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# "Localism", global history and transnational history

A reflection from the historian of early modern Europe

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Few things are more sensitive to the present than history itself. Few realities are as dependent on our current existences as the way in which we approach, view and reconstruct history. For this very reason, it is in no way strange that the historians of the early twenty-first century speak of "global history", "comparative history" and "transnational history". There are plenty of external reasons for this in contemporary academia. The globalisation process itself, and its acceleration in recent decades, has not only obliged us to seek out the precedents, roots, stages and forms of this globalisation. It has also made us look at the past in a global sense. Globalisation has also brought about a strengthening of the history of interconnections between different parts of the planet, drawing the interest of historians towards "interconnected histories" and "entangled histories", joining other forces that drive this process. For the same reasons this has led to a growing preoccupation with the comparison of these areas on an almost unprecedented scale.

At the same time, comparative and transnational history (the latter of which is difficult and controversial to define) have experienced notable and decisive development.<sup>1</sup> Comparative history essentially presents a more modern and methodologically sophisticated version of the work of Marc

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1. I am addressing this issue in a paper that I am preparing along with my colleague H. G. Haupt. The reader may find some of the ideas in "Estados, naciones y regiones en perspectiva europea: propuestas para una historia comparada y transnacional", *Alcores: revista de historia contemporánea*, 2, 2006, pp. 13–35.

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Bloch, but it has experienced a boom in recent years for a number of reasons. One of these reasons, perhaps the most important, is awareness of diversity. It is in no way strange that this development has been expressed with the most clarity in Europe. Europe is now – and has been for several decades – a historical subject in search of its "identity". Furthermore, this search is situated in the context of an extremely strong awareness of diversity. This awareness of diversity has been nourished for years by national and regional historiography and by the same principles of democracy and respect for minorities, but it has also been accentuated by the recent failure of the European constitution. Comparison is inevitable between citizens who now seek to find the specificities and shared aspects of the different global regions that lie at the heart of what we now call Europe. In addition, the enlargement of the European Union has obliged us to continue our comparisons. Many citizens ask themselves if Turkey is European or if it fulfils the vocation of pan-Europeanism that seems to be present in the European Union project. How is it possible to answer these questions without using comparisons to what is conventionally understood as the "centre" of Europe? These are fair questions for the regular citizen, for whom we historians are supposed to write.

On the other hand, the crisis of the nation state has been a key aspect of the development of transnational history. By means of this concept, historiography seeks to place emphasis on relations between imagined communities at levels other than that of relations between governments of contemporary nation states. At the same time, it seeks to underline the relevance of the relationships between social groups situated in these communities, placing emphasis on the importance of studying new and different dimensions of historical reality: international migration in the sense of cultural and national confrontation, social networks that cross and go beyond political borders, even in some cases – as has happened in the US – social networks within one country that express a form of identity that is different to the national identity, relations between groups of intellectuals situated in different nation states, etcetera.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is not strange that transnational history

2. There is no definition of transnational history that is accepted by all, and as such the concept is still a malleable one that changes depending on the different areas of use. This somewhat confusing situation can be seen in the different interpretations given in a paper that has been published recently. See C. A. Bayly, S. Beckert, M. Conne, I. Hofmeyr, W. Kozol & P. Seed, "AHR conversation: on transnational history", *The American historical review*, 111:5, 2006, p. 2. Earlier developments of the term can be seen in I. Tyrrell, "American exceptionalism in an age of international history", M. McGerr, "The price of the 'new transnational history'", and I. Tyrrell, "Ian Tyrrell's response", all of them in *The American historical*

has also been proposed as an alternative to the history that emerged in the nineteenth century, whose point of reference was almost always the nation state.<sup>3</sup>

Diverse and interconnected, what is certain is that all these developments within our discipline point towards one single view: the need to take the "local" and the "global" into account at the same time. It is on this particular necessity that I would like to express some reflections that lead to considering this problem in the context of early modern history, as well as a reflection on global history and transnational history.

*Global and trans-national history. Old wine in new wineskins?*

Among all these historiographical trends – perhaps it is enough to call them "labels" – it is evident that "global history" is the one that is gaining the most rapid acceptance among historians. It is the line of thinking that provides the most clear connections with the great concerns of the contemporary world, which are so much present in today's mass media.

But what is actually new in this historiographical trend? And what could make it into a useful and interesting perspective for the historian and for the society that demands it?

As is the case with all fashions, sometimes one gets the impression that global history is impressive less because it is new and of great interest, and more because of the format in which it is presented and the people presenting it. The very fact that it is offered to us by prestigious historians and research centres – naturally linked to the social demand already mentioned – seems to validate it as a new perspective, while it is an old and established perspective among historians. A fundamental text – it is at least from a journal that plays an important role in this sense – is the article written by Patrick O'Brien

*review* 96, October 1991, pp. 1056–1067 and 1068–1072 respectively. See also the discussion in the *Journal of American history*, December 1999, and in particular the introduction by D. Thelen, "The nation and beyond: transnational perspectives on United States history", *ibid*, pp. 965–975.

