



# ISHA NEWSLETTER

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## Social History and Global History

by

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What is the global situation of social history as a field? This is the ambitious question to which this essay is addressed, with full recognition that we can at best advance a conversation on this subject, but hardly pretend to complete it. We will proceed as follows: first, a comment on some obvious difficulties in relating social history to a global stage. Then some recent, fairly general trends in the field, as it moved from pioneer to more familiar staple. Next, the relationship between social history and the growing field of world history, an obvious connection from the global standpoint. A final main section discusses social history trends in major regions, another key task in the global assignment. A conclusion assesses further challenges and needs.

### Social and Global

Two complications surface immediately. The first, and most important, is the fact that modern social history was commonly based on intense regional analysis.<sup>1</sup> Many of the early triumphs of the *Annales* School focused on regions within France. American social history, beginning to rise in the early 1960s, was framed in terms of detailed studies of families and communities in New England. While much has changed since the pioneering days, a certain

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Burke, ed., K. Folca, trans., Lucien Febvre, author, *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

tension persists between many forms of social history, and the larger geographical scope commonly associated not only with global history but even many area studies projects. Many successful social history studies also focus on relatively narrow time periods, another means of facilitating deep probes into social experience and the frequent challenges of available source materials. While the subfield of micro history has not captured social history as a whole,<sup>2</sup> it represents an extreme statement of a common impulse: when dealing with aspects of human behavior or “inarticulate” social groups, social historians often narrow their range, and this inevitably complicates the relationship to a larger, global arena. This first disjuncture (granting some important early exceptions, such as Fernand Braudel’s work on the Mediterranean), helps explain why the field of world history, emerging strongly in the 1980s, long found it difficult to embrace social history topics and approaches.

It is also true that what was long called the “new” social history developed initially in Western Europe and the United States, and focused disproportionately on those same societies. This is a second problem area, in the social-global relationship, though arguably less fundamental. Obviously, topics and methods first applied to one or more Western cases can be carried over into the study of other regions, and elements of this process form part of the discussion in this essay. Even some contested Western findings – like Philippe Ariès’ notion of a modern “discovery” of childhood which has been disputed in Western historiography but which may fit developments in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Japan – can prove stimulating in a global context.<sup>3</sup>

But there are some obvious problems with Western origins. Some schemas that have been useful in Western social history may be wildly off the mark in other cases: Norbert Elias’ civilizing process schema (again, debated in the West as well) is hardly likely to be useful for Chinese social history, at least in the same early modern time period. The Chinese upper classes were already “civilized.” Some topics or materials central to Western social history may not be replicable in other regions, whereas other topics and approaches might be more fruitful. Western leadership in social history creates its own blinders, another challenge at the global level. New topics are too often treated only in a Western context but trumpeted without explicit attention to the limitations involved. Thus, to seize perhaps unfairly on a recent example, a really imaginative work on touch, part of the expanding field of the history of the senses, proclaims that it is “a cultural history “ of the subject, when in fact it’s a Western history alone (albeit a really good one), oblivious to other societies or to potential comparative issues.<sup>4</sup> Merely an overambitious title? Perhaps, but also possibly an indication of the neglect social historians of the West continue to tolerate when it comes to the world at large. The same caveats apply to a pioneering recent study in the history of sincerity, carving out a potentially important new topic but with nary a mention to sincerity issues or options in societies other than the West.<sup>5</sup>

Most obviously, the Western geographic origins of the “new” social history create a durable sense of disjuncture, in which many other regions must be discussed in terms of lags and gaps. Compared to the more solid advances in the Western case, historiography in other regions, in the social domain, can easily be described in terms of catching up, or failing to do so. Research on historical patterns in childhood, for example, continues to advance in the context of Western Europe and the United States; important recent work brings China and Latin

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<sup>2</sup> Sigurdur Magnússon and István M. Sziujártó, *What is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Ariès, “Centuries of Childhood,” in *Journal of Social History* 38 (Summer 2005), special issue on the global history of childhood.

<sup>4</sup> Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> R. Jay Magill Jr., *Sincerity: How a Moral Ideal Born Five Hundred Years Ago Inspired Religious Wars, Modern Art, Hipster Chic and the curious notion that we ALL have something to say (no matter how dull)* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012).

America into the picture, though without, yet, a comparable volume of work; but India and the Middle East remain largely unexplored in this regard.<sup>6</sup> Even newer topical areas, like the history of emotion, show still more marked disparities: while massive centers in the United Kingdom, Australia and Germany pour out detailed studies on the West (though of course with still more possibilities for the future), work on Eastern Europe and, now, China is just opening up, and the subject is essentially an unknown quantity for other major world regions.<sup>7</sup> Evaluations of this sort are unavoidable, and we will return to the dilemma in other sections of the essay; but there is also real danger in assuming the West as historiographic paradigm and in dealing with other regions in terms of degrees of deficiency, and we must be open to other measurements as well. It is also true, as we will see, that some disparities are beginning to even out, as social history gains ground across borders, so this particular problem – in contrast to the results of social history’s characteristic regional intensity – may prove finite.

### Recent Trends

Any current assessment of social history, globally or otherwise, must note that the field is not as vividly identifiable as was the case a generation ago. This is true in Western historiography, but it spills over into other regions as well; Latin American historians thus also note that distinctions between social history and other kinds of history are less pronounced than was once the case.

Several trends have combined, over the past twenty years or so, as social history moved from the status of “new” (a label introduced in the 1960s, but still applied into the 1980s) to a more mainstream position. The excitement of defiant innovation probably inevitably declined. Initial social history pioneers have given way to historians who assume that social history is an important part of their work, but not an exclusive or defining characteristic – and this seems largely true today even for social historians working in societies where the field is more novel.

Social history also saw its claims to distinctive methodology erode. Early interest in quantitative techniques, and topics such as demography, crime and social mobility for which they were appropriate, all lessened. While important quantitative work still emerges in social history, in the West but also in Latin America, Russia and other regions, it is no longer dominant. The exodus of many economic historians toward economics rather than history programs plays a role here as well. The turn toward cultural topics and evidence blurred some of the distinctions between social history and other approaches, and this has on the whole persisted even though the most intense fascination with cultural topics has itself lessened.<sup>8</sup> New opportunities are opening up, however, with the digitization of masses of cultural materials. Social/cultural historians, particularly dealing with the West but increasingly some other regions as well, will have new opportunities to quantify aspects of literate cultural expression, and this may not only generate new findings but also kindle a renewed interest in issues of methodology.<sup>9</sup>

Social history as a support for group identity and even social justice claims has also declined, though we will see there is some regional variation here. As social history rose in the West from the 1930s to the 1960s it was sustained in part by a deep sympathy for the com-

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<sup>6</sup> Peter N. Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, 2/e (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Susan Matt, eds., *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Davies and Dee Gardner, *A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary American English: Word Sketches, Collocates and Thematic Lists* (New York, 2010); “Google Books (American English) Corpus, 1810-2009,” and “Google Books (British English) Corpus, 1810-2009,” <http://goodlebooks.byu.edu>. See also works by Jean-Baptiste Michel, Ph.D, et.al., “Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books,” in *Science* 14, January 2011: Vol. 331 no 6014, pp. 176-82; and Jean-Baptiste Michel: *The Mathematics of History* (2010) retrieved December 1, 2012 from [http://archive.org/details/JeanBaptisteMichel\\_2012](http://archive.org/details/JeanBaptisteMichel_2012)

mon man, and a belief that history could be legitimately directed toward supporting the identity and agency of groups like the working class, African Americans, or women (a bit later). These passions have not disappeared; enthusiasm for the history of gays and lesbians, in American and European social history, show the ongoing potential of connecting social history and advocacy. Overall, however, measurable if still incomplete gains by some groups (for example, women or African Americans); new complexities in both historical and contemporary evaluations (the working class); and the larger decline of Marxism have reduced some elements of support for this aspect of social history's distinctiveness and the enthusiasm surrounding it. Here too, the increase in attention to cultural issues plays a role. In India, for example, attention to subaltern cultures, as part of the postcolonial legacy, has tended to eclipse social historical attention to social and economic inequality and the more marginal social groups. Similar basic trends have affected historical work in several other regions.

