There is no doubt that the world-making of historians and the rhetorical power of the terminology they employ produce a form of convergence and, to some extent, render invisible the diversity of past experience. In this, moreover, historians—and the humanities more generally—are not alone. In our present, the sequencing of genetic information, market logic in economics, the colonizing of local meaning through big data and "digital humanities" projects, the language of environmental threats, and so much else, are all engaged in a crowding out of peculiarities and specificities.

But whatever the discipline, and whatever the language employed, the "flattening" of the world that we now ascribe to the operations of discourse cannot be separated from the historical process itself. Increasing integration—whether initiated by Olmec civilizational hegemony in ancient Mexico, Russia's early-modern thrust into Siberia, or the rules and regulations of the International Monetary Fund—has always imposed shared vocabularies and mediated between social practices across different spaces. In the modern era, state building, imperialism, capitalism, and a range of developmental projects, to name only a few enterprises, have formatted—and in a sense "flattened"—social realities more powerfully than historians will ever manage to do.

Global history for whom?
The politics of global history

When history emerged as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, it developed in close relation to the institutions of the nation-state. Many historians had a national readership in mind. While some deliberately pursued the agenda of creating and shaping the nation, others did so inadvertently, merely by granting the travails and achievements of their own nation center-stage. Most historians wrote in the local language and addressed an audience with whom they had much in common, both politically and culturally. There was a sense that most, in one way or another, were contributing to producing the nation. Similarly, global history, in a very basic sense, is about coming to terms with the global past, and thus about *creating the world* for the purposes of the present. These purposes are manifold, and they may be conflicting and contested. Historians may have in mind a borderless world of liberal capitalism, but their reconstructions of the world may also be linked to the agendas of environmental movements, indigenous communities, and social pressure groups. While historians are engaged in their different forms of world-making, it is important to

reflect on the implications of making a world. If the "world" is the subject, who, then, is the "we" that global historians write for? And what are the politics of such an approach?

Global history for whom?

The most common answer to this question is: Global history is an inherently cosmopolitan endeavor. At its core, it is an inclusive project, both geographically and normatively. To begin with, it provides a broad account of humanity's past. At a time when news is no longer confined to one's own society; when tourists roam the planet, and migration links labor markets in different parts of the world; when we eat food grown in faraway locations and buy goods produced elsewhere: in our globalized present, in other words, global history is a contribution to making sense of the world in which we live.

To be a historian in the twenty-first century, then, in some fundamental sense means to be a global historian. Gone are the days when history departments could be content with a focus on one nation alone. "Such narrowness is the equivalent of a chemistry department committing itself to teaching and researching the workings of only one element [. . .] while ignoring all others."[1] What is imperative today is an awareness of different pasts in many regions of the globe, and of the interactions and exchanges between them. Our present invites historians to design their questions and answers within this broader framework, and to engage with other narratives, perspectives, and voices. This has long been the aspiration of broad-minded historians. "The boundaries which states and nations set up in their hostility and egoism have been pierced,"

Friedrich Schiller declared back in 1789. "All reflective men today are joined as citizens of the world."[2]

Herein lies the utopian promise of global history: to turn us into citizens of the world. The plausibility of such a promise is based on the extent to which the planet has been integrated on various levels so that many larger processes can no longer be studied, or understood, in isolation. Global ideologies and political movements, financial and economic crises, and the expansion of web-based communication—it is no longer possible to make sense of these things if a study is strictly confined to one place alone. Many of the problems that societies face today—from environmental and climate issues, working conditions and the functioning of markets, to cultural exchange—require an awareness that we all inhabit the same earth and share its resources.[3] In practice, however, the notion that one is a global citizen has remained only a weak factor in the identities of most people, an idea only tenuously rooted in their life-worlds.

The terms "cosmopolitanism" and "citizen" both look back to a longer European genealogy. However, the debate about cosmopolitanism has now emancipated itself from its exclusive concern with Western philosophy, abstract universal reason, and normative claims to universality. In recent years, scholars have unearthed a multitude of cosmopolitan approaches from a variety of locations beyond the West that defy easy classification as either all-inclusive or narrow, either assimilationist-universal or parochial. Instead, they have explored the many ways in which social groups practiced ways of coming to terms with one another, and very pragmatically engaged in conversations and forms of cooperation, beyond the idealist conceptions of philosophers. Such "cosmopolitan

thought zones" have emerged where dissimilar groups sought to solve problems together, thus bridging (cultural and other) divides even when not subscribing to a common universal outlook.[4]

However, cosmopolitan outlooks are not a vision subscribed to by all. Global history as an approach lends itself to a variety of competing and contradicting purposes. Some groups employ world and global history explicitly as a means to highlight and aggrandize their nation. In China, for example, historians have recently revived the memory of the transoceanic voyages of Zheng He and other feats of past trans-regional engagement in order to stimulate Chinese initiative and encourage China's accession to a leadership position in the world. Indeed, the popularity of world history in China is quite clearly connected to the country's status as a global economic and political power. In public discourse, globalization is sometimes seen almost as a political instrument of the Chinese state. Global history is therefore not generally regarded as a methodological alternative, but as a context in which the growth of the nation can be explained and promoted.[5]

The link between global history and more circumscribed identities can be observed elsewhere, too. "World-history-as-context is not in and of itself inconsistent with claims to national or civilizational supremacy, as it may provide an occasion for rendering either nation or civilization into the central moment of world history."[6] This link does not have to be blatantly ideological, either. Strictly speaking, whenever global history is conceived as a context that helps to better explain a nation or civilization, it tends to reproduce the spatialities it purports to challenge. This is true even for accounts that are highly critical of the national past.

