

Scenes from a Marriage. African History and Global History¹

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ABSTRACTS

Der Artikel fragt vor dem Hintergrund der Entwicklung der Geschichtsschreibung zu Afrika, ob Globalgeschichte als der jüngste „Turn“ in der Geschichte historiographischer Moden angesehen werden kann: Wie stark prägen globalhistorische Perspektiven das Schreiben der afrikanischen Geschichte, und wie stark ist Afrika in diesen Perspektiven sichtbar? Der Beitrag verweist in diesem Zusammenhang auf eine lange Tradition, Afrika als Teil globalhistorischer Entwicklungen zu verorten, wie das etwa bereits W.E.B. Du Bois in seinem 1946 publizierten Essay *The World and Africa* getan hat. Er hebt aber auch hervor, dass Historiker in Afrika globalgeschichtlichen Ansätzen vor allem skeptisch gegenüberstehen. Sie erscheinen als ein weiterer Ausdruck westlicher Hegemonie in der Geschichtsschreibung. Afrika werde vor allem als Ort des Schreckens und Leidens präsentiert, weil der Kontinent in der Globalhistoriographie vor allem über den Sklavenhandel präsent sei. Überdies würden in der Globalgeschichte lokale Quellen und Sprachen marginalisiert.

Against the backdrop of the development of Africanist historiography over the last fifty years, this article asks whether global history could be seen as the latest turn in African history: To what extent does the emergent field of global history shape African history, and is shaped

- 1 This piece builds upon a number of articles on Africanist historiography that I have published over the last years. See, e.g., A. Eckert, *Ethnizität und Nation in der Geschichtsschreibung zu Afrika seit 1960*, in: *Comparativ* 11 (2001) 4, pp. 17–30; Idem, *Fitting Africa into World History: A Historiographical Exploration*, in: E. Fuchs and B. Stuchtey (eds.), *Writing World History, 1800–2000*, Oxford 2003, pp. 255–270; Idem, *The Burden of Peculiarity: History and Historical Thought in Africa*, in: P. Duara, V. Murphy, and A. Sartori (eds.), *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, Oxford 2014, pp. 321–333; Idem, *Afrika in der Welt. Afrikanische Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, in: M. Wildt (ed.), *Geschichte denken. Perspektiven auf die Geschichtsschreibung heute*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 131–148; Idem, *Area Studies and the Development of Global Labor History*, in: U. Bosma and K. Hofmeester (eds.), *Marcel van der Linden: The Life Work of a Labour Historian*, Leiden 2018, pp. 156–173. For the quote: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro*, New York 2002 (1915), pp. 23 f.

by it? This contribution refers to a long tradition of placing Africa in the long sweep of global history, as exemplified by W.E.B. Du Bois 1946 essay *The World and Africa*. On the other hand, it emphasizes, that to historians *in* Africa, global history appears to be yet another western imposition on the writing of history, that stresses Africa as a site of damage – because Africa is mainly prominent in global history writings through references to the slave trade – and it devalues local knowledge and sources.

1.

“Africa is at once one of the romantic and the most tragic of continents... There are those, nevertheless, who would write universal history and leave out Africa.” When W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the fathers of Pan-Africanism, lodged this complaint, Africa was widely regarded as a continent without history. Things have considerably changed since then. However, much historiography still privileges states over all other forms of human connection and, furthermore, puts forward a specific idea of “progress” that inevitably leaves Africans aside, who seem to lack some important characteristic necessary to attain what is otherwise “universal.”² The ongoing pretensions of “western” intellectuals to set forth a “universal” truth, wherein Africa finds little space, has provoked a number of African intellectuals to go so far as to dismiss “history” as something inseparable from its imperialist origins.³ The academic discipline of history that was shaped in the nineteenth century is clearly a European product. Still, rejecting “history” as a hopeless imperialist endeavour would not only reinforce the old prejudice that Africans have no history, but doing so would add to this the idea that Africans don’t even want to have one.⁴ “Africa” is in fact at least partly a category that derived from the slave trade and colonization, and partly a counter-category that has its origins in the diaspora. Africa, as Mudimbe forcefully emphasizes, is an invention and caught within its colonial archive.⁵ “One never quite gets away from the colonial construction of African history,” Cooper argues, “but one can engage, challenge, and refashion it. And this is done in any uneasy, ill-defined space, between professionalized research and public debate.”⁶

It would thus be wrong to overemphasize the division between academic history and other varieties of narrating of the past. The debate about history within Africa is often not an academic one, but something in which journalists, artists, and writers participate; wall writing and music make it part of everyday life.⁷ Equally one should not make the

2 F. Cooper, *Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians*, in: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34 (1999) 2, p. 298.

3 M. Diouf, *Des Historiens et des histoires, pourquoi faire? L'histoire africaine entre l'état et les communautés*, in: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34 (2000) 2, pp. 337–374. A sharp and powerful critique of academic history as an imperialist enterprise was also voiced by numerous South Asian historians. See, e.g., V. Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, Delhi 2003.

