3 Time
Temporality in Global History

Christina Brauner

Time, it has been argued, is the 'last fetish' of the historians' tribe.[1] If this is true, global history has played, and continues to play, a peculiar role in that cult, at the same time acting as a devout believer and a fervent iconoclast. This ambivalence is connected to the diverse and divergent approaches assembled under the flag of 'global history'. Global historians' struggle with temporality points to problems of historical scholarship more broadly but also opens up possibilities for rethinking the discipline.

The Time of Global History

Time takes a central yet ambiguous role in the discourse of global history, as its definition demonstrates: global history, or so we are told, is the history our global and globalised present requires. It is, above all, required to explain the genesis of this global present, by studying historical globalisation processes or exploring the genealogy of growing connections. But global history's claim to timeliness also operates on methodological levels: here, the reference to the global present serves to call for viewpoints beyond the national restraints of traditional historiography.[2]

As this rhetoric of timeliness shows, global history is situated within the discourse of globalisation.[3] This does not mean that global history can only be written as a history of globalisation; on the contrary, a growing number of

[1] Chris Lorenz, 'Der letzte Fetisch des Stamms der Historiker. Zeit, Raum und Periodisierung in der Geschichtswissenschaft', in Fernando Esposito (ed.), *Zeitenwandel. Transformationen geschichtlicher Zeitlichkeit nach dem Boom* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 63–91; for an abridged translation see Chris Lorenz, '"The Times They Are a-Changin": On Time, Space and Periodization in History', in Mario Carretero et al. (eds.), *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education* (London: Palgrave Macmilan, 2017), 109–31.

[2] Cf. Bruce Mazlish, 'An Introduction to Global History', in Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjen (eds.), *Conceptualizing Global History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 1–24, here 1–2. For a structurally similar yet far more nuanced argument see Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 1–3.

[3] For a critical reflection, cf. Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Von einem hohen Turm? Weltgeschichte und Gegenwartsdiagnose', in Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Flughöhe der Adler: Historische Essays zur*

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global historians have set out to criticise this paradigm of globalisation. Yet the connection to the discourse remains present, even if in the form of critique.[4]

Evoking present-day concerns to frame and legitimise historical studies in general, or certain research agendas in particular, is, of course, not peculiar to global history. Some may call such references 'presentist' and mean this as a reproach. From an epistemological perspective, though, all history is and must be presentist, as the viewpoint historians think and write from is necessarily located in the present.[5] However, when globalisation theorists claim an unprecedented novelty of the global present, a more specific understanding of presentism is at play. It assumes a fundamental rupture between past and present, just as it is central to François Hartog's definition of presentism as the 'regime of historicity' which governs our order of time today.[6] In global history, such presentist reasonings lead to an uneasy co-existence with the discipline's quest for historicisation, seeking to trace and explain the genesis of globalisation processes. With regard to the identity of the field, too, there are tensions between claims to novelty and the quest for venerable ancestors and 'pedigree'.[7] While such discussions concern the beginnings of global history both as subject matter and scholarly field, the contours of the global present itself, too, are far from clear: When does it begin? And what kind of future does a global present have?[8]

globalen Gegenwart (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017), 203; Jürgen Osterhammel and Stefanie Gänger, 'Denkpause für Globalgeschichte', *Merkur* 855 (2020), 79–86, here 79.

[4] Cf., for example, Frederick Cooper, 'Globalization', in Frederick Cooper (ed.), *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 91–112, here 93; Geoff Eley, 'Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name', *History Workshop Journal* 63, 1 (2007), 154–88, here 158; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Globalizations', in Jerry H. Bentley (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89–104, here 92. On globalisation critique, see Olaf Bach, *Die Erfindung der Globalisierung: Entstehung und Wandel eines zeitgeschichtlichen Grundbegriffs* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013), 191–8.

[5] Ethan Kleinberg, 'Hiding (from the Present) in the Past', *History of the Present* 13, 2 (2023), 265–74; Cf. David Armitage, 'In Defense of Presentism', in Darrin M. McMahon (ed.), *History and Human Flourishing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 59–84; Marcus Colla, 'The Spectre of the Present: Time, Presentism and the Writing of Contemporary History', *Contemporary European History* 30, 1 (2021), 124–35.

[6] François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps*, expanded ed. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012), 13, 16–17. English translation: *Regimes of historicity. Presentism and experiences of time*, transl. by Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 17f.

[7] For an exchange about this, see Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History* 13, 1 (2018), 1–21, here 20–1. This resonates with the contradictory temporality of globalisation discourse itself, characterised both by historicist and ahistoricist tendencies; see Olaf Bach, 'Ein Ende der Geschichte? Entstehung, Strukturveränderungen und die Temporalität der Globalisierungssemantik seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 68, 1 (2020), 128–54, here 151–4.

[8] Kalle Pihlainen, 'Historians and "the Current Situation"', *Rethinking History* 20, 2 (2016), 143–53; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Where is the Now?', *Critical Inquiry* 30, 2 (2004), 458–62. See also the editors' introduction to this volume.

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Still, the global present has a peculiar temporal identity: it is a present that claims to have become, finally and fully, a time of contemporaries.[9] This claim is, above all, buttressed by allusions to an unprecedented experience of synchronicity – or at least the possibility of such experience – which is very much at the heart of globalisation definitions.[10] Hartmut Rosa, for instance, discusses globalisation as 'time-space compression' and characterises it 'temporally' as the 'dissolution of stable rhythms and sequences following the ubiquitous contemporisation (*Vergleichzeitigung*) of even the noncontemporaneous'.[11]

Indeed, when global historians refer to 'our present', they equally presuppose an all-encompassing yet somewhat fuzzy community of experience. Moreover, synchronising approaches to the past have become a signature practice of global history. They serve not only to transcend traditional divides and seek out connections otherwise invisible but have also been championed as an antidote to lingering 'centrisms' of various kinds. Both on a historical and a historiographical plane, however, the effects of synchronisation remain ambiguous: Does it lead to the emergence of a homogenous time regime, or rather reinforce or even foster a plurality of times?[12] And what is, after all, the 'noncontemporaneous' that is, in Rosa's wording, 'contemporised' in a globalising world?

Obviously, global history has its time. Reflecting on the consequences this entails for the practice of global historians leads to more general questions about temporality and historicity. It prompts us to consider the 'politics of time' or 'chronopolitics' inherent in our own scholarly practices and the institutional settings we inhabit.[13]

This chapter discusses how questions of time and temporality shape and challenge historical studies in general and global history in particular. Firstly, the chapter shows why time can be understood as history's 'last fetish', as Chris

[9] Cf. Peter Osborne, 'The Fiction of the Contemporary', in Peter Osborne (ed.), *In Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 15–36.

[10] For an overview see Paul Huebener et al., 'Exploring the Intersection of Time and Globalization', *Globalizations* 13, 3 (2016), 243–55; Lynn Hunt, 'Globalization and Time', in Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past, and Future* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 199–215, here 201–3; Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 75–80.

[11] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration. A New Theory of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 217, with a list of diverse 'forms of contemporisation' (219–20).

