

Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften

20. Jg., Band 2, 2009

Global History

Herausgegeben von
Peer Vries

StudienVerlag

Innsbruck
Wien
Bozen

Gefördert durch die Historisch-Kulturwissenschaftliche Fakultät der Universität Wien, das Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung in Wien, die Stadt Wien, Magistratsabteilung 7 – Kultur, Wissenschafts- und Forschungsförderung.

Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften

Zitierweise: ÖZG

Erscheinungsweise (ab Jg. 2009): 3 Bände im Jahr (ca. 600 Druckseiten)

Redaktion: Dr. Andrea Schnöller

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Website: <http://www.univie.ac.at/oezg/>

Einzelband € 29,00 / sfr 49,90

Jahresabonnement 3 Bände im Jahr (privat) € 45,50 / sfr 76,90

Jahresabonnement für Institutionen € 61,00 / sfr 105,00

(Abonnementpreise inkl. MwSt., zuzügl. Versandkosten)

Alle Bezugspreise und Versandkosten unterliegen der Preisbindung.

Abbestellungen müssen spätestens 3 Monate vor Ende des Kalenderjahres schriftlich erfolgen.

Aboservice:

Tel.: +43-1-74040-7814, Fax: +43-1-74040-7813

aboservice@studienverlag.at

© 2009 by StudienVerlag Ges.m.b.H., Erlenstraße 10, A-6020 Innsbruck

order@studienverlag.at

<http://www.studienverlag.at>

Buchgestaltung nach Entwürfen von Kurt Höretzeder

Satz: Marianne Oppel, Weitra

Umschlag: StudienVerlag/Karin Berner

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlor- und säurefrei gebleichtem Papier.

ISBN 978-3-7065-4750-5

ISSN 1016-765 X

Offenlegung nach § 25 Mediengesetz:

Medieninhaber: StudienVerlag

Herausgeber: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Geschichtswissenschaften, Wien

Blattlinie: Veröffentlichungen wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten aus allen Bereichen der Geschichtswissenschaften

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editorial: global history

Global history, or world history, to me the two terms are interchangeable, is in very good shape at the moment. Its practitioners are well-organised. There is a *World History Association* (WHA) with many branches and a *European Network in Universal and Global History* (ENIUGH), which originated in Leipzig and is now in the process of becoming a world-wide organisation. The sub-discipline of global economic history has its own Global Economic History Network. There is a Forum on European Expansion and Global Interaction. In the German-speaking world there is a *Verein für Geschichte des Weltsystems*. Those who are interested in the topic have ample opportunity to visit conferences where it is discussed. Not just those organised by the WHA or ENIUGH. At Social Science History Conferences, in Europe as well as in the United States, for example, there are always panels or debates dedicated to global history. The theme of the World Economic History Conference of 2009 in Utrecht will be global economic history. These are just some examples from the Western world. Many more could be given.

Many students are at least introduced in the subject. According to Felipe Fernández-Armesto, in the interview I conducted with him for this issue of ÖZG, at the moment, in the USA and Canada alone, over 300,000 undergraduates are taking some kind of course in it. An increasing number of universities there are offering Master programs for interested students. The same goes for Europe. The University of Leipzig, the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Universities of Leipzig, Vienna and Wrocław run a Master Programme in Global History and Global Studies. In Warwick, a newly founded Global History and Culture Centre from 2008 onwards offers a MA programme in Global History. Many universities have courses in global history in their Bachelor-programmes. Most of these initiatives originate in the West, but especially East Asia is catching-up.

There is no lack of possibilities to publish. The *Journal of World History* has already entered its twentieth year of existence. Four years ago the first issue of the *Journal of Global History* came on the market. *Itinerario. International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* is already over thirty years old, although it started under a different name that indicated that initially its focus was more exclusively on European expansion and the reactions it provoked. Those who read German are not short of publications either. Just think of *Zeitschrift für*

Weltgeschichte, the journal of the Verein für Geschichte des Weltsystems, or *Comparativ* that some time ago got a new subtitle: *Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und Vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*. The Journal *Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte* actually already exists since 1950. There are ample possibilities to publish and discuss on internet. *H-world Net* provides a popular and intensively used discussion forum. *World History Connected* [www.worldhistoryconnected.org], an internet journal, has just entered its sixth year with an entirely renewed format. It gives access to various websites and services. In Germany, there is the internet-site *Geschichte-transnational/History transnational*.

There is no lack of general overviews of what has already been done in the field of global history or of introductions showing how to practise it. Let me refer to some very recent examples. To begin with, there is Patrick Manning's *Navigating world history. Historians create a global past*, the most complete overview up until now. *Palgrave Advances in World histories*, a book edited by Marnie Hughes-Warrington, provides an extensive discussion of various topics and themes in global history. In a book edited by Tony Hopkins authors deal with interactions between the universal and the local in a number of interesting case studies. In 2008 Eric Vanhaute published his *Wereldgeschiedenis. Een inleiding*. And finally, there now is an introduction by Pamela Kyle Crossley, called *What is global history?*¹ For the German-speaking public Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert and Ulrike Freitag quite recently edited a volume with a selection, and translation, of recent articles that can function as a survey of the current state of the art, preceded by a long, informative introduction.² So did Jürgen Osterhammel, although he went further back in time and also selected some texts that are older but still have their relevance.³ In Austria, the University of Vienna has been quite active in promoting and discussing global history for already over a decade. Let me just refer to one recent publication, the book edited by Margarete Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund and Wolfgang Schwentker on globalisation and global history.⁴ The number of books and book series claiming to deal with world history has become too numerous to mention.⁵ There are encyclopaedias of world history⁶ and books dealing with the history of the writing of global history.⁷

All these indicators point in the same direction: global history is very much alive and has evolved into a mature discipline. It does not need an ump-tied 'in defence of'-text. I have never understood why global history would need so much defending anyhow, but considering its current boom, it is simply a waste of time and effort to try and explain that its existence would be a "Good Thing". Neither do I see much use in producing yet another publication full of declarations of intentions, announcements of plans, or theoretical reflections on principles. We have enough of those already. It is time to bother less about cooking books and focus on the actual cooking.⁸ That means, that in this issue of OEZG the reader can find survey articles,

case-studies, and, in particular, articles in which practitioners of global history tell us about their career, their points of view and their actual work. History to a large extent is a craft. Analysing best practices and watching best practitioners is much more informative than trying to formulate and follow general rules and principles. I have consciously chosen to try and present a 'state of the art-overview' here which, without in any sense pretending to be exhaustive, gives an impression of what is actually going on in global history. Where possible, I have done so via concrete persons, projects and publications. The best way to know a tree is by looking at its fruits. In my introduction I will try to put the articles in this issue and the topics they are dealing with in perspective by showing how they fit into what global history has and has not achieved up until now.

If one wants to further one's career as a scholar, writing a textbook is not usually regarded as a very efficient investment. If, however, one wants to make an impact by one's writings, it probably is. Global history in this respect is in a somewhat different position from most other varieties of historical writing. Interest in it, especially in the United States – which play such an important role in its current boom – often did not spread from scholarship to teaching but rather the other way around. The main driving force behind publications in the field has long been demand for good teaching materials. In the World History Association, which was founded in the United States, teachers working in schools and colleges held and still hold a prominent position and much that is written in the *Journal of World History* and in particular in *World History Connected* and associated media, tries to take on board the specific needs and interests of such teachers. Writing introductory textbooks has become a cottage industry. For the respectability and acceptance of the field it is extremely important what these books look like and whether they are up-to-standard. In an overview like the one we intend to present here, they should not be ignored.

We managed to get contributions by two authors who recently have published a textbook: Felipe Fernández-Armesto, who is interviewed, and Eric Vanhoute, who wrote an article. The textbook by Fernández-Armesto, *The world: A history*, is very well-received and much discussed.⁹ It gives a sweeping overview of the history of the world in which, though of course not as neatly and strictly circumscribed as is the case in 'traditional' introductions in fields of history, time and place continue to function as the structuring principles of a text that, full of maps, charts, figures, pictures, comparisons, questions, anecdotes and vignettes, aims at giving the reader an overall survey. Its author is one of the most prolific (global) historians of this

moment. He is outspoken, his work wide-ranging and widely-read. Interviewing him seemed an excellent way of charting what is going on in global history in general, while at the same time getting direct insights into the particular views of one of its eminent practitioners who, strikingly enough, as he himself indicates, was never educated to become a global historian.

Eric Vanhaute, professor at the University of Ghent in Belgium, also wrote an introduction in global history, with an equally succinct and adequate title, that, in English, reads *Global history. An introduction*.¹⁰ Interestingly enough, the set-up of his book could hardly be more different from that of Fernández-Armesto's. Vanhaute has not written a narrative, nor does he provide a synthesis of 'what happened'. His approach is thematic and problem-oriented, each chapter of the book dealing with a specific topic. He provides more of an introduction into the discipline global history than a survey of the history of the globe. As compared to Fernández-Armesto, he has produced a slender volume. One can only hope that it will soon be translated. The connection with teaching in his case is obvious: the book was written for and in the course of an introductory class in global history given by the author. In his article, Vanhaute shows that he is a global historian who seriously reflects on the scholarly, social and political implications of his work. He emphasizes that the world, including the world of scholarship, is not, and has never been 'flat'. Inequality is a fundamental fact of global life. He discusses the state of the discipline from four angles: defining global history, debating global history, teaching global history, and, what is very important for a further professionalization of the discipline, researching global history. His definition is rather straightforward: world or global history studies the beginnings, the growth and the changes in human communities from a comparative, interconnected and systemic perspective. Central underlying questions refer to the gradual (internal) expansion of human societies in relation to (external) ecological constraints and challenges, the emergence of overarching structures, called cultures or civilizations, and finally, the contacts, connections, and conflicts between cultures and civilizations. His background is that of an economic historian with a special interest in regional economic history, especially the history of peasants and agriculture, who became inspired by Wallerstein's world-systems analysis. This shows in the research projects he briefly presents on the copper commodity-chain and the global disappearing of the peasantry.

