Introduction
Rethinking History, Globally

Stefanie Gänger and Jürgen Osterhammel

Historians, whatever their area, period or subfield, are well advised to occasionally rethink the premises of their research, writing and 'craft' – that is, to think again or further about them, and to reconsider them with a view to amendment. Like any conscientious scholar, they ought to sometimes take a step back from their routine and habitual ways, to reassess their basic discourses and stances, their position and practice, and recall the explicit and the tacit, perhaps even unconscious, assumptions and conventions underlying their research. The present volume is premised on the conviction that it is not advisable to leave these kinds of reflections entirely to specialised philosophers or theorists of history, who often have little first-hand research experience. Rather, it is of fundamental importance that ordinary historians, too, reflect on 'their daily task', as Marc Bloch put it – on their methods, craftsmanship and conceptual basis.[1]

This volume is an attempt to do just that with regard to global history. A rethinking of global history, the editors and contributors assembled in the volume hold, is both necessary and timely. Despite three decades of rapid expansion and considerable public success, global history – or whatever is presented under that label – is still in need of studies that spell out the implications and consequences, the possibilities and risks of history going global. This is even more pressing because the ground on which global historians stand is moving fast. Much of the field's self-image, conceptual basis and success rests on what is ultimately a tautology: that global history is the history

[1] Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Knopf, 1953; reprinted Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 16. Other prominent examples for this kind of self-reflection by eminent practitioners include Johann Gustav Droysen, *Grundriß der Historik* (Leipzig: Veit 1868). For a recent edition, Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik*, 3 vols., ed. Peter Leyh and Horst Walter Blanke (Stuttgart–Bad Canstatt: Frommann–Holzboog, 1977–2020); Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essays on Epistemology* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Related genres are scholarly autobiographies, such as John H. Elliott, *History in the Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), or interviews, for instance those collected in Carolien Stolte and Alicia Schrikker (eds.), *World History–A Genealogy: Private Conversations with World Historians, 1996–2016* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2017).

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befitting a global age, connected histories suitable for a connected world.[2] That is unlikely to suffice in the long run. By the third decade of the twenty-first century, with globalisation in crisis and universal values under threat, our era remains irrefutably global – with our present predicaments, from warfare to climate change, meaningful only on a global scale – but no longer consistently or affirmatively, let alone enthusiastically so. Historians are unlikely to be startled by this turn of events; as scholars of the past, they are familiar with processes of contraction, disillusionment and fragmentation. If global history is to remain a fitting, fruitful approach for our present and the future, however, our 'guild' must rethink its craft accordingly and forge a more robust, enduring and timely form of global history, both attuned and impervious to the winds of change that are sweeping through the world today.

Theory, Methodology and Epistemology of Global History

While around 1980, and even 1990, global history was a promise, today it is a library. Alongside a vast range of research monographs, there are by now several volumes that introduce the subject of global history to students, professional historians and a general public[3] that reflect on the practice and overall situation of world and global history in various societies, past and present,[4] and that canvass the field's politics, both analytically and programmatically.[5]

[2] Diego Olstein, *Thinking History Globally* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), x–xi, 2; Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 2.

[3] Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Pamela K. Crossley, *What Is Global History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); James Belich et al. (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Doing Global History: An Introduction in Six Concepts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Rolf-Ulrich Kunze, *Global History und Weltgeschichte: Quellen, Zusammenhänge, Perspektiven* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017); Laurent Testot (ed.), *Histoire globale: Un autre regard sur le monde* (Auxerre: Sciences Humaines Éditions, 2008); Laura Di Fiore and Marco Meriggi, *World History: Le nuove rotte della storia* (Rome: Laterza, 2011); Eric Vanhaute, *World History: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013); Masashi Haneda, *Toward Creation of a New World History* (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2018); Conrad, *What Is Global History?*; Olstein, *Thinking History Globally.*

[4] Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice Around the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Hervé Inglebert, *Le monde, l'histoire: Essai sur les histoires universelles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 2014); Hervé Inglebert, *Histoire universelle ou Histoire globale? Les temps du monde* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 2018); Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura (eds.), *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[5] Alessandro Stanziani, *Eurocentrism and the Politics of Global History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Alessandro Stanziani, *Les entrelacements du monde: Histoire globale, pensée globale, XVI^e-XX^e siècles* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018); C. A. Bayly, 'History and

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A number of books and articles assess global history's future prospects[6] or situate it in the tradition of a cosmopolitan, world, or 'general' historiography[7]. However, despite that impressive output and incessant debates about what global history 'really' is, the field remains to some extent oblivious to the rules and formalities that guide its forms of inquiry and argumentation and to the tacit assumptions underlying much of its practice. Only a handful of authors – notably, Sebastian Conrad, Michael Lang and, in the early days of the debate, Raymond Grew – have hitherto sought a dialogue between the new global history and the established concerns of historical theory.[8] One might argue that the constellation of practice surging ahead and theoretical reflection trailing behind is an expected and common one. After all, Minerva's owl spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk. The opposite is possible, however. Some of the most important historiographical innovations, from the rise of the *Annales* school in the 1920s and 1930s to the reinvention of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, were concerted programmes of empirical research and theoretical, self-conscious reflection.[9]

The present volume is devoted to a reassessment of global history's most common metaphors, analytical instruments and cognitive practices. The project is theoretical and methodological neither in the sense of wilful pedantry nor in that of conceit; its expectation is not that of outwitting the practising historian. Rather, it is methodological in the sense of being (self-) reflective. It (re-)considers what it means for a historian to think 'globally' and examines the mental grids, cognitive instruments and linguistic devices

World History', in Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *A Concise Companion to History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–25.

[6] James Belich et al., 'Introduction: The Prospect of Global History', in Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History*, 3–22; Jeremy Adelman, 'What Is Global History Now?', *Aeon*, 2 March 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment.

