

Global History and the History of World Regions: An Inventory of German-Language Research

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ABSTRACTS

Die Beiträge dieses Sonderheftes fokussieren auf das komplexe Verhältnis zwischen regionaler Expertise und globalen Perspektiven in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Während frühen Beiträgen zur Globalgeschichte oftmals der Vorwurf einer regional unausgewogenen und allzu harmonischen Erzählung einer immer stärker verschränkten Welt gemacht wurde, hat die traditionelle akademische und historiographische Unterscheidung zwischen verschiedenen Weltregionen vielfach über vorgestellte räumliche Grenzen hinausgehende vergleichende Ansätze und Perspektiven der Verflechtung erschwert. In vier aus einer 2015 vom Center for Global Studies an der Universität Bern organisierten Vorlesungsreihe hervorgegangenen Beiträgen diskutieren Spezialisten für verschiedene Weltregionen (Lateinamerika, Afrika, Asien und Osteuropa) die Chancen und Herausforderungen globalhistorischer Ansätze für die regionalhistorische Forschung. Weitere zwei Beiträge von Kollegen aus dem Feld der Globalgeschichte diskutieren die Frage, wie regionale Unterschiede innerhalb globalgeschichtlicher Ansätze reflektiert werden können oder sollten.

The essays in this special issue focus on the complex relationship between regional expertise and global perspectives in historical writing. While early approaches to global history have been criticized often for presenting a regionally unbalanced and all too harmonious narrative of an ever more interconnected world, the traditional academic and historiographical distinction between different world regions has impeded more often than not comparative approaches and perspectives of entanglements that cross imagined spatial boundaries. Originating in several lectures organized by the Center of Global Studies of the University of Bern in 2015, the revised papers of four specialists on specific world regions (Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe) address the chances and challenges that global history approaches have brought to

regional historical research. Further two contributions by colleagues working in the field of global history offer their reflections on how regional diversity can or should be reflected within global history approaches.

Since the turn of the millennium, global history has developed into an established field of historical research both in the German-speaking academic landscape and internationally. Various professorships and scientific associations, as well as numerous conferences, research projects, and publications, focus on global history.¹ The academic rise of global historical research (as well as interdisciplinary global studies) can be attributed to a critique of the traditional focus of “general history” on the German, at most (Western) European or North Atlantic regions and the resulting voids and distortions of universal or world historical narratives. In this respect, global history follows on from the establishment of history chairs and interdisciplinary area studies which have specialized in certain regions of the world in the USA after the Second World War, and in Europe since the 1960s.

The focus on regional historical research originated in the nineteenth century’s concept of the “cultural areas” in linguistic, literature, and religious studies. Since the Second World War, the growing academic anchoring of historical and interdisciplinary research in various world regions, chiefly those of Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia, has been fostered by various socio-political factors, from the Cold War to decolonization and the Third World Movement, to the economic and political rise of Asia. Since the end of the twentieth century, the increasing number of research positions and other establishments (including study programmes) dealing with Europe has reflected political integration efforts on the (Western) European continent. From a postcolonial perspective, however, it can also be understood as a possible space for deconstructing Eurocentric perspectives on the world by “provincializing Europe”.²

The shift in the allocation of institutional resources towards certain regions of the world has, since the 1960s, undoubtedly contributed to a substantial expansion of historical-empirical research into the non-European world and thus created the preconditions for overcoming the mental barrier between “Europe and the people without history” (Eric R. Wolf), which predominates in the traditional historiography of the “West”.³ However, the expansion of the “general”, i.e. largely German, European or North Atlantic, history to include the history of other regions of the world has partly led to a division of labour that is not only spatial, but also thematic. For example, historical research into the categories of “race” and “ethnicity”, alongside European anti-Semitism research, had remained for a long time a largely exclusive field of research for professorships and

1 For a general orientation see, for example, S. Conrad, *Globalgeschichte. Eine Einführung*, München 2013; R. M. Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century*, Oxford 2013; R. Wenzlhuemer, *Globalgeschichte schreiben: Eine Einführung in 6 Episoden*, Konstanz 2017; S. Beckert and D. Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global History Globally: Research and Practice around the World*, London 2018.

