

# Global History for Global Citizenship

**Patrick Karl O'Brien**

Centennial Professor of Economic History  
London School of Economics, United Kingdom  
p.obrien@lse.ac.uk

## *An Autobiographical Preface*

Before I make a case for global history that could support the widespread consciousness required for “Global Citizenship” and because autobiography acquired cachet during that (now moribund) debate with post-modernists over “truth” and “personal detachment”, allow me the “indulgence” of referring to my own intellectual formation just to inform readers of how it came to pass that I am, in late career, attempting to reconfigure my academic identity by reading, teaching and writing in a genre called global history.<sup>1</sup>

My credentials and publications are largely in the fields of British and European economic history. But in 1960 I took my first academic job as a Research Fellow at the School of African and Oriental Studies to train as an area specialist on the Middle East. With difficulty I learned to read Arabic, but so slowly that ten years later I decided to move back to Oxford to a post in European economic history.

In the 1970s there were just three economic historians on the faculty: Peter Mathias, Joan Thirsk and me. Just four decades ago departments of history in Britain really did consist mainly of scholars, who worked on their own countries, complemented by a somewhat isolated a minority responsible for undergraduate teaching and postgraduate supervision on an alien world – which in those days included the mainland of Europe, as well as the kingdom’s decolonized empire. Thus for some twenty years I covered the economic history broadly defined, of anywhere and everywhere *but* the United Kingdom. I read chapters of theses related to many places I could hardly locate on maps, let

1 K. Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997).

alone begin to understand their histories and cultures.

In 1990 I moved to London as Director of the Institute of Historical Research, and to the amusement of my colleagues, convened the Institute's first ever seminar in global history.<sup>2</sup> Predictably that seminar began and continued by discussing a then rather short list of famous books locatable in this new field. Wittfogel, McNeill, Braudel, Hodgson, Wallerstein, Gellner, Jones, Hall and Mann were in print. Landes, Frank, Goody, Bin Wong and Pomeranz soon published their controversial theses comparing Europe with Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after my retirement as Director I was invited back to the LSE (where I had studied as an undergraduate in the late 1950s) to help the Department of Economic History set up the first ever master's degree for this subject in the kingdom.

The degree is advertised as global history, but (as you might expect from a group of economic historians) with credentials that cover Europe, the Americas, Africa, China, India and Japan, the course is in effect an integrated programme focussed upon the long-run history of "material life". The syllabus was designed for graduate students to study what is (perhaps) the mega problem of our times: namely, when or why some societies (located largely in the West and North of our modern world) became and remain affluent, while the majority of the world's seven billion people who reside in countries (to the East and the South) are still poor.<sup>4</sup> Demarcated into component courses the degree takes on board a range of themes that underpin most modern metanarratives in histories of the world focussed on environments, states, geopolitics, religions, cultures, gender, diseases etc.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the education on offer is "framed" by a concern with economic change and our bibliographies are based upon the writings of historians and social scientists who confront Adam Smith's mega concern with the "Wealth and Poverty of Nations".<sup>6</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the design of an innovative degree brought the entire problem onto the table of how "professional historians" (obsessed, as most of us are, with erudition, detail and archives) could read, teach, write and undertake research upon a "global scale" – unconfined by space and time. In short, could this be unavoidably relevant, increasingly fashionable and – as I will maintain – morally significant and politically necessary academic endeavour be undertaken in ways that might meet standards for theoretical rigour set by the social sciences. Furthermore, could the respect for evi-

2 Taken over when I retired as Director by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto who later moved to Tufts University.

3 References to the literature (articles as well as books) are included in a comprehensive bibliography compiled by P. Manning, *Navigating Global History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) updated by two major journals in the field: *The Journal of World History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press) and *Journal of Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

4 P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done About It?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 London School of Economics, Department of Economic History, MSc in Global History. Notes for students (published annually).

6 D. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York: Little Brown, 1998) and for an eloquent exposition of the alternative view based upon an extraordinary range of expertise in the history of economic thought read E.S. Reinert, *How Rich Countries Got Rich and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor* (London: Constable, 2007).

dence, the comprehension of contexts and chronology as well as aspirations for imaginative insights and for eloquent clarification demanded by modern styles of micro-history be satisfied? There was a sufficient degree of rational expectation (or surge of faith) to launch a master's programme in global history that the department of economic history believes is academically respectable and, by now, even a reputable credential for teachers and their students to possess.

### *Basic Arguments for the Study of Global History*

Five years after the launch of the degree the London School of Economics and Cambridge University Press sponsored the publication of a new journal – *The Journal of Global History*. I was asked by the editors to write a prolegomenon for its first issue and produced a long essay entitled: 'Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History'.<sup>7</sup> I wrote to reassure myself and a growing body of historians spearheading, collaborating or co-opted into the enterprise of delivering global history that our innovation or "restoration" could be justified. I attempted to do that by mobilizing three related but distinct prefatory arguments.

