Introduction – From Railway Juncture to Portal of Globalization: Making Globalization Work in African and South Asian Railway Towns

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The papers collected in this issue illustrate how people have shaped global connectedness in five African and South Asian railway towns. It is not the railway and the material connections enabled by it that are at the heart of these histories, but rather how people made productive use of local conditions and the availability of the railway. At first sight, a northern English labour force in the Jamalpur locomotive workshop (India), the entrepreneurship of Otto Siedle in Durban (South Africa), cosmopolitan residential patterns in Elisabethville (present-day Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo), the Belgian concession port in British-ruled Kigoma (Tanzania), and the self-organization of railway porters in Kapiri Mposhi (Zambia) are not the striking success stories of globalization. However, they tell us much about how globalization is produced and how processes of globalization are interlocked.

Creative responses, building on locality, longevity, and long-distance connectivity, turned these places into centres of activity where at a particular time specific ways of globalization were produced. In order to understand globalization processes, we need to grasp these historically specific and distinctly local features that produce globalization. We take this as a starting point in an effort to bring together the historiographies on railways and on globalization. Moreover, we do so in African and South Asian contexts.

Global Histories of the Railway

A stereotypical narrative of globalization would place Western European technological breakthroughs in the decades around 1800 up front, and continue with the submission of the rest of the world to European or Western supremacy. In such a narrative, the railway and globalization fit together well, since the railway is then both a product and a carrier of industrialization, which on top of that facilitates connectedness, mobility, as well as the spread of ideas, people, and probably control. I do not want to give too much attention to such a seemingly self-explanatory story of diffusion of a science- and technology-based, global system led by Europe or the West. This is not meant to discard the serious, empirical research that convincingly demonstrates the role of the railway as an instrument of state-building, as a tool of empire, or as a technology that profoundly altered the perception of time and space.[1] These are undeniably important aspects of the constitution of global connectedness and interaction, both when it comes to the imperialistic ways of seeing the world, and concerning the material imposition of imperial or state rule over contained territories and over long distances. Although this train of thoughts offers an evident link between railway technology and globalization, it pays less attention to the locally and historically specific dimension of the production of global connectedness. Why and how do globalization processes unfold and how does the railway play a role in historically and locally specific circumstances are not the prime concerns of narratives that explain spread or hegemony.

Another strand of literature likewise brings together the railway and historical events of global importance. Several historians have demonstrated the role of railway workers in politics, trade unionism, and decolonization.[2] In this research, the railway is interpreted as a tool of anti-empire. These stories show how the railway can work against the will of those who decided to build it, and that the railway empowers those who work or run it. The railway is used by people to overturn imperial rule and to redefine the state in ways that alter the order and power relations on a global scale.

In this issue, we add a third angle by addressing the dual question of how the railway and how globalization work in relation to each other. Assuming neither a self-evident Western hegemony nor a self-emanating power of the railway, the following questions arise: which kinds of global connectedness were produced in the wake of the railway;

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1   Patrick O'Brien, The New Economic History of the Railways, London 2014 (first published 1977); Patrick O'Brien (ed.), Railways and the Economic Development of Western Europe, 1830–1914, London 1985; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1986; Clarence B. Davis, Kenneth E. Wilburn, and Ronald E. Robinson (eds.), Railway imperialism, Westport, London 1991; David Wolff, To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898–1914, Stanford 1999; Irene Anastasiadou, Constructing Iron Europe: Transnationalism and Railways in the Interbellum, Amsterdam 2011; Bruce Elleman and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History: An International History, London 2015.

