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Local, Transnational, or Global? Liquid Spaces in Modern Historiography

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Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, let me thank you for your invitation to Kazan. I am honored to be part of this seminar. However, I will start my presentation by offending good manners in that I begin by – talking about myself. But that might make sense, because in preparing for my topic I wondered how much the ranges and spaces of historical interest have changed and extended since I began to engage in historical research more than 30 years ago. In what follows I will try to present and partly explain some key categories of recent historical writing, and they document a tendency towards spacial concepts becoming more and more *liquid*. These are - in order of their appearance: the *history of everyday life*, the *history of nations*, *international history*, *history of international organizations*, *history of globalization*, *colonial history*, *transnational history*, *entangled history*, *global history*, *universal history*, *area studies*, *glocalization*, and finally *Big history*. My presentation, of course, will be done from a Central European viewpoint, and I admit this may confine my scope. But may discuss that afterwards.

When in the early 1980s I started to study history the Cold War was still lingering. It was marked by an immobile, almost static conception of time and an apparent distinctness of spacial borderlines and ideological frontiers.¹ Germany was divided into separate political systems, and West-German historians were primarily concerned about their national traditions. In the first instance they researched their own national past. Historical interest even tended to focus more on smaller sections of the German society and smaller units of national spaces. The order of the day was the ‚history of the everyday life‘, and ordinary people were promoted to having had their share in suffering and in shaping history too.

Now it was the local region, the own city, one’s neighborhood or the workplace that were scrutinized historically. And in doing so, many amateur and professional researchers found out – not to everybody’s surprise – that women had also participated in history, as did people beyond the ruling or propertied classes, members of minorities or outsiders. In these

¹ See Melvyn P. Leffler/Odd Arne Westad (eds.): *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3 vols., Cambridge 2010.

years everything rouse public interest that was very concrete and exemplary for a distinct historical place, person, or case study. Concerning national boundaries little was changed in these years, but historical spaces were opened up in a more and more refined way, or better: it was zoomed onto smaller levels of investigation.

From *beyond* national borders, just some methodological suggestions were taken up and incorporated into German research strategies. In case of the **history of everyday life**, which I was talking about here, that was for instance Sweden or the United States, France, Italy or Great Britain.² Nevertheless, during the 1980s, historical research largely remained within national confines, and there were just very few people, who actually followed the history of international relations and even less people, who were interested in world history. In the later 1980s, there was a long-lasting dispute among German historians whether or not it is legitimate to compare National Socialism to Stalinism, and for different reasons many renowned representatives of the historian's guild rejected that such comparisons would make sense at all.³

This, however, changed in 1989/90, when the world was about to revolve dramatically. Not everybody realized at once how heavy the winds of change actually blew. When the wall between the two Germanys came down, I was at home and learned stuff for my final exams at the university. And I spent very little attention to the epic events, which took place in Berlin and elsewhere. For even historians are not always aware of history as it actually happens. My final academic thesis was devoted to a certain aspect of German fascism and to the prosecution of the German Jews, and it was exemplified by cities in which I was grown up.

The following dissertation that I prepared was again dedicated to an aspect of German history, but it also went beyond a German setting. The person I dealt with was a law teacher, who was famous in many European countries, in the United States and even in Japan.⁴ So in a way, I was forced to reverse my attention to a broader scope. Then, my first professional position at a university led me to Jena, a former East Germany city that before 1989 had been part of the socialist system. It was there that I could collect many insights and

² See Dirk van Laak: *Alltagsgeschichte*, in: Michael Maurer (ed.): *Aufriss der Historischen Wissenschaften*, Bd. VII: *Neue Themen und Methoden der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 14-80.

³ See *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, Muenchen 1987.

⁴ Dirk van Laak: *Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens. Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik*, Berlin 1993.

experiences about dissolving borderlines and what that entails, for instance, how this leads to amalgamations, but also to demarcations of a new kind. Seen from today's perspective it was something like a transnational integration within a national framework.