While *The American Historical Review* was the setting of the development of this concept, a very active group of German and French historians took up similar perspectives, see for example B. Zimmermann, C. Didry & M. Wagner (eds.) *Le travail et la nation: l'histoire croisée de la France et de l'Allemagne*, Paris 1999. This axis of development set the scene for later work such as that of M. Werner and B. Zimmermann, "Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung: der Ansatz der *Histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, 2002, pp. 607–636, of particular interest in understanding the connections between *histoire croisée* and transnational history. This same historiographical process can be seen in the collection of works at <[http://www.het.org/~german/discuss/Trans/forum\\_trans\\_index.htm](http://www.het.org/~german/discuss/Trans/forum_trans_index.htm)> (as on 31 December 2006), which we will refer to later.

3. Thelen 1999.

for the first issue of the *Journal of Global History*. If we go by his fairly explicit definition of global history, it becomes evident that it is in fact very old. It even goes as far back as the time of Herodotus and seems to refer to a kind of perspective that has as its point of departure the existence of "cosmopolitan concerns" that seek to go beyond the history of civilisation itself in order to demonstrate the relationship between it and the diverse other worlds that exist in any given moment.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore it is clear that this kind of history has been present in historians such as Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, Fernand Braudel, Eric Wolf, William H. McNeill and many more.<sup>5</sup>

One of the challenges of current global history is the construction of a metanarrative that goes beyond the traditional vision of the rise of the West, whose connotations of Eurocentrism provoke justified criticism among academics. As a result of this, interest has grown in studies that seek to place world history in terms of comparison of East and West and that also deal with the way in which the relationships between them have conditioned the differing development of Europe and Asia.<sup>6</sup>

These pages will go in a completely different direction. What I would like to suggest here is that the interest in this "new" history should be based on the inclusion of the local in the global, in a more rich and effective way than ever before.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is always important to remember that a global history that only takes up the links between regions situated on different continents is neither new nor offers any alternative or nuance to long-established perspectives. The history of the empires, the history of commercial relations on a global scale, the history of technological and cultural transfers between diverse civilisations, and other similar histories are part of a long and productive tradition among historians. This tradition is favoured by the trends of global history and is enhanced by the new perspectives that accompany its development, such as ecological history, the history of the migration of plants, animals and micro-organisms, etcetera.

4. P. O'Brien, "Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history", *Journal of global history* 1:1, 2005, pp. 3–40.

5. For a quick overview, see E. Grew, "Expanding worlds of world history", and M. Lang, "Globalization and its History", both in *Journal of modern history* 78, December 2006, p. 878–931.

6. Here it is important to cite K. Pomeranz, *The great divergence: Europe, China and the making of the modern world economy*, Princeton, 2000.

7. Of course I am not the first to say this, see for instance C. A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons*, Carlton, 2004, p. 2, who explicitly argues that all local, national, or regional histories must, in important ways, therefore, be global histories.

What could really lead to a new global history, in precise terms, is the study of the interaction between distant areas, situated in diverse cultural contexts all over the world, taking up the effects of these at a local level. A history of the interconnections themselves is of great interest and holds much potential, but the greatest contribution of global history should arise more from the consideration of the local effects of such connections, as well as from a comparison of the different local societies and of how the links between them have impacted their different trajectories.<sup>8</sup> Some of the more prestigious and innovative works in this sense are able to confirm the empirical nature of this statement. This is the case, for example, with Christopher A. Bayly, Kenneth Pomeranz and William H. McNeil.

Global history should also be transnational history (or cross-cultural history) in the broadest sense of these terms, especially if we see transnational history as an approach that takes up the relations between social groups that are situated at the heart of different imagined communities and the transformations that these relations have caused in those communities. In fact, global history could also be understood in this sense, a history referring to relations that affect different cultures and civilisations. This is the case in the history of international migrations and of the diasporas on an intercontinental scale, in the history of international organisations that emphasises both the transnational networks on which they are based and the effects of those networks on the evolution of different areas. It is also the case in the analysis of cultural transfers, which deals with the international aspect of these relations and emphasises the processes of transmission, reception and adaptation of new values, behavioural forms and scientific or technological discoveries; or in diplomatic history that concerns itself with the study of diplomacy as a link between people groups that goes beyond the simple political configurations of their governments.<sup>9</sup>

For precisely these reasons, global history can find its own methodology in the very same sources that have fed transnational history, that is, in the notions of "entangled history" or "histoire croisée". In fact, this kind of history,

8. This subject has been developed in several works by S. Subrahmanyam. See for example *Explorations in connected history: from the Tagus to the Ganges*, New Delhi, Oxford & New York 2005.

