Itinerario (2023), **47**, 365–376
doi:10.1017/S0165115323000293

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

CONVERSATION

Is Global History Global? Convergences and Inequalities

Thomas David[1], Anne-Isabelle Richard[2]* and Pierre Singaravélou[3]

[1]University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland, [2]Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands and [3]University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France
***Corresponding author.** Email: a.i.richard@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Abstract

Over the last twenty years, global history has experienced a considerable boom, breaking with traditional historical approaches that privileged the national framework and very often adopted a Eurocentric perspective. This triumphalist discourse about the field of global history should not, however, obscure the local and national specificities of this field of research, be they epistemological, institutional, thematic, or historiographical, nor the disciplinary, political, and economic obstacles with which researchers are confronted. This conversation explores the intellectual and structural specificities and constraints of global history.

Keywords: global history; globalisation; inequality; circulation; teaching and research

Over the last twenty years, global history has experienced a considerable boom, breaking with traditional historical approaches that privileged the national framework and very often adopted a Eurocentric perspective. This triumphalist discourse about the field of global history should not, however, obscure the local and national specificities of this field of research, be they epistemological, institutional, thematic, or historiographical, nor the disciplinary, political, and economic obstacles with which researchers are confronted: "global history faces many epistemological and methodological tests, as well as political pushback."[1]

In 2022, the ten-year anniversary of the French language journal *Monde(s): Histoire, Espaces, Relations* led us as members of the editorial board of *Monde(s)* to conduct a conversation to examine the intellectual, institutional, and practical state of play of global history. Following requests to make the text available to a wider audience, and mindful of the inequalities that were the topic of conversation, we are very grateful for the cooperation with *Itinerario. Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions* to have the conversation published in English.[2]

To make this conversation truly global, we invited colleagues from all regions of the world to participate in this conversation. This was not easy: some of the colleagues we approached had to decline our proposal because the pandemic had made their living and working conditions extremely precarious. In addition, we decided that the

[1] Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global History, Globally* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 14.

[2] Thomas David, Anne-Isabelle Richard, and Pierre Singaravélou, "Histoire(s) globale(s): convergences et inégalités: Conversation avec Sven Beckert, Elisabeth Dikizeko, Ali Raza et Barbara Silva," *Monde(s): Histoire, Espaces, Relations* 21:1 (2022), 117–35, https://doi.org/10.3917/mond1.221.0117.

participants had to belong to different generations and have different academic statuses. It was important not only to have the point of view of professors, but also to give the floor to a doctoral student who could share her point of view on the opportunities, but also on the difficulties, of writing a PhD in global history. We also paid attention to gender balance. Finally, we wanted the participants in this conversation to have non-overlapping fields of research in order to show multiple approaches. We were very lucky: the four historians who agreed to share their visions of global history and the particularities and evolution of this field in their countries and regions gave a truly global dimension to this conversation.

Barbara Silva is associate professor at the at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. She is a specialist in the history of science and technology, particularly astronomy, during the Cold War.[3] She takes a global perspective, having initially worked on Latin America and the United States and now focusing on circulations in the Southern Hemisphere.

Elisabeth Dikizeko, a doctoral student in African history at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, is preparing a PhD on the circulation of pan-Africanism between Ghana and Congo-Kinshasa from 1958 to 1966. She is also the guest editor of a special issue on 'Global Lumumba' for the *Revue d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Afrique* (forthcoming 2023)

Sven Beckert is professor of history at Harvard University and has published numerous works in global history, in particular his book *Empire of Cotton.*[4] He is currently writing a global history of capitalism.

Ali Raza, associate professor of history at the University of Management Sciences in Lahore, Pakistan, works on the social and intellectual history of South Asia, as reflected in his recent book *Revolutionary Pasts: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India.*[5]

The participants in this conversation agree on the diversity of practices and definitions, while recognising that one of the specificities of global history lies in its emphasis on connections and interactions across borders. They stress the need to focus on the circulation of people, ideas, and goods between regions of the South and not only between the latter and the Global North. Each in their own way places the question of inequalities at the heart of global history.

Historiographies that can be broadly described as global (global, connected, imperial, transnational trans-imperial histories, etc.) allow us to better understand the genealogy of inequalities between the different regions of the planet. They also remind us that Western hegemony was relatively short (late eighteenth to late twentieth centuries) and is in the process of closing—if it has not already. The fact remains, however, that there are still strong inequalities in the conditions of producing global history.

