

PREFACE

In May 2015, the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing invited the historian Hans Medick to give a lecture, drawing on his work on the remote Swabian village of Laichingen, located in the mountainous region of Württemberg in southern Germany.¹ Medick's 1996 masterpiece features the daily struggle for survival of the weavers and farmers of Laichingen, and forms part of an approach known as *Alltagsgeschichte* or the history of the everyday. But Medick's approach is also explicitly a micro-historical one: he reads the history of Laichingen through a micro-historical lens to reveal a view on the past as a whole, or general history (*allgemeine Geschichte*).² The lecture in Beijing was well-received, as Medick describes in a recent publication.³ There were questions that connected the proto-industrial labour practices of Laichingen to the pattern of development in the Yangtze delta between Nanjing and Shanghai, and an observation by Institute Director Zhang Shunhong that 'world-history exists in micro-histories and what happens in a village might be of a global meaning'.⁴ Zhang's comment and Medick's reflections in a recent volume of *Historische Anthropologie* point in the same direction this edited volume seeks to travel, namely, to draw on the methodologies of micro-historical studies in combination with the broad spatial approaches of global and world history.

We will explain in more detail below what we understand micro- and global historical approaches to mean, but first it may be worth expanding briefly on why this direction of combining the two seems prudent at this

particular moment in time. Whether we take the field of global history to have started with the writings of Thucydides (460–395 BCE) in the ancient Greek world and Sima Qian (c. 145 or 135–86 BCE) of the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) in China, or with Kenneth Pomeranz’ 2000 publication of *The Great Divergence*, there can be little doubt that in the last two decades, the field of history has been inundated with publications that espouse a global approach.⁵ Appearing more or less in tandem with the first publications in this field were critical voices: those who felt a history could only be called ‘global’ if it covered the entirety of the globe;⁶ those who felt global history was by necessity so general that it failed to deliver anything concrete or new;⁷ those who thought the study of the global could never do justice to any primary sources, and thus did not merit the term ‘history’;⁸ those who feel that the agency of human entities is left out of a story ruled by macro-level structures and institutions, etcetera.⁹ Of course, micro-historians have also received their fair share of critiques, from those who claimed the micro-level of analysis rendered the results irrelevant for anything other than the micro-unit it purported to study, from those who felt the scarcity of the sources invited too much historical imagination, or from those who felt approaches like thick description and close observation should be left to the anthropologists.¹⁰

In recent years, perhaps since 2010, the idea of combining the two approaches, micro and global, has started to attract attention. Scholars like Francesca Trivellato, Lara Putnam, John-Paul Ghobrial, Tonio Andrade, Filippo de Vivo, Sebouh Aslanian, and Cao Yin, amongst others, have begun to explore ways in which the two approaches can be brought together.¹¹ They have experimented with a number of different terms—Ghobrial, Andrade, and Cao Yin describe their work as ‘global microhistories’, fewer have used the term ‘micro-global history’—but the intent of combining both is clear.¹² Within the same period, several of the gatherings of the professional associations in the field of history addressed this combination, including the European Social Science History Conference and the congresses of the European Network in Universal and Global History and the American Historical Association.¹³ Most recently, Maxine Berg (University of Warwick) and John-Paul Ghobrial (University of Oxford) organised a conference in Venice in February 2016, entitled ‘The Space Between: Connecting Microhistory and Global History’.¹⁴

It is in the same context that the scholars brought together here embarked upon a series of conversations that eventually led to this publication. Christian G. De Vito organised a panel at the 2014 European Social Science History Conference in Vienna, followed by several presentations at a conference in Salvador, Brazil, in the spring of 2015 and the Cosmopolis seminar in Leiden. And last but not least, in January 2016, the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick hosted all the authors at a writing workshop, where the ideas presented here started to take their final form. We are grateful for the numerous funders and organisations that supported these events and our participation financially, especially the working group ‘Mundos do Trabalho’ in Brazil, the University of Padua-FIRB 2012 Mediterranean Borders, and the Global History and Culture Centre.

This volume, then, seeks to participate in the conversations about global and micro-history, and make a contribution to their combination as a way forward for historical research. As editors, we offer one particular model in our introductory chapter, which sets out our vision for a new way of practicing the craft of global history, but we also present a variety of different approaches in the empirical chapters offered by the contributors to this volume. We have not imposed our editorial authority to emphasize a singular approach; instead, we have encouraged a diversity of visions so as to facilitate the debates and discussions that will undoubtedly follow. In practice, what this means is that in the introduction, we set out our understanding of what we call ‘micro-spatial history’: an approach that seeks to avoid the ever so common conflation of the analytical level of the analysis, macro or micro, with its spatial level (global or local), proposing to combine the tools of micro-analysis with a spatial approach. We suggest that a mere reduction of scales, which starts with the necessarily generalised units, standards and measures of the macro-level and ends with the smallest discernible historical unit, goes directly against the appeal of micro-historians, which seeks to use the particular and the exceptional as tools to enhance our understanding of the unexceptional.