For a certain timespan of the early 1990s people tended to reason and believe that the fatal history of the 20th century with all its wars and ideological confrontation would have come to a definite end. Instead, an era would have come in which nations and states cooperate peacefully and didn't put borders into question. The national state concept and not even nationalism, was rarely challenged, not even by historians, although they already knew that since the 18th century national traditions usually had been invented. However, historians more and more embarked upon comparing the history of nations with each other as they had developed since the 19th century.⁵

Especially for the „age of extremes“, that is the short 20th century as it was labeled by Eric Hobsbawm, it actually did make sense to compare these national histories.⁶ A distinct era appeared to have ceased and to wait for getting historicized. During my working years in Jena I witnessed many historical myths of the former German Democratic Republic being challenged. Especially people, who had to adapt to the Western political and economic system, compared the history of East and West Germany to each other continuously.⁷ And they asked, what had kept the history of both societies together while they had been separated for more than 40 years, and that was more than many pundits initially believed.⁸

There was yet another experience Europeans could acquire during the 1990s: The European Community, which since the 1950s had evolved and developed rather slowly, during this decade expanded vigorously. Following the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 the European Union was established and quickly complemented by many European countries.⁹ However this process is assessed in detail – Europeans themselves were quite amazed to learn about falling borders, more freedom and mobility and formerly separated societies moving closer together.

Europeans experienced that they shared political and economic interests with countries that had appeared quite remote and foreign before. It would be misleading,

⁵ Hartmut Kaelble: Der historische Vergleich. Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt am Main/New York 1999.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm: Age of Extremes 1914-1991: The Short Twentieth Century, London 1995.

⁷ Christoph Kleßmann/Hans Misselwitz/Günter Wichert (eds.): Deutsche Vergangenheiten – eine gemeinsame Herausforderung. Der schwierige Umgang mit der doppelten Nachkriegsgeschichte, Berlin 1999.

⁸ Udo Wengst/Hermann Wentker (eds.): Das doppelte Deutschland. 40 Jahre Systemkonkurrenz, Bonn 2008.

⁹ Wilfried Loth: Europas Einigung. Eine unvollendete Geschichte, Frankfurt/Main 2014.

though, to state that Germans, Spaniards, or Italians of today are really interested in neighboring countries or their histories, this is just the case for a couple of people. But no European citizen can miss the fact that a rising number of Germans, Spaniards, and Italians travel to their respective countries more than ever before and that there are rising amounts of work migration and also a soaring interdependence in economic and administrative systems.

Nevertheless, in European countries the prevailing concepts of history still follow national orientations and confines. This is due to the fact that modern historiography came along *with* and was marked *by* the creation of nation states in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁰ The writing of history was even seen as a kind of auxiliary science of building up a nation state, and establishing grand national narratives contributed to the creation of „imagined communities“ effectively.¹¹ Largely for this reason many politicians, but also historians of today still pretend nation states to be something like the principle unit of history. This idea of a nation, furthermore, is still being based on a clear-cut territory, an integrated language and culture and last but not least an ethnically coherent population.¹²

However, with the possible exception of isolated locations like Iceland, something like that has never existed in history. Rather, it was the other way round: Attempts to create something equivalent as an accordance of all these factors must be ranked among the most violent aspects of recent history. Because these attempts have led to forceful shifts of borders, to the displacement of peoples, to more than absurd actions like „ethnic cleansing“ and subsequently to much suffering. Recent research quite bluntly uncovered that the idea of the nation state, but also the purported ‚right of self-determination‘ that was proclaimed after World War I, could entail a lot of very violent outcomes.¹³

It's self-evident that in these years of the 1990s **international history** in its classic sense, meant as a history of international relations, sparked renewed interest. The global situation of the Cold War with its clear frontiers had dissolved, and it was replaced by a

¹⁰ Christoph Conrad/Sebastian Conrad (eds.): Die Nation schreiben. Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich, Göttingen 2002. Heinz Duchhardt (ed.): Nationale Geschichtskulturen – Bilanz, Ausstrahlung, Europabezogenheit, Stuttgart 2006. Stefan Berger (ed.): Writing the Nation. A Global Perspective, Basingstoke 2007. Susana Carvalho/François Gemenne (ed.): Nations and their Histories. Constructions and Representations, Basingstoke 2009.

¹¹ Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger: The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge 1992.

¹² Hans-Ulrich Wehler: Nationalismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen, München 2011.