The first condition is political. These historiographies, based on the study of circulations and interactions, have flourished in liberal democracies, whereas authoritarian regimes around the world focus on promoting a national narrative, which for example also leads dissenting historians to address different research agendas. Moreover, passport privilege plays a determining role. Visa regimes limit the possibilities for researchers to visit archives and conferences depending on their passport.

The economic situation is another very obvious determining factor. Indeed, writing global history is almost a luxury for researchers in the richest countries (Western

[3] Barbara Silva, *Astronomy at the Turn of the Twentieth Century in Chile and the United States: Chasing Southern Stars, 1903–1929* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[4] Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

[5] Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambrigde University Press, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Europe, North America, Australia, Japan, Singapore, etc.), even though there are strong inequalities between universities within each of these regions and even within each country. Indeed, this field of research, more than local, regional, and national histories, requires substantial financial resources, mainly to consult archives abroad and to have access to the most recent historiography, even if the literature is increasingly available in open access.

Finally, participants noted that in order to address these inequalities, collaborations between researchers from all corners of the world are essential. Indeed, the conversation concluded with a presentation of such a partnership. Jos Gommans, professor of colonial and global history at Leiden University and a specialist in the encounters between Europe and Asia in the modern era, describes the projects that have been underway since 2000 to make the very rich archives of the Dutch East India Company available to researchers in the South. Partnerships have been established between archival and academic institutions in the Netherlands, South Africa, and Asian countries, and some 150 students and doctoral candidates from Asia and Africa have been trained in the analysis and interpretation of the Dutch colonial archives. This collaboration has resulted in the digitisation of most of the archives and the publication of many ground-breaking works focusing on the Company's interactions with Asian and African societies.

What is the status of global history in the academic world (e.g., curriculum, chairs, journals, key readings recommended to students) in your country/region?

Barbara Silva: As it may happen with global history all around the world, global history in Chile/Latin America is "invoked" by many scholars—and also by students. By this I mean that people state they are working on global history, but as it is a dynamic concept and somewhat ambiguous, we can question whether it actually is global history or whether it is rather connected history, transnational history, histoire croisée, etc. Perhaps due to a misconception, whenever people address places different to their home country, they think they are working on global history... but we should agree that global history goes beyond overcoming national borders.

As for curricula, there are not many courses in global history. Some history degrees have courses on transnational history (or transnational approaches to history), but global history as such, not that I can recall. It is interesting though that, in the region, a course on Latin American history is definitely not considered global history, nor within the scope of global history, and neither is a course on European history or U.S. history. Those courses are considered "world history," but not necessarily global. That leaves less room for what we can consider global history; but, on the other hand, it stresses the global condition as one which needs movement and several different places in the world, not just some spot in the Third World, and that's it. I don't know if in other places the situation is similar.

There is a fascinating paradox regarding the study of global history in Chile: almost every author we have students read is from the U.S. or Europe.[6] Admittedly, there is not much literature on global history written from Latin America, but still, it is absurd.[7]

Ali Raza: History, as a discipline, is national history in most Pakistani and regional universities. To that extent, global history is still a developing and nascent subfield in Pakistan and the wider region. We are still a long way from having established chairs or journals (at least in Pakistan) when it comes to global history.

[6] For example Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016); Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: Norton, 2014).

[7] Stefan Rinke, *América Latina y la Primera Guerra Mundial, Una historia global* (Mexico: FCE, 2019); or, for the Chilean case, Tanya Harmer and Alfredo Riquelme, *Chile y la Guerra Fría Global* (Santiago de *Chile*: RIL, 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

That said, what passes off for global history, when it is explicitly invoked at any rate, is often international history that is more concerned with the history of other regions/countries than it is with the question of (as Barbara put it) connections and flows that exceed, cut across, and transcend national borders. In that sense, global history, as I understand it, has yet to take off as a specific subdiscipline. The modern discipline of history in Pakistan, in keeping with its nineteenth-century Enlightenment origins and post-colonial anxieties, is still more or less "national."