Much ink has been spilled over the question what exactly global history would be. I will not enter into that debate here. According to David Christian, it in any case means playing with scales, which in practice boils down to covering broader geo-

graphical areas and longer periods of time than 'ordinary' history.¹¹ The study of time-periods which are quite distinct from those most traditional historians – and even an enthusiastic promoter of the *longue duree* like Braudel – tend to deal with, overall has received a boost. I need only refer to two studies by Jared Diamond that both had a huge impact, one providing a short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years, and one analysing cases of ecological collapse stretching over a period of many centuries.¹² This extending of the time-frame is taken to its limit by practitioners of 'big history', the branch of history that deals with the complete story of the planet, life, and people from the Big Bang to the present day.¹³ Big history is beginning to develop into a subfield with various prominent practitioners like Fred Spier, David Christian, Dan Smail, and Cynthia Stokes Brown and Christopher Lloyd.¹⁴ We are glad that David Christian responded positively to our request to write an article for this issue. In it he discusses his intellectual development, his work, and his inspiration, dealing amongst other things with the question whether big history with its huge time scale and its broad interdisciplinary approach has anything to offer to the 'professional' historian. Although, overall, the natural sciences provide a friendlier environment for it, he definitely thinks the answer must be positive. In his case too, the connection with teaching is obvious: his career as 'big historian' began when he quite enthusiastically, and naively, proposed at his university that one should teach "the whole of history" and then started wondering whether it would be possible to give a viable course on such a huge topic. And again, the background of this global historian is that of an 'ordinary' historian. As Christian indicates, he started his career as a historian who, influenced by the French *Annales*-school and by British Marxist historiography, studied the history of Russia. He still publishes on that topic and on the history of Central Asia, Mongolia and the Silk Road.

The effort of authors who 'confine' themselves to trying to encompass *human* history in its entirety has also already resulted in some fine syntheses. The most well-known example at the moment probably is the book by John and William H. McNeill on the human web, which, of course, also might function as a textbook. But their's is just one among many.¹⁵ Most global historians prefer a less extended time-frame. Not as well-known with the public at large and 'only' dealing with the pre-industrial world, is Patricia Crone's book from 1989. This excellent, concise volume with its thematic and analytical approach, to my view, has never received the attention it deserves.¹⁶ What is called 'the Ancient World' in Western historiography, as far as I can see, has not yet received a really global treatment. In the West at least, studies dealing with that period, tend to focus primarily on Greco-Roman Antiquity. There are signs, however, that interesting new perspectives are bearing fruit.¹⁷ For the Middle Ages, to again for the sake of convenience use Western chronology, to my knowledge, no global overviews have been published. Felipe

Fernández-Armesto's *Millennium. A history of our last thousand years* at least deals with a substantial part of them.¹⁸ The same goes for Janet Abu-Lughod's book on the world system before European hegemony in which Eurasian and African connections are analysed, and for Hodgson's classic study on the venture of Islam.¹⁹ A fairly rare example of a more global, *comparative* approach for the medieval era can be found in Michael Mitterauer's *Warum Europa?*, where the author claims that the reasons why European history took such a specific course already lay in the Middle Ages and tries to support that claim by comparing developments in Europe with developments in the Islamic world and China.²⁰ There are though, some promising attempts by scholars who write in German to further broaden the geographical scope of 'medieval' history.²¹

The early modern period undoubtedly is the period that is covered best in global historical writing. One can point at various overviews, e.g. Chris Bayly's *The birth of the modern world*.²² Less well-known, as it is written in German, but definitely quite interesting, is the one by Hans-Heinrich Nolte on empires, religions and systems during the period from 1400 to 1900.²³ A fascinating early example of a global treatment of this period can be found in Fernand Braudel's, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle*, a book that to my view is far more interesting and revolutionary than the book on the Mediterranean that made this author famous.²⁴ In it Braudel, as expected, tends to strongly emphasise the importance of the environment and of material life. This emphasis can be found in many global histories dealing with this period. One might think of studies dealing with what Crosby called the "Columbian exchange" and "ecological imperialism", or of John Richards' environmental history of the early modern world.²⁵ This of course does not mean that, for this period, only the environmentalist-materialist approach would have ushered in general surveys. We, for example, do have syntheses dealing with its military history, with the history of its science and technology, and, at least for Eurasia, with the history of its cultural exchange.²⁶

For the modern era, especially the twentieth century, we still are less well-provided with good syntheses. Hobsbawm's four overviews – *Age of Revolution*, *Age of Capital*, *Age of Empire*, *Age of Extremes* – though certainly of high quality and still valuable, according to modern standards would not be considered as 'really' global.²⁷ For the long nineteenth century, we now do have a global history, and even a superb and voluminous one: Jürgen Osterhammel's *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Osterhammel wrote an extensive article for this issue, but preferred not to devote it to his own work. His book, to my view a masterpiece that is bound to become a classic, deserves serious attention and discussion.²⁸ For the twentieth century we of course have many efforts to describe and interpret it globally, but as yet no books that have acquired the status of a 'classic'.²⁹ The efforts

made by Peter Gran deserve mentioning for their originality.³⁰ In Vienna, a series has been started, *Globalgeschichte – Die Welt 1000–2000*, that takes the concept of a century quite literally and may also present a good overview of the twentieth century.³¹ Other time-frames are of course possible. Some authors focus on the global history of just one year, for example 1688, 1800 or 1968.³² The year 1000 apparently is very popular in this respect.³³

All global historians try to get away from the national, territorial ‘state-focus’ and somehow become ‘trans-national’. That is easier said than done: if it is not states, then what entities must be regarded as the ‘bearers’ of global history, or at least as its units of analysis? Entire continents like Eurasia, that Jared Diamond likes to contrast with other parts of the world and that members of the California School like to see as a world of “surprising resemblances”?³⁴ Civilisations, as in Felipe Fernández Armesto’s book with that title, in Marshall Hodgson’s book on Islamic civilization, or in the many (text)books on Western Civilisation? World systems, in the sense that Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills use that term.³⁵ Or rather world-systems – and empires – in the specific sense that Wallerstein uses these terms?³⁶ Weltregionen, as is done in the Viennese series with that name? Or areas, as long was popular in so-called ‘area studies’?³⁷ Seascapes?³⁸ Or rather empires?

The study of empires, in particular their rise and fall, has a long and time-honoured pedigree and is very much *en vogue* amongst global historians.³⁹ We are therefore glad that John Darwin was willing to contribute an article to this issue. Darwin has just published a global history of empire, a *magnum opus* covering the period from the fifteenth century till the contemporary world, in which he writes: “The history of the world, it is tempting to say, is an imperial history, a history of empires.”⁴⁰ Darwin opens his article trying to explain the causes of the rise of global history, then points at the risks one runs when one tries to write it and reflects on the choices the bulk of global historians have made in their efforts to ‘interpret the globe’. They tend to do that by means of tackling big themes. He distinguishes between three options: the first one being to concentrate on macro forces beyond human control, which leads to studies in which geography and ecology loom large; the second one being to study new ‘ecumenes’, i.e., geographical entities that are larger than territorial or that in any case do not coincide with such states. The third one he mentions is to focus on the trail of consumption and write the history of products like tea, coffee, sugar or tobacco.⁴¹

After that introduction, Darwin reflects on why he came to write his global history of empire, and why he did it the way he did. The focus, as in so many global

history books at the moment, is on Eurasian interconnectedness and similarities. His analysis leads him to the conclusion that the fortunes of empires can be reversed quickly as global history is an unending series of conjunctures or phases. Darwin's book received many enthusiastic reviews, but there of course also was critique. That is also dealt with in the article. Darwin too, came to global history from other fields of interest. He has always been mainly known as a historian of colonization and de-colonization, in particular the decolonization of the British Empire. Making sense of that process increasingly led him to look at empire from a global perspective. He now teaches imperial and global history as a Fellow of Nuffield College in Oxford.

The experimenting with different scales that is so often regarded as characteristic for global history, can also mean connecting the local with the global in an effort to see 'heaven in a grain of sand'. One option then would be to try and combine a biographical approach with one that focuses on global phenomena.⁴² Another one would be to try and pinpoint global phenomena at one specific geographical site.⁴³ The research of Birgit Tremml, PhD student at the Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in Vienna, may best be regarded as an example of such an approach. Her research project she is reporting on in this issue, will be finished in about three years. It focuses on the history of the Philippines, more in particular Manila, during roughly the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. There probably is no better place to study global developments and make global comparisons in this period of time than the city of Manila. The moment that the Spaniards decided to settle there and set up a port in 1571, is often regarded as the moment that all major continents became actually linked by overseas connections and thereby as the moment 'globalisation' really took off.⁴⁴ Studying in this site provides the opportunity of learning about three different early modern states (Castile-Spain, Japan and China), which for the global historian of course means, comparing them and looking at their interactions and their wider ramifications. What did 'Manila' mean for those states and what did those states 'mean' for Manila? What can their interaction in the Philippines tell us about their politics, their political economies, institutions and cultures? Birgit Tremml presents two case-studies that will throw some light on these questions: the first one focusing on the political relationship between Japan and Spain in the first decades of Manila's existence, the second one on the rebellion of the Chinese in Manila in 1603.

World historians, of course, can also focus primarily on certain topics or themes which they then try to cover globally.⁴⁵ The very long-term perspective that is so

popular amongst global historians quite often is combined with a wide geographical coverage and a strong emphasis on ecological conditions.⁴⁶ A study like Felipe Fernández-Armesto's *Civilizations*, to which he refers in the interview, can count as an example. For its author, a civilisation is a specific relationship between the species of man and the rest of nature. He argues that civilizations have such strong geographical foundations that one can classify them according to environment.⁴⁷ But he is just one amongst many global historians who think natural conditions are quite important in understanding human history. The study of topics like the history of ecology, disease and energy, has already matured to such an extent that the reader can choose among various good syntheses.⁴⁸

That also goes for military history, of which, to my regret, we have no representative in this issue. This discipline that has long been primarily the reserve of self-referring specialists has evolved into one of the most innovative and open 'sectors' of historiography with many of its prominent practitioners quite willing to go global.⁴⁹

Although I might be prejudiced, I tend to think that in no sector of historiography global perspectives have become so prominent and the debate so lively as in economic history. The topic *par excellence* in global economic history, in particular in books dealing with the early modern era, continues to be that of 'the West versus the Rest', in which 'the Rest' increasingly tends to be identified with 'Asia'. The classic 'rise of the West-story' is not dead, as the success of, for example, David Landes' book on the wealth and poverty of nations, proves clearly.⁵⁰ But many global historians regard it as too Eurocentric and too fond of European exceptionalism.⁵¹ What currently holds centre stage is a lively debate on what is now usually called the 'Great Divergence-debate'. The so-called California School has completely changed the parameters of that debate, by claiming that the 'rise of the West' was far less obvious than it looks in traditional historiography and far less explicable in internal terms: it claims it occurred quite late and for quite contingent reasons.⁵² Authors who are primarily responsible for this change of perspective are Andre Gunder Frank, with his plea to reorient economic history, and of course Kenneth Pomeranz, with his original and highly influential book on the Great Divergence.⁵³ The Californian point of view has become so popular and wide-spread that it already provides the basis of new handbooks on the (economic) history of the early modern world, one by Robert Marks and the other one by Jack Goldstone, who wrote an article for this issue in which he expands on the ideas of this school and his position in it.⁵⁴ Current debates on the Great Divergence are strongly intertwined with debates on economic globalisation, in which the topic of intercontinental migration from the very beginning was a very important field of its own, for all periods of time.⁵⁵ Both issues, in particular the first one, are put in context and analysed in my extensive survey of what is and has been going on in global economic history.

