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## REZENSIONEN | REVIEWS

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**Sven Beckett/Dominic Sachsenmaier**  
(eds.): **Global History, Globally.**  
**Research and Practice around the**  
**World, London / New York:**  
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Reviewed by  
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The accusation that universal and world history are Eurocentric and thus privilege a particular perspective has long been part of the repertoire of critical voices that want to point to problems of a certain way of doing world history or to quite fundamental problems of historiography in general. One can make this accusation in different ways. The ones claim that the history of Europe receives above-average attention, and the history of the other, much larger part of the world degenerates into a quantité négligeable. World historians have long countered this objection with detailed chapters proving that history takes place everywhere on the planet and that interesting insights can be derived from the parallelism of events. The second level of reproach addresses the expertise and research-based nature of statements about

non-European developments. Here, the rise of area studies often offers a remedy, and there is no doubt that in the course of the 20th century, the level of knowledge about the history of Africa, Asia, or Latin America, or the history of the oceans, has improved as exponentially as it has for Europe and North America. Recent world histories have profited extensively from this, as we have demonstrated in detail in the columns of this journal analysing the Cambridge World History.<sup>1</sup> But this does not automatically avert the third dimension of the charge, which asks for a plurality of voices in the representation of the history of the world and subliminally includes an argument about authenticity. The World Social Science Report, which has been renewed again and again for more than a decade, points to the serious inequality in published knowledge production between the continents and cites numerous institutional reasons why this is not changing in the short term.<sup>2</sup> The World Humanities Report, currently in preparation, will certainly argue along the same lines and, even as it is being written, shows the enormous disparities in the possibilities of gaining an overview of knowledge production in Africa or the United States. The most radical variant of the Eurocentrism accusation against the world historians, however, is undoubtedly the

argument that world history in itself is the real problem and is an instrument to perfidiously perpetuate Western dominance and to justify it methodically and theoretically over and over again. Even the nasty word of epistemicide is making the rounds and arouses demands for its avoidance.<sup>3</sup>

The present volume, which emerged from a series of conferences held with the support of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University and the Duke Transcultural Humanities Committee, and later also the Volkswagen Foundation and the German Research Foundation since 2008, focuses primarily on the third dimension and aims to mitigate the inequalities resulting from the ignorance of original ideas and authors from non-European (or rather non-Anglo-Saxon) areas of the world. To this end, the essays, which have been fine-tuned and supplemented with missing aspects over the course of successive conferences, have been confined to authors from all continents and assigned to three sections.

The first is entitled *Regions* and provides a profound overview of global history in northwestern Europe (penned by Gareth Austin, an economic historian of Africa who teaches at Cambridge), in East Asia (by Q. Edward Wang, who teaches in the US at the University at Rowan and in Beijing), in Latin America and the Caribbean (by Rafel Marquese and João Paulo Pimenta of São Paulo), and in North America (by Jerry Bentley, the central figure of the World History movement in the US who taught and edited the *Journal of World History* in Hawaii until his premature death). They all point to focal themes, central locations, and important publications, creating a kind of collective biography of each

regional community of global historians. The assumption that guides these essays is that of a shared scholarly-political context and a shared historical path dependency that results in the selection of preferred topics. In this respect, it is consistent to include in this section the contributions by Selcuk Esenbel and Meltem Toksöz from Istanbul on imperial and national narratives in Turkey and the Arab Middle East, and by Omar Gueye from Dakar on the relationship between African and global history, even if, strictly speaking, they are only partially about global history. But at least they place regional historical culture and historiography in relation to the interest in global contexts that is stronger elsewhere.

The second section promises the discussion of *Central themes in global history*, and with the assumption of a centrality of some kind, one naturally enters complicated terrain, for here it must be made clear for whom these themes are central or have become central (again). Andreas Eckert from Berlin and Marcel van der Linden from Amsterdam have it comparatively easy with global labor history, because it has been renewed on so many corners and ends of the planet that one can actually speak of a globally shared interest. This, however, is what the authors of this essay themselves deserve credit for, not only by restlessly weaving threads between sites (and now drawing expertise from that experience for their overview), but also by proposing a new kind of synthesis that exemplifies how the global perspective can breathe entirely new life into a field that has long been explored already under different paradigms. Kenneth Pomeranz (Irvine) follows up here

with a profound problematization of the relationship between regional studies and global economic history. The latter in particular has been repeatedly described as an experimental field of the pioneers of global history, but in the process, impulses from an economic science that still has a strong universalist bent enter into a theoretically and methodologically mixture with inspirations from area studies that is not always entirely free from contradictions.

