

REVIEW ESSAY

The Prospects of Global History: Personal Reflections of an Old Believer

PEER VRIES

International Institute of Social History
Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

E-mail: peer.vries@iisg.nl

The Prospect of Global History. Ed. by James Belich, John Darwin, Margaret Frenz, and Chris Wickham. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016. xiv, 222 pp. Maps. £35.00.

Global history seems to be the history for our times.¹ Huge syntheses such as the seven-volume *Cambridge World History* or the six-volume *A History of the World* suggest the field has come to fruition.² Robert Moore, in his contribution to the book under review, *The Prospect of Global History*, is quite confident in this respect: if there is a single reason for “the rise of world history”, it is “the collapse of every alternative paradigm” (pp. 84–85). As early as 2012, the journal *Itinerario* published an interview with David Armitage with the title “Are We All Global Historians Now?”³ That may have been provocative but Armitage obliged by claiming “the hegemony of national historiography is over”.⁴

The contributors to *The Prospect of Global History* are all distinguished scholars. As such, this book can easily be considered as yet another sign that global history is doing well. However, not everyone would agree. Serious doubts, or at least qualifications, have been expressed recently

1. Or “world history”. I have always considered it a waste of time to discuss the “right” term for a form of history that takes the existence of the world seriously.

2. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, editor-in-chief, *Cambridge World History* (Cambridge, 2015). Of the six volumes of the series *A History of the World* by Harvard University Press, four volumes have been published to date, each with different editors, in 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2018.

3. Martine van Ittersum and Jaap Jacobs, “Are We All Global Historians Now? An Interview with David Armitage”, *Itinerario*, 36:2 (2012), pp. 7–28.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

concerning global history's alleged boom. David Bell, in a critical review of one of the volumes of *A History of the World*, suggested that "Perhaps the global turn [...] has hit a point of diminishing returns."⁵ Jerry Adelman, more recently, wondered: "Is global history still possible or has it had its moment?"⁶ This sense that appearances might be deceiving is, however, not new. Even in 2006, the *American Historical Review* invited six scholars to discuss the present and prospect of what it called "transnational history", because it wondered whether, "like other innovative approaches to history, it is in danger of becoming merely a buzzword among historians, more a label than a practice, more expansive in its meaning than precise in its application, more a fashion of the moment than a durable approach to the serious study of history".⁷ Apparently, there are concerns here. So much so that Richard Drayton and David Motadel in the *Journal of Global History* felt the necessity to defend the cause of global history against Bell's and Adelman's comments.⁸

I will use my review of *The Prospect of Global History*, a book that is inherently quite programmatic, to reflect on what I think it can teach us about the prospect – and prospects – of the project called "global history", and to what extent recent critiques such as those by Bell or Adelman are justified. The text will therefore be somewhat ambivalent in nature and more "essay" than "strenge Wissenschaft". Considering the broad range of topics discussed, I cannot do full justice to all the authors and their chapters. The book consists of nine chapters, an introduction, and an afterword. James Belich, John Darwin, and Chris Wickham provide the extensive introduction, after which Jürgen Osterhammel writes about "global history and historical sociology" and Kevin O'Rourke about "the economist and global history". After these "conceptual considerations", there is a second part

5. David A. Bell, "This is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network", *The New Republic*, 26 October 2013, available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/114709/world-connecting-reviewed-historians-overuse-network-metaphor>; last accessed 8 November 2018.

6. Jerry Adelman, "Is Global History Still Possible or Has it Had its Moment?", *Aeon Essays*, 2 March 2017, available at: <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>; last accessed 8 November 2018. The URL has a different title: "What is Global History now?". Drayton and Motadel – see note 8 – refer to this text under its other title: "What is Global History Now?"

7. C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History", *American Historical Review*, 111:5 (2006), pp. 1441–1464, 1441. See also Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2013), which has a strong focus on the methods and results of global economic history, with a generally optimistic tone.

