

Global history - challenges and opportunities

A winter school on global history for PhD and early career scholars in Germany and India

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Organised jointly by the Heidelberg Centre of Transcultural Studies, the India Branch Office of the Max Weber Stiftung and the German Historical Institute London

Convenors: Debarati Bagchi, Felix Brahm, Pablo Holwitt, Monica Juneja and Indra Sengupta

The turn towards global history, which in its present form can be traced back to the middle of the 1990s, has never been more influential. While world history can be linked to an older tradition of history writing that saw large-scale historical processes or ‘world events’ as the subject of historical inquiry, the more recent tradition of global history owes its origins to academic discussions about the globalisation of the 1980s and 90s. It examines in historical perspective the connections, networks and trajectories between unlikely and unequal spaces, sites and actors in a globalised world (Mazlish 1998/2005; Hopkins 2006). Among other themes, the relationship between Europe and the non-European world, long calibrated by colonial power relationships, drew much scrutiny, as European imperialism began to be framed in the history of globalisation that preceded the globalisation of the late twentieth century. And yet, as ethno-nationalism begins to reassert itself against the forces of globalisation, the question arises, is global history passé? Has its relevance ended? Is it time to ‘return’ to smaller entities, such as local spaces, the region or the nation as the principal subject of inquiry?

Such critiques of global history are not new. The championing of global history, especially in the UK, by historians of the British Empire and Imperialism had given global history a faint whiff of neo-colonialism, especially amongst historians of the many nation-states that emerged from the British Empire. It seemed to lack relevance, for instance, for detailed microstudies of social inequality in locally-embedded ‘small’ spaces, which are deemed crucial to understanding the postcolonial modernity of many a postcolonial nation-state. Hence, it appeared to ignore many of the concerns of historians of postcolonial nations and over-write these with a universalistic, neo-colonialist, hegemonic historiographic agenda.

Global historians have been aware of these critiques. They have responded to them from various perspectives, most importantly, by arguing that globalisation both in the past and present constituted powerful processes that succeeded in connecting even the small spaces of the world and that studying most modern phenomena, regardless of its scale, willy-nilly involves a study of global entanglements (Drayton/Motadel 2018). The aim of global history, global historians argue, is not to flatten out difference with a Western-dominated approach; rather, its agenda enables difference to be studied relationally. In this sense, global history is now being defined as both an approach as well as a field of study (Conrad 2016). More recently, attempts have been made to sharpen the focus and methods of global history and bring it into dialogue with related concepts such as translocality, transregionality or transculturation (Freitag/von Oppen 2010; Brahm/Epple/Habermas 2013). These underline the potential of a “critical globality” (Juneja 2018) as a tool to question the epistemic foundations of most disciplines in the humanities whose formation was part and parcel of processes of nation-building in Europe and in younger, postcolonial nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These epistemic foundations continue to shape our scholarly practice in the present. A critique of “methodological nationalism” or the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002) can open the field of global history up to a host of questions. These involve critiquing the very foundations of our modern-day

institutional structures – universities, archives, museums and the heritage industry – that both constitute our subjects of investigation and account for those questions that remain unasked.

The winter school is directed at PhD and early career scholars mainly from German and Indian universities who are working with the methods and approaches of global history or are interested in these, regardless of the region they have specialised in. It will address the following set of conceptual and methodological questions: How can globality as a critical perspective be fruitful in bringing the intellectual insights of regional experiences beyond Euro-America into more general analyses of historical phenomena? How do we move beyond the academic and institutional divisions between the so-called area-studies and an unmarked “mainstream” if we want to overcome the trap of universalising narratives? Conversely: What is at stake when we choose a global approach? What are the issues that such an approach is ill-equipped to address? The sessions will engage with the relationship between global history, the history of colonialism and local or micro-history and the methodological challenge posed by languages and concepts to the writing of global history.

Three thematic areas of study will be dealt with: 1) the history of labour; 2) the history of pedagogic practice and 3) the history of peripatetic objects. The focus will be on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While not the express intention of the school, in view of the location of the winter school, many of the themes may have a focus on India or South Asia, although our aim is to open the study of the region up to new questions and perspectives.

For participants from Germany and India (outside New Delhi), the cost of travel to New Delhi and stay will be met by the Max Weber Stiftung’s India Branch Office. Some meals will also be provided for.

We invite applications from PhD and early career scholars (no more than 2 years post-PhD) from history and related disciplines at Indian and German universities who are using or are interested to use global history approaches in their research. Your application should include the following:

- 1) your CV
- 2) a letter of motivation of no more than 500 words outlining why you are interested to attend the school, where your work fits in with the objectives of the school, and how you think your work will contribute to the field of global history
- 3) a letter of support from your supervisor or, if you have completed your PhD, a senior academic with whom you work very closely and who knows your work well.

Please send your application as a **single pdf file** to Ms Katharina Becker, India Research Programme at the German Historical Institute London (email: k.becker@ghil.ac.uk) by **11 October 2019**.