2   Frederick Cooper, 'Our Strike': Equality, Anticolonial Politics and the 1947-48 Railway Strike in French West Africa, in: The Journal of African History, 37 (1996) 1, pp. 81-118; Jim Jones, Industrial Labor in the Colonial World: Workers of the Chemin de Fer Dakar-Niger, 1881–1963, London 2002; Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, City of Steel and Fire: A Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906–1984, London 2003.

how did the railway fit in the cocktail of decisions to shape global connectedness; how did rail-facilitated mobility of people from across the world subvert the local orders that were planned for them; in how far were local strategies decisive in making the railway run; and which local historical circumstances facilitated how people made global connectedness effective? When zooming in on local specifics, it turns out that there are many globalizations and many ways the train runs. The examples collected in this issue show particular ways in which people combine the operation of the railway and the production of global connectedness. To sum up, our focus on the local production of globalization in connection with the railway – however, without reproducing the narrative of diffusion of industrial technology and transportation revolution – provides the meeting point of multiple globalizations that characterizes the railway towns in Africa and South Asia that are presented in this issue.

Along these lines, Nitin Sinha tells us the story of Jamalpur during the second half of the nineteenth century. This Northeast Indian town was home to an important railway workshop and drew heavily on skilled blacksmithing labour from the nearby town of Monghyr as well as on imported railway workers from northern England. He especially focuses on the tensions between an imperial policy of insularity and moral superiority of the 'white working class' on one hand, and the growing dependence on and connections with other parts of town, region, subcontinent, and empire on the other hand. Of interest, as such, are not the actual connections and mobility but rather the enabling mechanisms and processes that allow Jamalpur's specificity to be interpreted as making connections on different scales work.

Jonathan Hyslop reconstructs the story of Otto Siedle, a German-born and British-minded employee of the London-based Natal Direct Line who worked in the South African port town of Durban. Making use of the position of Durban, Siedle turned the place into an interface between coal mines to the north, Transvaal gold mines to the west, steamship connections with London and India, and the supply of indentured labour from India to Natal. As coal was crucial to make the interface work, he pushed forward the construction of the railroad, which was a decisive instrument to make coal mines, gold mines, ocean steamers, and politics on local, regional, national, and imperial scales interlock. Rather than claiming the centrality of Durban in the imperial constellation, Hyslop stresses the indispensability of Siedle's Durban in a hierarchical relatedness with powerhouses like London or Johannesburg.

Sofie Boonen and Johan Lagae investigate the spatial organization of the Congolese town of Lubumbashi (then Elisabethville) against the background of a booming mining industry. Interestingly, they do not concentrate on the mining industry but on how Jewish and Greek immigrants made intercultural life and a degree of cosmopolitanism in town possible. The railway connection with Southern Africa, meant to ship out ore and bring in mineworkers, brought "second-rate whites" who made a living from their intermediary position in town. At odds with segregationist colonial policies, their strategies allowed the urban economy of Lubumbashi to flourish while at the same time blurring racial boundaries. The agency of the migrants led to a cosmopolitan city that was more

directly linked to cities like Bulawayo, Beira, and Cape Town than to Kinshasa (then Léopoldville).

Geert Castryck analyses the rise and decline of the Belgian concession port of Kigoma during the interwar period. An Anglo-Belgian agreement after the First World War had granted privileges to Belgians on traffic between the Indian Ocean and Lake Tanganyika via the Dar es Salaam-Kigoma railway. This connection and the port of Kigoma in particular were booming in the years around 1930. This inland Indian Ocean port not only provided the shortest link connecting eastern Congo and the mineral rich region of Katanga with the world market, but was also completely Belgian-controlled. Castryck argues that the success of this connection had been made possible by the pragmatism and informality of the local administrators and operators, who did not insist too much on the formal Belgian rights.

Jamie Monson, finally, zooms in on casual labour by porters in a Zambian railway hub. The Chinese-sponsored TAZARA railway between Dar es Salaam and Kapiri Mposhi has gone through different phases of liberalization,[3] which have jeopardized the operation of the railway connection between East-Central Africa and the Indian Ocean. In the end, the self-organization of casualized teams of porters, who take care of transhipment between means of transport, has turned out to be a crucial factor to ensure the operation of the railway. Drawing on age-old strategies of mutual aid, they have stabilized both their own livelihoods and the TAZARA connection, and in so doing they are as crucial as container ships or the railway itself to make global connectedness work in this part of the world.