The tension between cosmopolitan and national/civilizational perspectives, however, should not be exaggerated. For many historians, the nation has long ceased to be the privileged point of reference, even when they are not thinking about humanity as a whole. Frequently, the imagined community is not the nation, but fragments of it, or transnational groups: the working class, women, Buddhists, environmental movements. But when historians write with such audiences in mind, their readers are often a much narrower constituency: essentially their own colleagues. If we exempt the few popular works of synthesis and focus on the specialist works that use a global perspective, this tendency is even more pronounced. In the institutional framework of academic research, writing global history is part of a professional conversation, and the "we" in question are our fellow historians.

That said, historians today are nevertheless accountable to a larger public, and in most places, this public is now implicated in broader global trends more than ever before. Potential readers, ranging from students to the educated public, experience their quotidian lives as increasingly globalized. For this group, the international middle classes that control high concentrations of financial, but also social and intellectual capital, transnational and global perspectives make a lot of sense. While catering to these markets, historians also feel the need to legitimize their use of public funds and institutional power. This may lead some to emphasize the global dimensions of their work, as it addresses pressing issues on a planetary scale. At the same time, it remains important to demonstrate that studies on other pasts—e.g., U.S. historians who study the trans-Saharan trade or rubber plantations in Malaysia—are not exotic and peripheral, but produce work crucial to an understanding

of the place our societies hold in the larger world in which we live.

Global history as the ideology of globalization?

Global and other spatial questions are often also normative questions. Apart from the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, the most pressing concern is to clarify the relationship between global history and globalization. There is no doubt that the broad appeal of global perspectives corresponds with, and is triggered by, the current globalization process. But how exactly are the two related? Or, to put it more provocatively: If national history emerged in collusion with the nation-building project in the nineteenth century, and area studies as a product of the Cold War—is twenty-first century global history not essentially a handmaiden of twenty-first century globalization?

As critics have pointed out, it is clear that global history at times comes close to constructing a genealogy of the current globalization process. The enthusiasm for movement, mobility, and circulation can make the ever-closer integration of the world appear a more or less natural development, so that globalization begins to look like a process taking place behind the backs of and independently of historical actors. Rhetorically, the celebration of different forms of "flows" is not far removed from the invocation of versatility and flexibility in management circles and the market-liberal language of globalization. Anthropologist Karen Ho has argued that "the language of flows, decenteredness, and immateriality" in social science literature has its roots in the elevation of capitalism's self-image to the level of theory.[7] Fernando Coronil sees a legitimizing

discourse at work in the notions of "one world" and the peaceful "global village." For him, such "globalcentrism" is but an ideological veil that misrepresents globalization and obscures the fact that it is driven by financial capital.[8] Training in global history or global studies, then, would nurture expertise in all things global and produce students attractive to global corporations.

Paradoxically, the very rejection of Eurocentric narratives can create the impression that there is no alternative to the rise of global capitalism, thus in fact taking Eurocentrism to its extreme. Indeed, in recent decades, historians in various places have argued against a diffusion model, and have instead embarked on a quest for the indigenous origins of capitalism in places such as Egypt, Japan, and China. They have emphasized culturally specific resources and a variety of paths into the modern world, making the case that global modernity has a plurality of roots, which are no longer to be sought only in Europe, but outside the West as well. From such a perspective, Chinese traditions, for instance, become ingredients for a Chinese capitalism. This kind of construction, however, suggests a universality that was home-grown and developed naturally. It is part of what Immanuel Wallerstein once termed "anti-Eurocentric Eurocentrism," for even as it takes an anti-Eurocentric stance, it may cause us to neglect the dominant and oppressive role that imperialism and European capitalism played in the forging of a global world order in the nineteenth century.[9]

Some recent readings of the global process that emphasize cultural diversity thus can easily morph into an ideological prop of globalization. They understand difference above all as cultural, as a conflict between "Western," "Chinese," and "Indian" traditions, while largely ignoring socioeconomic inequalities.

The concept of multiple modernities, for example, is open to appropriation by non-Western elites who are competing with other elites for global influence, but are less inclined to face up to the demands of their own workers for economic inclusion. Such back-projections of indigenous modernities frequently present their nations as homogenous cultural units and ignore the internal controversies that surround issues of modernity within the nation.[10]

This fundamental objection to discourses of globality and globalization cannot be simply dismissed—not even if one is skeptical about the clear-cut dichotomies of labor and capital and the rhetoric of veiling in which they are frequently formulated. Global historians therefore must be attentive to the ways in which their findings can be used, and to the logics that sneak into their own projects inadvertently. They need to be aware of the power structures of which they are part, even when they analyze these same structures. Essentially, this means that one of the crucial tasks of global history is to offer a critical commentary on the ongoing globalization process. Global history can offer a reflexive awareness and problematize the narratives that interested parties employ to legitimize their political agendas, be it the curtailing of the welfare state or the abolition of border controls. There are at least four ways in which this can be done.

