

Global Biographies – a writers' workshop

August 29, 2019 – South Campus, Room 12.4.07

12:00-13:00 - Welcome and Lunch

13:15 - 15:15 Panel 1 - Time and watershed moments

Diana Natermann (Leiden University)

Natalia Aleksion (Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Tuoro College)

Haakon A. Ikononou (University of Copenhagen)

Chair: Gunvor Simonsen

15:15-15:45 - Coffee and light snack

16:00 - 18:00 Panel 2 - Identity and Mobility

Ozan Ozavci (Utrecht University)

Stefan Eklöf Amirell (Linnaeus University)

Chair: Laura Almagor

19:00 - Dinner – Restaurant No. 2 (<https://www.nummer2.dk>)

August 30, 2019 – South Campus, Room 12.3.07

09:00-09:30 - Coffee and light snack

09:30-11:30 - Panel 3 - Analytical Scales

Benjamin Auberer (University of Heidelberg)

Gunvor Simonsen (University of Copenhagen)

Laura Almagor (University of Sheffield)

Chair: Haakon A. Ikononou

11:30-12:30 - Lunch

12:45-14:45 - Panel 4 - Exceptional Normal

Rósa Magnúsdottir (Aarhus University)

Holger Weiss (Åbo Akademi University)

Isa Blumi (Stockholm University)

Chair: Gunvor Simonsen

Concluding remarks on the process towards publication

The SAXO Institute

University of Copenhagen

Karen Blixens Plads 8, 2300 København S

Briefly on the four methodological approaches

Time and periodization:

“Any occurrence”, writes Conrad, “can be interpreted within different and multiple time frames”. This is, at once, a banal and profound insight. For, if we take its methodological implications seriously, we may use the biography as a method of unpacking the layers of time, question temporalities of events unfolding on larger scales, and criticize perceived ‘breaks’ in history and even historiographical periodization. One reason for this is that the global biographer can distinguish between and connect experienced time and historical time. Put bluntly, one person’s experience, agonies and memories of war may last long into historical peacetime. Just as individual stories can be used to defy neat geographies, then, they may be used to scrutinize chronologies produced on a more abstract or aggregated scale. However, what is perhaps even more intriguing is that the global biography allows us to hold together and analyse the interplay between several scales of time. History unfolds – in a Braudealian sense – in several tempi, and the biographical approach allows us to grasp how they interact with, and indeed produce, *experienced* time, which on the other hand, might engage, resist, cheat (or even alter) historical time. The chapters of this section seek to use *time* and *periodization* as a tool to write global biographies. As outlined above, this can be done in several ways, but common for all of them is the attempt to engage with either globally produced time or periodizations of global events (or indeed both).

Analytical scales:

Scales are central to most global history writing. To avoid global history operating only on a highly structural level – which often favours economic and geographic forces, narratives across centuries, a limited number of ‘causes’, and easily tends towards teleology – and to connect global processes to human experiences and engagement with the same, historians have turned to scales as a fruitful way of not only writing engagingly about abstract developments, but also as a way to explore the ‘depth’, heterogeneity and entanglements of global phenomena in local contexts. Just as Gerritsen holds that a locality can be ‘produced’ on several scales – ranging from the local to the global – so, we may engage with the individual as someone produced and engaging with several scales at ones. Thus, analytical scales – as we historians apply them – also need to resonate with and bring forth actual scales. The overweight kid may blame metabolism, family upbringing, the local supermarket, national tax regimes on sugar and additives, or the global power and productive networks of cocoa and sugar producers. All scales matter, and the historian’s questions determine which are brought into play and how. Contributors to this section use scales in such a way and strive to connect the individual life with the global scale. In this way, the biography becomes perhaps the sharpest tool to unpack the concrete manifestation of global phenomena, and the best way to challenge established narratives about its reality.

Identity and mobility:

As alluded to in the first section, individuals rarely adhere to the neat geographies that historians tend to think within. Transnational history has significantly challenged such 'box' thinking, by following ideas, people and goods *across* boundaries. This challenging of established spatialities is important for global history too. However, for both fields it might have led to somewhat of a mobility fetishism: the more boundaries crossed and the stranger their combination, the better. This has – perhaps – marginalized explorations of transnational and global phenomena and less extraordinary (im)mobility. More significant in our context, it has shifted the biographers focus from biography as a method of understanding the relationship between mobility and other phenomena, to an empirical celebration of protagonist's movements. This section wants to centre mobility within the biographical approach, to explore its relationship with identities. How can we use the biography to explore the co-constitutive relationship between the two, and – significantly – how can we relate both our protagonist's mobility and identity as shaped by global processes. The globalization of Wilsonian ideals of 'self-determination' towards the end of World War One and the global reach of imperial rail and sea-routes – for instance – were productive for both the identity and mobility of many interwar intellectual nationalists (and internationalists). The triangulation of the interplay between identity, mobility and global processes is central to this section.

Exceptional normal:

If the exceedingly mobile protagonist mentioned above was used as an analytical prism to shed light on social contracts and labour conditions in some 1600s agrarian society – an outlier that the historian uses to highlight the strict restrictions on physical mobility usually prevailing in that historical time and place, and – even better – perhaps to challenge some established interpretations of the same, well, then, we are very close to what Italian micro-historians labelled the 'Exceptional Normal'. This, then, is not the choice of an exceptional (as in fantastical) character for the sake of narrative zest or increasing book-sales, but to choose the outlier as an analytical tool – a peripheral gaze on normality, centre and taken-for-granted historical prose on the matter. It is not difficult – as Trivellato has argued so well – to see how this might be useful in the global biography. The 'exceptional normal' is a deliberate biographical decentring of global processes; and coming at them from a new angle – the thought is – promises to give new answers. But it is more substantial than this, for the in-depth sources, detailed scrutiny of individual traits and practices, and intense contextualization, might alter "the normal" all together. Thus, by altering the normality of the local, one may question the normality of the global. Contributions to this section does just that, and thus explores yet another crucial methodological category of the global biography.