Firstly, I referred to Nietzsche's remark that "knowledge of the past has always been desired in the service of the present" and concluded that the diffusion of global history into systems of preparatory and, above all, higher education is virtually "unavoidable" in our times of accelerated globalization.

Secondly, I reached for an analogy to represent global history as the obverse of new nano-science which is based on theories and experiments into what happens to our universe when its basic components (molecules, particles and protons etc.) are reduced into infinitely smaller atoms. A science scales towards the miniscule, more and more historians scale towards the global.

Thirdly and despite the difficulties involved in coping with long chronologies, wider spaces and cultural heterogeneities a raft of recent publications by distinguished historians shows there are no insuperable or particular problems involved in repositioning vistas for the interpretation of history outwards, backwards and forwards. To cite some examples: all the young scholars at Austin Texas involved in an exemplary endeavour, led by Tony Hopkins, to promote global history found no difficulties in exploring interactions and inter-connexions between the "local" (which bounded their specialized knowledge) and the "universal" which they recognized as the context for its comprehension and wider communication.<sup>8</sup> Celebrated historical biographers have discerned nothing incongruous in exposing and contemplating the universal in the lives of individuals.<sup>9</sup> Two distinguished

7 P.K. O'Brien: 'Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history', *Journal of Global History*, 1:1 (2006), pp. 3-40.

8 A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Global History: Interactions Between the Universal and the Local* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

9 N.Z. Davies, *Trickster Travels: In Search of Leo Africanus, a Sixteenth Century Muslim Between Worlds* (London:

social scientists (Jack Goody and John Hobson) experienced no problems in inverting a tradition of Eurocentric historiography by analysing the “East in the West”. While the insertion of relevant experiences from Asia and Europe into the current, lively and significant debate on the United States as an “empire” has attracted heuristic interchanges between historians, political scientists, sociologists and specialists in geopolitical relations to the comparative study of empires.<sup>10</sup>

My general claims for more global history in higher education (namely, that it is unavoidable, politically necessary and not that difficult to construct with the rigour necessary to meet standards established by modern scholarship in history and the social sciences) leads me to offer three headings for this essay: first – globalization and global history; second – approaches and methods for its study; and third – moral imperatives for the restoration of serious engagement with the study of the history of humanity as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Grand themes for global history above have already provoked sustained debate across the natural and social sciences as well as several humanities, particularly history. For example, the natural sciences (which claim universality for their theories, methods of investigations and recommendations) are intensely interested in the speed and extent of environmental degradation.<sup>12</sup> The queen of the social sciences (economics) is now really trying to comprehend the implications that might flow from the ever-closer integration of markets for commodities, capital labour and knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Philosophers are debating the meanings attracted to human rights and notions of global citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

In short, behind my proposals for yet another discussion making the case for global history, are wide-ranging and highly significant contemporary issues. These issues are now involving networks of historians and giving rise to serious historiographical debates around the world, concerned with the terms and parameters for professional engagement with a field that can be traced back to Herodotus. Positions range all the way from enthusiasm to outright rejection of the whole enterprise as intellectually untenable or, more often, as a morally malign agenda for cultural domination by the West.<sup>15</sup>

Faber, 2005); L. Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London: Harper Press, 2007) and D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> C. Calboun (ed.), *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power* (New York: New Press, 2006); N. Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2004); C.S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> These moral imperatives are brilliantly interrogated by B. Southgate, *Why Bother with History?* (London: Longman, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> J. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) and D. Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> J. Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (London: Allen Lane, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> A. Carter, *The Political Theory of Global Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); F. Dallmayr and J.M. Rosales (eds.), *Beyond Nationalism: Sovereignty and Citizenship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001); B. Mazlish, *Civilization and its Contents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> V. Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

## *Historicizing Globalization*

### (1) SOME DEFINITIONS

Whatever the discourse about global history, globalization will continue as the “leitmotiv” for our times. Without the extension, intensification and acceleration of ancient historical processes of encounters, connexions, colonizations, integrations and transformations of human societies which have for millennia been separated by time and space, the current interest in and diffusion of global history into higher education systems in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas would hardly have reached the runway.<sup>16</sup>

### (2) STAGES

Never slow to react to claims from their colleagues in the social sciences to have discovered changes that they represent as clear discontinuities with the past, historians have already historicized the process to reveal a long history of surprisingly extensive, sometimes intensive and more or less significant connexions that go back to ancient civilizations in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.<sup>17</sup>

As the late Andrew Sherratt (the Oxford archaeologist) argued – the history of connexions (selected as the motor for historical change by our godfather, William McNeill) is as relevant for his field as it is for ours.<sup>18</sup> “Globalization” (considered as inter-related geopolitical, political, social, economic, religious and cultural processes) does indeed run like a thread through history but it can be demarcated (as historians always do) into heuristic stages.