First, global history can be used as a methodology that challenges the teleology of globalization rhetoric. By situating events and processes in concrete (global) contexts, the approach offers an important corrective to assumptions of long-term continuity and secular change, and to the metaphysics of globalization frequently encountered in the economic and social science literature.[11] Second, historians can remind

us that global structures are always partly the result of globalizing projects, and thus of historical actors pursuing their own interests and agendas. In this way, a global history perspective is an antidote to assumptions of a naturally evolving process.

Third, historians will be in a position to assess both the costs and benefits of global integration. Connections are not in themselves either a good or a bad thing, neither inherently beneficial nor detrimental. Slavery, war, empire, epidemic diseases are potential high and exacting costs of connectivity. But at the same time, cross-border interactions make objects and ideas available and create new spaces where individuals and groups can form alliances, demand reforms, and think through the complexities of global reality. Much will depend on how historians assess the globalization process. A variety of actors have associated globalization with expanding worldwide inequalities, new modes of exploitation and domination, displacement, marginalization, and ecological holocaust. Others have praised the process as creating unprecedented forms of prosperity, freedom, emancipation, and democracy. Was the Mongol empire an engine of trans-border commerce, of cultural interaction, and of a general widening of horizons—or did it bring destruction and facilitate the spread of the Black Death? To some extent, both are true. Certainly there were casualties and victims who suffered from new forms of exchange, while others benefited and flourished. Conversely, although some have paid a high price for parochialism, there are also benefits to salvaging the local and the unconnected, in not being subsumed under global structures. We may be critical of the specific ways in which markets were made to converge, cultural hegemony was established, and transnational political institutions formed or were hampered. But on the whole,

it will be difficult to argue that connectivity, any more than history itself, bears responsibility for the shortcomings.

Finally, global history as an approach moves us beyond internalist explanations. This point may seem rather technical and inconsequential. However, it makes it possible to question genealogical explanations, which ascribe historical developments—such as rise and decline, prosperity and deprivation, openness and isolation—directly to the inherent qualities of individual persons, societies, and "cultures." Global history thus challenges the ideology that individuals and larger groups are entirely responsible for their own happiness or misery. Given the strong tradition of methodological individualism in the social sciences, this is an important corrective. Global history can shift our attention to the hierarchies of power and the geopolitical structures that conditioned the way in which the world became integrated, with important effects on individuals, groups, and whole societies.

Who writes the world? Hierarchies of knowledge

At the turn of the millennium, Dipesh Chakrabarty alerted his fellow historians to the "inequality of ignorance" as a pervasive structure of global knowledge production. "Third-world historians," as he put it at the time, "feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate." Historians in India, Kenya, or Argentina can only ignore the works of their prominent Western colleagues at their peril. Conversely, when scholars like Edward Thompson, George Duby, Carlo Ginzburg, and Natalie Davis crafted their studies, they were hardly expected to be conversant with

historiographies outside Euro-America.[12] In our globalized present, to what extent has this changed? Has global history as a paradigm enabled a broader range of voices to participate in the scholarly conversation? Where does global history writing actually take place?

We must first admit that well into the twenty-first century, global history remains primarily a domain of the industrialized and economically privileged parts of the world. As a perspective, as an additional dimension, it is beginning to have some influence elsewhere; but it is primarily in the United States and in other Anglophone countries, in parts of Western Europe, and in East Asia that global history has found anything like a permanent home in the university system. Institutional structures are important. The different perspectives on global history do not depend solely on theoretical debates and on discursive traditions; to a large extent they are the outcome of diverging sociologies of knowledge.

The reasons for this unequal development are manifold. In any single country, the appeal of global history depends on a variety of internal conditions. In the United States, for example, the rise of area studies, controversies over curriculum reform, and the demands of a society shaped by immigration all played an important role. As a result, the World History Association was founded in 1982, and the *Journal of World History* began publication in 1990. In Britain, the tradition of imperial history enabled a broader representation of the histories of Asia and Africa than in many other countries. Whatever the domestic specificities, however, it is hard to ignore that the rise of global history as a paradigm occurred primarily in countries that actively participated in, and benefited from, the globalization process. In some places—notably the

United States and China—the resonance of global history is keyed to a broader public awareness of the country's leading role in the world.[13]

Why is global history less prominent elsewhere, and what does its lack of popularity imply? To a large degree, different institutional conditions help explain the lack of enthusiasm in some quarters. One crucial factor is the extent to which academic communities are in touch with Anglophone discussions and affected by them. In many Arab countries, and to some degree also in countries such as France and Italy, contact with English-language debates is often minimal, and publication in the national language remains standard. Traditionally, many historians in Latin America tend to be influenced more by French or Spanish scholarship than by research from Britain or North America—a situation vastly different from that in places such as Denmark and the Netherlands where global history caught on much earlier.