4 Cooper, *Africa's Past*, p. 299.

5 V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington 1988.

6 Cooper, *Africa's Past*, p. 308.

7 See K. Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture*, Bloomington 1997; Idem, *A History of African Popular*

division too sharp between African forms of representing an authentically African past and European ways of representing a subordinated African past. Different representational strategies affect each other. Europe features quite prominently in many African “traditions,” while European history does not belong to Europeans alone.⁸ Moreover it is very problematic to fix a clear boundary between “foreign” and “indigenous” historical thought and historiography in Africa based upon criteria such as descent, skin colour or place of activity. The production of African history has always been a multicultural enterprise, albeit one characterized by hierarchies. In any case, the emergence of African history, as Steven Feierman puts it, “has changed our understanding of general history, and of Europe’s place in the world... It is no longer possible to defend the position that historical processes among non-European peoples can be seen as the consequence of all-encompassing influences emerging from a dominant European center.”⁹

One of the most striking features of the academic production on African history today is that it is largely produced and published outside the continent. During the 1960s, when African history as an academic field was gaining momentum, there seemed little question that the centre of intellectual action in this field was Africa itself. The enthusiasm of the beginning rapidly declined. Political and economic problems soon seriously plagued most independent African governments. This started to have massive effects on the knowledge production in African countries. Historical publishing suffered grievously from closed frontiers, restricted currencies, paper shortages, and impecunious students. The economic decline in Africa went along with a growing mood of self-criticism among Africanist historians (in and outside Africa), fuelled by the disillusionment about the political situation and the limits of methodological innovation, for instance in the realm of “oral traditions.”¹⁰ On the other hand, in the mid-1970s, African history, as the history of other non-European areas, had established itself at least in some European countries as well as in the US as a part of historiography that could not easily be neglected any more. Two major multi-volume projects – the Cambridge History of Africa and the UNESCO General History of Africa were well under way, the *Journal of African History* ranked high among academic history journals, and – especially in the UK and the United States – numerous historians of Africa occupied lifetime positions at universities.¹¹

Culture, New York 2018; M. Moorman, *Intonation: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to Recent Times*, Athens, OH 2008; K. M. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, Chicago 2002; H. Charton and M.-A. Fouéré (eds.), Dossier: Héro nationaux et pères de la nation en Afrique, in: *Vingtième Siècle* 118 (2013), pp. 3–100.

8 Cooper, *Africa’s Past*.

9 S. Feierman, *African Histories and the Dissolution of World History*, in: R. Bates et al. (eds.), *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contribution of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, Chicago 1993, p. 182.

10 A widely discussed critique at the time was T.O. Ranger, *Towards a Usable Past*, in: C. Fyfe (ed.), *African Studies since 1945*, Harlow 1976, pp. 17–30.

11 For the British case see, among others, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (ed.), *The Emergence of African History at British Universities*, Oxford 1995; for the United States, see R. Ferreira, *The Institutionalization of African Studies in the United States: Origin, Consolidation and Transformation*, in: *Revista Brasileira de História* 30 (2010), pp. 71–88. For a very critical assessment of African studies in the US as characterized by white privilege, see now J.M. Allman, *#HerskovitsMustFall? A Mediation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968*, in: *African*

Much has been written about the institutional breakdown of historical research in Africa that started in the 1970s and was shaped by the oil shocks, structural adjustment, and increasingly repressive political regimes. A brain drain, often more a brain push began, and those academics who stayed had to perform two or more jobs to survive. History writing has material foundations, too, and these rapidly faded away. Academic history journals once published in Ibadan, Dakar or Nairobi disappeared. Lack of access to foreign books and journals (that require hard currency to import) further hindered academic history writing, something that could not be redressed by the World Wide Web. The decline of academic historiography made other forms of producing history and historical memory more visible.¹² Local histories, written and published by non-academic historians, constitute a rapidly expanding genre in contemporary Africa. These local histories pursue a variety of agendas. They construct or reconstruct local and communal identities, often affected by rapid social change. Often they write history as part of cultural and political struggles. And all of them, sometimes openly, sometimes more implicitly, attempt to place local communities on the map of the world at large. Still, the most important audience of local histories is local, at least in terms of intensity of reception and response. These written accounts of history and culture interact in many ways with performances, fictional literature, objects of visual art, and contemporary studio photography.¹³ There is probably the danger of overgeneralizing the crisis of academic historiography. Some history departments in post-Apartheid South Africa, in Ghana, Senegal, or Kenya have produced excellent scholars but many of them especially outside South Africa suffer from low salaries, heavy teaching loads, and few research incentives. As a whole, history as an academic discipline has lost much of its standing within the universities, but also among politicians and a wider public. As a school subject, it is increasingly marginalized.¹⁴ Over the last 50 years, academic Africanist historiography outside Africa and especially in the United States has been subject to fads, as any other field of history. African history as an academic field came into being at a time when nationalist movements appeared to have triumphed in most of Africa, and historians of Africa all over the world acted like a “Committee of Concerned Scholars for a Free Africa”¹⁵ and wanted to write histories

Studies Review 62 (2019) 3, pp. 6–39. Instructive and – sometimes, not always – entertaining accounts of the establishment of African history in the UK and the US are provided by autobiographies of its main protagonists. See J. Vansina, *Living with Africa*, Madison, WI 1994; R. Oliver, *In the Realms of Gold. Pioneering in African History*, Madison, WI 1997; J.D. Fage, *To Africa and Back*, Birmingham 2002; P.D. Curtin, *On the Fringes of History. A Memoir*, Athens, OH 2005. There are much fewer autobiographical accounts of the first generation of African historians of Africa, but see J.F. Ade Ajayi, *African History at Ibadan*, in: Kirk-Greene, *Emergence*, pp. 91–106; B.A. Ogot, *Three Decades of Historical Studies in East Africa, 1949–1977*, in: *Kenya Historical Review* 6 (1978) 1/2, pp. 22–33.

12 See M. Diawara, B.C. Lategan, and J. Rüsen (eds.), *Historical Memory in Africa. Dealing with the Past, Reaching for the Future in an Intercultural Context*, New York 2010.

13 A. Harneit-Sievers (ed.), *A Place in the World. New Local Historiographies from Africa and South-Asia*, Leiden 2002.

14 D. Bentrovato, *Learning to Live Together in Africa through History Education*, Göttingen 2017, pp. 13–14, laments “history’s apparent general loss of importance as a stand-alone subject in the context of its increasingly widespread integration into broader disciplines, notably social sciences.”

