[10] Chakrabarty famously interrogated the implicit universalization of European experience inherent in historical thinking and encouraged pluralistic approaches to historical narrative. After citing Chakrabarty’s analysis approvingly, Livesey notes that, nevertheless, “the most influential coordinating ideas in modern life are universals,” a

testimony to European exceptionalism that “comes back in through the empirical window after being shown the theoretical door” (p.14). Livesey writes that “the interdependent meanings of ‘global’ and ‘rational,’ which are occluded in most contemporary accounts of global history, are made visible in the lived historical experience of the people of the Languedoc” (pp. 144-145). Scholars for whom the pluralization of narratives and frameworks is a critical component of global history as an intellectual project might question Livesey’s decision to use “global” here to stand in for a kind of universal rationality. Although not explicitly situated in this debate, Livesey apparently aims to salvage Enlightenment universalism from the relativizing tendencies of eighteenth-century scholarship in the wake of post-modernism while still acknowledging its embeddedness in European experience.

Yet, as the title and introductory discussion of Chakrabarty’s suggests, Livesey makes this attempt by using terms associated with universalism’s critics. For instance, there is the book’s prominent use of “subaltern.” I counted twenty-five textual references to “subaltern,” “subalterns,” and “subalternity,” including in the title to chapter four. Given the term’s complicated imbrication with Marxist and post-colonialist literature, as well as the mention of subaltern studies in the introduction, this term seems to merit a definition, but we are never given one. Who exactly are these subalterns, what is the countervailing hegemony against which they are defined, and, consequently, what theoretical work does this freighted term do?[11] At times, it seems to describe the same large swath of predominantly rural early modern Languedocian society that Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie famously characterized as helplessly trapped in *histoire immobile*, impervious to agricultural improvement, prey to the “parasitic phenomena” of extractive tax collection and noble rents.[12] But surely the term, as Livesey deploys it, encompasses more than the peasantry? This lack of clarity seems important to me in understanding the ramifications of Livesey’s argument.

Take, for instance, the first chapter, which focuses on public credit. Livesey argues that growing familiarity with public credit, through the market for *rentes*, not only helped fashion a mindset of provincial cosmopolitanism among ordinary people but also shifted elites away from pure extractive financial behavior and towards a culture of cooperation, trust, and public utility. For Livesey, this culture of public credit helps explain the revolutionary resistance to default and consequently outlasted the institutions that had initially fostered this mindset. Most of the chapter is devoted to a macro-level explanation of the tax infrastructure and analysis of the growing role of debt servicing and public works projects in government finance. Here, Livesey applies many of the arguments made about the modernizing effects of public credit in the British Financial Revolution, traditionally read in the extensive literature on the early modern fiscal military state as the antithesis to ancien regime France public finance, to the Languedoc.[13]

Yet Livesey goes further than arguing that by 1789 France had developed an elite or bourgeois political culture that valued credit and disdained bankruptcy. He seeks to show that this new understanding of financial knowledge and collective action depended on the prevalence in Languedocian society as a whole, that “the population, down to the most ordinary inhabitants, had learned how to manage the relationships between self-interest, risk, and development through the optic of an abstraction: public credit” (p. 51). To support this claim, the chapter opens with a comparison of the *sénéchaussée* of Carcassonne’s rentiers across thirty years from 1755 through 1787, providing a demographic snapshot from 1784-1785 in Table 1 (p. 21). The number of rentiers included is small, thirty-five in total, and raises questions about the *sénéchaussée* as a