[7] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *On the Origins of Global History: Inaugural Lecture Delivered on Thursday 28 November 2013* (Paris: Collège de France, 2013); Stefan Berger, *History and Identity: How Historical Theory Shapes Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 261–83.

[8] See, for instance, Conrad, *What Is Global History?*; Michael Lang, 'Globalization and Its History', *Journal of Modern History* 78, 4 (2006), 899–931; Michael Lang, 'Histories of Globalization(s)', in Prasenjit Duara et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Global Historical Thought* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 399–411; Raymond Grew, 'On the Prospect of Global History', in Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens (eds.), *Conceptualizing Global History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 227–49; Raymond Grew, 'Expanding Worlds of World History', *Journal of Modern History* 78, 4 (2006), 878–98.

[9] Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929–2014*, rev. and updated 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015); Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff, Entwicklung, Probleme* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 23–6; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn, 2009); Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

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that are helpful (or, indeed, detrimental) in organising that sort of thinking. The volume shares concerns generally associated with the philosophy or theory of history, in that it reflects on the structure and direction of history, its relation to our present, and the ways in which historians can best explain, contextualise and represent events and circumstances in the past.[10] The project is also an epistemological endeavour since it examines the validity and scope of global historical knowledge and considers the field's particular epistemic values and standards.[11] It is an exercise in epistemology, too, in the sense that it engages in reflections on the emergence of global historical objects of knowledge[12] – how 'the global', 'circulation' or 'connection' became thinkable: that is, how they coalesced and amalgamated into coherent categories, paradigms and domains of inquiry that continue to shape scholarly practice.[13]

Global history is usually not defined by way of method but either through its objects – global moments,[14] worldwide connections[15] or phenomena that occur globally – or as a political attitude, 'way of seeing' and perspective that transcends the nation-state and the we-group: non-parochial, inclusive, anti-Eurocentric and cosmopolitan.[16] Indeed, its practitioners rarely think of global history as a set of distinctive methods, let alone as an approach that may require cognitive instruments different from those common to historical studies in general – as a site of methodological innovation, progress and inventiveness.

[10] On the theory of history, see the general surveys in Aviezer Tucker (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009); Chiel van den Akker (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2022); Daniel Little, 'Philosophy of History', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, First published 18 February 2007; substantive revision 13 October 2016, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/history/.

[11] An excellent survey of the evolution of 'epistemology', mainly in the French tradition that emphasises the social production of knowledge, is Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Historische Epistemologie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2007); see also Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *On Historicizing Epistemology: An Essay* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). In English-language philosophy 'epistemology' is more akin to German *Erkenntnistheorie* and focuses on the justification of (scientific) knowledge.

[12] Uljana Feest and Thomas Sturm, 'What (Good) Is Historical Epistemology? Editors' Introduction', *Erkenntnis* 75, 3 (2011), 285–302, here 292.

[13] Lorraine Daston, 'Introduction: The Coming into Being of Scientific Objects', in Lorraine Daston (ed.), *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1–14, here 6, 9.

[14] 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* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–25.

[15] See, for instance, Olstein, *Thinking History Globally*, 14. A helpful sociological systematisation is John Urry, 'Mobilities and Social Theory', in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 477–95.

[16] See, for instance, Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 3–5. Sven Beckert once referred to global history as a 'way of seeing': see C. A. Bayly et al., 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational history"', *American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006), 1441–61, here 1454.

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The most widely used 'method' that global historians routinely refer to is comparison; some of the few theoretically sophisticated concepts in the field are those of entanglement, connected history and *l'histoire croisée*.[17] Instead, global historians rely on the semantics of 'mobility', 'connectivity' and 'networks' – usually with no reference to network theory, or at best a passing nod – as a kind of surrogate theory.[18] Most of these terms are metaphorical and figurative, however: 'circulation', connectivity, 'flow' or, indeed, 'the global'[19] are metaphors rather than concepts and, as such, prior to them, as Hugo Fazio has argued. They conjure up feelings and – in a tradition going back to Aristotle – help make similarities visible,[20] but they are less useful in establishing differences and in specifying the exact meaning of a historical event or process.[21] This, however, is what concepts are supposed to do. While they may be used flexibly in view of the world's semantic diversity, they should be defined as sharply as possible – Max Weber's legacy in the humanities. One ought not to abandon conceptual clarity for the sake of literary description and narration.[22]

Observers of the field have noted that when global historians are challenged, respond to criticism of their field, or seek to defend the solidity of their craftsmanship, they tend to avoid addressing the issue of method, let alone that of methodological innovation. Rather, they fall back on the historian's

[17] See, for instance, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'One Asia, or Many? Reflections from Connected History', *Modern Asian Studies* 50, 1 (2016), 5–43; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45, 1 (2006), 30–50.

[18] For additional observations, see Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Global History 2020: Fragility in Stability', *Balzan Papers* 3 (2020), 11–30; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Global History', in Peter Burke and Marek Tamm (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 21–48.

[19] See, for instance, Stefanie Gänger, 'Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity and Liquidity in the Language of Global History', *Journal of Global History* 12, 3 (2017), 303–18; Stuart A. Rockefeller, 'Flow', *Current Anthropology* 52, 4 (2011), 557–78; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Globalifizierung. Denkfiguren der neuen Welt', *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 9, 1 (2015), 5–16.

[20] See Andreas Hetzel, 'Metapher, Metaphorizität, Figurativität', in Andrea Allerkamp and Sarah Schmidt (eds.), *Handbuch Literatur und Philosophie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 125–36, here 128. It is impossible here to survey the long history of theories of metaphor. About twenty-five such theories are discussed in Luzia Goldmann, *Phänomen und Begriff der Metapher. Vorschlag zur Systematisierung der Theoriegeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019). We are not aware of a similar work in English.

[21] For this observation, see Hugo Fazio, 'La historia global: ¿encrucijada de la contemporaneidad?', *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 23 (2006), 59–72, here 59, 61.