Global history is also less attractive in countries where nation-building ranks high on the public and intellectual agenda. This is the case in many parts of Africa, but also in Eastern Europe in the wake of the Cold War. Under such conditions, funding—when at all available—tends to be allocated primarily to projects relating to the national past.[14] And more generally, of course, the issue of funding is crucial—and not only for global history agendas. In Africa in particular, many universities and academic institutions are in deep crisis, so much so that instruction in history itself may be called into question. Global history can be a particularly expensive undertaking. Journals and research centers, language training, international conferences, and the like can flourish only where foundations and government organizations are willing to promote, and take a risk on, the new approach, and where

publishers can count on a return on their investments. Their willingness depends not least on the extent to which societies can benefit politically and economically from the globalization process. As a result, the affluent nations in the West and in East Asia are still overrepresented in this field—and many of the internationally minded historians from other regions now teach at universities in the United States, Great Britain, or Singapore. Moreover, in a world of widely accessible online instruction (Moocs), the hierarchies created by Google Scholar, and the Shanghai Ranking of universities, there are massive incentives for an internationalization and globalization of research. The global political economy of the academy is a crucial factor in understanding the dynamics of agenda setting and the uneven landscape of knowledge production.

The institutional geography of global history is thus highly uneven. This does not mean, however, that we do not find trans-border perspectives elsewhere. While the history of one's own nation does remain the privileged form almost everywhere, the relevance of transnational research agendas has increased markedly in many countries since the 1990s, and the demand for alternative narratives and spatial visions has also grown. Usually the aim is not to abandon national history entirely, but to "transnationalize" it.[15] The absence of an explicitly global approach should not, therefore, be equated with parochialism.

In this context, transnational perspectives—studies of oceans and regional spaces, such as the Indian Ocean, the South Atlantic, East Asia, etc.—have played a crucial role for many historians outside the West. Working with such geographies may challenge the priority of the nation-state; and it can also be understood politically, as a response to the globalization process. It then often serves as a point of departure for

an alternative narrative that transcends the gradual incorporation of the "rest" into the Euro-American world system. This is why some historians pay particular attention to entanglements outside the West—to contacts between Angola and Brazil, migration from Korea to Manchuria, Islamic networks from Indonesia to Mauretania. This is also the reason why the focus of such studies is often on the time before the nineteenth century, before the ascendancy of Western imperial hegemony.

While a transnational historiography is thus well established, outside the Anglophone literature, the term "global" appears much less frequently; in some countries, historians explicitly avoid using it. This reluctance is linked to a general skepticism about an approach that, for all the anti-Eurocentric rhetoric, is perceived by some essentially as an imperialist discourse, as a Western imposition. According to the discipline's critics, global historians speak of interactions and entanglements, but in fact narrowly focus on relations between the West and the "rest." "Indian intellectuals have habituated themselves to the idea of a bi-polar world of India and the West," notes Vinay Lal. "This is the condition of colonized people everywhere. The frame is self-evidently furnished by European colonialism."[16]

In some cases, global history comes up against a historiography that has very consciously liberated itself from the pattern of "indigenous responses to the Western challenge," a pattern that includes studies of, for example, Latin America and the West, Africa and imperialism, India and the Raj, China after the Opium Wars. Instead, the focus shifts to endogenous dynamics, to an inductive history "from below," in which external influences are present as a general context but do not dominate developments. Against the background of such scholarship, the call for global narratives can appear as a

regression to interpretations that were thought to have been left behind.

The avoidance of the global, then, cannot always be easily discredited as mere recidivism. Rather, it is linked to conditions of knowledge production both within countries and beyond. To be sure, local concerns and historiographic traditions continue to shape the way the world is appropriated, or excluded, from national narratives. At the same time, "openness" and "resistance" to global frameworks only partly explain the appeal of global approaches. Their varying attractiveness also needs to be understood as an effect of larger geopolitical structures and of the ways in which different countries are implicated in the globalization process.

Geopolitics and language

Objections to the global history paradigm are particularly powerful when they are tied to a critique of the dominance of Anglophone scholarship. The issue of language is indeed crucial. The hegemony of English as an academic idiom is a fact, even if it has not affected the humanities quite as strongly as it has the natural and social sciences. In the field of global history it is particularly marked—so much so that the field is frequently seen as an American-British endeavor. Most global historians today continue to ignore scholarship written in other languages and produced outside the institutional frame of Western universities—particularly those in the United States and Great Britain. As Dominic Sachsenmaier has pointed out, such a marginalization of other historiographical traditions, even where works are available in translation, stands in stark contradiction to the inclusive and post-Eurocentric

rhetoric of the global history approach. "Until now, hierarchies of knowledge, which have emerged over the past one or two centuries, obviously remain intact and still channel the range of awareness and academic interest in the world." Sachsenmaier also alerts us to the after-effects that the global hegemony of the English language has produced outside of the West. "For instance, in China scholars in world and global history are usually quite familiar with the recent literature in the West but they are typically oblivious to developments in their field in societies such as India, let alone in Latin America, the Middle East or sub-Saharan Africa." [17]

The hegemony of English has the power to marginalize other languages and historiographical traditions. Of that there can be no doubt. And yet, the emergence of a global *lingua franca* is not only a tool of domination; it also harbors the potential to enable conversations across boundaries to an extent not seen in the multilingual universe of earlier, more Babylonian centuries. Unlike Latin, Persian, Chinese, and other regional idioms, it is no longer confined to a particular ecumene but is accessible globally. In principle, it facilitates access to scholarship hitherto arcane and impenetrable, allows broad participation in debates, and creates resonance for voices previously heard only locally.