9. One example of this last aspect would be the contributions of a diplomatic historian such as Akira Iriye, for whom transnational history projected onto global history constitutes one of the ways of correcting and improving the former. See for example <[http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/~kiri-hara/public\\_html/cgi-bin/shibusawa/Akira\\_Iriye.pdf](http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/~kiri-hara/public_html/cgi-bin/shibusawa/Akira_Iriye.pdf)> (consulted in May 2007).

which came to light among the German and French historians who were directly involved in the transnational perspective, has emphasised key concepts for the kind of global history that takes up the connections between distant societies and the effects of these connections on each of the societies. In this way, concepts such as "cultural transfer", "reception" and "adaptation" or "reflexivity" prove to be analytical instruments of great value and effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> The rare occurrence of these terms in much of the writings of the Anglo-Saxon global history tradition, owes more to a lack of connection between different historiographies than to a shortage of convergence and analytical complementarity.

In any case, the result is – or ought to be – clear: today we cannot discuss global history without taking into account local history.

### *Global and trans-national history of the early modern period?*

To what extent, however, are these historiographical perspectives and phenomena applicable and desirable for the study of the early modern epoch?

This question may seem banal or even unnecessary. Any specialist in early modern history has every right to use the methods mentioned and, of course, to contribute as much as anyone else to knowledge of the globalisation process or of the relationships between social groups or realities located in different and often distant imagined communities. However, the question is pertinent because of two different sets of reasons which have to do with (a) some ideas expressed by modern and contemporary historians and (b) the normal practice of early modern historians during the last decades.

(a) There are economic historians, such as Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, who have emphasised certain aspects of globalisation in terms of the convergence of intertwined economies as part of a global market, dating *only* from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and based on the convergence of prices and salaries.<sup>11</sup> There are debates in which reflections relating to the period prior to the nation state are absent. See, for example,

10. M. Werner & B. Zimmerman, "Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité" in *idem* (eds.), *De la comparación à l'histoire croisée*, Paris 2004, pp. 15–52. Also in the concept of "cultural transfers", see M. Espagne (ed.): *L'Ecole normale supérieure et Allemagne*, Leipzig 1995, and H. E. Bödeker & E. François (eds.): *Aufklärung/Lumières und Politik zur politischen Kultur der deutschen und französischen Aufklärung*, Leipzig, 1996 ; J. Kocka, "Comparisons and beyond", *History and theory* 42, 2003, pp. 39–44.

11. K. H. O'Rourke & J. G. Williamson, *Globalization and history: the evolution of nineteenth-century Atlantic economy*, Cambridge, MA, 1999.

the debate on transnational history that has been ongoing in recent months in the German electronic journal *G-History*. As a matter of fact, it has been understood that in the absence of the nation state – or perhaps on the understanding that the nation is associated with a particular stage of the development of the state – it makes no sense to talk about transnational history. This is the hypothesis that Christopher A. Bayly has launched in the debate on transnational history to which we referred at the beginning.<sup>12</sup>

(b) All of this is reinforced by the fact that the early modernists have sometimes created a kind of history where the division between regional or local history and international history may have become excessively rigid. Of course, there are exceptions. For example, Fernand Braudel proposed a kind of global history, with broad human and geographical contours, in which the protagonists were the relationships between these. The same could be said, in the field of economic history, about approaches such as that of Immanuel Wallerstein.<sup>13</sup> However, it is no less certain that the majority of French historiography in the 1960s and 1970s made the region – the local sphere – a closed field of investigation. Works such as those of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie or Pierre Goubert may sometimes seem like laboratory analysis, where attempts are made to contrast general laws as if there was nothing outside the geographical area of study, be that Languedoc or Beauvais.<sup>14</sup> In fact, these are versions of history where the superposition of variables on a local scale – for example, the relationship between population and production – eclipses the logic of evolution and of the analysis. This local and regional history was practised while other historians such as Pierre Chaunu concentrated on the study of the major inter-continental circuits, investigating its effects on the evolution of the different regions either little or not at all. It is not that these works forget the local context, for example omitting that the exploita-

12. "To designate 'global history' as 'transnational history' would not be useful before 1914, if then"; C. A. Bayly *et al.* 2006, p. 2.

13. F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme : XVe–XVIIIe siècle*, 1–3, Paris 1979 ; I. Wallerstein, *Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world economy in the sixteenth century*, New York 1974. It is no coincidence that Wallerstein was influenced by Braudel and that for him the concept of a "world economy" is a relational concept, full of interdependencies that determine the evolution of the different parts of the planet – perhaps even excessively.

14. E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc*, Paris 1969; P. Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730 : contribution à l'histoire sociale de la France du XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1982. This is perfectly in tune with the predominance of local market circuits in pre-industrial economies, with the politico-administrative system prior to the rise of the modern state and with the way those societies understood politics and social relations.

tion of the American mines affected the quantities of gold and silver that ended up circulating the planet. Nonetheless, it is clear that the logic of the argument is always of a general nature, based on analyses relating to the tonnage of the boats, the navigation conditions, and so on.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, local history and international history, the history of regions and the history of the major circuits, have been shown as being interrelated in studies referring to the period prior to 1800. However, it is also evident that these have been approached as two visions that are often disconnected, with their backs to each other. They have not been described as intertwined histories in which the historian focuses on the logic of mutual connections and the processes of cross-fertilisation based on the realities of each of the areas in question.