[12] For the plural temporalities emerging from attempts at synchronisation, see Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[13] For an often-quoted definition, see Charles S. Maier, 'The Politics of Time. Changing Paradigms of Collective Time and Private Time in the Modern Era', in Charles S. Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political. Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 151–78, here 151–3. Recently, it served as a starting point for Christopher Clark's 'time-history' of German regimes: Christopher Clark, *Time and Power. Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 14–15. See also Fernando Esposito and Tobias Becker, 'The Time of Politics, the Politics of Time, and Politicized Time: An Introduction to Chronopolitics', *History and Theory* 62 (2023), 3–23.

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Lorenz has phrased it, and how this makes itself known among global historians. The chapter moves on to consider the politics of periodisation as a particular challenge for decentring history, taking up the debate about the 'Global Middle Ages' as an example. Finally, it turns to synchronisation and contemporaneity as important concerns in global history, containing a promise and a problem at the same time.

The 'Fetish' of Time and the Pursuit of Global History

There is no history without time. Still, time has long been something of a 'blind spot' within the field.[14] It takes a double role, featuring as the seemingly empty and transparent *medium* in which 'history unfolds' and as the *product and means* of historical narrative and representation. Recently, in the wake of what has eagerly been hailed as the 'temporal turn', time increasingly appears as a specific *subject* of study.[15] Given this multiplicity of roles, it is important to distinguish between analytical and historical notions of time and temporality or – taking up a distinction from anthropology – the perspective of the scholarly observer (etic) and those of the actors involved in the field observed (emic).

Following Lorenz's diagnosis, historical scholarship even suffers from 'chronocentrism', with temporal units, markers and divisions as its arguably most important denominators. This chronocentrism is perhaps most evident in the guise of periodisation, in terms of both historiographical operation and institutional structure.[16] For global historians, periodisation presents a particular challenge. Thomas Bauer, a scholar of Islamic history and Arabic literature, has nailed this with perfection when he begins his essay *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab* ('Why there were no Islamic Middle Ages') as follows:

> Compare the following two sentences:
> 'Charlemagne was an important European ruler of the Tang period.'
> 'Hārūn ar-Rašīd was an important Near Eastern ruler of the Middle Ages.'[17]

The two sentences perform periodisation as a standard historiographical procedure, classifying historical phenomena in an apparently meaningful way

[14] Lorenz, 'Der letzte Fetisch', 64–5. Famous exceptions are, of course, Reinhart Koselleck and Fernand Braudel.

[15] For an overview, see, for example, Matthew S. Champion, 'The History of Temporalities. An Introduction', *Past & Present* 243, 1 (2019), 247–54.

[16] See Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty. How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

[17] Thomas Bauer, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab: Das Erbe der Antike und der Orient*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2019), 11 (my translation). On periodisation of Islamic history, see also Konrad Hirschler and Sarah Bowen Savant, 'Introduction: What Is in a Period? Arabic Historiography and Periodization', *Der Islam* 91, 1 (2014), 6–19.

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by assigning them to certain conventional units of time. The periodisation schemes they allude to – the European tripartite model of Antiquity–Middle Ages–Modernity and the Chinese dynasty–based model – are both part and parcel of specific historiographical traditions.[18] The European model, however, has managed to gain currency well beyond the context from which it originated: even if its specific usage can be shaped by very different concerns (as we shall see), its proliferation is nonetheless tied to a long history of Western hegemony and colonisation. Perhaps it is when both sentences begin to ring similarly strange or familiar that global history has achieved some success.

Striving to evade Eurocentric and other universalising periodisation schemes, some scholars have turned to chronology for an alternative and seemingly 'neutral' order of things.[19] Take, for example, the 'national global histories' that have recently been published in various European countries. In the *Histoire mondiale de la France* (2017), which set the model for the whole genre, chronology is chosen as an antidote against the 'illusory continuities of traditional narrative'. The volume thus abstains from any overarching narrative but presents the reader with a multitude of chapters or 'fragments' all linked to one specific year and arranged in strict chronological order.[20]

Yet such an order is neither neutral nor given. Every chronology presupposes the choice of a particular calendar. It is a choice we rarely think about in everyday life – indeed, such routinised phenomena are the often nearly invisible yet perhaps most pervasive effects of a politics of time. Moreover, chronology can also shape what is perceived as 'history' as such: by privileging 'events' over processes and the longue durée, it presents history as a sequence of distinct temporal units.[21] It is such an equation of 'historical' and 'chronological time' that Lorenz has identified as one of history's chronocentric 'idols'.[22]

A chronological framework, though, can also provide a starting point for more nuanced approaches to historical temporalities. So, even within the strict sequential order of the *Histoire Mondiale de la France*, the practitioner may question the very unity of historical time. Exploring the hoard of Ruscino, historian and archaeologist François-Xavier Fauvelle, for instance, prompts his

[18] On the Middle Ages and the European model, see n. 44; on dynastic periodisation in Chinese historiography, see Richard van Glahn, 'Imagining Pre-modern China', in Richard van Glahn and Paul J. Smith (eds.), *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 35–70.

[19] Patrick Boucheron et al., *France in the World: A New Global History*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan et al. (London: Gallic Books, 2021), 7–15, here 9.

[20] Boucheron, 'Ouverture', 14–15, commenting on the potential neglect of the *longue durée*.

[21] Cf. Gavin Lucas, 'Archaeology and Contemporaneity', *Archaeological Dialogues* 22, 1 (2015), 1–15, esp. 3–7; see also William M. Reddy, 'The Eurasian Origins of Empty Time and Space. Modernity as Temporality Reconsidered', *History and Theory* 55, 3 (2016), 325–56.

[22] Lorenz, 'Der letzte Fetisch', 90–1.

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readers to think not only about the presence of the past and the limits of our present knowledge, but also about past futures of the early-eighth-century Mediterranean world. Fauvelle sets the scene by directly addressing his reader:

> Imagine yourself there. . . . The place you are standing is called Ruscino. . . . You live there amid familiar ruins. As soon as the alert is sounded, you hide your tools . . . Neither historians nor archaeologists know who you are nor what you did there. . . . You're living in the provinces, but in a province that is no longer the province of anything. You are living in the outskirts of Perpignan, but you don't know that because Perpignan does not yet exist.

His essay thus also shows how literary strategies – rather than theoretical reflection – can be used to make visible historical contingencies and different temporalities.[23]

Others have rediscovered chronology itself as a possible way to move *beyond* 'historical time'. Discussing the challenges the Anthropocene poses to concepts of time and history, Helge Jordheim suggests that chronology could serve to integrate timescales beyond those of human and social life. It allowed us to relate historical time to geological temporalities but also to the life cycles of microbes and viruses. To serve such a critical aim, chronology must not be taken as a given temporal order but a knowledge practice in itself – which is, as Jordheim highlights, indeed a return to a pre-modern understanding.[24]

The most pervasive 'blind spot' in historians' relation to time is perhaps the temporalising work they themselves perform, especially in drawing a line between past and present.[25] This line is constitutive for the very field of historiography. It is also part of a specific temporal regime, namely that of modern historicity. Here, with the dissociation of experience and expectations, history has first emerged as the collective singular of a unified past and the present became oriented towards an open and malleable future.