¹³ Philipp Ther: Die dunkle Seite der Nationalstaaten. „Ethnische Säuberungen“ im modernen Europa, Göttingen 2011. More affirmative with respect to the ‚right of self-determination‘ is Erez Manela: The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism, Oxford/New York 2007.

situation that longed for analysis and explanation provided by history.¹⁴ Why, for instance, did a country like Yugoslavia split, broke down so violently and sank into a war, which Europe hadn't seen for more than 50 years? The international situation changed fundamentally, not just for Europeans or the dissolving Eastern and Western blocs, but for the countries in the Global South as well. Before decolonization, Eastern and Western blocs had courted them for a generation. Now they were almost left alone to subsequently pursue a status of being non-aligned.¹⁵ International history predominantly cares for conflicts and cooperation among nation states, but during the 1990s it was faced with an historically *incomparable* situation, so in the end it could not really contribute much to our understanding.

For the phenomenon of **internationalism** this was different. Internationalism was mainly rooted in the 19th century and was sparked anew by the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. What is *not* meant here is political internationalism like the communist or socialist international movements. Internationalism as it is understood here was marked by the realization of the 19th century that the booming technology, science, travel and exchange of goods had a tendency to integrate mankind and that there should be people or agents to organize and moderate this process in a peacekeeping direction.¹⁶ Institutions like the International Red Cross, the International Postal Union, news agencies like Reuters or Agence France Press or initiatives to implement a common international language like Esperanto were especially influential. Compared to often ostensible actions of statesmen and politicians, their activities had indeed been concealed and disregarded for too long.

After the Cold War's demise it became more and more evident that security and stability of the international order was fundamentally based on and depended upon shared interests, and these agencies of international cooperation have exactly promoted that for many decades.¹⁷ Consequently, the history of internationalism, of human rights, of the international fights against slavery, against epidemics or for the protection of the

¹⁴ Wilfried Loth/Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.): Internationale Geschichte. Themen – Ergebnisse – Aussichten, München 2000.

¹⁵ Vijay Prashad: The Darker Nations. A People's History of the Third World, New York 2008. Odd Arne Westad: The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times, Cambridge 2007.

¹⁶ Martin Geyer/Johannes Paulmann (eds.): The Mechanics of Internationalism. Culture, society and politics from the 1840s to the First World War, Oxford 2001.

¹⁷ Johan Schot/Vincent Lagendijk: Technocratic Internationalism in the Interwar Years: Building Europe on Motorways and Electricity Networks, in: Journal of Modern European History, Vol 6, No 2/2008, p. 196-216. Alec Badenoch/Andreas Fickers (eds.): Materializing Europe. Transnational Infrastructures and the Project of Europe, Houndmills 2010.

environment presently ranks among the most vivid and expanding branches of historical research. Part of it is the **history of international organizations**, which are not authorized by governments but act instead as independent individuals or agencies beyond and across national borders, for instance technical or scientific associations or international congresses, which took place to exchange and coordinate knowledge internationally.¹⁸

This renewed interest in internationalism was accompanied by a **history of globalization**. In dictionaries, the term „globalization“ emerged not earlier than during the 1960s to denote processes, which before were had been characterized as „world politics“, „world interior policy“, „internationalization“, „one world“ or equivalents.¹⁹ The history of globalization addresses endeavors to gradually entangle nations, regions or continents that had lived in a more separated state before. This is first of all a history of travellers, discoverers and explorers of parts of the world, which until then were foreign and unknown. It is a history of collecting things and knowledge about places and people, which Europeans often assessed as „exotic“.²⁰

On another level the history of globalization is a story of intensified exchange, an exchange of people, goods, ideas, and information across existing or imagined borders. It is a history of economic, political and cultural transfers, a history of creative adaptation, adoption and interaction and also a history of backlashes within groups of people, who have initiated all this.²¹ The history of globalization identifies temporal phases in which these processes of entanglement and interaction tremendously accelerated, e.g. the late 19th century, and phases in which such an exchange stagnated or even decreased, like in the Interwar years or during Cold War years with respect to the „Iron Curtain“.

