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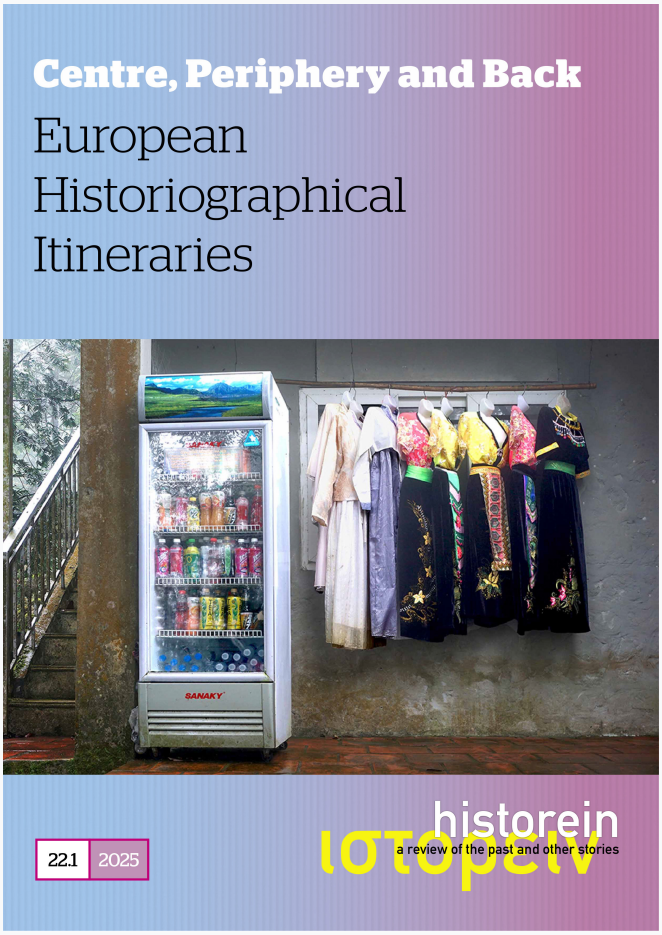
Centre, Periphery and Back: European Historiographical Itineraries



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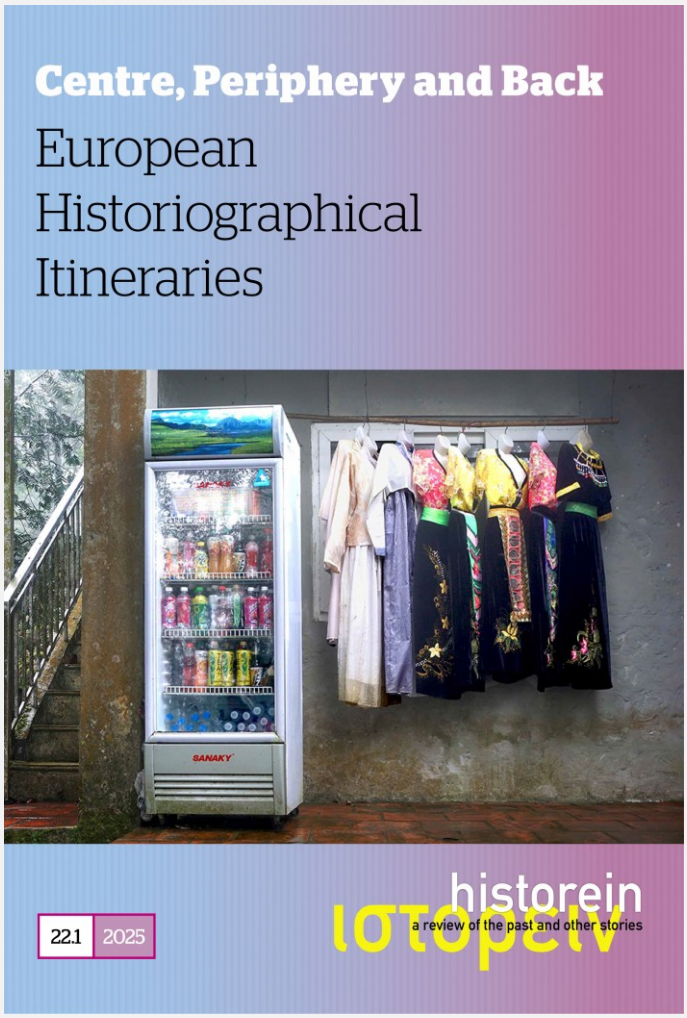

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Centre-Periphery and the Global Early Modern: Some Historiographical Reflections