8. Richard Drayton and David Motadel, "Discussion: The Futures of Global History", *Journal of Global History*, 13:1 (2018), pp. 1–16. For replies by Bell and Adelman, see David A. Bell and Jeremy Adelman, "Replies to Richard Drayton and David Motadel", *Journal of Global History*, 13:1 (2018), pp. 16–21.

called “Global Circulations” comprising four chapters: Nicholas Purcell, “Unnecessary Dependencies: Illustrating Circulation in Pre-Modern, Large-Scale History”; Robert Moore, “A Global Middle Ages?”; James Belich, “The Black Death and the Spread of Europe”; and Matthew Mosca, “The Qing Empire in the Fabric of Global History”. Part III, titled “Circulations”, contains chapters by Francis Robinson on global history from an Islamic angle; Antony Hopkins on the real American empire; and Linda Colley on writing constitutions and writing world history. The book closes with an afterword by John Darwin. Suffice it to say that the quality of the chapters overall is high. The contributions by Osterhammel and O’Rourke and, in particular, that by Belich, with its fascinating sketch of the (possible) consequences of the Black Death for Europe’s outreach to the rest of the world, were the ones I enjoyed most. Any reader interested in global history will certainly find chapters to their liking even if Bell – I think with good reason – might comment that in this volume, too, war, certainly a major form of global interaction, is barely discussed.⁹

The back flap of the book is forthright about the status of the field: “*The Prospect of Global History* takes a new approach to the study of global history, seeking to apply it, rather than advocate it.” This suggests that the debate on what global history *is* and whether it is *a Good Thing* has been settled and that the “only” thing we have to do now is to apply it. I would not be surprised to find that this is yet another example of the tendency, unfortunately widespread, for such texts, usually conceived by publishers and *not* authors, to be overly forthright. In the book itself, John Darwin, one of its editors, is much less categorical:

Global history – history on a global scale – is not an historical programme, still less a uniform approach to the history of the world. Its appeal and its value lie precisely in the multiple vistas it opens up, in the connections it suggests, in the questions it asks. “An extensive sight or view; the view of the landscape from any position”, was an early definition of “prospect”. That might serve quite well to describe the prospect of global history. (p. 183)

Such a statement can be taken – as I guess Darwin intends it – as a sign of the “pluralism” and “open-mindedness” that Darwin shares with Sven Beckert, who in the conversation in *American Historical Review* described transnational history as a “way of seeing”.¹⁰ A sceptic like Bell will probably consider this further proof that global history has become a “grab-bag” (an expression used by Adelman), lacking coherence because it is devoid of theory, overarching arguments, and grand narratives, so that reading its big syntheses makes you wonder what this kind of history actually teaches you about how the world has evolved over time.

9. See, for this comment, Bell, “This is What Happens”.

10. Bayly *et al.*, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History”, p. 1454.

Osterhammel addresses the assumed lack of theory head on: “Global history should steer clear of both dogma and the kind of superficial *naïveté* that is content with a good ‘global’ story expertly told, or worse, with a jumble of facts and images” (p. 27). He sees a fundamental role for social theory, defined as “a coherent set of explicitly defined concepts – as well as ideas about the application of those concepts to the interpretation and explanation of observable phenomena” (p. 24). He is convinced, as apparently Darwin is, that global historians in this respect might profit from exchanges with historical sociology. (For Darwin’s endorsement, see p. 180.) His advice to global historians and historical sociologists to learn from each other and his suggestions in that respect certainly make sense, but, unfortunately, they are not very concrete. Besides, as Osterhammel knows, historical sociology at the moment is not exactly booming or bristling with new ideas (p. 36).¹¹ O’Rourke is the only other contributor who explicitly deals with the input on global history from the social sciences, in his case economics. Every global economic historian interested in economic globalization would be well advised to read his comments, although they focus on matters of conceptualization and measurement rather than theories. Nowhere in the book do we read anything substantial about a possible input from political science. That is a pity, considering the fact that even global historians who refuse to think in terms of states and nations cannot ignore “politics”.

The assumed lack of grand narratives – that is, overarching interpretative frameworks in global history as practised by its current professionals – does not seem to be coincidental. Most global historians are positively resistant to such narratives. Often with good reason, as many grand narratives have turned out to be nothing but misleading myths. But as Connelly said in his contribution to the debate in *American Historical Review*: “while they have done harm, and continue to confuse, where would we be without them?” and, even more importantly, “People are yearning for grand narratives that can better explain our times.”¹² Beckert, in his contribution to that same debate, argued along similar lines:

We live in a world of rapid economic change, of enormous concentrations of economic power, sharp social inequalities, and drastic disparities in the distribution of political power – both between and within states. [...] If we, as historians, want to remain relevant to public debate, we need to engage these issues.¹³

11. In this context, it is striking that one might criticize Osterhammel himself for not presenting any grand narrative in his own magnum opus. See my review of Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 2009) in *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und Vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*, 20:6 (2010), pp. 20–39.