2 D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2008 (2000).

3 E.R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley 1982.

departments that focused on non-European world regions and in particular (former) European colonies. In the meantime, the postcolonial debate on the past and present of ethnocentrism and racism has reached even European countries without a colonial history.⁴ The concept of world regions has in the meantime come under criticism from different disciplines of the social and cultural sciences, especially since the “spatial turn” of the late 1980s led to a critical view of the demarcations made by historical actors and historians alike based on different political, economic or cultural notions of space.⁵ In 1961, the establishment of the first German-language Chair for Iberian and Latin American History at the University of Cologne still echoed the paradigm of “European expansion” and “European overseas history”. Since the 1970s and as a result of the establishment of area studies and the expansion of local archive research the history of Latin America has established itself as an independent subject of research, which has been accompanied recently by a shift in the focus of research to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶ However, the term “Latin America” owes much of its origin and use to the cultural imperial ambitions of Napoleon III in the region, and was subsequently adopted during the second half of the nineteenth century by representatives of the intellectual diaspora of the subcontinent in Europe.⁷

Apart from its European cultural-imperialist roots, the concept of a world region of “Latin America” remains problematic, not only regarding its internal political, economic, and cultural diversity, but also with regard to its difficult demarcation from the historically even more complex Caribbean region. The usual demarcation between an Anglo-American and a Latin-American sphere in the research tradition of historical comparison is also problematic in view of the steadily increasing migration movements within the American continent since the middle of the twentieth century.⁸ The original European-transatlantic dimension of the concept of Iberian and Latin American history has there-

4 For the case of Switzerland see, for example, P. Purtschert et al. (eds.), *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*, Bielefeld 2013 (2012).

5 M. Middell, *Der Spatial Turn und das Interesse an der Globalisierung in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: J. Döring and T. Thielmann (eds.), *Spatial Turn. Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*, 2nd edn, Bielefeld 2009 (2008), pp. 103–124.

6 H. Pietschmann, *Lateinamerikanische Geschichte als historische Teildisziplin. Versuch einer Standortbestimmung*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 248 (1989) 1, pp. 305–364. For a general overview regarding the development of an “Extra-European” historiography from the 1960s onwards see J. Osterhammel, *Außereuropäische Geschichte: Eine historische Problemskizze*, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 46 (1995) 5/6, pp. 253–276.

7 On the origin and development of the concept Latin America see W.D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, Malden, MA 2005.

8 Regarding traditional comparative approaches to North and South America see, for example, W. Reinhard and P. Waldmann (eds.), *Nord und Süd in Amerika. Gemeinsamkeiten, Gegensätze, Europäischer Hintergrund*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1992; K. Krakau (ed.), *Lateinamerika und Nordamerika: Gesellschaft, Politik und Wirtschaft im historischen Vergleich*, Frankfurt a.M. 1992. For a general discussion on the relationship between comparative and transnational-/regional research see H. Kaelble and J. Schriewer (eds.), *Vergleich und Transfer: Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a.M. 2003; H.-G. Haupt and J. Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, New York 2009.

fore recently been supplemented by a transregional inter-American perspective covering “the Americas”.⁹

The second half of the twentieth century has also seen the establishment of African and (East) Asian studies or history in western universities.¹⁰ However, European colonialism and diasporic practices and transcultural interdependencies have also undermined the notions of a historical unity of Africa or Asia.¹¹ The concept of a world region of Eastern Europe is in turn not only a product of the Cold War, which divided Europe into two political-ideological blocs, but also hides diverse historical connections on the Eurasian continent.¹² Finally, the distinction between different world regions is guided originally by a paradigm of modernization usually attributed to traditional world or universal history, which elevates (Western) Europe and North America to the ideal type of development that has been incomplete or completely missed elsewhere.¹³ In recent years, historians working on specific regions of the world have therefore increasingly become involved in research into transregional and global processes and interdependencies.