While trends of this sort have affected the identifiability of social history, they must not be pressed too far. Increased fascination with cultural issues has contributed to the huge topical expansion of social-cultural historical research, particularly in the West but also in some other regions. The proliferation of work on the history of emotions and the history of the senses are clear cases in point, where initial explorations just a quarter of a century ago have generated major new fields of inquiry.<sup>10</sup> New opportunities for interaction with other disciplines – another characteristic of social history in its heyday – have opened up as well on the strength of new discoveries and the wider topical range. Emotions historians thus interact – however uneasily – with interested neuroscientists. Even as the percentage of historians who exclusively label themselves social historians has undoubtedly declined, the currency of social history subjects continues to loom large in general historical conferences and in research projects. It was revealing that one historian in Texas, bemoaning the lack of attention to staple political and diplomatic topics, recently complained once again about social history's pervasiveness:

The obsessions with social, history originated in the 1960s, inspired by then-graduate students and young historians who wanted to concentrate on groups and classes that had been traditionally oppressed and overlooked... What has developed over the past 20 years is an almost oppressive orthodoxy and a lack of intellectual diversity among the history faculty. The result is that... very few courses are taught or books written... on the history of American government, economic development, or culture and the arts, or on America's strategic and tactical participations in wars.<sup>11</sup>

This blast was quickly disputed, by historians who objected to the notion that social history in fact still predominated, or that social historians themselves dealt only with victimization. But that the claim could still be made at all was a revealing commentary on the continuing complexity of social history's role.

Still, the question of identifying social history in the contemporary disciplinary arsenal has unquestionably become more challenging. In teaching terms, in places like the United States, course descriptions rarely at this point specifically reference social history, focusing instead either on conventional periods and places or on more specific topics such as slavery or gender or sports. Many of the courses – both surveys and topical offerings – embrace considerable social history content, but without explicit reference. The lack of any overarching offerings in social history further reflects the probable fragmentation of the field, into separate subject areas (a long-ago complaint by Charles Tilly in relation to social history scholarship, now translated into the disciplinary curriculum). In research, many of the new topic areas have similarly blended fairly clear social and cultural history analysis with more general and conventional targets. The history of emotion, for example, launched as a way to examine a crucial

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<sup>10</sup> Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching in History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Pells, "The Obsession with Social History," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 28, 2013.

aspect in the lives of ordinary people and family lives and, often a window into power relationships and subordinations – quintessentially socio historical, in other words – now risks becoming a catchall for otherwise fairly standard inquiries into the intellectual history of religion, science or literature, or as a means of examining conventional historical categories such as the Renaissance or Enlightenment. The explosion of interest in emotions history, in other words, certainly signaled a continuing capacity for innovation in the broader discipline, but it might or might not reflect new energy in social history per se. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that most of the journals founded during social history’s heyday survive and apparently thrive, in Europe and the United States, and other specialty journals, in areas like childhood, have added in. The question of how much social history has won, in terms of historical or interdisciplinary attention, versus how much it has either retreated or accepted dilution within more conventional categories, is simply not easy to answer.

### **Social History and World History**

Social history was born as a research field, and has spilled over inconsistently into teaching. As noted, many topics courses in fact call on social history, from women’s history to sports history with many stops in between; but the actual demarcation of more comprehensive social history offerings has probably gone down with the passing of the pioneering phase. World history, in contrast, has soared, in places like the United States, as a teaching field, though with increasing gestures toward some research categories. Here already is something of a disjuncture between these two approaches.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, as noted, the geographic and chronological narrowness of many social history probes creates some tensions with world history interests. World historians, dealing with big geographical areas and large interregional contacts, have found it easier to emphasize trade patterns or dominant political and intellectual history, than to encompass social history findings. Of course there have been some points of contact, for example in examining migration patterns.<sup>13</sup> And over time, some staple topics began to be built into world history standards, most obviously involving basic social structures (India’s caste system compared to Confucian social hierarchies; some of the different forms of slavery) and also gender relations (primarily, the installation and elaboration of patriarchy). Social characteristics of these sorts were incorporated into the definitions of major civilizations and were explored as part of the impact of new interregional contacts and key world history periods.<sup>14</sup> It remains true, however, that world history’s most important emphases fall outside of social, history proper, and that social history research is rarely cast in world historical terms. The two major innovations in the history discipline over the past half century plus have yet to fully connect, as differences in geographic and chronological scales continue to complicate the relationship.

There are of course at least two inescapable general linkages, the two great structural changes in the human experience that form an exception to the more complex standard relationship – quite apart from the need to incorporate specifics like the caste system or Atlantic slavery. World history has to grapple with the social consequences of the great Neolithic revolution, as the replacement of hunting and gathering with agriculture had huge impacts on family life including the purpose of children, on the nature of work and leisure, and on local organizational structures. On the more recent end, the advent of industrial systems, with attendant features such as global urbanization, reconfigure many of the most hallowed agricultural traditions, from the leading components of social structure (the ultimately global decline of the peasantry), of gender relations (the decline of full-fledged patriarchy), of migration patterns, of work and leisure including the rise of new forms of consumerism. These

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<sup>12</sup> Peter N. Stearns, *World History: The Basics* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History*, 2/e (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

changes begin to reshape world history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but play an even more formative role over the past century itself. These fundamental social connections can organize a great deal of world history coverage and analysis, forming coherent periodization markers in both fields.

But obviously there are limitations here as well. Most social historians do not go back to Neolithic origins, which weakens the force of the first chronological juncture. The rise of industrial society forms the more constructive link. But this leaves the vast space of the long agricultural period of human history – that is, what social historians would usually subdivide into much smaller chunks, particularly from 600 BCE to 1700 CE – less clearly defined in terms of social/world history overlap.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, there is a potential for a more fruitful and elaborate relationship. Examination of the spread of world religions in the post-classical period, central to most world history periodization schemes, can easily probe beneath the levels of high culture, to examine patterns and possible comparisons in popular religious culture or the impacts on family and gender. This could become a more rewarding social-world history connection in future. Claims that, in early modern world history thanks to population growth and accelerating trade, the rigor of work increased in many regions, bearing on children and the elderly as well as regular adult workers could frame a major discussion in social history.<sup>16</sup> Greater interest in demography – which has trailed off a bit in social history proper – could help organize periodization and comparisons within the millennia of agriculture. And some specific connections are not just possible, but already common currency: the Columbian exchange, as a framework for exploring global geography, disease and migration, is an important case in point.<sup>17</sup> Still, the disparity between social historians' delight in intensive analysis of relatively small spaces and world historians' commitment to the largest possible stages and contacts continues to complicate the relationship overall – particularly before the past century or so.

### **Social History and Regional Historiographies**

Questions about the regional roles of social history demand more attention than the field's place in overall world history per se, for it is the regional level that has seen much of the innovation of the past two decades and arguably, in an increasingly global environment, where the future rests. We have already established that the once-new social history survives strongly in its Western birthplaces, though amid some new complexities, but this begs the question about its larger regional positions. While the ambiguous place in world history is relevant, it is far more important to identify components and gaps in the major regional traditions outside the West. How extensively has what was initially a Western innovation in the field caught on? What other components in regional historiographies support or constrain socio-historical research, allowing perhaps some alternative to a purely Western topical model? Regional issues of this sort also loom large in the challenge of comparative work, which remains more an invitation than a reality in the social history field.

Overall, the amount of social history devoted to the world's major regions has gone up fairly steadily over the past several decades, and topical diversity has increased as well. The decline of Marxism certainly affected social history and arguably reduced attention to certain types of issues, particularly in centers like Russia; but there continues to be considerable interest in peasant and working-class histories, and studies around the phenomenon of revolution, even without the previous ideological spur and lens. At the same time, considerable regional diversity persists, both in the amount of attention devoted to essentially social history

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<sup>15</sup> David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*, 2/e (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), offers a characterization of the "agricultural" period.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to Present*, 2/e (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

topics, compared to other targets, and in the range of subject matter. No easy generalization suffices.

What follows is a first stab at generalization and comparison, unquestionably inviting critique and comment. Reasons for distinctive regional emphases, and more important for the clear diversity in levels of commitment to social history, deserve more attention. They clearly speak – promisingly in some cases but not in all – to the future of the field.

