

Flows and Orders: A Tension in Global History

Veranstalter: Leibnizpreis-Forschungsstelle „Globale Prozesse“, Universität Konstanz
Datum, Ort: 13.10.2016–15.10.2016, Konstanz
Bericht von: Wolfgang Egner, Exzellenzcluster 16 „Kulturelle Grundlagen von Integration“, Universität Konstanz; Lisa Korge, Leibnizpreis-Forschungsstelle „Globale Prozesse“, Universität Konstanz

Global history is often seen as the study of globalisation or mobility, with a focus on the flows of commodities, people and ideas. But the study of flows, crucial as it is, cannot constitute global history alone. As recent socio-political developments indicate, there is a crisis of globality, represented amongst other things by the public discussion of closing borders and the real or promised construction of fences and walls meant to exclude. Taking these disruptions of connectivity into account, the explanatory power of exchange or movement as favoured by global history might no longer be sufficient.

That is why the workshop ‘Flows and Orders: A Tension in Global History’, held at Konstanz from 13-15 October 2016, proposed to take the current crises as a starting point to enquire about the more general relationship between the dynamic and the static, between flows and orders.¹ The participants were invited to examine processes through which movement is ordered and transformed, through which it solidifies into more rigid systems of political, economic and social power and control, but also into elaborated and more or less durable structures of knowledge, imagination and artistic expression. In short, the convenors asked for a fresh look at the contradictory record of growing globality during the past centuries to re-evaluate global history’s penchant for connectivity.

The first panel ‘General Perspectives’ was opened by JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL (Konstanz) who explained the ideas behind the Konstanz workshop as mentioned above in his introductory statement. JOHN DARWIN (Oxford) then talked about ‘History and Mobility’. He suggested to critically re-think the understanding of flows in history to avoid the

following three pitfalls: First, flows tend to lead to a teleological narrative of globalisation, second, their explanatory value is sometimes exaggerated, and third, their nature often remains misunderstood. To analyse the qualities of these flows, namely direction, volume and speed, Darwin proposed to examine concrete places, for instance port cities, as they have a transformative power. They can accelerate flows and at the same time operate as barriers or bottlenecks. In the second presentation, HELMUTH TRISCHLER (München) introduced the idea of the Anthropocene. He described the geological and cultural debates shaping this contemporary concept and the timescales it denotes, as well as an overview of how historians have reacted to the attraction of this new approach.

The second panel of the workshop was named: ‘People’. In a collective Paper CÁTIA ANTUNES (Leiden), SUSANA MÜNCH MIRANDA (Lisbon) and JOÃO PAULO SALVADO (Évora) discussed asymmetries, deviances and resistances in Early Modern globalisation. By using the example of two Dutch merchants setting up and operating a business in Lisbon, the speakers presented the consequences of the encounter between the Dutch merchant knowledge and the Portuguese ‘pre-modern’ economic system. Although Lisbon lacked the modern infrastructure, the human capital and the global information system the Dutch were used to, it worked well as an *entrepôt*. LINDA COLLEY (Princeton) presented the case of the philosopher and legal scholar Jeremy Bentham, who never left London but whose trans-continental contacts were extensive. Like many prominent intellectuals in the 19th century, he established networks by exchanging letters and receiving visitors who provided information and connected him with central foreign political actors. The increasing politi-

¹ The workshop was organised by the Leibnizpreis Programme ‘Global Processes’ in conjunction with the research network ‘Global Nodes, Global Orders’ funded by the Leverhulme Trust, and was the fourth in a series of seven conferences. The aim of the project is a re-evaluation of basic concepts and methodological foundations of global history. The project is led by James Belich in Oxford and brings together scholars from Oxford, Princeton, Osaka, Kolkata, Leiden and Konstanz. For more information view: <http://globalnodesorders.history.ox.ac.uk> (10.02.2017)

cal relevance of London after the Napoleonic Wars improved Bentham's central position in his own network. This enabled him to influence the constitutional developments in different world regions (especially in Latin America), leading to his surname 'legislator of the world'. ANDREAS FAHRMEIR (Frankfurt am Main) dealt with the topic of immobility and disconnections, thereby reconsidering the prevalent narrative of increasing connections in the 19th century. Although new technology made the movement of people, goods and information much faster, even places with access to railway links could remain relatively isolated. For example, the mobility of the residents of Hatfield House, close to London, depended on the whims of the local aristocrat. With this and similar examples, Fahrmeir demonstrated that while infrastructures in the 19th century were improved, they did not always have a connective effect.