A history of globalization raises questions concerning the causes, the ranges and the effects of networks and interconnectedness. It is world history in a specific sense, and it takes its departure from the matter of fact that the globe of today is interconnected, and it asks how this historically came into reality.²² Following a definition of Jürgen Osterhammel

¹⁸ Akira Iryie: *Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, Berkeley 2002. Madeleine Herren: *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865. Eine Globalgeschichte der internationalen Ordnung*, Darmstadt 2009.

¹⁹ The term „global village“ was coined by Marshall McLuhan: *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, New York 1964.

²⁰ Mary Louise Pratt: *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London/New York 1992.

²¹ Benedikt Stuchtey (ed.): *Science Across the European Empires, 1800-1950*, Oxford 2004. Kapil Raj: *Relocating Modern Science. Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900*, Houndmills 2007.

²² Armand Mattelard: *Networking the World 1794-2000*, Minneapolis/London 2000.

and Nils Peterson it is concerned with the „expansion, consolidation and speeding-up of global connections“.²³

A major stimulus for taking up and developing further this perspective was critique. The obvious power of globalization in particular, which often appears to be irresistible and subordinating individuals or even governments provoked questions on who or which power actually was behind all this? Since Karl Marx this question often was answered by pointing at internationally operating business interests, trusts or multinational banks or enterprises, which allegedly sought for benefits and left behind their home countries as well as social responsibilities.²⁴ If that's true or not, I will not decide here, but will point out that there is a relatively new and telling differentiation often being made in recent historiography, the distinction between *winner*s and *loser*s of globalization. To highlight effects like these does just make sense, however, if one understands globalization as a process that's been man-made and that's neither natural nor irreversible.

To once again come back to myself here: In my academic biography I have approached global questions like many others did: I addressed a specific aspect of global entanglement in turning towards **colonial history**.²⁵ In Germany it was almost forgotten for a long time that from 1884 to 1914 the German Empire had possessed a range of colonies in Africa and in the Southern Pacific. Colonial history was a part of most national histories in Europe, even of countries like Denmark or Belgium. But first of all and primarily it was a very powerful part of the globalization story. Colonialism developed from the exploration of foreign territories, and it aimed at appropriating and subduing these territories, including the people living there.

Seen from the perspective of governance, colonial policy in almost all respects was a failure, and during the era of decolonization after 1945 colonial rule could be abolished almost everywhere in the world. However, during the preceding era of imperialism, which was full of conflicts *both*, the colonial and the colonized societies were deeply influenced and altered. This can also be recognized with respect to Germany, even though its

²³ Jürgen Osterhammel/Niels P. Petersson: Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen – Prozesse – Epochen, München 2003.

²⁴ Benjamin Barber: Coca-Cola und Heiliger Krieg, Bern/München 2001 (engl. "Jihad vs. McWorld. How the Planet is Both Falling apart and Coming Together"). Dwayne R. Winseck/Robert M. Pike (eds.): Communication and Empire. Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930, Durham/London 2007.

²⁵ Dirk van Laak: Imperiale Infrastruktur. Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas 1880 bis 1960, Paderborn u.a. 2004.

involvement in colonial matters, compared to France, Great Britain, or the Netherlands, didn't last for long.²⁶

Together with my students at Giessen University I am presently tracing imprints, which German colonialism has left in the history of Hessen. For instance we found out that one of the most important schools for the education of colonial farmers and settlers was opened in 1898 quite close to us, in the small city of Witzenhausen north of Kassel. The school still exists today, of course not as a colonial training center, but as part of the University of Kassel. It instructs in tropical and subtropical farming, and among its students of today are many Africans and Asians. My students and me also found out that still a lot of memorials exist, which refer to colonialists or other colonial aspects. Other imprints are street names or places, but also museum collections that have been generated in the era of German colonialism.²⁷

Insofar we convey a kind of research, which mix together the global and the local. It is exactly this what makes the history of globalization often surprising: It accounts for the fact that our present world is deeply permeated by global references even to the remotest places, and these references often do have a very long and complex prehistory. To give an example: Since many centuries we use to eat things, which originate in other continents. We are rarely aware of the twisted roads they took to please us today, just think of coffee or tea, many spices, sugar or salt, many fruits and cereals, tobacco and textiles, fish and meat, oil and timber and many other products, which had to travel a lot to finally become an everyday matter of course for Europeans.²⁸