15 J. Lonsdale, *States and Social Processes in Africa. A Historiographical Survey*, in: *African Studies Review* 24 (1981), p. 143.

useful for nation-building. African historians began to divide the continent's history into "pre-colonial", "colonial", and "post-colonial" eras. According to this division, the first and the last were marked by the autonomy of African societies. The first was a period of kingdoms, empires, chiefdoms, village councils, systems of kinship; the last was a period of nation-states, each with its own flag, passport, currency, its seat in the United Nations and many more international organizations, and its claims to regulate and to tax production and commerce within its national borders. The Nigerian historian Jacob F. Ade Ajayi famously called the colonial period "one episode in the continuous flow of African history". His argument came directly from a nationalist conception of political life: he wanted to stress the direct connection of "modern" African states to an "authentic past", allowing the new rulers of Nigeria, Tanzania or Senegal to assume the legitimacy of the kings and elders of the past.¹⁶

At the time, anticolonial resistance and pre-colonial history were regarded as "genuine African history." On the other hand, studies of the colonial period were considered to be a return to old-fashioned imperial history.¹⁷ In terms of method, oral history seemed to provide a real "African" alternative to written sources.¹⁸ It was a widely shared conviction that in order to analyse and use oral sources adequately in their writing, historians of Africa needed to be at home with the local languages and cultures in which those sources were encoded. Otherwise, the historians' use of them would be not only incomplete but also often even misleading. African history appeared to be an exciting field for pioneers, with a wide-open future and much work to be done: "At the moment ... historians have really only just begun to piece together the most basic narratives... only when we have many more detailed historical investigations – and many more historians at home – can we begin to understand the African past to the extent that we understand the past of other parts of the world."¹⁹

Two decades later, the preferences had completely changed: no resistance studies, hardly any pre-colonial history except for the slave trade. Colonialism was in, and the colonizers came back into the picture to an extent that would have been unthinkable in the earlier years of African history. Once it became clear that nation-building projects were not

16 J.F. Ade Ajayi, *The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism*, in: T. O. Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes in African History*, Nairobi 1968, p. 149; F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940. The Past of the Present*, 2nd edn, New York 2019, p. 19; B. Jewsiewicki and V.Y. Mudimbe, *Africans' Memories and Contemporary History of Africa*, in: Idem (eds.), *History Making in Africa*, Middletown 1993, p. 9, called this model of periodization a "perspective of three eras... From almost immobile glorious traditions, one completely overlooks the colonial blemish and passes directly to the time of independence."

17 F. Cooper, *Conflict and Connections. Rethinking African Colonial History*, in: *American Historical Review* 99 (1994) 4, pp. 1516–1545.

18 The path-breaking work on oral tradition in Africa was J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition. A Study in Historical Methodology*, London 1965. A good introduction to this field and its methods is offered by B. Cooper, *Oral Sources and the Challenge of African History*, in: J.E. Philips (ed.), *Writing African History*, Rochester NY 2005, pp. 191–215. The classic, highly romanticized praise of "oral traditions" as "African archives" or "libraries" comes from Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ in a speech at UNESCO in 1960: "When an old man dies, a library burns down". Quoted in: R.A. Austen, *Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ: From a Colonial to a Postcolonial African Voice: Amkoullel, l'enfant peul*, in: *Research in African Literatures* 31 (2000) 3, p. 2.

19 J. D. Fage, *History*, in: R. A. Lystad (ed.), *The African World. A Survey of Social Research*, London 1965, pp. 53, 56.

providing the ideological basis for a new Africa, scholars became more interested in the constraints: on the institutional and ideological constructs that colonial rule imposed on Africans and on the particular ways in which Africa's incorporation into the world economy subordinated it to outside forces, before, during, and after colonial rule.²⁰ Labour history boomed in the 1970s and '80s. Africanist historians re-interpreted the colonial period as a period when capitalist modes of production were introduced to Africa. A number of comprehensive collective volumes were published, each representing a specific pattern of African labour history.²¹ The most vibrant historiography on labour could be found, not surprisingly, in South Africa, where wage labour played a comparatively important role.²²

Yet, by the turn of the twentieth century African labour history was in a deep decline and is now only slowly reviving.²³ Cultural history in many variations dominated the field in the 1990s and 2000s, but currently there does not seem to be a clear turn that everyone is following. Younger Africanists are delving into a wide array of topics. The specter ranges from studies on early African societies based on linguistic reconstruction to studies of politics and culture in Africa in the 1960s and '70s.²⁴ There is a new wave of research on the slave trade, especially on the earlier phases and based on Portuguese sources, focusing on the interaction of trading networks on sea and on the African continent.²⁵ Economic history is experiencing a comeback, with a rather strong focus on quantification, but sometimes in strong opposition to mainstream economists doing African history.²⁶ The

