

Matthias Middell (ed.): The Practice of Global History. European Perspectives, London: Bloomsbury 2019, 215 p.

Reviewed by
Carolyn Liebisch-Gümüß, Washington

Over the last 15 years, the Leipzig-based European Network in Universal and Global History (ENIUGH) has established itself as the main organization for bringing together global historians throughout Europe and connecting them with colleagues from other world regions. This book provides a forum for current debates in the field and innovative findings from the 2014 ENIUGH congress. Unlike its title may suggest, it is not an introduction to doing global history. Instead, it offers a range of thematically distinct essays from different subfields like cultural transfer studies or global economic history. This makes it a stimulating read for both insiders and everyone who wants to gain an impression of up-to-date trends in global history. What sets the volume's approach apart from the similar undertaking "Global History, Globally",¹ is its explicit focus on research in Europe. Gathering nine scholars from Paris as well as Amsterdam, Budapest, Exeter, and Ghent, Matthias Middell's aim is to inspire debates about "the European character of certain approaches in global history" (p. 19).

The opening essay by Michel Espagne makes a strong case for increased mutual awareness between the linguistically dif-

ferent academic communities in Europe and beyond. Why do German global historians pay considerably more attention to their Anglo-American colleagues than to their French neighbours? Why do global historians all too often write about certain regions without assessing vernacular texts? And how come they talk so much about Eurocentrism and still largely fail to acknowledge researchers from non-Western places as partners in their projects and discussions? To Espagne, knowledge of different languages is crucial to overcome these hurdles whereas a simple retreat to universal English would limit our sources, undercut the potentials of multilingual conceptual history, and obstruct access to distinct historiographic traditions. We might end up with increased uniformity where we could have achieved multi-perspectivity. However, Espagne's appeal must not be mistaken for particularism. For his essay encourages historians to explore cultural transfers crisscrossing the historical map of Europe and thus promotes a radically transregional view on the ways any "European space" (p. 37) and its cultural-national units were created in the first place. Upholding the value of language skills and regional specialization, Espagne's essay could also stimulate reflection on how both could be incorporated more systematically in the training of young scholars and the M.A. programs in global history. Despite the diversity of the contributions, at least two themes stand out for being addressed repeatedly throughout the volume: First, most authors focus on new trends in global economic and social history. Second, several essays track the still unfinished shift away from Western centric historical narratives about Western Europe's

neighbouring areas like Africa (Cocquery-Vidrovitch and Espagne) or Russia. Turning towards the former Eastern bloc, James Mark and Tobias Rupprecht dismiss older accounts that portrayed socialist countries as mere bystanders to a triumphing capitalist globalization. Grounded on a rich research survey, they argue convincingly in favour of moments of co-globalization as well as the legacies of alternative, “Socialist globalization” (p. 91). Alessandro Stanziani explains how looking at Russian economic history in the narrow terms of backwardness fails to see the long-lived compatibility of economic expansion and socio-political inequality. In our present times, where beliefs about capitalism and liberalism as quasi natural allies have become doubtful, narratives about illiberal forms of world economic inclusion as suggested by Mark, Rupprecht, and Stanziani obviously have much to offer. Marcel van der Linden and Atilla Melegh underline the ways a global view on labour has changed somewhat outdated paradigms in European historiography. In the spirit of a truly decentred global history, Van der Linden highlights that studies about labour history in e.g. Western Africa or India revitalized European labour history by revealing the narrowness of Weberian/Marxist concepts of classic wage labour. Melegh shows how the history of (labour) migration gave new impetus to the history of demographics which started to shift focus away from national family planning to migration-related factors. The resulting political conflicts that Melegh mentions, between post-migration-minded experts and nationalist voices, might themselves

make an interesting subject for historization.²

The individual essays in the volume certainly make important contributions to their respective subfields and to global history in general. However, they do not rely on any common analytical framework. Neither Espagne nor the others respond directly to the question about “Europeanness.” Nor is there a mosaic-like effect, in the sense that the single contributions would add up before the reader and reveal the contours of what could be European idiosyncrasies. The collection’s miscellaneousness thus appears somewhat random, but it undoubtedly gives a good impression of the methodological variety within the field. This includes such unusual approaches like combining the study of cultural transfer with quantitative data (Charle) or advocating regional approaches to the very large-scale debate on the so-called Great Divergence (Vanhaute). Needless to say, the field’s ample innovativeness cannot be grasped within eight articles. Further volumes envisaged by the editor might include domains that have received little attention here like global microhistory, global trends in gender history, or research on international organizations, to name but three. This would also be an important chance to give more visibility than in the present volume to the numerous female experts out there.³

In the end the question remains: What is distinct about the way global history is practiced and conceptualized in Europe? Perhaps the problem here is not so much the lack of answers and, as a result, of overall coherency, but the question itself. As the editor himself stresses, diversity within

Europe and connectivity beyond Europe are the most defining characteristic of the field. A glance at the footnotes in the volume is enough to prove the transcontinental – though predominantly transatlantic – dimension of ongoing debates. The extent to which European global historians build on long-distance intellectual transfer probably outweighs regional trends, as we also read in “Global History, Globally”.⁴ In light of this consensus, the endeavour to ascertain the European character of our approaches actually feels like a step back behind the bigger endeavour to challenge Eurocentrism in both our perspectives on the past and our present research practices. After all, it might be more productive to simply encourage a more multi-sided exchange between global historians. The volume makes a valuable contribution in this direction, and as the subsequent 2017 ENIUGH congress has seen participants from not only broader Europe but also from e.g. Gabon, Hong Kong, Israel, Pakistan, and Senegal, there are yet plenty more perspectives to explore.

Notes

- 1 S. Beckert/D. Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global History, Globally. Research and Practice around the World*, London 2018.
- 2 With regard to Germany, one might think of the infamous „Kinder statt Inder“ dispute instigated by a CDU politician in 2000 as a relevant moment in such a cultural history of post-migrant demographic discourses.
- 3 Recently, Margrit Pernau spoke of global history as “still very much a boys’ network.” M. Pernau, *A Field in Search of Its Identity. Recent Introductions to Global History*, in: *Yearbook of Transnational History* 1 (2018), pp. 217–228, 226.
- 4 G. Austin, *Global History in (Northwestern) Europe. Explorations and Debates*,

in: Beckert/Sachsenmaier (ed.), *Global History*, pp. 21–44, 21.

The Oxford Illustrated History of the World, ed. by Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019, 481 p.

Reviewed by
Matthias Middell, Leipzig

When a renowned academic publisher such as Oxford University Press gathers well-known (mainly British and American) historians to write an illustrated history of the whole world, one can expect a cross between the highest erudition, light and metaphorical language and opulent visualization – and this is exactly what this volume delivers, which wants to be and indeed is a coffee table book and a serious intervention in an ongoing historiographical debate at the same time. The editor, who has proven a sense of world-historical curiosity from his earlier work on explorations across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic to his more recent Hispanic history of the USA, burns a firework of popular and amusing explanations right at the beginning, of what world history actually is, of what diversity of perspectives means for the desire for objective knowledge, of what distinguishes humankind from other species on earth (cultural diversity in constant change, among other things with the nice distinction between different lifeways and foodways) and how something like a trend