IV ENIUGH Congress „Encounters, Circulations and Conflicts“: Economic History

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Since the 1990s, economic history has contributed to the renaissance of global history.* The experience of present globalization has encouraged economic historians to pursue more intensively similar processes in the past. Economic historians have also referred to the similarly large range (dimension) of a „first globalization“ from the mid-19th century up until the First World War while analysing similarities and differences. Globalization, in this context, is defined as an emergence and/or increasing integration of the world markets for commodities, capital, and labour force.

Despite the fact that during the first globalization almost all parts of the world were included in the capitalist world economy, the research initially focused on the quantitatively still dominating interactions within the Western world. This focus mostly considered processes of market integration and its impact on processes of convergence and divergence. Kevin O'Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson, for example, observed that the integration of the Atlantic region became evident in an increasing convergence of commodity prices and real wages between Western Europe and North America from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. Flows of commodities, capital, and people between the West and certain areas of the „rest“ were rather used as supplementary explanatory variables.

At the congress in Paris, this type of „classical“ economic history research on globalization was almost absent. The paper by Stijn Ronsse and Samuel Standaert „Contagion on a Historical Trade Network: Europe in the 20th Century“ combined historical GDPs and bilateral trade data utilizing a state-space model in order to construct a „Historical Integration Index“. Ekaterina Khaustova and Robert C. Allen presented a paper about „Russia in the World Economy“ with a detailed analysis of a time series showing the development of wages and price from 1820 to 1916, and also discussed in how far there were phases of convergence and divergence.

However, the „classical“ studies on globalization are an applicable point of reference for the systematization of the economic historian topics at the Paris congress.

1. Theory

From a theoretical point of view, it is remarkable that the categories „centre“ and „periphery“ are still applied in various contexts, together, at times, with a discussion on the corresponding models. Not coincidentally, the organizers put together at least nine panels in the group „Centres and Peripheries“. However, for the most part the perspective of postcolonial studies dominated, arguing for a culturally rooted understanding of spatial hierarchies and, thus, focus on the analysis of discourses, images, stereotypes, and mental mappings.

The panel „Centres and Peripheries Revisited: Polycentric Connections or Entangled Hierarchies?“, organized by Andrea Komlosy and Klemens Kaps, linked the origin of dependency theory and world-systems analysis with a cultural science perspective. It included discussions about Arab silver redistribution networks in Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages (Dariusz Adamzyk); geopolitics, socioeconomic development, and internal differentiation in Habsburg Central Europe in the 18th century (Klemens Kaps); and whether China is on the way to a new global core or to one of the centres of a multicentric world (Andrea Komlosy). All presenters showed that the application of centre-periphery models could be useful if essential socioeconomic, political, and cultural phenomena were examined and rigid assumptions were avoided.

2. Empiricism

Some panels shifted the perspective on the globalization process by undertaking empirical research that focused on the periphery. This shift was best exhibited in the history of the most famous and extraordinarily successful climber among the countries of the periphery: Japan. One panel focused on ne-

glected aspects of Japan's transitioning from 1870 to 1930 from a semi-colony to member of the capitalist and imperialist club of Western powers. Other panels analysed the institutional infrastructure that made the globalized flow of goods, money, and labour force possible. It was also shown that it is possible to tell the story of globalization through the reconstruction of the history of certain commodities, such as sugar, cotton, diamonds, spice, and indigo. The congress as well opened up a totally neglected field, for example, the business history in Africa.

3. Periods

While the „first globalization" was rarely discussed – possibly because their existence and relevance is now widely recognised – some of the panels were dedicated to premodern or archaic globalization. The period from 1500–1800 was characterized by a growing globalization, which sometimes was referred to as the so-called „International Republic of Money". During this period, commercial companies (for example, chartered companies, joint-stock companies, or family partnerships) played the role of multinationals nowadays.

That is why the analysis of merchant networks played a crucial role in research about pre-modern globalization. The panels in Paris did not deal so much with the North Atlantic centre but with regions that had not previously been in the spotlight. The title of the panel „Unexpected International Trade Connections" – which focused on the linkages between East Central Europe, the Mediterranean, and Scandinavia in the 18th century – could act as a symbol for some panels and papers about ancient Eastern Europe or the trade with diamonds and indigo from India. In fact, these relations were particularly important for the formation of commercial capital, while the trade pattern did not follow a clear-cut centre-periphery structure.

4. Labour history as the main topic of economic and social history at the Paris congress

Studies of labour history were exceptionally well represented at the congress. Labour history is indeed more of a social-historical subject but only in the context of the economic background can it be adequately studied.

