

Latin America in a Global Context. Center for Global Studies, University of Berne, Switzerland; Center for International Relations of the Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil, 04.12.2014–05.12.2014.

Reviewed by Stella Krepp

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (May, 2015)

In the last decade, an important shift has taken place within Latin American Studies, advocating a hemispheric, Atlantic, or global approach to writing history amongst others. As rewarding and innovative as these new approaches are, they provide specific challenges regarding both methodology as well as implementation.

The workshop “Latin America in a Global Context” explored these new ideas and debates on how to write Latin American history within a global framework, but also how we, as researchers, can contribute to this emerging field of studies. It was organised jointly by the Center for Global Studies of the University of Berne, Switzerland, and the Center for International Relations of the Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil. Overall, the workshop had a decidedly international character, with participants from the United States, Latin America, and from all over Europe and thus brought together scholars from distinct linguistic and academic backgrounds. Additionally it was targeted specifically at early career researchers, and thus scholars who are on the verge of setting their long-term research agendas, and who will be the ones shaping debates in the following decades.

In the first presentation, FREDERIK SCHULZE (Muenster) provided an overview of recent scholarship on Brazil, as Brazilian historians have so far more readily embraced global approaches, something that was reflected in the workshop.

One of the biggest challenges for Latin American historians, we found, was to uncover formerly neglected links and source material, as well as venture into new research fields. MIGUEL SERRA COELHO’s (Florence) study on the Brazilian diplomacy during the crisis of Goa between India and Portugal and COURTNEY CAMPBELL ’s (London) presentation on the Brazilian Northeast as internationally embedded region were two excellent examples of tracing these new narratives, while GABRIEL PASSETTI (Rio de Janeiro) discussed the opportunities the incorporation of new sources could provide. LEONIE HERBERS (Berlin) on the history of aviation and JONATHAN HAGOOD (Hope College) on nursing highlighted how the establishment of new research fields have contributed to the writing of global history.

Another major theme was the need to contextualise fields such as labour history and cultural history in a more global framework, as JULIE WEISE (Oregon) on her comparative study on Mexican *braceros* and German *Gastarbeiter* and LUCAS MARTIN POY PIÑEIRO (Buenos Aires) on labour history in Argentina argued. DANIEL RICHTER (Maryland) and JAMES WOODARD (Montclair) in their respective work on filmmaking and consuming cultures shared this outlook as well.

Although there was a definite focus on the 20th century, FRANZ HENSEL RIVEROS (Bogotá) with his research on revolutionary Spanish Amer-

ica and its connections to London, as well as JUAN MORIEL-PAYNE's (Houston) on religious feasts in colonial New Spain showed the potential of global history in earlier time-periods. Furthermore, BENJAMIN COWAN (George Mason University, Virginia) with his work on hemispheric military ideology, VANNI PETTINA (Colegio de México) on Mexico's development politics, and THOMAS FIELD (Embry-Riddle University, Arizona) on Bolivia demonstrated that the global phenomenon of the Cold War and was often married up with quite distinct national phenomena on the local stage, thus resulting in a unique global-local connection. This global-local connection, at times tension, was also at the core of the presentations by ALICE FROIDEVAUX (St. Gallen) on the *campesino* movement and EVAN MATTHEW DANIEL (New York) on the role of cigar makers in the Cuban separatist movement in the 19th century. Finally, CHRISTIAN SALM (Bochum) explored the possibilities of writing global history by focusing on non-state actors in the diffusion of European political ideas.

During the debates, two overarching questions crystallised early on: How could we, as early career researchers, utilise global history approaches for our own research? And, just as importantly, how could we contribute to the Latin Americanisation of global history?

So far, global history has not played a major role in Latin American research, even though some research fields have embraced global approaches much more willingly than others. Although we could not provide a conclusive assessment for the marginal position of global approaches as of yet, a range of possible explanations were brought forward during the event.

One factor, often side-lined in theoretical works on global history, is the very pragmatic challenges historians face. Apart from epistemological questions, global history requires not only the desire to move beyond national frameworks, but, more so, the means to put it into practice. In

that sense, one of the crucial elements of facilitating the writing of global history is the access to funds, of which the lack thereof is particularly acute in Latin America, with the exception of Brazilian scholars in the last few years. Global history often involves costly travel, lengthy stays, and requires specialist training in languages and other necessary skills. In such a context, access to funding becomes important, if not vital to historians and can determine which institutions or departments are able to lead the field.