[22] On the adjustment of precision in the use of ideal-types by Max Weber and his followers, see the case study Mikhail Ilyin, 'Patrimonialism. What Is Behind the Term: Ideal Type, Category, Concept or Just a Buzz Word?', *Redescriptions* 18, 1 (2015), 26–51. Still essential for the categorisation of categories is David Collier and James E. Mahon Jr., 'Conceptual "Stretching" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review* 87, 4 (1993), 845–55.

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most conventional skills and research methods, stressing their reliance on primary sources, historical depth and context.[23] This is not to say that global historians should not be judged by similar standards as historical scholarship in general, that its practitioners should not treat their sources with the same circumspection or forgo the established rules of source criticism. It is to say, however, that one would expect 'a new prospect to have methodological implications', as Peer Vries put it; it cannot suffice for its practitioners to visit more archives and master more languages than other historians.[24] Indeed, in regarding global history as a prospect *with methodological implications*, to appropriate Vries's phrase, we are emphasising both its specificity and its openness. In our view, global history, though it may often be a distinct *field* within historical studies in institutional terms, is invariably also an approach with methodological implications applicable – albeit with varying success – to many different historical subdisciplines and neighbouring fields within the humanities: think of global histories of art, medicine or music, to name but a few examples. It is not, nor should it be, thought of as fundamentally different from, let alone superior to, the many other methodological and theoretical approaches historians embrace whenever their subject requires it.

Global history and other relational approaches to history may be said to need conceptual and theoretical awareness even more urgently than other fields of history. Only in exceptional cases have historians with a global purview ventured into explicit theory-building; Martin Mulsow's 'reference theory of globalised ideas' is one of those daring deeds: an attempt to suggest a general framework for global intellectual history.[25] Their overall hesitancy is all the more paradoxical since global histories are a theoretical enterprise by definition. Their practitioners cannot treat their parameters as though they were a given; the very choice of a timeframe, a spatial arena or a suitable unit of analysis requires reflection. None of them are sanctioned by tacit – that is, in many cases, national – conventions.[26] Even the use of categories of analysis or comparison – seemingly neutral, but ultimately European concepts such as class, dynasty, revolution or bourgeoisie – requires a measure of theoretical consideration.[27] Historians going global are also in need of conceptual

[23] Peer Vries, 'The Prospects of Global History: Personal Reflections of an Old Believer', *International Review of Social History* 64, 1 (2019), 111–21, here 119.

[24] Vries, 'The Prospects of Global History', 119.

[25] Martin Mulsow, 'A Reference Theory of Globalized Ideas', *Global Intellectual History* 2, 1 (2017), 67–87. See also the comprehensive application of this theory in Martin Mulsow, *Überreichweiten. Perspektiven einer globalen Ideengeschichte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022).

[26] Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Global History and Historical Sociology', in Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History*, 23–43, here 25.

[27] See, for instance, Christof Dejung et al. (eds.), *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Jeroen Duindam, 'A Plea for Global Comparison: Redefining Dynasty', *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019), 318–47. For a collection of basic essays in (global) conceptual history, see

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reflections since many of the classic analytical instruments commonly employed by historians require some reduction of complexity – to explain, to periodise or to compare. These tasks are naturally more difficult, and in need of theoretical reflection and guidance, in endeavours that deal with an unusual convolution and abundance of evidence and factors. Global historians might likewise want to engage in theoretical reflections on the matter of perspective and authorial vantage point in history writing: after all, global history's initial battle cry was a revisionist impulse, an assault on Eurocentrism, now widely considered a fundamental shortcoming of the modern social sciences and humanities at large.[28] But how to actually write a history without a centre or, indeed, one with a diversity of voices and vantage points, given that any narrative requires a minimum of coherence?

Historians adopting global perspectives would also be well advised to engage in critical epistemological introspection because of the tacit political assumptions underlying and informing their scholarly practice. Global history 'rests on the notion of global integration as a defining feature', as Sebastian Conrad put it;[29] its understanding of history is inseparable from the telos of continuously increasing global integration, one that leads to a state where 'everyone lives inside a global web, a unitary maelstrom of cooperation and competition'.[30] Any self-respecting historian, global or not, will firmly reject the association with teleology – by common understanding, one of the worst of historiographical sins – but it is hard to refute the reproach that a certain *telos* and sense of direction is implicit in every global historian's very research interest: in the spread of ideas, the making of connections and the formation of networks; in the shrinking of distance, 'entanglement' and 'transculturality'. Global history has recently come under critique – both from within and outside the field – for its sense of proportion, or, rather, its lack thereof: for overstating the significance of 'influences', both inward and outward, over internal causes.[31] These points are well taken; indeed, a penchant for overstating the weight of connections is a logical defect in a field devised to look for

Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global Conceptual History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[28] This is linked to extensive debates on the role of colonialism and racism in the history of the humanities. See Andrew Valls (ed.), *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Oliver Eberl, *Naturzustand und Barbarei: Begründung und Kritik staatlicher Ordnung im Zeichen des Kolonialismus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2021); and numerous studies on individual thinkers, such as Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi (eds.), *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[29] Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 101; or, as Conrad puts it elsewhere more subtly, 'it takes structured integration as a context, even when it is not the main topic'. 90, also 129.

[30] John R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003), 5.

[31] David A. Bell, 'Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution', *French Historical Studies* 37, 1 (2014), 1–24, here 23.