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The early years of the new millennium marked the gradual emergence of globality as a new interpretive vision in early modern studies. I am referring particularly to the interdisciplinary field of early modern studies, as in early modern history the global perspective has had a longer tradition, reaching back to the 1990s or even earlier with the works of William McNeill, Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein. However, also history in the 2000s witnessed some key developments such as the foundation in 2006 of the *Journal of Global History* or the much-discussed work of Kenneth Pomeranz which, along with the earlier work of R. Bin Wong, recast the question about the origins of European economic hegemony against previous triumphalist narratives by arguing that it was contingent and conjectural and detached early modernity from the "great divergence" of the nineteenth century.[1] While in the field of early modern history the global turn privileged comparisons and processes on a large scale mainly through the lenses of economic history and historical sociology, the new globality in early modern studies favoured, in the words of Daniel Vitkus, "interlocking and interactive aspects of cross-cultural encounters in world history".[2] As this trend developed and matured in the following decades, a new set of terms, such as cultural encounters, cosmopolitanism, transculturalism, to name but a few, entered the scholarly idiom.

Both fields, early modern history and early modern studies, in their global vision and endeavour, share some common interpretive assumptions: they view the early modern world as polycentric and shun perspectives that emphasise asymmetries of power. However, world or global history in its early stages drew on the grand narratives that theories of world systems, dependence and centre-periphery entailed, especially in the works of Braudel and Wallerstein or later in Janet L. Abu-Lughod's, while early modern studies, as a latecomer in the globalising project, from the onset discredited paradigms of centre-periphery, prioritising convergences, transfers and encounters in a multidimensional and fluid early modern world or a global Renaissance, evoking Arjun Appadurai's remarks on the contemporary global cultural economy as a "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even

those which might account for multiple centers and peripheries)".[3] However, one is prompted to ask if this vision of the early modern world is simply a canvas on to which visions of contemporaneity are historicised as a teleologically "doing history backwards", in the words of Frederick Cooper.[4]

Over the last two or three decades this interpretive vision in early modern history and studies developed against a backdrop that since the 1970s included both a well-established tradition of a centre-periphery approach in the study of early modern/Renaissance Europe, especially as far as cultural and intellectual movements or social history were concerned,[5] and a tradition on the social and cultural hierarchies and processes that the European expansion established and enforced overseas, especially in the New World. Whereas the rise of global history has recently generated several questions about its practice and the asymmetries of power relations entailed,[6] in the fields of early modern history and studies questions on power relations, hierarchies and taxonomies both in the early modern past and current academic practice only rarely are addressed. In this view, the topic of this special issue on centre and periphery in the study of European history offers a rather rare and challenging opportunity to examine the global early modern in both fields of history and in early modern studies. The question on centre-periphery will inform this article in two ways, first by delving into the politics of history writing and second by addressing some interpretive assumptions of the historiography of early modernity. To this end, the scope of the article will be reflective and historiographical.

Centre and periphery and the politics of history writing

More than a decade ago, Richard Evans, well known also in Greece mostly for his work on the Third Reich but also on historiography, published a book called *Cosmopolitan Islanders*. The book did not meet with success although "its purpose was to arouse debate", as Evans himself later admitted.[7] Derived from the inaugural lecture that Evans delivered as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, the book posed an interesting but rarely addressed question: in Evans' terms, why do British historians write about other European countries while their continental colleagues are less keen to get involved with their non-national history? The core of his argument was based on rough statistics and a questionnaire. Some interesting observations aside which, should they have received more investigation, a different story might have emerged, Evans reached a sanguine but rather narrow conclusion: "British historians seem to be a good deal more cosmopolitan than their counterparts on the European Continent."[8] A series of arguments, for instance on the number of translations of English-language history works, their impact and success or on the use of a captivating prose by British historians and its appeal to a wider international readership, were put forward to support or explicate Evans' thesis on British historians'

cosmopolitanism. At the same time, however, it can be read as a refashioned centre-periphery perspective. As I am writing from an academic periphery and with the benefit of hindsight, the argument on the British historians' cosmopolitanism now seems in alignment with the "global Britain" mantra during the Brexit campaign.

However, as already noted, despite its merits, Evans' book did not spark the debate he wished for. This "failure" or lack of interest on behalf of the scholarly community would require some attention on its own, but a more thorough examination is beyond the scope of this essay. I will only say that it can be seen as a symptom of the state of the discipline that historians, in the face of growing specialisation and the inevitable inwardness that the dictum of "publish or perish" entails, are less keen on entering the realm of reflexivity and critique, on engaging with debates and pursuits other than those dictated by their narrow interest and priorities on which their academic careers and survival may rest.