Historicising historicity, this specific constellation of temporal relations, has become a major concern in recent years, with Reinhart Koselleck's work leading the way. With his analysis of historicity as a specific temporal regime emerging in the so-called *Sattelzeit* ('saddle period'), Koselleck has made a decisive and unmatched contribution to denaturalising history itself. His role in inspiring critical reflection on questions of temporality and the regime of historicity – also

[23] François-Xavier Fauvelle, '719. L'Afrique frappe à la porte du pays des Francs', in Boucheron et al., *Histoire mondiale de la France*, 124–9; for the English translation: '719. Africa knocks on the Franks' Door' in Boucheron et al., *France in the World*, 87–92, quote at 87f.

[24] Helge Jordheim, 'Return to Chronology', in Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier (eds.), *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 43–56.

[25] See Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz, 'Breaking up Time. Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past, and Future – Introduction', in Bevernage and Lorenz, *Breaking up Time*, 7–35, esp. 22–6.

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far beyond the narrow field of historiography – can hardly be overestimated and, indeed, continues to grow.[26] At the same time, Koselleck has also left us with a substantial notion of modernity, maybe even with the last and possibly most refined refuge of such an understanding.[27] As Lynn Hunt has put it: 'If modernity exists – and I still want to admit some doubts on this score – then it is at least in large measure a category having to do with the experience of time.'[28]

Approaching modernity through the lens of temporality and historicity provides a sophisticated and reflexive understanding. Still, as with all attempts at conceptualising modernity, it is inextricably tied to the 'pre-modern', situated before and/or outside of European modernity. This 'pre-modern' remains cast in terms of 'deficit', measured against the yardstick of modern historicity: it has no open future, no sense of the difference of the past as past. Hence, the temporal understanding of modernity, too, can be read as a – even if sophisticated – reproduction of an old binary, contrasting the history of the West with its pre-modern Other.

In response, an interdisciplinary critique has emerged, ranging from postcolonial studies and global history to medieval studies.[29] In terms of historical critique, this has led to explorations of temporalities outside of modern Europe, adding historical depth and differentiation to a debate long centred on the *Sattelzeit* and its aftermath.[30] This helps to make visible conflicting temporal

[26] The growing attention is also due to recent translations of his work: see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (Columbia University Press: New York, 2004); Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time. On Possible Histories*, transl. and ed. by Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). Cf. Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), esp. 217–31, and Helge Jordheim, 'Against Periodization. Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities', *History & Theory* 51, 2 (2012), 151–71.

[27] For an account of the *Sattelzeit* (*c*.1750–1850) as the period of transition to modernity and the need to historicise history, see Reinhart Koselleck, 'On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History' in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, transl. by Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1–20, with a strong emphasis on the heuristic character of the period concept (5).

[28] Hunt, *Measuring Time*, 75; see also Lorenz, 'Der letzte Fetisch', 75–80, 91, and Allegra Fryxell, 'Time and the Modern: Current Trends in The History of Modern Temporalities', *Past & Present* 243, 1 (2019), 285–98.

[29] Cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. ch. 1; Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, ch. 3, esp. 87–95; Prathama Banerjee, 'Time and the Limits of the Political: Anti-Historical Excursions from South Asia', *2nd Berlin Southern Theory Lecture* (Berlin: FU Berlin / ZMO Berlin, 2020), www.zmo.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/Publikationen/Berlin_Southern_Theory_Lecture/bstl_2_banerjee_2020_1.pdf. See also Theo Jung, 'Das Neue der Neuzeit ist ihre Zeit: Reinhart Kosellecks Theorie der Verzeitlichung und ihre Kritiker', *Moderne. Kulturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 6 (2010/2011), 172–84.

[30] See, for example, Matthew Champion, *The Fullness of Time. Temporalities of the Fifteenth-Century Low Countries* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), esp. 7–12 for taking issue with Koselleck's understanding of medieval temporality. Medievalist critique has, in particular, focused on the problem of futures and futurity: Klaus Oschema and Bernd Schneidmüller eds., *Zukunft im Mittelalter: Zeitkonzepte und Planungsstrategien* (Ostfildern:

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orders and, indeed, chronopolitics in what is much too often understood in terms of a given 'culture'.[31] Sometimes, though, this historical critique seems to falls prey to a certain precursorism: tracing the emergence of open futures and 'historical consciousness' ever further back in time, for instance, retains and, in fact, reinforces the basic tenets of 'modernity-as-temporality'.[32] Lately, critics have taken issue with the presumed domination of historicity itself, pointing to alternative and conflicting temporalities within European modernity.[33] Moreover, criticising historicity has also brought forth conceptual reflections on the inherent Eurocentrism of history as a discipline rooted in such an understanding – indeed, the very venture of historicising history presents a paradox in itself.[34] Here, the full power of the 'fetish' plays out: historicising historicity has the paradoxical effect of simultaneously questioning and perpetuating the historically bound understanding of history as a discipline. Global history, perhaps more than many other fields, needs to engage the practical consequences of this paradox.

The Politics of Periodisation and the Case of the 'Global Middle Ages'

Many historians happily leave conceptual debates and reflections about the discipline's epistemological foundations to those specialising in the philosophy and theory of history and the pages of respective journals such as *History & Theory* or *Rethinking History*. The problem of time and temporality, though, is particularly apt to demonstrate how allegedly 'theoretical' questions concern the everyday work of historians. To do so, this section focuses on a practice that is, at the same time, a banal operation and a highly political business: periodisation.[35] For global historians, periodisation presents a particularly

Thorbecke, 2021); Felicitas Schmieder ed., *Mittelalterliche Zukunftsgestaltung im Angesicht des Weltendes/Forming the Future Facing the End of the World in the Middle Ages* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015).

[31] See, for example, Kathleen Davis and Michael Puett, 'Periodization and the 'Medieval Globe': A Conversation', *The Medieval Globe* 2, 1 (2015), 1–14, esp. 8–12; Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 16–17, 88–95.

[32] Cooper's thought-provoking critique of 'multiple modernities' comes to mind here; Frederick Cooper, 'Modernity', in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 113–49, here 133. Cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Muddle of Modernity', *American Historical Review* 116, 3 (2011), 663–75.

[33] Cf. Fryxell, 'Time and the Modern'.

[34] Cf. Fernando Esposito, 'The Two Ends of History and Historical Temporality as a Threatened Order', in Ewald Frie et al. (eds.), *Dynamics of Social Change and Perceptions of Threat* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 221–39, esp. 232–9.

[35] As Chakrabarty has phrased it: 'The periodizing instinct and the political instinct are deeply connected'; Chakrabarty, 'Where Is the Now', 459. See, for example, Jacques Le Goff, *Faut-il vraiment découper l'histoire en tranches?* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014); Eric Hayot, 'Against Periodization; Or, On Institutional Time', *New Literary History* 42, 4 (2011), 739–56; Jürgen

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acute challenge. As one of the most prominent manifestations of universalising Eurocentrism, it is central to all attempts at decentring historical studies. It is not only tied to the interplay of appropriation and critique, but also leads to wide-ranging questions about institutional and conceptual change.[36]

The notion of a 'Global Middle Ages' has enjoyed a remarkably dynamic career since the 2010s: journals and handbooks advocate the study of 'medieval worlds' and 'The Medieval Globe', central conventions of medievalists have prominently debated 'the Global Middle Ages' and first jobs in the field have been advertised.[37] This career has come somewhat unexpectedly. Indeed, the wording 'Global Middle Ages' itself presents – once more – a kind of paradox.[38] As mentioned earlier, the 'Middle Ages' are part and parcel of a traditional European periodisation scheme that has been exported to the world. For this reason, the term has been heavily criticised by postcolonial scholarship and historians of the non-European world. Such critique is exacerbated by the fact that 'medieval' functions not only as a geographically but also as a temporally 'mobile category' around the globe: used as a signifier for 'backwardness', the 'medieval' plays a principal role in the temporalisation of difference.[39] Equally, historians of Europe themselves have long, and strongly, criticised the concept.[40]

So why does the 'Middle Ages' enjoy such a career precisely in the field of global history? While definitions have often remained vague, the 'Global Middle Ages' serves a clearly designated function: it was designed as an

Osterhammel, 'Über die Periodisierung der neueren Geschichte', *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berichte und Abhandlungen* 10 (2006), 45–64.