Global history of science and technology has also come of age. Here too, various syntheses have already been published, and here too, to be honest, many studies focus on the early modern period.⁵⁶ In this special issue, we have contributions of two specialists in this field who will both publish a *magnum opus* during the course of this year. The first one is Floris Cohen who already wrote a widely acclaimed book on the Scientific Revolution and who is now finishing a book called *How science came into the world. A comparative history*.⁵⁷ The other one is Jack Goldstone, the author of many articles and, amongst others, books on revolution and rebellion in the early modern world and on the rise of the West, who is now finishing a book on the origins of modern economic growth.⁵⁸ Both authors are clearly interested in the Great Divergence. Readers very probably will be struck by the extent to which these authors, coming from opposite intellectual backgrounds, that of a macro-sociologist with quantitative leanings in case of Goldstone and that of a historian of science and ideas in case of Cohen, end up with quite similar interests and a quite similar approach.

Cohen as historian of science wants to connect – or in any case discuss connections between – economic history and the history of science and technology, two fields between which, according to him, there exists “a curious dichotomy”. He claims that the rise of modern science played a pivotal role in the rise of the West and sets out to answer a couple of related questions: What do we mean by modern science? How could it emerge in Europe in the seventeenth century? Why did it emerge there rather than somewhere else? What did it mean for traditional craftsmanship in the shorter and longer run and what was its contribution to the coming into being of the modern world? He regards the harnessing of steam power as quint-essential for understanding the Western ‘road to riches’ and therefore focuses on analysing the role of science in the invention and application of the steam engine. His conclusion leaves not much room for doubt: without ‘science’ the steam engine could not have been invented, which implies that it could not have been invented in China, as modern science did not – and was extremely unlikely to – emerge there.

Goldstone was trained as a sociologist and acquired a PhD in that discipline. He developed a strong interest in historical macro-sociology and later on in quantitative economic history and global history. In his article he tells how exactly this happened and gives an insight in the workings of modern international academia that, according to him, benefits from globalization. He is the person who coined the phrase ‘California School’, and he shares many of its ideas which he aptly synthesized in his *Why Europe?* He is strongly influenced by and sympathetic to its views, but criticises its lack of attention to science, technology and culture in explaining how the Great Divergence could come about. According to him, it did not start in Britain by accident. So he began focusing his research on the question why Britain

and at first *only* Britain became the leading centre of machine invention and use. He regards it as global history's goal to look for similarities and differences between various societies to then identify the most likely consequences of those similarities and differences. He clearly is very optimistic about the future of this endeavour, claiming it entered a new golden age in the 1990s and is still gathering momentum.

Global history is clearly booming. There is a lot of activity in which many people are involved; there are many excellent and interesting publications. There of course also are problems, or rather 'challenges'. As yet, not all subfields of global history look equally well developed. It looks as if social history and women's history have to do some catching-up.⁵⁹ That also seems to apply to religious history, although the number of books with global as well as religion in the title increases quickly.

One problem would be its place in ordinary, secondary schools; in the Netherlands e.g., as a student of mine discovered, attention to non-Western history in books used for teaching in secondary schools, over the decade from 1990 to 2000 as compared to the previous decade, in absolute terms *decreased* rather than *increased*.⁶⁰ I would not be surprised if this were the exception rather than the rule. Then there is the position of those who teach it and write about it. Most of the people who do global history are not employed as global historians and often global history is not even mentioned in their job description. A look at the careers of the scholars writing in this very issue is enlightening in this respect. It means that, institutionally, the discipline is still quite weak. That of course brings us to the question of its further professionalization. The classic standards of professionalism for traditional historians are well-known: whatever else they may include, they in any case presuppose intimate knowledge of a confined field with its sources, archives and literature, and the ability to critically analyse one's primary source material. These requirements can not simply be transferred to global history. What can not be doubted is that a broad erudition covering different societies, judgement, and as a rule knowledge of more than one discipline are required, as all the articles in this issue clearly show. For example, the global study of Manila Birgit Tremml is writing, would, ideally, require the capability to read sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources in Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese; knowledge of these languages in their current form to read secondary literature; very probably also working knowledge of a couple of other languages; acquaintance with the history of the regions involved and with comparative methods, and finally the capability to write down one's results in fluent English.

All this suggests that teamwork might be very important in global history. It clearly is in the collecting, constructing and standardising of data, as well as in making them available for researchers. Here there still is an enormous amount of work to be done. Currently exists – and very probably always will exist – a sometimes enormous imbalance in what we know and might know about various parts of the world. Teamwork is also the rule when it comes to providing the platforms for discussion without which any kind of serious modern scholarship would be impossible anyhow. The actual writing of monographs, however, still tends to be done by one or sometimes two persons and very probably that will continue to be the case. What in any case is needed is a ‘professionalization’ of research. That throws up the questions how to find and educate a new generation of researchers and how to find substantial and sustained funding. Who is willing to pay for the past of the world?

Then there of course is the problem of how to write from a global perspective, assuming that this is what global historians are supposed to do. Felipe Fernández-Armesto suggests that it implies writing like a “[...] galactic museum-keeper, contemplating the world from an immense distance of space and time and seeing it whole with a level of objectivity inaccessible to us, who are enmeshed in our history”.⁶¹ Apparently he thinks such objectivity is possible as well as salutary. I personally have severe doubts about that and would claim that in writing history a more ‘engaged’ perspective is not only unavoidable but also necessary because otherwise one lacks focus in one’s research and one’s writing. In this context, it is usually the danger of being Eurocentric, that is, almost ritually, decried. What one may call the ‘Eurocentrism of arrogance’, that tends to claim that the West and only the West has made history and has been the source of all progress, is a phenomenon directly linked to that brief period in global history that the West indeed was a dominant and progressive force. That period appears to be coming to its end, which robs this kind of thinking of most of its material base and in any case makes it much less convincing and acceptable. History is ‘provincializing’ Europe: it does not need historians to do so. Amongst global historians anti-Eurocentrists already far outnumber Eurocentrists.

The real problem now has become how to make global history a really ‘ecumenical’ project. When it comes to the number of studies that is devoted to them, some regions are clearly under-represented. In a way, one might talk of a certain Eurasia-centrism in current global history. The Americas but in particular Africa are under-represented, although one must not lose sight of the fact that Eurasia has always been home to the bulk of world population. Far more problematic for global history than Western arrogance is the persisting dominance up until now of what might be called ‘the Western way’. The West appears to still be dominating the agenda of global history in terms of the questions that are asked, the terminology used, and

the interpretative models that figure as points of departure and reference.⁶² This can be explained by the fact that global history, like the modern discipline of history as a whole, not only began as a Western project but, *for the time being*, still is dominated by Western scholarship that is backed-up by large amounts of resources. A majority of prestigious and well-endowed institutions of teaching and research still are in the West. Much of the material needed to study non-Western societies has over time been moved to the West. Many important scholars who originally came from elsewhere, have found a new home in the West too. Especially for East Asia, things are changing quickly. But overall, the West and Westerners are still dominant in scholarship, in particular in the humanities and social sciences that are 'luxuries' many poorer countries can ill afford. All the contributors to this issue are Westerners living in the West. It would definitely have been possible to include various non-Westerners working at Western universities or research institutes, or scholars from East Asia. It would definitely have been much more complicated to include non-Westerners living outside the West. But my approach has been quite pragmatic: try and produce a good overview with interesting topics and good scholars, which is complicated enough as it is. The line-up of this issue may not yet be all-encompassing: its authors do live in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, The Netherlands and the United States. That is a quite international group.

It is not by accident that this issue is in English: that has become, almost exclusively, the *lingua franca* of international scholarship. That clearly is not to everyone's liking and in any case food for thought. That brings us to the one article in this issue that we have not yet referred to, the one by Jürgen Osterhammel. He opens his analysis by pointing out that in Manning's *Navigating world history* there is not one reference to a living historian coming from a German speaking country. If one does not write in English, one apparently is not noted in the wider world. In a way, that of course is to be expected and 'normal'. If one wants to reach an international or even global public, one should write in an international or global language. German simply isn't such a language and will not become one in the future; actually only English is. One simply cannot expect many foreigners to learn German, a language that is sufficiently understood by, I guess, at most five percent of the world's population.

Osterhammel correctly points out though, that most global historians, even if they may want to speak to the world, continue to work in a context with an often distinctly national character and have a national audience. This as a rule implies that they (also) have to speak to that audience. The debates on global history and its practice unmistakably have a distinct flavour in various countries across the globe, a fact that may very easily be lost sight of when publications are not in the *lingua franca* of modern scholarship. Even a discipline as global as global history, is clearly connected to and rooted in certain, often national contexts or 'subcultures'. In his

succinct analysis of roots and varieties of global history in Germany, Osterhammel manages to inform those who do not read German about what has been and is currently going on in German global history. Before 1945, there were various traditions of global history in the country. These, however, did not manage to coalesce into one strong scholarly tradition after World War Two, so that global history became quite weak in a country that had made substantial contributions to its invention. German historiography continued to be focused on the state and the nation, especially the modern state and nation in Europe, and in particular Germany. The study of global history reached its lowest ebb in the 1970s and 1980s. Osterhammel tries to explain why and sketches various efforts to go ‘beyond the nation-state’ and make history transnational. These efforts notwithstanding, global history institutionally remains quite weak in Germany, as it basically is still dependent on personal contacts and interests. Prior to the current generation of PhD candidates, nobody in Germany ever had a chance of being trained from the outset in the study of global phenomena, and even at the moment very few universities possess the necessary institutional foundations for global history. Strikingly enough, Osterhammel himself teaches conventional courses in late modern European history and the history of international relations. His first major publications dealt with the history of China and more broadly Asia. In countries like France, Italy or Spain global history too faces idiosyncratic challenges and problems. Overall, the situation there definitely is not better. But like Goldstone, I would want to conclude quite optimistically: global history is a very vibrant field of study that is still gathering momentum.