If we apply a historical perspective onto these routes, then very often exciting stories evolve. Take for instance the triangle trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, in which money, goods and slaves was exchanged, or the extended routes, which many plants, crops or animals have taken to become domestic and acclimatized at very different places and in very different climates. Quite generally, the hunger for resources – be it gold or diamonds, foodstuff or rare metal – was a kind of *leitmotif* for transcending existing borders, for appropriating different objects, for subduing foreign people, for letting them work for us or for simply establishing trade. These actions are salient subjects of **transnational history**, which furthermore has been driven by interventions into the natural habitat, by the

²⁶ Dazu Dirk van Laak: Über alles in der Welt. Deutscher Imperialismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, München 2005.

²⁷ Vgl. <ilias.uni-giessen.de/ilias/goto.php?target=wiki_46789_Hessen_%28post%29kolonial&client_id=JLUG>.

²⁸ Reinhard Wendt: Vom Kolonialismus zur Globalisierung. Europa und die Welt seit 1500, Paderborn 2007.

building up of facilities for travel and communication, by the transfer of goods and ideas or by environmental disasters as generated by industrialization or the global touristification.²⁹ Together with a female colleague from Portugal, I have just finished a book manuscript, in which many of these aspects will be included. It is part of a series of books, to which Mikael Hard also has contributed a volume. Following this lecture, some of us, I suppose, will discuss excerpts from our manuscript, and I am looking forward to it.

Many of these global and transnational aspects have formerly been odd subjects for historical research that was focused on national units, because actors and agents here are neither governmental nor confined within given borders. Since some years historians discuss the methodology of a „**verflochtene Geschichte**“ or „histoire croisée“ or „entangled history“.³⁰ It tries to explain processes of interaction among actors of different localities and cultures, by which all actors are challenged and something happens that has been called ‚hybridization‘, something that none of the actors involved actually has intended. It absorbs elements from all cultures involved but at the same time represents something new and independent.

Having said this, it is overdue to characterize **global history**, which indeed should be separated from the history of globalization. It can be understood as a more general invitation to add historical dimensions to the existing *one world* of today.³¹ This invitation, however, involve a lot of questions and problems. For instance: Do we have to imagine global history as a kind of history, which converges towards an integrated and homogeneous world? And how will this unified world eventually look like?

Asking questions like these moves global history very close to the universal history approaches of the 18th and early 19th centuries, when world history was conceptualized and written with philosophical aspiration. Writers like Friedrich Schiller or Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel assessed history as a gradual fulfillment of human rights, freedom, peace, democracy, and equality. With a similar attitude, some recent macro sociologists were suggestive of space and time being categories of the past, not of the future. Everything

²⁹ A great example of ‘new’ stories to be told from this perspective is Akira Iriye/Pierre-Yves Saunier (Hg.): The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History, Houndmills 2009. Michel Espagne/Michael Geyer/Matthias Middell: European History in an Interconnected World: An Introduction to Transnational History, Houndmills 2010.

³⁰ Michael Werner/Bénédicte Zimmermann: Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Vol. 28 (2002), p. 607-636.

³¹ See the six volumes of “History of the World” (2012ff.), edited by Akira Iriye and Jürgen Osterhammel.

would merge and be networked into a global system, which would eventually be defined by coexistence and synchrony.³²

However, there is more evidence that global history does *not* evolve into a synthesis or towards a certain goal, but to rather view it as something that neither develops straight-lined nor purposeful. Rather it displays many rupture zones, a lot of nation states and empires rising up and falling down, territories that fall back into oblivion like in some parts of Africa, former centers becoming provincialized again etc. Global history is especially considerate for activities, which constantly change without arriving anywhere. That's why the transfer and migration of people and ideas, goods and things are saliently represented in it to such an extent.³³

Seen from this perspective the problem arises if ‚natural borders‘ in fact do exist. Or has this concept been a fixed idea of a certain time or specific interests?³⁴ Actually the political geography of the late 19th century had stressed this notion of ‚natural borders‘ to legitimize the expansion of nation states and the manipulation of existing borderlines. In fact, borders can be justified almost exclusively by arguing historically. Globalization and the definition of national confines were reciprocal forces that intensified each other. The emphasis, with which coherent nation states and integrated territories were conjured up since the early 19th century, can only be interpreted by taking into account existing definitions becoming liquid, people getting mobile and flows of commodity diffusing more and more.³⁵ Consequently, global historians like to talk about processes of re- or deterritorialization, about imagined communities, mental maps and other categories that paraphrase spacial concepts as hypothetical constructs.³⁶