[36] See, for example, Jerry H. Bentley, 'Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History', *American Historical Review* 101, 3 (1996), 749–70; Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Teleology, Discontinuity and World History. Periodization and Some Creation Myths of Modernity', *Asian Review of World Histories* 1, 2 (2013), 189–226; Thomas Maissen et al. (eds.), *Chronologics: Periodisation in a Global Context*, 9 October 2018, https://chronolog.hypotheses.org/.

[37] Cf. Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, 'Defining the Global Middle Ages (AHRC Research Network AH/K001914/1, 2013-15)', *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015), 106–17. For a recent overview and comment, see Roy Flechner, 'Review Article: How Far is Global?', *Medieval Worlds* 12 (2020), 255–66, and Christina Brauner, 'Das "globale Mittelalter" und die Gegenwart der Geschichtswissenschaft', *traverse* 28, 2 (2022), 41–62.

[38] Uhlig speaks of an 'anachronistic, even oxymoronic character'; Marion Uhlig, 'Quand "Postcolonial" et "Global" riment avec "Médiéval": Sur quelques approches théoriques anglo-saxonnes', *Perspectives médiévales* 35 (2014), https://doi.org/10.4000/peme.4400, sect. 2. See also Kim M. Phillips, 'Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages', *History Compass* 14, 3 (2016), 81–92, here 87.

[39] See, for example, Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*; Carol Symes, 'When We Talk about Modernity', *American Historical Review* 116, 3 (2011), 715–26.

[40] Cf. C. Warren Hollister, 'The Phases of European History and the Nonexistence of the Middle Ages', *Pacific Historical Review* 61, 1 (1992), 1–22; Timothy Reuter, 'Medieval: Another Tyrannous Construct?', *The Medieval History Journal* 1, 1 (1998), 25–45; Bernhard Jussen, 'Richtig denken im falschen Rahmen? Warum das "Mittelalter" nicht in den Lehrplan gehört', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 67, 9–10 (2016), 558–76.

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instrument of critique – directed against traditional notions of the 'medieval' and its 'Eurocentric straight jacket'.[41]Overall, this aims at a more inclusive understanding of the past.[42] Some of the most prominent champions propose a programmatic understanding of the 'Global Middle Ages' as a venture to decolonise medieval studies.[43]

Roughly and conventionally located between 500 and 1500, the 'Global Middle Ages' provides a heuristic framework that allows scholars to bring together coeval phenomena and processes formerly treated separately, to seek out unusual comparisons and to discover unknown or neglected connections. It resonates with a preference for a seemingly neutral chronological order, as outlined earlier, and points to the important role attributed to synchronicity in global history.

There are, however, also a few attempts to build a period concept with a specific period identity. Naomi Standen and Catherine Holmes, for example, who in 2012 initiated the interdisciplinary network 'Towards a Global Middle Ages', advocate such a 'strong' concept. They define the 'Global Middle Ages' as 'a period of human history with distinctive characteristics; and as a powerful concept to "think with"', set apart from a more amorphous global 'pre-modernity'. So far, Holmes and Standen propose to understand it as a phase of 'dynamic change and experiment when no single part of the world achieved hegemonic status', as a 'time of options and experiments'.[44] While such an understanding would certainly counter traditional narratives of both the Middle Ages and Western domination in globalisation processes, the specificity of the suggested characteristics remains controversial. Indeed, many global historians are sceptical about any kind of 'strong' periodisation schemes operating on a global scale and claiming universal validity.[45]

Whether one subscribes to 'strong periodisation' or not, Holmes and Standen's proposal clearly shows that thinking about the 'Middle Ages' in a global perspective also carries critical potential for global history, its periodisation and the

[41] Peter Frankopan, 'Why We Need to Think About the Global Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval Worlds* 1, 1 (2019), 5–10, here 9.

[42] Bryan C. Keene, 'Introduction: Manuscripts and Their Outlook on the World', in Bryan C. Keene (ed.), *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019), 5–34, here 8; see also Walter Pohl and Andre Gingrich, 'Medieval Worlds: Introduction to the First Issue', *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015), 2–4, here 2.

[43] Heng, *Global Middle Ages*; Geraldine Heng, 'Early Globalities, and Its Questions, Objectives, and Methods: An Inquiry into the State of Theory and Critique', *Exemplaria* 26, 2–3 (2014), 234–53; Sierra Lomuto, 'Becoming Postmedieval: The Stakes of the Global Middle Ages', *postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 11, 4 (2020), 503–12.

[44] Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, 'Introduction', in Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen (eds.), *The Global Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–41, here 2–3, 6; cf. Naomi Standen, 'Colouring outside the Lines. Methods for a Global History of Eastern Eurasia, 600-1350', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (2019), 27–63.

[45] Pohl and Gingrich, 'Medieval Worlds', 2; Osterhammel, 'Über die Periodisierung'.

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definition of the 'global' itself. Indeed, no matter which terminology is chosen, every discussion of medieval history – or, for that matter, of any other 'pre-modern' period – from such a perspective has to engage with the temporality inherent in global history, just as it needs to engage with the inextricable connection between global history and the discourse of globalisation: Is there such a thing as 'globalisation' in a pre-modern world? Can the 'Middle Ages' actually be global? And, if so, what does 'global' mean in this context?

Such questions concern issues controversial within global history at large, and medievalists have approached them in various ways. Some stress the limited and fragmentary character of medieval connections, as judged against current models of globalisation and global modernity. Against this backdrop, Michael Borgolte, a pioneer of global medieval history in Germany, has argued in favour of an 'Eurafrasian era' in place of the 'Global Middle Ages'.[46] While such an approach clearly sets global history apart from the history of globalisation, it still operates within the framework of globalisation narratives. According to its logic, a truly 'global period' only becomes possible with the beginning of globalisation. Indeed, the emerging periodisation scheme itself visualises the process of spatio-temporal integration.[47] Other scholars have called for a thorough and critical engagement with such a notion, aiming at a historicisation of globality.[48] Such pleas resonate with current critical reflections on 'globalism' from within the social sciences and contemporary history, drawing attention to its inherent teleology and hegemonic bias.[49] Studying 'globalities' in the *longue durée* may help to foster reflection on the remnants of modernisation theory in the discourse of globalisation and, once more, on the embeddedness of global history in this discourse.[50]

[46] Michael Borgolte, 'Sprechen wir doch einfach vom eurafrasischen Zeitalter', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 August 2018, 11. and his opus magnum: *Die Welten des Mittelalters. Globalgeschichte eines Jahrtausends* (München: C.H. Beck, 2022), here 13–31. In his view, medievalists study 'transcultural entanglements' in contrast to 'globalisation' as a twentieth-century phenomenon; see Michael Borgolte, 'Mittelalter in der größeren Welt: Mediävistik als globale Geschichte', in Michael Borgolte, *Mittelalter in der größeren Welt. Essays zur Geschichtsschreibung und Beiträge zur Forschung*, ed. Tillmann Lohse and Benjamin Scheller (Berlin: De Gruyter: 2014), 533–46, esp. 536–38.

