

Global History Collaborative

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State of art

Unlike conventional Eurocentric historiography, current approaches in global history reject analyses and comparison based exclusively on the Western model.¹ However, beside Europe-centrism, Chinese, Indian or Russian ethnocentrism do exist as well. Thus, global history seeks to reconcile the differences between the historical paths specific to particular regions with their connections, transfers and overall dynamics. Today's forms of globalization are not the first or unique. During previous centuries if not millenaries, strong connections between different areas of the world were already developed. Circulation of ideas, people, institutions and values added to climatic impact and overall market dynamics. Yet, forms of integrations and internationalization did not always give rise to global dynamics. We need to stress the analogies and differences between globalizations in History.

To this aim, we encourage to adopt the following methodological principles:

-Instead of opposing “Europe” to “Asia” or “Africa” and “the Americas”, or comparing national-based parts of it such as France, China, India or Britain, we seek to explain how local, regional, national and imperial entities have been identified, interacted and evolved in time. Knowledge, institutions, religion, environment, economic and social relations will be analyzed on these multiple scales.

- We reject mono disciplinary approaches and, at the opposite, superficial mix up of different fields. Instead we consider that a dominant discipline has to be preserved while being nourished by suggestions and methods from other fields. History is required to interact with social sciences (archeology, anthropology, sociology, linguistic) and economics. History cannot be simple description of events and, at the same time, it cannot limit itself to adopt and test abstract models. We suggest to develop a heuristic of historical dynamics in which history's tools can contribute to historicize the categories of social sciences while adopting their major insights.

- We intend to escape superficial global and world history approach putting different realities into the same mold. We intend to preserve the specificity of this and that area in its historical dimension. At the same time, unlike conventional approaches in area studies, we consider that “specificity” requires to be analytically and empirically defined and proved and not just assumed. We should avoid identifying entities called “India”, “Europe”, “the Indian Ocean” or “China” in terms of their current borders or those in the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, the territories as well as the social and political hierarchies of these areas changed over time. Our project aims at problematizing the “global” itself in order to avoid simple

¹Gareth Austin “Reciprocal Comparison and African History: Tackling Conceptual Eurocentrism in the Study of Africa's Economic Past”, *African Studies Review*, 50, 3 (2007): 1-28. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 8; Bin Wong, *China Transformed* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

tautologies. No doubt our approach owes a great deal to *l'histoire croisée*;² we will take the main contributions of this approach into account, but our position is not as strictly opposed to comparison. Comparison can have a role to play in analysis, provided it gives rise to a genuine iterative, reciprocal process in terms of historical dynamics and the construction and use of sources. Though interaction and circulatory phenomena help us to understand a number of important questions, they cannot explain everything. Why, for example, did China under the Ming dynasty in the sixteenth century go back on its promise to engage in long-distance navigation, when Bengal merchants and European trading companies insisted on it?

We suggest to adopt at the same time comparative and circularity approaches in the studying of historical dynamics. The construction and size of political identities, fiscal and the state, local versus global knowledge, markets and social hierarchies, labour and material culture, money and finance, and the environment will be among the concerned, although not exhaustive, topics.

Polities and sovereignty in context

The comparative history and the sociology of state construction have often taught us to think in terms of nation-states. Even if an author like Charles Tilly declares at the outset that we must avoid projecting recent constructions on the past, he cannot help doing so himself.³ Tilly divides states into three groups: tribute-making empires; city-states, mainly Italian; and nation-states. These three categories corresponded to different gradations of capital and coercion. City-states were distinguished by maximal capital and minimal coercive power; at the opposite extreme, again according to Tilly, in Asian empires like Russia and China, lack of capital was compensated by maximum coercion. Finally, only the European nation-states are said to have achieved the right mix of capital and coercion. This combination is said to have given birth to modern states, along with their armies as well as the industrial revolution and urbanization.