*Latin America.* This region, predictably, offers an interesting illustration of the attractions and limitations of Western-style social history outside its home base.<sup>18</sup> It is of course in some ways presumptuous to discuss Latin America generally, since most historians organize themselves nationally – though they do also tend to read North American and European scholarship. Latin America did not participate strongly in the original turn to social history, in the 1960s and 1960s, or in the cultural turns of the 1980s. There were, of course, some classic topics, pursued both by Latin American historians themselves and by foreigners: issues in Brazilian slavery were a case in point. But these aside, many Latin American historians, particularly in the liberal camp, have maintained a primary interest in politics and political culture. In contrast a Marxist minority, for example in Argentina, explores economic and political oppression, but more from a materialist, structural standpoint than in terms of “history from the bottom up.”

The divergence between Latin American historians and their North American counterparts may be yielding, thanks to efforts by people like the Yale Brazilian historian, Emilia Viotti da Costa, whose students have explored political and cultural issues from both upper- and lower-class vantage points in a generally Gramscian framework. The result has been a host of new studies on topics such as criminality, sports, and the family.

Concomitantly social historians in the United States and Western Europe, dealing with Latin America, have been busy producing a fairly standard array of topics, including consumerism, disease, and gender, as well as race and ethnicity. Of course social history does not rule the roost: conventional political and intellectual history have their adepts as well. Labor history, a strong early interest of U.S. social historians, has declined, for Latin America as well as for the West itself, in favor of cultural issues, gender, and sexuality – amid considerable lament, however, from the labor historians themselves. Popular religion also gains attention, though more for the colonial than for the modern period.

In sum, most of the standard social history topics have fairly strong Latin American representation. Family history has been less elaborately treated, though there are exceptions; work on childhood has tended to focus on groups like abandoned or orphaned children, in part because childhood was otherwise regarded as a rigorously private family matter and generated limited historical data.<sup>19</sup> Again, however, most aspects of social history offer at least some strength, either through the work of foreign historians or through interests within Latin America itself. Distinctions remain, in terms of the place of social history amid political concerns and the partially separate trajectory that social history has developed within the region.

*Russia.*<sup>20</sup> The rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s had found quick echo among historians dealing with Russia, while in the Soviet Union itself Marxist scholarship had already generated major studies of key social groups and of social structure more generally. Research on the working class benefited particularly, bent on showing impetus toward or impacts of the great Revolution. A great deal of work on the peasantry also advanced

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<sup>18</sup> I am deeply indebted to Matt Karush for suggestions in this section. See also José Moya, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) ; and Gilbert Joseph, ed., *Reclaiming the Political in Latin America: Essays from the North* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Tobias Hecht, *At Home in the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> My thanks to Rex Wade for his assistance and insights in preparing this section. See also the review articles by Lewis Siegelbaum and Mark Edels. For pioneering social history work of the “revisionist” sort, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

knowledge, and research developed on other key topics such as the social history of the military. Gender history also found quick echo in scholarship on Russia.

By the 1970s and 1980s some historians also tried to use social history approaches to develop an alternative to state-centered accounts, even in dealing with the Soviet era. They argued that the state had received too much attention in Russian historiography; this current, often termed “revisionist,” meshed to some extent with the wider turn toward topics on the cultural side.

Recent trends point in several directions. In work on Russia (and in Russia), as elsewhere, specific designations for social historical research have declined. Many historians both inside and outside of Russia, arguably “do” social history without caring about the label. Other trends can add to a sense of social history in decline. The effort to develop a line of history apart from the state, never an exclusive trend, has dropped off; there are few references, now, to doing history “from the bottom up”. Among historians in Russia, indeed, crucial debates over topics such as the nature of Stalinism or the Khrushchev regime have refocused considerable attention on political history, though this is less true among Russianists elsewhere; there is also some interest in a rather formal intellectual history. Finally, the predominant interest in the major social classes, and especially the workers, has dropped off considerably. This reflects wider global trends in the field, but also the impact of changes in the place of Marxism and perhaps also a diminution in the fascination of explaining the Revolution. Given prior interests and strengths, current Russian trends may particularly illustrate the decline of the classic social history approach.

On the other hand, some scholarly observers argue that social history really commands the Russian field (though more clearly among researchers outside Russia itself). Three trends combine here.

First, as historical work on the Soviet period has expanded, with wider archival access, interest in the social aspect of the Soviet experience has grown as well. A variety of social groups and topics play into this exploration, which also highlights the continued reliance on state archives in most social historical work. Research initiatives on the gulags or on veterans are two examples here among many. The general approach emphasizes picking a Soviet policy and mapping the different groups involved and their mutual relationships and overall influence.<sup>21</sup>

Second, though building on earlier social class case studies, interest in a wider social geography, and in regional geographic specificity, has grown. Locality- or region-specific studies often embrace a variety of topics, but social history components run strong.<sup>22</sup> A related interest, clearly social historical though not “classic”, explores non-Russian ethnic groups – not a new aspect of social history more generally, particularly in the United States, but a new strength in the Russian case.

Third, and finally, exploration of Russian society, whether or not labeled as social history, has raised a growing range of topics – again mirroring trends in the West and to an extent elsewhere. Work on various aspects of consumerism, including even automobiles and even “car culture”, is one illustration here. Housing has been another, related interest. Another illustration is the effort to mine Russian and East European materials for a social history of emotion. Another involves growing attention to topics dealing with family and childhood,

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Edel, *Soviet Veterans of World War II: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941 – 1991* (New York: Oxford, 2009); Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Paul Stronski, *Taskent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930 – 1966* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

which had been somewhat underplayed previously. Many historians in Russia, despite the concern with political history, are dealing with a variety of social topics, including labor, gender, and education, with perhaps a particular interest in the history of daily life and material culture.<sup>23</sup>

Despite or indeed because of the disagreements over whether social history as an explicit category is declining or ascending, Russian social history continues to link to, and to influence, wider trends in the field, though with a few distinctive features and trends. Labeling aside, a positive bill of health seems clear, as Russian historians contribute actively to pushing out the boundaries of the field.

*Africa.* With sub-Saharan Africa we move into more distinctive social history territory, for practitioners in Africa and those working on the subcontinent elsewhere. Social history for this region remains lively (after a slightly late start, compared to the other regions treated thus far), with much less debate about possible decline. At the same time the topical agenda is on the whole somewhat narrower, more dependent on exploring key topics with contemporary political and social implications, than is true for other regions. Whole areas, like the social history of childhood, are largely neglected.<sup>24</sup>

Four sectors command particular attention. First, interest in the social and cultural impact of imperialism, post imperialism and the cold war continues to expand. This can include colonial/regional interactions on gender roles and family structures. American influences on popular culture (including music), or African student experiences in the Soviet bloc, including Cuba, organize a number of studies. This sector can include attention to the role of racism in encounters both with the West and in Eastern Europe.

Second, the complexity of anti-colonial struggles is a vigorous theme. Struggles among African groups during these conflicts, including efforts to ally with or manipulate colonial authorities in what were essentially African struggles, often overwhelmed direct attacks on white rule. Research in this area reflects an effort to go deeper into the social framework of recent African history, but also attempts to explore the background of contemporary civil wars and genocides. Sexual violence is a key topic here as well, again with conflicts during the anti-colonial reactions preparing more recent tensions. This same basic framework embraces specific studies of key moments of anti-colonial revolt, but again with attention to internal rifts and local colonial collaborations as part of the picture rather than over simple African-colonialist divides. Many struggles barely masked efforts to settle older indigenous scores. The resulting resentments and retributions would survive into the post independence era.<sup>25</sup>

Third, contemporary problems and tragedies obviously inspire great interest in the history of disease and public health, with examination of past epidemics over long time periods. This includes growing interest in syncretic medical approaches from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, with mixtures of African and Western palliative and healing efforts.<sup>26</sup>

Fourth and finally, there is a very welcome resurgence in pre-colonial African historical inquiry. A prize-winning book has explored centuries of trans-Saharan trade and attendant

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<sup>23</sup> A good barometer here is the *Social History Yearbook*, published annually in Moscow since 1997. See also Mark Steinberg, *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); Lewis Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Rodric Braithwaite, *Moscow 1941: A City and Its People at War* (New York: Random House, 2006); Heather DeHaan, *Stalinist City Planning: Professionals, Performance, and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); and Stephen Lowell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> My thanks to my Mason colleague Benedict Carton for guidance in this section

<sup>25</sup> Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War and Decolonization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Dean T. Jamison, et al, eds. *Disease and Mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006).

social interactions. More broadly the University of Witwatersrand is sponsoring a “500 Year Initiative”, designed to combine history, anthropology and archeology, and a variety of source materials, in exploring many aspects of the southern African experience. There is a deliberate attempt to use this effort to go beyond explaining imperialist impact or Apartheid categories that have “oversimplified” and “disfigured” the past. This project includes efforts to develop new teaching materials and wider public outreach, in a refreshing reassertion of some of the basic goals of social history.<sup>27</sup>

*South Asia.* In comparison with work on the West, and possibly even Latin America and Africa, social history in India remains at a much earlier phase. Great strengths in a few sectors vie with huge gaps in others – the lack of systematic attention is striking.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, Indian historians have contributed particularly in the field of religious history, including religious conflict and communalism, with attention as well (on an interdisciplinary basis) to the subject of caste. Research on the history of the family or childhood is far more scattered. Important work, in India and elsewhere, has tended to center around middle-class/*bhadralok* families in Bengal,<sup>29</sup> and the issue of wider regional and social coverage remains to be addressed.