[47] Cf. Christian Grataloup, 'Les Périodes sont des régions du Monde', *ATALA Cultures et sciences humaines* 17 (2014) [special issue 'Découper le temps: Actualité de la périodisation en histoire'], 65–1.

[48] For example, Amanda Power and Caroline Dodds Pennock, 'Globalizing Cosmologies', *Past and Present* 238, Supplement 13 (2018), 88–115, esp. 90–4; Alicia Walker, 'Globalism', *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012) [special issue 'Medieval Art History Today – Critical Terms'], 183–96, esp. 185–7.

[49] See, for example, Tim Ingold, 'Globes and Spheres: The Topology of Environmentalism', in Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 209–18, here 210–11; Simon Ferdinand et al. (eds.), *Other Globes: Past and Peripheral Imaginations of Globalization* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[50] Cf. Wolfgang Knöbl, 'After Modernization: Der Globalisierungsbegriff als Platzhalter und Rettungsanker der Sozialwissenschaften', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 68, 2 (2020), 297–317; Urs Stäheli, 'The Outside of the Global', *The New Centennial Review* 3, 2 (2003), 1–22.

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No matter what definition of the global and the medieval they propose, all protagonists of the debate share the belief that global perspectives can serve as a critique of the 'Middle Ages' as we know it. The 'Global Middle Ages' act as a successful formula for this critique, although (or perhaps because) it pinpoints the paradox this venture entails. Indeed, scholars have reflected upon this in different ways: While some stress the provisional and, finally, transitory status of the 'Global Middle Ages' – for want of a better term – others frame the paradox as a strategy of deconstruction. Geraldine Heng, prominent champion of the 'Global Middle Ages' as a decolonising project, seeks to employ the notion of the Global Middle Ages to upturn 'old tyrannies of periodisation in the West' from within. To do so, she draws on the 'asynchrony of global temporalities'. To establish this asynchrony, she relies on modernity as a yardstick, defined, though, as a recurrent 'transhistorical phenomenon', as 'repetition-with-difference'. Heng uses this to identify 'modernities' across the medieval globe *before* their European manifestations. Pointing, for instance, to industrialised mass production and printing technology in China, she integrates Chinese history into the framework of medieval history and establishes its comparative 'advance' over Europe.[51] This certainly helps to unsettle both long-standing narratives about the 'West and the Rest' and institutional divisions within academia. Yet, the 'muddle of modernity' remains: can a 'transhistorical' concept of 'modernity' help us to do away with the dichotomy of the medieval and the modern? For instance, if we search for industrial revolutions *avant la lettre*, doesn't this reinforce European developments as a blueprint and yardstick of global synchronicity? In short: where does 'breaking' a concept 'from within' lead?[52]

Such questions point to more general discussions within postcolonial studies about subversion, appropriation and change.[53] To explore the longer history of these discussions, let us briefly consider how the concept of the 'Middle Ages' has been employed to claim a place *within* history. In Indian and African historiography, for instance, it has been introduced by some to break with periodisation schemes structured around the pre-colonial/colonial divide.[54]

[51] Heng, 'Early Globalities', 235–8; see also Heng, *Global Middle Ages*, 20–1.

[52] For a related critique cf. Chakrabarty, 'The Muddle of Modernity'.

[53] For an early discussion see Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-Colonialism', *Social Text* 31–2 (1992), 84–98; and the response by Stuart Hall, 'When was "the Post-Colonial"? Thinking at the Limit', in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds.), *The Postcolonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1995), 242–60. Cf. also Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 165–6; Gabriela De Lima Grecco and Sven Schuster, 'Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American Perspective', *Journal of World History* 31, 2 (2020), 425–46, here 442–3.

[54] See also Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 1–10; Daud Ali, 'The Idea of the Medieval in the Writing of South Asian History. Contexts, Methods and Politics', *Social History* 39, 3 (2014), 382–407, esp. 388–90.

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Against such a divide, perpetuating assumptions of a static and ahistorical 'precolonial' age, François-Xaver Fauvelle has positioned the 'African Middle Ages' as a marker of 'historical value'.[55] Locating the period between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries AD, he identifies the advent of Islam and the onset of direct European contact and Atlantic trade as relevant caesura. These dates are tied to external factors, to be sure, yet bear witness to the entanglements that connect African and Eurasian pasts. Fauvelle also singles out the specific documentary regime that characterises the period and continues to shape our knowledge practices. The 'African Middle Ages', he argues, is a move towards a more inclusive and truly globalising view of the 'medieval world', with Europe and Africa both studied as provinces of 'a global world that deserves to be called medieval based only on its distinctive way of being global'.[56] Some reviewers have appreciated Fauvelle's attempt at periodisation 'in terms of global history' and stress the importance of integrating African history into mainstream historiography as well as public discourse.[57] Other commentators, in contrast, are more sceptical and object to what they perceive as a return of Eurocentrism, or even 'exoticism'.[58]

The 'African Middle Ages', however, are no invention of Fauvelle's. Comparable notions had already surfaced in African historiography and debates about intellectual decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s.[59] They are tied to attempts at synchronising European and African history, frequently to the advantage of the latter and frequently through means of comparisons, with a particular interest in the history of slavery and serfdom.[60] Here, striking parallels to the agenda of the Global Middle Ages today emerge. And, just as

[55] François-Xavier Fauvelle, *The Golden Rhinoceros. Histories of the African Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 10.

[56] Fauvelle, *Golden Rhinoceros*, 11; cf. François-Xavier Fauvelle, *Leçons de l'histoire de l'Afrique: Leçon inaugurale prononcée le jeudi 3 octobre 2019* (Paris: Collège de France, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cdf.9292, esp. sec. 9–14.

[57] Claire Bosc-Tiessé, 'Penser et écrire l'histoire d'un Moyen Âge en Afrique: Une lecture de François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar, *Le rhinocéros d'or. Histoires du Moyen Âge africain*', *Afriques. Débats et lectures*, 27 July 2015, http://journals.openedition.org/afriques/1702; Marie-Laure Derat, 'Moyen Âge africain: Plaidoyers pour des histoires de l'Afrique', *Médiévales: Langue, textes, histoire* 79, 2 (2021), 209–20, esp. 209–11.

[58] Cf. Arno Sonderegger, Review of Fauvelle, 'Das goldene Rhinozeros', *Stichproben: Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 17, 33 (2017), 134–41; Bauer, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab*, 151–3.

[59] Sylvie Kandé, 'African Medievalisms. Caste as a Subtext in Ahmadou Kourouma's Suns of Independence and Monnew', in Nadia Altschul and Kathleen Davis (eds.), *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of 'the Middle Ages' Outside Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 301–24, here 302–8.

[60] See, for example, Philippe Decraene, 'Le Mali médiéval', *Civilisations* 12, 2 (1962), 250–8; Cheikh A. Diop, *L'Afrique noire pré-coloniale: Étude comparée des systèmes politiques et sociaux de l'Europe et de l'Afrique Noire, de l'antiquité à la formation des états modernes* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1960). For a more extensive discussion, cf. Brauner, 'Das "globale Mittelalter"'.