The individual chapters reveal the wide variety of ways in which this combination of different tools from the micro-historical kit can be put to use in the historical landscapes of the post-spatial turn. For Canepari, the connections identified between different historical sites add up to a coherent trans-local vision; for De Vito, the key point lies in the simultaneity of singularity and connectedness of individual places; for D’Angelo, the

historical landscape can be visualised as a carpet, where the pattern reveals both the structuring elements of society in the warp of the carpet, and the varied and multi-coloured stories of individual agency that make up the weft. Atabaki looks at the consequences of a global event such as the First World War from the perspective of short- and long-distance labour recruitment across the Persian region; Gerritsen reverses the perspective, and focuses on a single locality where the manufacture of a product was undertaken for both regional and world markets; in Pizzolato's chapter, the focus lies on how a located event was differently appropriated and acted upon by historical actors and institutions in distinct sites. Of course, a multitude of other methodologies, conceptualisations and theories feature in these studies: biography, to tell the story of global lives and foreground the connected histories of distinct sites (Marcocci); prosopography, to reveal the details of social groups where full biographical details are absent (Tarruell); commodity chains, to follow the traces of commodities and the workers who handle them (Caracausi); network analysis to show how people are connected across long distances (Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller); and border studies, to examine short- and long-distance migrations (Rolla and Di Fiore), to name but a few.

These methodological and theoretical insights are embedded in research extensively based on primary sources. Ordered chronologically, the chapters invite the reader to take an ideal voyage from the late medieval Eastern Mediterranean to present-day Sierra Leone, through early modern China and Italy, eighteenth-century Cuba and the Malvinas/Falklands, the journeys of a missionary between India and Brazil and those of Christian captives across the Ottoman Empire and Spain. Labour is the *trait d'union*, analysed under multiple perspectives: its management and recruitment; its voluntary and coerced spatial mobility; its political perception and representation; and the workers' own agency and social networks.¹⁵ We very much hope that this volume, and the variety of approaches on offer in this collection, will be part of continuing and new conversations about the encounters between local and global historians, between labour historians and area specialists, and between medievalists, early modernists and historians of more recent times

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NOTES

1. Hans Medick, *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650–1900: Lokalgeschichte als allgemeine Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).
2. These methodological reflections can be found especially in the introduction of the book: Ibid., 13–37.
3. Hans Medick, ‘Turning Global? Microhistory in Extension’, *Historische Anthropologie* 24, no. 2 (2016): 243–44.
4. Ibid., 244.
5. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, Rev. ed, The Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972); Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty*, trans. Burton Watson, Rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Research Centre for Translation, Chinese University of Hong Kong; New York, 1993); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, The Princeton Economic History of the Western World (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
6. Simon Szreter, ‘Labor and World Development through the Lens of Cotton: A Review Essay’, *Population and Development Review* 42, no. 2 (2016): 359–67.
7. Douglas Northrop, ‘Introduction: The Challenge of World History’, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1.
8. T. E. Vadney, ‘World History as an Advanced Academic Field’, *Journal of World History* 1, no. 2 (1990): 212–13.
9. Roland Robertson, ‘Globalisation or Glocalisation?’, *The Journal of International Communication* 18, no. 2 (2012): 191–208.
10. See the discussion of critiques in Sigurður G. Magnússon and István Szíjártó, *What Is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 40–41; See also Robert Finlay, ‘The Refashioning of Martin Guerre’, *American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (June 1988): 553–71; Steven Bednarski, *A Poisoned Past: the Life and Times of Margarida de Portu, a Fourteenth-century Accused Poisoner*, 2014, 12–13.
11. Francesca Trivellato, ‘Un Nouveau Combat Pour L’histoire Au XXIE Siècle?’ *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 70, no. 2 (April 2015): 333–43; Lara Putnam, ‘To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World’, *Journal of Social History*, 39, no. 3 (Spring, 2006): 615–630; John-Paul A. Ghobrial, ‘The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory’, *Past & Present* 222, no. 1 (2014): 51–93; Tonio Andrade, ‘A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a

- Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory', *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 573–91; F. de Vivo, 'Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale: A Response', *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 387–97; Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*, The California World History Library 17 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Cao Yin, 'The Journey of Isser Singh: A Global Microhistory of a Sikh Policeman', *Journal of Punjab Studies* 21, no. 2 (2014): 325–53.
12. Martin Dusanberre referred to the term "micro-global history" in the abstract of his paper for the annual conference of the European Social Science History Conference, held in April 2016. For the programme, see <https://esshc.socialhistory.org/esshc-user/programme> [consulted on 22 September 2016].
 13. In 2015, the European Network in Universal and Global History held its biannual conference in Paris, and featured sessions addressing the issue; the International Institute of Social History, which organises the European Social Science History Conference, devoted several panels to the topic at its conference in 2016; and the American Historical Association is using 'Historical Scale: Linking Levels of Experience' as the theme for its 2017 conference in Denver.
 14. For details of the conference, and a brief report, see <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/thespaceinbetween> [consulted on 22 September 2016].
 15. For an example of a fruitful expansion of the labour history of Japan into a global debate: Martin Dusanberre, 'Circulations of Labor, Bodies of Work. A Japanese Migrant in Meiji Hawai'i', *Historische Anthropologie*, 24, no. 2 (2016), 194–217.

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