Given its importance on the classic Indian nationalist agenda, the issue of social reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has maintained considerable scholarly attention. On the other hand, again with individual exceptions, the social history of education is much less well developed. Labor history remains a staple, with an annual conference that draws considerable attendance. The 1980s interest in subaltern studies, focused on the political and cultural agency of lower-class groups, leaves a legacy here, though its specific impetus has declined.<sup>30</sup> Other specific fields, such as the social history of the railways, have respectable historiographies, though the broader history of the social impact of technology is underplayed. Work on other topics, such as consumerism and rural society, is also scattered at best. Overall, this is a field still very much in the making, particularly in terms of overall structure and consistency.

*The Middle East.* A great deal of interesting social history has emerged for the Middle East. Constraints are important also, however. A good bit of the survey work, even relatively recently, has a slightly dated air, with economic considerations outstripping other categories. Not surprisingly, research often focuses on state-society connections, as in dealing with crime or the legal system during the Ottoman Empire or discussing the relationships between Egyptian merchants and the state. Family history, though not absent, plays a surprisingly small role in this historiography. There have been some interesting forays into gender history and even sexuality and queer studies, but they remain somewhat isolated. The influence of subaltern history, from India, has generated some significant studies of the peasantry and, occasionally, of the working class. Consumerism also wins some attention, particularly in Egypt.

A review of articles and books considered over the past decade, in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, suggests both the achievements and the constraints. The jour-

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<sup>27</sup> Ghislaine E. Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade networks and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); for additional information on the 500 year initiative, see: <http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/science/geography/research/500yearinitiative/5663/home.html>; retrieved June 3, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> My thanks to Vinay Lal, University of California Los Angeles, for suggestions here. See also Rochona Majmdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1855 – 1947* (India: Macmillan, 2002); and Judith Walsh, *A Brief History of India, 2/e* (New York: Facts on File, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Nita Kuma, *The Politics of Gender, Community, and Modernity: Essays on Education in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Prasannan Parthasarthi, “Indian Labour History,” in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 82, (Fall 2012), pp. 127-35.

<sup>30</sup> Prasannan Parthasarthi, “Indian Labour History,” in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 82, (Fall 2012), pp. 127-35.

nal is commendably interested in history, but it also displays a predominant focus on political and diplomatic issues, ethnic minorities, human rights and other topics that seem particularly vital in the recent experience of the region. The issues clearly reach back into history, stimulating for example an abundance of attention to religious history rather than a wider range of social topics. Again, the picture is not static. A recent interest in the social history of the environment demonstrates again the possibility for innovation. A growing range of work by Turkish historians, mainly of course on the Ottoman period, must also be noted. And some practitioners see no reason to question the regional importance of social history overall. Yet for most historians the main focus – more perhaps than for any other region – seems to lie elsewhere, at least for the moment.

*East Asia.* Initial social historical work on Japan, particularly in the United States and Great Britain, focused disproportionately on a modernization model.<sup>31</sup> There was great interest in identifying social and demographic characteristics in Tokugawa Japan that could help explain subsequent successful modernization. This also prompted a critical response, also using social history but to counter the image of a smooth, seamless transition to modernization; Marxist perspectives figured prominently here.

Partly because of the constraints of this discussion, historical work on Japan was particularly heavily influenced, in the 1990s, by the cultural-intellectual turn. Linguistic and cultural work predominated on modern and premodern Japan alike, with very little social history content. During the past decade, however, this has changed, with a host of topics mixing social and cultural concerns. Work on Japanese imperialism, for example, has combined textual analysis with social history methodology to get at the experience of Japanese settlers and non-Japanese brought into the empire. With some retrospective bows to the modernization interests, studies of the social history of education have advanced as well. “Pure” or conventional social history remains however somewhat marginal, focused primarily on labor and women’s history (with considerable textual analysis built in here as well). As is the case for South Asia and even Africa, though with different specifics, what might be regarded as a fuller topical range is absent – including surprisingly little work on topics such as the social history of childhood.

*China.* One of the most striking developments in historical research over the past two decades has been a virtual explosion of sociohistorical work on China, from both Chinese and Western scholars. As in the West earlier, the result has challenged traditional historiography in a number of ways. Interest has shifted from elites and dynasties to the study of ordinary people in the past – women, ethnic minorities, the working class and beyond. A variety of urban studies also derive from the interest in many aspects of the human experience. Social historians here, as in other lively centers, argue that Chinese history should not be confined to political events, dynasty changes and ideologies, and institutions, but also on the understanding of shifts and continuities in broader human behavior, daily life, even demotions. The social history surge also turns to new kinds of materials for research. Here too there is a major shift, away from strict reliance on officially compiled histories and documents, with a turn toward oral history, folk art and literature and (occasionally) anthropological field data. Correspondingly, interdisciplinary connections, particularly with other social sciences but also psychology, gain new attention.

Gender history illustrates the social turn. Long ignored, because of the inferiority of women in the past and then the lack of interest on the part of Marxist practitioners, the field took off from 1983 onward, with initial work in China soon supplemented elsewhere. A key goal sought sources from women themselves, and as was true in the rise of social history generally the materials available have proved surprisingly rich. The field has also generated fruitful discussions among Chinese and non-Chinese scholars dealing with a common array of topics and methodological issues, though the Chinese also worry about undue foreign influence, or

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<sup>31</sup> My thanks to Brian Platt for suggestions on the Japanese situation.

“theoretical colonization,” including excessive reliance on Western Historical models. Another challenge involves undue generalization based on the experience of Han Chinese; attention to minority experiences is gaining ground. Still, the field displays great vitality, stimulating work on all major time periods and branching out into studies of family, childhood and other topics.

Overall, the capacity of social history to redefine at least part of a classic field of study in China is proving quite remarkable. In the process, Chinese research adds greatly to the body of work in social history generally, and deserves new attention from scholars interested in key topics in the field, regardless of regional specialty.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Social history remains a lively field, globally and in many though not all regional historiographies. It is no longer a pioneering approach, but it continues to expand the topics open to historical inquiry and to enliven and challenge in several regional domains. Whether it would be possible or fruitful to enhance specific identification with the field is open to question: many historians now clearly do social history, often very imaginative social history, with no particular commitment to the label.

It is both a strength and a weakness that social historians respond to regional distinctiveness – as in the topics commanding attention for Africa. Ultimately, some topical expansion will be helpful in some of the regional cases, to create a more common range for inquiry – as is clearly occurring in China. This would also facilitate an increased commitment to more comparative work. Comparative social history has already delivered important dividends in areas like slavery, but there are many other possibilities as part of further maturation. Comparison might also spark greater analytical daring, more efforts at provocative generalization, which would build beyond monographic achievements in the field. Even aside from explicit comparison, we could do a better job identifying some themes that clearly cross regional lines, but almost inadvertently: the growing interest, in many regional cases, in ethnic minorities is a case in point.

A return to greater interest in interdisciplinary collaboration is another desirable next step. Here – again with important exceptions like the Witwatersrand project and some of the bolder work in emotions history – there has been a retreat since the glory days, and it can and should be repaired. Both comparative and interdisciplinary efforts also call for a greater willingness to generate collaborative rather than solo research projects.