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today, such approaches were by no means uncontroversial: would a celebration of the African Middle Ages, with its grand empires of Ghana and Mali, help to decolonise the history of the continent? Or is it in danger of reproducing European notions of historicity, located in rulers and states?[61]

As Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul have observed, 'the medieval occupies a fraught, paradoxical role in postcolonial politics'.[62] When prominent protagonists of postcolonial scholarship – namely, members of the Subaltern Studies Group – engaged with European medievalists' debates on feudalism and the peasant economy, this helped them take a stance with regard to the Indian present and future.[63] Similarly, the contested meanings of the Chinese Renaissance are less connected to scholarly debates about Eurocentrism than to discussions about different visions of Chinese identity and political futures.[64]

The global proliferation of the Middle Ages is a postcolonial phenomenon itself, shaped by local appropriations that are part of specific *local* discussions and politics.[65] Reflecting on these 'multiple Middle Ages' leads us to reconsider the question of critique and change. From an analytical point of view, the transfer and transformation of concepts can be the subject of global conceptual history.[66] But it constitutes a methodological and, indeed, a practical challenge for all historians, as they themselves take part in processes of translation and entanglement. In this sense, the Global Middle Ages can serve as an example of global history's potential to question concepts and institutions, but also for the difficulties and challenges such attempts at transformation face. This, as

[61] See Finn Fuglestad, 'The Trevor–Roper Trap or the Imperialism of History: An Essay', *History in Africa* 19 (1992), 309–26.

[62] Nadia Altschul and Kathleen Davis, 'The Idea of "the Middle Ages" Outside Europe', in Altschul and Davis, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World*, 1–26, here 12. On ambiguities of postcolonial histories, cf. also Fuglestad, 'Trevor–Roper Trap'; Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 28–31; V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), here 35–48.

[63] Bruce W. Holsinger, 'Medieval Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and the Genealogies of Critique', *Speculum* 77, 4 (2002), 1195–227.

[64] Pablo A. Blitstein, 'A Global History of the "Multiple Renaissances"', *Historical Journal* 64, 1 (2021), 162–84. See also Thomas Maissen and Barbara Mittler (eds.), *Why China Did Not Have a Renaissance – and Why That Matters. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

[65] For selected case studies, see Marwa Elsharky, 'The Invention of the Muslim Golden Age: Universal History, the Arabs, Science, and Islam', in Dan Edelstein et al. (eds.), *Power and Time. Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 80–102; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Region, Nation, World: Remarks on Scale and the Problem of Periodisation', in Maissen et al., *Chronologics*, 23 April 2018, https://chronolog.hypotheses.org/270; Sebastian Conrad, 'What Time Is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography', *History and Theory* 38, 1 (1999), 67–83.

[66] For recent approaches to global conceptual history see, e.g., Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global Conceptual History. A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Margrit Pernau, 'Provincializing Concepts: The Language of Transnational History', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, 3 (2016), 483–99.

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Suzanne Conklin Akbari has reminded us, is not only a language game: Speaking about 'medieval Ethiopia', for instance, also means claiming a place for Ethiopian studies within the medievalist community and access to its resources.[67] Politics of periodisation have their very material effects, too.

At the Same Time: Simultaneity and the Dialectics of Non-Coevalness

Global history is often understood in terms of space and spatial expansion. Yet it is also characterised by specific attention to time. 'The concern with synchronicity, with the contemporaneous even if geographically distant', Sebastian Conrad suggests, 'has become the hallmark of global approaches'.[68] Numerous books and studies have followed such an approach, often choosing one specific year as their observational unit.[69] As we have seen, studying what happens at the same time in different places can contribute to dismantling traditional periodisation schemes. It serves as a powerful tool to counter the 'denial of coevalness' and the confinement to the 'waiting room' of history, in Chakrabarty's felicitous wording. In this sense, synchronicity seems to contain a promise of equality, set to counter exclusions and divisions of traditional historiography. But what concepts of time underwrite synchronisation itself? The issue of synchronisation showcases how global historians approach time as iconoclasts and believers at the same time.

The very formation of Western scholarship is tied to the temporalisation of difference and the allocation of different temporalities. In his influential study *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983), Johannes Fabian argues that anthropology as a discipline was built on a 'denial of coevalness'. It assigned its subject of study – the allegedly 'primitive' cultures – to a time different from the one inhabited by the scholarly observer, a time before history and historical change. Precisely for this reason, studying 'primitive peoples' was thought to allow for insights into the deep past of 'our own' civilised societies. The 'denial of coevalness', in fact, was a denial of diversity, as all societies were supposed to follow the same scheme of development (if they developed at all).[70]

[67] Suzanne C. Akbari, 'Where Is Medieval Ethiopia? Mapping Ethiopic Studies within Medieval Studies', in Keene (ed.), *Toward a Global Middle Ages*, 82–93.

[68] Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 150. See also Adrien Delmas, 'De la Simultanéité en histoire globale', *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 20 (5 April 2019), https://doi.org/10.4000/acrh.9586, sec. 1.

[69] Just to name a few examples: Valerie Hansen, *The Year 1000. When Explorers Connected the World – and Globalization Began* (New York: Scribner, 2020); Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); Serge Gruzinski, *What Time Is It There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

[70] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); see also Johannes Fabian, 'The Other Revisited: Critical

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While explicit denials of coevalness are on the retreat, the basic framework survives in the institutionalised division of labour between the disciplines, especially in the divide between history and area studies. Synchronising approaches can help to make visible these persistent divisions and potentially contribute to their undoing. This is also, as we have seen, what the champions of the 'Global Middle Ages' propose. According to Jürgen Osterhammel, a focus on simultaneity characterises global history at large: global history 'highlights the simultaneity of societies in various parts of the world . . . Few literary devices have been more successful in overcoming Eurocentric habits of seeing.'[71] Pitted against the temporalisation of difference, simultaneity becomes associated with a promise of equality and equivalence.

The issue of 'being at the same time', however, is trickier than it might seem. Some ambiguity already appears when we consider the vocabulary that is usually employed but rarely reflected upon. Compare, for instance, the different terms used in the statements quoted so far – namely, 'simultaneity', 'synchronicity', 'coevalness' and 'contemporaneity'. Although these terms might appear similar or even synonymous at first glance, on closer scrutiny one finds that they contain allusions to different temporalities and, in fact, point to a conflation of emic and etic notions of time. If we want to unpack the different concepts and layers of temporality involved, some analytical distinctions might be helpful. *Simultaneity*, for one thing, can be understood in terms of an analytical framework of calendrical or chronological time: referring to things, events, processes happening at the same time from an external observer's point of view, without any necessary connection between them drawn by internal observers. *Synchronicity*, on the other hand, usually designates the active relating of phenomena and processes that result from the 'work of synchronisation', as Helge Jordheim has called it.[72] Understanding synchronicity as a product of making relations rather than a given helps to uncover the economic and political rationales involved and consider unexpected outcomes. As Vanessa Ogle has astutely demonstrated, attempts at a global standardisation of time in order to synchronise 'the world' have led to a greater variety of times, to hybridisation and the co-existence of different temporalities.[73] Historians are also engaged in the 'work of synchronisation' – for instance, by integrating

Afterthoughts', *Anthropological Theory* 6, 2 (2006), 139–52. Cf. Berber Bevernage, 'Tales of Pastness and Contemporaneity: On the Politics of Time in History and Anthropology', *Rethinking History* 20, 3 (2016), 352–74; John D. Kelly, 'Time and the Global: Against the Homogeneous, Empty Communities in Contemporary Social Theory', *Development and Change* 29, 4 (1998), 839–71, here 860–4.