The authority vested in English-language scholarship has also allowed historians elsewhere to use it strategically, and to criticize peculiarities and forms of parochialism in different national traditions. For example, historians in Germany, Italy, Korea, and China have explicitly distanced themselves from earlier (national) traditions of writing about the world, and have instead introduced global history by means of translation and methodological borrowing—with the explicit aim of transcending earlier traditions, such as universal and overseas

history. Referring to Anglophone debates could thus serve to open up a space for a new intellectual agenda and for liberation from older and more parochial (e.g., Eurocentric) readings of the world's past.[18]

What is more, the hegemony of English in this field will never be absolute. After all, for global historians, proficiency in many languages is a crucial advantage. All technological homogenization notwithstanding, there is an indissoluble linguistic heterogeneity to the past, and this is true even in periods that now appear increasingly global. As Benedict Anderson remarked, nineteenth century Filipinos "wrote to Austrians in German, to Japanese in English, to each other in French, or Spanish, or Tagalog [. . .]. Some of them knew a bit of Russian, Greek, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese. A wire might be sent around the world in minutes, but real communication required the true, hard internationalism of the polyglot."[19] Whatever the future fortunes of global English, the documents of the past are written in Malay and Persian, in Russian and in Telugu. In the long run, the vogue of global history may even disadvantage scholars who are not freely conversant with such languages, who have not left the comfort zone of their native English out of a misplaced trust in its universal power and reach.

That said, English has emerged as a hegemonic language to an extent that no other language has before; frequently, the meaning of the term "international" is essentially narrowed to "Anglophone." This of course privileges native English speakers. Those scholars who do not speak English as their mother tongue may not be able to express themselves as well, write as fluently, or stand their ground as effectively as Anglophones in academic conferences. More important, the dominance of English language scholarship turns the specific customs of

Anglo-American universities into broadly accepted scholarly norms, with effects on the preferred length of a book (which is certainly not the length of a French *these d'État*), on how empirical or thesis-driven a dissertation should be, and on the kinds of questions and research agendas that are deemed "cutting edge." The asymmetry of linguistic reach thus also profoundly impacts the forms and contents of scholarship, and the digital circulation of information and research will not alter the situation. Online courses may be accessed around the world, but the source material that can be used, both for reasons of accessibility and out of legal considerations, tends to be English translations. We likely face a digital age that will be more Anglophone than any before it.

The dominance of the English language, and more fundamentally, the powerful role of American (and some British) institutions are fairly obvious; they are essentially an effect of the geopolitical power of the United States. But the terrain of global history is also tilted in a way that has received much less attention. In this emerging field, there is a clear Asian bias. On one level, this bias is institutional: scholars in Japan, Korea, China, and Singapore have begun to work on global problematics, and institutional support in these countries continues to grow. The Asian Association of World Historians, founded in 2008, is a flourishing enterprise. But on another level, and more unexpected, Asia is also a privileged subject of global history writing. Many current studies focus on events in Asia and on the history of the links that connected Asia to Europe and to the New World. In most syntheses and overviews, Asia features prominently, frequently at the expense of Latin America, Russia, and sub-Saharan Africa. A striking example is John Darwin's impressive *Global History of Empire*,

which mentions not a single imperial formation outside of Eurasia.[20] Discovering Asia is really what much of global history seems to be about.

This Asia, to be sure, is neither the continent, nor a purely geographical designation. The focus is less on Afghanistan and Iran than it is on Japan and the four Asian "tigers" (Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan); it is less on Malaysia and the Philippines than it is on China. In a fundamental sense, global history has been triggered by the rise of China, and in particular by the need to come to terms with a changing geopolitical situation. In this respect, Kenneth Pomeranz's comparative study of economic development and industrialization in England and China is the paradigmatic work of the new approach.[21] More than all of the methodological debates and other intellectual currents in the academy, the rise of Chinese capitalism has provoked a rethinking of global hierarchies, both politically and epistemologically. For an understanding of the trajectories of global history debates, the China challenge is as important as the dominance of American institutions and the hegemony of the English language.

Limitations of the "global"

After having devoted some time to the sociology of global history, let us shift gears and conclude this chapter, and this book, by briefly looking into the potential drawbacks and intellectual costs of global history as an approach. The concept of the global helps us move beyond isolated stories and beyond the bilateral structure of narratives of influence and transfer, diffusion and borrowing. It is part of a methodological revolution

that challenges internalism in historical analysis. At the same time, the concept of the "global" also has its limitations, and its inherent dangers.