The question of what global history can achieve for the development of historical science, and the extent to which global historical research can be defined by specific objects, theoretical assumptions, and methodological approaches, remains the subject of discussion. In the multitude of circulating ideas about what global history is or should be, two fundamental concerns can be identified.¹⁴ On the one hand, global history attempts to overcome approaches that seek to interpret and explain historical structures and processes within the framework of given territorial entities – above all the nation states, but also certain regions of the world, but on the other hand – and here lies the actual conceptual and practical research challenge for historians – it aims to decenter perspectives on a past that has usually been analysed and interpreted as a referential historical space around Europe or the “West”. Against this background, historical research on world

- 9 See, for example, O. Kaltmeier et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook to the History and Society of the Americas*, London York 2019.
- 10 Osterhammel, *Außereuropäische Geschichte*, p. 263; A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (ed.), *The Emergence of African History at British Universities*, Oxford 1995; for the United States, see R. Ferreira, *The Institutionalization of African Studies in the United States: Origin, Consolidation and Transformation*, in: *Revista Brasileira de História* 30 (2010), pp. 71–88; Pietschmann, *Lateinamerikanische Geschichte*; P. van der Velde, *Re-orienting Asian Studies*, in: J. Stremmelaar and P. van der Velde (eds.), *What about Asia? Revisiting Asian Studies*, Amsterdam 2006, pp. 87–103.
- 11 On the (de-) construction of Western concepts of Asian history see H. Sutherland, *Southeast Asian History and the Mediterranean Analogy*, in: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34 (2003) 1, pp. 1–20; I. Chatterjee, *Connected Histories and the Dream of Decolonial History*, in: *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41 (2018) 1, pp. 69–86; V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington 1988; R. Law and P. Lovejoy, *The Changing Dimensions of African History: Reappropriating the Diaspora*, in: S. McGrath et al. (eds.), *Rethinking African History*, Edinburgh 1997, pp. 181–200; J. Chatterji and D. Washbrook (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, Abingdon 2013; N. Glick-Schiller, *Long-distance Nationalism*, in: N. Glick-Schiller et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World*, New York 2005, pp. 70–80.
- 12 Cf. the conception of the Russian and Soviet “polyethnic Empire” by A. Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung – Geschichte – Zerfall*, München 1993, p. 9.
- 13 For a critical analysis of western modernization approaches in history see W. Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne: Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika*, Frankfurt a. M. 2007.
- 14 S. Conrad, *What is Global History?* Princeton 2016, p. 3.

regions located outside the “West” and based on geographical conurbations and “civilizations” is confronted with the task of rethinking their role in the production of historical knowledge. It faces concrete challenges that can be described as contradictory. On the one hand, by criticizing the conventional meta-geographic categories of historical science, global history approaches question also the basic assumptions and framings of the history of the world’s regions. On the other hand, the decentring of historiographical perspectives requires a strengthening of expertise and empirical research in non-Western European and non-North American history, which are still largely organized in spatially defined historical sub-disciplines or area studies.

The challenges for a stronger link between global historical questions and empirical research on (not only) non-European history are manifold. They initially refer to the knowledge of different languages and “scientific cultures” (epistemologies, research questions and paradigms, analytical categories, etc.) and the way this knowledge affects the research results achieved by “western” historians. It should be emphasized that the differences between different scientific cultures cannot be limited to a differentiation between Europe or the “West” and the non-European or non-Western world. For example, the high impact of subaltern studies in Asian social and cultural sciences contrasts with its rather low reception in Latin America,¹⁵ and the analytical concept of decoloniality (*decolonialidad*), coined recently in Latin America social and cultural studies in the light of the early decolonization of the subcontinent, consciously stands out from the postcolonial studies approach, developed previously in the Asian research context.¹⁶

There are also different ideas regarding the temporal location of structures and processes of global historical significance in research on the various regions of the world. On the one hand, historiography concerning the Americas, as well as Immanuel Wallerstein’s world system theory, see the European colonization of the (chiefly central and southern) continent and the associated exchange of goods in the early modern period, which also included Asia and Africa, as the starting point of the first phase of globalization.¹⁷ The image of the modern *supertanker*, on the other hand, which by 1500 could have easily carried half of the annual transatlantic trade, and by 1800 still 20 per cent of it, condenses the majority position among global historians, according to which global connections only assume a significant extent in the nineteenth century, which can be considered, from this perspective, as the real starting point of globalization and global history.¹⁸

The integration of global and regional historical research is hampered further by national historical paradigms which continue to be strongly pronounced in the non-European world. Moreover, historical research in many non-European regions is barely supported

15 I. Rodríguez (ed.), *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, Durham, NC 2001.

16 W. D. Mignolo and A. Escobar (eds.), *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, London 2013.

17 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols., Berkeley 2011 (1974); F. Edelmayer et al. (eds.), *Globalgeschichte 1450–1620. Anfänge und Perspektiven*, Wien 2002.