Peer Vries/Vienna

Notes

- 1 Patrick Manning, *Navigating world history. Historians create a global past*, New York and Houndmills Basingstoke 2003; Marnie Hughes-Warrington, ed., *World histories*, Houndmills Basingstoke and New York 2005; A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Global history. Interactions between the universal and the local*, New York 2006; Eric Vanhaute, *Wereldgeschiedenis. Een inleiding*, Gent 2008 (*Global history. An introduction*); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What is global history?*, Cambridge 2008.
- 2 Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert and Ulrike Freitag, eds., *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, Frankfurt am Main 2007.
- 3 Jürgen Osterhammel, ed., *Weltgeschichte. Basistexte*, Stuttgart 2008.
- 4 Margarete Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund and Wolfgang Schwentker, eds., *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte*, Vienna 2005.
- 5 Let me only refer to two Viennese series: *Edition Weltregionen*, published by Promedia, and *Globalgeschichte – Die Welt 1000–2000*, published by Mandelbaum Verlag.
- 6 See e.g. *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History*, senior editor William H. McNeill, Great Barrington Mass. 2005; *World History Encyclopedia*, editor Alfred J. Andrea, forthcoming.
- 7 For example, Benedikt Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs, eds., *Writing world history 1800–2000*, Oxford 2003; George G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, with contributions by Supriya Mukherjee, *A global history of modern historiography*, Harlow 2008. See also the article by Patrick Karl O’Brien, *Histo-*

- riographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history, in: *Journal of Global History*, vol. 1, issue 1 (2006), 3–39.
- 8 I take this expression from Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2009, 1305.
 - 9 Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The world: A history*, Upper Saddle River 2006; second revised edition, Upper Saddle River 2009.
 - 10 Vanhaute, *Wereldgeschiedenis*.
 - 11 See his contribution called ‘Scales’ in: Hughes-Warrington, *Advances in World histories*, 64–89.
 - 12 Jared Diamond, *Guns, germs and steel. The fates of human societies*, London 1997; idem, *Collapse. How societies choose to fail or succeed*, New York 2005.
 - 13 That at least is the way Christopher Lloyd puts it. See his, *What on earth happened? The complete story of the planet, life, and people from the Big Bang to the present day*, Bloomsbury 2008.
 - 14 Fred Spier, *The structure of big history: From the Big Bang until today*, Amsterdam 1996. In 2009, Spier will publish a book called *Big history and the future*, with Amsterdam University Press; David Christian, *Maps of time. An introduction to big history*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2005; Dan Smail, *In the grip of sacred history*, in: *American Historical Review*, vol. 110, issue 5 (2005), 1337–1361; Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Big history*, New York 2007. For Lloyd see the previous note.
 - 15 In chronological order: Robert Wright, *Nonzero: the logic of human destiny*, New York 2000; Clive Ponting, *World history. A new perspective*, London 2000; Noel Cowen, *Global history: a short overview*, Cambridge and Malden Mass. 2001; John R. and William H. McNeill, *The human web. A bird’s eye view of world history*, New York 2003; Michael Cook, *A brief history of the human race*, New York 2005.
 - 16 Patricia Crone, *Pre-industrial societies*, Oxford 1989.
 - 17 See e.g., Walter Scheidel, *Rome and China: comparative perspectives on ancient world empires*, Oxford and New York 2009; Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel, *The dynamics of ancient empires. State power from Assyria to Byzantium*, Oxford and New York 2009. Still interesting and relevant in this respect is Joseph A. Tainter, *The collapse of complex societies*, Cambridge 1988.
 - 18 Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium. A history of our last thousand years*, London 1995.
 - 19 Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European hegemony: the world system A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford 1989; Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The venture of Islam*, 3 vols., Chicago 1974.
 - 20 Michael Mitterauer, *Warum Europa? Mittelalterliche Grundlagen eines Sonderwegs*, Munich 2003.
 - 21 See the article by Osterhammel in this volume, note 36.
 - 22 Chris A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914*, Oxford and Malden Mass. 2004.
 - 23 Hans-Heinrich Nolte, *Weltgeschichte, Imperien, Religionen und Systeme 15.–19. Jahrhundert*, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar 2005.
 - 24 Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle*, 3 vols., Paris 1979. This trilogy book has been translated in German and published under the quite misleading title *Sozialgeschichte des 15.–18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1985/86.
 - 25 Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange. Biological and cultural consequences of 1492*, Westport 1992; idem, *Ecological imperialism. The biological expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, Cambridge Mass. 1986; John F. Richards, *The unending frontier. An environmental history of the early modern world*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2003.
 - 26 Military historians like Geoffrey Parker and Jeremy Black, have published a lot about this period. For the global history of science and technology that also tends to ‘disproportionably’ focus on the early modern period see under note 56. For cultural exchange in Eurasia, see Geoffrey C. Gunn, *First globalisation. The Eurasian exchange, 1500–1800*, Lanham 2003.
 - 27 Hobsbawm’s books were published in 1962, 1975, 1987 and 1994.
 - 28 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*. The book is no less than 1568 pages. It will be extensively discussed in a coming issue of *Comparativ*.
 - 29 For an introduction in the literature see Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, *World history in a global age*, in: *The American Historical Review*, vol. 100, issue 4 (1995), 1034–1060, in: *Comparativ*, vol. 4 (1994), 13–45, one can find their ideas presented in German in the article *Gobalgeschichte und die Einheit der Welt im 20. Jahrhundert*. We do have an excellent environmental history of the twentieth century: John R. McNeill, *Something new under the sun. An environmental history of the twentieth century*, New York 2000.

- 30 See Peter Gran, *Beyond Eurocentrism. A New View of Modern World History*, New York 1996; idem, *The rise of the rich. A new view of modern world history*, New York 2009.
- 31 *Globalgeschichte – Die Welt 1000–2000*, Mandelbaum Verlag Vienna. So far Peter Feldbauer and Jean Paul Lehnert, eds., *Die Welt im 16. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 2008, and Bernd Hausberger, ed., *Die Welt im 17. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 2008, have been published.
- 32 John E. Wills, *1688. A global history*, London 2001; Olivier Bernier, *The world in 1800*, New York 2000; Mark Kurlansky, *1968. The year that rocked the world*, New York 2005.
- 33 See for a very recent example the journal *GeoEpoche* 35, 2/09, *Die Welt im Jahr 1000*.
- 34 Diamond, *Guns, germs, and steel*.
- 35 Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, eds., *The world system: five hundred years or five thousand?* London and New York 1993.
- 36 See for a brief recent explanation, Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-systems analysis: an introduction*, Durham 2004.
- 37 See e.g. Birgit Schaebler, ed., *Area Studies und die Welt. Weltregionen und neue Globalgeschichte*, Vienna 2007.
- 38 See note 110 of my article in this issue.
- 39 See, e.g. in chronological order: Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the great powers. Economic change and military conflict 1500 to 2000*, New York 1987, very influential but not really global; Peter Turchin, *War and peace and war. The rise and fall of empires*, London 2006; Amy Chua, *Day of empire. How hyperpowers rise to global dominance – and why the fall*, New York 2007. For an example in German, see Herfried Münkler, *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*, Berlin 2005. For a very recent analysis with many references see Peter Turchin, *A theory for formation of large empires*, in: *Journal of Global History*, vol. 4, issue 2 (2009), 191–218.
- 40 John Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The global history of empire*, London 2007, 491.
- 41 This 'strategy' is also used by contributors to this volume. See e.g. the article by Vanhoute, where he refers to the commodity-chain analysis that his PhD-student Abbeloos is performing, and my *Zur politischen Ökonomie des Tees: Was uns Tee über die englische und chinesische Wirtschaft der Frühen Neuzeit sagen kann*, Vienna 2009.
- 42 See e.g. in chronological order: Roxann Prazniak, *Dialogues across civilizations. Sketches in world history from the Chinese and European experiences*, Boulder 1996; Nathalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster travels: a sixteenth-century Muslim between worlds*, New York 2006; Bernd Hausberger, ed., *Globale Lebensläufe. Menschen als Akteure im weltgeschichtlichen Geschehen*, Vienna 2006; Linda Colley, *The ordeal of Elisabeth Marsh: A woman in world history*, London 2007; Jonathan Hyslop, *The world voyage of James Keir Hardie: Indian nationalism, Zulu insurgency and the British labour diaspora, 1907–1908*, in: *Journal of Global History*, vol. 1, issue 3 (2007), 343–363.
- 43 A very original strategy of looking for the global in the local is used by Timothy Brook, who in his book, *Vermeer's hat. The seventeenth century and the dawn of the global world*, New York 2008, looks for traces of globalisation in Vermeer's paintings.
- 44 For this claim see in particular Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, e.g. in their *Globalization began in 1571*, in: Barry K. Gills and William R. Thompson, eds., *Globalization and global history*, London and New York 2006, 232–247.
- 45 There is actually a series called *Themes in global history*, published by Routledge Publishing House.
- 46 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949. See for the comment that ecology figures so prominently in the work of many global historians, Jerry Bentley, 'Web browsing', in: *History and Theory*, vol. 44 (2005), 102–112.
- 47 Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Civilizations*, London 2001, Introduction.
- 48 For some very recent syntheses, see, in alphabetical order: J. Donald Hughes, *An environmental history of the world: Humankind's changing role in the community of life*, London 2009; Clive Ponting, *A new green history of the world: The environment and the collapse of great civilizations*, Harmondsworth 2007; I.G. Simmons, *Global environmental history*, Chicago 2008. For an important contribution in German, see Joachim Radkau, *Natur und Macht. Eine Weltgeschichte der Umwelt*, Munich 2000. There is a paperback-edition with a new afterword, Munich 2002, and an English version, together with Thomas Dunlap, *Nature and power. A global history of the environment*,