One of those few who engaged with *Cosmopolitan Islanders* was Peter Baldwin. In a robust critique he argued that Evans' data were rather simplistic and thus created a strict dichotomy between cosmopolitan British and insular continentals which was far from accurate.[9] However, judging from my own principal field of research, late medieval and Renaissance/early modern Italy, and the narrower one, the history of Venice, a field that exemplifies research internationalisation, my impression on the scholarly output of the last 20 years at least seems to confirm Evans' argument. Numbers also corroborate it, but they also reveal a more nuanced picture, which also makes Baldwin's argument valid. Although bibliographic data is often hard to find, the field of "early modern Italy" has benefited from the excellent work of Gregory Hanlon. For years Hanlon has meticulously compiled a detailed bibliography on "early modern Italy, 1550–1790", which includes works in French and English from the mid-nineteenth century until recently. His bibliography reveals some interesting trends which complicate Evans' argument. Until the Second World War publications in French clearly dominated. It was only in the late 1950s that English-language publications began to compete with, or even surpass, those in French and in 2015 their divergence reached a peak. The late 1990s marked an explosion in overall output, reaching an average of 700 books and articles annually in the first half of the 2010s, which can be clearly credited to the work produced in British, American and Canadian universities. [10] This output certainly includes historians of Italian universities who communicated their research in French or in English, although one can with certainty assume that the vast majority of their publications are in Italian.[11] Though the field of "early modern Italy" confirms Evans' argument as far as the last decades are concerned, certainly further research is required.

Evans is also partly right when he writes that British (and possibly Anglophone) historians enjoy considerable success on the Continent as translations of their works and sales may indicate. This argument would have had a certain validity in demonstrating his success story as far as the number of translated works and their impact are concerned if it did not falter in its explanatory claims of the superiority and exceptionalism of British history

writing, which again was cast in nationally demarcated academic traditions. While Evans fails or is reluctant to consider explanations for his success story other than English-speaking historians' engagement in appealing to a wider reading public by cultivating a captivating prose and a literary style in their works, his critic Baldwin has a different and more convincing story to tell by weaving together the linguistic dominance of English, the population size of the English-speaking world, the Anglosphere as he dubs it, and its market forces, especially the publishing industry.[12] In Baldwin's view, the asymmetry of works translated into English may be read as a form of insularity the other way.[13]

Despite its shortcomings, Evans' argument is a good starting point to think about the politics of writing history and some fundamental assumptions that continue to condition its practice. The basis of Evans' argument is about historians (British in his case) who choose to work outside their national narrative and get involved with other national narratives and interpretive traditions, debates, scholarly communities, the organisation of archives and sets of rules. Put otherwise, despite claims to internationalisation (to some extent materialised in certain trends and milieux), history remains more or less a nationally grounded discipline.[14] Obviously, Evans' remarks reflect the British professionalisation of history (and its ideological and cultural specificity) with the distinction between British and European history in the form of a particular focus on nation-states or regions. This distinction goes back to the nineteenth century.[15] It should be noted that this professional and disciplinary distinction between national and European history is not a unique British feature, though. Although for diverse reasons and under different cultural circumstances, this is also the case in Greece where the subject of European history has a recent history, especially in those history departments where in the last couple of decades the subject is being taught by historians whose research lies outside the national historiography and their scholarly training has mostly taken place outside Greece. Overshadowed by his claims of "cosmopolitanism" and "insularity", Evans' distinction between historians who work on national history and those who work on other national narratives, all within the same nationally demarcated academic community, (unintentionally) reveals a principle that (disturbingly) still governs academic history: its practice remains nationally defined.

The main drawback of Evans' argument is that the engagement with non-national history is framed in terms of cosmopolitanism and insularity. In this view, it obscures and distorts differences in investment, expectations and traditions which, to a great extent, can be relegated to European states' imperial past and to the current domination of English as the world's lingua franca.[16] In other words, historians' openness or not to engaging with histories other than their national history might be recast in terms of centres and peripheries in the production of historical knowledge, or as Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni put it many years ago, in an essay on the historiographic exchange and imbalance between Italy and France, an "unequal exchange in the historical marketplace".[17] However, this "marketplace"

remains nationally organised. Despite the postwar Annales "school's" interest in geohistorical units, exemplified in Braudel's *Mediterranean*, or the more recent development in transnational and global perspectives, history is still haunted by its nation-state origins.

The prominent position of English, the English-language publishing industry and the more or less English-centred bibliometric systems make a centre vs. periphery relation more meaningful rather than one based on degrees of cosmopolitan openness. Along with national boundaries, language strongly conditions historical research and output or, in other words, historical research and output is still clearly defined by practitioners, audiences and readership along linguistic boundaries. National academic boundaries and language define most fields and specialisations of historical research, be it national historiography or other national historiographies. Some examples will illustrate this point. Anglophone historians' interest in French history is reflected in its reception by the English-language publishing industry with the development of relevant venues for publishing research such as specialised research series and journals, even series of textbooks and companions for students. Across the channel, French-speaking scholars specialising in English, British or American history and studies have also their relevant journals (such as *Revue française d'études américaines*, *Études irlandaises*, *E-rea: Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone*, *Caliban: French Journal of English Studies*, *Études anglaises*). However, although I have no data to provide other than personal experience as a reader, I have reservations if English-speaking historians specialising in their national (English, Scottish or British, American) historiography ever consult what their French-speaking colleagues have to say on their common field of research. Similar observations can be made about a research field closer to my interests, Renaissance history. Here, too, I think it is not usual for English-speaking historians to systematically follow developments and trends in French-speaking Renaissance historiography (and its output in journals devoted to Renaissance history, such as the *Réforme, Humanisme, Renaissance*, the *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* or the *Seizième siècle*), unless they are specifically interested in the French Renaissance.