In this view, the building of nation states has been an act of defense that could create unities and establish political control just transitionally, before transnational processes soaked these voluntary definitions again and provoked continuous modification. Global history mirrors the complex interplay between national sovereignty on the one hand, the ambition to cooperate internationally on the other hand. One of the main advantages of global history is, that in applying a view from above onto regions and nations almost nothing

³² Etwa Manuel Castells: *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996ff.).

³³ Matthias Middell/Ulf Engel (eds.): *Bruchzonen der Globalisierung*, in: *Comparativ*, No. 5/6 (2005) 15.

³⁴ Robin A. Butlin: *Geographies of Empire. European Empires and Colonies c. 1880-1960*, Cambridge 2009.

³⁵ Sebastian Conrad: *Globalisierung und Nation im deutschen Kaiserreich*, Muenchen 2006.

³⁶ Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections o the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983. Frithjof Benjamin Schenk: *Mental Maps. Die Konstruktion von geographischen Raeumen in Europa seit der Aufklaerung*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 28 (2002), p. 493-514.

appears to be “natural” or self-evident. Rather it was compromises, compositions, migrations and mixtures, which constituted global history on a daily basis.³⁷

Whereas international history in a traditional manner indicated questions of power, global history seeks for them often being concealed in factual issues like technical questions, the setting of international standards, the competition among political, economic, technological, or cultural systems and their scaling and synchronization, e.g. in air traffic or financial transactions.³⁸ Global historians are less inclined to research large political conferences, on which the fate of peoples or nations were decided upon. In a striking frequency they rather turn towards congresses of scientists or experts, on which it was decided upon the implementation of the metrical system, on technological adjustment of radio or telegraphy, on sustainable management of timber, on environmental issues or the coordinated exploitation of the Arctic regions.

Likewise, the League of Nations and the United Nations have become subjects of an intensified historical research. And indeed: If you analyze what they and their sub-organizations have achieved, often in the background, their records often impress much more than they superficially do if you just take official politics and diplomacy into account, where lofty expectations often were not fulfilled.³⁹

There is also a rising historical interest in the phenomenon of large empires. Seen from a global perspective, empires have been longer-lasting and in many respects even more successful than nation states. Their existence is not just questioned for their military power that allowed for centuries of hegemony and dominance, but also as a model of integrating migrants and tolerating minorities.⁴⁰ In some aspects empires and their rather flexible frontiers and social stratification appear even more modern than nation states do.

In the 1990s it was the prediction of US political scientist Samuel Huntington, the world would usher into a “clash of cultures” that promoted an attention for the fact that the

³⁷ Ein gutes Beispiel hierfür ist Harald Fischer-Tiné: 'Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The Salvation Army, British Imperialism and the 'pre-history' of NGOs (ca. 1880-1920)', in: Sebastian Conrad/Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.): *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s*, New York 2007, p. 29-67.

³⁸ Craig N. Murphy/JoAnne Yates: *The International Organization for Standardization. Global Governance through Voluntary Consensus*, London 2008. Roland Wenzlhuemer: *The History of Standardisation in Europe*, in: *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2010-12-03. URL: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/wenzlhueherr-2010-en> URN: urn:nbn:de:0159-20100921441 [02.01.2013].

³⁹ Vgl. <www.lonse.de>.

⁴⁰ John Darwin: *Der imperiale Traum. Die Globalgeschichte großer Reiche 1400-2000*, Frankfurt/New York 2010. Jörn Leonhard/Ulrike von Hirschhausen (eds.): *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Göttingen 2012.

global networks of traffic, communication, goods, people, and ideas do not automatically create a unified world, but also provoke defense actions that legitimize themselves culturally or religiously.⁴¹ There seem to be a dialectic process of cross-border opening on the one hand, the need of man to define distinctive spaces of law, culture, religion and morality on the other. This dialectic is still valid and one of the major problems of our time.