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evidence of these. Again, this is where method is bound to be useful, to rein in the imagination. Global historians using quantitative methods, for instance – formalising, at least in some basic sense, their arguments – would invariably weigh the relative importance of 'influences' more carefully, and endeavour to comprehend the reach and meaning of 'the global' in the past with greater precision. A quantitative approach might also help them define thresholds for 'globality', take the measure of mobility, and establish sounder criteria for speaking of 'integration', 'connectivity' and interrelatedness. At any rate, a certain hesitancy about methodology and theory, which may materialise from time to time as a backlash against excessive theorising, is detrimental to any field. To an approach like global history, with its particular need of conceptual, methodological and theoretical guidance, it is self-defeating.[32]

The present volume addresses global historians in particular for the obvious reason that many of the concepts and metaphors that are their daily bread – think of scale or distance – do not have the same relevance in other fields of history. And yet, much of what is said in the following pages should be of interest to historians more broadly. Of course, every historian ought to occasionally pause and reflect on the conceptual basis of their work: on the place of explanation – and its relation to narration – in it; on how to tackle the issue of *telos*, perspective and directionality in history writing or to establish robust, consensual criteria; on when they should speak of 'more', 'fewer' or 'better'. Indeed, in its particular need of theorisation, global history can also serve to challenge and add to theories of historiography more broadly. Narrativist theory, for instance, as discussed in the chapter on explanation by Jürgen Osterhammel in this volume, usually refers to very simple set-ups of more or less linear narratives within a limited spatial arena. The kinds of discontinuous stories connecting disparate venues that global historians contend with challenge and add complexity to conventional conceptions of narratives.[33] Reflections on periodisation, likewise discussed in this volume in the chapter by Christina Brauner, similarly benefit from global historical debates, given that the chronopolitics involved in our conceptions of time, temporality and temporal regimes are nowhere so evident as in colonial and imperial legacies. Or take the issue of teleology. Global history is not the only example of an approach that, after renouncing one form of teleology – in its case, that of Eurocentrism and nationalism[34] – has unwittingly adopted a new sense of direction: that of global integration. Indeed, since the late 1700s historians have again and again renounced one *telos* and replaced it with another, from

[32] For a sensible defence of theory, see Gary Wilder, 'From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effects of Historiographic Turns', *American Historical Review* 117, 3 (2012), 723–45.

[33] See Gabriele Lingelbach (ed.). *Narrative und Darstellungsweisen der Globalgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

[34] Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 3–4.

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eschatology to progress to nationalism. More recently, teleology has made another (re-)appearance in the form of an apocalyptic Anthropocene discourse and environmental histories premised upon the *telos* of continuous natural degradation.[35] This is not a call to foolishly deny climate change or environmental destruction and degradation, of course. It is to say, however, that other areas of historiography are also infused with a sense of direction and would be as well advised as global historians to critically reflect on whether this might not be to the detriment of their understanding of historical complexity and contingency.

The global perspective, in short, is not just a minor adjustment of focal length. Global history shares the basic logic and cognitive infrastructure of historical studies in general. It adds complications and theoretical challenges, however, that are of interest even to those who are unconcerned with or indifferent to global historians' empirical results. Microanalyses, studies that limit their purview to one village, town or country, and other 'discrete' forms of history have long injected fresh perspectives into historical theory, questioned the validity of paradigms, and challenged simplifications in their attention and sensitivity to agency, idiosyncrasy and detail. So, too, global and other relational forms of history can be a touchstone for historical theory.[36] Together, they allow us to test the premises and value of historical theory, its soundness and its scope.

Shifting Ground: Global History in the 2020s

A systematic rethinking of the global historian's craft is all the more important because the world is changing fast. Global history, though standing in an ancient tradition of world or 'general' history, is conceptually and theoretically a creature of the 1990s, the formative decade of theorisation and euphoria about globalisation.[37] At the time, the conclusion to half a century of political decolonisation, an ebb of international tensions, a bright economic outlook

[35] Such a 'declinist' perspective is not limited to prognostic books (e.g. David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* [New York: Tim Duggan, 2019]), but also informs substantial historical accounts such as Daniel R. Headrick, *Humans Versus Nature: A Global Environmental History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), and Laurent Testot, *Cataclysms: An Environmental History of Humanity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020). Historians have challenged environmental catastrophism for some time now from the perspective of Indigenous societies, who suffered its consequences long prior to western societies and were not equally culpable of it. For a critique of 'the Anthropocene as a teleological fact', see Zoe Todd, 'Indigenizing the Anthropocene', in Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds.), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environment and Epistemology* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 241–54, here 251.

[36] See, for instance, Francesca Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?', *California Italian Studies* 2, 1 (2011), http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/C321009025.

[37] A key text summarising the thinking of that decade is David Held et al., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

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and the rise of information technology seemed to open up the prospect of a borderless world, of irreversible, peaceful integration, and – with few voices dissenting[38] – of an end to ideological and religious cleavages. As a scholarly project of growing prestige and respectability, global history took shape in the context of that decade's sanguine outlook and in the spirit of 'one-worldism', palpable to this day in global historians' 'enthusiasm for movement, mobility, and circulation',[39] their basic vocabulary of effortless flows and their tacit belief in a perpetually increasing 'connectivity'.[40]

That kind of muted confidence can no longer inspire and support global history. There is no need to rehearse at length the long series of setbacks for cosmopolitan hopes in the twenty-first century: the rise of nationalist 'my-country-first'-ism and isolationism, the inability of 'global governance' to tame the selfishness of great powers, the use of information technology for digitised surveillance and cyber warfare rather than liberation or, indeed, the disintegrating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the attendant containment measures. This is not to say that globalisation has lost its relevance; in fact, on some levels, the world has become more integrated than ever, with political and economic shocks reverberating globally, or with a nuclear threat and climate catastrophe endangering all of humanity in a finite, closed world.[41] After all, the greatest possible globality is attained when there is nowhere to hide from disaster. What globalisation has lost is its innocence and any appearance of inherent goodness on the one hand, and all semblance of consistency, uniformity and dependability on the other. Rather, today's world reveals the dialectics of entanglement: not in terms of a simple see-saw between integration and disintegration, globalisation and deglobalisation, but in terms of multiple levels of integration standing in a possibly contradictory relation to one another and drifting apart. The pandemic, for instance, brought worldwide physical mobility to a standstill, unravelled global supply chains and revealed a dire lack of global solidarity in the distribution of vaccines, while at the same time enhancing digital communication on a global scale, not to mention showing us how the virus would leave no corner of the world unscathed. The war against

[38] From different political perspectives: Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

[39] Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 210.