One possible set as elaborated by Christopher Bayly and Tony Hopkins includes:

- (a) archaic globalization (running from the ancient civilizations of Sumner, Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome to the conquest of Cueta by the Portuguese in 1415 – a date which marks the very beginnings of European exploration and expansion overseas;
- (b) proto globalization which flowed from famous voyages of discovery navigated by Columbus, Da Gama and Magellan (1492-1520) which shifted both the scale and modes of connexion from overland transportation to seaborne commerce carried on wind-powered sailing ships – a stage which lasted from 1415 to the 1840s;

16 Those processes inform J.R. McNeill and W.H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's Eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003).

17 R.A. Denemark et al (eds.), *World System History* (London: Routledge, 2000). The problematic of stages in world history is astutely discussed by W. Schwentker, ‘Globalizing and the Science of History’, in S. Akita (ed.), *Creating Global History from Asian Perspectives* (Osaka: Osaka University, 2007), pp. 9-27.

18 A. Sherratt, ‘Reviving the grand narrative: archaeology and long term change’, *Journal of European Archaeology*, 3:1 (1995), pp. 139-53.

- (c) modern globalization (1846-1989) seen by Marx as led by the “bourgeoisie through its exploitation of the world” which gave a “cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country”, – a stage marked by the penetration inland of the periods outstanding innovation, the railway; and promoted by an international order of freer trade and more peaceable interstate relations;
- (d) contemporary globalization, 1948-2007.

These stages (elaborated by Chris Bayly and Tony Hopkins and scholars affiliated to the World systems school of historical sociology) are not boxes empty of heuristic value because they prompt historians (i) to explore the extent, intensity, velocity and outcomes of connexions over time; (ii) to analyse connexions within relevant chronologies and (iii) to explore major forces changing the world, be they geopolitical (wars), political, (states) organizational (multinational corporations) or technological capacities for communication embodied in ships, aeroplanes and electronic media for communication. In short, historians investigate and analyse the forces that over long spans of history moved ever larger proportions of the world's politics, populations and societies from one “stage” to another.

### (3) CONTEMPORARY GLOBALIZATION AS A PROFOUND DISCONTINUITY

Clearly globalization has had a long (but far from linear history) that can be divided for heuristic purposes into stages. There may well be nothing really new under the sun. Nevertheless, recent writings on the long run history of connexions on all of their multi-faceted (geographical, geopolitical, political, economic, social and cultural dimensions) expose one inescapable conclusion. The “extent”, “intensity” and “velocity” of globalization (as that ancient and ubiquitous process has proceeded recently – let's say since the independence of India in 1948) represents a really profound “qualitative” change with the past. Sixty years after an event that signified the end of European empires overseas, it becomes clear we are living in a new epoch and passing thru a transition at least if not more profound than the transition from feudalism to capitalism, from ancient to modern political regimes or from agrarian to industrial economies.<sup>19</sup>

Professional historians are, by training and educated reflexion, often inclined to discount claims for fundamental discontinuities. Nevertheless, the case for representing the half century of hot and cold warfare (1939-45 and 1947-89) as a conjuncture in world history, which threw up multiple propellants for the accelerated globalization, which is now clearly on stream, seems compelling if not unavoidable. First of all, the horrendous attacks on peoples and their property by states and their armed forces in almost every part of the globe, raised the level and extended demands for:

<sup>19</sup> This thesis is expounded with brevity and eloquence by B. Mazlish, *The New Global History* (London: Routledge, 2006).

institutions of global governance to protect human rights; for the maintenance of peaceful conditions for commerce and connexions across the frontiers of states which had, moreover, increased substantially in number as a result of the break-up of European and Japanese empires in the wake of the Second World War. Widespread pressures for conditions that could promote the diffusion of economic development and social welfare; for protection of the environment against the unintended consequences of scientific, technological, economic and demographic change; for restrictions on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have also intensified.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the surge in demand for the recognition and protection of human rights has an intellectual history that can be traced back through the world's great religions founded in the axial age to the Stoical and Confucion of philosophies around in pagan times.<sup>21</sup> Their histories as diplomatic agreements and embryo international law appeared during the Renaissance. In the form of institutions, associations and organizations transcending and operating outside the sovereignties of states to promote human, economic and social welfare (however inadequately) they appeared in course of the 19th century and proliferated after the foundation of the United Nations and the declaration of universal human rights in 1948.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the cold war which added some 23 million deaths to the 80 million recorded for the first truly global war in history actively promoted research and development not merely into wasteful expenditures on weapons, but incidentally into transportation and communication systems of vastly superior efficiency to anything available during the century of "modern" globalization after 1846. American and Soviet military industrial complexes also generated technologies that greatly enhanced the capacities of agricultures, industries and commercial services in all parts of the world to produce and sell more on a global scale. Finally, some four decades of acrimonious and dangerous competition between two nuclear superpowers and their satellite organizations competing for allegiance and alliances by offering different packages of modernities to states and societies everywhere around the globe promoted greater awareness of interdependence. Unfortunate and costly ideological rivalry intruded a greater consciousness of universal into local consciousness and concerns and thereby strengthened exogeneous and globalizing forces.<sup>23</sup>