Global migration history, for which Amit Kumar Mishrat from Hyderabad is responsible, could be an object par excellence for global re-perspectivizations and has also produced an almost unmanageable literature and numerous innovations (from the paradigm of the transnational to the study of entanglements) in the last two to three decades, but interestingly, a coherent synthesis is not so easy to conceive. Dominic Sachsenmaier (first Durham, now Göttingen) and Andrew Sartori (New York) make clear that this is also true for global intellectual history. This is true if only because local/national traditions (the authors distinguish this only vaguely) continue to be pursued and remain much stronger than the effects of undoubtedly increasing international contacts and collaborations. The term entanglement can obviously also mean a conversation between deaf-mutes who mutually ignore each other intellectually, but fiercely emphasize their affinity on the basis of belonging to the same group. Here flashes a very fundamental challenge to the demand for “global history, globally” that is also hinted at in many other contributions, but perhaps not so clearly addressed. The large umbrella of global history allows many to congregate and, in doing so, to further their own schooling

without the need to clearly delineate their own conception from others. This creates the illusion of a large, more powerful unified movement, which in fact, on closer inspection, breaks up into many groups and differentiates itself according to differently privileged axes of vision. The minimal consensus that is often to hear according to which global history is characterized by a common decision of its proponents for a global perspective turns out to be both an advantage and a disadvantage. This unitary identity has undoubtedly fostered the fabulously rapid rise, like a phoenix out of ashes, from the complete damnation of grand theory, meta récit, and master narrative since the 1980s. But at the same time, debates on theory have failed to materialize, which could possibly hinder further expansion, because while tremendous work has been done in empirical investigation, which even the most adamant opponents of global history cannot deny, arguments for the why of a global history have not been sufficiently sharpened. In any case, “there is no alternative” is not a sufficiently convincing argument.

The remaining four essays are grouped under the heading *Problems in the Practice of Global History* and give further weight to the context of historiography. David Simo from Yaoundé underlines the (also materially explicable) marginality of African voices in the concert of global historians; Jie-Hyun Lim from Seoul recalls the continuing hegemony of national-historical narratives in East Asia (and elsewhere), which have skillfully integrated transnational perspectives without relinquishing their claim to dominance. In the process, a methodological nationalism cultivated in much of Marxist historiography does

not fare well, either, and stands in glaring contradiction to the original internationalist impulse of that political camp. Marnie Hughes-Warrington from Canberra brings the question of the weight of indigenous conceptions of the world to bear on the historiography of former Anglo-Saxon settler colonies, and Shigeru Akita from Osaka reflects on the progress but also the contradictory stance of Japanese research when it comes to Eurocentric paradigms in global history. Each of these contributions makes clear that we are far from a unified landscape of global history, however much it has followed the North American model in some countries, nurturing an undergraduate course designed to make up for the worst failures of school teaching in the subject of world knowledge.

That it is precisely in this diversity that the appeal of a globally conceived global history lies becomes abundantly clear when reading the volume, but did not really play an explicit role in the initial ascendancy of global history.

Thus, the present volume is also (still) carried by a tone of optimism throughout that, if efforts that are well on their way continue, the goal of a global history for all as the basis for a renewed ecumenism of historians and a school curriculum that moderates conflict is achievable. As a normative idea, both visions - that of a worldwide community of all historians oriented toward global challenges and that of a school curriculum that no longer incites hatred and discord with historical arguments - can only be welcomed. Historians, even as experts on the past and seemingly closed periods, can indeed do something to make the present and the future friendlier.

This volume demonstrates the intellectual power and competence with which global historians from all continents think their way into other cultures and thus build bridges to a global cohesion that is necessary in view of the new dynamics generated by accelerated climate change, shrinking biodiversity, pandemics that negate all borders, and the historically evolved inequality of resources. Global history, globally, however, does not necessarily mean a unified view of history, but can also mean the mobilization of diversity for a more complete picture. With this volume, the editors have presented an impressive record of how both can go together: the vision of a common cause and the recognition of plurality, without which this common cause would quickly take on totalitarian features.

#### Notes

- 1 Matthias Middell and Katja Castryck-Naumann (eds), *Narrating World History after the Global Turn: The Cambridge World History* (2015) (=Comparativ 29 (2019), 6).
- 2 <https://en.unesco.org/wssr2010>.
- 3 B. de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*, London 2015.