But that is not because of either inability or ignorance. There are good reasons why the study of history is still geared towards questions that are of "national" importance. And that's because these are amongst the most urgent questions within our South Asian context. Creating a national(ized) history has long been one of the most pressing educational tasks for India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which itself comes from a difficult legacy of anti-colonial struggle and intercommunal and internecine conflict. Dissenting and non-nationalist historians have little other choice than writing against national myths and probing their colonial inheritances. There are real and immediate stakes in writing these histories. This then raises the question of the stakes involved in pursuing global history in the so-called post-colony. Are the questions and frameworks of "global history" equally urgent for historians writing and situated in the post-colony? I think that explains in large measure why global history is still a nascent field in Pakistan and the wider region. It's not a question of absence or lack of interest as much as it is a question of different questions, and the stakes involved in asking those questions.

Elisabeth Dikizeko: As Ali pointed out, it is important to consider the issues involved in researching global history in the postcolonial and colonial era. Without going into detail on the diversity of currents that can be identified in the field of global history (connected history, transnational/transcontinental history, cross-cultural history), I would like to mention here the way in which global history is approached from Africa and from the centres of knowledge production in the Black/African worlds.

Historically, the Black experience is part of the phenomenon of globalisation through the various slave trades, colonisation, and the rise of global capitalism. The slave trades have created a multiplicity of circuits and geographical zones where African diasporas and various forms of Black identity have been formed. Consequently, the interest of African and Afro-descendant scholars in the process of globalisation is intrinsically linked to this history.

One of the most important reflections on the relationship between Africa and the world was developed by the historian and pan-Africanist activist W. E. B. Du Bois in 1947.[8] His work, both academic and political, nourished the generation of African researchers who, after the first decolonisations, developed a transnational and multidisciplinary approach to African history, right from the creation of the first Institute of African Studies in Africa (Accra, 1960).[9] It must be said that the political ideology advocated in Ghana by Kwame Nkrumah helped to consolidate this methodological approach in which importance was given to interconnections and circulations. It was necessary to involve the social sciences in the pan-African cause.

The creation of CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Sciences in Africa) in 1973 played an important role in the definition of knowledge about Africa that was thought out for Africa from Dakar. The Council consolidated its "pan-African social

[8] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York, Viking, 1947).

[9] The Institute was formally opened as a semi-autonomous unit in 1963, see Jean Allman, "Kwame Nkrumah, African Studies and the Politics of Knowledge Production in Black Star of Africa," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 46:2 (2013), 181–203.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

science paradigm"[10] by adopting a vision and building academic relations with Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia.[11] By introducing the concept of Global Africa, also worked on by the editors of the new volumes of the General History of Africa within UNESCO and by the *Contemporary Journal of African Studies* of the University of Ghana (CJAS), African historians mark an important epistemological turning point and propose a rereading of history that breaks with the binary and reductive perspective on the relations between Africa and its diasporas.

Sven Beckert: Global history is a dynamic field of historical studies in the United States—it has a small but growing place within the curriculum, it animates much research and has produced an important body of work that is read by many students, even by those not primarily interested in global history as such. Some universities advertise positions in global history and by now most major history departments have at least one colleague who would identify as a global historian. Students are interested in the classes global historians teach, write dissertations within the field, and a few global history books even have become almost bestsellers, that is, they are read beyond purely academic audiences. Articles within the field are much sought after by historical journals, and several major academic publishers have begun to publish series of books dedicated to research in the field. As emphasised by Barbara and Ali, there is some debate and disagreement about what exactly constitutes global history, and some scholars prefer to identify as world historians, international historians, or as practitioners of transnational history. Almost always, global history is not the study of literally the history of the entire world; as Barbara suggested it typically investigates a particular historical problem without concern for national boundaries; it chooses a spatial framing that is appropriate to the questions asked.

You all point out that there are debates about the definition of global history. Beyond these definitional issues, what are the predominant and emerging global history themes in your country/region?

Sven Beckert: Global history has become such a rich field of study in the United States that it is very hard to generalise. Vibrant scholarship can be found, for example, in global economic history, the history of slavery, intellectual history, and labour history. Commodity histories have also been important, often bringing together economic, social, and cultural history questions. Scholars write oceanic histories, they explore spaces such as the Indian Ocean, and they come to understand processes such as industrialisation from a global vantage point. The national history of the United States itself is increasingly understood in global terms. Nowadays, for example, the colonial history of North America is generally comprehended within an Atlantic framework, nineteenth-century slavery within the framework of "second slavery," and writings on the emergence of the twentieth-century welfare state within a global context.