representative sample, but the other categories designated are “bourgeois and subalterns,” “women,” “charities,” “officers (law etc.),” “military and noble” and “church,” which raise still others. It is in this discussion of public credit that the book’s only reference to gender, in the form of the role played by female debt-holders, occurs and apparently highlights the exceptional pervasiveness of public credit to all levels of society. Indeed, the chapter begins with an account of the *rentes* held by two potentially related *filles de service* (female hospital orderlies). But I wonder how much we can make of this. As Elise Dermineur’s work has highlighted, female servants, particularly single women, played a key role in early modern credit markets in general, since their inability to store money in their homes, combined with their steady salaries, primed them to invest (she shows that male domestics followed similar patterns, which may apply to the few examples of *jardiniers* and *cuisiniers* Livesey mentions).[14] It is true that, as Livesey argues, these studies concern the private credit market, and we are missing studies of the provincial markets for *rentes* in the ancien regime. Yet, this only makes differentiating them from ordinary credit markets more significant. From the standpoint of “ordinary” people (subalterns?), wouldn’t various instruments of public debt not be viewed as just an alternative investment opportunity? What would seem to be important here is to demonstrate first that interaction with *rentes* in the countryside paralleled the new knowledge cultures and new senses of collective action fostered by urban or mercantile interaction with financial instruments, money, and credit as shown in the works of Katie Jarvis and Amalia Kessler, as well as in trades.[15] But since this work has already argued for the increasing cosmopolitanism fostered by interaction with financial instruments, it would be also particularly useful to have a stronger sense of the uniqueness of the new culture of *public* credit during this time. Certainly, this has much to do with the culture of knowledge that enabled new kinds of interactions between classes based on trust and cooperation, a culture that persisted even after the collapse of ancien regime institutions. But what was this mindset like? For instance, Rebecca Spang’s nuanced treatment of the mental world of ancien regime *rentes*, which also mentions their appeal to various levels of French (and European) society, argues for their attraction based on surety and immovability.[16] Yet the entire discussion of debt, penetrating as it is, remains at the level of elites (or at least bourgeoisie?) and institutions rather than the actual annuitants themselves.

I offer my reflections on chapter 1 not merely because they engage with what is for me a generally familiar literature. Rather, I think this chapter reflects broader issues with the notion of global history as emerging from the previously mentioned “entanglement of local cosmopolitanisms” (p.146). The book’s ending point is instructive for understanding this phrase’s full significance. *Provincializing Global History* is truly a “long eighteenth century” book, one that begins in the late seventeenth century and moves through the mid nineteenth century (the titular range of 1680 to 1830 is only approximate) with no decisive starting or stopping year. As such, it traverses the revolutionary divide, thereby confounding the reader’s assumption that a book about the evolution of modern culture of knowledge and social action in France would naturally lead up to 1789 (indeed, the book also at times uneasily alternates between a French narrative and a narrative of global modernity). The book ends rather with the fractured self of early nineteenth-century France, which Livesey examines at the end of chapter 5 through a discussion of Jan Goldstein’s work.[17] In one of the book’s few directly comparative passages, Livesey contrasts the project of stabilizing bourgeois selfhood in France, where “in the absence of a hegemonic bourgeoisie, the self could not be univocally bourgeois” (p.161), with the much more “successful” project of British bourgeois selfhood. But who is this bourgeoisie? How do they relate to the subalterns (before and after the

Revolution)? A famously fraught category in French history, by some measures many of the characters in this book would qualify as bourgeois.[18] And surely that matters if the conclusion we are to draw is that the stability of social innovation derived from society as a whole rather than from the dominance of a particular class. For Livesey, however, the intellectual fruit of this contrast is both to detach the rise of modernity (global history?) from the ascendancy of a class (and, consequently, with a particular notion of the individual), and simultaneously to insist on the importance of social innovation in society as a whole, rather than the emergence of unified class-bound rational selfhoods, in explaining the rise of local cosmopolitanisms.

Viewed in this light, the vagueness regarding the social composition of subalternity seems retrospectively intentional (although still I argue that the term should be defined upfront). Leaving aside my reservations, expressed in my discussion of Chapter 1, about whether subalternity can be viewed without more attention to social history, I want to end by reflecting on the vision of global history that ultimately emerges. Having dispensed with class as the critical factor in universalism, and with it the lingering ghost of materialist insistence that universalism masks class or colonial interest, new local cosmopolitanism seems free to move on its own through the world. In the conclusion we learn that “the repertoire of global action, embedded in credit markets, orders of knowledge, and worlds of work imposed itself everywhere” (p.165). But this sanguine, apparently agent-less, and potentially pluralistic vision of many provincial communities evolving new dynamic stabilities that enabled universalism sits uncomfortably with the reality of how exactly these systems were actually introduced to much of the world. It also returns the reader to the introductory question, of whether we are to believe that there is something inherently universal about this pattern that just happened to arise first in Europe, or whether universalism is inextricable from its Eurocentric origins and with the coercive means often used to “impose itself everywhere.” These are crucial questions, and credit should be given to Livesey’s stimulating book for asking them anew.