The second day of the workshop started with the panel 'Ideas, Information, Technology'. DAVID ARNOLD (Warwick) spoke about the development of cremation in India and the western world during the last 150 years in the context of growing global mobility and cultural interconnectedness. In the India of the 1870s, cremation was an ancient religious tradition performed by the social elites, while at the same time in Britain incineration was obscure and illegal. Arnold gave examples of how the establishment of cremation as a tolerable practice in the West might have been influenced by the much older Indian traditions. In the course of time, they changed significantly themselves, not least due to measures of British colonial rule. MORITZ von BRESCIUS' (Konstanz) paper highlighted the material and cultural processes that surrounded the making of the so-called 'synthetic age' during the 1920s. He suggested that this term might be used as a temporal and conceptual framework to study the changing attitudes towards nature from that time on. He argued that rubber played a key role in societies' turn towards the artificial as it prepared consumers for the introduction of synthetic products. WOLFGANG SCHWENTKER (Osaka) introduced a group of Japanese social reformers, like Noburo Kanai and Kumazô Kuwata, who travelled

Europe between 1890 and 1930 to gather information about social issues, such as poverty or child labour, and to study policies which could solve similar problems in Japan. While the travellers were the agents that initiated flows of ideas, it was not they themselves who implemented these ideas into orders of social practice in Japan, but representatives of a reformist state bureaucracy.

The fourth panel dealt with 'Art, Architecture, Literature'. MAYA JASANOFF (Harvard) made a case to interpret Joseph Conrad as the first author of modern globalisation. Using Conrad's biography, from his childhood as son of a Polish nationalist exile to his employment as sailor in the British merchant fleet and his later career as an author, Jasanoff argued that he not only witnessed globalisation but actually embodied it. Thus, Conrad's novels give historians access to a certain type of global consciousness and are of methodological value as sources which reveal a globalising world from within the minds of the characters negotiating it. CORNELIA ESCHER's (Konstanz) paper analysed architecture in colonial Togo and Cameroon at the turn to the 20th century. Her focus was on the material and constructive features of the buildings in order to examine how these were used to define and differentiate types of 'African' or 'European' housing. The European preference for solid constructions hindered the adoption of local building techniques and consequently strengthened urban segregation.

In the fifth panel 'Commodities' SHIGERU AKITA (Osaka) presented the economic history of the cotton trade and industry in Japan, India and China as a case of 'Intra-Asian Competition' and collaboration against the West. In his analysis, he concentrated on the N.Y.K (Nippon Yusen Kaisha) Shipping Company, which developed into an autonomous shipping business able to compete with Western enterprises through Japanese-Indian cooperation in the cotton trade and remained economically important. LAURA RISCHBIETER's (Konstanz) talk focused on coffee trade: She argued for the invention of the 'world economy' (Weltwirtschaft) as a political pseudo-constraint. Coffee was one of the major trade goods in the 19th century and

the German Empire was one of the main consumer states. That is why the rising coffee prices after 1900 became a key issue in German political and public debates. Rischbieter re-evaluated the German coffee trade as a result of the actions of pluralistic interest groups, some demanding free trade and others protections. In their power struggle the term 'world economy' was invented as a political topos which served to unburden domestic policy from acting on the question of coffee prices, by arguing that the nation state could not influence the 'world economy'. In his presentation, BERND-STEFAN GREWE (Freiburg) analysed sequences of the commodity chain of gold in three different locations: London, South Africa and India. The gold standard influenced and was influenced by speculation, price and production and the political debates around the flows of gold. These factors finally led to the abandonment of the gold standard which changed the gold trade fundamentally. Grewe argued that for all participants it was nearly impossible to cut off global connections. For example, as new mining regulations in South Africa limited the amount of gold, the following scarcity led to the change of direction of flows: After 1931 India changed from an import country to the world's second largest exporter of gold.