In Eric Vanhaute's panel about „Relations of Land and Labour in Commodity Frontier Zones, 16th–20th Centuries", for example, the main question was what determined the choice for „unfree" (plantation) versus „free" (peasant) labour as well as for direct land grabbing versus more equal property rights. The participants looked for comparisons over different forms of commodity production over space and time.

In general, labour history has a remarkable variety of different methods and approaches, such as comparative studies and the reconstruction of entanglements.

In explanation, the international research project organized by the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam – „Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations 1500–2000" – should be mentioned. This project aims at gathering data on all types of labour relations in various parts of the world during six cross sections in time: 1500, 1650, 1800, 1900, (for African countries 1950 is included), and 2000. The panel in Paris presented case studies about Mozambique, Ghana, and Tanzania, highlighting the problems of finding and evaluating quantitative data in this field.

One of the main aims of this project together with other panels was to review the standard narratives of transition, whether from slave to wage labour or from slavery to what might be described as a subaltern form of sharecropping. Even in Europe there was only a small free labour market until the mid-19th century. Karin Lurvink showed remarkable similarities between truck systems in Louisiana and the Netherlands. While slavery enjoyed the more prominent part in theoretical debates as the obvious counterpart to free labour, the (rare) comparisons of regions characterized by slavery and serfdom usually did not go beyond diagnosing „backwardness" as a common denominator. Several contributions made clear that the history of labour is far more than the replacement of one phase with the one following next. Analysing different forms of labour coercion in different types of colonies, they argued that inequalities between the legal and economic entitlements of working people and those of their masters were far greater in the colonies than in Europe.

Manuela Boatcă argued in her paper about „Coloniality of Labor in the Global Periphery: Eastern Europe and Latin America in the World-System“ for a conceptualization of slavery and serfdom, alongside tenancy, indentured labour, and other forms of coerced work as labour regimes of the modern capitalist system's periphery. The paper examined the advantages and disadvantages of terms such as „second serfdom“ (Friedrich Engels) for 16th–19th-century Eastern Europe and „second slavery“ (Dale Tomich) for Brazil, the Caribbean, and the US South in the 18th–19th centuries in order to illuminate the structural similarities between the two institutions in the regions. Contrary to commonly held views, in both cases the labour regimes have been far from homogeneous as they encompassed widely differing degrees of coercion of workers, which led to complex patterns of free and unfree labour relations after abolition, most of which still characterize work regimes in the periphery today.

5. „Golden Oldies“ of economic history

By integrating economic developments in a variety of world regions beyond the Western world, economic history at the Paris congress had a different focus than the field represented at the world congresses of the International Economic History Association. However, the last World Economic History Congress held in Stellenbosch in 2012 provided a lot of information about African economic development as well as some theoretical debates about colonialism. This can be interpreted as an indication that recently economic historians deal more intensively with the non-Western world.

At the ENIUGH Congress, in many panels – for example about Cold War development or territorialization – economic processes were taken into account, although only playing a minor role. Nevertheless, besides the already mentioned panels about the „Historical Integration Index in 20th-Century Europe“ and „Russia in the World Economy“, two other panels were devoted to classical themes of economic history. The first one reassessed the role played by state-sponsored manufactories in the economic, social, cultural, and political evolutions of early modern states. However, the focus was not on the classical cases of a mercantilist economic policy, like France, but on Renaissance Italy, China, and the Ottoman Empire.

The second panel was organized by a Hungarian project group that deals with „Multiple Economic Crisis“ in modern history. Again a perspective on less-developed regions was utilized, for example, looking at various parts of East Central Europe. This session aimed to investigate whether there are specific characteristics and factors of the multiple economic recessions in less-developed countries and the transmission of macroeconomic and financial shocks across countries or regions. The discussion in the panel highlighted that this group uses an understanding of crises that in itself includes various phenomena, like the credit crises in Hungary before the age of banks, the hitherto totally neglected „small“ crisis of 1869, the (structural) crisis of the steam mill industry of Budapest at the end of 19th century, and the Great Depression of 1929–1933 (partly compared with the most recent financial crisis.

6. Summary

In summary, from the viewpoint of an economic historian, the economic aspects of global history were still underrepresented. This is true both for the congress as a whole and for many individual panels. However, a considerable number of sessions on labour history offered several innovative approaches. Furthermore, many phenomena were analysed in the periphery and/or from the perspective of the periphery, what is usually not the case in other events with a similar format. To put it in economic terms: these two aspects were the profit of the ENIUGH Congress in Paris.

Note:

* Of course, the author could not join all the interesting economic history panels. The report is therefore based primarily on abstracts and selected papers.

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