In both examples, it is hard to believe that the lack of interest on behalf of English-speaking historians suggests that the quality or professionalism of those scholars, mostly French-speaking, who publish their research in these venues is flawed. Or it is hard to believe that this lack can be attributed to English-speaking historians' less cosmopolitan orientation and outlook. Finally, considerations of reaching a wider audience are clearly explained in the *Annales* journal's recent decision to provide an English-language edition in partnership with Cambridge University Press, which certainly sets a new example given the well-known policing of French.[18] As I have already argued, history, national or non-national, still remains a nationally defined discipline, and differences in the interest in historiographies other than the national ones can be more productively understood in terms of centres and peripheries in the production of historical knowledge and the politics of historical research. In this view, Dominic Sachsenmaier's remarks that "a largely nationally

organized scholarly community is somewhat ill equipped to handle transnational or even global research agendas" are still pertinent.[19]

Decentring early modernity?

The study of European early modernity is currently experiencing a so-called global turn. A new array of words and concepts, such as globalisation, transculturalism, cultural encounters and diasporas, has entered the historians' vocabulary and toolkit.[20] This development stems from various directions and needs, whether they are acknowledged or not. Certainly, it is part of the broader trend of global history and can be attributed to what Lynn Hunt has called the crisis of history and the search for new big narratives that would reinvigorate the discipline.[21] At the same time, the rise of globality in early modern history and studies is more or less a response to Dipesh Charkabarty's critique of Eurocentrism and urge to "provincialize Europe". In this view, far from approaching early modernity as the period which teleologically was to pave the way for the so-called "rise of the West", to modernity's imperialism and colonialism, early modern Europe becomes now part of a premodern world. That world was polycentric. European regions or certain states were simply among other actors in transregional and international exchanges without something uniquely or exceptionally European that would explain later developments and dominance. That was a world with its own dynamic. Instead of being placed in a gradual, longue durée process leading to or culminating in what Pomeranz has called "the Great Divergence", early modern Europe was part of a homogeneous world. In Pomeranz's words, there was a "variety of early modern core regions with roughly comparable levels and trends of development in their everyday economies".[22] This is a very basic narrative that revisionist approaches with different lenses and varying degree have adopted.

Through various lenses and lines of interpretation, revisionist accounts have sought to counter previous triumphalist narratives, which situated Europe's ascendancy firmly in the early modern period and its inherent and structural qualities.[23] For instance, Europe is geographically and economically subsumed in Eurasia.[24] Europe becomes a periphery of the Eurasian world-system.[25] By placing Europe as a weak actor on the periphery of premodern Eurasia and then displacing European early modernity as a crucial stage in the "rise of the West", in this narrative Europe's dominance is understood as a late development, beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and is explained as contingent and accidental. However, it is worth noting that Christopher Bayly, one of the pioneers of global history, still argued that already by the mid-sixteenth century Europe had developed "competitive advantages" that complicate the notion of the divergence as a late phenomenon and problematise contingency.[26] Even those scholars who continue to decipher Europe's ascendancy in the early modern period, far from seeking

European exceptionalism, emphasise interaction and interconnection on a Eurasian level and attribute the "decline of the East" and the West's pre-eminence to uneven, multiple, "mutually conditioning and co-constituting processes" over a long period.[27] Here, notions of centre-periphery with Europe being placed on the Eurasian periphery before obtaining pre-eminence in the early modern period and the importance of colonialism retain their importance and validity. Despite its empirical and interpretive shortcomings, one of the greatest merits of the revisionist globalised perspective that emphasise "divergence" as a late phenomenon is that regions and states which have hitherto remained outside the trajectories of European history or confined in their own historiographical traditions are given new importance in emerging narratives.