Our project wishes to overcome this approach, first because nation-states are not a viable category to explain the evolution of Afro-Eurasian and global dynamics in the modern period and second because empirical analyses do not confirm the opposition between capital-based Europe and coercion-based Asia, and even less that between centralized State in Europe and decentralized entities in Africa.⁴ Western capitalism made use of slavery in the colonies, forms of forced labor in the mainland (convicts, workhouse) and often developed without granting scarcely any civil rights; Conversely, the Asian states in the modern period were hardly as despotic and had more capital than Tilly and others assert. We should not suppose that these countries were held together solely by a great deal of coercion and had no capital.⁵

More recently, analogous considerations have been raised for African entities in pre-colonial

² Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann (eds.), *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée* (Paris : Seuil, 2004).

³ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States. AD 990-1991* (Cambridge-Oxford : Blackwell, 1990).

⁴ Alessandro Stanziani, *After Oriental Despotism. Eurasian Growth in Global Perspective, 17th-20th centuries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); *Bâtisseurs d'Empires. Chine, Russie, Inde à la croisée des mondes* (Paris: Liber, 2012).

⁵ Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies. The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

times. Markets were widespread⁶ and territorial entities were important. Unlike common views, state was indeed important in many African areas. In the early Nineteenth century, The Sokoto Caliphate, the Zulu kingdom, the Asante and Buganda kingdom, the Omani kingdom and many other entities were present in Africa.⁷ They had well established administrations and armies and contributed to the enhancement of trade and some industries. Capital was more important than usually held.⁸

This means we must grasp the characteristics of each Empire and carefully differentiate them according to the period under study. When the notion of Empire is historically situated, it leads us to examine fluid, mobile territorial entities in which various ethnic, religious and social groups (from the family and the clan to public administration, peasants and soldiers) interact and form a hierarchy, in keeping with different modes of integration and/or assimilation. This leads to question the notion of sovereignty itself.

Sovereignty is much often taken for granted; on the contrary, we intend to show that it is constructed in variegated ways –legal means, military, geography, cartography, explorations, trade- and always negotiated between multiple actors. It is necessary to acknowledge that we are living in a multi-polar world with continuous cross-fertilization of populations, ethnic groups and economies. The frontiers will not be viewed as limits, but on the contrary as areas of varying scope. The frontier refers to modes of imperial expansion that applied sometimes to one region, sometimes to another, depending on the period.⁹ Over centuries, the effort of polities have been to invent a form of sovereignty on the sea and the desert. Maps and law constantly sought to invent jurisdictional corridors and justify discovery, conquest and militarization.¹⁰ The Indian Ocean realm experienced a sea change in the concept of sovereignty not only for local powers, but also for European colonizers.¹¹ Traditional Chinese texts and maps presented the sea as a frontier and a contact zone at the while. Maritime zones facilitated cultural, religious and commercial exchange.¹²

Historians have given too much importance to European sources claiming sovereignty in Europe as well as outside of it. Out of doubt, rules of law, political and military claims and economic pressure were important tools in the hands of European elites. Yet, putting them into practice was another matter, not only because “Europeans” were divided when not in conflict between them, even within the same Empire and inside the same administration, but also because the objects of their claims –polities, local elites and people- were everything but passive actors. Institutional pluralism was widespread on the level of empires, where legal pluralism was an important instrument of economic and political action.¹³ Not only the Mughal, but also the Ottoman and Safavid Empires granted important local autonomies which were foreign to the British notion of monolithic sovereignty. However, in practice, Britain

⁶ Gareth Austin, “Reciprocal Comparison and African History: Tackling Conceptual Eurocentrism in the Study of Africa’s Economic Past”, *African Studies Review*, 50, 3 (2007):1-28.

⁷ Paul Lovejoy, *The Abolition of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ Gareth Austin, “Markets with, without and in spite of States: West Africa in Pre-colonial Nineteenth century”, LSE, working papers, 03/04, March 2004.

⁹ Mikhail Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier. The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington-Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Lauren Benton, *A search for Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹¹ Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizon. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹² Angela Schottenhammer and Roderick Pick (eds), *The Perception of Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2006).