In the conjoined spheres of intra-societal relations, economic connexions and cultural consciousness the conjuncture of 1939-89 propelled a truly transformational discontinuity in the nature, extent and intensity of globalization. Historians who remain inclined to stress antecedents and continuities might do well to reflect more on the changes compared to the world of their grandparents and to read some futurology on where their own world might be in 50 years' time.<sup>24</sup>

20 P.M.H. Bell, *The World Since 1945: An International History* (London: Arnold, 2001).

21 P.G. Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

22 Carter, *Political Theory of Global Citizenship*.

23 D. Reynolds, *One World Divisible: A Global History Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

24 P. Hirst and G. Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) hold the continuity view.

From that perspective and by reading about prior archaic, proto and modern stages of globalization, they might wish to draw the didactic conclusion that it would be a complacent abnegation of the political and moral responsibilities of professional historians at this juncture in history to fail to make space and to allocate resources and time for the scholarly study of past experiences of countries, local communities and individuals as they became willingly (or often unwillingly) enmeshed into larger regional, national, imperial, trans-national and global units of operation, adaptation and interaction. For historians the challenge of our times is to discover what we might find out there in historical records to help us to understand both the “benign” as well as the “malign” effects of what have now become extremely rapid movements towards a more closely connected world. History has a lot to contribute to the pervasive discourse on how to make globalization work for the benefit of mankind.<sup>25</sup>

#### (4) ARGUMENTS PRO AND CON ON ENGAGEMENT BY HISTORIANS WITH GLOBALIZATION

Unfortunately the case that converts to the field have been making for an altogether more serious engagement with metanarratives in global history continues to meet with idealistically based, but by now entirely “anachronistic rejections” from otherwise erudite, post-modern and post-colonial sub-groups of our heterodox tribe of historians. In recent decades, and taking a lead from influential philosophers largely from France, the United States and India, postmodern opponents have recommended (to quote Lyotard) that people should treat all “metanarratives with incredulity”.

To their credit these philosophers have also been engaged in heuristic exercises designed to “destabilize”, “relativize” and “provincialize” all manner of traditional histories; to expose their linguistic ambiguities, literary forms, foundational categories; and above all to reveal how inescapably centric and unavoidably situated all attempts to recover “Truth”, “Meaning”, “Lessons” from the past really were.<sup>26</sup>

Having lived with and through this particular “cultural war”, I can now recognize its cathartic benefits. I also observe that lessons have been absorbed. It seems to me that further and prolonged engagement with philosophers of history, with linguistic turns and literary theory have run into diminishing returns. For my part, I regard the task of persuading a hard working, conservative or otherwise indifferent profession of historians to become engaged with global history as far more important for the future of our discipline and as urgent for the problems of this century.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile those of us engaged with the genre may as well treat attacks on its agenda to create, refine and publish more inclusive metanarratives for our times as: ideologically situated antipathies to caricatured representations of the recent history of globalization – and, to be blunt, as an en-

25 J.A. Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

26 My own review of and mediations through the controversy with postmodernism can be read in P.K. O'Brien, ‘An Engagement with Post Modern Foes, Literary Theorists and Friends on the Borders with History’, *Reviews in History*, 1:1 (1998) an electronic publications accessible at <http://ihr.sas.uk/ihr/reviews>.

27 This stance informs Tony Hopkins’ recent writings in global history – see *Global History*.



trenched belief in original sin that presupposes that all metanarratives from Western historians will be forever biased, exclusive and oppressively anachronistic.

Historians should reject spurious allegation that global history lends implicit support to claims from neo-liberals and neo-conservatives for “progressive outcomes” (actual and potential) of all past and predicted trends towards global integration. In no way does our now extensive bibliography of histories analysing the records of interactions between the local and the global fail to deal with malign as well as benign effects of connexions across time and space.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, neither economic historians (nor a growing body of economists) are any longer in thrall to Ricardian predictions that openness to trade, capital, labour and knowledge flows will lead to economic growth combined with greater equality in the distribution of the world’s wealth.<sup>29</sup> Our colleagues in political history and political science seem acutely aware that the formation of sovereign, autonomous and effective states to protect their citizens from unregulated connexions with the rest of the world has historically been a protracted and complex process – easily thrown off course by incautious and uncontrolled engagements with powerful geopolitical, economic and cultural forces from beyond those porous and vulnerable frontiers of embryo empires, realms and republics.<sup>30</sup>

To turn to our own academic tribe of historians: my alas superficial survey of the historiographies of: China, Japan, Islamdom and Europe reveals that, for millennia, historians from all civilizations have been more or less involved with the universal problem of how to reconcile “packages of modernities” on offer from outside their communities, polities and empires with indigenous traditions and values that they and their societies wish to preserve.<sup>31</sup> Very few professional historians today (indeed only a minority of our now infamous “Eurocentric” predecessors) lent unequivocal support to what has been represented as “cultural genocide”, have acted as “a fifth column for Western values” or used history to support a “Washington consensus”. We are emphatically not in the business of telling people that the only history they “have to catch up with is other people’s history”.<sup>32</sup>

28 That bibliography included in Manning, *Navigating Global History*, is updated by at least three journals, *The Journal of World History*, *The Journal of Global History* and *The Bulletin of the World History Association* published by the University of Hawaii.