18 P.C. Emmer, *Die europäische Expansion und ihre Folgen im atlantischen Raum, 1500–1800*, in: *Jahrbuch für europäische Überseegegeschichte* 2 (2002), p. 10; cf. J. de Vries, *The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World*, in: *Economic History Review* 63 (2010), pp. 710–733. However, P.C. Emmer stresses also the fact that inner continental trade exceeds intercontinental trade from early modern times until the present, *ibid.*

in view of the scarcity of economic resources and limited career prospects, and the internationally renowned specialist journals and handbooks on individual world regions or global history are published to this day primarily by (mainly English-speaking) publishers based in the North Atlantic region. In contrast, the contributions in the current issue emphasize that historical research on the various regions of the world can look back on a longer tradition of transregional perspectives and can, in this respect, be regarded as a forerunner and pioneer of a new, non-Eurocentric global history. What's more, non-Western historians and social or cultural scientists as well as the scientific diaspora in North America and Europe originating from Latin America, Asia, and Africa have played an important role in the development and critical appraisal of both area studies and global history.¹⁹

Against such a background, it is not surprising that the potential of global history to lead regional history out of its artificial separation from general – usually Western – history is emphasized. However, critics have pointed out that large scale histories of globalization run the risk of covering asymmetries and hierarchies or even tend to (re-) colonize the history of the non-Western world.²⁰ Therefore, from the context of postcolonial studies new concepts and research agendas like the “Black Atlantic” or the “Global South” have emerged since the 1990s, which specifically distinguish themselves from Eurocentric approaches and look at transregional interdependencies outside or beyond the West or western actors.²¹

Other critical voices on the current state of global history point to the fact that the various regions of the world have been considered to varying degrees even in current publications. While Asia, for example, always plays a prominent role in the classics of global historical research, such as those by Christopher Bayly or Jürgen Osterhammel, Latin America and Africa often remain underexposed. In recent years, Eastern Europe has only gradually come to the fore in global historical perspectives.²² This is also true in the case of an increased consideration of the Early Modern period, which is rather under-represented within the current study of global history, including the slave trade which involved the most diverse local actors, and the development of an Atlantic economic

19 See, for example, S. Amin, *Global history: A View from the South*, Oxford 2011; A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 2010; W.D. Mignolo, *Local Histories – Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, NJ 2000; cf. B. Mazlish and A. Iriye (eds.), *The Global History Reader*, New York 2005.

20 M. Pernau, *Global History – Wegbereiter für einen neuen Kolonialismus?*, in: *Connections. A Journal for Historians and Area Specialists*, 17 December 2004, <https://www.connections.clio-online.net/article/id/artikel-572> (accessed 15 June 2019); cf. V. Lal, *Provincializing the West: World History from the Perspective of Indian History*, in: B. Stuchtey and E. Fuchs (eds.), *Writing World History, 1800–2000*, Oxford 2003, pp. 270–289.

21 P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London 1993; H. Dorsch, *Afrikanische Diaspora und Black Atlantic. Einführung in Geschichte und aktuelle Diskussion*, Münster 2000; S. Costa, *Vom Nordatlantik zum Black Atlantic. Postkoloniale Konfigurationen und Paradoxien transnationaler Politik*, Bielefeld 2007; K. Bystrom and J.R. Slaughter (eds.), *The Global South Atlantic*, New York 2018; S. Wieringa and H. Sívori (eds.), *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, London 2013.