- 20 Some of this work was in (partly very) critical dialogue with Immanuel Wallerstein's influential World System Approach. See esp. F. Cooper, *Africa and the World Economy*, in: F. Cooper et al., *Confronting Historical Paradigms. Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America*, Madison, WI 1993, pp. 84–201.
- 21 See, e.g., R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds.), *The Development of an African Working Class. Studies in Class Formation and Action*, London 1975; P. C.W. Gutkind, R. Cohen, and J. Copans (eds.), *African Labor History*, Beverly Hills 1978; M. Agier, J. Copans, and A. Morice (eds.), *Classes d'ouvrières d'Afrique Noire*, Paris 1987. An excellent synthesis of the dynamic labour historiography of the 1970s and early 80s is B. Freund, *The African Worker*, Cambridge 1988.
- 22 The arguably most impressive example of this historiography was C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1924*, vol. 1: *New Babylon*, vol. 2: *New Nineveh*, Johannesburg 1982.
- 23 See J. Copans, *Pourquoi travail et travailleurs africains ne sont plus à la mode en 2014 dans les sciences sociales: Retour sur l'actualité d'une problématique du XXe siècle*, in: *Politique Africaine* 133 (2014), pp. 25–44. For recent trends see F. Cooper, *From Enslavement to Precarity? The Labour Question in African History*, in: W. Adebani (ed.), *The Political Economy of Everyday Life. Beyond the Margins*, Woodbridge 2017, pp. 135–156. For South Africa see B. Freund, *Labour Studies and Labour History in South Africa: Perspectives from the Apartheid Era and After*, in: *International Review of Social History* 58 (2013) 3, pp. 493–519. An example for excellent new work in African labour history is Z. K. Guthrie, *Bond for Work: Labor, Mobility, and Colonial Rule in Central Mozambique, 1940–1965*, Charlottesville, VA. 2018. A comprehensive volume emphasizing current debates and themes in African labour history is S. Bellucci and A. Eckert (eds.), *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries*, Rochester 2019.
- 24 R. Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700–1900*, New York 2013; A. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam*, Durham, NC. 2011.
- 25 T. Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589*, New York 2012.
- 26 For a harsh critique on economists doing Africa see M. Jerven, *Why Economists Get it Wrong*, London 2013. For earlier critiques A.G. Hopkins, *The New Economic History of Africa*, in: *Journal of African History* 50 (2009) 2, pp. 155–177; G. Austin, *The "Reversal of Fortune" Thesis and the Compression of History: Perspectives from African and Comparative Economic History*, in: *Journal of International Development* 20 (2008), pp. 996–1027. For the quantitative approach, see E.J. Frankema, J.G. Williamson, and P.J. Woltjer, *An Economic Rationale for the West*

new history of missionaries and especially mission converts who used literacy to make claims on authorities and to develop cultural syntheses, is part of an ongoing broader interest in the history of religion, including the history of Islam.²⁷ Urban history is rapidly gaining more historiographical ground.²⁸

2.

Is global history the latest turn in African history? To what extent does the emergent field of global history shape African history, and is shaped by it? Area Studies in general have been an important factor in the rise of global history in many parts of the world. As Gareth Austin argues, it is even safe to say that an important “impulse behind the (re-) emergence of global history in the European academy was a reaction against what may be called Eurocentrism of agency (the assumption that it has been mostly Europeans – or at least Westerners – who have changed the world) and Eurocentrism of concept (the dominance in history and social science of models derived from perceptions of European/Western experience, even when the object of analysis is experience elsewhere).”²⁹ African historians played a crucial role in promoting global history in Northwestern Europe. It is not a coincidence that among these, it has been mainly economic historians – Gareth Austin, William Gervase Clarence-Smith, and A.G. Hopkins in the UK – and historians of the slave trade and slavery – Philip Curtin, Patrick Manning, and Joseph Miller in the US – who paved the way: representatives of two historiographical fields that for a long time already, at least partly, employed perspectives beyond the nation and were interested in world regions beyond the North-Atlantic realm.³⁰

The core concerns of global history are, according to Sebastian Conrad, “with mobility and exchange, with processes that transcend borders and boundaries. It takes the interconnected world as its point of departure, and the circulation and exchange of things, people, ideas, and institutions are among its key subjects. A preliminary and rather broad definition of global history might describe it as a form of historical analysis in which phenomena, events, and processes are placed in global contexts.”³¹ A meteoric rise of global history has been noted for the Americas, Europe, and Asia, not for Africa.³² The global

African Scramble? The Commercial Transition and the Commodity Price Boom of 1835–1885, in: *Journal of Economic History* 78 (2018) 1, pp. 231–267.

27 D. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent*, New York 2012. For a good introduction to the history of Islam in Africa, see D. Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, New York 2004.

28 B. Freund, *The African City: A History*, New York 2007; L. Fourchard, *Between World History and State Formation: New Perspectives on Africa's Cities*, in: *Journal of African History* 52 (2011) 2, pp. 223–248.

29 G. Austin, *Global History in (Northwestern) Europe: Explorations and Debates*, in: S. Beckert and D. Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global History, Globally. Research and Practice around the World*, London 2018, p. 24.

30 A recent call for a stronger cooperation between Africanists and Global historians is P. Manning, *African and World Historiography*, in: *Journal of African History* 54 (2013) 3, pp. 319–330.

31 S. Conrad, *What is Global History?* Princeton 2016, p. 5.

32 D. Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History. Theories and Approaches in a Connected World*, New York 2011.

history bibles on the nineteenth century, Bayly and Osterhammel, have comparatively little to say about Africa.³³ Some commentators interpreted this as another example of the marginalization of the continent in global history approaches, others saw it as a confirmation of Africa's rather marginal role in global history. Debates of this kind do not take us much further. Two other sets of questions arise: First, do historians of Africa employ global perspectives in their work? Or to what extent did they always do so but never called it "global"? And, secondly, what do historians *in* Africa think of global history? This question is addressing the place of African institutions in the global professional field of historiography and refers to issues of global academic hierarchies and the material foundations of the historical profession.

Although some protagonists of global history come along as missionaries, most representatives of this field would agree that global history is not the only game in town but one perspective among others. To consider Africa in relation to global history suggests valuable lines of connection to other fields of history and new perspectives on a number of topics, but also hopping on bandwagons. There is no need for historians of Africa to prove that they are also capable of employing a global perspective and thus being entitled to historiographical citizenship; although, some seem to feel a kind of pressure and even react defensively. Toby Green concludes his recent, ambitious study on the *longue durée* of West African history and its global entanglements with other parts of the world from 1250 to the mid-nineteenth century with the lament that "Africa has been so global for so long that its continued exclusion from 'world history' speaks volumes about misconceptions that have arisen outside the continent over so many centuries."³⁴ In fact, there is a long tradition of placing Africa in the long sweep of global history. In *The World and Africa*, published in 1946, W.E.B. Du Bois described how Africans had mastered their environment and the creativity of political processes, going back to Egypt from 5000 BC onward, passing through Ethiopia to the great African empires from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries and the powerful states in many parts of the continent on the eve of colonial conquest. The book told the history of Africa's peoples not as one of communities developing their own ideas in isolation but of engagement with people, commodities, and ideas from across and beyond the continent. The subtitle of the book was telling: *An Inquiry into the Part which Africa has played in World History*. Some of the themes covered by Du Bois had been articulated long before by African and African-American intellectuals, religious leaders, and political activists, going back to the days of North American slavery.³⁵

33 C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1870–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford 2004; J. Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2009. Bayly's posthumously published global history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (*Remaking the Modern World 1900–2015. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford 2018), features Africa more prominently.