Connections with teaching continue to invite, in conventional classrooms and careful outreaches to a wider public alike. Further interaction with world history offers a channel here, in improving our grasp of global-local interactions by exploring their impact on the social experience. Here too there are abundant possibilities.

Finally – and this also links to interdisciplinary, comparative and global dimensions – I would suggest renewed attention to the kinds of big problems which social history can help explore. In a world beset with challenges in the environment or global health, social history offers relevant data and analysis alike. Renewed sense of “relevance” is particularly called for given global challenges in areas like gender relations and economic inequality. Rekindling the older commitment to the “inarticulate,” the common person gains new impetus in a world of multinationals and concentrations of power. For the modern period, a commitment to exploring the social bases and impacts of globalization itself would both celebrate and transcend regional approaches. Contemporary social historians are advancing on many fronts. Happily, and not surprisingly, there is much left to do.

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<sup>32</sup> Wang, Shuo, “The ‘New Social History’ in China: The Development of Women’s History,” in *The History Teacher*, vol. 39, no. 3 (May 2006), pp. 315-23.

## “Social history is almost like a public forum”

*Interview with Hartmut Kaelble*



*Hartmut Kaelble was born 1940 in Göppingen, Germany. He studied history, sociology and law in Tübingen and at the Free University of Berlin, where he also received his doctoral degree in 1966 and did his habilitation in 1971. In 1971 he was also appointed to professor of social and economic history at the Free University of Berlin. In 1991 he joined the history department of Humboldt University, Berlin, and he held this position until his retirement in 2008. He is currently professor emeritus at the history department of Humboldt University. In the 1990s he co-founded the Zentrum für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas (Centre for Comparative History of Europe) and later served as the institution's co-Director. He has received several fellowships and honorary degrees. Professor Kaelble has published extensively on the history of social mobility and social inequalities, the comparative social history of Europe, the social history of European integration, European identity and the methods of historical comparisons. His latest book in English, A Social History of Europe, 1945-2000: Recovery and Transformation after Two World Wars, came out with Berghahn in 2013.*

### **Could you tell us about the start and the major stages of your career?**

Social history for me was always society with politics left in. I started in the early 1960s as a student with a strong interest in the history of political ideas, constitutional history, and the political decision-making in democracies. I believed that interest groups are a difficult, but essential, part of democracy. Therefore I wrote my dissertation on the largest interest group among industrial firms in Germany before 1914, that is, during a period in which democracy was still in the making.

Writing the dissertation I became convinced, as with many other young historians during the *trente glorieuses*, that the foundation of stable democracy lies within society. Hence I was satisfied to work as a social historian and, in 1965, to join a research group on industrialization in Berlin where I worked on a project exploring the social history of the Berlin business elite 1830-1870 - this was the subject of my second book which included a comparative chapter on the social origins of the business elites in Europe and the US. This chapter inspired my interest in the history of social mobility in the 19th and 20th centuries, and, as a consequence, it also sparked my interest in the history of social inequality – this was the topics of three books I wrote in the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout this period I taught as professor at the Free University of Berlin at the institute for social and economic history, which had an excellent international library. I had stimulating research stays at Harvard University (1972-73) and at the St. Antony's College Oxford (1976).

In the early 1980s, in the time of the eurosclerosis, I started to work on the topic, which fascinates me still today, of the emergence of a European society, with a research stay in Rotterdam and numerous research stays in Paris. I wrote a book on the West European society between 1890 and 1980, another book on the comparative history of French and West German society since the late 19th century, and a third book on the representations of European society by Europeans since the late 19th century.

After the fall of the wall and the politicisation of Europe during the 1990s and the early 2000s, when I moved to a chair for social history at Humboldt University, I enlarged the scope of my study of European society to include the eastern part of Europe. This was one reason why I took part in the foundation of the Centre for Comparative History of Europe (*Zentrum für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas*, later *Berliner Kolleg für Vergleichende*

*Geschichte Europas*), which promoted comparison between Eastern and Western Europe. It helped me very much in writing two syntheses of the history of the entire Europe, the history of European society since 1950, and the general history of Europe between 1945 and 1989. For obvious reasons my interest in democracy reemerged. I wrote a book on democracy in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Moreover, I started in this period to reflect more intensively on the methods of comparison. I published a small book for students on historical comparison that contributed to the vivid debate on that topic. For the same reason I participated in the direction of a doctoral school on historical comparison besides the research centre which I just mentioned. The fall of the wall also opened our eyes to the world outside of the North Atlantic space. Hence, I became more interested in global history and, in 2004, I initiated a research centre on representations which brought together experts of regional studies of Africa, the Near East, Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America. This never culminated in a book on global social history, because the administration of this research centre together with the other centers took much of my time.

After my retirement in 2008 I continued to teach at the Humboldt University as senior professor. I was also stimulated by the recent European crisis to work on several projects, including the history of the crisis of European integration, on the sometimes difficult, but much needed and appreciated, cooperation between France and Germany, on the rising social inequality, and also on the new challenges and critiques of the welfare state - an important European particularity.

**What were the most important intellectual and other influences that directed your research and who were those teachers/scholars who had the most significant impact on your work?**

Remembering the influence from others is always arbitrary. I remember that I was influenced by five groups of scholars: (1) scholars in exile during the Nazi period, who either came back to Germany or visited Germany regularly, especially the social historian Hans Rosenberg and the political scientist Ernst Fraenkel; (2) the generation of historians who started their career after World War II, who became professors at an early age and who were very open towards the Anglo-Saxon scientific world, especially: Gerhard A. Ritter, an early comparativist, who supervised my dissertation in 1966; the two evaluators of my habilitation in 1971, Wolfram Fischer, an economic historian, and Rudolf Braun, a social and cultural historian; and at a greater geographical distance, Hans-Ulrich Wehler; (3) comparative social scientists, mostly American, such as Charles Tilly, Reinhard Bendix, Karl Deutsch, and Peter Flora, (4) French historians such as Fernand Braudel, René Girault, Maurice Aymard, Christophe Charle, Etienne François, Michael Werner, Robert Frank, Patrick Fridenson; (5) also by the colleagues and friends of my own generation with whom I worked together in running research centers in Berlin such as the historian Jürgen Kocka, the ethnologist Georg Elwert, the sociologist Martin Kohli, the social scientist Jürgen Schriewer, the historian of the USSR Jörg Baberowski, the political scientist Herfried Münkler, the ethnologist Wolfgang Kaschuba, the historian of the Near East Ulrike Freitag, the historian of Africa Andreas Eckert, and the historian of South East Asia Vincent Houben.

**When did you turn to historical comparisons?**

In the late 1960s, when history in Germany once again became more open towards the idea of international research following the self-isolation of the Weimar period and the Nazi period. In retrospect I remember three motivations for comparative research with the West in the late 1960s. A first motivation was political. We had the impression that we could explore the origins of the Nazi seizure of power, a hot topic for historians since the early 1960s, only by comparing Germany with the stronger and more solid long-term democratic traditions in Western countries, particularly Britain, France, Scandinavian countries, and the USA. We were perhaps too optimistic and naive in believing to find good answers in this comparison

with the liberal West, but this was an inspiring idea for research. A second motivation was more scientific. Since my participation in the research group on early industrialization in Berlin, I was continuously confronted with and finally convinced by the idea that the rise, backwardness or total lack of industrialisation and industrial societies can be analysed only by comparing contrasting cases. It is not astonishing that this idea looked particularly convincing by working on a regional project. I also had the privilege both to work with a very good international library on social and economic history with an impressive budget at the Free University of Berlin and also to meet many visiting scholars from other countries. Very few universities in Germany had international libraries with this quality in my field in addition to this intensive exchange with foreign guests. For all these reasons I did not find it attractive to continue to work exclusively on German history.