22 M. Aust (ed.), *Globalisierung imperial und sozialistisch. Russland und die Sowjetunion in der Globalgeschichte 1851–1991*, Frankfurt a.M. 2013.

area, which in turn entailed manifold interdependencies extending beyond the Atlantic area.²³ Global historical research on Eastern Europe, or Russia, and Asia is also connected with a trans-regional historiography that overcomes national research contexts and, in the case of Asia, also includes the period before European expansion.²⁴ Against the background of the preceding considerations, the aim of the current issue is to discuss the overlaps, tensions, and contradictions between the approaches of global history and the history of world regions. Even though the ongoing discussion of global historical concepts generally focuses on the connections between the “global” and the “local” and between global and national histories, the question of the relationship between global history and the history of world regions has not been investigated thoroughly, and in many cases the contributions in this regard have not gone further than observing the difficulties of integrating the latter into global approaches. Some studies have, for example, (re-)considered the significance and outline of world and global history within the research agendas and teaching curricula in specific countries or selected universities.²⁵ Or, with a view to historiography of a particular region of the world, they have looked into the question of how far it is integrated into global history or global studies debates.²⁶ Other works have continued the older debate, which started in the 1970s, on the deficits, challenges, and perspectives of area studies under the new auspices of the discussion on global history.²⁷ More recently, individual contributions deal with the place of particular world regions within world or global history.²⁸ However, this has not resulted in a coherent picture that would make the similarities and differences between the historiographies on the various regions of the world more visible in their relations to global history. Finally, there is now almost a decade of research practice in global history which is essential

- 23 M. Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei. Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 2013; J. Cañizares-Esguerra and E.R. Seeman (eds.), *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000*, London 2018; C. Strobel, *The Global Atlantic 1400 to 1900*, New York 2015.
- 24 K. Goff and L.H. Siegelbaum (eds.), *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands*, Ithaca 2019; S. Subrahmanyam, *Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia*, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997) 3, pp. 735–762; K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge 1990.
- 25 For the US see, for example, J.L. Hare and J. Wells, *Promising the World: Surveys, Curricula, and the Challenge of Global History*, in: *The History Teacher* 48 (2015) 2, pp. 371–388; M. Gräser, *Weltgeschichte im Nationalstaat. Die transnationale Disposition der amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 283 (2006) 2, pp. 355–382. From a Marxist perspective in East Germany, see M. Middell, *Manfred Kossok: Writing World History in East Germany*, in: *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 38 (2015) 1–2, pp. 41–69.
- 26 For a critical perspective on older modernization orientated approaches to the place of specific world regions in global processes, see W. Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne*; P. Manning, *African and World Historiography*, in: *Journal of African History* 54 (2013), pp. 319–330; M. Brown, *The Global History of Latin America*, in: *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015) 3, pp. 365–386.
- 27 V.L. Rafael, *The Cultures of Area Studies in the United States*, in: *Social Text* 41 (1994), pp. 91–111; M. Braig and F. Hentschke, *Die Zukunft der Area Studies in Deutschland*, in: *Africa Spectrum* 40 (2005) 3, pp. 547–558; P.A. Jackson, *Space, Theory, and Hegemony: The Dual Crises of Asian Area Studies and Cultural Studies*, in: *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 18 (2003) 1, pp. 1–41; K. Slocum and D.A. Thomas, *Rethinking Global and Area Studies: Insights from Caribbeanist Anthropologists*, in: *American Anthropologist* 105 (2003) 3, pp. 553–565.
- 28 See, for example, M.J. Gilbert, *South Asia in World History*, Oxford 2017; P. Manning, *Locating Africans on the World Stage: A Problem in World History*, in: *Journal of World History* 26 (2015) 3, pp. 605–637.

for the assessment of the questions to be discussed, not least in view of the early demands of allowing empirical work to follow the theoretical discussions raised in the field.