One of the great strengths of global history in the United States is its diversity—it engages with many different questions and many different time periods, and deploys many different methods. I consider it a particular "way of seeing," namely a way of seeing that doesn't stop at the borders of modern nation states. And, importantly, global history acknowledges that there is just one human community.

[10] Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba, "Séance d'ouverture," *Bulletin du CODESRIA* 4 (1993), 2.

[11] Olukoshi Adebayo and Nyamnjoh Francis, "CODESRIA: 30 Years of Scholarly Publishing," *Africa Media Review* 14:1–2 (2006), 17–26; Martin Mourre, "Le Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique (CODESRIA), ou la volonté de savoir en Afrique pour l'Afrique. Naissance et évolution d'une institution panafricaine," *Histoire de la recherche contemporaine* 8:2 (2019), 189–99, https://doi.org/10.4000/hrc.3621.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Barbara Silva: I think "circulation(s)" has become pretty popular. It might not be global history per se, but has a global dimension that I think connects with global history that has been trendy here: circulation of ideas, peoples, objects, etc. This transit of whatever element (living or non-living) you might think is analysed within transformations and appropriations in different cultures around the world, until it reaches Latin America, at any stage of that circulation. And it applies to different topics in history such as history of science, cultural history, material culture, religion studies, socialism or communism, etc.

In this sense of connections, another recurring theme is the intention of turning the relationship around or shifting the point of view. If a few decades ago historians were interested in observing how North Atlantic phenomena influenced Latin America, now I guess there are more of us interested in how Latin American logics, perspectives, knowledge, culture, or whatever reached North Atlantic processes—without dismissing or rejecting the idea that there are indeed differences in power, of course. And I think this approach has potential, or at least, it illuminates areas of history that we have not been aware of for a long time.[12]

I would say there is another theme that should emerge, especially if we really want to go global, and I confess it is a personal interest: South-South relations, scarcely explored. Latin America's relationship with Africa or Oceania is barely studied, and I think it is extremely interesting, or even more, necessary.

Elisabeth Dikizeko: I agree with Barbara. One of the themes that emerges is the history of relations between the countries of the South. There is a particular interest in the history of the African continent and all the regions of Black settlement outside Africa. The history of pan-Africanism and the history of diasporas are the main themes of the global history of Africa, without being limited to the Atlantic world. New studies also focus on the African diasporas in the Indian Ocean, the Near and Middle East, and Asia. The circulation of ideas of "black political radicalism"[13], the circulation of activists, the so-called practices of return and repatriation to Africa, also popularised by the Year of Return project launched by the government of Ghana in 2019, are examined. Since then, the History Department of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana has been devoting a symposium to this theme in order to develop new reflections on the question of memory between Africans and people of African descent[14], as well as the circulation of music, dances, religious syncretisms (rumba, capoeira, voodoo, santeria), practices of resistance (quilombo), of care and of cultures (history of plants, pharmacopoeia, food, cooking).

Ali Raza: As pointed out by Barbara, to the extent that global history is emerging as an overarching framework, I think that regional and international connections/circulations are an important theme. I am thinking specifically of migratory flows here (which is not strictly restricted to "history" but also extends to sociology, politics, anthropology, development studies, and so on). Given the size and spread of South Asian migrant communities across the world, that seems to be an especially timely and urgent question. In that sense, this focus overlaps with many of the themes identified by Elisabeth. In years to come, I expect

[12] See for example Rafael Gaune and Antonella Romano, "Fragmentos de un mundo en tránsito entre América y Europa. Experimentos desde Chile," special issue, *Unisinos* 23:2 (2019).

[13] Ronald J. Stephens and Adam Ewing, eds., *Global Garveyism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019); "AHR Conversation: Black Internationalism," *American Historical Review* 125:5 (2020), 1699–1739.