Nonetheless, we should not be carried away by this situation or by the arguments, implicit or explicit, mentioned above. Emphasis on price and salary convergence processes, as described by Williamson and O'Rourke, makes sense from the analytical perspective of the approximation of the different regional economies of the planet within the framework of a world market economy that is already developed. However, it would be a mistake not to talk of globalisation as a historical trend for earlier periods. Firstly, because it would be tantamount to forgetting that prices, and more so salaries, are only one indicator of the processes by which different societies come closer together. Many more factors, such as migration, the creation and strengthening of commercial networks, the shortening of time taken for sea travel, the increase in the flow of ideas and the culture shocks that these cause between distant areas, the creation of colonial empires that include distant continents, the intensification of transfer of micro-organisms, animals and plants, are phenomena that imply the existence of a process of globalisation. Furthermore, it is clear that, observed from a long-term perspective, globalisation should be understood as a broader concept. Throughout the course of history, there have been growing integration processes between diverse parts of the world that have not necessarily or not always revolved around Europe and that can be considered constituent parts of this process, thus saving us from the danger of Eurocentrism. Secondly, as the previous point suggests, because it is clear that globalisation should be understood as a process rather than an event, and in this sense, the beginning of the process

15. P. Chaunu, *Seville et l'Atlantique (1504-1650)*, Paris 1959.

should be sought further back in time. All of this leads us to consider that rather than understanding globalisation and the increasing interpenetration of different areas of the planet as a recent phenomenon, the historian should distinguish between the different modes of something that has not been a linear process led by the Western world.

Similar reasoning should be carried out on the concept of transnationality and its application to the early modern age. In reality, preventing the use of this term for this period is a question of semantics, if not an overly narrow interpretation of the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It is true that the efforts of early modernists in recent years to destroy the habit of projecting towards the past the idea of a so-called "modern state" as a precedent of the nation in the actual sense have forced us to restrict our usage of the term transnational. If we recognise that "Spain" and "France" were – like many other political groupings in Europe – dynastic collectives, far from the current concept of state or of nation, it then becomes difficult to talk about transnationality. We would have to say the same about the longstanding union of Denmark and Norway, or about the union of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England prior to the Commonwealth. Herein lies the value of such formulae as "composite state" or "composite monarchy", in their capacity to reflect a very different reality to that which is evoked by the idea of the modern state, usually associated with one nation or with processes that have been considered teleologically as stages in the construction of a nation state. In this sense it is easy to understand the reluctance of many historians to use the term "transnational history", which they consider to be anachronistic and to lead to analytical errors, for periods earlier than the nineteenth century.

However, the use of the term "transnational" in its broadest sense, and indeed in its etymological sense, may be justifiable for this era. This for two reasons. Firstly, it is justifiable in as much as we can consider it to be linked to its Latin root, *nascere* or *natio*: the group of people born within one and the same community. Secondly, it is justifiable if we consider this as an imagined community that is not necessarily a nation in the modern sense of the term. Disconnected from the specific historical meaning that the term "nation" (closely associated with, but not exactly the same as, the term "state") could have, it is perfectly possible to seek entangled histories between earlier "nations" or in other fields beyond that of the nation state. Just to give an example, the use of the term "the Castilian nation" is not unusual in six-

teenth century Flemish documents in referring to the merchants of Castile, and it was also common to use the term to differentiate between these merchants and other Spanish merchants who were not Castilian, such as those from the Basque Country or Aragon. This is clearly about imagined communities that were also perceived as such in cities like Bruges or Antwerp independently of what was to be the nation state known as Spain in the nineteenth century. And there is more. These imagined communities coincided temporarily with the increase in references to another imagined community that included them and that was already called Spain but that did not yet have the same meaning that the nation called "Spain" would have in the nineteenth century. All of these are examples that can be found in other parts of Europe.

All that said, it is clear that it would be erroneous on the part of the historian to centre all attention only on questions of a terminological nature. If there is one thing that has been useful in the advance of historiography, it is debate over terminology. This has contributed to strengthening the conceptual machinery of the historian and facilitating communication between members of the historians' community. However, at the same time, we all know that excessive debating of terminology tends to lead less to a mutual understanding and more to a plethora of useless discussions with high opportunity costs. Whether we speak of the global history or of the transnational history of the modern era, this remains a convention whose analytical usefulness depends more on the way in which we use the terms than on the terms themselves.

Methodologically, the need to complement the global with the local is even more visible in reference to the early modern era, for various reasons.