**You were the co-founder and one of the directors of the Centre for Comparative History of Europe (*Zentrum für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas, ZVGE*) in 1998 and the succeeding Berlin College for Comparative History (*Berliner Kolleg für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas, BKVGE*) which has qualified as one of the major centres of comparative historical research for a long period of time. The BKVGE, however, ceased to exist some years ago. Was this fact a result of a changing place of comparative history in German academic life?**

Not really. The main goal of the BKVGE was the stimulation of historical comparisons between Eastern and Western Europe. It was successful, since the idea was taken over by other scholars. Because of this success the BKVGE lost its uniqueness. Hence, unfortunately, foundations did not continue to finance the centre for a new generation of directors after our retirement. At the same time, I do not see a decline of comparative studies amongst practical research in Germany. In a leading journal like *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* the number of comparative articles even rose in the 2000s compared to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**The social integration of Europe, that is, the problem of convergences and divergences on the continent, has become a major focus of your research since the 1980s. What were the most significant trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe in that respect?**

The core topic of the research on social integration is in fact the divergence of European societies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then the convergence since the 1950s, first separately and in very different ways throughout the Western and Eastern part of Europe, and then as a common convergence of both parts of Europe since the 1990s. Before 1990 this was an unplanned, unintended and often even unobserved social integration resulting from policies from above and from civil societies in Western Europe, and a planned, intended, highly regulated, and more socially opposed integration from above in the Soviet empire. Several questions are open for further research in my view: (1) How deep was the divide between societies in the Western and Eastern part of Europe between 1945 and 1989, or did the rivalry of Cold War also lead to convergences (this is an old question)? (2) Who exactly were the actors of social integration in governments, administrations, civil societies, and business firms? How can we explain the unplanned, unintended and often even unobserved, but effective and lasting, social integration in Europe? (3) What was the impact of the short lived, failed, violent, repressive, racist social integration and disintegration undertaken by the Nazi regime in occupied European countries: did it become a major cause for the totally different social integration in Western Europe or are there important continuities? (4) Is social integration of Europe a peculiar development without any parallels in history, or does it have imperial characteristics, either as part of a larger American empire, or as an empire of its own with many parallels to investigate for historians in European empires in the past?

Social integration as a complement to political and economic integration of Europe was always more than just the reduction of structural social divergences among European societies. Other important aspects of social integration include the international social interconnections through migration, travel, communication, exchange of ideas, international organisations and movements, marriage, and knowledge of foreign languages and translations. Social integration also always had much to do with encounters between Europeans from different countries in very different ways – an important and often neglected topic. Social integration also always consisted of the representation of European society by Europeans, and a dialogue on European society with non-Europeans.

During the crisis in recent years we learned that a neglected topic of social integration is the awareness of mutual interdependence and solidarity. We might investigate more the historical change of solidarity reaching from the international solidarity between individuals, to the institutional solidarity organised by the European Union and its precursors since the beginnings of European integration in the 1950s. This research might be motivated by the irritating contradiction between the strong support provided by Europeans for international solidarity between members of the European Union, as demonstrated in social science research, and by the highly controversial public debate on financial transfers in the actual European crisis.

**How do you assess the impact of the present crisis on these developments? This question seems to be quite relevant since many observers think that the crisis affects European integration as well. So can we also talk about the crises of European social integration?**

So far I do not see an opposite trend towards rising social divergences and hence towards European structural social disintegration since the beginning of the crisis in 2008. The convergences continue. The divergences in hot topics such as unemployment or social expenditures for instance are now rather smaller, not larger than in the 1980s. But what has changed quite dramatically during the recent crisis is the evaluation of social divergences. Economists often argue that the economic and social divergences within the Euro zone are too large and dangerous for a common currency. They usually do not take into account that divergences are mostly as large in the USA and much larger in other big currency zones such as China, India, Brazil or Russia. In addition, in the heavy disputes between Northern and Southern media and politicians social divergences are often used for attacking the other side. In the Northern part of Europe, social divergences in high social expenditures, in the early age of retirement, in excessive numbers of state employees or in nepotism are seen as major deficits of Southern European societies. These Northern critiques are not always based on solid facts. Even if they are so, these factual divergences are not new. But they are seen in a different way because of the conflict between different regional interests about the financial politics of the European Union and the new awareness of mutual dependency of Union members. Southern Europe is now seen by Northern Europeans as deviant and not as excitingly exotic as it once was. This type of regional interest conflict is normal in national politics, but new on the European level and hence frightening for many people. For these reasons, I see a new situation for historical experts of European convergences and divergences: they work in a much more politicised context than before and I personally see a new task in warning of excessive interpretations of social divergences in Europe.

**How do you see the current situation of social history in Europe?**

It is an important part of history. A substantial number of dissertations – in Germany about a fourth to a third depending on the definition of the field - are written in social history. At the same time social history is not a much formalised, professionalised subdiscipline of history. There are very few chairs in social history, very few leading institutes, and few organisations such as the International Social History Association, and few regular gatherings. There are

various journals, but few recent syntheses and no generally accepted definition of the field. Social history is almost like a public forum that historians visit during parts of their career, but in which few historians work permanently.

Social history has changed strongly since the 1960s when I joined the field. It is no longer primarily a history of social classes and, in addition, which is often forgotten, a history of family and the welfare state as in the 1960s. Today, social history is thematically a much diversified field and it has no common hot topics. A simple definition of the field has become extremely difficult. I would see three major dimensions: the history of social inequality in a broad sense; the history of the pillars of life such as family, work, consumption, values and representations; and the history of the interaction between society and politics. But this is a personal view besides many others. Social history now is less theoretically oriented, less influenced by sociology, less quantitative than in the 1960s, but perhaps more interdisciplinary. It is now closer to the new cultural history, and has much profited from this vicinity, but it is unfortunately more distant from economic history than it was in the 1960s. Social historians in the 1960s were particularly happy, as Eric Hobsbawm explained in his memoirs. Social history was an attractive, innovative, exciting, new field opposing mainstream history. Today social history is an established field, often with stimulating strong motivations, but not with a particular sense of happiness.

**Is the advance of global history and related broader approaches having a significant impact on the discipline of social history in Europe and worldwide?**

I wish it was, since social history was once more closely tied to the national or the local framework than economic history and political history with its diplomatic history branch. Hence global history presents a particular challenge for social history. This might be a reason why the International Social History Association came so late. I do not expect to see a large number of historians suddenly writing on global social history. In the best case I expect three other impacts. I hope for the inclusion of more global perspectives in national and local studies. Moreover I would expect more exchange between social historians of non-European regions and social historians of European countries. This exchange does not happen automatically. It much depends on institutions, history departments, research centres, institutes for advanced studies, and doctoral schools, in which experts of different regions work together. This exchange could define categories such as the 'European century'; that is, these exchanges could clarify what the long 19<sup>th</sup> century actually means for non-European countries and assess how Europe was influenced by non-European societies. Finally I hope that this cooperation will not simply emerge between experts with European and American passports, but will be also an encounter between historians originating from different regions of the world.

**You have written several historical syntheses over the past couple of years. What are your further scholarly plans?**

If time and health is given to me, I want to write syntheses on the history of social inequality in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and on the history of the welfare state in Europe since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Thank you.**

**Interviewed by Béla Tomka**

# A Brief Guide to the European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) Program

by  
Christian De Vito



The Tenth European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) will take place in Vienna from 23 to 26 April 2014. As in the past, the Conference will be organized under the auspices of the International Institute of Social History (IISH). The program and further information about registration and travel grants are available at the conference website:

<http://esshc.socialhistory.org/>

Thirty concurrent sessions will be held at the four-day conference meeting. As in previous conferences, the program will predominantly focus on twenty-seven networks, spanning across “Africa”, “Asia” and “Latin America” and will range from “Labour” and “Women and Gender” to “Politics, Citizenship and Nation”, “Criminal Justice” and “Material and Consumer Culture”. It will also include “Urban” and “Rural”, “Antiquity” and “Middle Ages”, and “Theory”, “Space and Digital History”, “Oral History” and “World History”. For a complete list of networks, see: <http://esshc.socialhistory.org/networks/list>.

Each social historian will, no doubt, find his/her own way through this enormous offering of high quality scholarship, covering virtually every network. Therefore, the four “routes” suggested below, which relate exclusively to sessions scheduled during the first day of the conference, are simply meant to provide a deeper insight into the richness of the program, and as teasers.

The first route covers the particularly numerous sessions regarding Eastern European history. It starts with the session on *Memories of WW2 Traumas*, mainly centred on this area, and continues with *The Transformation of Labour under State Socialism and Migration and Socialist Countries after 1940*. The choice of the last time-slot implies an option between the Balkans (*Bridges of Culture. The Balkans at the Crossroads of Civilizations*) and European Russia’s Far North-East (*Changing Northern Societies Mirrored in Pre-WWII Censuses*).