- Cambridge 2008. For the history of diseases, see e.g., Dorothy H. Crawford, *Deadly companions. How microbes shaped our history*, Oxford 2007, and Mark Harrison, *Disease and the modern world: 1500 to the present day*, Cambridge 2004. For the history of energy see e.g., Vaclav Smil, *Energy in world history*, Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford 1994, and Alfred W. Crosby, *Children of the sun: a history of humanity's unappeasable appetite for energy*, New York 2006.
- 49 The amount of literature has already become enormous. Here, I simply refer the reader to the work of Geoffrey Parker and Jeremy Black.
- 50 David S. Landes, *The wealth and poverty of nations. Why some are so rich and some so poor*, London 1998.
- 51 For concrete critique on Eurocentrism and European exceptionalism, see e.g. James M. Blaut, *The coloniser's model of the world. Geographical diffusionism and Eurocentric history*, New York 1993; James M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric historians*, New York and London 2000; Jack Goody, e.g., *The East in the West*, Cambridge 1996; *Capitalism and modernity. The great debate*, Cambridge 2004, and *The theft of history*, Cambridge 2006; John A. Hobson, *The eastern origins of western civilisation*, Cambridge 2004. For a more theoretical critique, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Postcolonial thought and historical difference*, Princeton 2000.
- 52 For an analysis of the ideas of the members of this school, see Jack A. Goldstone, *Why Europe? The rise of the West in world history, 1500–1800*, Boston 2008, and Peer Vries, *The California School and beyond: how to study the Great Divergence?*, in: *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik/Austrian Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 24, issue 4 (2008), 6–49.
- 53 Andre Gunder Frank, *Reorient. Global economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1998; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The great divergence. China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy*, Princeton N. J. 2000.
- 54 Robert B. Marks, *The origins of the modern world. A global and ecological view*, Lanham 2002; Goldstone, *Why Europe*.
- 55 For a synthesis see Patrick Manning, *Migration in world history*, New York and Oxon 2005.
- 56 See e.g. in chronological order: Michael Adas, *Machines as the measure of men: science, technology, and ideologies of Western dominance*, Ithaca and New York 1989; Joel Mokyr, *The lever of riches. Technological creativity and economic progress*, New York and Oxford 1990; Arnold Pacey, *Technology in world civilization: a thousand-year history*, Oxford 1990; Toby E. Huff, *The rise of early modern science. Islam, China, and the West*, New York 1993; James E. McClellan III and Harold Dorn, *Science and technology in world history. An introduction*, Baltimore 1999; Daniel R. Headrick, *Technology: A world history*, New York 2009. For the enormously influential comparative approach of Joseph Needham, see Joseph Needham and C.A. Ronan, *The shorter science and civilisation in China*, 5 vols., Cambridge, 1978–1995.
- 57 H. Floris Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution. A historiographical inquiry*, Chicago and London 1994. The forthcoming book will be published by Chicago University Press.
- 58 Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and rebellion in the early modern world*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford 1991; Goldstone, *Why Europe*.
- 59 In *Journal of World History*, vol. 18, issue 1 (2007), special attention is given to the position of social history and women's history in world history. See *Forum: Social history, women's history, and world history. The history of labour has always figured very prominently in social history. Here the recent book edited by Marcel van der Linden, Workers of the World. Essays toward a global labor history*, Leiden 2008, shows one is indeed catching up quickly.
- 60 I refer to Jonathan Even-Zohar, *World History in education. Non-Western history in school textbooks: a quantitative and comparative analysis*. This text was submitted as Master Thesis for the study of history at the Institute of History at the University of Leiden.
- 61 Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium*, Preface and Prologue.
- 62 See for an analysis e.g. Arif Dirlik, *Performing the world: reality and representation in the making of world history*, in: *Journal of World History*, vol. 16, issue 4 (2005), 391–410; Dominic Sachsenmaier, *World history as ecumenical history*, in: *Journal of World History*, vol. 18, issue 4 (2007), 465–489. Giorgio Riello, *La globalisation de l'histoire globale: une question disputée*, in: *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine*, vol. 54, issue 4 bis, 2007, Supplement, 23–33.

Who is afraid of global history?

Ambitions, pitfalls and limits of learning global history

Abstract: This essay debates the present state of global history from four angles: defining global history, debating global history, teaching global history, and researching global history. My comments and suggestions reflect my own experiences, but also configure and support the choices I make in my teaching and research missions. We are witnessing new, global shifts as the centuries-long hegemony of European and Western societies and theories are increasingly challenged. This urges us to broaden and deepen the paths of global history. This is an essential task since the topics that we are dealing with have never been bigger, the questions we are tackling have never been more important, and the stakes have never been higher.

Key Words: Debating and teaching global history, researching global and world history

There is probably no branch on the big tree of the social sciences and the humanities that is so occupied with self-evaluation, self-criticism and self-inquiry as world history or global history.¹ Countless workshops, conferences, publications, newsletters and discussion threads are filled with debate, reflection and sometimes despair about the point and the direction of, and the methods used in global history. Time and again, we find ourselves debating, evaluating and reinventing the very existence of the discipline we so believe in.² Obviously, there are good historical reasons to do so, as we are defending a rather new perspective that aims to cross borders in time and space and between disciplines. The recent and growing visibility of global history in and outside academia requires strong supporting narratives. This constant stream of self-reflection has recently been broadened by shifts within scientific paradigms and academic knowledge (economic globalisation, global climate change, global governance etc.). ‘Home-grown’ in the West as an alternative to stories of

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western civilizational, imperial or economic expansion, the new global history of the early 21st century, tries to 'debunk' and replace former founding perspectives. Yet ongoing debates are still framed within the boundaries of hegemonic Western cultural knowledge. Increasingly there is discomfort with the dominant traditions within academic debates, which are transmitted by old western-centred sciences and formed with traditional academic communication tools, mostly limited to a global academic elite, and which exclude those who have little or no knowledge of the one and only hegemonic academic language. Being both a player within and an outcome of contemporary global transformations, world history needs to incorporate transformations within the scientific community. Where will we organize meetings about the future of world history in 2030? In which language(s) will we debate our field of research?

This essay presents some personal reflections by a strong believer in and a humble practitioner of world history, working in western academia in the early 21st century. I discuss the state of global history from four angles: defining global history, debating global history, teaching global history, and researching global history. My comments and suggestions reflect my own experiences, but also configure and support the choices I make in my teaching and research missions.

1. Defining Global History: communities, comparisons, connections and systems

The basic premise in global or world history is that historical trajectories of human individuals, groups, nations or civilizations only make sense within their mutual connections, within the context of a general human story. As with every historiographical narrative, global history also *creates* meanings. The focus is not on the peculiarity of each case, but on comparison and interconnection within a global context. In the humanities and the social sciences, global history has the potential to grow and develop into an independent discipline with specific research questions, theoretical debates, methodologies, and goals. In its ambition to survey the human journey, global history confronts the big questions of our time: demographic growth, ecological boundaries, food security/insecurity, political decision making, cultural diffusion, and social and economic inequality. As Jerry Bentley has stressed:

“World history is one of the big intellectual issues of our times. It draws attention to the mind-boggling processes of change, development, and transformation that human beings have generated and driven through time.”³

In its most basic definition, world or global history studies the beginnings, the growth and the changes in human communities from a comparative, interconnected and systemic perspective. Central concepts are communities, comparisons, connections and systems. It is not about the world as such; it is about human societies that have shaped this world. These communities or societies have to be studied in three ways: 1) from a comparative perspective to detect patterns, similarities and differences, 2) via their interactions, connections, circulations and conflicts, and 3) within the context of (large-scale) systems that condition human actions and historical development.

Global history stimulates different ways of looking at and thinking about human history. To being with, world history is another perspective; it moves away from particularistic forms of research that focus on ‘me and my case.’⁴ In world history, the actors are human individuals, groups, or communities, who live, create and reproduce within the theatre of a global human society. More than other branches of the human sciences, global history follows the famous motto of Karl Marx that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please. They do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁵ Men and women make choices in similar or differing circumstances. World history wants to know which choices are made and why. Answers may be found by focusing on the human journey in its entirety. That is why global history creates new meta-narratives, narratives about humans and humanity starting from local experience but always looking for broader connections, lineages, and patterns.

Secondly, global history is another way of thinking, of reflecting. World history is not about knowing, but about understanding (in German: *können* instead of *kennen*). That is why world history is an attitude, a way of understanding. Of understanding that behind each snapshot of the outside world there is a bigger picture; understanding that all human actions have to deal with the bigger questions of life (see below). The big questions and answers that feed world history constantly redefine the three dimensions that are interwoven in all human and social sciences: the spatial dimension (*world*), the temporal dimension (*history*) and the thematic dimension (*world history* or the history of human communities). These dimensions are never a given, they are the outcome of human, cultural choices. That is what world history tries to reconstruct. Global history constantly questions and debates chronological and spatial dimensions and boundaries. It understands that choices about time and space imply cultural prejudices and value judgments. Global history can discuss these biases and value judgments better than other disciplines.⁶

“The beauty of nature lies in detail, the message, in generality”, writes Stephan Jay Gould in his masterpiece *Wonderful Life*.⁷ Global insights into world history

can only be based on detailed local knowledge. The 'world' is not a tangible object, it is a concept defined by a set of overlapping scales. What looks like a semantic discussion quickly implies concrete choices about limits, frames and borders. It is not enough, however, to define the outer boundaries of space and time. Every perspective is the outcome of a multitude of scales, from micro (human actions) to macro (systemic forces). There is no basic scale, not even a global one. Every scale is linked to other levels of organization, smaller and larger. Every scale is modelled by human actions and choices, which cannot be deduced from one isolated scale or pattern. For example, economic transformations over the last five centuries or so can only partly explain the Industrial Revolution, in the same way that regional processes and individual actions have limited explanatory value. Scales only get their meaning from interdependency. This is also true of the global level, as we learn from global history. Large processes and big structures cannot be understood merely as aggregates of smaller patterns in time and in space. That is why global history needs a synchronous, comparative, interconnected and systemic approach. This is an interlinked approach, surpassing the limits of exclusively comparative, international, trans-national and/or systemic analyses.

Consequently, researching, teaching and writing global history has to follow a threefold trajectory: a comparative analysis of societies and human systems, an analysis focusing on connections, interactions, and circulations between societies and human systems, and a systems-analysis, looking at societal (economic, social, cultural) structures as units of analysis. This threefold trajectory has to be understood as a unity, or better, a trinity. This research strategy addresses two sets of basic questions in world history. Firstly, how do human groups and organizations try to attain similar goals within different contexts and with different means: the reproduction of the physical self, of their labour and knowledge, of their social and cultural patterns, of their societal organization? Which factors, internal or external, define different or diverging outcomes? Secondly, how do human groups and organizations reconfigure their societal systems in the wake of contacts, interactions or conflicts with other groups? Does this cause fragmentation, reconstruction, or expansion of societal systems?