In each of these cases, the creativity or pragmatism of people in combination with particular characteristics of the place in question made globalization work in historically and locally specific ways. In each of these cases, the railway could only contribute to different forms of global connectedness because of how people made use of the locally available technology, infrastructure, institutions, material and cultural resources, social relations, traditions, and so on. The railway juncture, understood here as both the material junction and the pivotal moment at which the railway became effective, is interpreted in its local historical setting. In so doing, globalization does not spread from the West to the rest carried by as well as carrying industrial technology, but is produced in different guises wherever local historical conditions provide the fertile ground for people on the spot.

Portals of Globalization

I suggest to analyse these places – where local historical features, the agency of people, and available technology or infrastructure come together – as portals of globalization. With this suggestion I build on the idea developed by Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann in 2010. In their article on *Global History and the Spatial Turn*, they paid special

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3   TAZARA stands for Tanzania Zambia Railway Authority.

attention to the spatial, historical, and discontinuous character of globalization. Their understanding of globalization processes combines a focus on the reconfiguration of political space with attention for the historicity of territoriality. Drawing on the ideas of Charles Maier,[4] they are interested in how territorial orders have been produced, controlled, and challenged in historical processes of de- and re-territorialization, and how these processes have led to global convergence. Moreover, in order to facilitate empirical research along these lines, they developed a vocabulary to talk about spatial-temporal arenas of accelerated and intensified transformation (critical junctures of globalization), about the places where globalization processes crystallize or pop up repeatedly over time (portals of globalization), and about the converging redefinitions of political-spatial orders that characterize critical junctures of globalization (regimes of territorialization).[5]

My use of the words "railway juncture" is loosely inspired by the spatial-temporal idea of accelerated transformation accompanying the introduction of the railway. Above all, however, I pick up on the idea of "portal of globalization." Middell and Naumann characterize such portals as "those places that have been centres of world trade or global communication, have served as entrance points for cultural transfer, and where institutions and practices for dealing with global connectedness have been developed." They stress the longevity of portals of globalization when pointing out that "such places have *always been known* as sites of transcultural encounter and mutual influence."[6]

This category is deemed useful because it "allows for analysis of how global connectedness challenges a seemingly stable territorial order by extending it to other spheres," and because "it invites us to look at the various means by which elites try to channel and therefore control the effects of global connectivity." For them, an investigation of portals of globalization is tantamount to "an examination of those places where flows and regulation come together." Add to this their plea for empirical research, for a focus on actors, and for a combination of local and global aspects, and it is indeed tempting to build "a theoretically coherent and empirically sophisticated programme of research and historical interpretation of globalization" on the basis of the research categories just mentioned, and spatially concentrated in portals of globalization.[7]

However, this agenda comes with a couple of drawbacks. Firstly, as Hyslop questions elsewhere in this issue, one can wonder in how far the periodization and convergence of a nation-state-based regime of territorialization, which figures prominently in Middell and Naumann's article and which allegedly became prominent in the course of the nineteenth century, can be considered to be global. Hyslop makes a case for a simultaneous

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4   Charles Maier, Consigning the twentieth century to history: alternative narratives for the modern era, in: American Historical Review, 105 (2000) 3, pp. 807-831, and Charles Maier, Transformations of territoriality, 1600–2000, in: Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz (eds.), Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien, Göttingen 2006, pp. 32-56.
5   Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, Global history and the spatial turn: from the impact of area studies to the study of critical junctures of globalization, in: Journal of Global History, 5 (March 2010) 1, pp. 149-170.
6   Middell & Naumann, Global history, p. 162. Emphasis added.
7   Middell & Naumann, Global history, p. 162.

prominence of different territorial orders in different parts of the world that are neverthe-less connected. Imperial and national territorial orders not only coexisted side by side but were interdependent. In fact, Hyslop's reading does not have to be at odds with Middell and Naumann. They even emphasize that Europe and other parts of the world do not necessarily fit into one historical narrative of territoriality.[8] Nevertheless, Hyslop does point out that their chronology and the demonstration of convergence relies heavily on the European example.