29 P.R. Krugman, *Development Geography and Economic Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995) and J. Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

30 The bibliography surveying debates among social scientists is well covered by M.F. Guillen, ‘Is Globalization, Civilizing Destructive or Feeble? Five Key Debates in the Social Science Literature’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 21 (2001), pp. 235-60. For an economist’s reservations read D. Rodrick, *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1997).

31 O’Brien, ‘Historiographical traditions’, and vide an excellent analysis of Chinese historiography which reinforces this point by S. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, ‘World History and Chinese History: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Historiography Between Universality and Particularity’, *Osaka University Global History and Maritime Asia Working and Discussion Paper Series*, 5 (2007), pp. 1-18.

32 The flavour of these stimulating attacks and quotable polemics against the perceived “pretensions” of global historians endeavouring to construct metanarratives for the genre can be captured in essays by Arif Dirlik and Vinay Lal in two collections of historiographical articles edited by B. Stuchtey and E. Fuchs, *Writing World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in Global Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

Metanarratives will probably remain in some senses unavoidably Western. But centric histories were never a monopoly of Europeans.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, there were several classical authors (Herodotus is just one), and traditions (Medieval Christendom, the Enlightenment and the period after the devastations of the Great War, 1914-18) when cosmopolitan histories appeared to contradict, qualify and question a mainstream Eurocentric tradition running from Hegel all the way to Lynn Cheyney, the self-appointed guardian of American values for school textbooks used in the United States.<sup>34</sup>

Global history teaches us to recognize that there has been a relatively short period (three centuries, not much more) of Western geopolitical, scientific and technological hegemony when all historiographical traditions (including separable traditions of European nations) extolled, rejected or adapted to alien packages of modernities on offer from outside their own more or less insulated frontiers and cultures.

Many historians will wonder when they read those eloquent objections to any engagement with global history by post-colonial, subaltern and other post-modern theorists if their authors have ready anything from our field since John Roberts published the *Triumph of the West* and Eric Jones wrote *The European Miracle* in the early 1980s.<sup>35</sup> Of course, such books continue to sell and what is more dangerous appear on television whose gatekeepers (until they are replaced with re-educated and younger graduates in the humanities) persist in communicating histories that minister to the patriotisms (xenophobias) of publics in search of narrowly conceived national identities. Fortunately such books are increasingly subjected to professional criticism for: centric bias, for ignorance of the histories of China, India, Japan, Africa and other “knowable” others, and for dependence upon the now obsolete but formerly canonical authorities and foundational categories (often derived from Smith, Marx and Weber) underlying their narratives.<sup>36</sup> Surely the days when jejeune Eurocentric forays into world history could be treated as scholarship are fast disappearing?

Furthermore, and since most academic historians tend to be located in departments of specialists, jostling for space and recognition, the exclusions of either “peoples without a history” or wide ranges of human activity (however trivial) are no longer a danger that thought police from philosophy need worry about.<sup>37</sup> That everything and everyone has a history has become a consensual presumption of modern history. The problem is not exclusions, but proliferations. How best to

33 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, op.cit., retains a deep antipathy to cross-cultural translations of foundational categories used for historical analysis and inevitably and unavoidably falls back to biography as the only genre of history that is virtually free from Eurocentric bias. And vide: L.T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999).

34 J. Bentley, ‘Myths, wages and some moral implications of world history’, *Journal of World History*, 16:1 (2005), pp. 51-82.

35 J. Blaut, *The Colonizers’ Model of the World: Geographical Diffusion and Eurocentric History* (London: Guilford Press, 1993) surveys the initial phase of attempts to revive global history in Western academe.

36 Vide the protracted and illuminating debate between Landes, his critics and supporters. Following the publication in 1998 of his best selling book, D. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (H-NET List for World History – H-World@H-NET.MSU.EDU 1998).