From their inception, these new globalised narratives mostly drew on economic history and historical sociology and their major interpretive imprints have been comparisons and exchanges. More recently, this outlook has expanded towards a more "cultural" trend, especially in the field of early modern studies, favouring circulation, contacts, exchanges and encounters on a global scale. However, serious shortcomings remain which at times seem to betray the endeavour to shake the burden of Eurocentrism. The most serious one seems to be conceptual, as, for instance, in the use of periodisation schemes. While researchers have debated whether the origins of globalisation can be found in the early modern period or even earlier, they have retained concepts such as medieval or early modern, which have a long and ideologically loaded use in the field of European history. Since the 1980s or earlier the term "early modern" has been widely used, especially as the rise of social and cultural history has questioned the validity of previous historiographical landmarks of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. However, the term has not been accepted without objections, especially as far as its teleological burden is concerned, and Randolph Starn referred to it as the "early modern muddle".[28] It is worth noting that the ubiquity of the term, which is an Anglophone coinage, coincides with the quasi domination of English-language research.[29] In Italian and French historiographies the equivalent terms "prima età moderna" and "première modernité" have a more recent coinage and are certainly under the influence of the English term. From the confines of European history, the term "early modern" is currently experiencing a second life with the rise of globalism.[30] In this view, despite reservations expressed on its use in European history, the term has been transposed outside Europe. In the late 1990s Jack Goldstone critically identified this asymmetry in the use of the term, by arguing that "it is clearly time to abandon … the whole idea of an 'early modern' period in European or world history". Instead, he proposed the term "period of advanced organic societies" to refer to the period from 1500 to 1800.[31] Obviously his critique has not been taken seriously, as the term early modern has become almost canonical in scholarship. Is this just the case of a term that has slipped into a kind of neutrality or common use and, from this vantage point, has come for the sake of convenience to cover a global perspective? However free from a cultural and ideological burden this view might seem, concepts cannot be easily neutral. Can a more

neutral but still meaningful perspective be found by moving away from concepts of European periodisation such as the Middle Ages or early modernity, as, for instance, when researchers simply use the term "the fifteenth century" to locate the origins of a global scale of integration?[32]

However, even if the "Middle Ages" or the "early modern" have slipped into a dubious neutrality as descriptive (and analytical) categories, other concepts of the European historiographical apparatus have entered the global terrain through a different trajectory: by disassociating them from their European specificity and recasting them as parallel global phenomena. This has been the case of the "Renaissance".[33] Since the 1970s new perspectives from the social, economic, cultural and feminist history had eroded much of the Renaissance's lustre in European historiography or had reframed it as an intellectual and artistic movement within the male, urban elite. However, the Renaissance has been reconceptualised along with the rise of early modern globality.

Initially, Lisa Jardine relocated Renaissance Europe within an emerging culture of consumption where bankers, merchants, feudal lords and prelates were hungrily driven by new tastes and the "urge to own". A new sort of consumerism was the engine of Renaissance society and culture and motivated exchanges of goods for European consumption on a global scale.[34] It is worth mentioning here a very critical review by Lauro Martines, who argued that in Jardine's approach "current campaigns for market economies and private enterprise, as mounted during the Reagan-Thatcher years, are here obliquely accommodated, and we begin to see late-medieval and early-modern Europe under a fine rain of 'new' commodities". All this was at the expense of a social and economic history more attentive to and mindful of social hierarchies and relations.[35]

Jardine's work put the Renaissance on a new trail. From a conventionally defined and confined European movement, the Renaissance was recast as a geographically wider phenomenon which transcended the boundaries between "East" and "West" through the circulation of objects, mostly works of art and luxury articles, between rival political entities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as rulers sought to establish themselves as world powers. A distinctively Renaissance material culture was embedded into global networks of exchange, which demonstrate that "cultural identity in early modern Europe was formed out of direct encounters between artefacts exchanged amongst international communities at distinct geographical locations". Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Eurocentrism is held responsible for confining the Renaissance as a European phenomenon and erasing its non-European links.[36]

This new strand of scholarship seeks to rethink the historical period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when, as Jerry Brotton argues, "eastern and western societies vigorously traded art, ideas, and luxury goods in a competitive but amicable exchange that shaped what we now call the European Renaissance". While earlier generations of

researchers had set out to deconstruct the Renaissance through the new approaches of social and economic history, women's history and historical anthropology and substitute it with the concept of early modernity, this new project returns confidently to the old concept with new clothes and envisages a diffusionist model; as Brotton writes, "in offering a more global perspective on the nature of the Renaissance it would be more accurate to refer to a series of 'Renaissances' throughout these regions, each with their own highly specific and separate characteristics".[37]

The idea of multiple renaissances was further endorsed with the comparative work of Jack Goody, who argued that "Renaissance-type developments" can be found in most urban societies while becoming more complex, and can be better defined as "renascences".[38] The new "global Renaissance" has now achieved almost a canonical status in the sense that the notion accommodates diverse approaches: from those of multiple renaissances across the globe to those approaches that decipher processes of interconnection, especially involving material culture, on a global scale but essentially examine "how Renaissance Europe informed and responded to the rest of the world".[39] At the same time it betrays certain interpretive paradoxes and asymmetries which deserve further consideration.