[14] See also Florence Mahoney, *The Liberated Slaves and the Return to Africa* (The Gambia: F. Mahoney, 2001); Nadia Yala Kisukidi, "Du retour en Afrique: philosophies de la diaspora," Séminaire université Paris 8, 2020–2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzkS0EZpjoU; On Rastafarianism: Carmen White, "Living in Zion: Rastafarian Repatriates in Ghana, West Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 37:5 (2007), 677–709; Giulia Bonacci, *Exodus! L'histoire du retour des Rastafariens en Ethiopie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008); Monique Bedasse, *Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzanie and Panafricanism in the Age of Decolonization* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

this focus to further sharpen. Finally, I do wonder whether the impending catastrophe of anthropogenic climate change will not push us all to think in terms of global (if not planetary) histories? Can we afford not to? For even as we acknowledge that there is, as Sven points out, one human community, global history also raises fundamental questions of historically produced inequities within this community. That is a key concern when it comes to climate (in)justice and climate reparations to vulnerable countries and vulnerable communities. For that reason, I suspect that global history will become increasingly relevant in the Global South in a way that not only reminds us of how we got to this point, but also highlights the inadequacy of thinking in national(ist) frames.

What are the conditions to do research in global history in your country/region (e.g. financing or access to archives)?

Barbara Silva: Conditions to do global history are difficult, I guess no matter where we are based. When we say, "to do research in global history," we are referring to the possibility of going to foreign archives—for digital archives are still very limited—and travelling from Chile is indeed expensive, if you exclude Latin America. In Chile, for the humanities, there are not many grants available—a recurrent reality all over the world. There is a state agency (ANID) which has a national grant, with yearly applications. You must apply with a solid project, which will be evaluated by three peers. It is extremely competitive, but if you get it, then you have funding for your research for three or four years, which includes research trips. So, if you are working on global history and you manage to get this funding, it is really good: if justified by the project, you get expenses paid for working in international archives, with a couple of trips a year. So, that is the best option to do research in global history. Other grants are extremely rare; universities here have small research grants—when available at all for the humanities—which are not enough to work on global history from Chile. Unfortunately, for students it is almost impossible to have access to funding for doing research in global history. PhD students might have a few options but still, they are very scarce and difficult. In this regard, it is difficult for students to think of a global research project, not only because of funding, but because advisers rarely inform them about foreign archives and international grants either.

Elisabeth Dikizeko: The conditions for research are very difficult in Africa. Since the 1970s, structural adjustment plans have had an impact on the budgets of African states, forcing them to make drastic cuts in the shares allocated to education and research. Although some countries (South Africa, Kenya, Egypt, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Ethiopia) manage to contribute 1 percent of their GDP to research, there is a general crisis in funding, which also involves the responsibility of decision-makers lacking academic and political strategies. In addition to the problem of a lack of resources, there are also institutional and scientific issues. The limitation of academic freedom and the lack of infrastructure have an impact on scientific quality.

Even an institution like CODESRIA, which has managed to diversify its economic partners, has had to adapt its scientific orientations to the global academic market. Due to a lack of resources, CODESRIA does not employ any statutory researchers. However, the institution establishes partnerships with African researchers from the continent's best departments and with Afro-descendant researchers who share its historiographical conception of African history and who are generally affiliated with Western universities. Partnerships and the development of networks make it possible to pool human resources.

However, few African researchers have the possibility of being funded to study a "global" object in archives and fieldwork located on several continents. This reality necessarily restricts the choice of subjects by privileging the spaces of accessible deployment of the object of study. This probably explains the interest in the history of circulations.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ali Raza: This is fairly simple: the conditions are difficult, if not outright impossible. Financing is always a key question for cash strapped universities in Pakistan and the wider region. Public universities, especially, are frequently deprived of sufficient research funds, especially when it comes to the humanities as they are not seen as essential to the state's "development" goals. The vast bulk of funds go to the science and technology sector. That said, I guess that's a familiar story in most countries.

But more than financing, global history requires passport privilege. Should one be unfortunate enough to be saddled with a Third World passport, especially when one comes from a Muslim country, global history becomes an impossible pursuit. As a Pakistani researcher for example, it is exceedingly costly and time intensive to apply for visas for accessing archives and presenting in conferences. Our research questions then are also shaped by the kind of visa regimes in place. As a Pakistani researcher it is next to impossible to even get access to Indian archives, which allows us to write about our shared past. Researchers from industrialised countries rarely ever have to reflect on these issues, let alone confront them—though scholars on China might have a different story to tell in that regard. To put it bluntly, there is a deep connection between White (passport) privilege and the ability/wherewithal/possibility of doing global history.