Today, more than ever before global history has to deal with a problem traditional world history had also been faced with from its beginning: Who is entitled to research and write such a history? Who is capable to overlook different world regions and provinces and cultures? Obviously, single people rarely do. Consequently, it often was an outsider of the historical guild like Oswald Spenger, Arnold J. Toynbee or William H. McNeill, who dared to do so. Notwithstanding, there are some encouraging examples of global syntheses with respect to the 19th century coming from Christopher Bayly or Jürgen Osterhammel.⁴² Other global histories resort to a number of specialized authors to let them portray certain aspects of world history, and this also works well.

In earlier times, writing a coherent history of one nation was like the most prestigious job a historian could seek for. Writing world history was regarded a field of outsiders, writing local history was seen as an enterprise mostly for amateurs. Today, it seems as if historians should be ready to adapt to *all* regional and spatial levels. A hierarchy of competence and of allegedly more and less important fields of historical research is about to dissolve.⁴³ As everything is connected to everything in the end, you should be able keep your eye on all these levels. In their everyday work, of course, historians have to focus and specialize on certain aspects; usually they are well educated to do so.

Today, more than ever historians have to stress the tentativeness of their findings and assertions. It was a distinguishing mark of former research that historians tended to assess their own history to be the most important in the world, to claim their own position as being the most advanced and also to rank their own virtues as the most significant. The perspective on world history was centralized and aligned to the writer's position. Usually, historians talked about the world that was familiar at a given moment and they tended to divide it into leading civilizations on the one hand, barbarians and antediluvians on the

⁴¹ Samuel R. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations*, New York 1996.

⁴² Christopher Bayly: *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford 2005. Jürgen Osterhammel: *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, München 2009.

⁴³ Michael Geyer/Charles Bright: *World History in a Global Age*, in: *American Historical Review* 100/1995, Vol. 4, p. 1034-1060. Patrick Manning: *Navigating World History. Historians Create a Global Past*, Houndmills 2003.

other. Following this path, meaningful histories of salvation were written, and they legitimized one's own standpoint and tended to devalue counter standpoints.⁴⁴

Today, regional histories or „**area studies**“, as they often are called nowadays, are researched and written without such presumptions – or at least they should do so.⁴⁵ In my opinion it is one of the most salient and exciting aspects of global history that it shows quite plainly how restricted and tentative our historical knowledge actually is – especially with respect to non-European affairs. The notion of Europeans to view certain cultures of Latin America, Africa, or Asia as “people without history” has been unmasked as a colonial attitude.⁴⁶ What is even more important: it's not true. The more we know about other regions, the more we realize that Europe is just one of the world's provinces among others, the more Europe is “provincialized”.⁴⁷

To refer to two striking examples: If in 1485 sultan Bayezid II hadn't prohibited the printing of books, a ban that remained in effect in the Ottoman Empire until the 19th century, or hadn't in the same century the Chinese fleet been turned away from the African coast, because Emperor Zeng-He's successors were too afraid of adventural expeditions – who knows, how world history had developed in these cases? Chances and accidents are – and always have been – major forces of history, as well as were often disregarded aspects like the weather or changes of climate.⁴⁸

In recent book productions there has been a revealing boom of histories telling exemplary stories. Sometimes this is about crossroads or magic moments of history.⁴⁹ Sometimes this is the story of worldshaking things like resources, inventions or ideas and their global impact, like the already mentioned history of spices or tulip bulbs or certain weapons like the notorious „Kalaschnikow“. ⁵⁰ Or it is a story, which sometimes is denoted as „**Glocalization**“, which encompasses global changes as they are reflected in local settings.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Vgl. Jürgen Osterhammel: Weltgeschichte, in: Stefan Jordan (Hg.): Lexikon Geschichtswissenschaft. Hundert Grundbegriffe, Stuttgart 2002, p. 320-324.

⁴⁵ Birgit Schäbler (ed.): Area Studies und die Welt: Weltregionen und die neue Globalgeschichte, Wien 2007.

⁴⁶ Eric Wolf: Europe and the People without History, Los Angeles 1982.

⁴⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty: Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, Princeton 2000.