It is increasingly clear to historians – primarily but not only the early modernists – that historical knowledge, like law or anthropology, is a form of local knowledge<sup>16</sup>; in other words, ways of "observing general principles in local events", to use the expression of Clifford Geertz.<sup>17</sup> Microhistory and the different forms of "thick description" as well as the close relationship between anthropology and historical analysis have made us conscious that one of the most important ways of approaching history at present is to "study

16. C. Geertz, "Conocimiento local: hecho y ley en al perspectiva comparativa", in *idem*, *Conocimiento local: ensayos sobre la interpretación de las culturas*, Barcelona 1994, p. 197.

17. C. Geertz, "Thick description and interpretive theory of culture" in *idem*, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, New York 1973, pp. 3–31.

the universal in the small things".<sup>18</sup> Of course, it is worth remembering the profound differences that – according to one of the most well-known micro-historians – separate "thick description" from microhistory.<sup>19</sup> What characterises microhistory is not its concentration on the local in a spatial or geographical sense, but its interest in creating analysis on a micro scale, which reveals dimensions of the past that are not evident through other historical lenses.<sup>20</sup> However, it is clear that if both aspire to study the universal in the local (whether or not both concepts are defined in the spatial sense), both allow the opportunity to observe the interconnections between imagined communities and even between very distant civilisations, by way of the analysis of a small town or community in a backwater in any corner of the world. To give one example, the mental universe of a sixteenth century Italian miller, his way of dressing, the traditions by which he was surrounded, the fabrics he used, etcetera, all have to do with the interaction of cultural forms between very distant points of the planet. The production of porcelain in some English towns in the eighteenth century can be seen as a reaction to the consumption habits caused by the import of porcelain and other products from Asia.<sup>21</sup> It is possible to understand, only from this perspective, the evolution of the different regions of Europe and the role of global and transnational relationships between people's groups in this evolution. It is not surprising that authors such as Ronald Robertson – although their viewpoints differ in terms of perspective – have reminded us that ever since Polybius we have been able to see studies that emphasise "the global–local nexus", or indeed "the local–global nexus", and that – following a teleological perspective of the globalisation process – they have referred to the present world as a form of "localisation of globality".<sup>22</sup>

This should not lead us to conceive some kind of absurd holism from global and transnational history. On the contrary, it allows us to discern different facets, different levels and scales, different forms and even different vehicles

18. G. Levi, "Sobre microhistoria", in P. Burke (ed.), *Formas de hacer historia*, Madrid 1991, pp. 119–143. (Original edition in English, *New perspectives on historical writing*, London 1991).

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–132.

20. *Ibid.*, passim.

21. M. Berg, "In pursuit of luxury: global history and British consumer goods in the eighteenth century", *Past and present* 182, 2004, pp. 85–142.

22. R. Robertson, "Mapping the global condition: globalization as the central concept", *Theory, culture and society* 7:2–3, 1990, pp. 19, 21. This work can also be found in *Globalization, social theory and global culture*, London 1992, pp. 49–60.

of globalisation and of relationships between different imagined communities. This, in turn, allows us to separate different historical specificities, models and forms of globalisation, according to the period and the analytical references of our work.

Also from a methodological perspective, the early modernist seems to have some advantages. For example, the theoretical and methodological problems posed by global history have been discussed. "Subaltern studies" in particular have drawn attention to the impossibility of a history that remains the fruit of a vocabulary and conceptual system that is insufficient for the study of the evolution of non-European societies. In other words, what historians such as Dilip K. Chakrabarti and others have expressed is that the need for local knowledge of non-European societies – an indispensable condition of global history – cannot be satisfied by using the analytical instruments of one of these, namely current Western society.<sup>23</sup> I do not wish to go into this controversy here – although it seems extremely relevant, it is also something of a trap. In any case, I think that this problem causes the least difficulty – precisely because it is ever present – for early modernists. If non-Western societies constitute for any historian a remote world of categories, languages and representations, for the early modernist the past that he or she studies is in itself a remote world that demands great effort in terms of interpretation of categories and languages that are often alien to those of the social sciences in the form they have taken since the nineteenth century. Concepts such as that of class may not be of great use as analytical instruments in the understanding of current Hindu society, but they are doubtless of little more use in understanding European societies of the sixteenth century. It could be said that it is more difficult to carry out this exercise in comprehension twice: for the alien world that is Western reality in the modern era, and for the alien world that is non-Western societies of that period. Undeniably, however, the argument lends itself to the opposite perspective: someone who does this exercise once and as a daily practice in their profession ought to be able to do it twice with greater ease.

In addition, from the point of view of the concerns of current early modern history, the need to combine the local and the global and transnational is becoming increasingly evident. Allow me to give a few examples.