World history tells the story of the world as a human society. It is a complex story, because boundaries are not given, as is often the case in national or civilizational histories. It is a complex story, because there is no dominant political, cultural or economic narrative. Ecological (humans/nature), economic (production), demographic (reproduction), social (power relations) and cultural (legitimization) interpretations merge into the big questions that support global history. It is a complex story, because it is not structured by reporting events and listing grand persons, but by analysis, comparison and interpretation. Finally, it is a complex story because

it does not (re)create another master narrative deduced from a singular interpretative scheme. It aims to create new meta-narratives with a view that is grand, an ambition that is pretentious, but with answers that are never absolute or final.

Methodological holism does not imply factual comprehensiveness. Global history is not, cannot be, the history of everything. Choices have to be made when it comes to timeframes, spatial boundaries and thematic angles. A framework has to be chosen and constructed that refers to larger units of analysis such as societal or ecological systems. That way global history can tell a differentiated story by looking at big and small, at continuity and change, the particular and the general, causes and consequences. This way of making sense of human actions fundamentally distinguishes global history from other supra-national historical practices. At the same time, the search for histories of communities, comparisons, connections and systems, determines what world history is not:

- It is not universal history, a history of everything.
- It is not international or trans-national history, or a type of history that focuses predominantly on connections.⁸
- It is not comparative history, comparison being only one of the strategies to understand patterns in the human journey.
- It is not a (Western) civilization-history, which focuses on the emergence and success of one culture/civilization.
- It is not a non-Western history, framed in a set of ‘exotic’ area studies.
- It is not globalization studies focusing on and starting from current processes within global society.

2. Debating global history: history strikes back

Debating global history is also inquiring about the context of this debate. As national history was in the 19th century, the new global history of the early 21st century is a ‘child of its time’. If we want this child to grow up into an independent adult, the global history community must become global itself. This means connecting knowledge from different parts of the world, including insights from outside the global academic elites, and adding other world languages to the canon. More than before, the experience of global history must be placed within the experiences of a rapidly changing, ever more interconnected, but also ever more unequal world. By debating its roots, causes and consequences, the academic community is part of this transitional process. Evaluating, deconstructing and reconstructing a new global history are the central tasks. Below is a list of ten personal reflections that, for me, draw the contours of this debate.

1. World history is about connections, but not only about connections. Global or world history has been mainly defined with the help of the Latin prepositions *inter*, *trans*, *cum* and *meta*, in an ever changing order. Most of its practitioners will agree that global history de-nationalizes and connects. A very important *raison d'être* is found in the deconstruction of state-centred stories. It is, or should be, a new perspective that generates new questions and forges new answers. Units of analysis are deconstructed; connection is the central concept that recreates them. As Pat Manning wrote, "To put it simply, world history is the story of connections within the global human community."⁹ New metaphors such as flows, networks, webs and new epithets as trans-national history, entangled history, shared history or *histoires croisées* aim to translate the experience of border-crossing interconnections. Connections, however, are created and redefined in a world that is not flat. Inequality defines the direction and the impact of connections. They have to be analyzed within, rather than next to, a systems-perspective of connected and diverging zones. Societal relations configure the world on different levels or scales. In order to understand how they influence each other, we need a scheme of analysis that integrates connections and networks with that of (differing) scales and (over-arching) systems.

2. Global history needs to have global ambitions. Seeking to pose new questions obviously includes the ambition to formulate new answers. Big questions seek big answers; answers that deal with big structures, large processes and huge comparisons, to use the famous expression of Charles Tilly.¹⁰ This concurs with the passionate plea of Patrick O'Brien for new "cosmopolitan meta-narratives in global history [...] that might at one and the same time, deepen our understanding of diversities and scale up our consciousness of a human condition that has for millennia included global influences, and intermingled with local elements in all its essential dimensions."¹¹ Across the wide diversity of themes, perspectives, methods and angles, global historians should build global vocabularies and common concepts that facilitate the debate about the general ambitions that unite us.

3. Practical barriers associated with practicing global history slow down its expansion. These barriers are manifold and often huge. They often dominate discussions within the community of global historians, for good reason, but at the same time they prevent the exchange of ideas about what connects us rather than what divides us. Most problematic is the need for collaborative and discipline-crossing research networks; an ambition that clashes with existing, disciplinary practices related to funding and evaluation. Dependence on national research foundations and lack of experience with international funding organisations are serious obstacles in the expansion of global history as a research field. Much more time and effort has to be invested in the international, cooperative training of graduate students,

researchers, and Ph.D. students (including language training), and in communication platforms outside the established institutions and languages. We need more institutional anchoring of global history worldwide. Existing disciplinary divisions slow down this process.

4. Global history's audience is diverse; it includes readers, students, and our academic peers. Our means of communication are just as diverse; they include bestselling authors on the one hand, and reports written by high-profile research groups on the other. Most of the successful literature that is useful for interpreting the world happens to be the outcome of individual projects that were not created with a global perspective per se. Other publications with a clear-cut, global ambition often do not reach the general public. Ever-present questions should be: Who are we writing for? Why should people know this? What is global history good for? What are we missing if we exclude the global dimension? Global history is never self-evident. It has to have 'exposure', not only to sell itself but also to keep us awake and alert.

5. Most of us will agree that 21st-century global history has to be a 'decentred' history. Much of the drive for a 'new' global history started with the aim to surpass or delegitimize the 'old' Eurocentric stories of the rise of a unified world. A central paradox in world history is that, as a product of the centre of modernity, it tries to understand and deconstruct its roots that are squarely in civilization history, modernisation theory and Eurocentrism. We must, however, avoid new south- or east-centric master narratives, as much as we do not want to fall into the post-modern trap of ever-changing but equal 'truths' and 'universalities'. Decentring the human story does not imply a 'politically correct' flattening of experiences around the world, nor does it need to become a basket of 'alternative', anti-hegemonic local stories and area-studies. In order to avoid that it decomposes into a set of separate stories, global history needs to urgently take up the debate about unifying meta-levels of analysis, and the paradigms that bring us together, rather than those that divide us.

6. The eternal quest for trans-disciplinarity is an important mover in global history; crossing disciplines goes to the very heart of global history. The emergence of modern world history is rooted in new research in social, biological and physical sciences. On the other hand, deep chasms seem to continue to exist between economic and ecological history and varieties of history that focus more on culture. New efforts to develop a language of multitudes and different universalities risks to split up knowledge even more. In order to develop common paradigms and common tongues we need to engage with social theory more thoroughly. Global history and global studies often still are different worlds, physically and intellectually. We need open discussions about theoretical frameworks and practical methodologies that can link both fields. Concepts such as global economy (globalisation), global

community, global governance and global ethics, have to be taken on board (critically!) within world history.

8. Global history tells emancipating stories; stories that connect human actions within a broader human-made world. This is not a plea for legitimising stories, but for a morally charged program. World history does not exchange a national perspective for other exclusive frameworks, either global or sub-national. It does not essentialize new concepts like the non-West, the Global South or the subaltern. It does, however, create an emancipating space for action, interaction or resistance through the idea of contingency. Engagement in global history cannot be translated directly into an ideology or directly put to a concrete use. It is the lubricating oil in the paradigmatic engine that drives global history; paradigms that question the relationship between peoples and powers. Because world history tells us about the complexity of both the past and present worlds, it makes moral claims about today and tomorrow. Since differences and diversity are basic components of the human story, world history shows that understanding and handling differences is an important moral skill. Claims, interpretations and evaluations can not be made solely in the framework of our own, known world; they must reflect the complexity of human history.

9. Global history not only has to promote a 'transnationalization' of knowledge, it must also deal with a sharp hierarchy in academic knowledge. As Dominique Sachsenmaier has argued, this has become so much part of our academic reality that it is usually not even problematised.¹² Unequal worlds of knowledge create an unequal exchange of insights. "This privileged position, which makes Western scholarship primarily an exporter but not an importer of theory, may indeed be rooted in an unequal, Eurocentric global past."¹³ Every debate about the status and the future of global history cannot escape the fundamental question: How do our patterns of knowledge reflect the existing hierarchical systems of knowledge?

10. With the emergence of a new global history, history finally strikes back. Pat Manning argues that historical study is indeed undergoing a revolution, with world history currently in the lead.¹⁴ History, as the discipline studying time and place, deals with interactions and the hierarchy of scales in the human world. In that way it provides us with a protective shield against the threat of an undifferentiated multitude of new stories. The historical project serves two goals. First, it provides a ceaseless stream of detailed knowledge and case-studies. Secondly, it advances the levels of ambition, time, place and themes, of questions and answers. Historicising does not create a new, totalising master-narrative, a lack of historical knowledge does. History asks for new meta-questions and generates new meta-narratives.

3. Learning Global History: a teaching experiment

I have been teaching an introductory course for first-year students at Ghent University since 2005. It is a very mixed group consisting of students from the departments of history, archaeology, philosophy, African and Asian studies.¹⁵ The setting is a big auditorium of 500-600 students. My method of teaching includes a series of orations lasting two hours each, augmented with a slideshow. For almost half of the students, this is the last history course they will ever have. Within this challenging, and in many respects unique setting I built up my course, starting from four principles: the course has to attract, or seduce, historians and non-historians alike; the course must address both historical and contemporary interests; the course must elucidate the relevance of the global perspective for a broad audience; and, the course must show that in order to understand the past, one must know the contemporary world, and vice versa. That is why I have chosen a thematic angle, connecting past and present worlds. Three basic story lines/research questions guide my teaching project.

1. The gradual (internal) expansion of human societies in relation to (external) ecological constraints and challenges. Every society displays comparable societal patterns: forms of social order and cohesion, forms of language and communication, forms of leadership, forms of food provisioning, and forms of demographic and social reproduction (fertility, child-raising, family formation, etc.). Within these patterns, similar or differing choices have to be made. The nature of these choices is largely determined by the natural contexts in which these groups survive.
2. By increasing interaction, human groups are incorporated in bigger, overarching structures, called cultures or civilizations. Each of these cultures has to formulate answers to the same challenges and make choices about the system of (political) command (state, leadership, bureaucracy, etc.), the system of (economic) survival (agriculture, trade, industry, plundering, etc.), the system of (social) control (legitimization, repression, etc.), and the system of (cultural) morals (religion, etc.). What determines the differences and similarities in the choices made within each culture or civilization?
3. The contacts, connections, and conflicts between cultures and civilizations generate new general patterns such as trade, migration, cultural diffusion or imitation, plundering, conquest, war, and incorporation. These contacts or conflicts often generate broader societal systems. Which ones are successful, which are not?