34 T. Green, *A Fistful of Shells. West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution*, Chicago 2019, p. 476.

35 F. Cooper, *Africa in World History*, in: J.R. McNeill and K. Pomeranz (eds.), *The Cambridge World History*, Vol. VII, Part 1, Cambridge, UK 2015, p. 556. For some of these nineteenth-century intellectuals, see A. Eckert, *Bringing the "Black Atlantic" into Global History: The Project of Pan-Africanism*, in: S. Conrad and D. Sachsenmaier (eds.),

The claim that Ancient Egypt was a genuine African culture was part of some of these pre-Civil War articulations, and later became part of pan-African thinking. Since the 1950s the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop took up and developed this thesis with vigor in numerous articles and books.³⁶ According to him, not only do both the biological origin of humanity and the emergence of civilization take place in Africa; he further insisted that Egypt was specifically a black civilization, and was the fullest flowering of a cultural system, unifying the whole African continent. The most important aspects of human social and intellectual development originated here. Moreover, it was distinct from Eurasian societies in its matriarchal, spiritual, peaceable, and humanistic character. Ancient Greece – and hence all European civilization – took almost everything of value usually claimed to be theirs from this antecedent African-Egyptian culture. Diop draws the conclusion that Africa must recover the glories of its ancient past, rejecting the racist, eurocentric mystifications which had obscured those glories, and progress to the future by drawing on the lessons of the old Nile valley philosophies. This recovery of the glorious past should, according to Diop, lead to the construction of a single, federal African state, which, taking confidence from the unique greatness of past African achievements, will stand equal with Europe and the rest of the world. Thus, for Diop “history is nothing but a means to serve the realization of a political plan.”³⁷ By replacing the classical theme “all that is European is civilized; all that is African is barbarous” with “all that is African is civilized and beautiful,” Diop’s publications represented in many ways an early and radical manifestation of African nationalist historical writing. His claim that Africa had a place in the world’s past was part of the demand for political liberation in the present.

Over the last decades, numerous studies have emphasized Africans’ agency in their relationships with others in a broader, albeit not necessarily global context. Africa’s communities have long been open to the world and, as John Lonsdale emphasizes, “Africans are like the rest of us, shaped by both external and internal relations. They are not unusually disturbed by the threat of cultural cosmopolitanisms, however much they suffer the

Competing Visions of World Order, Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s, Basingstoke 2007, pp. 242f. A case study on West African intellectuals discussing these ideas during the late nineteenth century is P. S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas*, Charlottesville 2000. P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA 1993, served as a powerful incubator for studies about connections between Africans, African-Americans and generally people of African descent on both sides of the Atlantic. However, Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* is ultimately a rather narrow concept with its strong focus on cultural creativity and the intellectual links between the African diasporas in the United States and the United Kingdom, overlooking the southern part of the Atlantic, and especially the relations between Africa and Brazil. Moreover, it concedes to intellectuals in Africa only a marginal position.

36 S. Howe, *Afrocentrism. Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes*, London 1998; A. Eckert, *Wem gehört das Alte Ägypten? Die Geschichtsschreibung zu Afrika und das Werk Cheikh Anta Diops*, in: W. Reinhard (ed.), *Die fundamentalistische Revolution. Partikularistische Bewegungen der Gegenwart und ihr Umgang mit der Geschichte*, Freiburg i.Br. 1995, pp. 189–214.

37 M. Diouf and M. Mboji, *The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop*, in: V. Mudimbe (ed.), *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947–1987*, Chicago 1992, p. 120.

inequalities of international trade.”³⁸ Labour has always played a central role in the long history of relations between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The creation of a world economy by European capitalists and the reordering of economic relations in nearly every part of the world was followed by a huge need for human labour, which could only be satisfied by various forms of force and coercion. The slave trade completely transformed labour regimes in most parts of the “New World,” but also in Africa where slaves became a crucial commodity in many regions as well as the main resource for labour. Starting with Eric Williams seminal work on *Capitalism and Slavery*, published in 1944, there has been an ongoing and highly controversial debate about the importance of slavery and slave labour for the rise of capitalism in the North Atlantic regions, especially for Britain. It was a Nigerian historian teaching in the United States, Joseph Inikori, who provided the most careful study based on Williams’s thesis thus far. On the basis of broad and substantial empirical evidence, he firmly insisted on the crucial role of trade with plantation crops – and therefore the products of the labour of African slaves – for capitalist development in England. Moreover, he showed in much detail indirect, but important effects of the Atlantic slave economy on sectors such as shipbuilding and finance.³⁹

For two decades or so, historians of Africa have increasingly stressed the role played by Africans in the construction of the Atlantic economy and the new colonial societies in the Americas. At the same time, they emphasized that African leaders took an important part in the operations of the Atlantic slave trade.⁴⁰ Others have demonstrated the continuous involvement of West African coastal communities in trans-oceanic networks. Parts of the area that Europeans called the Slave Coast (the coast of what is today Togo, Benin, and south-western Nigeria) were integrated into the Atlantic world, not only by business links but also by resultant cultural and social ties, on such a scale and intensity that the commercial and ruling elites might be considered to be participating in what has been coined an “Atlantic community.”⁴¹ Trade during the transition from the slave trade to so-called “legitimate” commerce over the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century has been a prominent topic among Africanist historians since the late 1950s, but more and more the high degree of autonomy of action on the part of African traders was emphasized.⁴² Studies on Africans in the Atlantic world during the first decades of the twentieth century emphasize less the economic than the political (and partly the social) dimensions. Much recent work focuses on the creation of a “radical black Atlantic” and

38 J. Lonsdale, *Globalization, Ethnicity and Democracy: A View from “the Hopeless Continent”*, in: A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History*, London 2002, p. 195.