23. D. K. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference*, Princeton & Oxford 2000, pp. 6–11.

Concepts that are currently en vogue, such as that of "composite monarchies", infer in themselves a continuous invitation to this perspective.<sup>24</sup> Indeed in effect this term implies something of an emphasis on the local political conditions, on the institutional and social diversity of the different realms, on the different traditions that define them, and on their informal constitutions, but also on the nexuses of articulation between these territories. Although these nexuses have always been presented from the perspective of the possibilities of projecting the power of a ruler whose patrimony is made up of diverse territories, it is clear that the dynamics of the relationships between social groups and communities in each of these territories – merchants, nobility, elites in general, vagabonds, soldiers, pilgrims, etcetera – constitute an essential element in understanding the history of these societies and, in this sense, a potential line of investigation of great importance for the future.<sup>25</sup>

Subjects that currently preoccupy the social historian, such as the diasporas and the merchant communities, are impossible to understand if one does not consider this interplay between the local and the global. If the relational channels between the members of these communities – how they transmit information, how they organise the movements of their members, how they create trust mechanisms, etcetera – are basic elements of understanding the society of the early modern era, then the specificities of their confrontations with members of other societies at a local level are no less so. As such, the conformation of identities and their dynamics – at times with superimposed identities – have a lot to do with both dimensions of these groups. Just to give one example, works such as that of Yosef Kaplan on the Orobio de Castro family, Portuguese Jews of the seventeenth century whose international connections directly conditioned their way of thinking, constitutes an example of a kind of analysis that is of great interest in this context.<sup>26</sup>

One final example could stem from the criticism of the application of the transnational approach to the early modern era, which has been mentioned above. In effect, those who, like C.A. Bayly, harbour doubts in this respect, forget that the modern concept of the nation as an imagined community stems from those very "transnational" relationships that predate the nation in

24. J. Elliott, "A Europe of composite monarchies", *Past and present* 137, 1992. For a critique of the transposition of the concept of the modern state to the pre-modern era, see works such as B. Clavero, *Tantos estados como personas*, Madrid 1987.

25. The work which I currently conduct runs along these lines, under the title "Elites in the Empire: the Hispanic and American monarchy, 1492–1714", compiled by historians from different countries.

26. Y. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: the story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, Oxford 1989.

the current meaning of the word. Prior to rise of the nation-state, societies existed that were very much locally composed, that interacted and intertwined with each other through commercial, cultural and other networks, and from whose mutual relationships a consciousness of alterity arose that changed the reality of these communities. The stereotypes of "the Spanish" in France in the late sixteenth century are partly derived from the presence of Spanish soldiers on French territory and from the image of the "Spanish" Habsburgs in France in this era. And it is in regard to this and by extension that the images of "the Spanish" begin to emerge in France, constituting one of the keys to the progressive, non-linear formation of an imagined community that we can call France. It is precisely the study of this interpenetration between groups and social networks that are located in different, sometimes distant, societies that constitutes the key to self-definition with respect to the other.<sup>27</sup>

#### *New parameters and new challenges*

How can we use transnational history as an analytical approach for historical periods that predate the industrial revolution? And what can the historian of the early modern era bring to the debate that could be relevant for historians in all fields?

The first answer relates to the need to "historicise" the use of the concepts, and the concepts themselves. The second answer relates to the need to clearly define the units of analysis when demonstrating the effects of the connections over large distances. For example, it is evident that for much of the reasoning in global and transnational history, the nation state or its territorial antecedents are not the appropriate units of analysis and the continent (for example Europe) is even less so. Or rather, they are only appropriate on the basis of a particular type of reasoning. That is the case when we speak of the formation of stereotypes among neighbouring communities. Continuing with the example already mentioned, the image of "the Spanish" in France in the seventeenth century is only conceivable as a series of very diverse stereotypes of Spain that form in diverse sectors of French society and that may be very different, even divergent. In the Parisian court, these stereotypes were of a particular nature in the sense that they were generated as a result of the work of the diplomats and the elites who had relations with Spain, and

27. This subject has been dealt with magnificently in a doctoral thesis by A. Álvarez, *Los embajadores de Luis XIV en Madrid: el imaginario de lo español en Francia (1660–1700)*, European University Institute in Florence, thesis defended in October 2006.

under the paradigms of Parisian court society. Something quite different happened in the border areas of the Pyrenees, where the rural communities on both sides came into contact and mixed under the conditions of the popular culture and the daily contact that was characterised by a mixture of conflict and permeability.<sup>28</sup> There are other examples from an economic point of view. When historians speak of long distance commercial interaction and its effects, it is clear that these effects cannot refer to the evolution of a national economy in these societies. On the contrary, the strongly regional nature of the economic circuits and the lack of an integrated national market forces us to look for the impact of these intersecting histories at a local and regional level, based on the assumption that their effects on other nearby regional economies were transmitted in very different ways to what is currently the case.<sup>29</sup>

The third answer is that, the early modernist historian should be conscious that the mediations between the different political realities of the Ancien Régime may be very different to those of the present day. For example, in the current form of global capitalism, the way in which products are circulated and their projection to distant areas where they change local conditions, primarily in terms of the patterns of consumption and material culture, is very often based on the commercial circulation, usually preceded by commercial forms of product promotion (marketing, in the narrowest sense of the word). The link between the local and the global or transnational has not always been like this, however, as is shown by the history of certain goods. The aristocracy, by way of their international links, the Church, though its transnational administrative infrastructure, and merchants present in diaspora communities and transnational networks have created these webs which have often been used for this kind of promotion. Networks whose fundamental *raison d'être* was more social than commercial have had much more initial importance and have been the key to the conversion of products and objects into merchandise, or even to the creation of desires that have generated merchandise, the consumption of which has varied on a local scale, depending on social factors. The market has of course supported the diffusion of

28. Alvarez 2006, *passim*, and P. Sahlin, *Boundaries: the making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford 1998.