Sven Beckert: It is impossible to generalise. The discipline of history as such is not doing well at American universities. The job market is in terrible shape, PhD student slots are rapidly disappearing and funding for historical research is difficult to come by. Government funding is very limited, and few private foundations focus on supporting historical research. This is a world in which it is difficult for any field of history, including the field of global history, to thrive.

That said, in comparison with the situation described by Ali, Barbara, and Elisabeth, the United States most likely still has more historians than any other part of the world, it has some extraordinarily rich universities, and the profession of history has been unusually global in orientation for the past half century. Few important U.S. universities would not have historians on their faculty who study almost all important world regions, an important precondition for global history, as it allows conversations across regional specialisations and allows for the training of students expert in more than one world region. The United States also has a long tradition of teaching courses on "World History," which is a strand of work that feeds into global history research.

As we have discussed, inequality on a global level has a very significant impact on the structure of global history. That same inequality also applies to historians in the United States itself—with a few scholars having access to extraordinary resources that enable them to do research in archives and libraries all around the world, while other scholars are burdened by disproportionate teaching and administrative responsibilities and the lack of access to significant research funds.

What are your thoughts about inequality in the opportunities to engage with and practice global history in your country/region?

Ali Raza: I think I have already pointed to a few considerations above. I don't have much to add beyond those, except to point out that global history is a deeply unequal subdiscipline that can only be possible in rich Western (and predominantly American) institutions. If global history is to grow as an area of interest/concern, it has to reflect on its inherent inequalities and privileges.

Sven Beckert: As I mentioned, there is a diminishing commitment to historical research as such, and there is increasing inequality within the history community of the United States. Altogether, however, U.S. Americans have played an important role in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

development of the field of global history, partly for a set of intellectual reasons, partly because of the wealth of U.S institutions.

Barbara Silva: I would like to return to what Ali and Sven mentioned, and elaborate on the link between inequalities and the practice of global history. Beyond issues of availability of funds and research time, it seems to me that inequalities come from the very understanding of what global history is, or could be, and the form it takes depending on the point of view. Thus, for example, research linking Latin America and Asia is considered global history if it is written by a researcher based in the United States or Europe (I am not using the term "Western" here, because otherwise Latin America would be considered Eastern, which leads to confusion). But working from Latin America, such research would generally not be considered global history, as you come from one of the places you are analysing. It would have to include a perspective on Europe or the United States, depending on the historical period. It would seem incomplete to study a Latin American process without having in mind what is happening in the United States or in Europe during the period under consideration. Hence the question: what is global history when the research hypotheses are formulated from the Third World?

What I mean is that inequalities can be explained in terms of the situation of the country or the region, and this is indeed important, but also very obvious; inequalities can also come from the dynamic notion of the "global." No one can make the history of everything, not even Stephen Hawking! Thus, global history can only constitute fragments of the global, or a vision of the global from pieces of the world. In a way, it is like being aware of one's "blind spot": there is something that one cannot see because of one's own position, and if one moves, even slightly, then one can see it and a whole new perspective emerges.

What solutions do you propose to remedy inequality (such as new institutional and editorial partnerships, the establishment of collaborative networks, or open access policy)?

Sven Beckert: For the global history project to succeed, it needs to become global itself. It needs to enable and encourage the participation of scholars from all corners of the world. If it becomes a Euro-American project it becomes in fact just another way for a small minority of humanity to explain the world to the world. This is unacceptable. Instead, we need to begin by recognising the many important contributions to global history that have come from Africa, various parts of Asia, and Latin America. When it comes to the kind of issues that my own work engages in, namely the history of capitalism, it is indeed true that some of the most important interventions have historically come from the Global South. We need to connect to these interventions and make them visible in our own work. Beyond that, we need to embed all conversations on various themes in global history within global networks. Global history needs to be discussed from various global perspectives. Our own work at Harvard has made it a point to always have scholars from all corners of the world participate in our debates. We have also created a global network of global historians, linking universities in India, China, Senegal, Brazil, the Netherlands, and the United States that jointly organises global conversations (much helped by new forms of electronic communication), conferences, and PhD student exchanges.[15] We now even have a global young scholars' network in global history. In many of our events, the majority of participants come from the Global South. Of course, huge inequalities persist, but this is the one thing within our power that we can undertake to globalise global history. We need to realise that a conversation on global history that is

[15] https://wigh.wcfia.harvard.edu.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dominated by historians from a few countries in the world is just not that interesting, and also not really legitimate. It goes against what I see as the fundamental spirit of global history.