In the search for multiple renaissances or renascences, scholars seem to rebrand an outdated version of the Renaissance. Social and cultural history have variously modified, debunked or even deconstructed Jacob Burckhardt's vision of the (Italian) Renaissance and have disentangled its timespan (fourteenth to sixteenth century) from grand narratives on the origins of modernity, secularism or the birth of individualism. In the multiple-renaissances perspective, archetypical features of the Renaissance, such as humanism or modernity, although discarded because, among much else, they were thought to have created and sustained the myth of European superiority, re-enter the argument, but this time as having been developed elsewhere before being "appropriated by the west".[40] In a balanced article, Peter Burke, a historian who has steadily retained the importance of the Renaissance in the conceptualisation of European history, argued that forms of humanism or individualisms, typified for instance in the rise of ego-documents, are discernible and well-known across regions and cultures but "the difference between Renaissance and 'renascences' is one of degree rather than kind".[41] However, from a different perspective, with the multiple-renaissances argument we are faced with a paradox: in a strange interpretive twist the argument seems to reproduce the Eurocentrism which, at the same time, it seeks programmatically to shake off, by "colonising" other pasts with concepts from the historiographical and conceptual apparatus of Europe's modernity.[42]

How truly global is the global Renaissance? A careful reading suggests that often the global is essentially equated with regions neighbouring Europe, such as the Ottoman Empire, parts of the Mediterranean or Islamic regions of Asia. As a matter of fact, much scholarship concerns bilateral relations between a European region and a "non-European" one. Certainly, under the imperative that researchers in the humanities should demonstrate

the relevance of their field and work to current concerns and priorities, impressive references to globality and globalisation might serve this need. However, it is a matter of concern that much illuminating and high-quality scholarship is placed under misleading headings and nomenclature.[43] A similar concern was raised in the pages of the *American Historical Review* on the use of transnational history and the "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".[44]

Equally concerning are the striking asymmetries which become the units of analysis and interpretation and sustain the endeavour of crafting global narratives. Brotton's recent book maps out diplomatic relations, international trade, theological debates, influences, impacts and "real" and literary encounters between two rather asymmetrical units in terms of nomenclature, "Elizabethan England" and "the Islamic World", encompassing, as the pages of the book reveal, such diverse regions as northern Africa, the Ottoman Empire and Persia. The book is peppered with expressions such as "Anglo-Islamic relations".[45] Curiously the religious content of the term "Islamic world" does not find an equivalent in, for instance, the use of "Protestant England". This nomenclature is not unique here, but it can be found in a wide range of recent scholarship, including the *Cambridge World History*, where the chapter on "The Iberian Empires, 1400 to 1800" is placed along the one on "The Islamic Empires of the Early Modern World".[46] In this view, it seems as if little has changed since earlier scholarship, which was obviously produced in different cultural milieus.[47]

Brotton's recent book is a good starting point for examining another perspective on the interpretive premises and assumptions that recent scholarship on early modern/Renaissance globalism, transculturalism and cultural encounters rests. Under the new configuration of globalising early modern Europe, the richest and most consistent scholarship is produced on England, which of course tells something about the dynamism in British and American historiography. Although other European areas or states receive less attention than England, the most striking asymmetry is how little scholarship has been produced by placing Europe as the observed.[48] Revisiting Renaissance England and English culture from a global perspective scholarship has reconceptualised England as peripheral compared, for instance, with the Mediterranean world. In this view, this new reframing subscribes firmly not only to decentring England but also problematising older teleological narratives on Britain's later imperial prominence. Travel literature has been a prominent site for historians and literary critics to engage with postcolonial theory and especially with Edward Said's *Orientalism*. This scholarship has variously interrogated and questioned the validity of applying Said's formulations for the premodern, precolonial or early colonial period. In the next lines, I will briefly examine some major interpretive premises on which almost unanimously this scholarship rests.

In most cases, research examines the representational strategies of early modern

travel writers in terms of cultural encounters. Scholars concur that early modern "Islamic states", especially the Ottoman Empire, were powerful enough to prevent English or other travel writers from a hegemonic position which would have sustained imperial designs and fantasies of possession. This is an argument based on geopolitics and a discourse vs. "historical reality" perspective. As Gerald MacLean writes, "Unlike 'the Orient,' the Ottoman Empire really existed … For Said, Orientalism situates the generalised European subject 'in a position of strength,' while the English regarded the Ottomans from a position of relative weakness."[49] On other occasions, scholars have argued that early modern writers did not always represent Islamic societies in a negative light, and positive and denigrating judgments often coexisted. In this view, early modern texts did not participate in a fully articulated discursive system that homogenised Islamic or other Asian societies and cultures, as became the case later during the colonial period from the eighteenth century. A final line of interpretation rests on the experience of the encounter, that is, on how much "real" encounters might have unsettled processes of otherness that took place on a more figurative and representational mode.[50] These interpretive premises seek to come in alignment with the perspective of a polycentric early modern world.

