

“Scales of Global History”
Global History Network Conference
Universidade de São Paulo (USP, Brasil)
March 3-5, 2016

EVENT REPORT

One of the landmark events for WIGH this year was the first meeting bringing together the global history network. Coordinated by Jessica Barnard from Harvard, the network consists of six universities and institutes from every continent and is dedicated to this emerging subfield of historical study. Under the title “Scales of Global History,” WIGH, in collaboration with the *Laboratório de Estudos sobre o Brasil e o Sistema Mundial* (LAB-Mundi) at the University of São Paulo (USP), hosted the first of a series of international global history seminars. Additional support for the event was offered by FAPESP, CAPES, the Volkswagen Foundation, the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, Harvard University, and the Department of History and Social History at USP. Attended by two faculty members and two graduate students from each partner institution, the meetings were held at the Fernand Braudel Auditorium of the Department of History at USP between March 3 and March 5, 2016. Conference participants were enthralled by the vast campus engulfed in wild greenery and beautiful landscapes. They also celebrated the fact that at all times during this conference six different institutions were represented on each panel – it was indeed special to have people from all over the world, who read different repertoires and speak different languages, still share common ground and even thematic unity.

The first panel, chaired by Professor Hector Maldonado of the Universidad de San Marcos, Lima, tackled the question of labor in global history. The session was opened by Professor Marcel van der Linden of IISH, who presented an Aristotelian approach to the understanding of coerced labor generally. Later papers covered more specific aspects of global labor. Professor Babacar Fall of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar discussed the labor organization of early colonial projects in Senegal through the case of the men deported to work the Dakar Port and the Dakar-Saint Louis Railway in the thirty years from 1855. Professor Rafael Marquese of USP examined compulsory labor within the global coffee industry during the Age of Revolutions. Professor Prabhu Mohapatra of the University of Delhi closed the session with a discussion of Indian labor migration from a global history perspective in the century from 1840.

The second panel, chaired by Professor Gustavo Paz of Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, tackled two linked themes: commodities and immigration, the latter theme providing continuity between this panel and the first. Professor Sven Beckert of Harvard University opened with a discussion of his coming project on the history of global capitalism, which builds on the research he undertook in the process of writing his latest publication, a global history of cotton. Professor Amar Farooqui of the University of Delhi discussed the global opium market and its impact on the “small” lives of local communities in different geographies. On the theme of migration, Professor Leo Lucassen of Leiden University discussed the intersections between cross-cultural migrations and changing labor relations on a global scale, while Professor Mu Tao of the East China Normal University in Shanghai focused on the flows between China and Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Professor Charles Maier of Harvard University was the first speaker on a panel dedicated to “Territories, Regions, and Cities,” giving an overview of territoriality in global history over the last five centuries. Professor João Paulo Pimenta of USP followed with a focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and what he described as geographical, political, and ideological territories within the new-world colonial empires. Professor Zhu Ming of East China Normal University offered a closer analysis of global cities, exploring a regional and interregional approach to their analysis, and using Paris, Saigon, and Shanghai as case studies. Professor Rokhaya Fall of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop finally zoomed in even further without losing sight of global history, getting down to the level of particular agents, and discussed the role of African women in transatlantic networks. This panel was chaired by Professor Iris Kantor of USP.

The last two panels, chaired respectively by postdoctoral students at USP and UNIFESP, Gabriel Aladrén and Tamis Parron, were dedicated to the ongoing research of graduate students. These two final panels featured:

- Zhanna Popova (International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam): “A Threatening Geography: Exile and Forced Labour of Prisoners in Western Siberia (1870-1917).”
- Priscila Ferrer (USP): “Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Spain, Brazil: Joaquín Infante in the Age of Revolutions.”
- Ben Goossen (Harvard University): “Religious Nationalism in an Age of Globalization: A Case Study.”
- Gambou Prisca Nadine (Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar): “Emancipation, work and mission: works of Saint-Joseph’s of Cluny convent in Senegal and Congo 1819-1965.”
- Xu Shikang (East China Normal University, Shanghai): “The Funeral system of the Middle Chinses’s influence on the Qidan people: entering on the compare of the epitaphs between the two.”
- Ritesh Jaiswal (University of Delhi): “Recasting Indian Migratory trends: An analysis of Maistry Mediated Mobility to Burma (c. 1880-1940).”
- Pepijn Brandon (International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam): “Between the Plantation and the Port: Racialization and Labor Control in 17th Century New Amsterdam and 18th Century Paramaribo’.”
- Marcelo Ferraro (USP): “Slavery in the Paraíba Valley and the World-System.”
- Joan Chaker (Harvard): “Muleteers as Bandits and Mutineers: Global Capital and Social Transformation in the Ottoman Countryside.”
- Mamoudou Sy (Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar): “The impact of the Great Depression in Police Governance of Colonial Senegal 1931-1941.”
- Chen Jinlong (East China Normal University, Shanghai): “A Colonial Economic History: Study on the Development of Sisal Industry in Tanganyika.”
- Shubhankita Ojha (University of Delhi): “Across Oceans: The Global Work, Lives, and Experiences of Bombay Dock Workers (1930-1990).”

A special issue of the University of Sao Paulo’s history journal, *Almanack.unifesp.com*, will feature some of the presentations as a dossier. The platform is published in Portuguese, English, and French, and enjoys good readership abroad – which makes it a perfect platform for global history publications.

Participants to this event were all enthralled at the productivity of the exchange and at the larger research community in which they were able to share their work. It was agreed that more such meetings will be convened, the three upcoming ones to be held in Delhi, Shanghai, and Dakar. The conference thus closed on a roundtable dedicated to the discussion of “Perspectives for the Global History Research Network,” and geared towards learning from this event with a view to future meetings. The question was put to the graduate students, who will be the ones to write this global history: How was this meeting helpful to you? As this network develops, what sort of activities and ideas would be useful to you in your own work?

Most importantly, this final roundtable recognized that the group brings together diverse views to global history that are irreducible to a single approach, and insisted on the importance of preserving this multiplicity rather than foreclose the debate over the organizing principle of the global. For instance, participants decided to remain open on the question of whether global history addresses a system, or comparisons and connections. Another such difference among participants related to the role of theory. Some participants wished to see future conferences dedicate panels to methodological and theoretical questions, going beyond an intuitive sense of global connections to effectively define a global process, describe its organization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and determine its turning points. Other participants expressed doubt about the fruitfulness of a conversation about theory that does not arise from the critique of a specific piece of empirical history writing.

On a pedagogical level, it was decided that future meetings should discuss the question of a global-history bibliography. The issue of language in the teaching of global history was also raised: most of the literature is in English, and thus cannot be assigned at an undergraduate level in some institutions. It was thus decided that future meetings would include book panels.

It is noteworthy that beyond these annual meetings, the global history network allows an ongoing exchange. A network website acts as a platform for the sharing of global history syllabi or working papers, as well publications. Year-round, the activities of the various partners are publicized throughout the network, and even shared by video-conferencing, live-streaming, or recorded video. Beyond facilitating global discussion, the network supports cross-continental collaborations and long-term projects, particularly through graduate student exchanges: nine global fellows have so far spent a semester at another partner institution. To incentivize the study of global history, the network helps students in institutions with no access to funding access fellowships and stipends, and is often working to raise funds for research.