Another reason provided for the Latin American marginalisation so far has also been the perception that global history had been appropriated by certain area studies, which consequently imposed their own historical and political agenda, thus creating frameworks, periodisations, and focal points that complicate the incorporation of Latin American history. One such example is that global history firmly situates the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule in the decade of the 1950s and 60s, while Latin America's decolonisation process of the early 19th century remains forgotten in that debate. Another instance is the study of regional and multilateral governance focusing on the 20th century, while overlooking the much earlier regional experiences of cooperation and politics.

As a result, a form of global history has emerged that is very much rooted in imperial and colonial history and thus perpetuates Euro-centric perspectives. It is an indisputable fact that many global history chairs came to life when colonial history chairs were renamed. Yet, the very definition of what global history means, whether we understand it as a synthesis with broader space-time dimensions or as a history that transcends the European notion of nation-state, is intimately tied to this problematic issue. Thus, more than ever, the field could profit vastly from an increased Latin American contribution, as it would help to establish a more balanced global view, but

it will also most certainly complicate global master narratives.

Nevertheless, there was also general agreement that global approaches should not displace area studies, but instead contribute to it. In an ideal scenario, global history should organically emerge from area studies when national, regional, and global moments converge. In order to manage and understand increasingly complex phenomena, the way forward can only be through the combined work of specialists with the necessary language skills and in-depth historiographical knowledge.

Furthermore, new approaches that propose distinct space-time perspectives were highlighted during the debates. Participants seemed to agree that life and every-day social practices, symbolic frameworks, perceptions, as much as meaning, signification, and the use we make of objects are not any more (or at least exclusively) related to a specific place or territory. In that sense, the study of cultural, economic, and political relationships of individuals or institutions enables us to reassess the importance of geography in the formation of identities and instead to emphasise connections between the local and the global, thus creating new possibilities for the 'belonging' through political borders.

At the same time, participants debated intensely the idea that not every historical process or event can be explained through a global lens. As a preliminary step, the diverse forms and limits of connections must be understood by historians before they can decide on their definitive approach. In fact, while new connections crossing local, regional, and national borders can be discovered, not every phenomenon is equally interlinked at every one of those geographical scales. Indisputably, a major focus on entanglements between world regions and across borders does promise a wealth of exciting and fruitful research and it prompts a change in the questions we ask. Yet, it is as equally important to examine 'disenta-

lements' or moments of de-globalisation, when there is a backlash and an explicit return to the local or national, as we find today with many Latin American indigenous and *campesino* movements. Equally, there are historical processes that start out in Latin America and thus travel globally in the opposite direction, be it ideological, such as Liberation Theology or Dependency Theory, or political, such as the independence movements already mentioned, that later provided models to emulate in other parts of the world. And ultimately, we need to keep in mind and question ourselves repeatedly if there continue to exist unique and exceptional moments where no connections can be established.

Finally, participants highlighted two fundamental considerations historians should consider before approaching and appropriating global history. First, the relationship of Atlantic, hemispheric, and global history remains unclear. More work needs to be done to better define each framework, as well as address its strengths and pitfalls, but also new possible fusions of it. While it is clear that demarcations between each are fluid and transfers are continuing, all three have an inherent logic of their own, resulting in distinct spatial patterns and historical narratives.

Second, there was a general understanding that a pre-requisite for a global history approach is to de-exceptionalise Latin America. Too often research is written from a vantage point that highlights the distinctiveness of the continent, in turn complicating comparative analyses and the discovery of links. Similarly, a US-centric historiography that privileges US-Latin American relations to the exclusion of extra-hemispheric connections has so far dominated research. Breaking this hemispheric 'deadlock' is a first step to enabling the writing of global history. This is particularly striking if we bear in mind that Latin America as well as Latin American studies as a discipline were artificially constructed and imposed from outside the region.

Conclusively, the overall consensus of the event identified and discussed by CHRISTIAN BÜSCHGES (Bern), TANYA HARMER (London School of Economics), CORINNE PERNET (Basel), and ALEXANDRE MORELI (Rio de Janeiro) at the final roundtable was to stress that there is a wealth of themes and research where Latin was to stress that there is a wealth of themes and research where Latin American historians can and should contribute to global history debates.