From the overview above, certain interpretive patterns emerge which have as an underlying principle the engagement with and dismantling of Said's Orientalism from early modern textual production.[51] However, certain interpretive discrepancies arise. In analysing early modern texts from a postcolonial perspective while discrediting the validity of Said's insights as too monolithic, this scholarship seems to deny one of the most promising and enduring contributions of postcolonial theory, the unravelling of power relations and the deconstruction of powerful discursive regimes and epistemological apparatuses or "systems of thought", as Said calls Orientalism.[52] At its most extreme conceptualisation, discourses, such as Orientalism, and discursive regimes are not being corrected or contradicted by reality or experience since they constitute "reality" and mediate "experience", they might operate independently of geopolitical constellations and junctures, especially in a polycentric world such as that of early modernity, and have the power to accommodate both "positive" and "negative" representations and judgements. Is this distancing from the work of Said and postcolonial theory evidence of a general distrust towards a theoretically informed engagement with sources, which evokes the recent argument of Jürgen Osterhammel on the lack of theoretical involvement in doing global history and his words that "global history may be in danger of losing a sense of proportion by underestimating social structure and hierarchy"?[53] Is this evident only in recent globalised and transcultural approaches or is it a broader configuration in the practice of history, as Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Wallach Scott, and Gary Wilder warn in their "Theses on Theory and History"?[54] In this view, it is important to rethink early modern texts by readjusting our interpretive assumptions towards unravelling the operation of power relations, the ensuing discursive formulations and utterances that textual production entailed; in other words, to decipher a more centre-periphery-oriented perspective that would more fully locate the texts' historicity

and broader impact on shaping epistemologies of the self and otherness.

This perspective would rewrite "Orientalism" without precluding the dynamism of early modern globality but, as the editors of a recent volume have noted, "the '-ism' in Orientalism needs to be understood as much more open, creative, and flexible than the rather rigid ideology that Said signified by it". Revisiting and decentring early modern Europe through the prism of globality can also accommodate discourses and fantasies of domination, including a "notion of Orientalism that it is essentially Eurocentric and therefore conditioned by a unidirectional perspective, looking from the West to the East and from a center to the periphery".[55] Otherwise, questions on the emergence, circulation and impact of the extensive early modern textual corpus on the "East", ranging from diplomatic reports, humanists' treatises and religious works, to dramas, travelogues and ethnographic accounts written and translated in most European vernaculars or Latin, which has only recently received systematic attention, especially in English historiography, remain unavoidably open and persistent; in this view, obsolete explanations on Europe's uniqueness and exceptionalism would still remain, lurking.

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[1] It is worth noting that in the journal's first issue half the articles focused on the early modern period. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of the European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). See, also the articles in the "AHR Forum," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 2 (2002).

[2] Daniel Vitkus, "Introduction: Toward a New Globalism in Early Modern Studies," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): vi.

[3] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (1990): 6.

[4] Frederick Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 204.

[5] For a short but useful discussion of the concepts of centre-periphery in history, see Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 79–84. See also Burke, *The European Renaissance: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[6] This concern is clearly voiced by Jürgen Osterhammel, "Global History and Historical Sociology," in *The Prospect of Global History*, ed. James Belich, John Darwin, Margret Frenz, and Chris Wickham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 38. Reservations and critiques on global history are summarised in John-Paul A. Ghobrial, "Introduction: Seeing the World Like a Microhistorian," in "Global History and Microhistory," ed. John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *Past and Present* 242, suppl. 14 (2019): 1–10.

[7] Richard Evans, "Response to Baldwin," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011): 368.

[8] Richard Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), 21, 58.

[9] "Smug Britannia: The Dominance of (the) English in Current History Writing and Its Pathologies," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011): 351–66.

[10] As far as the British historians are concerned, this output should be placed within the expansion of the UK higher education in the 1960s and the interest that a post-Second World War generation of historians developed in non-British history; Richard Evans, "What is European History? Reflections of a Cosmopolitan Islander," *European History Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 599.

[11] Gregory Hanlon, *Early Modern Italy: A Comprehensive Bibliography of Titles in English and French*, 12th ed., 2016, Academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/7820421, 7–13.

[12] Peter Baldwin, "Response to Evans," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011): 377–80. See also the remarks of Caspar Hirschi, "Republicans of Letters, Memory Politicians, Global Colonialists: Historians in Recent Histories of Historiography," *Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 876–77.

[13] Differences in the structure of the publishing industry between continental countries and the UK (or the US), where university presses have a predominant role in disseminating academic history, should be taken into account. Non-English-speaking publishers seem to have been keener on translating history works, among those the works written by British historians, that might appeal to both specialists and a wider readership. One such work from my field of research is Patrick Boucheron's *Léonard et Machiavel* (2008), which has been translated in Italian, Spanish, Greek, and German but there is no English translation, yet.

[14] Beyond the confines of professional history, history's national appeal resurfaces recurrently in controversies over textbooks and memory wars. For a brief discussion, Lynn Hunt, *History: Why It Matters* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 11–24.