12. Bayly *et al.*, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History”, p. 1457.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 1450–1451.

The fact that global historians are not very active in providing narratives with which to make sense of past human experience or in developing explanatory frameworks has the consequence that others have stepped into the breach, often scholars who would *not* define themselves as global historians. For example, I refer, in chronological order, to the biologist Jared Diamond, author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*; the ancient historian Ian Morris, author of *Why the West Rules – for Now*; the psychologist Steven Pinker, author of *The Better Angels of Our Nature* and *Enlightenment Now*; and the medievalist Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*. In the field of economic history, I could refer to work done on global inequality by the economist Branko Milanovic and ancient historian Walter Scheidel.¹⁴ In the field of so-called cliodynamics, the biologist-zoologist Peter Turchin is the main protagonist.¹⁵ The development of “big history”, with, as the main protagonist, David Christian, originally a historian of Russia, has been relatively autonomous. Global historians have not played a prominent role in this.¹⁶

I myself came to global history via historical sociology and later historical economics. I have always associated it with theories and grand narratives. I chose to actively promote a global approach because to me this meant studying “big structures, large processes, [and] huge comparisons”.¹⁷ For me, global history loses its *raison d’être* without them or, to quote Fernand Braudel, “Il faut voir grand, sinon à quoi bon l’histoire?”¹⁸ The dislike of theory and grand narrative apparently has become so strong that in *The Prospect of Global History* and elsewhere one comes across several explicit pleas for “global micro-history”. I must say I feel an increasing discomfort with

14. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York, 1997); Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules – for Now: The Patterns of History and What They Reveal about the Future* (London, 2010); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Harmondsworth, 2011); *idem*, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (New York, 2018); Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York, 2015); *idem*, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London, 2015); Branko Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have-Nots: A Brief and Idiosyncratic History of Global Inequality* (New York, 2011); *idem*, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ [etc.], 2017).

15. See his website for an explanation of his approach. For an example see Peter Turchin, *Ultrasociety: How 10,000 Years of War Made Humans the Greatest Cooperators on Earth* (Chaplin, CT, 2016).

16. For big history’s most prestigious project, supported by Bill Gates, see <https://school.big-historyproject.com/bhplive>; last accessed 8 November 2018; for David Christian’s latest publication, see his *Origin Story: A Big History of Everything* (London, 2018).

17. Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).

18. This quote of Braudel is the opening motto in Roselyne de Ayala and Paule Braudel (eds), *Les écrits de Fernand Braudel II. Les ambitions de l’histoire* (Paris, 1997).

such pleas, and here, too, the contributors to the volume seem to be divided. Robert Moore favours “the abandonment of the lumbering, grotesquely generalized spatial units, the continents and civilizations of the happily superseded ‘West and the rest’ discourse. More fruitful are the precise regional and even micro-regional comparisons precisely selected for their purposes [...]” (p. 88). Nicholas Purcell claims that global history needs micro-history to keep it “grounded” (p. 78). Matthew Mosca points out that one should try to pair the micro and the macro, realizing that one cannot just jump from the one to the other (pp. 122–123). He, in any case, takes a macro-entity, the Qing Empire, as his point of departure. Antony Hopkins’s contribution also focuses on an empire. Jürgen Osterhammel, in contrast to Robert Moore, claims one cannot dispense with the concept of civilization and believes it can have great virtues (pp. 33 and 36–38). Francis Robinson writes about global history from an Islamic angle. Is that not a civilizational angle?