A similar consideration can, secondly, be made about their empirical and actor-oriented awareness. The actors who use and make the portals of globalization and who are suc-cessful in establishing and managing a specific spatial constellation at a certain time are at the heart of Middell and Naumann's projected empirical programme.[9] Their focus on elites as the ones who try to channel and control the effects of global connected-ness, however, threatens to eclipse the instances, presented elsewhere in this issue, where elites' attempted control was undermined by Greek and Jewish intermediaries in colonial Lubumbashi (Boonen & Lagae), or blocked rather than facilitated connectivity in the port of Kigoma (Castryck), or was intentionally meant to inhibit rather than to enable transcultural encounter in Jamalpur (Sinha). In Kapiri Mposhi, the ones channelling, stabilizing, and enabling global connectedness are everything but elites (Monson). Otto Siedle, who was a branch holder of a London-based company, can somehow be consid-ered to be part of an elite, but he was flipping the decisive switches in a place that was not at all a centre until he made it into an indispensable interface for global connectivity (Hyslop). As a matter of fact, being an interface rather than a centre applies to most if not all of the places discussed in this issue.

The combination of these critiques urges us to take the category 'portal of globalization' further – even more empirical, more actor-oriented, and more local. Middell and Nau-mann in fact already indicated that the category portal of globalization can be applied beyond elites and 'important places' and that it can be used to focus on a whole range of concrete historical actors, on perspectives "from below," or on small towns.[10] There is, indeed, an inherent tension in their description of "portals of globalization," oscillating between a European bias in the empirical examples and a categorical openness to histori-cal and regional difference, as well as adopting a primarily centric and elitist view in the description of the category while opening up to small towns and bottom-up approaches

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8   Middell & Naumann, Global history, pp. 163-164. The attention for the diversity of globalization echoes the work of Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, upon who Middell and Naumann approvingly draw. See for instance: Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, Regimes of World Order: Global Integration and the Production of Difference in Twentieth-Century World History, in: Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Anand A. Yang (eds.), Interactions: Transregional Perspectives on World History, Honolulu 2005, pp. 202-238.

9   Middell & Naumann, Global history, pp. 164-165. The same is true for Michael Geyer, who also uses the concept "portal of globalization" and pays special attention to agency in making transfers between national and global work. In Geyer's approach, the national-global interaction is at the heart of his understanding of portal of globa-lization. Michael Geyer, Portals of globalization, in: Winfried Eberhard, and Christian Lübke (eds.), The Plurality of Europe: Identities and Spaces, Leipzig 2010, pp. 509-520.

10   Middell & Naumann, Global history, p. 164.

when displaying its potential uses. Since they wrote their article as an inviting programmatic text, we take this tension as a productive one, and suggest to understand a portal of globalization as a place or a space where globalization is produced by actors who develop practices or institutions for dealing with global connectedness, thereby drawing on creativity, local assets, and the actual presence of connectivity in the form of infrastructure, technology, and cultural interaction – or put otherwise, in the form of the mobility of goods, ideas, and people.

The distinction between place and space is included here in order to leave it open whether, for instance, the category of the railway town (a space), the railway line or network (a space), or locally specific railway towns (places) are scrutinized as portals where people, place/space, and connectedness come together. Four of the contributions to this issue were presented at a conference panel at the 2014 European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) in Vienna,[11] which dealt particularly with the relation between the empirical findings in historically specific railway towns, the railway town as a generic space, the railway juncture as a pivotal time of transformation, and the longevity or path dependency of a town as a portal of globalization. The idea was further elaborated during a panel at the Fourth European Congress on World and Global History in Paris, which applied the same approach to peripheral port cities, and which was enriched by comments from Abdul Sheriff and Ulf Engel.[12] The participants in the ESSHC panel, which was commented upon by Matthias Middell and whose contributions have been revised and brought together in this issue, clearly tended towards the specificity of the place in its local, historical and globally connected contexts. This should not preclude, though, approaching spaces like the ones mentioned above or, for instance, universities as portals of globalization.[13]

Is everything global?