39 J.E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England. A Study in International Trade and Economic Development*, New York 2002. See also S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History*, New York 2014.

40 J. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd edn, Cambridge, UK 1998.

41 A key text was R. Law and K. Mann, *West Africa in the Atlantic Community: The Case of the Slave Coast*, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1999), pp. 307–344.

42 This perspective was especially prominent in the 1980s and 90s. An instructive case study is M. Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa. The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 1997. For a historiographical overview, see R. Law, Introduction, in: Idem (ed.), *From Slave Trade to “Legitimate” Commerce. The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, Cambridge, UK 1995, pp. 1–31.

the role of African activists, especially in the years between the two world wars, or looks at political, cultural, and social activities of Africans in large European cities such as London, Paris, but also Berlin and Hamburg.⁴³ The strong focus on the Atlantic World is progressively challenged by scholarship on the Indian Ocean that also emphasizes the *long durée* of commercial and cultural networks and the crucial role of Africans therein.⁴⁴ More recently, African labour historians have begun to take up global perspectives but at same time take seriously the warning about the dangers of “doing history backward” – limiting research to identify only the flows and nodal points of globalization.⁴⁵ It is no accident that recent research focuses very much on seamen and other mobile sectors of the African (and Asian) labour force, which contributed to the emergence of global commodity and labour markets.⁴⁶ However, there is a growing consciousness of the risk of neglecting large parts of the workforce – non-plantation rural labour, for instance – and the related tendency to miss out on the contradictions and unevenness of global incorporation processes. The “globalization” of labour not only meant unbounded mobility but spatial immobility as well. Thus, the search for entanglements entails risks, for instance the tendency to assume an ever-increasing connection and compression of labour regimes and practices – thereby reproducing the teleological perspective of the concept of globalization.⁴⁷ Some authors, for instance, cast doubt on the perception of “the global” manifesting itself in Africa in the form of connections, seeing rather disconnection, segmentation, and segregation. Franco Barchiesi specifically criticizes the idea of workers’ “teleconnections” in global commodity chains put forward by Marcel van der Linden. He argues instead that “colonial and postcolonial Africa shows indeed that the globalization of capital did not only provide a minority of unionized workers with new opportunities to converse with the global working class. It has also, and more importantly, excluded and marginalized multitudes of producers, households, and communities.”⁴⁸

43 H. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, Leiden 2014; H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939*, Trenton, NJ 2013; J. Derrick, *Africa’s Agitators. Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939*, London 2008; M. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis. Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism*, New York 2015; M. Matera, *Black London. The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, Berkeley 2015; R. Aitken and E. Rosenhaft, *Black Germany. The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960*, Cambridge, UK 2013.

44 E.A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, Oxford 2013. A new effort to promote Oceanic histories in order to “decolonize history” once more, is D. Armitage, A. Bashford, and S. Sivasundaram (eds.), *Oceanic Histories*, Cambridge, UK 2018.

45 A. Eckert, *Capitalism and Wage Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in: J. Kocka and M. van der Linden (eds.), *Capitalism. The Reemergence of a Historical Concept*, London 2016, pp. 165–185.

46 J. Hyslop, *Oceanic Mobility and Settler-Colonial Power: Policing the Global Maritime Labour Force in Durban Harbour, c. 1890–1910*, in: *Journal of Transport History* 36 (2015) 2, pp. 248–267.

47 For a powerful critique, see F. Cooper, *What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian’s Perspective*, in: *African Affairs* 100 (2001), pp. 189–213.

48 F. Barchiesi, *How Far from Africa’s Shore. A Response to Marcel van der Linden’s Map for Global Labor History*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2012), pp. 77–84. His argument was directed against M. van der Linden, *The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 57–76. For an extremely sinister view of Africa’s marginal position in the world, see J. Ferguson, *Global Shadows. Africa in a Neoliberal World Order*, Durham, NC 2006, who argues that unlike in earlier centuries, the rest of the world does not need the la-

Finally, large data-driven projects in labour history, such as the very laudable Amsterdam based “Global Collaborative on the History of Labour Relations,” run the risk of marginalizing African history because of the paucity of data for many periods and aspects of labour history.⁴⁹

Moreover, one of the virtues of labour history in recent decades – in Africa as everywhere – has been its micro-historical focus on workers and work in relation to the range of social processes in a particular milieu – race, gender and ethnicity, for instance. What is the advantage if we look beyond both locality and region toward wider spatial relationships in addition to the insight that we are confronted with fuzzy categories and fuzzy constellations? If we look at the African case, the history of labour there does not fit a linear model of “proletarianization” and “making of the working class.” Power, on the shop floor, in the mines, and on plantations, was rooted in particular cultural structures – from the racially based system of colonial authority to Africans’ efforts to use personal relations to shape work patterns to their own needs. Labour movements were more than automatic responses to becoming a proletariat; they were rooted in specific patterns of affiliation and strategies of mobilization and alliance-building. The challenge, then, “is to look at different modes of thinking, speaking and acting as a worker, patterns shaped not by statically conceived “cultures”, but by history, by layers of experience and memory.”⁵⁰ Labour historians face the difficulty of focusing on the necessarily specific historical trajectories in certain localities in Africa and across specific patterns of regional migration. They must do so without losing sight of the wider context in order to evaluate how much African labour has been shaped by its connections to the rest of the world and how much the world has been shaped by the labour of Africans. Through these reflections, there is an important contribution to be made to the field of global history.

