

Editorial

With this issue we close the 29th year of a journal that owes its beginning to the special circumstances of the upheaval of 1989. Until autumn of this year, it was almost impossible to dream of founding an academic journal for Leipzig's school of world history writing led by scholars like Walter Markov and Manfred Kossok, because real-socialism in its East German variant was characterized above all by inscrutable bureaucratic rules that concealed the desired control over thoughts and concepts. True, the leading historical journal in the country, the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, was open not only to national history narratives and hosted also debates on the world historical importance of past events but this remained unsystematic and often heavily impacted by an orthodox understanding of Marxism-Leninism. The other review that could have become home for world history approaches, the journal "*Asien-Afrika-Lateinamerika*" founded in 1973 as successor to the Leipzig based yearbook of the same title, had developed into a place where contemporary issues and current political strategies of the GDR-government towards the so-called Third world dominated completely.

The only possibility to publish on a regular basis comparative historical research based upon case studies dealing with different world regions where small booklets appearing four times a year undercover as teaching material for university purposes. These "*Leipziger Beiträge zur Revolutionsforschung*" brought through the approval process in small print runs, were at least connected to a trunk of loyal readers, even if most of them thought twice during the transition to the new currency in 1990 whether the ideas published in *Comparativ* would now be worth West German money. Clemens Heller of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme* in Paris stepped in and generously provided the cost of printing the first two issues as venture capital and also bought the first subscription in France.

An intellectual tradition of world historiography was to be continued, while at the same time the standards for writing history were subject to rapid change – locally and globally. Some time passed before the journal took its place among the new journals of global history, and here is an opportunity to thank all the authors who entrusted us with their ideas for thematic issues and essays, although elsewhere it might have given them more reputation and fuel for a mainstream career. What has distinguished the magazine on the

one hand and continues to do so today is a strong sense of community. But this community, contrary to many a grudging prediction, has not simply remained stable and slowly become “historical”, but has grown and changed. Since a memorable founding meeting in 2002, the European Network in Universal and Global History has been the institutional framework of this community and has been constantly changing and thoroughly rejuvenated in the course of numerous congresses on world and global history.

This thematic issue follows earlier attempts to provide an interim balance or at least some orientation along the way on what happens to the field of world and global history writing. In 1994, we asked for the first time in a thematic issue of *Comparativ* about the relationship between older world history and more recent global history, and the distinction has since found many supporters, but also variants of its justification. In an issue appearing in 2000 on skulls and bones as objects and subjects of a history of humanity we addressed the issue of the fundamental turn away from Eurocentrism in anthropology and world history writing.

In between we explored in the now 170 issues the many facets of the global with focus on social, cultural, political, economic histories as well as their spatial framing.

In 2010, we devoted another themed issue to the then current trends in global history and observed with some surprise the double trend that global history has now become an empirical matter, expressed in dissertations, journal articles, and research monographs with a well-defined subject matter and corpus of sources, while at the same time „world history“ of classical coinage has not only survived in one or many volumes, but has experienced a true renaissance and has met with abundant demand. This boom is far from over. The appetite for a complete narrative of world history has rather increased and it is no coincidence that this issue is mainly about one particular example, the *Cambridge World History*, which appeared in 2015 under the main responsibility of Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. We asked specialists from various epochs and approaches to discuss one volume each for us and tried to make an overall interpretation ourselves. The total of nine volumes do not make it easy to keep track of the whole, as they are a collective work of more than 200 authors. State of the art in a way, but also a collection of very individual manuscripts. Can trends and commonalities be read from them, or do we have to capitulate in the end to the diversity? The contributions in this issue seek to find an answer together. And perhaps a rudimentary analysis of the composition of this authorship will help us to understand what global history confronts us in this narrative.

The *Cambridge World History* is evidently an important milestone in the development of the field, given already the wide dissemination and the high quality of the contributions made to become a major reference in the classroom everywhere. But at the same time this is not the ultimate word global historians have to say. On the contrary, it is an invitation to take notice of the achieved level of scholarship in order to go beyond. *Comparativ* will continue to accompany historiography critically on this path and give space for innovative approaches.

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