29. This is the assumption made in my own reflections in B. Yun Casalilla, "The American empire and the Spanish economy: an institutional and regional perspective", in P. K. O'Brien & L. Prados de la Escosura (eds.), *The costs and benefits of European imperialism from the conquest of Ceuta, 1415, to the Treaty of Lusaka, 1974*, *Revista de historia económica*, special number, 1998, pp. 123–156.

products in the past, but it has not always played a role in the initial promotion stage.

There is no doubt that a perspective such as transnational or entangled history has and will continue to have important implications on the way in which we write history and even on the relations between academic historians and their work. This fact deserves some reflection.

The first reflection stems from what I consider to be a key paradox. The so-called global historians are commonly viewed as if they were able to teach us more on the history of Asia and its connections with the West than on the history of Europe as such. Furthermore, the criticism of Eurocentrism, though of course it is often entirely justified, is presented as something to be overcome by taking a vision that places the emphasis on the perspective of non-European societies. However, seen as a form of "entangled histories", global history does have another added value, just as important and often forgotten: it will tell us much more about the history of Europe, or if you prefer, about the history of the West. In effect, it is in the context of this global – and not always Eurocentric – complex that we will be able to understand more about the West, on a general and comparative scale, but primarily in terms of local processes. These will offer a richer dimension that will explain the nature of the evolution of these societies that are continually interfered with by others that seem so distant yet are so present. The capacity for absorption of cultural forms and knowledge coming from other societies, the way in which the West exchanged contact with other civilisations and the manner in which it was shaped are just as important as anything we may be able to learn about non-Western societies. Though one could debate on this, it is worth to note that historians such as David Landes or Eric Jones have sought to explain the economic development of the West, making reference to the capacity of Europeans in terms of absorbing, incorporating and adapting technology and knowledge originating from other civilisations. The former explained the differences in the process of the industrial revolution by referring to the distinct capacity of different European societies in terms of absorbing technology that came from outside Europe.<sup>30</sup>

A second issue of some interest has to do with languages. Clearly, global history and transnational history require a *lingua franca* that is also global.

30. D. Landes, *The wealth and poverty of nations: why some are so rich and some so poor*, New York 1998; E. Jones, *The European miracle: environments, economies, and geopolitics in the history of Europe and Asia*, Cambridge & New York 1981.

Its market, which is gradually becoming more global, its audience, which is gradually becoming wider, and even its producers, who constitute a scientific community dispersed across the world, all seem to impose an agile and shared vehicle of communication – the English language. Logically, and despite the fact that the distances are constantly shrinking, this gives an advantage to historians in the Anglo-Saxon area, and with this it also benefits the perspectives that they often adopt subconsciously. The danger is that it leads to a situation in which a strongly Anglocentric vision of history is presented as "global history". It is not even unusual – allow me to avoid giving examples here – that we are presented with works of global history whose references are exclusively in English. This situation is doubly problematic if at the same time we maintain the idea that good global history is based on a profound knowledge of the local and if we consider that, whether we like it or not, the historiographical production that has developed in recent years, primarily in original, local languages, has often proved indispensable. This constitutes a difficult problem, since it is unthinkable that the historians of the future – global and transnational historians in particular – will be able to work in all the linguistically diverse languages that enter into his or her field of analysis. However, it is no less evident that if we seek to be consistent with the proposal of "globalising" history, we must never forget the language dimension. Anyone watching the developments of global and transnational history from an external perspective would surely notice that in debates such as the one in *The American Historical Review* to which I referred earlier, the historians participating, all clearly from an Anglo-Saxon school of thought, do not make the slightest reference to the developments in transnational history led by French and German historians.

There is another level to the tension between the local and the global that is of great importance. Global history involves a clear movement of the historian's laboratory, from the archive to the library. This is an increasing movement away from primary sources and towards secondary sources. In many cases, one can even get the impression that the historian is a kind of "broker" who, rather than making new discoveries, creates a bridge between remote areas of local knowledge. The globalisation of research, evident in the digitalisation and incorporation of more and more primary sources in the web, acts as compensatory mechanism that balances this trend. However, it is nonetheless necessary to clarify the fact that this new situation exists and could be the cause of some problems relating to the appropriate interpreta-

tion of these sources. For example, some current specialists in comparative history – a part of the future global history – call our attention to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of applying this method using exclusively secondary sources. This is a type of problem that we can also identify in other aspects, and that has encountered criticism in the work of historians such as Dilip K. Chakrabarti.