¹³ Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

invented new forms of flexible sovereignty to manage its Empire. Imitation and adaptation of Mughal customs remained a characteristic feature of British imperial authority during both the East India Company raj and Crown raj. The presumed legal order at global level was far more complex and instable than globalizing approaches and world-system theory presumed. Local conflicts framed global structures and vice versa; the final issue always was contingent and require to be empirically tested. To this aim, it is important to investigate the creation and circulation of knowledge in the making of local identities and global connections.

Knowledge, techniques and elites.

Foucault and Clifford Geertz took the lead among historians and many of them talked about “kidnapped language” and language-based or “cultural” dependence, etc. In Said’s orientalism, these constructions were part of a long-term intellectual and political context: Western domination implied above all the invention of a backward Orient.¹⁴ This approach extended to other contexts in Africa, Asia and the Americas, and even inside Europe itself (the orientalism of Eastern Europe, that of the peasantry inside each country).

Over the years, this approach has been tested for so many different fields as history of sciences and technique, religion, economic values, anthropology and sociology.

We aim at problematizing this link. For sure, knowledge is a component of power and a factor in fixing hierarchies, both social and between political entities. Translations, media, the circulation of legal rules and the language of international organisations are instruments of power and domination. Notions such as market, trade, family, child, property, inheritance, peasant, worker, etc. therefore acquire specific local features that are irreducible to a more general model.¹⁵ Thus, the British exercised their power in colonial India by controlling and modifying the language, as the case of the Zamindars clearly illustrates. The Zamindars, who were income tax administrators under the Moguls, were considered landowners by the British. This “translation” subsequently paved the way for British territorial control.

There are nevertheless several problematic aspects in these approaches, beginning with the interaction between elites and subaltern groups. Africans, Indians and colonised populations were far less passive than subaltern studies assert. Colonised peoples had significant impact on their colonisers, whose violence and flagrant programmes did not always reflect real control over the colony.¹⁶ The same can be said about other areas such as India vis à vis Britain, Korean and Japan, Inner Asia and the Ottoman Empire: language and politics, although important, never were the only determinant of power and hierarchies. This circulation led not only to increased homogeneity among systems but also to differentiation and even hierarchies of areas and countries. More recently, historians, sociologists, and philosophers of science have radically undermined this traditional, essentialist understanding of modern science. Moving away from a conception of science as a system of formal propositions or discoveries, these recent studies understand it as the construction, maintenance, extension, and reconfiguration of knowledge, focusing equally on its material, instrumental, corporeal, practical, social, political, and cognitive aspects. Systematically opting for detailed case studies of the processes through which knowledge and associated

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London : Penguin, 1977).

¹⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Frederick Cooper *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

skills, practices, procedures, methods, and instruments are created in preference to “big picture” accounts, they have investigated the negotiated, contingent, and situated nature of the sciences. This new scholarship has convincingly shown that scientific research is not based on logical step-by-step reasoning but on pragmatic judgment, much like that involved in practical crafts, and is thus historically and geographically situated.¹⁷ This approach, instead of attending exclusively in confined spaces, such as laboratories, cabinets of curiosity, libraries, and the like, focuses on the movement of scientific skills, practices, material, and ideas and their encounter with the skills, practices, material, and ideas of other specialized communities in natural history, medicine, cartography, linguistics, ethnology, and so forth.

In this circulation of knowledge and its practices, middle level elites play a major role in the making and circulation of knowledge: teachers and scholars, translators and engineers, so many groups with historical and social backgrounds quite different from their Western counterparts. Some main themes will be studied:

- the agency of translators and missionaries in transmitting foreign knowledge to receiving societies.

- how new religions lead to a reinterpretation of established knowledge, how universal religions went local and conversely local ones attempted to grow universal.

- the agency of the military and the diaspora in the spread of knowledge in colonial times

- how groups of technicians and academics were created and their link with the pre-existing traditional scholars, from Japan to Tibet? For instance Japanese schools from the 18th c. up to Meiji, or the growth of private schooling in 19-20th c. central Tibet, or the study of specific groups, as the architects.