Looking at the various chapters in the volume makes one wonder *why* the contributors have gone global. Most of them have done so because they have become convinced that human history is a globally interconnected process and they consider it their task as historians to show that this has indeed been the case. The editors of *The Prospect of Global History* are explicit in their endorsement of this point of view: “Migration [...] has surely been one of the great constants of world history” (p. 16). They wonder: “Why [...] should we give precedence to place over movement? Why indeed?” (p. 21), and they have learnt to mistrust the “historical cliché [...] that most parts of the world, even most parts of Europe, existed before modern times in semi-, if not complete, isolation from the traffic of goods or ideas” (p. 183). That mistrust is certainly well founded, although their cliché is also a bit of a caricature. Realizing that the concept “globalization” is as popular as it is vague, they come up with different categories of globalization (sub-global, semi-global, and pan-global); different intensities of connections (contact, interaction, circulation, integration); and different vectors of connectivity (diffusion, outreach, dispersal, expansion, attraction) (pp. 3–5). Although Darwin in his afterword suggests that the comparative history of what might be thought of as “universal processes” is likely to remain the dominant focus for most global historians (pp. 180–182), connections are far more prominent than comparisons in the book.

Bell and Edelman are critical in this respect too. They think global historians are exaggerating in their “rage [...] to uncover past global connections” and their privileging of “motion over place, [...] stories that move [...] over tales of those who got left behind”.¹⁹ Again, Osterhammel seems to share

19. The first quote is by Bell in his “This is What Happens”, the second one by Edelman, in his “Is Global History Still Possible”.

their scepticism: “Global history may be in danger of losing a sense of proportion by underestimating social structure and hierarchy [...]” (p. 39). In combination with the relative absence of theories and grand narratives this could lead to a situation in which “global history degenerates into long, and somewhat trivial, lists of spaces, people and events that are somehow linked to each other” (pp. 41–42). In my view, this is often already the case.²⁰ I can only endorse the critique by Bell and Edelman. It may be helpful to realize that even now, in 2018, less than 4 per cent of the entire global population are international migrants, that is, people who are living in a country other than their country of birth.²¹ In Western Europe in 2015, that figure was less than 5 per cent and in the USA 0.9 per cent.²² The sum of world exports and world imports as a percentage of world GDP, according to a guesstimate, was some 5 per cent in 1600, some 10 per cent in 1800, both in *optimistic* estimates, and some 60 per cent in 2010, the last year for which I found the relevant figures.²³ When it comes to wealth and income, it is hard to overestimate the importance of location. According to Branko Milanovic, between two thirds and three quarters of people’s income is determined by their place of birth.²⁴ Ironically, there is no better proof for the exaggerated importance given to global connections than the current growth of economically motivated migration: if it does not really matter where one lives, why are some people so desperate to enter another country? Neither distance, nor the national state – that other black sheep of global history – are dead. I personally find it quite challenging to declare an institution dead that in total redistributes more than fifty per cent of my gross income. This implies that politics is not dead either. The state is still evidently capable of making a difference in respect to the effects of globalization. Simply assuming that the world is flattened and suggesting that paying attention to politics and political units in the past and present is “outdated” is not only naïve – if not outright misleading – it also takes away most of global

20. Sebastian Conrad also critiques global history’s alleged “obsession” with mobility and movement. See his *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ, 2016), p. 226. I base my pessimism in this respect on a quick survey of the last ten years of *Journal of Global History*, *Journal of World History*, *Itinerario. International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction*, and *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und Vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*.

21. See http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migration-report/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf; last accessed 8 November 2018.

22. See <https://jakubmarian.com/emigration-in-europe-destination-countries-and-percentages-of-emigrants/>; last accessed 8 November 2018.

23. See <https://ourworldindata.org/international-trade>; last accessed 8 November 2018.

24. Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have-Nots*, pp. 120–123; *idem*, *Global Inequality*, pp. 132–143.

history's societal relevance.²⁵ Even in a globalized world of networks there is power, and that power is located somewhere. It cannot be otherwise.²⁶

This again shows the relevance of the comments about “measurement” that O'Rourke makes in his contribution. More energy should be devoted to determining the exact extent and impact of the various kinds of “contacts” and “exchanges” of which global historians are so fond. Can one seriously claim for any period in the pre-industrial era that “there was a fundamental and resonant division of labour” in which “China and India did the manufacturing, and the rest of the world paid in non-manufactures, such as spices, dyestuffs, horses, furs, and, especially bullion” (p. 7)? Does it really make sense to describe Kenneth Pomeranz's Great Divergence as actually the fourth of its kind (p. 10)? What is the concrete support for the assumption that the millennium between 500 and 1500 was one of intensification and, as such, a *global* Middle Ages (p. 91)?

