

Third ENIUGH-Congress „Connections and Comparisons“: Panels on „Global Hierarchies and Inequalities“

Veranstalter: European Network in Universal and Global History

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In global history, we still have a long way to go in order to gain a relatively fair representation of human social experience in the past and the memory of those social arrangements both in research and in other forms of communicative practices. By fairness we should not mean artificially equal representation, but a relational and structural analysis of change in the world with its large variety of social, interpersonal arrangements. Eurocentric history writing has been bad at a history of global social change not only because of its conscious and subconsciously felt aspiration for dominance on behalf of various Europeans, but because it has been misleading the readers of history concerning the major processes in the preceding centuries. And this is becoming clear in recent research although skeletons of the previous forms of analyses are still with us. We are living in a post Eurocentric world. But hopefully we will be able to move on before too long; the third ENIUGH-Congress „Connections and Comparisons“ held in London in April, 2011, provides us with some hope in this respect.

The conference had a section on „Global Hierarchies and Inequalities“, which included a wide range of topics including the concept of development, comparative GDP per capita analyses, the imagination of smaller powers, the historiography of European semi-peripheries, and the virtues of weakness. This set of topics is to be welcomed, since they do acknowledge the role of hierarchies and there is a focus on the „middle level“, that is to say on those countries which have occupied positions which offer the greatest number of possible links and perspectives, as already suggested by Immanuel Wallerstein.¹ Choosing this starting point for a systematic look at the conference means that many brilliant ideas and talks will be omitted in this review due to

my selective attendance and surely personal interest.

The section contained a panel which dealt with how GDP per capita evolved during the medieval and early modern period before 1870 in Europe and Asia. More specifically, the panelists dealt with the so-called „great Asian divergence“, i.e. the relative decline of major Asian powers (for instance the talk by STEPHEN BROADBERRY and BISHNUPRIYA GUPTA: India and the Great Divergence: An Anglo-Indian Comparison of GDP per capita). In order to reformulate Eurocentric ideas concerning the rise of the West, this is a crucial topic. One of the key elements of this approach is looking at history from the point of view of „ratism“ (indicators of per capita wealth) as put so nicely and eloquently by József Böröcz in his latest book on global social change.² Ratism forgets the size of the analyzed countries and the role of size in understanding global development during the last three hundred years. But this matters, as keynote speaker MAXINE BERG reassured during the discussion following her talk on „Europe’s Asian Centuries: Material Culture and Useful Knowledge 1600-1800“: as the economies of China and India represented more than 50 percent of the global economies in the 17th and early 18th centuries, minor Europe naturally had to absorb a large number of commodities from these countries. The decline of China and India in size and rate is all the more shocking and, as the speaker stressed, this was due to colonialism, which destroyed these economies in various ways. But this Asian relative decline, or the relative European ratist advancement, was not only about colonialism. Non-colonized countries also experienced some relative decline due to the unequal developments between economies of locally bound rural and urban economies as complex as the Japanese on the one hand (JEAN-PASCAL BASSINO / STEPHEN BROADBERRY / KYOJI FUKAO / BISHNUPRIYA GUPTA: Japan and the Great Divergence, 800-1913), and the ones opting

¹ Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *The capitalist world-economy: essays*, Cambridge 1979, pp. 69, 89, 97.

² József Böröcz, *The European Union and Global Social Change: a Critical Geopolitical-Economic Analysis*, London 2009.

for expansion and a peculiar dynamism based on freely floating capital, which could modernize even agriculture, on the other. This *longue durée* had a major impact in formulating global hierarchies.

Concerning colonial intervention on behalf of the weak ones, NIKLAS THODE JENSEN gave a brilliant talk on how Halle missionaries and merchants in Tranquebar fitted into an overall „European“ network of colonizers, on the fights they had and how they combined politics, science and religion for a, as the speaker agreed, super exploitative mix aiming at setting up unequal exchanges between locals and the „Europeans“ (Niklas Thode Jensen: Science without Empire: Negotiating scientific knowledge in the Halle Mission, India, c. 1706-1820). As other speakers during the conference stressed, industrial and intellectual spying utilized in a systematic manner was one of the key elements in this process. Interestingly, another „weak“ colonizer, a Polish political prisoner scientist sent to Siberia, also knew the major techniques of scientific colonization, but both from a political and colonial point of view he was maneuvering among far more ambiguous positions (MARIA RHODE: Polish scientists in Siberia: from exiles to scholars). For very obvious reasons he hated Russian imperialism politically, but smoothed into Russian geographic orientalism and even this social space offered him some of the scientific prestige elements he needed to become a renowned scholar. Looking back from today, a classic East European „in-between“ technique appeared in this analysis: minimizing the long term social cost of the political fight (securing class positions in the long run) but (or for this purpose) maintaining European orientalism and racism with regard to other „inferiors“. This differed somewhat from the techniques of those people who were racially excluded but wanted to get integrated into European societies. In the 18th century Christian Potten was such a person and his career maneuvers were superbly described during GUNVOR SIMONSEN'S talk. To become less post-Eurocentric, we should continue the work for instance on how Africans looked at the Europeans, like in the highly interesting exhibition shown in Detroit³ and partially in the Africa collection

in the British Museum. Among the manifold topics are magic, hierarchies, slave trade, alcoholism, astonishment, dressing up into European cloth and using weapons as symbols of power. Thus when analyzing the role of missionaries, we should analyze them not only from the point of view of the sending community (e.g. how women could liberate themselves from gender discrimination), but also by who and how they were seen by the „targets“. This was missing from the discussions which I attended.