[71] Osterhammel, 'Globalizations', 94.

[72] Helge Jordheim, 'Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization', *History and Theory* 53, 4 (2004), 498–518.

[73] Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*.

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distinct yet simultaneous phenomena in the same narrative and one explanatory framework, regardless of potential connectivity or historical perceptions.

In line with this distinction, studying global history through the lens of simultaneity does not necessarily imply a focus on connectivity and connections. Simultaneity is tied to an observer's (etic) perspective and does not presuppose that the observed actually experience each other as 'being at the same time' or share the same understanding of time and temporality. Such a framework of observation is what champions of the Global Middle Ages as an inclusive approach and 'chronological container' aim at: a framework that opens up space for comparison and historiographical synchronisation.

Coevalness and *contemporaneity* are linked to an actively and consciously shared time.[74] Sometimes, 'intersocietal contemporaneity' is distinguished from 'interpersonal coevalness'. Yet, more often than not, contemporaneity and coevalness are used interchangeably and refer to experiences of time as shared time.[75] Sharing time contains a promise of commonality, maybe even of potential equality. For better or worse, it presupposes that there is one single time 'we all' are living in.[76] As we have seen, a central tenet of globalisation discourse posits the 'global present' as that time in which we all have become, fully and finally, contemporaries.

Tracing such temporal characteristics of globalisation, historians have turned to the study of 'global events' or 'global moments': 'global moments', according to the influential definition proposed by Dominic Sachsenmaier and Sebastian Conrad, are 'events with global repercussions', 'events of a popular significance that appealed to people in discrete and distant locations'. Such moments, Sachsenmaier and Conrad suggest, are characteristic of the 'high time of globalisation since the late nineteenth century', resulting from a preceding emergence of a 'global consciousness throughout much of the world'.[77] Global moments, in their reading, are thus tied to specific historical

[74] Cf. Bevernage, 'Tales of Pastness', 367–9; María I. Mudrovcic, 'The Politics of Time, the Politics of History. Who Are My Contemporaries?', *Rethinking History* 23, 4 (2019), 456–73, here 459–62 on the term's history.

[75] I will follow this usage here when discussing the relevant literature; otherwise, the term 'coevalness' is preferred.

[76] An influential distinction between the two terms goes back to Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 24–5, 30–1. Referring to Alfred Schütz, he defines coevalness as 'intersubjective time', connoting 'a common, active "occupation", or sharing, of time' (31) and even defined as a 'condition of communication' that cannot be denied (32). 'Contemporary', in contrast, is understood as 'co-occurrence' in 'typological time' (like a period). For a critical discussion, see Bevernage, 'Tales of Pastness', 360–7; Kevin Birth, 'The Creation of Coevalness and the Danger of Homochronism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, 1 (2008), 3–20, here 11–12.

[77] Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, 'Introduction: Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s', in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–28, here 12–13, 15–16.

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conditions, showcasing how the process of globalisation brings about experiences of a 'shared time' worldwide.

The term itself, however, has been put to more generalised use and expanded to periods well before the late nineteenth century. Indeed, we read, for instance, about Polybius' 'global moment' in the context of shifting Roman discourses about mobility, or find the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Samalas discussed as a 'global moment' in the 1250s.[78] This travelling concept thus brings us back to the relation between simultaneity, synchronicity and contemporaneity: Polybius' 'global moment' is discussed in terms of historical perceptions of shared time and practices of synchronisation. The Samalas eruption as a global event, in contrast, emerges from analytical observation of simultaneous processes and phenomena, as the result of synchronisation of disparate materials and timescales, not least through global comparison. The notion of 'global events' has thus travelled far from its origins, pointing, once more, to the importance of precise terminology. It equally illustrates the fascination of synchronisation that goes beyond a mere observational device – indeed, past simultaneity seems to contain a promise of potential contemporaneity.

Contemporaneity, despite its claim to unity, comes with its own Other. Remember, for instance, how Rosa characterised globalisation 'temporally' as the 'dissolution of stable rhythms and sequences following the ubiquitous contemporisation (*Vergleichzeitigung*) of even the noncontemporaneous'.[79] Evidently, this alludes to the often-quoted figure of the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (which roughly translates as 'contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous'). However, while this figure is often employed to assert an ecumenical vision of pluritemporality, Rosa hints at the final dissolution of such diversity in an encompassing contemporaneity.

But what is the contemporaneous, after all? And how can Rosa distinguish it from the 'non-contemporaneous'? The statement contains a normative understanding of contemporaneity – implying, once more, a distinct unity of times in time.[80] Peter Osborne has described the notion of contemporaneity as an '*operative* fiction: it *regulates the division* between the past and present within the present', bound up with the project of 'global modernity'. Given 'growing

[78] Cf. Elena Isayev, 'Polybius's Global Moment and Human Mobility through Ancient Italy', in Martin Pitts and Miguel J. Versluys (eds.), *Globalisation and the Roman World. World History, Connectivity and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123–40; Martin Bauch, 'Chronology and Impact of a Global Moment in the 13th Century: The Samalas Eruption Revisited', in Andrea Kiss and Kathleen Pribyl (eds.), *The Dance of Death in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe: Environmental Stress, Mortality and Social Response* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 214–32.

[79] Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 217, with a list of diverse 'forms of contemporisation' (219–20).

[80] Cf. Achim Landwehr, 'Von der "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen"', *Historische Zeitschrift* 295, 1 (2012), 1–34, here 3–10. For an example, see Koselleck's usage of the figure, relating to 'our own experience to have contemporaries who live in the Stone Age': Koselleck, 'Need for Theory', 8.

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social interconnectedness', 'constructions of the contemporary increasingly appear as inevitable'. In this transition from 'fictional to historical narrative', he locates the role of the 'global histories of the present' that aim at 'an empirically consistent hypothetical unity of the present, beyond pure heteronomy or multiplicity'.[81] When we observe the role of the 'global present' in global history, we observe this operative fiction in action.