Moreover, it might not be such a good idea to so emphatically justify global history, as has become common, by reference to connectivity. Two comments are in order here. Firstly, if being connected is such an important reason for studying “the other”, then why not, considering the fact that time and resources are scarce, focus on the “foreign” people and places with whom one is most connected? Global historians, including the contributors to the book under discussion, like “the great leap outward”. I have been teaching global history in the Netherlands and Austria for many years, talking about other continents to groups of students, largely Dutch or Austrian, who as a rule did not have the slightest knowledge of the history of countries more or less on their doorsteps. Who in the Netherlands researches and teaches the history of, for example, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, or the Baltic states, all member states of the European Union and several of them in the Eurozone? To assume that students, let alone the wider population, know what they need to know about these places and that it is now time to globalize their knowledge is “optimistic”, as I have experienced myself time and again. In the best of all worlds we would, of course, prefer to study and teach about all places and countries in the world, but we are not living in the best of all worlds. Secondly, if connection is the key and if history as a discipline should follow trends in history as a process, would global history, as the connectivity argument in the end implies, then become less important when globalization does? Or, to put it in Adelman's terms, “In our fevered present of Nation-X First, of resurgent ethno-nationalism, what's the point

25. I here refer to Thomas Friedman's manifesto of globalization in which the author claims: “The world is being flattened, I didn't start it and you can't stop it, except at great cost to human development and your own future.” See Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2005), p. 469.

26. See also my comments in Berg, *Writing the History of the Global*, pp. 201–205.

of recovering global pasts?”²⁷ Whatever the answer to that question may be, it is a legitimate question.

A third comment, of a different kind, on which I would like to expand somewhat, would be that the bulk of “global” history, and in particular the “connection” variety of it, to my mind at least, is strikingly traditional in respect to goals and methods of research and presentation. Words such as “global”, “transnational”, or “intercultural” are now brands under which, as Matthew Connelly rightly notes, historians often retail “very conventional kinds of scholarship”.²⁸ As a matter of preference, I believe global history should not resign itself to being conventional history with a faraway place added, as is now far too often the case. A history that starts from the premise that there is a world of which one can discuss the history ought to be a fundamentally *different* kind of history. At the textbook level, Eric Vanhaute’s *World History: An Introduction* is a fine example.²⁹ It does not try to give an overview of interconnected histories of all parts of the world like those huge synthesizing volumes that function as introductory textbooks, but builds around questions and topics of global importance and global reach. In my view, global history ought to have a strong comparative component and thus show more methodological awareness. There is nothing wrong with conventional scholarship – far from it – but one would expect a new prospect to have methodological implications. What is striking in that respect in *The Prospect of Global History* – as well as in recent *criticisms* of global history – is the plea for (even) *more* emphasis on traditional skills and methods. Global historians are advised to “understand and rely on primary sources above all” (p. 12); to “insist on depth in historical analysis” (back flap); to confront linguistic variety (p. 12); and to pay more attention to agency and the micro level (*passim*). The Global History and Culture Centre in Warwick organized a couple of conferences about global micro-history. The invitation I received stated that “global historians [...] seek to move beyond large-scale syntheses and comparative data sets to engage closely with primary sources, philology, and local context”. They “seek ways of conveying agency, individual histories, events and locality within a global framework”.

Who can be against that? Well, I might, in any case when I imagine the possible implications of these “requirements” or “suggestions” that to me smell too much of “Ranke in the tropics”. No-one can discuss substantial global-historical subjects if they have to study all the (potentially) relevant sources themselves. If we make that a requirement, global history by necessity becomes a collective endeavour. That far-reaching implication is hinted at