37 E. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

integrate our ever widening and deepening historical knowledge of the world into narratives that educated elites, politicians and even gatekeepers to mass media might read, absorb and communicate is the real problem. Historians need no longer confront Hegel, revise Marx, bawdlerize Weber or provincialize Europe. Those in the loop know it would be more heuristic to engage in debates of what to include and exclude from narratives that seek to inform global as well as national histories? They know that if scholars and intellectuals in higher education do not engage directly (or indirectly by toleration and support) in the construction of new cosmopolitan metanarratives then others, less educated, qualified and sensitive, will continue to take up that challenge and (as they have for centuries) write textbooks for schools (what is perhaps more pernicious) televise histories in the form of teleological chronicles designed to reinforce peoples very own set of values enshrined in canonical Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Confucian and other sacred texts; lend credence to their own established assumptions, in favour of particular forms of government and support ideological arguments for economies based either upon unfettered private and enterprise or upon systems of command based upon Stalinish precepts for the allocation of resources, income and wealth.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile new and plural ways of understanding world history and improved foundational categories for its reconstruction continue to emanate from the sciences, philosophy and social sciences, that are broadening out to incorporate the wisdoms from the East. Let us recognize, however, that the provenance and birth places of intellectuals of the stature of Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire, Smith, Malthus, Hegel, St Simon, Marx, Comte, Mill, Durkheim and Weber does not a priori invalidate many of the insights they continue to offer to historians for reconstructing the past – even the pasts of societies and cultures outside Europe. Their representations of “other cultures” are all too easily parodied as imperial or Eurocentric.<sup>39</sup> Western concepts, categories and theories have, however, evolved over time into a range of social sciences that are: no longer the property of the West anymore than contributions derived from Chinese medicine, the flexibility of Sharia law or African art are the property of any Eastern culture.<sup>40</sup>

Modern social sciences (including economics) are no longer based upon singular overarching paradigms. Instead they offer a competing plethora of theories, taxonomies and vocabularies for the study of history. History itself has become more open than ever to alternative ways of accessing, knowing and understanding the past through memory, oral testimonies, artefacts, ballads, dance, ritual as well as printed sources of all kinds. Provided that the inferences drawn from these diverse forms of evidence are subjected to the same theoretical and empirical tests that historians are trained to apply to all forms of knowledge of the past, then such ways may well be Bengali, Manchu, Maori or any other traditional ways for the recovery of meaning.<sup>41</sup> Most historians do not assume

38 C. Hendrick, ‘The Ethics of World History’, *Journal of World History*, 16:1 (2005), pp. 83-98.

39 Lal, *The History of History*.

40 V. Lal, ‘The Globalization of Modern Knowledge Systems: Governance, Ecology and Future Epistemologies’, *Emergencies*, 9:1 (1999), pp. 79-103 and his *History of History*.

41 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

that “indigenous” ways of comprehending the past are necessarily inferior or superior to Western natural and social science. Nevertheless, they also know that folkways can be situated as irrational potentially dangerous and malign as well as useful and helpful for the construction of local identities along with a sense of global citizenship.<sup>42</sup>

The basic problem with history as it is currently taught in education systems everywhere in the world is too that high a proportion of our colleagues time (funded by taxpayers) is devoted to servicing the local and national needs of their own communities.

### *Approaches and Methods Comparisons and Connexions*

As a novel field of study with strong potential for making its way alas all too gradually into higher education, global history has been concerned these past years with its own scope, scale and methods. Patrick Mannings’ text *Navigating Global History* as well as numerous articles in the *Journal of World History*, the *Bulletin of the World History Association* dealing with the field’s historiographical particularities and problems testify to its youthful preoccupation with methods.

Yet, and until they came under a sustained attack from opponents who assert that all metanarratives are a form of oppression, global historians allocated very little of their precious research time or made space in their syllabuses for methodological discussion. They leave that to historiographers and philosophers. They tend to ignore prescriptions from outsiders in favour of simple approaches, distinguished between comparisons and connexions. To make the case for any particular sub-field of an ever-widening subject, historians prefer to cite exemplars of their own specialized genre – be it cultural, family, demographic, diplomatic or other forms of history, some of which (pace economic history) are attached to a social science.

Most global historians have not, however, formed close alliances with any particular social science. Although more of them probably consult and use cultural anthropology and economics than other neighbouring disciplines. An increasing minority (vide David Christian, *Maps of Time*) who aim to bring about that promised synthesis between natural and cultural history have clearly digested a great deal of “popularized” natural science, which is currently coming on stream in forms accessible to historians.<sup>43</sup>

Much of the discussion about global history that is methodological in character makes do with arresting metaphors, extolling the benefits of scaled up vistas from space, parachutes and skyscrapers; tells historians to think longer and harder about architecture than buildings, let alone bricks; recommends an escape from concerns that are particular, local and above all proclaims in favour of

42 R.O. Hanlon and D. Washbrook, ‘After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34:1 (1992), pp. 141-67, and R.H. Wiebe, *Who are We? A History of Popular Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

43 Christian, *Maps of Time*.

a move towards an engagement with problems that are universal such as environmental degradation, human rights, poverty, gender, slavery, health, warfare and material life.