### *A final proposal*

The proposal that we have shared arises from the need to combine the study of the local with global interconnections. We have thus attempted to draw attention to the possibilities in this regard, in terms of methods and questions of entangled history. The result is a clear point of convergence between global history and transnational history in the wide sense. More than the history of the world as a whole, and indeed more than the history of the process of globalisation, what we are suggesting is a history of the mutual influences between distant areas and cultures. In this sense, the modern period is not so much a precedent for globalisation, rather a time in which the interconnections and their effects have particular characteristics. I do not doubt that these kinds of studies can end up recomposing the history of the globalisation process in its entirety. Nonetheless, this should be a secondary consequence of a much less linear analytical project, whose meta-narrative is not necessarily located in the rise of the West. Rather, in breaking with this and placing it in a secondary position, this will also break with the kind of history that threads together the theory of modernisation and its phases.

## Lokal, global och transnationell historia

### Reflektioner utifrån det tidigmoderna Europa

Denna uppsats diskuterar begreppen lokal historia, global historia och transnationell historia och den metodologiska potential som ryms inom dessa. Transnationell historia kan vara ett givande och nyskapande sätt att skriva också tidigmodern historia och kan ge viktiga bidrag till en ny global historia.

Det nyskapande med detta perspektiv är dock inte att uppmärksamma på vilket sätt olika delar av världen haft relationer, kontakter och utbyten med varandra. Det har historiker alltid gjort. I stället är det att intressera sig för vilken påverkan dessa utbyten hade på lokala utvecklingsmönster i samhällen långt ifrån varandra. Begrepp som anammande, anpassning och sammanlänkad historia (*entangled histories, histoire croisée*) är viktiga i detta sammanhang.

Globaliseringen som är på dagordningen har fått oss att se på det förflutna i ett globalt perspektiv. Men inte heller global historia är något nytt inom forskningen. Många välkända historiker har på olika sätt skrivit verk med globala ansatser. Utmaningen i dag är att skriva en global historia som bryter med det eurocentriska perspektivet. En transnationell historia som fokuserar samspelet mellan globala relationer och den lokala och regionala utvecklingen kan erbjuda en utväg i det sammanhanget. En av inspirationskällorna för en sådan transnationell historia är den grupp av franska och tyska historiker som myntat begreppet *histoire croisée*.

Av olika skäl finns det ett motstånd mot att tala om transnationell historia för den tidigmoderna perioden. Det har hävdats att det inte går att tala om transnationell historia innan nationalstaterna uppkom, men detta är begreppsmässigt hårklyveri särskilt då ordet nation också kan ha andra betydelser såsom en viss grupp av människor. Vissa samtidshistoriker har också hävdats att globaliseringen är av sentida datum. Men om vi ser globaliseringen som en process i stället för en händelse, så finns det all anledning att gå längre bakåt än till den moderna världens födelse. Historikerna borde resonera kring olika sorters globalisering och inte se globaliseringen som en linjär process ledd av västvärlden. Vissa forskare har också medverkat till en historieskrivning om den tidigmoderna perioden där lokalt och internationellt har vänt varandra ryggen. Somliga har grävt ned sig i lokala studier utan att se sambanden med världen utanför, andra har enbart undersökt flöden mellan kontinenter utan att se på de lokala och regionala miljöer där dessa flöden landade.

Global och transnationell historia gör det möjligt att skilja ut olika sidor, olika nivåer, olika former och olika medel av och för globalisering och relationer mellan olika grupper. Det gör det möjligt att se olika historiska former av globalisering. Det handlar dock inte om att skriva världens historia eller globaliseringsproces-

sens historia utan om att skriva en historia om ömsesidig påverkan mellan avlägsna kulturer och platser. Den tidigmoderna perioden är inte globaliseringens förstadium utan en tid under vilken kontakterna och deras effekter tog sig speciella uttryck.

Denna nya typ av historieskrivning medför några praktiska problem. Det ena är engelskans roll som *lingua franca*. Vi behöver ett gemensamt språk och engelskan är det språk som flest historiker tycks kunna och därmed det språk som bär internationaliseringen av historieämnet framåt. Men detta ger engelskspråkiga kolleger ett stort övertag och innebär risk för att global historia först och främst likställs med anglocentrerad historia. Det förekommer att verk som presenteras som global historia enbart har referenser till litteratur och källor på engelska.

Det andra problemet är att global historieskrivning lett till att historikerna allt mer lämnat arkiven för att i stället bygga sina studier på andras tolkningar och bli ett slags mäklare mellan olika kulturer. Även om digitaliseringen och tillgängliggörandet av källmaterial via internet delvis motverkar denna tendens så kan den leda till svåra feltolkningar.

*Keywords:* local history, global history, transnational history, early modern European history, globalization, entangled history