

In class reading laboratory

I – what is global history

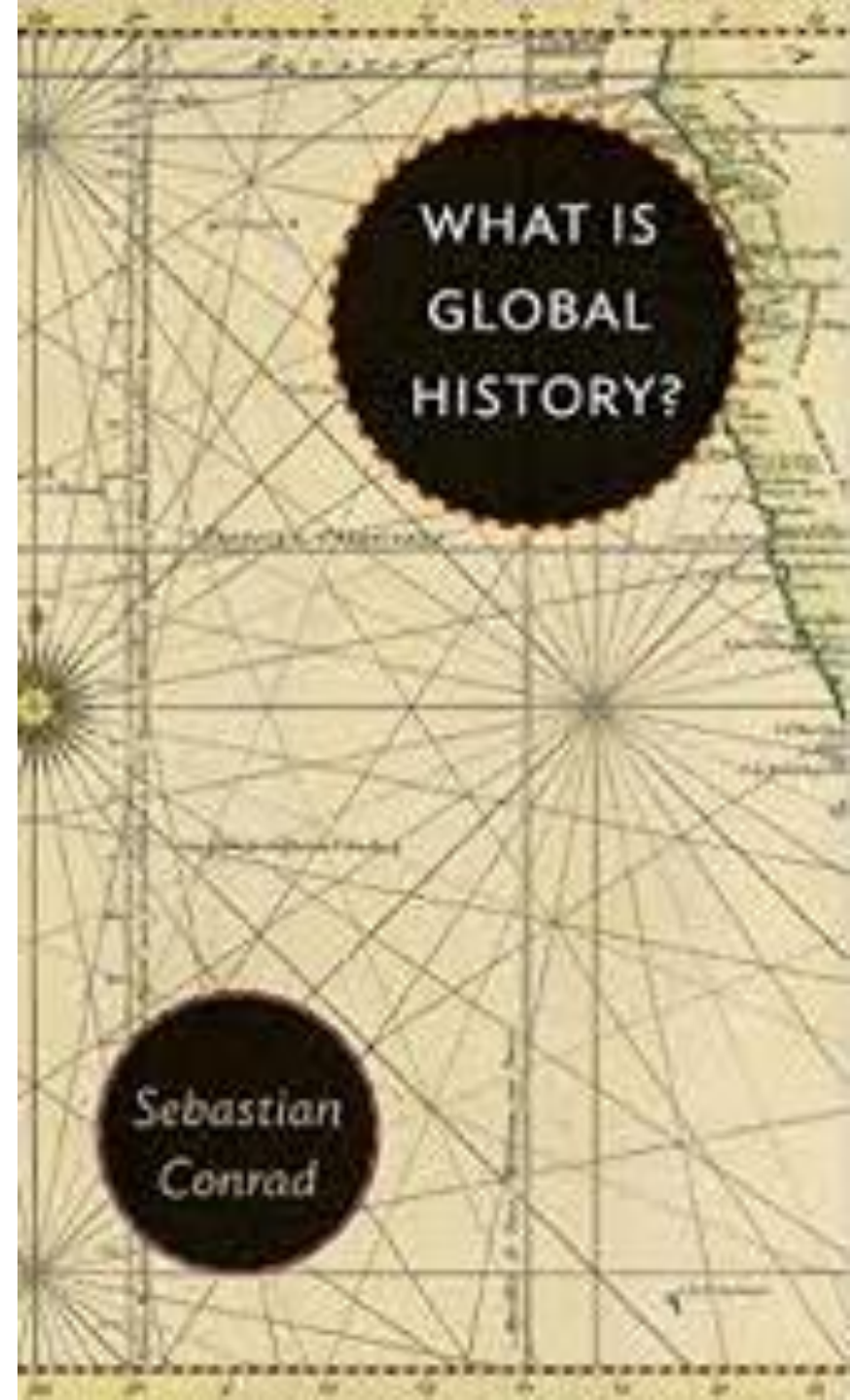


Today in class reading

Sebastian Conrad

What is global history? (Princeton University Press, 2016), *Introduction*

“All historians are world historians now”
(C.A. Bayley)



The rise of global history

Conrad opens with C. A. Bayly's claim that "*all historians are world historians now*" (p. 1) to highlight the field's rapid growth since the 1990s. Global history, he argues, "*has been the fastest-growing field within the discipline,*" reflecting the intellectual climate shaped by the end of the Cold War and the global awareness that followed 9/11

Social and intellectual transformations

The field's expansion responds to "*the demand for a more inclusive, less narrowly national perspective on the past*" (p. 2). Conrad links this to the "*communication revolution*" and to scholars' "*increased mobility, further enhanced by the Internet,*" which have fostered cross-cultural collaboration and new forms of knowledge exchange (pp. 2–3).

A critique of methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism

Global history, Conrad writes, emerged from the conviction that “*the tools historians had been using to analyze the past were no longer sufficient*” (p. 3). It seeks to overcome two “*birth defects*” of the modern disciplines:

1. “*Methodological nationalism*,” the assumption that the nation-state is a self-contained unit of analysis; and
2. “*Eurocentrism*,” the tendency to treat European experience as the universal model of progress (pp. 3–4)

Three varieties of global history

Conrad distinguishes three dominant tendencies:

1. **“Global history as the history of everything”**—attempts at comprehensive synthesis or “*the history of what happens worldwide*” (p. 7).
2. **“Global history as the history of connections”**—the study of mobility, exchange, and “*the interconnectedness of the world*” (p. 9).
3. **“Global history as integration”**—which explores “*patterns of exchange that were regular and sustained, and thus able to shape societies in profound ways*” (p. 10). Conrad identifies this third model as the most promising for serious historical analysis.

Global history as both
process and perspective

Global history is “*both an object of study and a particular way of looking at history*” (p. 11). It offers “*a heuristic device that allows the historian to pose questions and generate answers*” different from national or regional approaches (p. 12). Yet, as he cautions, “*not every research project requires a global perspective*” (p. 15); global history should complement, not replace, other methods.

Towards a working definition

Global history perspectives go beyond mere studies of connectdennes by examining large - scale structured integration; and global historians pursue the problem of causation up to the global level. Connections in and on themselves are only a starting point. Effective global history needs to remain aware of systemic dimension of the past and of the structure character of social change.

(Conrad: chapter 4)