What came out of both panels is that the historical actors, the specific place or space, as well as the global interaction and integration are prerequisites to make a portal of globalization. This is reflected in our reformulated description of a portal of globalization and invites empirical research as to how globalization is made locally. Our new definition has at least one serious drawback: if the whole world is living under the global condition, then every place and every space can end up being called a portal of globalization. For

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11   The panel 'Railway Towns as Portals of Globalization' took place on April 25, 2014. You can find the panel line-up via the following link: https://esshc.socialhistory.org/esshc-user/programme/2014?day=14&time=26&session=390 (last accessed on January 11, 2016).

12   The panel 'Peripheral port-cities as portals of globalization' took place on September 6-7, 2014. You can find the panel line-up via the following link: http://research.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/congress/programme/event/?tx_seminars_pi1[showUid]=115 (last accessed on January 11, 2016).

13   For an attempt to apply the category portal of globalization on universities, see Claudia Baumann (ed.), Universities as Portals of Globalization: Crossroads of Internationalization and Area Studies, Leipzig 2014 (CAS Working Paper Series No 4).

this reason, portal of globalization should not be seen as a label but rather be used as an analytical category in order to empirically gauge the interplay of locality, originality, and connectivity in making globalization work. It can and must not be ruled out that this interplay can be found everywhere, but it would still not mean that it applies to everything. The local and historical particularity of the place, the idiosyncratic creativity of the actors, and the specific ways in which connectedness operates draw empirical attention to the heart of the production of globalization. The sites where practices and institutions that enable the making and managing of global connectedness are concentrated do not necessarily coincide with the railway town as a whole, are at the same time constitutive to the spatial organization of that town, and are crucial for its spatial connectedness. This understanding accentuates the local and historical specificity of every portal of globalization and to the diversity of processes and mechanisms of globalization.

About the underlying concept of globalization, a similar objection – a warning for the loss of meaning if the concept becomes too vast – has been made by Frederick Cooper in 2001. In his article "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective,"[14] he made a plea for historical research about interactions and connections on all spatial levels, thereby echoing his earlier plea for "constantly shifting the scale of analysis from the most spatially specific […] to the most spatially diffuse."[15] In this research, historians must pay attention to increasing as well as decreasing intensities of connectedness. However, in his opinion it makes no sense to label all these historical, non-linear and multilevel processes of interaction and connection globalization. "Global," so he argues, suggests an all-encompassing, homogeneous telos, which is not in line with historical experience, and "-ization" suggests a linear and deterministic trajectory towards this telos, which is equally not historical. I subscribe to both his plea for historical research on different scales and his refusal of homogeneous linear teleologies. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the fact that three authors in this issue approvingly cite Cooper's 2001 piece, we do use globalization as a historical concept. Indeed, globalization must not be self-explanatory, and therefore it requires qualification, scrutiny, and historical analysis along the lines suggested by Cooper, and not rebuttal. As a matter of fact, he had anticipated that there would be people like us. He wrote that one could use the term "globalization" for all the interactions and connections on all levels and with ups and downs over a long time, but then, so he stated, it would mean that everything therefore would be meaningless. That is where I do not agree. The connections and interactions under scrutiny have become entangled to a degree that they cannot be studied as discrete instances of connectedness. That is the moment when a disdain towards globalization as a linear, homogenizing teleology paradoxically tends to confirm this read-

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14   Frederick Cooper, What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective, in: African Affairs, 100 (April, 2001) 399, pp. 189-213.
15   Frederick Cooper, Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History, in: The American Historical Review, 99 (Dec., 1994) 5, p. 1539.

ing. It is not at all meaningless to disregard the "everything" in multilevel and long-term processes of connection and interaction.

