“What”, asked the eminent historian of Africa, Frederick Cooper, a few years ago, “is the concept of globalization good for?” Cooper’s criticism of the concept does not argue with the quest to understand how different parts of the world have been interconnected. However, he criticizes the lack of historical depth implicit in many uses of the term, and the often underlying assumption of a single process encompassing the whole world. This perspective, Cooper argues, obscures the very unevenness of a variety of processes which create cross-territorial linkages and flows. This vision also obfuscates that such processes go hand in glove with specific limitations to and blockages of such connections.

Obviously, historians of global history have attempted to grapple with some of the shortcomings of globalisation theory. Thus, Janet Abu Lughod confronted the clearly eurocentric focus of world system theory, which implicitly still underlies much of globalisation theory. She argued that before the capitalist world system discussed by Wallerstein, there already existed an earlier, Islamic world system encompassing and linking much of the “old world” of Asia, Africa and Europe. More recently, global history has been understood as a history of entanglement and interconnectedness. This meant to break up both the limitations of nationalist historiographies as well as a historical

---

1 We thank Elisabeth Boesen, Katrin Bromber, Bettina Gräf, Sarah Jurkiewicz and Dietrich Reetz for their contribution and comments on this chapter. As it is the outflow of ZMO’s research programme, the chapter is a truly collective effort and the authors only take credit for summing up collective work and discussions.


meta-narrative of “global” developments. This approach—to be distinguished from “globalisation history”, which studies the emergence and transformations of connectedness on the global level—has been elaborated on quite different scales. A regionally limited but highly refined—if methodologically perhaps overly complex—variant is the concept of Histoire Croisée which was developed for the investigation of Franco-German relations in history, relating both to the history of events and to historical perceptions. On a larger and therefore less detailed scale, the “new imperial history”, influenced by postcolonial studies, builds on notions of cultural influences operating quite independently of the economic and political developments which used to be highlighted by conventional historiographies of empire and imperialism. Another approach to overcoming the monopolar and eurocentric vision of globalisation is the attempt to study global connections of specific historical actors as well as historical moments of global importance. Such global moments often sparked international networking as, for example, the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 or Wilson’s declaration of the right to self-determination.

Such approaches have opened important new perspectives on entangled and/or shared histories. Moreover, they can, as the study of non-Western experiences of the World Wars illustrates, significantly

---


6 Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, eds., De la comparaison à l’histoire croisée, (Le Genre humain) 42 (Paris, 2004), pp. 15–49.

7 For example Kathleen Wilson, ed., A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840 (New York, 2004).