[40] Gänger, 'Circulation'; Rockefeller, 'Flow'; Osterhammel, 'Globalifizierung'.

[41] See Sabine Höhler, *Spaceship Earth in the Environmental Age* (London: Routledge, 2017); for the background in intellectual and media history, see David Kuchenbuch, *Welt-Bildner: Arno Peters, Richard Buckminster Fuller und die Medien des Globalismus, 1940–2000* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2021). The future is no longer seen as 'open' and malleable but as a source of danger and doom, as recent discussions of historical time have argued. See, for instance, Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, *History in Times of Unprecedented Change: A Theory for the 21st Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

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Ukraine that started on 24 February 2022 caused the disruption of international grain markets and led to an unprecedented isolation of a major country, while simultaneously triggering a large refugee movement, an exceptionally unanimous global public opinion (at least in the arena of the United Nations),[42] and a global energy crisis. Pipelines transmogrified into weapons of economic strangulation, while interdependence lost its 'inter'-prefix and turned from seemingly reciprocal to hierarchically constraining.

If global history is the history for our time, what happens when the times are a-changing, as Christina Brauner puts it in this volume? The 1990s created the specific historical conditions for the invention of epistemic categories such as 'the global', 'connectivity', 'flow' and 'circulation'. By the 2020s, the historical conditions that brought about this sort of 'global talk'[43] have changed and, in some measure, vanished. Recent developments are invalidating several of the assumptions and images that continue to inform global historical discourse and require us to rethink it. It is imperative, for one thing, to reflect on the value judgements implicit in our writing and terminology: our idea of globalisation as a benign process, our obsession with movement, so palpable especially in the pioneering years of global history, or the ultimately positive connotations long attached to terms such as 'connectivity', 'flow' and 'circulation'.[44] Recent experiences such as refugee crises, the pandemic, climate catastrophe and nuclear threat remind us not only of the unpleasant, toxic and lethal side of global 'connectivity', but also drive home the fact that 'connectivity' is not necessarily about free choice, inclusion and unrestricted agency. It can befall us, haunt and torment us against our will. Global historians will no longer speak of connectivity, circulation and mobility with quite the same ease and innocence; different, perhaps less anthropocentric semantics – 'contagion', even the much-maligned 'diffusion'[45] – might well have to be added to their vocabulary to express global experiences in the past and the present.

The association of the modern era with unchecked and unprecedented mobility, long held to be an iron law in global historical scholarship, is also

[42] On the concept of a global public, see Valeska Huber and Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Introduction: Global Publics', in Valeska Huber and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Global Publics: Their Power and Their Limits, 1870–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–60.

[43] Paul A. Kramer, 'How Did the World Become Global? Transnational History, Beyond Connection', *Reviews in American History* 49, 1 (2021), 119–41, here 133.

[44] For a critique of what has been called 'happy transculturalism', see, for instance, Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, 'Understanding Transculturalism: Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna in Conversation', in Fahim Amir et al. (ed.), *Transcultural Modernisms* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2013), 23–33, here 31–2.

[45] Damon Centola, *How Behavior Spreads: The Science of Complex Contagion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Adam Kucharski, *The Rules of Contagion: Why Things Spread – and Why They Stop* (London: Profile Books, 2020). The concept of 'diffusion' has been successfully employed in the study of technological globalisation; see, for example, James W. Cortada, *The Digital Flood: The Diffusion of Information Technology Across the US,*

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shaken. This is not to deny an increase in the level of migration after 1850 on account of advances in transportation technology;[46] if mobility can be banned or made next to impossible from one day to the next by governmental strategies for disease containment, however, 'acceleration' is a changing variable rather than a force of nature. The premise of growing integration, likewise, is not only bordering on the trivial: global population growth and improved technical means of transport and communication will inevitably lead to a proliferation of contacts; our present experience makes that basic belief untenable. Indeed, one might consider replacing the concept of 'globalisation' or 'global integration' with approaches that take into account the various levels of integration and their possibly contradictory relation to one another – to move to a level beneath that undifferentiated macro-process and 'framing device', as Jan C. Jansen puts it in this volume, by thinking in terms of 'heterodox' global processes with varying directionalities, velocities and reaches; even cyclical, contingent and chaotic processes that encompass expansion and contraction, termination and reversal.[47] Not only must global historians pay more heed to 'global imaginaries' expressive not of cosmopolitan yearnings but of fear and endangerment from the world; they also ought to consider more seriously the possibility of past worlds that were 'devoid of connectivity' – idiosyncratic, asynchronous and insular.[48] At any rate, when the 'facts change',[49] conventions of thought and language must be re-examined.

Global history cannot be a history out of sync with the present, to be sure; in some measure, however, it must dissociate and distance itself, not just from the 1990s, but also from its presentism, broadly speaking.[50] This is not to deny history's necessary relation to the present nor the fact of its invariably changing

Europe, and Asia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and this path-breaking study: Vernon W. Ruttan, *Technology, Growth and Development: An Induced Innovation Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[46] Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, 'The Mobility Transition Revisited, 1500–1900: What the Case of Europe Can Offer to Global History', *Journal of Global History* 4, 3 (2009), 347–77.

[47] Peter Laslett, 'Social Structural Time: An Attempt at Classifying Types of Social Change by Their Characteristic Paces', in Tom Schuller and Michael Young (eds.), *The Rhythms of Society* (London: Routledge, 1988), 17–36; Wolfgang Knöbl, 'After Modernization: Der Globalisierungsbegriff als Platzhalter und Rettungsanker der Sozialwissenschaften', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 68, 2 (2020), 279–318, here 313; Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Soziologie vor der Geschichte: Zur Kritik der Sozialtheorie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022); Andreas Wimmer and Reinhart Kössler (eds.), *Understanding Change: Models, Methodologies, and Metaphors* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[48] Giorgio Riello, 'The World in a Book: The Creation of the Global in Sixteenth-Century European Costume Books', *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019), 281–317, here 286, 295, 302, 316. On early modern global imaginaries, see also C. A. Bayly, '"Archaic" and "Modern" Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750–1850', in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 47–73, here 52–54.