The sixth and last panel on the closing day of the workshop was concerned with 'Pathogens and Material Objects'. STEFAN R. HAUSER (Konstanz) contributed an archaeological perspective and stressed that pre-modern interconnectedness is often underestimated by most historians. Hauser used the case of Palmyra and its relations with the Roman Empire as an example of long distance trade in the first centuries CE. He demonstrated how the increasing importance of commodity flows slowly changed the social order of the oasis: civic institutions and a Palmyrene identity emerged, the city's territory expanded into the hinterlands and the polis became a political power in its own right. JAMES BELICH (Oxford) dealt with an ecological variable as an explanatory factor in global history by examining the second plague pandemic from the 14th century onwards. He linked the spread of the disease that was transmitted by black rats to sys-

tems of circulation that were established by grain trade, and conceptualised this process as 'transformative connectivity'. As plague decimated the general population, it reshuffled West-Eurasian economies, technologies and societies because the labour shortage had to be compensated for. In the long run, this created new motives and tools for imperial expansion.

The workshop concluded with a summary by MARGRET FRENZ (Oxford) who grouped the topics of the presented papers into two categories: flows that create orders and orders that initiate and structure flows. She then highlighted that while 'orders' generally imply the notion of stability and 'flows' are linked to the idea of instability, both can change and transform into each other and are mutually constitutive. Frenz suggested viewing both as the two ends of one spectrum whose interplay creates a productive tension for global history.

The final discussion evolved around two major topics: 'transformative connectivity' as one particular concept and the general terminology of global history itself. Some participants argued that movement and connectivity are the distinctive features of global history for it should only be concerned with connected places. Examining trade is an obvious means to trace such links because, besides its economic importance, it also served as proxy for various other forms of interaction. Others warned about a reduction on trade and the exclusion of unconnected places without asking why they remained isolated. The focus on flows may also hinder the exposure of causality, which can only be traced consistently in a local context.

While this tension could not be suspended, the debate led to questions about the general language of global history. As the discipline has developed fast, its language and metaphors remain rather unclear. A discussion about theories and vocabulary of global history is therefore still needed. This became apparent during the Konstanz discussion about the persuasive power of 'transformative connectivity', which was dominated by the use of metaphors. The complexity was perhaps increased by the many different academic traditions brought together in one

place. But the potential of such constellations promises to generate new ideas and solutions for the development of a common terminology for global history. This challenge could be tackled in upcoming workshops of the series.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dirk Leuffen (Konstanz) / James Belich (Oxford) / Moritz von Brescius (Konstanz)

Panel I: General Perspectives

Introductory statement: Jürgen Osterhammel (Konstanz)

John Darwin (Oxford): History and Mobility
Helmuth Trischler (Munich): The Idea of the Anthropocene – New Temporalities in the History of Science, Technology, and the Environment

Panel II: People

Cátia Antunes (Leiden), Susana Münch Miranda (Lisbon), João Paulo Salgado (Évora): Early Modern Globalization – Deviancies, Asymmetries and Resistances: The Curious Case of Merchant Knowledge Transference
Linda Colley (Princeton): The Worlds of Jeremy Bentham
Andreas Fahrmeir (Frankfurt am Main): Im-mobility and Disconnection – Marginal or Typical Nineteenth-Century Experiences?

Panel III: Ideas, Information, Technology

David Arnold (Warwick): Cremation, India and the World – Global Flows and Diasporic Connections
Moritz von Brescius (Konstanz): Rubber and the Nature of the ‘Synthetic Age’
Wolfgang Schwentker (Osaka): Exploring the Poverty of Others – Japanese Social Reformers in Europe, 1890-1930

Panel IV: Art, Architecture, Literature

Maya Jasanoff (Harvard): A Moving Life – Joseph Conrad as an Author of Globalization
Cornelia Escher (Konstanz): Ordering Spaces and Fixing Flows – Architecture in Colonial Togo and Cameroon, 1884-1914

Panel V: Commodities

Shigeru Akita (Osaka): ‘Intra-Asian competition’ and Collaboration against the West – The Emergence of a ‘Cotton-centered Linkage’ at

the End of the 19th Century

Laura Rischbieter (Konstanz): The Empire Strikes Back – Global Value Chains and the Invention of the World Economy as a Political Pseudo-constraint in Imperial Germany
Bernd-Stefan Grewe (Freiburg): Staunching the Flow of Gold – Disconnecting from Global Economic Networks in the 20th Century

Panel VI: Pathogens and Material Objects

Stefan R. Hauser (Konstanz): Commodity Flows and Social Order at Palmyra
James Belich (Oxford): Plague in Global History

Concluding Discussion

Comments on the workshop: Margret Frenz (Oxford)

Tagungsbericht *Flows and Orders: A Tension in Global History*. 13.10.2016–15.10.2016, Konstanz, in: H-Soz-Kult 23.02.2017.