⁴⁸ Richard H. Grove: Ecology, Climate and Empire. Colonialism and Global Environment History, 1400-1940, Cambridge 1997. Alfred W. Crosby: Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900, New York 1986. Jared Diamond: Guns, Germs, and Steel. The Fates of Human Societies, New York 1997.

⁴⁹ See Alexander Demandt: Sternstunden der Geschichte, München 2004.

⁵⁰ See for instance Mike Dash: Tulpenwahn. Die verrückteste Spekulation der Geschichte, München 1998.

⁵¹ Angelika Epple: “Global History” und “Area History”. Plädoyer für eine weltgeschichtliche Perspektivierung des Lokalen, in: Birgit Schäbler (ed.): Area Studies und die Welt. Weltregionen und neue Globalisierung, Wien 2007, p. 90-116. Angelika Epple: Lokalität und die Dimensionen des Globalen. Eine Frage der Relationen, in: Historische Anthropologie, Vol 21 (2013) 1, p. 4-25.

Because this is another dialectic process influencing each other – the global and the local. To give another example for this: The protection of certain animals, let's say elephants, did have far-reaching effects onto the ivory industry at the Odenwald, a region located southwest of Frankfurt. These global changes that have local effects can most frequently be traced in the spheres of economy and industry.⁵² It can for instance be extremely illuminating to tell the story of cocoa or cotton in this 'glocalized' way.⁵³

There is yet another revealing approach to exemplify global developments. Biographies enable historians to describe a multitude of activities and experiences, especially if the subjects in question travelled a lot and collected impressions on many places. A lot of them have lived „transnational lives“, and the closer we approach present times these kinds of life, instead of being an exception, become a common phenomenon.⁵⁴

To finally sum up what I presented here: Whereas in the 1980s national histories were extended to much more agents and actors, since the 1990s world history has been globalized and also extended to much more actors being involved. This can be assessed a process of *democratizing* history. At the same time it also became much more difficult to identify distinctive tendencies of historical development, because the more factors you have to regard, the more elaborated it is to arrive at a conclusion. The times are gone when the course of world history could be attributed to a chosen few of statesmen. That was quite comprehensible, but in the end it was much too simplistic.

Global history carries the risk of almost everything appearing convertible and constructed. To counterbalance this notion, historical research should collaborate with other sciences to tell the more stable aspects of life, like the natural environment or anthropological constants, from the more diversified aspects – just like the French historian Fernand Braudel already did in his classical study on the Mediterranean Sea.⁵⁵ Research results from biology, meteorology, or medicine can provide fresh perspectives and insights for our historical understanding. This has already been exemplified by another version of recent historiography that is called **Big history**. It discusses relationships between natural and human history, and puts man-made history into a much longer developmental

⁵² Vgl. Ernst Giese/Ivo Mossig/Heike Schröder: Globalisierung der Wirtschaft. Eine wirtschaftsgeographische Einführung, Stuttgart 2011.

⁵³ Sven Beckert: King Cotton. Eine Globalgeschichte des Kapitalismus, München 2014.

⁵⁴ Angela Woollacott/Desley Deacon/Penny Russell (eds.): Transnational Lives. Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present, New York 2010.

⁵⁵ Fernand Braudel: La méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II, Paris 1949.

perspective. In doing so, some findings get a dramatic twist, for instance the insight how deep man has interfered into the natural environment during the last two or three hundred years.⁵⁶

Ladies and gentlemen, using my example I have aspired to show how the horizons of recent historical research have expanded with respect to contents *and* to space. I really hope that I haven't puzzled you too much, but inspired to further think about the liquidation of spaces in history. Whatever you devote your research to – and this may be a local, regional, national or global topic – I hope I could encourage you to consider the respective other levels too. Because that's the great privilege of us, the historians: We can devote ourselves to virtually *every* question, provided that it somehow addresses the *past*. Concerning the *future*, I am quite convinced that a globalizing history is about to enter into another era of exploration and astonishing new spheres of knowledge. Many thanks for your attendance!

⁵⁶ Fred Spier: *The Structure of Big History from the Big Bang until Today*, Amsterdam 1996. David Christian: *Maps of Time. An Introduction to Big History*, Berkeley 2005.