3.

When African history was constituted as an academic discipline in the 1950s, a silent, but presumably conscious, decision appears to have been made to exclude the history of Africans in the diaspora from the definition of African history.⁵¹ No explicit rationalization of this restriction was offered by the pioneers of academic historical studies, but their rationale is not hard to guess. The pioneers of the 1950s and ’60s were clearly concerned with establishing the history of Africa as an interest in its own right, rather than merely as part of the background to the history of the Americas – which was the

bour power of Africans anymore. Other scholars think that multinational capital is finding new uses of workers in Africa, as long as they are cheap, particularly to reach customers of modest means. See K. Meagher, *The Scramble for Africans: Demography, Globalisation and Africa's Informal Labour Markets*, in: *Journal of Development Studies* 52 (2016), p. 487.

49 For the project's many features and activities, see its webpage: <https://collab.iisg.nl/labourrelations>.

50 F. Cooper, *African Labor History*, in: J. Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labor History. A State of the Art*, Berne 2006, p. 116.

51 R. Law and P. Lovejoy, *The Changing Dimensions of African History: Reappropriating the Diaspora*, in: S. McGrath et al. (eds.), *Rethinking African History*, Edinburgh 1997, pp. 183–184.

dominant, earlier perspective in their view, exemplified by the writings of African-Americans such as Du Bois. In this context, African history had to be detached from its wider Atlantic context to constitute itself as an autonomously viable subject. In the field of studies about the slave trade, this led to the – rather bizarre – implicit assumption that African slaves, once embarked from the coast or joined a Saharan caravan, ceased to be part of African history.

This container model of African history has been replaced by numerous efforts to bring the diaspora back into African history.⁵² However, in Africa itself, making Africa an autonomously viable subject of historical research and teaching and contributing to nation-building still constitute the central pillars of academic history. One impressive account of the history of an African nation in the form of a manifesto for a national identity came from the Congolese historian Isidore Ndaywel È Nziem. His voluminous *Histoire Générale du Congo*, published in 1998, is all the more interesting, as the Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, usually serves as an example for a weak or even “failed” state in which a national identity never developed. Ndaywel È Nziem, on the other hand, conceptualizes the Congo as a space with “national destiny” and constructs a kind of geographical and human inevitability through which a pre-colonial constellation characterized by ethnic identities was transformed into the identity of a modern nation-state. In his approach, Ndaywel È Nziem strongly refers to European, most notably Belgian historiographical traditions and regularly quotes Henri Pirenne. In a period when “the invention of ethnicity” was at the core of Africanist debates in Europe and the United States, the doyen of Congolese historiography opted for a highly schematic model in which ethnic groups corresponded to a linguistic group and lived in a clearly demarcated territory.⁵³

According to the Senegalese historian Omar Guèye, it would be nearly impossible to write the history of Africa in the modern era without references to places, peoples, and processes on different continents. He claims that in the beginning, historians in Africa, in their struggle against the persistent prejudices that Africa has no history, wrote national histories still often connected to events beyond this continent. This changed when the focus increasingly switched to subnational groups. Guèye sees the time ripe for linking the wealth of local historical research to broader global trends.⁵⁴ He recently published a study on Mai ’68 in Senegal in which he locates Dakar within a global network of youth and student movements.⁵⁵ However, among historians in Africa, with his global perspectives, Guèye so far seems to plough a lonely furrow; although, some scholars based in

52 For an overview, see M. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*, New York 2005. See also this article, above.

53 On this book and its broader context, see J.-L. Vellut, *Prestige et pauvreté de l'histoire nationale. A propos d'une histoire générale du Congo*, in: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 77 (1999), pp. 480–517.

54 O. Guèye, *African History and Global History: Revisiting Paradigms*, in: Beckert and Sachsenmaier, *Global History*, pp. 83–107.

55 O. Guèye, *Mai 1968 au Sénégal. Senghor face aux étudiants et au mouvement syndical*, Paris 2017. A recent effort to present a truly global portrait of the 1960s and to systematically include non-European regions such as Africa is C. Lian et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building*, London 2018.

South Africa do see clear trends towards global approaches within South African historiography (and beyond).⁵⁶

Achille Mbembe critically commented on the ongoing priority of historians in Africa on national and regional perspectives: “The first ritual contradicts and refutes Western definitions of Africa and Africans by pointing out the falsehoods and bad faith they presuppose. The second denounces what the West has done (and continues to do) to Africa in the name of these definitions. And the third provides ostensible proof that – by disqualifying the West’s fictional representations of African and refuting its claims to have a monopoly on the expression of the human in general – are supposed to open up a space in which Africans can finally narrate their own fables. This is to be accomplished through the acquisition of a language and a voice that cannot be imitated, because they are, in some sense, authentically Africa’s own.”⁵⁷ Against this background, to do research on Europe, for example, was perceived by many as an activity that perpetuated, in some sense, the colonial extraversion which was about to be overcome and which keeps Africans away from themselves, so to speak.⁵⁸ The Cameroonian scholar David Simo, who started as a specialist of German literature, is one of the few Africans who regularly contribute to conceptual debates about global history. He strongly recommends that if African historians want to create alternative (global) historical perspectives, they cannot simply create an African “Other.” Instead, they have to develop these alternative perspectives and a critical and constructive stance towards global history through a dialogue with the currently dominant western disciplinary cultures.⁵⁹ So far, few Africa-based scholars have followed his advice.