Most historians are now beginning to appreciate why the allocation of more space for global history is desirable and appreciate that the field could be both heuristic for their students and unifying for a would-be “guild” of scholars to adopt. What remains more difficult to figure out is a set of acceptable guidelines (not methodologies) on how best to proceed. In short how do we move on from exhortations and metaphors to methods. Personally I do not find the epistemological problems involved any more difficult than those encountered in writing histories of Europe or Latin America. Such problems will, I suspect, be resolved (not solved) by the appearance of a more impressive flow of exemplars of the genre.

Meanwhile what should be resisted are the pressures from those with years of scholarship and interest vested in the study of an area is any suggestion that “nomads” without passports or credentials be discouraged from venturing into “their” territory in order to resituate “their” scholarship into global contexts. Alas, this attitude is still prevalent (as well as the more famous face) of Western Orientalism and must be ignored. Persia is not (as that great Persian Orientalist, Anne Lambton, opined) accessible only to real scholars of that ancient and complex civilization. Yes, the credentials required for entry into any new territory should involve a serious engagement with the best secondary literature, hopefully abundant and available in languages that we can read. Furthermore, the interests and new insights that we claim will come from global history should be good enough to be potentially publishable in specialized journals for the areas we use as case studies. To help along the way the *Journal of Asian Studies* might (for example) begin to solicit attempts to compare Chinese and European history. Journals in Japanese History might also welcome articles that situate Japan in wider Asian and European contexts. The methods and traditions of scholarship in imperial, economic and transnational histories are clearly helpful. Discovering and synthesizing the local in the global and global in the local clearly also has a major contribution to make.<sup>44</sup>

### *Moral and Political Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History*

Since the historiographical tradition of attempts to detach history from its moral role and power to instruct in favour of Van Ranke’s utopian historicist project to recover Truth from the past has been short-lived and is now recognized as a failure, is it not time to return to the ideals of constructing Narratives of Enlightenment for these our own exciting but dangerous times of accelerated globalization?<sup>45</sup>

44 Hopkins, *Global History*, and I recall with appreciation that one of the supporters of the seminar I inaugurated at the Institute of Historical Research was the then Director of the Victoria County History of the Parishes of England and Wales.

45 Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge

With its commitment to inclusion and to long chronological and wide spatial parameters, global history represents a challenge to all those who continue to claim primacy for Western civilization along all of its manifold dimensions. Short lived geopolitical and technological success of the West (or indeed of Song China) never embodied any kind of moral superiority. Only a few historians ever claimed that they did. Global historians seek to follow recommendations from Herodotus to “preserve the memory of the past by placing on record the astonishing achievements of both our own and Asiatic People”.<sup>46</sup> We might, in this our twenty-first century, hopefully confine to archives for “historiographers” millennia of historical writing that was basically confessional, providential and centric and which implicitly and often explicitly proclaimed the superiority of a particular civilization (be it, Egyptian, Hellenistic, Christians, Moslem, Byzantine, Hindu, Confucian or Western). Our mission for the third millennium is to quote our modern Godfather (William McNeill) is to write and communicate *Ecumenical Histories*.<sup>47</sup>

Such histories should be designed to make room for global diversity in all its complexity and to provide proper acknowledgements for human agency (including the agency of women). Of course, its metanarratives will remain unavoidably provisional and negotiable. But as more and more professional historians from systems of higher education from all parts of the world (not just from Europe and the United States or from diasporas of Asian academics) see it as their public role to reveal the universal in the personal; the global in the local; as well as reciprocal connexions between east as west, north and south; then flows of relevant research from every style of history could provide building blocks for the next generation of Hodgsons, McNeills and Braudels to construct even better metanarratives than those now on offer from these our illustrious predecessors.<sup>48</sup>

At the very least academic debate as it evolves into competition for popular attention might and constrain the nationalistic myopias of politicians and elites in control of the mass media for the communication of history. Historians are, however, realistic and recognize that even as this begins to happen, the attachments of peoples everywhere to their own institutions, celebrities, heroes, communities, ethnicities and religions as well as mythologies feeding more malign kinds of chauvinisms and fundamentalisms will continue to remain extremely strong and not easily undermined by education in something wider than the national and provincial histories we all imbibed at school.

Nonetheless, and although the task looks daunting, global history seems to be both an inescapable task and a noble dream for departments of history to embrace. Steps towards the realization of the field's mission could lead eventually to a better understanding of the past of our long connected

University Press, 1997), For such narratives in German historiography vide J. Osterhammel, ‘Approaches to Global History and the Question of the Civilizing Mission’, *Osaka University Global History and Maritime Asia Working and Discussion Papers*, 3 (2006), pp. 1-29.

46 J. Evans, *Herodotus: Explorer of the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 67.

47 W. McNeill, ‘The Rise of the West after Twenty Five Years’, *Journal of World History*, 1:1 (1990), pp. 1-21.

48 G. Marshal Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History* (ed. Edmund Burke III, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 3 vols (London: Collins, 1984-85); W. McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

world. By extension that could well contribute to consciousness, pressures and institutions currently under construction and in operation for citizenship in a global civil society.