An alternative path that might appeal to social historians lies at the intersection between labour, gender and migration. This begins with *Working Class Identities*, and moves on to *Economies and Emotion: Kinship, Work, Poverty and Deprivation in Nineteenth Century Britain* and the session proposing an original perspective on the history of prostitution (*Selling Sex in the City*), and reaches *Migration and Inequality in Colonial Societies* – the latter session covering British Malaya, French India and Indochina and French Algeria.

Those interested in global and comparative approaches to social history might have to make a difficult choice on the first timeslot – between sessions on *Global Luxury Commodities: Production, Exchange, Consumption and Valuation* and *Urban Communities in Europe, 1300-1650 – New Social and Economic Perspectives*. The following two timeslots will provide insights on *Transnational Social History* and *Women’s Political Activism between the Local and the Global* respectively. A choice is also available for the last time-slot of the day, this time comprising three sessions: *Trade Unions in International Perspective*, *Travel Reports: Transnational Journeys for Abortion Services* and *Consuming Health, Cures, Medicine and Market in World History (16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*.

The fourth route opens up fascinating perspectives for scholars interested in a historical-anthropological approach. Saxony, Austria, Sweden and Finland form the background of the session on *At the Mercy of Natural and Supernatural Forces. Health, Mind and Suicide in a Historical Perspective*, followed by either a session on *The Confluence of the Social Sciences and History in the Study of Chinese Religion* or the one on *Scandal in the Early Modern*

*World*. For the third and fourth timeslots, the choice will be between two double sessions: *Urban Memory, Language and the Social History of Politics (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* or *Developing Distinction: Objects and Practices* – the latter will ultimately lead social historians through noble and bourgeois ideas and practices of distinction relating to French opera, Central European travelling culture, Nazi “stew Sundays” and Argentinean horse racing, among others.

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## **Workshop on Global Labour History at the University of Pavia, Italy**

by  
*Christian De Vito*



A workshop on Global Labour History (GLH) was held at the University of Pavia, Italy, on 17 October 2013. It was organized by the *Centro Studi Popoli Extraeuropei* of the University within the framework of a recently funded PRIN project titled “State, Plurality, Changes in Africa”, in which the Pavia research unit will specifically address African labour history. Introducing the meeting, Pierluigi Valsecchi and Massimo Zaccaria, respectively coordinator and member of the research unit, stressed the need for an approach to African labour history that will break away from the traditional Eurocentric perspective, and also bring together researchers and PhD students of the Faculty and external scholars based at the International Institute of Social History (IISH), where GLH first developed.

The discussion focused around two presentations.

Christian G. De Vito (honorary fellow, IISH and research assistant at the University of Leicester), opened the workshop by introducing the development of GLH since the 1990s, pointing to key-issues such as the re-conceptualization of the “working class” and the centrality of the study of the process of commodification of labour and the multiple labour relations involved. He also presented two examples of how GLH has been conceptualised: the Collective Research Model, developed through research on textile workers, dockers, shipbuilders and prostitutes; and the *Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations* (<https://collab.iisg.nl/web/labourrelations>), involving over fifty scholars from all continents in order to “provide statistical insight into the global distribution of all types of labour relations in five historical cross-sections: 1500, 1650, 1800, 1900, and 2000”. Finally, De Vito addressed the issue of how the “global” is conceptualized in GLH – mainly through a macro-analytical, comparative, and transnational approach. He also proposed further spatial perspectives centred on connections among individuals, goods, ideas, and representations.

Stefano Bellucci, head of the IISH desk for Sub-Saharan Africa, stressed the marginality that has thus far characterized African labour history, and demonstrated the potential of three key-issues in GLH. First, he addressed the multiple labour relations in African history by making references to the taxonomy developed by the scholars involved in the *Global Collaboratory* project. Second, he presented a general typology of trade union organizations and, at the same time, underlined the need to expand the research to more informal organizations as well, taking the African context fully into account. Third, Bellucci gave examples of possible research topics and methodologies, including themes on migrant labour, transnational waves of collective actions, global labour chains and intrinsically global occupations, such as the transport and the maritime sectors.

Almost all participants commented on the presentations and shared their own research experiences. The discussions particularly focused on three issues: a) methodological issues relating to the conceptualization of spatiality in transnational studies, micro-history and new imperial histories. In this respect, the importance of the role of the State (and power in general) was stressed, for example, studies that systematically seek to overcome a methodologically nationalist approach. b) the need to reflect on the socio-historiographical construction of categories such as “unemployed”, “slavery”, “peasants”, “convicts”, and on the actual possibility of comparisons among groups that are fundamentally different, even if they are referred to by the same concepts; c) the need to expand the GLH approach to other categories of labour, such as artisans, tailors and soldiers. Through references to the participants’ empirical studies, a promising picture of new trends in research on Italian colonialism and Italian migration to Africa emerged.

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## European Labour History Network Meeting

*International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 12 October 2013*

by  
*Astrid Verburg*



### **Some background information**

The founding of the French Labour History Network was announced recently in Dijon, inspired by the establishment of the Italian Società a few months earlier. Our French colleagues expressed a desire to collaborate with other labour historians and Marcel kindly offered to organize a meeting at the IISH and invite European labour historians to discuss the matter.

The meeting at IISH had two objectives: to get acquainted with other academics in the field and to check out if it was helpful to form a coordinated European Labour History Network; and, if possible, consider the issues/topics for collaboration. This was to be done through an extensive round of introductions to get to know one other, followed by a discussion of possible forms of collaboration.

### **Introductions Part**

Marcel van der Linden opened the meeting at 10 am. Three colleagues had given their apologies, namely, Cristina Borderías (Barcelona), Michaela Maier (VGA Vienna) and Marien van der Heijden (IISH). Cristina had also offered to host a future meeting. Marcel introduced two representatives from the Brazilian Network *Mundos do Trabalho* (Worlds of Labour): Larissa Correa and Paulo Fontes.

The participants introduced themselves and spoke on their work.

### **Social History Portal**

Donald Weber gave a presentation on the Social History Portal (<http://www.socialhistory-portal.org/>), the main outcome from the HOPE (Heritage of People’s Europe) project. The portal displays the collected works/collections of participating institutions and aspires to become the central catalogue of IALHI members (IALHI–International Association of Labour History Institutions, [www.ialhi.org](http://www.ialhi.org)).

The easily accessible collections mainly comprise visual items such as photographs, posters and single items from libraries or single documents. The contributors will need to further build on these materials to develop a large database of complete collections, including the

input of minutes of trade-union meetings etc. Currently, researchers might consult specific archives. The Portal also includes a Social and Labour History News section. The digitalized European collections are also available online at Europeana ([www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu)).

### **Discussion on the European Labour History Network**

After much discussion, participants approved the establishment of a European Labour History Network (ELHN). The network might function as a pathway to share knowledge and (digital) material, to jointly apply for grants, etc. How could this be done?

Two main methods were proposed:

- ELHN organize a wide-ranging conference on Labour History to bring together as many interested scholars as possible
- ELHN become an umbrella organization for small working groups with specific topics or responsibilities. All academics/scholars attached to the ELHN will be invited to create working groups, with the network being used for meeting/contacting potential collaborators.

A central (temporary) coordinating committee be formed to coordinate these activities, organize the broad conference, and assist the working groups. In IALHI the coordination task is done by a consortium that functions as a legal representative. This is not necessary for this network at the present time.

Rationale for organizing a broad or wide-ranging conference

- Opportunity to attract and support young scholars' participation and showcase their specific areas
- Create a platform for wider networking and future collaborative research
- Opportunity to undertake transnational comparative studies
- Focussing on all aspects of Labour history
- Inclusion of all academics/scholars who are interested

Rationale for establishing smaller working groups, which may be either for specific projects or for longer-term collaboration.

- Re: Journals. Provide an opportunity for Journal Editors to jointly discuss collaboration options, problems, and resolving matters. This could be done within the context of collegiality and competitiveness. Interesting topics could be: (lack of) item, translation, transition to open access. Aad Blok, Silke Neunsinger and Frank Georgi will organize such a working group.
- Re: Joint applications for grants to fund research groups.
- Groups on collected works/collections: to assemble data, sources or bibliographies on specific topics.
- Specialist research working groups where scholars can closely work together on specific topics.