[49] Tony Judt, *When the Facts Change: Essays 1995–2010* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

[50] François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and the Experience of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

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with the times. But a global history less reliant on concepts with evident expiry dates, more aware of the historicity of its own premises, more careful and conscious in its use of categories, would promise to be more impervious to the winds of change. It is likely to be less of a 'trend' and more of an approach or, indeed, a set of methods, in history that is here to stay. The present volume does not presume to foretell what global history will look like many years from now; we are no astrologers. Rather, it is about what it *might* look like. Many historians shy away from the prescriptive or normative, and for good reason. In an academic world of proliferating 'turns' and competing trends, blowing one's own trumpet too loudly tastes of the vulgar. At the same time, assessing the present state of a scholarly field will never be an entirely neutral or unbiased activity. Inasmuch as ours is a critical exercise, it is bound, and indeed designed, to uncover failings and weaknesses, reveal room for improvement and avenues for further exploration. Some amount of gate-keeping is indispensable for any line of scholarship. Again, our critique is no swansong farewell to a failed promise – quite the contrary. We simply believe that academic fields improve through the intellectual exercise of destabilising and stabilising, of disassembling and reconstructing, their premises, terms and concepts. To us, global history is a methodological approach that is teeming with possibilities, with stories to be told. We criticise it not because we think it has 'had its moment'[51] – incidentally, the very Jeremy Adelman, to whom that assertion is attributed, never thought it had[52] – but because in dissociating it from the moment it is bound to live longer, to evolve and to thrive. Any survey of the present by necessity points to the future. The present volume takes such a path of cautious normativity.

Rethinking the Premises

In an ideal world, one would assemble a group of specialists and charge them with compiling a multi-volume dictionary of 'key terms in global history', an endeavour along the lines of Reinhart Koselleck and his co-editors' encyclopedic, eight-volume project of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Basic Concepts in History), an indispensable tool for any German-speaking historian.[53] The present book, inevitably, falls short of such comprehensive ambition. Rather, it

[51] Adelman, 'What Is Global History Now'.

[52] See the response by Jeremy Adelman to Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History* 13, 1 (2018), 1–21, here 18.

[53] Otto Brunner et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 7 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–97); see also the extensively revised English translation of a French work: Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

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offers a selection of concepts and themes that, we hope, strikes a balance between coherence and diversity.

The instruments at the disposal of the historian can be arranged on a scale between precision and vagueness, between 'hard' methods and 'soft' visions. Some of the topics in this volume are located at the 'hard' end of the spectrum: comparison, explanation, periodisation and quantification are well-established set-pieces in the methodology of history and the social sciences. They are canvassed in Part I, which is devoted to methodological forms of inquiry and argumentation in global history. Jürgen Osterhammel's chapter discusses the particular difficulties that explanation, or the asking of why-questions – invariably reliant on a certain reduction of complexity – poses for a historiography dealing with an unusual plurality and abundance of evidence. Explanation seems to have somewhat gone out of fashion; many global historians prefer storytelling and colourful narratives to explanation and analysis. No narrative goes without deliberation, however; even the most compelling story contains an explanation, albeit an implicit one that does not reveal its premises, selection and contingency. Closely related to the challenges attendant on explanation are those related to comparison on a global scale, a topic discussed by Alessandro Stanziani. Stanziani dwells on the difficulties of choosing 'neutral' parameters for comparison, on the discourse of singularity and other implicit comparisons, and on forgoing or finding 'other' models when fundamentally different entities are being brought together for the purpose of noting similarities and differences. Every comparison requires a meta-language, an exercise in commensurability, that will commonly be more intricate on a global scale, and thus in particular need of conceptual reflection and guidance.

Questions of time and temporality, too, addressed in Christina Brauner's chapter, pose a challenge for global history. Brauner discusses the difficulties of periodising on a global scale and with a claim to universal validity, given the diversity of temporalities, temporal regimes and cultures of time in the world of the past. Take the much-debated concept of the 'global Middle Ages', for instance. Is it a way of ensuring contemporaneousness and inclusiveness – a place within history for all – or a mere continuation of Eurocentric pretentiousness? This part concludes with a chapter by Pim de Zwart on quantitative approaches in global history – in other words, on arguing with numbers: a topic properly within the remit of economic historians but with much wider repercussions. The rise of the digital humanities is bound to bring numbers to the fore; we might as well dispel whatever qualms we have about them and learn to employ them with a view to crafting a more robust form of global history.

Other topics in the volume are nearer the 'soft' end of the spectrum in that they are devoted to metaphors and even verbal images (*Sprachbilder*) rather than sharply defined concepts and categories. First in line is, of course, 'the

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global' – a notion invoked time and again in academic as well as popular global history writing but which rarely receives the careful consideration it urgently requires.[54] As Peer Vries has pointed out, the terms 'global' and 'globalisation' may well be appealing to some practitioners in their very fuzziness, suggestiveness and vagueness. Their alluring imprecision, however, precludes a vigilant assessment of their potential, on the one hand, and of the analytical limitations and constraints of a global perspective, on the other.[55] In his chapter, Sujit Sivasundaram gauges the meaning of 'the global', by all accounts global history's most basic concept, stressing its constructedness and contingency: how the globe is not a given but a historic artifice – the only given is the earth, incidentally an oblate spheroid rather than globular – and how the meaning of and associations with globality have changed over time, in relation to our historical actors' cosmos and its geographical, social and communicational limits.[56] Sivasundaram's chapter adds to and is complementary to debates in other fields that have sought to come to terms with 'the global', such as sociological systems-theory[57] and international relations discourses.[58]