27. Adelman, “Is Global History Still Possible?”.

28. Bayly *et al.*, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History”, p. 1447.

29. Eric Vanhaute, *World History: An Introduction* (London [etc.], 2013).

several times but never extensively discussed in the volume. That is a pity. Teamwork undoubtedly can and already has revealed some very interesting and useful results. When thinking about successful collective endeavours in global history it is not major databases that first come to mind. Of course, they can be useful and certainly will be widely used as they are considered to provide data and thus the bricks with which global history might be built.³⁰ I am sceptical about the actual value of much of the data provided in these projects so far but have no doubt that they can and will be improved. To do so we need far more discussion of how the data in these databases are constructed and what they might actually mean. In that discussion, the underlying assumptions of such databases – that one can produce “bricks” to be used by “architects” – needs to be questioned. Personally, I expect more promising and concrete results from groups of scholars who closely interact in defining questions, collecting and interpreting materials – all in their field of historical expertise – and writing down their results, naturally, where necessary, helped by experts in handling data. In this way, the specific and “local” knowledge required to know what is actually going on is optimally assessed, exchanged by and between experts, and used in a way that in principle is agreed upon by all scholars involved. Such close interactive collaboration of experts in so-called collaboratories that can use online exchange certainly will, and in my view with good reason, become more important in the future and ought to have been discussed in a book about the prospects of global history.³¹ In this way, collective endeavours need not result in simple data sets or textbook-like syntheses in usually big volumes, which are both important but not real “research”.

Even so, the prospect of the disappearance of the individual scholar and their story or argument is not, to me, alluring. Fortunately, however, to write global history one does not need to be a Jack-of-all-trades. Global historians should be allowed to be “experts in the general” using the work of “experts in the specific”, naturally prudently and modestly, in constant exchange with them and on the basis of as much erudition and consideration as possible. What is the use of experts if, by definition, one has to repeat or extend their work? Global history in the end is about bold syntheses and risky hypotheses. In that sense, it would be better to be wrong with Weber than right with Ranke.

In this context, a brief aside is in order with regard to the alleged hegemony of English as an academic language in the field of global history. Drayton

30. See e.g. <http://seshatdatabase.info>; <https://ourworldindata.org>; and <https://socialhistory.org/en/research/infrastructure>; last accessed 8 November 2018, and the Maddison Project Database of the Groningen Growth and Development Centre.

31. For some exemplary examples, see the collaboratories of the International Institute of Social History, available at: <https://socialhistory.org/en/research/infrastructure>; last accessed 8 November 2018.

and Motadel suggest that “global history, in general” would “be dominated by Anglophone historians who seem unable or indisposed to read history written in other languages”.³² Adelman goes even further and claims that it is “hard not to conclude that global history is another Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues”.³³ I would certainly not want to deny that there are imbalances in global academia and that the predominance of English can have negative effects here. They should be addressed. But I am fairly confident that in this respect, too, the rapidly proceeding “decline of the West” will act as a corrective. I am quite certain that the Other – including non-Anglospheric Westerners – will not allow Anglospheric intellectuals to become or stay hegemonic.

To conclude, not much is said in this volume about the *purpose* of undertaking a study of global history. Of course, a slim volume cannot cover all topics, but nevertheless this omission is unfortunate. The history of global history, in particular when we look at the World History Association and its publications and other activities, has always been very connected if not focused on its relevance for teaching and teachers. I contend it is of the utmost importance not to sever that link. Paraphrasing Adam Smith: “Education is the sole end and purpose of all research.”³⁴ Global historians – though, to be fair, not explicitly in the text discussed here – like to suggest that a “more globally oriented history” would “encourage a sense of international citizenship”, to quote Lynn Hunt, whose words are explicitly endorsed by Drayton and Motadel.³⁵ The assumption is that knowing more about “the other” makes you and, I assume, “the other”, more tolerant. One need not necessarily believe that. But if global history is indeed a future prospect, the question *who* is looking, *for what*, and *for what reasons*, needs more attention. Such an approach implies that global history will mean different things to different people and to different peoples. And the various contributions in this volume are proof that global historians, even if they try to develop a global perspective, will never become “Olympian”. But this is not something we should regret: unanimity is the gateway to boredom.

32. Drayton and Motadel, “Discussion: The Futures of Global History”, p. 8. Their claim is simply untrue for almost all the global historians I happen to know.

33. Adelman, “Is Global History Still Possible?”.

34. “Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production”, Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* Book IV, ch. 8, p. 49. I refer to the edition by R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (Indianapolis, IN, 1981).

35. I here quote Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York, 2014), p. 51. Drayton and Motadel fully agree. See their “Discussion: The Futures of Global History”, p. 15.