As globalization continues to accelerate such a society is no longer regarded as an oxymoron impossible to envisage and hardly on the drawing board, let alone defined as a site for serious intellectual debates of societal construction and the formation of institutions for global governance. As a utopian ideal it can be traced way back through a long and illustrious line of philosophers to Mencius in the East and to the admonitions of Stoics in the West.<sup>49</sup>

Their ideals of specifying, promoting, and where possible, protecting basic human rights for peoples everywhere against violence, disease, hunger, discrimination, natural disasters etc. etc began to take diffuse but transnational institutional forms (congresses, global networks, international societies, cosmopolitan associations and (albeit for profit the rise of multinational business corporations) during the 19th century.

Overtime such institutions extended their range of missions to include more objectives and peoples whose basic needs, rights and wants they perceived to be neglected, poorly serviced or even threatened by states under whose sovereignty, jurisdiction they resided.<sup>50</sup>

In the wake of: profound historical conjuncture of hot and cold wars (1939-89) which witnessed unprecedented and extensive barbarities; the rapid emergence of such larger numbers of decolonized states claiming sovereignties over the lives of peoples; and the diffusion of advanced technologies for rapid transportation and for instantaneous oral and visual communication, political spaces for the proliferation of institutions dealing with the needs and evolving desires of humankind have opened up and out.<sup>51</sup> Today there are literally thousands of global institutions. Their concerns and services provided as public goods or sold as commodities by business corporations touch and influence the lives of an ever growing proportion of the worlds populations.<sup>52</sup> These institutions conceive of their missions operational concerns and interests to be unbounded by frontiers. More often than not they operate in tacit or active alliance with sovereign states, but sometimes in opposition to the policies of governments and local authorities.<sup>53</sup>

Many (even multinational corporations) represent their moral missions in terms of concerns for humankind as a whole and refer to universal declarations for human rights as promulgated by the United Nations in 1948, reaffirmed at Vienna in 1993, and recognized by the foundation of International Courts to hold politicians and their servants accountable for crimes against humanity.<sup>54</sup> Politically global institutions find mandates for their operations and activities in claims (some-

49 M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defence of Reform and Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).

50 Scholte, *Globalization*.

51 Bell, *The World Since 1945* and Reynolds, *One World Divisible*.

52 Mazlish, *The New Global History*.

53 N.C. Crawford, *Organization and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

54 Carter, *Political Theory of Global Citizenship*.

times spurious, often shallow, but generally plausible) that they are meeting demands for human welfare as those concerned perceive and formulate them.

Historians have read and researched more deeply than other academic disciplines into the long and complex process of state formation, the evolution and consolidation of personal identities and cultures behind civic societies regarded as stable and more or less successful. They will recognize that, in diverse ways, the plethora of institutions now offering public goods and even selling private goods and services upon a global scale are the analogues of institutions that helped to form functional, national societies, economies, cultures and states over centuries of time. They will also recall the tensions and resistance this process met from vested, political and economic interests, parochial religions and local cultures as well as personal antipathies to the widening of contexts for economic, social, political and family life. Their comprehension of the gains, losses and violence involved in this protracted history of nation building will enable them to recognize that the accelerated globalization of our times is leading us, but slowly, towards some form of global civil society. Power is shifting away from sovereign states. Although communication, politics and religious fundamentalism are still omnipresent as dangerous reactions.<sup>55</sup>

Local cultures are merging, adapting, surviving and contributing to universalizing tendencies.<sup>56</sup> Intellectuals from the sciences, social sciences and humanities are explaining the kinds of education that could underpin a culture for global citizenship and for the institutions that might foster the development of some kind of global civil society.<sup>57</sup>

History contains knowledge that is politically, economically and culturally significant for the great debate of our times. Not because, as Ranke hoped, the subject could recover truth and scientifically valid evidence about the past, but because an historical understanding of social and political processes involved can be acute and useful. The moment should be seized because historians without purposes or agendas have never existed. Yes, ironic detachment and careful attention to evidence are virtues to be cultivated by historians who wish to remain intellectually persuasive. But so too are the construction and reconfiguration of metanarratives that will educate the public, appeal to the young and serve the needs of our times for a sense of global citizenship. That task might well revive the best tradition of a guild among a rather cantankerous profession of postmodern scholars, pursuing their own riskless and self-defined agendas.

Anything less could be folly and folly as Bolingbroke anticipated could be remedied "by historical study which should purge the mind of ... national partialities and prejudices. For a wise man look upon himself as a citizen of the world".<sup>58</sup>

55 Dallmayr and Rosales, *Beyond Nationalism*.

56 Hopkins, *Global History* and E.L. Jones, *Cultures Merging* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

57 M. Albrow, *The Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

58 Southgate, *Why Bother with History?*, p. 163.