Establishing the conference and working groups: Problems and Prospects

- Too many commitments to enable participation in yet another conference, another working group. A possible solution would be joint meetings within the existing structures: ESSHC, IALHI, ITH, for a possible conference on industrial action and social conflict. The ESSHC labour history network is very small and only 50 per cent of the papers were accepted for the 2014 conference. Thus it could form the basis for the working groups. ESSHC is the largest forum for scholars, IALHI is for those working on collections, while ITH has the greatest potential for bridging these gaps. The ITH is probably too small and should be opened up, especially with respect to themes and issues.
- Lack of funding to participate in a variety of conferences, especially for young scholars from Eastern and Southern Europe.

- How do we create visibility? Information can be circulated via the following channels:
  - o Labnet (<http://www.iisg.nl/labnet/>)
  - o The Social History Portal, which could be further developed as a platform for dialogue between those interested in collections and researchers.
  - o A web-based discussion platform on the cyber net. Donald Weber has agreed to organize this.

### **Summary of what has been achieved**

- Establishment of the European Labour History Network (ELHN)
- Appointment of a provisional coordinating committee comprising Marcel van der Linden, Stefano Musso, Silke Neunsinger, Leda Papastefanaki, Tibor Valuch, Xavier Vigna, Donald Weber and Susan Zimmermann.  
(They intend to hold their first meeting later in the day)
- Organization of a first broad conference probably in 2015, and possibly in conjunction with other events, such as ITH in Berlin or with the Strikes and Social Conflicts conference in Barcelona.
- Formation of working groups (and appointment of coordinators)
  - Feminist Labour History (coordinator Susan Zimmermann)
    - Long term perspectives on remuneration (Michel Pigenet, Leda Papastefanaki)
    - Factory/ worksite history (Görkem Akgöz)
    - Industrial heritage and structural change (Christian Wicke)
    - Workers politics and social movements (Paulo Fontes)
    - Imperial labour history (Keith Laybourn)
- Future action
  - Meeting of the coordination committee in Vienna, during the ESSHC, 23-26 April 2014. (Marcel to organize this with Astrid)
  - Meeting of the journals group in Vienna, during the ESSHC (to be organized by Silke)
  - Creation of a virtual information / communication / discussion platform (Donald Weber)

### **A New Journal with Flavour of Social History: The Hungarian Historical Review**



The *Hungarian Historical Review* (HHR), established in 2012, is a peer-reviewed international social sciences and humanities journal. The *HHR*'s main geographical focus is Hungary and East-Central Europe in general. The journal aims to stimulate dialogue on East-Central European history in a transnational context and it fills a lacuna in the field. It provides a forum for articles and reviews in English on Hungarian and East-Central European history, thus making Hungarian historiography accessible to a wider audience and contributing to the broader international scholarly discourse.

The quarterly journal is published by the Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities (RCH), Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), Budapest. The Chief Editor is Pál Fodor (Director General, RCH HAS), while the Editors include: Péter Apor (RCH HAS), Gábor Demeter (RCH HAS), Gabriella Erdélyi (RCH HAS), Sándor Horváth (RCH HAS), Judit Klement (RCH HAS), Veronika Novák (Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest), Tamás Pálosfalvi (RCH HAS). All issues of *HHR* are dedicated to a specific topic in the field of social history.

#### **Vol 1. 1–2/2012 Urban History**

The scholarship on urban history in Hungary has a long tradition and has won international recognition (one could mention here the work of Péter Hanák, Vera Bácskai, or Gábor Gyáni, for example). Continuing on this tradition, the first issue of the *Hungarian Historical Review* addressed this topic. The issue offered a selection of some of the finest works of Hungarian scholarship on the distinctive aspects of urban history in Central Europe. The articles mainly focussed on the uses and transformations of urban spaces, as well as on the way these spaces were managed, from the early modern era to the Second World War (Ágnes Flóra, Béla Vilmos Hihalik, Gábor Czoch, Roland Perényi, Erika Szívós). A second focus centred on the strategies used by the cities' residents either to become, or continue being, members of the urban elites (István H. Németh, Árpád Tóth) during the adaptation phase in the new political system (Ágnes Nagy).

The articles are already available on the website of *HHR*:

<http://www.hunghist.org/index.php/issue-current/79-hhr-issue/76-volume-1-issue-1-2-2012>

#### **Vol 1. 3–4/2012 Migrations**

The "Migrations" issue of the *Hungarian Historical Review* represented a contribution to the scholarship on migration as an historical topic, especially in the East-Central European context. The authors situated migration in an interdisciplinary and comparative framework, building on the findings of relevant international scholarship. Their contributions include highly pertinent themes on nineteenth and twentieth-century migration, such as the function of migration history in global history (Gábor Gyáni); the history of migration policies (Balázs Ablonczy); patterns of international migration in East Central Europe; exiles and forced migration and its discursive representations (Heléna Tóth, Tibor Frank, Matěj Spurný, András Lénárt, Stefan Troebst); net migration in Southeastern Europe (Attila Melegh); language and identity; perceptions of immigrants' access to welfare; and the role of migration in defining ethnicity and national identity (Sándor Hites).

The articles are already available on the website of *HHR*:

<http://www.hunghist.org/index.php/issue-current/79-hhr-issue/110-volume-1-issue-3-4-2012>

### **Vol 2. 1/2013 Reformations**

The issue on Reformations consists of studies dealing with diverse aspects of the Protestant Reformation in Hungary and is divided into three sections, according to the period covered. The first paper uses philological methods to support the contention that the use of a new evangelical language played an essential role in the identity formation of the early adherents of the new tenets in the urban context of Upper Hungary (Zoltán Csepregi). The discussion is followed by a nuanced debate on the active role played by lay people in religious change in rural areas (Gabriella Erdélyi). Another article reinterprets Holbein's famous painting of the Dead Christ, pointing to its intellectual roots in the radical reformation (Pál Ács). Next, an important essay challenges, relying on a close reading of the sources, the established but highly questionable views with regard to Transylvanian Protestantism in the sixteenth century. According to the author the religious laws of 1568/71 were intended to assert the Protestant identity, at the time undivided, of the principedom, and not the equality or tolerance of four different confessions (Mihály Balázs). The final article offers a comparative analysis of church discipline in the Reform Diocese of Küküllő in Transylvania, which reached its climax in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Réka Kiss).

These articles will be available on the *HHR* website in 2014.

### **Vol 2. 2/2013 Angevin History**

The second issue of the *Hungarian Historical Review* examines Hungarian history of the Angevin age and Hungary's ties with the rest of Europe at the time. The articles include traditional studies of political and urban history, as well as an assessment of international relations; artistic representation; and the cults of saints. Most of the specific articles adopt interdisciplinary perspectives, for instance in a study of the phenomena of political history (interregnum) in the broader historical context (Attila Zsoldos); and an analysis of the political background of a significant moment in art history (Vinni Lucherini). The articles include the entire fourteenth century, though some of them also extend into the fifteenth (such as Gábor Klaniczay's article on the cult of Saint Margit and Veronika Csikós' article on János Hédervári, bishop of Győr). Because of their diversity of approaches and their international perspective, the articles offer a considerably more nuanced understanding of Hungarian history and its European context in the fourteenth century.

The articles will be available on the website of *HHR* in 2014.

### **IN PREPARATION:**

#### **Vol 2. 3/2013 Ethnicity**

Most of the articles will focus on how ethnicities were created and perceived in the interwar period and after World War II in Hungary, Romania (particularly in Transylvania), and Czechoslovakia (particularly the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia). Furthermore, they explore how ethnicity and "politics of ethnicity" changed the everyday practices of social actors; how they then found social representation in small, local communities at the level of everyday life, and how "ordinary people" handled their relations in multi-ethnic settings.

#### **Further issues:**

Vol 2. 4/2013 Gábor Bethlen and his Age

Vol 3. 1/2014 History of the Family: Marriage and Divorce in Eastern Europe

Vol 3. 2/2014 Fabricating History: Representations, Manipulation, Evidence

Vol 3. 3/2014 Identity, Loyalty, and State: The Balkans in and after the Ottoman Empire  
Vol 3. 4/2014 Confessions in Social Relations

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