These story lines offer insight into the nature of the human journey. Moreover, they teach students that overview, comparison, and connections within knowledge (*kön-*

nen) are much more important than the accumulation of knowledge itself (*kennen*). Context not only matters, it is the key. Historical processes (familial cohabitation patterns, cultural reproduction systems or processes of state formation) never develop in isolation. By reconstructing the big picture, world history gives meaning to the myriad of human actions that form the world as we know it. In order to reconstruct the big picture, we must understand the following concepts:

1. Throughout history societies have come and gone, succeeded, perished, or they have destroyed each other, and they therefore have never remained the same. Nonetheless, they share an important set of basic characteristics. They all develop material survival mechanisms, political command systems, social and gender relations, cultural patterns, demographic and social reproductions systems. They are not equal, but they can be studied *in comparison*. This approach clarifies the way men and women structure their lives within the context of group-formation and external limitations.
2. Human societies develop, grow and change *because of interaction*. Patterns of interconnection can only be made visible on levels of analysis that supersede the individual case.
3. Human societies are interconnected *on a systemic level*, there exist large-scale units of analysis that condition historical development.

Students learn how world history tries to understand human actions and patterns in a comparative, interconnected and systemic way. By using multiple lenses, we can reconstruct narratives that are fragmented and make them more interconnected. World history connects human beings, peoples and cultures. It connects places and periods. It connects the world of yesterday with the world of today. It tells a historical yet contemporary story. These insights are translated into ‘competences’ directed at understanding and applying. They include translating the central aims of world history into practical applications (comparisons, connections, and systems), explaining how diverging scales of analysis generate diverging explanations (examples), understanding how processes of interaction and diffusion reconfigure global society, and evaluating generalized or universal statements.

When looking for a good textbook, I was surprised to discover that a comprehensive, thematic introduction that would suit my needs did not exist. I wrote a text myself and had it published in Dutch: *Wereldgeschiedenis. Een inleiding* (Ghent, Academia Press, 201 pages) (*World History. An Introduction*). The book and the course are divided into ten chapters/classes (each session consists of two blocks of 75 minutes, actually 120-130 minutes). Each session starts with and returns to a relevant question in our contemporary world. I have developed an interactive slideshow that includes images, maps, charts, tables, pictures, etc. The slides illustrate the story while adding new information. The syllabus consists of the book and the

slides. Students have to learn the story as it is set out in the book and in class, and have to actively integrate the slides that were presented. The course/textbook contains the following chapters:

1. World history: a history of the world? An introduction to the theme and the perspective: a way of looking, a way of thinking. Why study world history? Traditions in world history.
2. A human world: man and mankind. Here the focus is on demography, migration, family, mortality.
3. A natural world: ecology and economy: ecology, climate, energy, limits to growth.
4. An agrarian world: farmers, agriculture and food: agricultural revolutions, agricultural exchange, the end of rural societies.
5. A political world: government and governors: mini-systems, empires, states and state-systems, global governance.
6. A divine world: civilizations and religions: definitions of civilization, discussions about the West, cultures and religions.
7. A divided world: The West and the Rest. The rise of the West and the Great Divergence, internal versus external explanations.
8. A global world: globalization or globalizations. In search of globalization(s), the roots of globalization, the rhetorical and ideological struggle.
9. A polarized world: development, poverty and inequality. Visions on and debates about development, poverty and inequality, past and present.
10. A world in pieces: unity or fragmentation. Scales of time, scales of place, interactions and research frames.

The book's structure illustrates the central focus of my global history course: providing 'an introduction to' and not 'an overview of'. The chapters/classes focus on the big questions in world history: How man evolved from an endangered to a successful species; How nature moulded human history; How agricultural societies pushed human history in a new direction; How mankind organized itself in ever more complex governing systems; How man developed new religious and cultural patterns; How the trajectories of 'The West' and 'The Rest' diverged over the last five centuries; How the world became more interconnected and global over the last five centuries; How this world is characterised by growing gaps in wealth, poverty and inequality.

4. Learning Global History: learning by doing?

In addition to being a pedagogical project, world history is increasingly becoming an important (and hopefully pioneering) research project within the human

and social sciences. However, it is still relatively few historians who would describe themselves as “doing research in world history”.¹⁶ The bumpy road of specialisation and professionalisation within academia is at least partly responsible for this. Most teachers of and researchers in world history have a traditional historical background; they often specialized in non-European history. In my case, I started out as a rural historian, trained in the French *Annales* tradition of village studies. Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis confronted me with the outside world; not as a descriptive background variable, but as a crucial scale of analysis even in small-scale micro-research.¹⁷ Yet in many academic settings, this ‘enlarged perspective’ is not warmly welcomed in teaching and research, to put it mildly. I was able to build up my interest in global history gradually, via my introductory courses and research projects that focused on development theories. Another impeding factor is the (sometimes deliberate) confusion between the concepts world, global, total, and the mostly infertile discussions about the differences between inter, trans, cum and meta. In their editorial to the first issue of the *Journal of Global History*, William Gervase Clarence-Smith, Kenneth Pomeranz and Peer Vries point out that the global perspective does not necessarily entail taking the whole globe as the framework of analysis. The geographical framework should consist of *zones of interaction* between diverse societies, rather than regions dominated by one particular ‘civilization’ or ‘oecumene’.¹⁸ Still, the ‘world’ is too often defined as a common denominator, with limited explanatory power. The Report on the *World History Research Agenda Symposium* (Boston 2006), which summarized the debate regarding the relevance of world history, concluded:

“At the most general level, the phrase ‘world history’ expresses a willingness to move beyond existing thematic, regional and chronological frameworks, to experiment with a variety of different conceptual, spatial and temporal scales that raise new types of questions and encourage new forms of comparative study.”¹⁹

Related to the debates about theme and content (see also supra), a central problem regarding training and research in global history is that a common methodology and treatment of sources is lacking. If a school of world history existed, it would have many classrooms. For example, when studying the problem of economic development, the world-systems perspective would see this as a function of global structural relationships, while a more institutional economics perspective would emphasize the analysis of different configurations of state, business and labour to understand global economic differences.²⁰ In both cases, one could write a world or global history, yet the stories might in fact have little in common, apart from their initial research interest, due to what we might call different ideological stands. As Raymond Grew has

put it, world history is marked by “high productivity but topical lacunae, conceptual weakness and limited consensus”. On the bright side, Grew acknowledges that this also provokes fresh perceptions and new questions, pushing beyond established categories and challenging familiar assumptions.²¹ In addition, students and researchers in world history seldom find their sources grouped together in archives or presented comprehensibly in any source guide. Except for some quantitative data series such as trade and migration statistics, archival entries are mostly created to study local or national phenomena. Moreover, world history cannot borrow uncritically the methodological toolboxes from more traditional human and social sciences. Data and sources must be ‘re-read’ with new concepts and tools, such as comparative analysis, network analysis or systems analysis. Last but not least, a further professionalisation of world history needs more integration of paradigms and insights from social and physical sciences. That is not easy. It very probably will have to emerge on a project-by-project basis, via trial and error, by ‘doing’ it.

As in all social sciences, a research project starts with a *research object*. That can be a case, flows, networks, or systems. To understand the nature of the object we need a *research framework*. This is composed of a set of three units of analysis: time, space and theme. This framework has to be elucidated and accounted for because it defines which questions will be asked, and which answers will be formulated. The research framework is the legend that is needed to read the map that is drawn; the basis of the story that will be told. A research framework also channels the search for data, sources, methods, concepts, and units of analysis. What is the best choice, to study social inequality or demographic change? When do we use the concept civilization, and why? The research object and research framework define the research strategy, the way we want to understand what happened to the research objects. Basic strategies in world history include making comparisons, looking for connections, and searching for broader patterns or systems. Most popular, even in world history, is the case study, or the comparative analysis of two or more case studies. The main motivation is the broader relevance of cases (as examples or norms, or sometimes as exceptions), and the power of systematic comparison of the cases. A strong metaphor in recent world history is networks. Networks can be regarded as cases, units, but without clear-cut boundaries. A network analysis focuses on flows, nodes, exchange, relations, fusion, diffusion, etc. more than (comparative) case studies do. It tells stories about connections, circulations, interactions, conflicts. A systemic analysis tries to grasp deeper, broader, and certainly more complex fields of interaction. A system is a unit with a logic and mechanisms of its own, which can only be understood on its systemic level. Systems analysis looks for patterns and processes on a systemic scale, on the level of unity. Trade systems, political systems, and economic systems cannot be fully understood by simply adding up knowledge

from existing subsystems. They are more than the sum of their parts. The existing global economic system is much more than the sum of different national economic systems (the capitalist world-system). The same is true of political systems (inter-state system). Systems theory is holistic in nature, stating that a whole can never be understood only via its parts. These 'meta-systems' are not closed unities, but open historical systems with a specific historical trajectory of growth and decline. Systems analysis tries to detect which structures and processes tie together the actions and choices of human groups. It tries to map out which horizontal (between subsystems) and vertical (between scales) ties define the spaces of human action.

Two current research projects in the History Department of Ghent University illustrate the way we make choices within this integrated research framework. The first project analyzes the roles of both governmental and business agencies when explaining the spatial configuration and transformation of trans-national copper production networks within an integrated Atlantic market.²² This market developed throughout the 20th century (1870–2000) in response to a growing demand for refined copper, a vital conductor and building component. Since Adam Smith, it is commonplace that a process of market integration should lead to specialization. However, it would be a mistake to simply distinguish between copper importing and exporting countries within the Atlantic market. Looking at specialization in this respect, e.g. from a commodity trading perspective, can only highlight part of the process. That is why this study applies a so-called commodity chain perspective. This perspective builds on the idea that the natural resource business is about more than just capturing the earth's minerals or vegetation and exporting it. The natural it deals with are turned into economic commodities by means of different production processes that do not need to take place in the same region or country. From cashew nuts to copper, natural resources are at the beginning of production chains that are often trans-national, even transcontinental. In the case of copper, the production chain connects the phases of mining, smelting and refining and the places where these production processes occur; all within the space of a growing copper market. The question is not which country exports or imports copper. The question is: To what extent is the national copper business primarily engaged in the mining, smelting or refining stage of the copper production chain? This is an important nuance, since value is added to the natural resource while it passes through the production chain and gradually turns into a commodity with greater potential use-value as well as exchange-value. By looking at the question of specialization from this angle, the commodity chain perspective complements a trade perspective in trying to understand the link between natural resources and (national) economic development. It goes beyond simplistic notions that identify natural resources as curses or blessings.