Some of the potential pitfalls of the approach have been touched upon in preceding sections. Especially sensitive is the issue of scales as discussed in chapters 6 and 7. Opting for large spatial and temporal frameworks may bring to light broader contexts and the structural constraints impacting a particular event or situation. At the same time, it may occlude the role of actors and their motives and choices, thus potentially obfuscating individual responsibility in history. The dichotomy of local actors versus global factors is certainly misleading, as neither can be neatly disentangled from the other. Nevertheless, the privileging of large scales may come at the price of downplaying local agency.

Apart from this problematic, let us consider four additional challenges that global historians face. Briefly put, the concept of the "global" may lead historians to erase the specific logic of the past, to fetishize connectedness, to neglect the issue of power, and to flatten historical reality in a quest for unifying frames. All four hazards caution us not to overstate global claims. Let us take up these four issues in turn.

First, the concern with globality and globalization has led many historians to privilege interactions and transfers, and to treat them as ends in themselves. Connectedness then becomes the only language that the sources seem to speak, as if this was their deep and true meaning; all other possible stories—be they about faith, war, political intrigue, intimacy, environmental protection, or working habits—are treated as superficial and ephemeral. Sometimes, global historians claim an ability to see through the veil of all such surface events, so

that they can mine the sources for what they have to tell us about the state, quality, and logic of connectivity.

If that is what we are after, then such an approach is of course appropriate. But a quest of this nature can also be limiting, as it effaces the richness and the complex texture of the past. The biography of a German migrant to the American Midwest in the 1840s can tell us something about the political history of 1848, about economic conditions in rural Germany, about German diaspora communities in Michigan, about relations between immigrants and Native Americans, about masculinity and gender relations in the family, and much else. To use these stories primarily as a means of access to the state of connectedness can end in an impoverishment of historical analysis. "Indeed," John-Paul A. Ghobrial has cautioned us, "we risk finding ourselves in a world populated by faceless globetrotters, colourless chameleons and invisible boundary crossers, individuals stretched so far out of any local, confessional or personal context as to make them little more than panes of glass through which to view [...] the connected world in which [they] lived."[22] If we reduce all historical biographies, stories, and events to metaphors of globality, we end up with a one-dimensional and shallow image of the past.

This also means, secondly, that global history needs to move beyond the fetishization of mobility, which is so characteristic of much recent work in the field. Indeed, in many discussions, mobility has become the hallmark, if not the equivalent, of global history. The movement of people across borders—as travelers and immigrants, as slaves and laborers, as traders and as prisoners of war—is one of the key mechanisms that created internationality and globality—and also the key means by which they were experienced first-hand. This is why much

of the relevant literature has concentrated on migrants and mobile groups. Such a perspective has opened up important new windows on the past; but at the same time, the preoccupation with mobility tends to render the past into a simple prehistory of globalization. As a result, everyone and everything appears to be on the move, everywhere. In reality, such an image tells us more about the desires of the present than it does about the past.

The obsession with mobility and movement thus leads to exaggerations and distortions. Take the numerous examples of global historical surveys in which sections on social change are replaced by chapters on migration. Millions of peasants gradually disappear from the radar, while the crews of ships receive scholarly attention well in excess of their actual numbers. The majority of people traveled rarely or not at all, and certainly not for long distances or to foreign cultures; existing social, political, and economic conditions and the lack of infrastructure in many parts of the world made such pervasive mobility quite impossible. Global historians would be ill-advised, therefore, to turn non-movers into the casualties of their current preoccupation with circulation and fluidity. It is an irony of sorts: Itinerant and nomadic peoples were among the victims of the globalization process—and now it is the sedentary, those who stay put, who are neglected by historians and thus pay the historiographical price.

One of the unacknowledged effects of this phenomenon is the privileged role allotted to elites in some global history texts. Of course, there was slavery, coolie labor, and mass migration. But in many accounts, key roles are reserved for educated travelers to faraway lands, for the sages who were able to report from distant realms, for the few who put their global consciousness into words and onto paper. In the long run,

therefore, global history will benefit from a social turn—after all, even those who hardly ever moved were affected by larger processes. It is not difficult to foresee that historians will eventually begin to turn their attention back, more and more, to those who were settled, autochthonous, and less privileged; and to those who have remained largely unconnected and outside the fold of globalization. Think of the more than 100 million people belonging to marginalized groups in the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia that historians have termed "Zomia." For centuries these groups have avoided integration, steering clear of institutions and exploitative relationships controlled by the state. Groups such as these—the "refugees of modernity"—are currently almost entirely absent from narratives of globalization.[23]

Put more generally, the social science of globalization has prioritized mobility and celebrated the flows of goods, people, and ideas. Flows, understood as persistent patterns of circulation, have emerged as a key metaphor in the literature. They promise to undermine fixity, place, and territory, as they proclaim globalization's mantra of "everything solid melts into air." Flows are equated with "de-territorialization," and in particular with overcoming the framework of the nation-state. But while we need to study the flows, we also need to be aware of the slumps and obstacles. Some of the abhorred processes of territorialization, in fact, are not the result of stubbornness or of tears in the tightly knit webs of globalization. Instead, they should be seen as responses to global integration; the rise of the nation-state, most prominently, was a reaction to global pressures in the nineteenth century.[24] Usually, both processes went hand in hand. When the Suez Canal opened in 1869 and drastically shortened travel time between Britain and India, the new waterway also forced camel caravans and dhows to

stop and to wait, thus disrupting longstanding routes of trade and mobility. Acceleration and forms of deceleration thus conditioned each other.[25]