Closely related to 'the global' is another image: that of the 'sphere', with its implied ability to regulate access through both inclusion and exclusion. Global historians tend to reject a 'container' type view of the past which is often seen as emblematic of old-fashioned methodological nationalism.[59] Still, some kind of structuration is indispensable, with spheres as an interesting candidate, as Valeska Huber shows in her chapter. It is one of many examples global historians might consider taking up in order to diversify their vocabulary. The last chapter in Part II concerns another fundamental, much-used concept in global historical discourse: that of 'scale'. Dániel Margócsy's chapter questions both the self-evidence of the concept – the very idea of 'levels of analysis' – as well as the all-too-entrenched dichotomies of micro–macro or global–local it has entailed; it points, at the same time, to the concept's

[54] For a similar critique, see Duncan Bell, 'Making and Taking Worlds', in Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 254–79, here 256.

[55] Vries, 'The Prospects of Global History', 116; Cooper's comments on 'globalisation' remain indispensable: Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 91–112.

[56] See Christoph Markschies (ed.), *Atlas der Weltbilder* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2011). On the politics of 'global speak', see Olaf Bach, *Die Erfindung der Globalisierung. Entstehung und Wandel eines zeitgeschichtlichen Grundbegriffs* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2013); Sabine Selchow, *Negotiations of the 'New World': The Omnipresence of 'Global' as a Political Phenomenon* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017).

[57] Rudolf Stichweh, 'World Society', in Ludger Kühnhardt and Tilman Mayer (eds.), *The Bonn Handbook of Globality* (Cham: Springer, 2019), vol. 1, 515–26.

[58] Jens Bartelson, *Visions of World Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jens Bartelson, 'The Social Construction of Globality', *International Political Sociology* 4, 3 (2010), 219–235.

[59] See, for instance, Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 4.

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usefulness if handled carefully, premised partly on recent theoretical reflections in geography. Like Sivasundaram's or Stanziani's contributions, Margócsy's study retraces the semantic evolution of the concept in question. Historians, after all, even when they engage in methodological reflections, are unable to abandon their habitual interest and expertise in change, to good effect.

Contributions in Part III expose unquestioned 'configurations',[60] biases and assumptions that guide global historians' work and put them up for careful inspection. Jan C. Jansen's chapter reflects critically on global histories' tacit directionality, especially the implicit assumption of a continuously growing global integration. Rather than passing judgement on a historiographical sin or seeking to refute the reproach that a certain *telos* and sense of direction is implicit in global historians' thinking and writing, the chapter turns the debate about teleology into one about the theoretical foundations of history – especially, but not exclusively, global history – at large. It uses teleology as a stimulus to think creatively and provocatively about direction, coherence and processes in the writing of history more broadly. As does Jeremy Adelman, whose chapter is concerned with another form of *telos* in the global history literature: the alleged demise of distance in the modern era. Global history is often defined as the historical study of objects that are separated by, but that cover and overcome sizeable distance, both geographical and cultural; yet its practitioners rarely reflect on distance as a subject and as a narrative. Adelman's chapter not only exposes how the collapse and surmounting of physical distance in the modern era has entailed other forms of (social, legal, racial) distance, but also canvasses ideas about strangeness and familiarity, the 'arc of history' and distance as both variable, and effect more broadly.

Stefanie Gänger's chapter, in turn, is concerned with the implicit, unspoken assumptions that guide and inform global histories that consider aspects of the material world. Its particular interest is in the grounds on which historians associate matter and material culture with a specific scale, context or level of observation: with world-making, the global scale and 'connectivity', but also with the concrete, the particular and the intimate, the latter presumably a substrate of their own societies' socioreligious texture. The last chapter in the volume, written by Dominic Sachsenmaier, examines yet another unquestioned assumption – that of global history's downright renunciation of 'centrism'. Surveying Eurocentrism, Sinocentrism and other forms of centrism, the chapter unmasks the illusion of a non-centred vantage point of uncontaminated authorial oversight. It employs the concept of centrism as a lens to reflect on perspective, viewpoint and the possibility and desirability of writing histories without a centre more broadly. The piece ultimately relates to a political question: if any history requires a narrative gradient

[60] On the concept of (con)figuration, see Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 128–33.

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or centre, is global history unavoidably related to hegemonies inside and outside of global academia – European, US-American and more recently Chinese?

Many more concepts and images would merit the kind of reflection that this volume attempts to offer. One of its main purposes is to inspire and encourage further research and reflection along the lines suggested in it. We could have included contributions on the concepts of 'network', 'periphery', 'chain' – as in commodity chain, for instance – or 'diffusion', the latter one of many naturalistic metaphors in global history. Much remains to be said about the idea of 'context' – particularly the deceptive self-evidence of a 'global context', as the context of all contexts, in which events or processes tend to be 'embedded'[61] – and the idea of 'order', or, indeed, orders. The idea of connections and connectivity would certainly have been worth a chapter, too; but then, that topic is so ubiquitous and obvious that it is taken up at many places across the volume.[62] A few more classical issues, models and ideal-types in global and other relational forms of history surely deserve a closer look, such as 'agency', 'structure' or the complex field of 'translation', which is both a designation for a precise linguistic operation and a general metaphor for intercultural conversion and metamorphosis.

Further contributions in our project's spirit will hopefully transcend the linguistic, geographical and historiographical limitations of our volume, which, except for Sachsenmaier's chapter, centres on material written in Western European languages. Some future collection of essays might broaden the purview to a worldwide perspective, inquiring, for instance, into East African views of 'the global', Polynesian concepts of time or Japanese constructions of maritime space.[63] Its authors and editors, who might not be Europeans as we mostly are, will hopefully be reflective of their own sociocultural premises, too, and not give in to a very European and modern longing for originality, 'unchanging certainty' and 'endangered authenticities',[64] nor, after renouncing the telos inherent in Eurocentrism and global integration, succumb to a new sense of direction, hoping to find radically different ontologies and fundamental alterity out there. Indeed, a thoroughgoing 'decolonisation' of the historiographical vocabulary is difficult, if not impossible, for the modern era. Students of history

[61] This topic has attracted the attention of the *doyen* of intellectual history: J. G. A. Pocock, 'On the Unglobality of Contexts: Cambridge Methods and the History of Political Thought', *Global Intellectual History* 4, 1 (2019), 1–14.