[15] Evans, "What is European History?," 597–99.

[16] Only passingly does Evans refer to the legacy of the imperial past and its entanglement with the discipline's formation and professionalisation in Britain or elsewhere.

[17] Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "Il nome e il come: Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico," *Quaderni storici* 40 (1979): 181–90.

[18] "A message from the Annales (January 2017)," https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/annales-histoire-sciences-sociales-english-edition/information/a-message-from-the-annales-january-2017.

[19] Dominic Sachsenmaier, "World History as Ecumenical History?," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (2007): 465.

[20] Despite the impetus, there is no unanimity on the definition of globalisation and its beginning: Jan De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World," *Economic History Review* 63, no. 3 (2010): 710–33.

[21] Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: Norton, 2014), 1–2, 10. For a different perception of history's crisis and a call for the longue durée as a remedy, see the debate: "La longue durée en débat," *Annales HSS* 70, no. 2 (2015).

[22] Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*, 111. However, see Stephen Broadberry and Bishnupriya Gupta, "The Early Modern Great Divergence: Wages, Prices and Economic Development in Europe and Asia, 1500–1800," *Economic History Review* 59, no. 1 (2006): 2–31.

[23] For recent works that still emphasise the "uniqueness" and inherent qualities of Europe as an explanation for the "rise of the West": Ricardo Duchesne, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[24] For instance, Jack A. Goldstone, *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500–1800* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009); Goldstone, "The Rise of the West – or Not?," *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 2 (2000): 175–94.

[25] Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[26] Christopher Bayly, "History and World History," in *A Concise Companion to History*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5–6.

[27] For instance, Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancioğlu, "How Did the West Usurp the Rest? Origins of the Great Divergence over the *Longue Durée*," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 1 (2017): 34–67, esp. 67–68.

[28] Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 3 (2002): 296–307.

[29] On the term's history, see Terence Cave, "Locating the Early Modern," *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 29, no. 1 (2006): 12–26.

[30] Unlike "early modern", the Middle Ages have only recently entered the global endeavour and scale. See Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, eds., "The Global Middle Ages," *Past and Present* 238, suppl. 13 (2018).

[31] Jack Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern' World," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 277.

[32] Patrick Boucheron, Julien Loiseau and Yann Potin, eds., *Histoire du monde au XVe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2009).

[33] More recently another key concept of early modern history, the Reformation, has entered the global path: Ulinka Rublack, eds., *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[34] Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

[35] Lauro Martines, "The Renaissance and the Birth of Consumer Society," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1998): 193.

[36] Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests*: *Renaissance Art Between East and West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 133.

[37] Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1, 19.

[38] This argument was first developed in *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and then in *Renaissances: The One and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[39] On this latter approach, Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Luca Molà, "The Global Renaissance: Cross-Cultural Objects in the Early Modern Period," in *Global Design History*, ed. Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley (New York: Routledge, 2011), 12.

[40] Goody, *Theft of History*, 127.

[41] Peter Burke, "Jack Goody and the Comparative History of Renaissances," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, no. 7–8 (2009): 28.

[42] For a forceful critique of colonising other pasts by the globalization of concepts of the European past or historiography, see Hirschi, "Republicans of Letters," 867–68.

[43] For instance, Mingjun Lu, *The Chinese Impact upon English Renaissance Literature: A Globalization and Liberal Cosmopolitan Approach to Donne and Milton* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Matthew Dimmock, *Elizabethan Globalism: England, China and the Rainbow Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

[44] "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1441.

[45] Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

[46] For instance, to name but a few, Gerald M. MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Bernadette Andrea and Linda McJannet, eds., *Early Modern England and Islamic Worlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, eds., *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 6, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE*, pt. 1, *Foundations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[47] For instance, Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937).

[48] An exception is Kumkum Chatterjee and Clement Hawes, eds., *Europe Observed: Multiple Gazes in Early Modern Encounters* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008).

[49] Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and Ottoman Empire before 1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 18, 19. Nabil Matar argues that "Britain did not enjoy military or industrial power over Islamic countries", *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11–13.

[50] The words of Nabil Matar summarise this perspective: "This construction of an image that was independent of and contrary to empirical evidence confirms … that the representation of the non-European non-Christian in the Renaissance was not so much dependent on facts and experience as on cultural molds and imaginary portraits. That is why, for the first time, Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa began to be categorized as 'Barbarians' by English (and other European) writers." *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 14.

[51] Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García have noted early modernists' rather late engagement with *Orientalism*, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Early Modern Orientalism," in *The Dialectics of Orientalism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.

[52] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1994), 6.

[53] Osterhammel, "Global History and Historical Sociology," 38.

[54] Available at http://theoryrevolt.com/.

[55] Keller and Irigoyen-García, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Early Modern Orientalism," 6.