This also means that not everything moves and not everyone travels—and that, consequently, we will have to supplement the rhetoric of flows with a language of frictions, of non-transfers, and of inertia. Why did certain forms of knowledge never travel? Why were some ideas not passed on—even when the political and infrastructural conditions not only allowed, but actually encouraged such transfer? Take just one example, the story of the peacock flower. Peacock flowers were used as a contraceptive and abortifacient in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the eighteenth century, slave women acquired knowledge of the medicinal effect of the flower and employed it to abort offspring who would otherwise be born into slavery. Yet this knowledge remained local, even after the close integration of the Caribbean into the capitalist structures of the Atlantic economy. Historian of science Londa Schiebinger has introduced the concept of "agnotology"—the study of the culturally induced forms of non-knowledge—to describe factors, ranging from cultural and institutional priorities to individual likes and dislikes, that stood in the way of knowledge becoming more broadly disseminated.[26]

Third, global history as an approach is not immune to the criticism that it neglects issues of power. The concept of the "global," so the claim goes, can conceal the social hierarchies and the asymmetries of power that have shaped the modern world. And indeed, in some works there is a tendency to see global connections not as a project, driven by individuals and groups pursuing interests of their own, but as a quasi-natural process. In their celebration of connectedness, such accounts

use the "global" to conceal, usually inadvertently, underlying inequalities of power.

The results are—or rather can be—stories of self-generated flows, of an effortless expansion of commerce, and of free-floating movement. In his nostalgic musings about the *World of Yesterday*, novelist Stefan Zweig gave vivid expression to such a utopia of borderless mobility: In the nineteenth century, he writes, "the earth belonged to all people. Everyone went wherever he wanted and stayed as long as he wished." To Zweig, there existed no borders that were more than "symbolical lines that were transgressed as easily as one stepped across the meridian at Greenwich."[27] But his experience was hardly representative. The lived experience of millions of indentured laborers and Asian coolies working the mines and plantations in Southern Africa, in Cuba, and in Hawaii was vastly different from that enjoyed by a handful of Austrian novelists and English tourists. Zweig's borderless mobility—"we embarked and disembarked without ever asking or being asked"—is a far cry from the experience of the masses of people who faced immigration procedures, hygienic controls, quarantine stations, nationality acts, fingerprinting and document examinations, citizenship laws and exclusion acts.

We can observe similar myopias in other fields. In some recent writing, empires appear as the self-evident forms of political rule over heterogeneous populations and no longer as based on infringements upon individual and group rights. Markets seem to converge naturally—even though many of them were opened to outside trade only at gunpoint. The spread of religions is portrayed as the result of translations and conversations, and less of prosecutions and crusades. There is a tendency, in some accounts, to de-politicize our understanding

of history and to frame the past according to a liberal market imaginary.[28]

On the level of theory and method, such an expulsion of politics corresponds with the way in which "global history" is sometimes touted as an antidote for the perceived exaggerations of postcolonial studies on the one hand, and world systems scholarship on the other. While both of these approaches are built on a critique of power, some of their more recent strains, identifiable in global economic history and in the natural-science inclinations of big history, have largely eliminated issues of social and political hierarchies. It is therefore essential to remind ourselves that cross-border interactions and processes of global integration were deeply shaped by asymmetries of power and by violence. While transnational and global connections are frequently hailed as inherently progressive and benevolent, many of them were the work of more sinister forces. We may be accustomed to read Jules Verne's journey *Around the World in 80 Days* as symbolic of an emerging global consciousness, but it was World War I that displaced millions of people to faraway shores, battlefields, and graveyards, and thus created global experiences that left indelible wounds.

What does "the global" conceal?

The fourth point of contention explicitly addresses issues of normativity and, more specifically, the question of responsibility. In overviews in particular, and in studies spanning long periods of time, there is a tendency to describe the unfolding of large and anonymous processes as if individual humans had no role in them. In an effort to explain broader developments,

and to arrive at interpretations that bridge historical experiences in different regions, historians opt for analytical categories that virtually exclude human agency. This tendency is particularly apparent in the extreme case of big history, but it also extends to accounts of less sweeping temporal reach. Is global history a form of history with the people left out?

On one level, this is a matter of narrative style. But is there any reason why global overviews should differ from national histories in the vividness of their presentation? Just as macro-accounts of the history of a nation can be colorful and mindful of the decisive role of individual agency, so can global histories, at least in principle. Some genres of global history writing indeed privilege individual activities to an extent that distracts from the larger conditions under which they acted.[29] On the whole, however, many overviews of the history of the world seem to struggle with questions of agency. As a result of the need to range across vast spaces and long swaths of time, we frequently encounter a vocabulary of necessity and inevitability.