We still have very little in-depth information on recent or current dissertation topics and on history curricula,⁶⁰ but it seems very likely that the majority of research-based manuscripts in history produced in Africa (Master, Ph.D.) focuses on aspects of national or even regional history. The internationally well-known Senegalese historian Ibrahima Thioub, currently President of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, the most important francophone university in Africa, recently complained: “My students and colleagues in history tend to write about themselves.”⁶¹ By this he referred to the fact that most Senegalese historians prefer to write about their home region, mainly for two

56 I. Hofmeyr, African History and Global Studies: A View from South Africa, in: *Journal of African History* 54 (2013) 3, pp. 541–549. A call for a stronger transnational dimension in South African Labor History has been launched by P. Bonner, J. Hyslop, and L. van der Walt, *Rethinking Worlds of Labour. Southern African Labour in International Context*, in: *African Studies* 66 (2007) 2–3, pp. 137–168.

57 A. Mbembe, African Modes of Self-Writing, in: *Public Culture* 14 (2002) 1, p. 244.

58 D. Simo, Writing Global History in Africa, in: D. Northrup (ed.), *A Companion to World History*, Malden, MA 2012, p. 438.

59 D. Simo, Writing World History in Africa: Opportunities, Constraints, and Challenges, in: Beckert and Sachsenmaier, *Global History*, pp. 235–249.

60 For some information, see C. Janson-Jabeur and C. Coquery-Vidrovitch (eds.), *L’histoire africaine en Afrique*, Vol. 1, Paris 1995, Vol. 2, Paris 2003; A. Eckert, “To make students aware of the general history of Africa.” *Geschichtswissenschaft und universitäre Lehre im Fach Geschichte in Afrika*, in: G. Lingelbach (ed.), *Vorlesung, Seminar, Repetitorium. Universitäre geschichtswissenschaftliche Lehre im historischen Vergleich*, Munich 2006, pp. 291–324.

61 Interview with Thioub, Dakar, 14 April 2016.

reasons: It allows them to be active and take part in important and often controversial local debates, and the research is comparatively cheap, since in Senegal as in most African countries research funding is scarce. For them, global history is often not even a matter worth discussing. It appears to them to be yet another western imposition on the writing of history that emphasizes Africa as a site of damage – because Africa is mainly prominent in global history writings through references to the slave trade – and it devalues local knowledge and sources.⁶²

Another dimension not explicitly discussed at this roundtable but relevant here is the question of the material basis for research. Jean Allman made the important point that the postcolonial archive is not the easy and direct descendant of the colonial archives project.⁶³ “It is not a “national archive”. It does not reside in one place, or even two or three. It is a global, transnational archive, ranging from Accra to Beijing, from New Delhi to Frankfurt, from Moscow to Bucharest, from Tel Aviv to Harlem. The archival skills that Africanist historians have honed in London, Aix-en-Provence, and Lisbon – in Accra, Dakar, and Luanda, surely require refashioning in order to meet the linguistic, logistic, financial, and conceptual challenges posed by this vast shadow archive, much of it generated by the transnational policing mechanisms of the Cold War surveillance state.”⁶⁴ Thus, she insists on the necessity to move beyond the older area studies, colony/metropole template and beyond archival work on any given independent African state that is limited to the national archive of that state and the former imperial power. She identifies this as an especially formidable challenge for scholars based at underfunded African institutions. Many scholars and intellectuals working at these institutions still feel marginalized and obliged to operate in an infrastructure that is framed by non-African epistemological interests. Nearly two decades ago, the Nigerian historian Toyin Falola who teaches in the United States, aptly summarized the widespread attitude among African intellectuals towards their position vis-à-vis their North Atlantic counterparts:

*How Africans, either at home or abroad, will acquire autonomy and control the production of knowledge about their continent will ultimately depend on the possibility of a positive political and economic transformation of Africa. The marginality of African studies and Africans’ feeling of irrelevance in Western institutions reflect the marginality of the continent in world affairs. If Africa lacks the resources to sponsor research and publish, to retain excellent scholars and build viable universities, it will be hard to overcome intellectual domination by outsiders to have their own agenda, interests and priorities.*⁶⁵

62 These are impressions of a roundtable discussion with members of the history department of the Univ. Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, animated by Babacar Fall, in December 2011.

63 J. Allman, Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History-Writing, in: *American Historical Review* 118 (2013) 1, pp. 104–129.

64 Ibid., p. 126f.

65 T. Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, Rochester, NY 2001, p. 291.

One might argue that over the last twenty years, due to its resources and strategic importance, the continent's position in world affairs improved, but the effects on institutions of higher education and research have been marginal so far.

4.

Africans have, as other peoples, always thought about their past, though in distinctive ways that emerged from the social and cultural milieu particular to their lives. Those dealing with the African past had to rely on African modes of historical thought, frequently oral. Those modes referred to understandings of history, memory, power, time, and other aspects that are often not in accordance with the assumptions and questions taken as “natural” or “universal” by history as a discipline founded in Europe. This should not necessarily imply the construction of a fundamental mental difference between Africans and the rest, but allude to the fact that “Africans have made sense of the world and their own histories in ways that are simultaneously consistent with and formative of the realities on the ground around them.”⁶⁶ One of the problematic aspects that has shaped thinking and writing about Africa's past and which is still characteristic for part of the field of global history, is the idea of conceptualizing Africa as peculiar and other places as normal. The terms of debate have to be shifted away from the particularity of Africa to the particularity of the course of global history in which Africa was a participant. Historians have shown that Africans had a voice in determining what “universal” values are, although theirs was never equal. Still, “Africa's engagement with the rest of the world has been painful and tragic, but the struggles of Africans for one or another form of liberation have, among other things, vitally affected what it means to be free.”⁶⁷ Global history allows historians to move across and beyond the geographical fields on which the profession has been organized, calling upon us to give as much attention to the particularities of other places as (we) Africanists wish our colleagues would give to the specificities of African history. At the same time, it seems to widen the gap in the production of historiographical knowledge between Africa and the Rest.

66 Cooper, *Oral Sources*, p. 210.

67 Cooper, *Africa's Past*, p. 299.