[62] For interesting suggestions on various forms, functions and effects of connectivity in other fields, see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[63] See Richard Reid, 'Time and Distance: Reflections on Local and Global History from East Africa', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (2019), 253–72; Warwick Anderson et al. (eds), *Pacific Futures: Past and Present* (Honululu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018); Takashi Shiraishi, *Empire of the Seas: Thinking about Asia* (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2021).

[64] Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 36, 51–3, 118.

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outside Europe, North America and Australia – the archetypal 'West' – nowadays discuss the same authors, regardless of their geographical location and cultural background, notwithstanding an asymmetry in the business of academic translations that leads to a very uneven reception. What is more, not every concept forged in Western historiography is hopelessly tainted and untransferable. Questions of closeness and distance or the dichotomy between materiality and spirituality are common to many cultural contexts.[65] So too is an understanding of the temporal form of historical change; indeed, the study of temporalities is a particularly fruitful field in this regard.[66] Explanation, comparison and counting, though they can be implemented in varying ways, are cognitive procedures of unbounded generality.[67] The *logic* of using sources, constructing historical arguments and making bias transparent, too, is not culturally specific. This is not to say that future historians should not historicise, 'provincialise' and contextualise their concepts and assumptions; rather, that they should do so without succumbing to the illusion that there is radical alterity, purity and authenticity to be found out there.

Global history has come under attack from several angles. The more fundamental criticism has come not so much from within their own global community of scholars, but from two external factions: from historians who object to decentring, relating and comparing their national histories for fear of diminishing the stature of the nation-state on the one hand,[68] and, on the other, from postcolonial and decolonial scholarship increasingly reluctant about putting the former victims of imperial violence and exploitation within the same analytical framework as the perpetrators.[69] Both lines of attack deny the universality of

[65] On the premise that materiality is that which ought to be transcended, the merely apparent 'behind which lies that which is real', see Daniel Miller, 'Materiality: An Introduction', in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Materiality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–50, here 1.

[66] See, as a model study, Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, 'Temporalities in Southeast Asian Historiography', *History and Theory* 59, 2 (2020), 210–26.

[67] See Angelika Epple and Walter Erhart, 'Practices of Comparing. A New Research Agenda between Typological and Historical Approaches', in Angelika Epple et al. (eds.), *Practices of Comparing: Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020), 11–38. Though not ambitiously 'global', a seminal collection is Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *The Force of Comparison: A New Perspective on Modern European History and the Contemporary World* (New York: Berghahn, 2019). A hotbed of methodological advances in comparison is now ethnology/anthropology: see Michael Schnegg and Edward D. Lowe (eds.), *Comparing Cultures: Innovations in Comparative Ethnography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[68] See, for instance, the criticism brought forth against Patrick Boucheron (ed.), *Histoire mondiale de la France* (Paris: Seuil, 2017); the wider debate is aptly summarised in Damiano Matasci, 'L'histoire mondiale: Un modèle historiographique en question', *Revue Suisse d'Histoire* 71, 2 (2021), 333–46, here 335–6.

[69] The relationship between global history and postcolonial studies would have been an additional topic of great complexity given the numerous positions subsumed under those general labels. For a good juxtaposition of postcolonialism and globalisation studies, see Nicolas Bancel, *Le postcolonialisme* (Paris: Que sais-je?, 2019), 110–16.

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the human experience and the existence of a common ground that makes it basically possible to converse, relate and compare anything to anything else. Though methodologically and conceptually a creature of the 1990s, global history has deep roots in older forms of world or general historical writing that comprehend the world in its widest conceivable extent as it was known, or knowable, at a given place and time. General history – as in the Arabic tradition, for instance – is a history that transcends the historian's 'we-group'; a history of Us *and* Them.[70] Unlike world history, which starts out from the division of humanity into units – civilisations, religious ecumenes, empires or world regions – global history stands in that 'general' tradition in its deliberate de-emphasising of units or, where they cannot be ignored, in regarding them as 'produced' or constructed rather than as given.[71] If the field takes that legacy and approach seriously, there is no fundamental obstacle to a global conversation about concepts, images and methods. Indeed, global historians ought to stand their ground on this. Not only is their approach one that allows us to decide which metaphors, forms of inquiry and ideas to dismiss on the grounds of their utter idiosyncrasy and which to retain, or take up, because they are sufficiently general or ample; their relational approach also allows for a global conversation that we desperately need today. Some will object that a proper dialogue is impossible when reception and influence between Western and other countries remain asymmetrical.[72] And, to be sure, the distribution of resources – from journal licences to visiting fellowships – is deeply unequal, as is that of academic freedom from political, ideological and religious pressure, vital for a kind of history that, from the point of view of rulers and guardians of orthodoxy, refuses to be 'useful' in any obvious way. While there can be no doubt that imbalance remains an obstacle to relations and exchange, however, it is also the best reason to nurture them; relations can, at best, help redress imbalance. To resort, once more, to cautious normativity: global history is, and ought to be, a 'general' kind of history; it can and should be a history for all of humanity, an approach through which people relate to each other.

[70] Subrahmanyam, *On the Origins of Global History.*
[71] See, for instance, Olstein, *Thinking History Globally*, 51.
[72] Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier, 'Introduction: Global History, Translation and Semantic Changes', in Pernau and Sachsenmaier, *Global Conceptual History*, 1–28, here 17.

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