Questions over the relationship between global history and the history of world regions, however, does not purely aim at the role of the latter, but also at sharpening the understanding of the former. The most influential, most discussed contributions to global history in both English and German-speaking countries in recent years have come mainly from historians whose research has a focus on a non-European region of the world, although not on several regions. At the same time, specialists in non-European history have expressed reservations against global history. The most important criticism was the undeniable danger of a flattening of historical analysis, due to a lack of regional expertise – including the associated language skills – which could lead to a reproduction of Eurocentric views or a “history light”.²⁹ Accordingly, the idea of a substantial global history has been associated with a solid anchoring in research on the world regions outside of Europe and the USA.³⁰

Apart from the emphasis on the importance of regionally specific competences – and the associated differentiation from macro-perspectives and claims to totality as ascribed to older world history – conceptual and empirical contributions in the field of global history hold different views on what “global” actually designates and what this subsequently means for specific objects, questions, theories, and methods of global historical research. Even though the frames of national history, as a dominant research paradigm, have come under pressure, they still dominate historiographical production. However, even where global historical perspectives are offered, it is sometimes a question of interests in national history, for example with a view to the narratives of a special national path (*Sonderweg*). In a spatially broader perspective, it can be stated that most historians continue to research the history of precisely those regions of the world in which they live and have been academically socialized. In addition, the selection of questions and themes of existing global history studies do not differ always fundamentally from those of transnational history, or entangled history. In the broadest sense, the main benefits of global history would therefore be the focus on structures and processes that affect the globe as a whole. Global history thus seeks to intertwine the local, the regional, and the national with the global. In this respect, global history, from a theoretical and methodological point of view, usually appears to be openly conceived as a “perspective” or “approach”, whose primary research goal are the global – or even only transregional – connections or entanglements of people, goods, and knowledge.³¹

One can however ask whether the perspectives and the potential for innovation of global history and its significance as a discipline in its own right could not benefit from a more specific definition of the concept. While the detachment of historical perspectives from

29 Cf. Perna, *Global History*; B. Barth et al., *Einleitung: Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte*, in: B. Barth et al. (eds.), *Globalgeschichten. Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven*, Frankfurt a.M. 2014, pp. 7–18.

30 For a recent survey on global history approaches regarding different world regions and regional historiographies see Beckert and Sachsenmaier, *Global History*, pp. 19–142.

31 Cf. D.A. Washbrook, *Problems of Global History*, in: Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global*, pp. 21–31.

their fixation on national history is also the concern of transnational history, research on non-European regions of the world is aimed also at overcoming Eurocentric historical narratives and provides the basis – and the challenge – for an empirically saturated global history. According to Sebastian Conrad, the concern of global history therefore goes beyond the investigation of transregional and global interdependencies by focusing on “large-scale structured integration” and pursuing the “problem of causation up to the global level”.³² But then again, global history currently operates scientifically and politically between two fronts: Within Europe and the North Atlantic world, on the one hand, the current renaissance of nationalism seems to confirm the historical significance of nation states. Outside the West, on the other hand, global historical perspectives are sometimes exposed to the suspicion of a (re-)colonization of historiography and thus to a – not so New – Imperial History.

The question posed for discussion in the current issue regarding the relationship between global history and the history of world regions thus initially points to the existing tension between the – explicit or implicit – postulate of a globalization emanating from Europe and the demand for a provincialization of Europe in a global perspective. In addition, it opens a critical reflection on spaces and places, structures and processes of entanglements and synchronicities, as well as disentanglements and divergence, which allow us to scrutinize the concepts of the global and the world regions themselves. Finally, it takes up the significance of comparative approaches in the context of global history research. The current issue focuses on how the relationship between global history and the history of world regions is reflected in German-language historiography. It approaches the relationship from the varied academic conditions under which global history is discussed in different contexts – in Germany as well as in the USA, Great Britain, France, China, or Mexico – and which are also relevant in research practice. In addition, the focus on German-language historiography serves the goal of conducting a more nuanced debate on the topic, in view of the necessity of multilingualism within discussions on global history.

The following contributions are divided into two parts. The first part consists of articles by Stefan Rinke and Frederik Schulze, Andreas Eckert, Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Martin Aust, who, based on their expertise in the history of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, deal with the relationship between the historiography on the respective world region and global historical research. Subsequently, Roland Wenzlhuemer and Stephan Scheuzger will present their considerations on the status and tasks of global history and the role of regional expertise.