By bringing together an empirical approach to people producing globalization in locally and historically specific circumstances, with a theme that seems to fit remarkably well in the simplistic linear diffusion discourse of Western industrial globalization, we illustrate that different instances of connectedness are themselves entangled. It is important not to look away from the places where these entanglements are made productive by people who pull together the strings of material and technological infrastructure, local and historical resource, and their own imagination and initiative. The capacity of individuals, groups, or communities to manage the coming together of different strands of spatial connectedness and historical trajectories implies that globalization does not merely spread but is produced and altered in these places. Therefore, the characteristics and the history of this capacity to produce globalization merit our attention. With the introduction of the railway, the global positionality of several African and South Asian towns was redefined. Long-distance mobility and connectedness as well as perhaps a feeling of promise or technological pride were corollaries of this introduction, but the meaning, impact, and use of the railway was produced locally, building on deep histories, leaving long-lasting consequences, and mobilizing long-distance connections. Globalization did not merely spread along the railway; local "institutions and practices for dealing with global connectedness have been developed" in the wake of the railway, which in turn enabled this global connectedness to gain substance.[16] An understanding of globalization has to include these local and historical faculties, which make places pivotal and – within a certain domain, radius, or period – turn them into portals of globalization.

The historical dimension of such a place includes the antecedents, the unfolding of agency, and the ensuing legacy that can underpin a place's long-term identity and provide the germ for future creativity and inventiveness in the context of another critical juncture of globalization. As such, the experience of making globalization work can also lead to a symbolic status of global *lieu de mémoire* (memory space).[17] Due to the focus on scrutinizing the specific ways in which globalization processes are made in specific African and South Asian railway towns, this long-term aspect of portals of globalization has only marginally been touched upon in summary references to the role of Monghyr in the development of Jamalpur (Sinha), to the nineteenth-century caravan trade in the urban area around Kigoma (Castryck), to the position of Kapiri Mposhi in the Zambian national railway network (Monson), or to the traces in present-day Lubumbashi of Jewish urban activity in the 1920s (Boonen & Lagae). It would be worthwhile, though, to take this idea of *lieu de mémoire* and longevity as the starting point for a future special issue of this journal.

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16   The quote comes from Middell & Naumann, Global history, p. 162.
17   See Matthias Middell, Erinnerung an die Globalisierung? die Portale der Globalisierung als ‚lieux de meìmoire' – ein Versuch, in: Kirstin Buchinger, Claire Gantet , and Jakob Vogel (eds.), Europäische Erinnerungsräume. Frankfurt/Main & New York 2009, pp. 296-308.

For now, we focus on places where global connectedness is produced by empirically identifiable people who act both locally and globally in interaction with the availability of the railway. In order to identify interesting portals of globalization, we first and foremost have to localize, to historicize, and to diversify our understanding of globalization. At the same time, it allows us to understand idiosyncratic spaces of connectedness and integration beyond the usual political and economic global powerhouses. The advantage of this understanding of portals, therefore, is both that it does not only encompass the usual suspects of globalization narratives, like imperial metropoles and industrial technologies, and that it does not reduce globalization to political and economic processes at the expense of cultural and social dynamics. This ipso facto means that our understanding of globalization needs to be diversified. The forces that make globalization work are decentred and the appearances of globalization multiplied and dehomogenized. The acknowledgment of the synchronicity of multiple globalizations and the intricate entanglement of these globalizations allows us to get beyond too one-dimensional and unidirectional narratives of global integration without having to discard the partial explanatory potential of existing narratives. The juncture or the pivotal moment of the invention or introduction of the railway, for instance, matters still, but does not determine. What actually happens is made by people on the spot, making use of creativity and deep-rooted local assets or resources. Seeing these specific places as portals of globalization provides an inspiring approach to act as a bridge between the particularity of the individual instance and a better understanding of globalization in practice.

Acknowledgements