But there were superbly interesting discussions on development, even the concept of development both in Tanzania (EMMA HUNTER) and in Nepal (SARA ELMER). „Progress“ and „development“, in civilizational and social terms, always include the element of uplifting and upward movement in global hierarchies, imagined at least by some social groups within the local social hierarchies. Due to structural reasons, powerful concepts and ideas (including the „back to the village“ programs) traveled or emerged throughout the world in the 20th century and represented a rather robust social force, as documented for instance by ARLAND THORNTON'S developmental idealism talk in the population panel of the global hierarchy section. This possibly changed the demographic landscape in the 20th and even in this century. These analyses are keys in understanding the working of global hierarchies in the 20th century. It is equally necessary to analyze how different practices and forms of developmental ideas are related to each other in the world, and even more importantly how they are related to other ideas like anticolonial and postcolonial nationalisms and other forms of discourses connecting local and global hierarchies. An „upward looking“, developmental perspective is just one among many other views. In this field we have much to do to reach adequate comparative interpretations on global social development.

At least in history, as it seems, analysts of

³ Barbara Blackmun, Henry Drewal, Christraud Geary, Simon Gikandi, Veronica Jenke, Michael Kan, Babatunde Lawal, Daphne Ntiri, George Ntiri, Mangedwa Nyathi, Alex Okorefor, Through African Eyes: The European in African Art, 1500 to Present, Exhibition in the Detroit Institute of Arts, April 18 – August 8, 2010.

the imagination of smaller powers concerning the present (or very recent history) are already preparing for such a move. SCARLETT CORNELISSEN's brilliant and truly elegant talk on South African foreign policy ideals described eloquently how South Africa is aiming at some kind of tutelage position for the whole continent and thus securing a mid-level position. This is a fragile and complex position challenged not only by other African states but also by the local population which constantly fights against „lower level“ immigrants for its own „security“. Hierarchy and national exclusion are real brothers in hierarchical contexts, we learn with special implications for Eastern Europe where this linkage has been so clear and so nasty for already quite a time since „the opening up“ following 1989. In this panel, German foreign policy was put into the context of smaller nations in an eloquent attempt to reconstruct Eurocentric frameworks (ULF ENGEL: Making sense of changing world order: The case of Germany). This approach sharply contrasted with the conference's final discussion, where „Russian, French, German and British views“ on the advancement of global history were presented in a classical, 19th century „Concert of Europe“ approach. Conferences on global history should critically analyze and remember such global political approaches, in case we want to follow the intellectual trends of the congress itself.

Conference Overview: Theme „Global Hierarchies and Inequalities“

Comparing Living Standards in Europe and Asia before 1870

Convenors: Stephen Broadberry (Warwick), Bishnupriya Gupta (Warwick)

Carlos Álvarez-Nogal : The Rise and Fall of Spain (1270-1850)

Jean-Pascal Bassino / Stephen Broadberry / Kyoji Fukao / Bishnupriya Gupta : Japan and the Great Divergence, 800-1913

Stephen Broadberry / Bishnupriya Gupta: India and the Great Divergence: An Anglo-Indian Comparison of GDP per capita

Stephen Broadberry / Bruce Campbell / Alexander Klein / Mark Overton / Bas van Leeuwen: British Economic Growth, 1270-1870

Bas van Leeuwen / Jan Luiten van Zanden: The Origins of Modern Economic Growth: Holland between 1347 and 1800

Bozhong Li / Jan Luiten van Zanden: Before the Great Divergence? Comparing the Yangzi Delta and the Netherlands at the beginning of the nineteenth century

Development – a Global Concept?

Convenors: Clemens Six (Bern), Sara Elmer (Zürich)

Sara Elmer: Developing Differences: The 'Back to Village Campaign' and the Representation of Rural Nepal

Clemens Six: Development and Religion: The „construction“ of religious pluralism in post-Independence Delhi

Lukas Zürcher: Liberation and development: Rwandan conceptions of development after World War II

Imagination of Smaller Powers in the Construction of World Order

Convenor: Ulf Engel (Leipzig)

Scarlett Cornelissen: African modernscapes? Aspirations, projections and limitations in South Africa's foreign policy

Ulf Engel: Making sense of changing world order: The case of Germany

Lionel Obadia: Buddhism and the World: the poetics and politics of globalization from an Asian point of view

Population Processes and Global Hierarchies

Convenors: Attila Melegh (Budapest), Arland Thornton (Michigan)

Mikolaj Szoltysek: Family systems and the genealogy of eastern European difference: An insider's view

Arland Thornton: Developmental idealism and worldwide family change

Kathryn M Yount: Lay Accounts of „Modern“ and „Traditional“ Family in Greater Cairo: A Test of Developmental Models of Family Life

Attila Melegh: Population and developmental ideals in the agrarian semi-periphery in the early 20th century in Europe in the context of global hierarchies

Dirk Van de Kaa: Rise and Fall theory

Virtues of Weakness

Convenor: Michael Harbsmeier (Roskilde)

Christina Folke Ax: Protesting innocence – Danish strategies and narratives of power in Iceland, c. 1870-1950

Michael Harbsmeier: Microhistories of colonialism

Richard Hoelzl: In Dire Straits. German Catholics between anti-modernism and civilising mission

Niklas Thode Jensen: Science without Empire: Negotiating scientific knowledge in the Halle Mission, India, c. 1706-1820

Maria Rhode: Polish scientists in Siberia: from exiles to scholars

Gunvor Simonsen: Making a Career: Christian Protten and Frederik Svane Pedersen

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