While these normative implications of 'being at the same time' are often invisible, they come to the forefront when we compare the topos of the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous' to the figure of anachronism. While the two figures are structurally related, they come with starkly different value judgements. One of the most thought-provoking analyses of anachronism has been proposed by Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, anachronism is less 'a question of facts' than 'a question of thought'. Accordingly, he defines the 'reproach of anachronism' as follows: 'The accusation of anachronism is not the claim that something did not exist at a given date. It is the claim that something could not have existed at this date.'[82] When anachronism is about historical potentiality, it presupposes a distinct notion of what is do-able (say-able or think-able) in a certain time.[83] Thus, anachronism is tied to an understanding of 'time itself as the principle of immanence that subsumes all phenomena under a law of interiority. The truth of history is then the immanence of time as the principle of co-presence and co-belonging of phenomena.'[84] Obviously, the mechanism at work in anachronism is similar to the one implied in the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous'. In both cases, phenomena (people, processes) are 'out of time' – and both presuppose a universalising viewpoint from which to establish temporal order and to diagnose its distortion. Curiously, though – and here the politics of time set in – the topos of the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous' has evolved into a self-evident shorthand of a diversity-conscious history whereas anachronisms still count among the mortal sins in the field.[85]

Next to the notion of 'shared time', the figure of 'being out of time' has also received increasing attention lately.[86] In the wake of Fabian and others, we are used to associating non-coevalness (or non-contemporaneity) with imperial politics and colonialism. However, is the assertion of non-coevalness always an

[81] Osborne, 'Fiction of the Contemporary', 23 and 25–6.
[82] Jacques Rancière, 'The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth (English translation)', *InPrint* 3, 1 (2015), 21–48.
[83] Quentin Skinner, presumably anachronism's most prominent enemy, relies on a similar concept: Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8, 1 (1969), 3–53, here 8–9 and passim.
[84] Rancière, 'Concept of Anachronism', 26.
[85] Cf. also Achim Landwehr and Tobias Winnerling, 'Chronisms: On the Past and Future of the Relation of Times', *Rethinking History* 23, 4 (2019), 435–55.
[86] This is what Birth, 'Creation of Coevalness', calls 'the danger of homochronism'.

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imperial gesture? Or can it also be part of resistance and subversion? Berber Bevernage, a Belgian historian and theorist of history, has made a powerful case for the multiple usages and meanings of non-coevalness.[87] Building on examples from his research in transitional justice, he argues that being non-coeval can equally operate as a subaltern, critical strategy, especially tied to experience of violence and trauma. Moreover, he draws attention to the fact that the benevolent assertion of coevalness can also distort our view on inequalities even within the global North – so living as a refugee is also and decisively characterised by the absence of a future, as humans usually inhabit it as a space of expected actions. Recognising the lack of coevalness inherent in such an experience is, Bevernage argues, no imperial gesture but rather a starting point for critical action.

The problem of non-coevalness is tied to different configurations of past, present and future – and, indeed, to struggles about the very division between them. Within the context of global history, it is the ongoing debate about the legacies of colonialism and imperialism that draws attention to the diverging approaches. When issues of reparation and restitution are at stake, for instance, the relation between past and present shapes the very scope of legal and political action: Even if responsibility for past actions can be clearly attributed, it is often less clear who is to be held accountable today – and whether one can indeed claim responsibility for the past.[88] In the case of reparations for slavery and the slave trade, for instance, determining who is to pay and who is to be paid raises complex questions about identity and continuity.[89] Are reparations about individuals or about institutions and social groups? Can past wrongs be compensated by financial means? Is there even such a thing as 'restorative justice' or a 'reparatory history'?[90] A disciplined historian may easily disavow his profession's competence for such questions and dismiss the issues at stake as anachronistic. Yet, this would be too easy a way out. Even if answers remain

[87] Bevernage, 'Tales of Pastness'.

[88] Cf. Berber Bevernage, 'The Past Is Evil/Evil Is Past. On Retrospective Politics, Philosophy of History, and Temporal Manichaeism', *History and Theory* 54, 3 (2015), 333–52.

[89] For the long history of such demands since the eighteenth century, see Ana Lucia Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); cf. also Adam Crawford, 'Temporality in Restorative Justice: On Time, Timing and Time-Consciousness', *Theoretical Criminology* 19, 4 (2015), 470–90, here 474–5, on slavery 484.

[90] Cf. for different positions: Matthew Evans and David Wilkins, 'Transformative Justice, Reparations and Transatlantic Slavery', *Social & Legal Studies* 28, 1 (2019), 137–57; Catherine Hall, 'Doing Reparatory History: Bringing "Race" and Slavery Home', *Race & Class* 60, 1 (2018), 3–21; Thomas Creamer, 'International Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade', *Journal of Black Studies* 49, 7 (2018), 694–713; Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, 'Reparations for the Slave Trade: Rhetoric, Law, History and Political Realities', *Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 41, 3 (2007), 427–54.

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controversial (and they certainly will), the questions themselves remind us of the presence of the past and the way it shapes potential futures today.[91]

Conclusion

Among global historians, time and temporality are a source both of concern and hope. In the struggle against traditional periodisation and the 'denial of coevalness', temporalising practices such as synchronisation and the reference to chronology have been employed as a remedy. At the same time, pluritemporality and chronopolitics remain critical issues. To conclude, I highlight four points to further rethink temporality in global history and beyond.

1. *Global History and Its Time.* Global historians take pride in actively embracing multiple voices and plural perspectives and in critically rethinking standards and procedures of historiography in general. Calling out the 'fetish of time' by assessing pluritemporalities thus appears to be their very mission. Yet, proceeding along these lines, we can also turn back to the temporality of global history itself: if global history is the history for our time, what happens when the times are a-changing? Or when the global present does not work as an 'operative fiction' anymore? How does this change global history, its narratives and its role? Is global history an episode in a broader movement towards a decentering of history and historical scholarship?[92] Does its success lie, then, in turning global perspectives into the 'new normal'?
2. *After Modernisation.* Globalisation discourse entertains an ambiguous relation with modernity and modernisation theory.[93] The same goes for global history. Global historians, though, also grapple with modernity in a specific form – that is, the temporal regime of historicity. As the chronopolitics involved in this emerge nowhere more clearly than in the legacies of colonialism around the world, global historians can contribute to historicising historicity.[94] Studying periods before the onset of globalisation discourse, in particular, may help to make visible – even if inadvertently – silent assumptions about the 'global' and the 'modern'.
3. *At the Same Time*. Time has been described as the 'unity of difference'. While any attempt at ontological definition is beyond a historian's grasp, we have certainly observed that time is intimately connected to the making of differences: from outright denial of coevalness to the more subtle figures of anachronism and 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporary'. At the same

[91] Rolph-Michel Trouillot, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press 2015); cf. also Jan Jansen's chapter on Teleology in this volume.
[92] See Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World', *History and Theory* 50, 2 (2011), 188–202, esp. 190–2.
[93] See Knöbl, 'After Modernization'; Cooper, 'Globalization'.
[94] Cf. Satia, *Time's Monster.*

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time, a synchronising approach emerges as global history's most prominent tool to envisage more inclusive histories. 'To be at the same time' seems to carry a promise of potential equality that oscillates between ethics, representation and historical truth. Or, as Chakrabarty phrased it: 'We have "equal" histories of the past because we would like histories to be equal! Histories – actual events on the ground – do not necessarily become equal even if historiography makes them look so.'[95] If we take history seriously, we cannot do without accounting for inequalities.

4. *Doing History.* 'From wastes, papers, vegetables, indeed from glaciers and "eternal snows"', Michel de Certeau observed, 'historians *make something different*: they make history'.[96] For historians, critical reflection on temporalities is no detached academic exercise. On the contrary, it concerns the very core of their profession and their work. Rethinking time and temporality thus should lead us to consider on how we *do* history and under what circumstances: how we draw a line between the past and the present, how we routinely rely on established temporal markers to convey significance and inhabit institutions shaped by past politics of periodisation. At the same time, being historians, we also need to think about our capacity for doing things differently.

[95] Chakrabarty, 'Muddle of Modernity', 672.
[96] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 71, italics in the original.

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