

# Global histories

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Dear reader,

There is a constellation of texts we vaguely can call ‘academic history writing’ composed of a seemingly never-ending stream of books, anthologies, research articles, book reviews, essays, conference reports. Some belligerent and impeccable, some compliant or tedious — they move back and forth addressing and referring to each other. They refute, support, or criticize previous works; they also propose and imagine new ways to formulate questions about the past. Discussions flow through different fields, subdisciplines, languages and institutions. The aim of this publication has been, since its inception, to engage in these discussions from the authorial and editorial perspective of students. The field we are interested in is not any kind of history — we want to think and write from, about, or against, the approach known as global history.

This issue carries on with such a task. However, after eight editions under the sun perhaps it is now the moment to sit down, contemplate and reflect on our field of study. This issue is that moment. This pause is not to elaborate on the definition of global history, but rather to think on why we would want to write (global) history, and what for? As always, there is no single answer. What we do know, however, is that the answer is not to emulate an omniscient eye that surveys all epochs and lands; neither to reify the economic connections and power relations of contemporary globality. History writing evidently belongs to its author’s own time and space, its execution is never detached from its surroundings. It comes from a political stance; it is a political stand. Taking that into account, one answer could be to use the historian’s eye to reflect on closer — one might even say present! — events. In other words, to know the aim or sense, we first have to think about the position from which we write it.

Reader, we have no clear answers. However, we would like to present to you two new sections that intend to reflect on these issues. The ‘Methodologies’ section orbits the question of how we conceptualize and ‘practice’ global history. Which tools and perspectives do we use, perhaps without even acknowledging them? What are their scopes or limitations? What are other possible frames or approaches

can we use? Goh Ngee Chae Joshua, Billy Sawyers and Lisa Poggel's contributions tackle these questions. Goh's essay proposes 'Mythic Kinships' as a way to study cross-cultural interactions in Antiquity, beyond what is acknowledged as 'factual' processes. Billy Sawyers explores the uses of cosmopolitanism in global history, arguing for a reconsideration of the concept in the post-2008 world. Lisa Poggel reflects on why modernization theory remains a common place in history writing, even after several decades of analysis and criticism.

The 'Public History' section, edited by Ben Miller, focuses on the uses of historical tools and discourses in contemporary discussions. Do we mean to use our knowledge in contemporary public debates? Which past is portrayed to the public? Who is this public? Virgil Taylor and Carla Panico's essays deal directly with these issues. Taylor's work analyzes online queer public history, while Panico's traces the discursive strategies used to portray migrants as a negative 'other' in contemporary Italy.

The intention of this issue was to come up with different ways to answer the questions above. The Public History and Methodologies sections are two avenues to address them directly. However, these are questions that are always addressed, albeit in a less explicit way, by history writing itself. In this volume we have research articles by Marvin Martin, Fatima Aizaz, Wang Jialu, and Hans Magne Jaatun. Their inquiries are not disconnected from our own concerns. Wang's research focuses on the power structures that favored the creation of art history as a discipline in China at the dawn of the 20th century. Martin's article follows the journey of five Aboriginal activists to the "Congress of African People" in Atlanta in 1970. Through the thorough analysis of newspapers, Aizaz traces 'Pan-Islam' discourses formed under and against colonial rule. Jaatun's article analyses the relationship between religion, international humanitarianism and colonialism using the case of the Near East Relief during the interwar years.

As in previous issues, this issue has a Review section. Sandra Alsén, Lisa Phongsavath, Yeo Huijin Martina, Paul Sprute, Peder Østebo, and Sébastien Tremblay have reviewed

recently published history books, while Max Vogel and Paul Sprute give us an account of the 'Africa and the Cold War' Conference, which they attended this past March in Addis Ababa.

It is true that academic and non-academic discussions of history, and those in-between, are constituted mostly by texts, as they do not require the simultaneous presence of people to unfold. However, they only have meaning and sense when there is a reader to engage with them. All texts are made for a reader, so we hope you enjoy this issue!

Best regards,

The Global Histories editorial team



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