Ali Raza: I agree with what Sven said. Interregional and international collaborative networks are an excellent way of thinking of a way beyond these inequalities. History as a discipline is still very much tied to the "individual author/individual monograph" model. There are very few institutional or associational incentives for collaborative work across regions, archives, and languages.

Open access for journals and digitised archives is another much needed initiative. Bluntly put, most institutions, whether private or public, can't afford comprehensive access to paywalled articles and books. Visa regimes are another matter, as I mentioned above. Most researchers don't even have access to ongoing conversations, let alone being part of them.

Elisabeth Dikizeko: One way of combating these inequalities would be to cite the research produced by pan-African centres of knowledge production that attempt to redress the imbalances by having a federative approach and to give more space to the African historiographic conception of global history in the journals dedicated to this field of study.

As Sven points out, however, the question of visibility arises. It remains difficult for African research centres to engage in global collaboration, partly because of the inequalities that structure research production and partly because the continent also needs to achieve epistemological independence. Decolonising knowledge remains a prerequisite for more egalitarian scientific relations and exchanges.

Barbara Silva: If we accept the dynamic nature of the concept of global history, we should stress the idea that the global does not come from the number of kilometres that separate our areas of research but from the questions we ask. In the same way, we should be clearer on the fact that the global does not always mean more integration, more connections, more coherence; on the contrary, inequalities are part of its questions. And I think that is a basic attitude to start working on inequalities.

In this regard, partnerships might be a very good approach to reach this elusive global dimension, and partnerships can give shape to a diverse range of options: networks, study groups, editorial projects, research, etcetera. Perhaps it would be a good idea to try some partnership for teaching. Of course, language might be a problem to overcome, but we can use technology to deal with that. Yes, English is our current "lingua franca," and we could discuss the limitations it implies for global history, as it certainly does. But we are not going to solve that in the short term. So, we could think of how new generations could access global history being global, using our available technology for that.

The Dutch Colonial Archive in the Making of Global and Local Histories: An Experiment to Remedy Inequalities in Global History

Jos Gommans, Leiden University

The VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) was by far the largest of the early modern European trading companies operating in Asia. For almost two centuries, VOC-Asia was managed on-site by local Company officials who governed a long string of factories spread across the Indian Ocean, including its headquarters in Batavia (now Jakarta) and up into China, Taiwan, and Japan. The fascinating history of the VOC represents a grisly combination of stunning profit coming from monopolies on Asian spices with excessive violence to implement such monopolies.

The activities of the VOC produced a massive archive of more than 25 million folios which reflect the intensive engagements of Company officials with the local societies in which they operated, either at the top as true colonial rulers in places like Java, the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Maluku Islands, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka, or as mere traders in powerful empires like Qing China and Mughal India. Hence, the archival result builds on an extensive information network producing an impressive amount of data on the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious circumstances in more than a hundred local societies around the Indian Ocean. The most important holdings of this archive are in The Hague, Jakarta, Colombo, Chennai, and Cape Town.[16]

The bulk of these materials are in a script and a language that the people coming from the regions concerned cannot read. Hence until recently most of these Dutch materials were primarily used by Dutch historians often following an overly Dutch research agenda. At the same time, there were a handful of international scholars, indeed a few from Asia too, who skilfully used the VOC archive as a window on the regional history of for example Bengal or Ceylon. Despite these pioneering studies, the VOC archive remained massively underused, with economic history receiving most of the scholarly attention to the neglect of the political, social, and cultural potential of the archive. Arising from this awareness, Leiden University and the National Archives in The Hague, in cooperation with partners in Asia and South Africa, in 2000 launched a massive archival-*cum*-academic project called TANAP (Towards an Age of New Partnership) which was primarily aimed at academic capacity building in Asia and South Africa, as well as the improvement of archival access. Since 2000 a succession of projects—TANAP (2000–2007), ENCOMPASS (2006–2012), and COSMOPOLIS (2012–)—have seen the light of day in which more than 150 students from Asia and South Africa, at various levels, were instructed in the use of the Dutch colonial archives, later also including the late-colonial archive primarily pertaining to Indonesia.[17] Alumni of these programmes have now gained tenured positions at the best academic and archival institutes in their countries of origin and far beyond.