One topic predestined for global history is Latin America as the first site for colonisation and later imperial rule. Even if we do not necessarily agree with Greg Grandin's contention that Latin America and the Caribbean were a laboratory for the world, there is a case to be made for Latin America's importance as a training ground for colonial and imperial rule Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of New Imperialism*. New York 2006. . Another topic is the global diffusion and circulation of knowledge: from ideas of liberalism and development, to regional integration or military counterinsurgency. Latin America played a crucial role in the creation and dissemination of these ideas. However, the biggest challenge will be to connect Latin American history with global processes and moments. Frequently, we do need the global framework to explain local events. One major example of this would be the Global Cold War, as without the rationale of the Cold War many developments and assessments remain woefully incomplete. The majority of Latin American communist parties remained miniscule and without wider influence, yet political leaders prohibited, suppressed and feared them and this only makes sense because of its wider connections to the global struggle of ideologies at that time.

Conference Overview:

Concepts, Methods, Sources

Frederik Schulze (University of Münster, Germany): Brazil in Global History

Gabriel Passeti (Fluminense Federal University, Brazil): Travel Writings: Sources to International Relations History

Latin American Identities between the Global and the Local I

Miguel Serra Coelho (European University Institute, Italy): The crisis of Goa between Lisbon, New Delhi, and Rio de Janeiro (1947-1962): The Transnational Destiny of an Empire

Courtney J. Campbell (Institute of Historical Research, University of London, United Kingdom): The Latin American Region as Internationally Embedded: The Case of the Brazilian Northeast (1926-1968)

Latin American Identities between the Global and the Local II

Franz Hensel Riveros (University of Rosario, Colombia): A New-New World: The London-Based Crafting of Post-Revolutionary Spanish America, 1808-1829

Juana Moriel-Payne (University of Texas at el Paso, USA): Las fiestas religiosas de San Joseph del Parral: creación y redefinición de identidades en el norte de la Nueva España

New Approaches to Labour History

Lucas Martín Poy Piñeiro (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina): Between the "global" and the "local". The history of labor in Argentina from a comparative standpoint.

Julie Weise (University of Oregon, USA): Mexican Braceros: Hemispheric Travelers, Global Migrants

Non-state or Transnational Actors

Alice Froidevaux (St. Gallen University, Switzerland): La Vía Campesina: Cultural Brokers and 'Entrepreneurs' in a Transnational Social Movement

Evan Matthew Daniel (City University of New York, USA): Rolling for the Revolution: Cuban Cigar Makers, Anarchism and the Separatist

Movement in Havana, New York and Florida 1840s-1890s

Christian Salm (University of Bochum, Germany): Do non-state actors diffuse regional integration? The role of political parties, trade unions and business associations in the diffusion of European political ideas and institutional patterns to the emerging Mercosur

New Fields for the Global History of Latin America

Leonie Herbers (Free University Berlin, Germany): The beginnings of aviation in Brazil (1898-1930): Global networks and national dreams

Jonathan Hagood (Hope College, USA): A Profession Without Borders: The Rockefeller Foundation's Global Perspective on Nursing in Latin America before WWII

The Global Cold War

Thomas C. Field (Embry-Riddle University, USA): Andean Pivot: the Global Struggle for Bolivia, 1965-1971

Vanni Pettinà (El Colegio de México, Mexico): The struggle for development. Mexico's international strategy of modernization, 1946-1952

Benjamin Arthur Cowan (George Mason University, USA): Brazil, Hemispheric Militaries, and the Atlantic Origins of Counterinsurgent Warfare

Culture and Latin American History

Daniel Richter (University of Maryland College Park, USA): Celluloid Gauchos and Tangos: Buenos Aires and the Transnational World of Mass Entertainment in South America during the 1930s and 1940s

James P. Woodard (Montclair State University, USA): Consuming and Constitutive Cultures in Twentieth-Century Latin America

Roundtable

Christian Büschges (University of Bern, Switzerland)

Tanya Harmer (London School of Economics,

United Kingdom)

Alexandre Moreli (Getulio Vargas Foundation, Brazil)

Corinne Pernet (University of Basel, Switzerland)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Stella Krepp. Review of *Latin America in a Global Context*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. May, 2015.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44486>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.