More fundamentally, by locating causality at least partly on a global level, global historians may appear to relativize issues of responsibility that lie closer to home. This may be the effect of a methodological choice characteristic of the global approach, namely the choice to emphasize synchronous factors in space over long-term genealogies and internal temporal continuity. A wholesome escape from internalist narratives would then be purchased at the cost of slighting agency on the ground. If the Holocaust, to take one example, can be explained partly by synchronous global forces, then this could relativize the guilt of Nazi perpetrators. Such over-contextualization—the privileging of global factors over local actors—might externalize issues of accountability, and of guilt. It is therefore important

to remember that global structures are as much shaped by human activity as they are responsible for shaping it; they are the result of processes of structuration. As such, they help define the conditions under which people act, but they do not dictate their behavior. Structures frame specific situations and render certain developments unlikely. They do not determine human agency.[30]

The fifth challenge is in many ways the most fundamental. Simply put, it is this: If the term "global" is used to describe both the travels of Marco Polo and the workings of the financial crisis in 2008, is it then not too general? How effective is a term that is universally applicable? If we subsume all sorts of trans-border exchanges under "global," how useful is the term as an analytical category?

To be sure, through the ages different parts of the world were connected to one another, and zooming in on these connections yields valuable insights. However, not all of these links were of the same kind. They were enabled, moreover, by very different structures—some of them coalescing, and others competing. To lose sight of the particular logics of the conditions under which interactions took place would result in a loss of historical specificity. To render all of them "global" may be accurate on one level, but it is as unspecific as replacing individual names with the word "person." We want to know more precisely who initiated the Crusades or the storming of the Bastille, and who suffered in the Taiping Rebellion; the term "person" would abolish all personalities. Equally, it is crucial to understand whether the durability of faraway links is guaranteed by an Islamic ecumene, by the Persian language, by the routes of transatlantic steamships, by the chain migration of Chinese clans, by the power of the British Empire, or by the

silent mechanisms of supply and demand. "Global" as a stand-in for everything may blind us to these crucial distinctions.

The notion of the "global" suggests a continuity that is frequently fallacious. Spatially, it translates different forms of entanglement into sameness. Temporally, it suggests that earlier links were the pre-history of later connections. Was the great Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta (1304–1377) simply the precursor of today's tourists on low-cost airlines? Did British colonialism pave the way for globalization—for "Anglobalization," as some historians now hold?[31] The British Empire certainly established new connections—but at the same time, it destroyed old ones, time-honored links that no longer served the interest of the London City. Colonialism also imposed new borders that inhibited mobility and trade. Sri Lanka, for example, was downright "islanded" in the early nineteenth century, as the British sought to sever its links to the mainland and to Indian Ocean networks by making it into a separate territorial unit.[32] Whatever the links between earlier and later forms of connectivity, then, they are more complicated than the term "global" suggests.

What is at issue is not so much whether large-scale structures were literally "global," that is planetary and reaching into every corner of the earth.[33] Rather, the problem is terminological: to translate a variety of empires (as diverse as the Mongol and the British), trade networks (ranging from trans-Saharan caravans to current multi-national corporations), discursive hegemonies, and so forth into "global structures" can only be achieved by an act of conceptual violence. Such an abstraction might help to answer a few large-scale questions, but it will prove less appropriate for addressing the concerns that most historians, and a reading public, have today. Employed in this

way, the notion of the "global" threatens to level historical reality and, in some ways, to take the history out of global history.

Does this mean we need to abandon the vocabulary of the "global" altogether? Certainly not. On the most general level, we need it as a catchword that allows us to discuss seemingly different pasts in one frame, and to look into connections that earlier paradigms rendered invisible. On a very specific level, it helps us address the emergence of truly global structures. And politically, we need it as a rallying cry. Global history is not only an approach; it is also a slogan that is necessary for reshaping the landscapes of knowledge and for revamping institutions of knowledge production. It signals that the past was global—and not limited to American, Italian, or Chinese history alone. For the purposes of a revolution in our paradigms of knowing, and to rescue history from container thinking, the concept "global history" will remain indispensable.

As an analytical device, however, it competes with more specific and frequently more accurate terms. In the long run, therefore, the heuristic surplus of the notion of "global" is bound to decrease. It is safe to predict that the better we understand to what degree various regions of the world were interlinked, and the more we recognize the ways in which larger structures impact local events, the more we will, gradually, liberate ourselves from the rhetoric of the global. There is, to be sure, still a long way to go. Historians virtually everywhere predominantly focus on their own nation. In many countries, institutional settings and public expectations collude to keep the national framework firmly in place. Given the close ties of the discipline of history to questions of national identity, this is not likely to change any time soon. By contrast, the institutionalization of global history is a slow business, and to this day remains largely stalled in the Anglophone world and

in parts of Western Europe and East Asia. And even in these regions its reach remains limited.[34]

But sometime in the future, once we can take a better understanding of global structures and world-wide dynamics for granted, the notion of the "global" may recede into the background and give way to a renewed emphasis on specificities. Historians will resort to new geographies, no longer *a priori* the nation-state, but also not necessarily the whole world. They will follow specific interactions and patterns of exchange, rather than taking any one scale as their point of departure. The gradual disappearance of the rhetoric of the "global" will then, paradoxically, signal the victory of global history as a paradigm.