The concept of the current issue goes back to a series of events organized by the two editors under the title “Global History and History of World Regions” in the autumn semester of 2015 at the University of Bern’s Center for Global Studies. The following six central questions underlying the events also form the starting point for the contributions

to the current issue: (1) What understanding of global history – and related concepts, such as transnational, international or entangled history – underlie the considerations? (2) How can the claims arising from the twofold constitutive orientation of global historical approaches – the spatial decentration of research perspectives and the breaking up of fixed spatial concepts – be judged in relation to and weighed against one another? (3) How is the position of historiography on the respective world region assessed in the current global history – also regarding older transregional approaches to research and postcolonial studies, which may have already anticipated the concerns of global history? (4) What significance is ascribed to the history of the respective world region regarding global historical research – especially considering the questions from which historical period onwards global history can be meaningfully pursued, and which forms and aspects of cross-border interdependencies, as well as which objects of investigation, are to be classified as particularly relevant? (5) How can these considerations be illustrated with examples from the contributors own empirical research? (6) How can we conclude the potential and risks of global historical approaches between theoretical claim and empirical realization?

The first part of the current issue is opened by the contribution of Stefan Rinke and Frederik Schulze, who, from the perspective of Latin American historians, emphasize the importance of historical Latin American studies for a global history that not only looks at its objects from the nineteenth century onwards, but also integrates early modern times into its perspectives. With the establishment of colonial rule in early modern Latin America, many of the worldwide interdependencies began that are regarded today as shaping a globalized world. In addition, the authors elaborate on the fact that these far-reaching interdependencies have been known for some time in the historiography of Latin America, but have also been examined by it for decades as a global history *avant la lettre*. This clearly contrasts with the finding that the subcontinent has so far played only a marginal role in the trend of global history. The reasons for this marginalization is therefore of particular interest. At the same time, the authors refer to the recent upswing of global historical perspectives on Latin America, which can be seen in the areas of migration, social movements or the two world wars and the Cold War.

In his contribution, Andreas Eckert also notes a role on the fringes of the rise of global history for African history. However, he also considers the ongoing debate of whether there is further evidence of Africa's continuing marginalization in historiography, or whether it can be traced back to the continent's rather marginal position in world history. He instead focuses primarily on the question of how historians of Africa position themselves in relation to global history and how they use global historical perspectives in their research. This approach leads onto the question of global academic hierarchies and the material basis of historical research. The pressure generally felt among African historians to prove their ability to connect to global historical approaches is often countered – as in Latin America – by the view that global history is another manifestation of Western knowledge imperialism and represents an attack on the specific knowledge of local constellations. Eckert also proves – like Rinke and Schulze for Latin America –

that there is a long tradition, dating back to W. E. B. Du Bois, of tracing Africa's place in world history. However, one of the problematic aspects that is still characteristic of both African and global historiography is the notion of Africa as "special" and of other regions of the world as "normal". The contribution therefore argues for a perspective that does not overly focus on the particularities of Africa, as on the peculiarities of global history, of which Africa is a part.

In the following contribution, Harald Fischer-Tiné discusses, among other things, to what extent it is true that (South) Asia represents, as historians often see it, a privileged object of global historical research. It was indeed the South Asian specialist Christopher Bayly, who more than ten years ago helped global history achieve an international academic breakthrough (and commercial success) with his highly acclaimed book *The Birth of the Modern World*. It should also be noted that some of the theoretical thinkers frequently quoted by global historians such as Dipesh Chakrabarty or Partha Chatterjee began their careers as regional specialists for the Indian subcontinent. The article shows why global historical and even transnational perspectives had anything but an easy time asserting themselves among historians of the region, at least if they transcended the imperial axis of South Asia-Britain. In addition to an inventory of the older research approaches that embedded the history of the subcontinent in larger trans-local contexts (outside the British Empire), the article also provides an overview of some of the most important fields of research that South Asian historians have been working on since the "global turn" at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Fischer-Tiné illustrates his own methodological ideas of a "global micro-history" of the region using the example of his research on the history of the US Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in South Asia.