Markets and material culture

The ideal of competition has been debated, analysed, proposed, imposed or rejected at least since the end of the eighteenth century in France, Britain, Japan, China or Brazil. In the course of the last three centuries, this ideal has engendered the main oppositions in economic policies: the opposition between liberalism and interventionism in the eighteenth century and a good part of the nineteenth century, then between liberalism and Marxism, planned vs. market economies, keynesianism vs. monetarism in the twentieth century, and today, between free competition and the welfare state. At present, the debate over competition is affecting the construction of Europe, development policies, “North”-“South” relations and tensions between growth and inequalities.¹⁸

Our aim is twofold: firstly, we want to go back and identify the sources and explain the success of this intellectual construct, i.e. the principle of competition; secondly, we would like to demonstrate how market really works over the long run and at multiple scales –local, regional, global-.

¹⁷ Kapil Raj, “Beyond Postcolonialism ... and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science”, *Isis*, 104, 2 (2013).

¹⁸ Alessandro Stanziani, *Rules of Exchange. French Capitalism in Comparative Perspective, 18th-20th centuries*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012. New edition and paperback, 2014).

Appadurai and others have stressed that the invention of tradition in marketing strategies is a central corollary of globalization.¹⁹ Indeed, this link has a long history. It was already present in the periods evoked above. For example, at the end of the nineteenth century, growing internationalization of the economy and the invention of tradition in agro-food and in overall politics went hand in hand.²⁰ What is new today, is the fact that this trend takes place not only in Europe and the USA, but also in Latin America, Africa, Australia, and some parts of Asia, and that these parts of the world are active actors in globalization. Indian, Brazilian, or Chinese producers are able to compete with Western firms. Aggressive economic strategies and protectionism in the name of public health are no longer an exclusivity of the West.²¹

Indeed, one may wonder whether the standardization of tastes really follows that of products. Colin Campbell and Arjun Appadurai have already criticized the excessive accent historians such as Brewer and Porter have placed on the imitation effect.²² Not only is this effect overestimated and barely proved – except for the elites - but it also ignores the persistent strength of habits and repetition in consumption in general and in food in particular. This phenomenon is not new; all the histories of travelers in modern times taken up by Braudel and many others show the importance of local food habits, even in a transnational context. Nowadays, pizza and Chinese food are to be found all over the world. At the same time, they change profoundly from one country to another according to the origins of emigrants and the way they identify local preferences.²³ One may complain about this, but the fact is that fusion, rather than standardized food, is the dominant trend in kitchens and recipes around the world.²⁴

These concerns must be integrated into a wider picture of the history of supply and access to food. From the seventeenth century on, the increasing supply of food and agricultural produce was a feature not only of Western Europe but also beyond. The agrarian revolution has to be incorporated into a long term evolution. Increasing demand and important market development outside and prior to industrial capitalism have played a major role in world history since the modern era.²⁵ As such, multi-polar globalization is not entirely new. Multi-centrism is particularly clear in food history, in which, for several centuries, supply and consumption have been local and global at the same time.

This means that we are requested to stress the importance of gift and other not-instrumental forms of the exchange also in the advanced economies. Following Claude Levi-Strauss, many scholars have opposed gift to market. However, if one accepts Carlo Ginzburg's Marshall Sahlins'²⁶ interpretation of Mauss, then, gift is not opposed to market but it rather is a peculiar form of exchange, in which obligations are even more compelling than under market exchange.²⁷ Starting from this, Mauss linked debt slavery to potlatch and reciprocity.

¹⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large : Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Indianapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1996).

²⁰ Kohleen Guy, *When Champagne became French* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2003).

²¹ Alessandro Stanziani, "Social Inequalities and Food Identification in Food Markets. A Critique of Modernization and Globalization Paradigms", *Food and History*, 10, 1 (2012): 13-45.

²² Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1987).

²³ Alberto Capatti, *Le goût nouveau, origine de la modernité alimentaire* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1989).

²⁴ Jean-Loup Amselle, *L'Occident décroché. Enquête sur le post-colonialisme* (Paris : Seuil 2010).

²⁵ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (New York: Wiley, 2004); APPADURAI, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimension of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁶ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Aldine-Atherton, 1972).

²⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, "Don et reconnaissance. Lecture de Mauss", *Annales, HSS* (2010), 6, pp. 1303-1320.

For them, the obligation to reciprocate, instead of the search for profit or power, could lead to bondage.²⁸ The issue is worthy of consideration: of which forms of market correspond to which forms of slavery? Is debt slavery caused by market failure more or less widespread than that due to harvest failure?

Labour: the uncertain boundary between freedom and coercion.

Anthropologists, sociologists and historians have highlighted, according to their disciplines, different aspects of labour relationships in an attempt to draw the line between “free” labour and “forced” labour, particularly slavery. Social status (membership in or exclusion from the clan, the family, the local community), religion, legal status (the form of dependence, freedom of movement, the hereditary character of such constraints), socio-economic conditions (dependence, non-economic advantages, coercion, etc.), political rights and legal (and procedural) rights have all been discussed.²⁹ Researchers have pinpointed several variables, but without reaching a consensus. These issues have been debated even more fiercely in the last twenty years as *cultural studies* and *subaltern studies* brought out the relativity of the notions of freedom and coercion. As a result, the question is now become whether or not a given form of dependence, bondage, etc. found in a particular society in Africa, Asia, the Indian Ocean or the Americas could be considered “slavery”. If the answer is yes, then by implication slavery existed before and independently of colonialism; conversely, if the answer is no, it means that these forms of dependence and bondage were specific to a particular place and “imperialist” and revisionist culture would like to call them “slavery” to minimise Western “debt” to the Third World.

The aim of this project is not to take sides in favour of one or the other “general” definition of labour and forced labour, but rather to set the boundary line between free labour and forced labour in specific historical and institutional contexts and explain why, in a given context, this line was conceived and put into practice in one way rather than another.³⁰ By undertaking a radical re-examination of the historical forms of labour and how they were defined, we are not seeking to relativize and deconstruct categories in order to assert, for example, that “forced labour did not exist” or that it is an “intellectual invention”. Quite the contrary, by viewing these elements in their proper historical contexts, we hope to provide an original explanation of the dynamics of forms of labour. Instead of attempting to establish the moment when “free labour” and “civilisation” emerged, or conversely, stigmatising the continuation of the “guild tradition” or even of latent forms of slavery, we want to grasp the dynamics at work in certain

²⁸ Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 2010), in particular ‘Essai sur le don’. For a recent review of the wide literature developed ever since, see Gabel Peebles, ‘The Anthropology of Credit and Debt’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39 (2010), pp. 225-240; J. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism Since 1700* (London: Routledge, 1995); Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1999).

²⁹ Alain Testart, *L’esclave, la dette et le pouvoir* (Paris: Editions errance, 2001); Claude Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l’esclavage* (Paris: PUF, 1986); Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1983); David Eltis (ed.), *Slavery in the Development of the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³⁰ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph Miller (eds), *Children in Slavery through the Ages* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009).

historical forms of labour starting from the historically situated tension between freedom and constraint.³¹

The first underlying hypothesis of this project is that so-called “free” forms of labour and bondage were defined and practised in reference to each other. Not only in each country and area, but also at a global scale, forms of bondage and freedom were mutually defined.³²

Unlike conventional thesis –celebrating the triumphal march toward freedom started in the nineteenth century after centuries if not millenaries of bondage- recent approaches in historiography underline the changes in slave-trading systems prior to official abolition and conversely, the continuation of forms of bondage and slavery after the reforms. The condition of African-Americans and of “free” labourers in the colonies are used to confirm this position.³³

Continuities between free and unfree labour are important not only in time but also in space. Surprisingly enough, there has been little dialogue between historians of slavery and historians of wage labour, and consequently, neither group has challenged the presupposition that these two worlds were and remain separate or even opposed. The aim of this project is precisely to overcome this fracture by revealing the connections between these elements underpinned by chronologies that are in fact too common to be unconnected or to have come about merely by chance.

³¹ Alessandro Stanziani, *Bondage. Labor and Rights in Eurasia* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014).

³² Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery. The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London, Oxford University Press, 1974).

³³ Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-slavery : British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1987).