With the copper commodity chain as the research object, what are the research framework and strategy? They are twofold. In the first research strategy, we look at a dataset of production numbers that show us the evolving patterns of specialization within the Atlantic market during the long twentieth century. To explain how and why these patterns came about, we need to step out of the data and into the archives, so to speak. No single process of specialization meets textbook free-market conditions or happens in a political vacuum. In order to understand what is actually going on, we must comprehend the international circuits of political and market power in which both governmental and business agencies are embedded. We also need to appreciate local differences in historical trajectories, geography, political economy, etc. In other words, the network approach of the commodity chain implies a more global and local/regional/national perspective in order to understand the chain itself. To do so on a global scale would be impossible in the context of a single Ph.D. thesis. That is why we choose a second research strategy: to zoom in on one case study. By looking at the Atlantic market as one integrated copper commodity circuit, this study takes a closer look at how the regional copper deposits of Katanga, the southern province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, were integrated into this circuit. This is first and foremost a history of colonization (1900–1960), with Belgian and British capital developing a local copper business that was specialized in mining, not refining. Yet it also goes beyond this; it is also the history of what followed colonization: the failed attempts, after political independence, to achieve economic independence and refine the copper ores domestically. It is a story with clear protagonists and institutions (Société Générale de Belgique, Union-Minière du Haut-Katanga, Gécamines, the Ministry of Colonies, the Congolese presidents, etc.), archival sources, and a broad base of secondary literature that was written from various viewpoints (colonial studies, world-systems analysis, modernisation theory, and Third-World studies). By combining these two strategies, this research does not aim to fill up a particular historiographical lacuna; it hopes to come to a better understanding of the processes of market integration, specialization and economic development.

A second project focuses on the impact of disintegrating peasant societies in a comparative and global perspective: *The end of peasant societies? Comparative and global research into the decline and disappearance of peasantries and its impact on social relations and inequality (1500–2000)*.²³ The research object is three examples of transforming peasant societies: Western Europe (North Sea Area), East China (Yangtze Delta) and Brazil (the North). The *longue-durée* time-frame, the topological choice of the cases (referring to different strata in the world-system) and a focus on the place of rural societies within broader processes of transformation, define the boundaries of the research framework. The main hypothesis behind the research

strategy is that the 'global' capitalist world-system with its roots in the European Late Middle Ages has constantly 'fuelled' itself by means of a process of incorporation, transformation and eventually absorption of 'regional' peasant societies. The extraction of goods, labour and capital from the 'non-capitalist' rural society was (and is) vital for the expansion of the system. The timing and phasing of these processes are very unequal over time and place. The project aims at reconstructing these processes and wants to measure the impact of the destabilization/dismantling of peasants societies on economic performances and social inequality. The research strategy is structured in three steps. First, we reconstruct the process of the disintegration of peasant societies in a global context. Then we analyze the causes of this process, general causes (related to the global process of transformation) and specific causes (related to time and place). Finally, we ask what the impact was of differences in space (zoning within the world-economy) and time (phase of incorporation). To answer these questions, we follow a twofold methodology. First, we present a global overview using a collection of data on peasants and peasant societies while applying a long-term perspective (we concentrate on five periods, five 'benchmarks': 1600, 1800, 1900, 1950, and 2000). Then we make a comparative analysis of the transformation and dismantling of peasant societies in different times and places. These will be described as cases and analyzed comparatively, with a focus on how the peasant societies function (labour, property, income, household level, locality, and regional level), the position of these societies within broader societal structures (trade and commerce, fiscal systems, power and property relations, regulation, and institutions), the transformation of these societies, and the effects on social relations, survival and income positions. This twofold research strategy brings together information from three thematic clusters:

1. ruralization/urbanization (population, (agrarian) production, exchange circuits, etc.);
2. demographic processes and patterns (household formation, gender/age patterns, migration, etc.),
3. income structures, property relations and social protection.

The project combines different themes, strategies and perspectives. The integrated comparative (three cases), interconnected (relations between the three zones) and systemic (integration and incorporation within the capitalist world-system) approach gives this research its 'global' perspective: what are the timing, causes and effects of the 'end of peasantries' on a global scale? In what way can the 'European experience' be reconstructed or deconstructed in a more global experience? What do the different 'local' stories of incorporation tell us?

To conclude, performing research in the field of world history is very similar to any other type of historical research. You start by posing intriguing questions,

finding the right sources to answer them, and constructing a methodological and theoretical framework to make the sources speak. The added value of world history is that it provokes new questions and proposes alternative ways of looking at the past by integrating the concepts of community, comparison, connection and system. The new meta-stories are disconnected from the particular interests of a group, nation, or people. They reconstruct the diversity of the human experience within the entangled history of the human journey. The opportunities for a new global history have never been better. Not only has our knowledge about human societies of every time and place increased, our methodological toolboxes and models of interpretation have been extended, refined and sharpened. We have learned from the insights and failures from introspective national and civilizational histories. We are witnessing new, global shifts as the centuries-long hegemony of European and Western societies and theories are increasingly challenged. We have the means for real dialogue using knowledge from outside the West. This urges us to broaden and deepen the paths of global history. This is an essential task since the topics that we are dealing with have never been bigger, the questions we are tackling have never been more important, and the stakes have never been higher.

Notes

- 1 I use global history and world history as interchangeable concepts, i.e. as synonyms. Many thanks to Jan-Frederik Abbeloos for his suggestions and remarks.
- 2 The most complete and challenging overview remains Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History. Historians create a global past*, New York and Basingstoke 2003. The leading forum about 'learning and teaching world history' is the free e-journal *World History Connected*, www.worldhistoryconnected.org, affiliated with the World History Association and published by the University of Illinois Press. "World History Connected is designed for everyone who wants to deepen the engagement and understanding of world history:" *H-World* is a quintessential discussion list, a member of H-Net Humanities & Social Sciences Online, <http://www.h-net.org/~world>. "The H-World discussion list serves as a network of communication among practitioners of world history. The list gives emphasis to research, to teaching, and to the connections between research and teaching."
- 3 Jerry H. Bentley, *Why Study World History?* in: *World History Connected*, vol. 5, issue 1 (2008) <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu>.
- 4 This can vary from small (a group, region, nation) to large (European or Western civilization).
- 5 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), in: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>.
- 6 See for example David Christian, *This Fleeting World. A short history of humanity*, Great Barrington, Ma. 2008, 97–105; Saskia Sassen, *The places and spaces of the global. An expanded analytic terrain*, in: D. Held and A. McGrew, eds., *Globalization theory. Approaches and controversies*, Cambridge UK 2007, 79–105.
- 7 Stephen J. Gould, *Wonderful Life. The Burgess shale and the nature of history*, London et al. 1989, 13.
- 8 See the definition of transnational history by Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier in their introduction on *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, Basingstoke 2009 (see www.transnationalhistory.com) that very much limits its ambition to an empirical description of border crossing

connections and flows: “We are interested in links and flows, and want to track people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between politics and societies.”

- 9 Manning, *Navigating World History*, 3.
- 10 Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, New York 1984.
- 11 Patrick O’Brien, Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history, in: *Journal of Global History*, vol. 1, issue 1 (2006), 3–39, 38.
- 12 Dominic Sachsenmaier, World history as ecumenical history? in: *Journal of World History*, vol. 18, issue 4 (2007), 465–489.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 472.
- 14 Manning, *Navigating World History*, 11.
- 15 The reform of the Flemish educational system into a bachelor/master structure created the opportunity to introduce a new general history course in the Faculty of Arts at Ghent University. I was able to set up the course after conducting long debates over European versus world history, and after overcoming many doubts regarding the academic relevance of a global view. History students can choose within their Master’s degree a world history trajectory by following research seminars and writing a master thesis.
- 16 Barbara Weinstein, History without a cause? Grand narratives, world history, and the postcolonial dilemma, in: *International Review of Social History*, vol. 50, issue 1 (2005), 71–93, 80.
- 17 Eric Vanhaute, Processes of peripheralization in a core region. The Campine area of Antwerp in the long nineteenth century, in: *Review. Fernand Braudel Center*, vol. 16, issue 1 (1993), 57–81.
- 18 William Gervase Clarence-Smith, Kenneth Pomeranz and Peer Vries, Editorial, in: *Journal of Global History*, vol. 1, issue 1 (2006), 1–2.
- 19 David Christian, Potukuchi Swarnalatha and Marilyn Lake, Mapping world history. Report on the World History Research Agenda Symposium, Boston, November 10–12, 2006, 8. The report can be downloaded from http://www.worldhistorynetwork.org/conference/Mapping_Report.pdf (accessed March 9th, 2009)
- 20 Lauren Benton, From the world-systems perspective to institutional world history: culture and economy in global theory, in: *Journal of World History*, vol. 7, issue 2 (1996), 261–295, 278.
- 21 Raymond Grew, Expanding worlds of world history, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 78, issue 4 (2006), 878–898, 879 and 897–898.
- 22 This research is conducted by Jan-Frederik Abbeloos. The research greatly benefited from postgraduate training at the Dutch/Flemish N.W. Posthumus Institute, a member of ESTER, the European graduate School for Training in Economic and Social Historical Research. The research was presented at the Second Annual Workshop of the Commodities of Empire project (London, 11–12 September 2008) and the Workshop History of Commodities and Commodity Chains (Konstanz, 26–28 February 2009). Both initiatives prove that commodities can be a valuable inroad into world history, almost making world history tangible. Within this broad panorama of commodity studies, the commodity-chain framework with its focus on networks and connections directly connected to many of the questions global history poses. More information on this research program is available at <http://www.nieuwstegeschiedenis.ugent.be/jfabelloos>.
- 23 See more in detail Eric Vanhaute, The end of peasantries? Rethinking the role of peasantries in a world-historical perspective, in: *Review. Fernand Braudel Center*, vol. 31, issue 1 (2008), 39–59.