NOTES

[1] Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 6.

[2] For such critiques see Jeremy Adelman, “What is Global History Now?” URL <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>. For measured skepticism about the “global turn” in eighteenth-century French history more generally see David Bell, “Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution,” *French Historical Studies* 37 (2014): 1-24 and Paul Cheney, “The French Revolution’s Global Turn and Capitalism’s Spatial Fixes,” *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 4 (2019): 575-83.

[3] See John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Introduction: Seeing the World like a Microhistorian,” *Past & Present* 242, no. 14 (2019): 1–22. Similar points are raised by Romain Bertrand and Guillaume Calafat, “La microhistoire globale : affaire(s) à suivre,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 73, no. 1 (2018): 1–18.

[4] Emma Rothschild, “Isolation and economic life in eighteenth-century France,” *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 4 (2014): 1055-1082; Julie Hardwick, “Fractured Domesticity in the Old Regime: Families and Global Goods in Eighteenth-Century France,” *The American Historical*

Review 124, no. 4 (2019): 1267–77; Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Heath, “Guinée Cloth, Wage Slavery, and Colonial Commodities,” paper given at New Political Economics of the French Empire Workshop at Columbia University February 28, 2020.

[5] Andrew David Edwards, Peter Hill, and Juan Neves-Sarriegui, “Introduction: Capitalism in Global History,” *Past & Present* 249, no. 1 (Nov. 2020): e1–e32, URL <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa044>

[6] Specifically, Livesey refers to Joel Mokyr, *A Culture of Growth: The Origins of the Modern Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Jack Goldstone, *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History 1500-1850* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008) and Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), but this literature is considerably larger including many works of institutional economics. Many economists have tried to reconcile imperialism and innovation. Kenneth Pomeranz’s *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) is only the most prominent example.

[7] On the divergence between economic history, generally now practiced by economic historians, and cultural and social histories of economy, see William H. Sewell Jr., “A Strange Career: The Historical Study of Economic Life,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 4 (2010): 146–166.

[8] Livesey does not mention the most widely known recent discussion of rent-seeking behavior, Thomas Piketty’s *Le Capital au XXIe siècle* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 2013).

[9] On the need for this reconciliation see Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, “Information and Economic History: How the Credit Market in Old Regime Paris Forces Us to Rethink the Transition to Capitalism,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 69-94.

[10] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[11] In the introduction, “subalterns” are differentiated from “provincials.” In Chapter 1, Table 1, a chart of social categories includes a category called “bourgeois and subalterns.” (p. 21). In Chapter 4, the plow is derived from “artisanal and subaltern technology” (p.117).

[12] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N, 1966).

[13] See in particular David Stasavage, *Public Debt and the Birth of the Democratic State: France and Great Britain 1688-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620–1720* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011) and Bruce G. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1999). A good overview of the literature comparing French and British fiscal-military states can be found in Tyson Leuchter, “Finance

Beyond the Bounds of the Fiscal-Military State: Debt, Speculation, and the Renovation of Nineteenth-Century French Financial Capitalism,” *French History*, forthcoming.

[14] See Elise M. Dermineur, “Single Women and the Rural Credit Market in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 1 (September 1, 2014): 175–199. The role of female lenders has also been highlighted in Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and Laurence Fontaine, *The Moral Economy: Poverty, Credit, and Trust in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[15] See Katie Jarvis, *Politics in the Marketplace: Work, Gender, and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), esp. pp. 104-134; Amalia D. Kessler, *A Revolution in Commerce: The Parisian Merchant Court and the Rise of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 188-237.

[16] Rebecca L. Spang, *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 19-56.

[17] Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[18] See for instance the conversation aroused by Sarah Maza’s *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

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