Martin Aust's review of the relationship between global historical historiography and historiography of Eastern Europe, focusing on the subject of Russian history in the nineteenth century, concludes the first part of the current issue. Aust begins by referring to the historiographical tradition of studies on the Russian empire. Since the research carried out on the Tsarist Empire over the past 25 years has focused primarily on its internal conditions, and has only recently begun to address the links between the empire and various external worlds, Aust considers two interesting starting points for global historical research in Russian historiography. First, the volume on the nineteenth century of the history of the world recently published by the Russian Academy of Sciences reveals a convergence between the otherwise traditionally separate fields of so-called general history and the history of Russia. Secondly, the contributions of former Soviet area studies are moving in a direction that also focuses on Russia's connections to the respective regions. Aust argues that these approaches should be pursued for future research on the place of Russia in global history. He analyses the potential of such connections using the example of the question in which fields globalization processes in the nineteenth century opened up spaces of possibility for actors from the tsarist empire, and in which fields they had a structurally restrictive effect. Aust focused on aspects of economy, mobility, and law. In addition to examining interdependencies, he also emphasizes the importance

of comparative perspectives on a global scale. In this way, historical specifics and inter-relationships would be discernible, through which historiography of Russia could enrich global historical debates.

All four contributions of the first part of the current issue emphasize the central importance of regionally specific competences when it comes to addressing the question of the tension between the two central strands of global history – the overcoming of internalist perspectives and the decentering of historiographical perspectives – in their relationship to historiographies about specific world regions. Accordingly, global history not only requires the expertise of historiography on these world regions, but it is also best researched from the perspective of these regions. The authors cannot recognize a fundamental questioning of the geographically and epistemologically defined formats of historical research on Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, a loss of significance in favour of global history, or even an over-shaping by the latter, neither as threat scenarios nor as desiderata. Since all authors reflect from their position as specialists in the history of a region of the world, from where they have also included global history approaches in their research, this finding is not very surprising. However, it does seem significant in terms of the representativeness it can claim: In the German-speaking world, global history was established by historians who, in the first generation, were closely linked to the regionally defined sub-disciplines of historical studies.

In the second part of the current issue, two historians whose works have inscribed themselves in the further developments of the field of global history, and who have increasingly detached themselves from a specialization in the history of a single region of the world or have never been part of such a regional research tradition, present their ideas of the central concerns of global history.

Roland Wenzlhuemer understands global history primarily as the history of transregional or global connections. Thus, his central theme is how and why global connections have arisen through the thoughts and actions of people and, at the same time, have influenced them. This fundamental question would give rise to countless systematic problems that need to be examined in a wide variety of regional settings. The regional contexts are highly relevant, but do not form the explanandum. The aim of global history approaches, through a focus on global networking and exchange processes, to contribute to overcoming Eurocentric perspectives, does not imply any particular relationship between the history of certain, especially non-European, world regions and global history. Rather, every object can be viewed – in principle – from a perspective of global connections. Wenzlhuemer exemplifies his research approach with a case study on the interweaving of British colonial politics and communication technologies in Burma (Upper Burma) in the late nineteenth century.

Stephan Scheuzger argues in favour of giving more analytical weight to the hitherto less prominent aspect of the deceneration of historical perspectives, in contrast to the dominant focus in research on transfers and interactions that global history shares with transnational or renewed international history. Using the example of the global history of punishment in the “long” nineteenth century, the contribution shows the fundamental

limitations of the investigation of transmission processes and the analysis of their significance for local processes. At the same time, Scheuzger critically notes that historians in the context of global history, apart from a regular distinction from the macro-perspectives of world-historical approaches, rarely investigate what the “global” exactly describes in their research. To do this on an empirically founded basis implies, on the one hand, a precise analysis of the scope of cross-border interdependencies as well as their significance for historical developments in certain regions – for which regional historical expertise is required. On the other hand, it is necessary for global historical studies to integrate different spaces into their consideration in as wide and meaningful manner as possible, based on different regional historical expertise. The core global historical concern of decentration should therefore be implemented – first and foremost – in a multicentric perspective. This corresponds with an understanding of global history that is situated somewhere between a global history essentially conducted as an extension of regional history and master stories of world history and that ascribes a central role to comparison.