The results of TANAP and its successor are visible in a wide range of studies based on the Dutch colonial archive, including more than sixty PhD dissertations, many now published.[18] More generally speaking, these studies have provided Dutch colonial history with a much more Asia-centric perspective, dealing with topics that include classical economic studies on so-far ignored Asian trading circuits, social and cultural studies like that on the Thai court or on the Sri Lankan peasantry, to studies that investigate longer-term conversion processes like the Islamization of Eastern Java or the Christianization of Mindanao in the Philippines. In all these studies, the focus is much less on Dutch colonial history and more on regional Asian history as seen through the Dutch archival window.

Other examples of this tendency to understand colonial history from the inside out are studies that exploit the neglected legal system which the VOC operated in Java, Sri Lanka, and Kerala. It generated a great number of court cases in which—by reading them against the grain—the voices of the local "subaltern," albeit distorted through the interpretation of the Dutch interface, can be heard, often surprisingly loud and clear. Some of these micro studies allow for fascinating comparative and connective intra-Asian perspectives, in particular between South and Southeast Asia, thus undermining the still dominant segregation of colonial history along national lines. A few of these regional Asian studies have even struck back at the metropolis by reading Dutch sources about Asia not *against* but

[16] See http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords for more information on the TANAP programme.

[17] Among the institutions that funded TANAP and its successors were the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Dutch National Archives of the Netherlands, and Leiden University. The current COSMOPOLIS programme is specifically geared towards the early modern history of Indonesia and now supports six PhD students.

[18] See the two series: TANAP Monographs on the History of Asian-European Interaction by Brill and Colonial and Global History through Dutch Sources by Leiden University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with the grain in order to unveil the making of a Dutch orientalist discourse affecting Dutch identity itself.[19]

On the archival side, almost the entire VOC archive in The Hague and Chennai have now been digitised and are everywhere in the world available online. With the help of various finding aids and a super inventory the VOC archive can now be accessed from almost every desk in the world as it becomes even more accessible through new technology that can transcribe handwritten scripts or otherwise help to unlock a still defiantly massive archive.[20] With worldwide access and a global network of alumni in place, the basic Leiden training has become somewhat superfluous as the focus shifts more and more to the cooperation with existing and new research centres in the region to further localise and decolonise the Dutch archive.[21] Leiden is now just one hub of a flourishing network of study centres that use the Dutch colonial archive for a field that has become less colonial and more global, less Dutch and more local-Asian.

Acknowledgements. The authors thank *Monde(s). Histoire, Espaces, Relations* for permission to publish this English translation of the conversation.

Thomas David is professor at the University of Lausanne. His research examines the history of elites, philanthropy, and international employers' organisations.

Anne-Isabelle Richard is university lecturer at the Leiden Institute for History and co–editor in chief of *Itinerario.* Her work is situated at the intersection of European and global history.

Pierre Singaravélou is a French Global historian who was British Academy Global Professor at King's College London and is currently full Professor of Modern history at Paris 1 Pantheon Sorbonne University. In English, he recently published *Tianjin Cosmopolis* (Columbia University Press, 2024), *Decolonization* (The Other Press, 2023) and *A Past of Possibilities* (Yale University Press, 2021, with Q. Deluermoz).

[19] To name just two exemplary recent studies: Manjusha Kuruppath, *Staging Asia: The Dutch East India Company and the Amsterdam Theatre* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016); and Nadeera Rupesinghe, *Navigating Pluralities: Lawmaking in Colonial Sri Lanka* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022). For the intra-Asian perspective, see e.g. Mahmood Kooria and Sanne Ravensbergen, eds., *Islamic Law in the Indian Ocean World: Texts, Ideas and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[20] https://globalise.huygens.knaw.nl/.

[21] See the current project Cosmos Malabaricus that seeks close cooperation with institutions in Kerala (India) at https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/archiveren/nieuws/cosmos-malabaricus-samenwerkingsprogramma-nederland-india-start-2021.

Cite this article: David T, Richard A-I, Singaravélou P (2023). Is Global History Global? Convergences and Inequalities. *Itinerario* **47**, 365–376. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115323000293