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Cross-Cultural Comparison in Times of Increasing Transregional Connectedness: Perspectives From Historical Sciences and Area Studies on Processes of Respatialization

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Key words: cross-cultural comparison; spatial analysis; study of entanglements; cultural transfers; history of historiography; area studies; transregional studies

Abstract: In this article, I follow the history of debates about cross-cultural comparison within the historical disciplines and the social sciences and argue that, depending on the historical context, such comparisons are related to the study of entanglements in one way or the other. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, comparative history was the subject of sharp criticism while comparison remained a prominent and widely undisputed method in the social sciences. This can be explained by the different ways in which historians and social scientists react to the debate about globalization. In the meantime, within the disciplines of history, the harsh opposition between *Vergleich* [comparison] and *Verflechtungsanalyse* [the study of entanglements] has made room for a series of innovative approaches to combine them in a reflexive way.

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1. Cross-Cultural Comparison in Times of the Emerging Global Condition

Cross-cultural comparison has developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into a valuable tool for societies undergoing processes of self-identification and self-positioning in contexts larger than the single society—be it at a continental, transregional or even global level. Such comparisons have gained increasing importance since the world entered the global condition (KAELBLE, 1999). In this context, the "global condition" refers to the situation emerging in the mid-nineteenth century that brought societies into a new relationship with one another (GEYER & BRIGHT, 1995). Long before this period, undoubtedly, there were connections and encounters. Historians of what is called "early modern times" have collected impressive evidence of the long-lasting existence of transcontinental ties. Additionally, archaeologists together with historians of periods prior to 1500 have provided data on migration patterns, the exchange of plants and animals, and inspiration for socio-economic practices and cultural techniques (BORGOLTE, 2016). [1]

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In short, "globalization" has a very long history and must not be reduced to the last two or three centuries. Nevertheless, at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the quality of such connectivity across the globe changed dramatically. Global historian BAYLY (2002) proposed the distinction between "archaic" and "modern" globalization. Economic, migration, and cultural historians, as well as analysts of international relations, have now taken this up and postulated a transitional phase between roughly 1750 and 1850, during which the global condition was first imagined, politically negotiated, ideologically charged, and finally materially realized. As means of communication and transport became increasingly available and widespread—by telegraph and steamship—it became possible to gradually establish world markets, resulting in further global integration. This transition was not an abrupt change from less developed to more developed patterns of globalization. Rather,

> "the argument is that the period saw the subordination of older forms of globalization to new and yet inchoate ones emerging from Euro-American capitalism and the nation-state. An essential feature of this proto-globalization was its continued utilization, or ‘cannibalization' of forms of archaic globalization" (p.50). [2]

The fundamental difference between the phases before and after this transitional period can be seen in the underlying worldviews. BAYLY summarized these as "cosmic kinship, universal religion and humoral understandings of the body and land" (ibid.) for the time before the nineteenth century, opposed to the emerging, and increasingly dominant, ideologies of nationalism, capitalism, democracy, and consumerism for the period since the nineteenth century. [3]

In particular, the idea of cosmic kinship stood in the way of an all-encompassing territorialization within the established frameworks of the empires that were prevalent until the end of the eighteenth century. Only the idea of peoples' sovereignty swept away this ubiquitous idea. Before, the management of cultural differences in various parts of such expansive empires was comparatively unproblematic, mainly because there was no reference to a continuous assimilation of any kind of generally accepted norms. Despite the efforts to strengthen the centrist tendencies of large empires, archaic globalization was primarily based on very extensive regionalization, which was reinforced still further by the slow and limited means of transport at that time (BANG & BAYLY, 2011; BANG & KOLODZIEJCZYK, 2012; BANG & SCHEIDEL, 2013). [4]

It is therefore no surprise that the nineteenth century has sparked growing interest, not only among global historians (OSTERHAMMEL, 2009) but also among scholars in the field of international studies (ACHARYA, 2014) and in historical sociology, which was popular in the first half of the twentieth century but lost weight within the field of sociology in at least several countries. However, recently there has been renewed interest under the label of global historical sociology (GO & LAWSON, 2017). This is a compelling shift as at the beginning of the 1990s, when the debate on globalization took off, with the social sciences and historiography developing in rather different directions. Social scientists insisted on a radical presentist understanding of globalization, while the

historiographers explored similarities between the current wave of global entanglements and historical predecessors. Within the social sciences, political scientists continued anchoring their narratives in what was called a Westphalian order, largely neglecting historical research concerning the many different forms of statehood that had emerged since the sixteenth century. The erroneous belief in an opposition between the two myths of a seemingly complete sovereign state and the only very recent rise of globalization made a dialogue with historical research considerably difficult. Historians, in contrast, have most often presented their results in the traditional form of a historical narrative but not so often as a theoretical statement challenging the more theory-driven debate among social scientists. [5]

However, with scholars on both sides of this analytical divide becoming more interested in the global condition, a common discussion of methodological nationalism—which was criticized early on by anthropologists, migration researchers analyzing migration, and historians—has begun to take place (BASCH, BLANC-SZANTON & GLICK-SCHILLER, 1992). This discussion further centered on a sharp contrast between globalization and nationalization. Recently, this opposition has weakened to a significant degree, particularly after the previously held theses predicting the end of the control of the nation-state or even its end in general proved to be incorrect. During the period of the financial crisis from 2008 to 2010, states—in fact representing the taxpayers—showed that, through independent action and cooperation, they were able to contain the crisis, which had been created by new techniques of financialization—which in turn were handled by very powerful banks and insurance companies. Such a situation is confirmed by global historical researchers, who consider the emergence of the nation-state in the late nineteenth century not as a denial of global interconnectedness but rather as an attempt to deal with, control, and situate these new global relationships through innovative structures (BREUILLY, 2013; CONRAD, 2006). Accordingly, we can identify, roughly speaking, two phases in the debate about global developments since the early 1990s.

1. In the first phase, social scientists and economists in particular saw in globalization, above all, a means of overcoming previous limitations in nation-states and national economies. They propagated the idea of a world that is or will become flat (FRIEDMAN, 2005). Historians reacted comparatively slowly and rather defensively to this new interpretation of the present. They retreated to the secure terrain of the older historical epochs and claimed more interpretive primacy of the distant past, yet they probably did not explicitly or aggressively enough disturb the emergence of a kind of globalization ideology (for a self-criticism, see ADELMAN, 2017). To this day, the nineteenth century rather than the twentieth century still represents the parade of global histories. However, in historical research and empirical studies, the weight of evidence that counters the short-term presentism has increased (GULDI & ARMITAGE, 2014), dominating large parts of the social sciences.
2. Although, in the beginning, global and transnational historians primarily emphasized the previously underestimated phenomena of border-crossing

> entanglements, in the second phase, a more nuanced and balanced interpretation of connectedness as both a traversing of borders and a reconfiguration thereof came to the fore. Such entanglements do not all travel the same direction or develop to the same degree. Accordingly, differences in entanglements define the course taken by societies in a more and more globalized setting. For example, intentionally becoming entangled with others to one's own profit sits side by side with being entangled in asymmetrical power relations of colonialism. In this understanding, there is not one globalization that may result in the same porousness of borders everywhere. Instead, there are many variants of global projects undertaken by different actors insisting not only on their socio-economic and political aims but also on their worldviews and perceptions of positionality in a world that is growing more and more together while becoming more and more fragmented (and therefore more prone to conflict) at the same time. [6]

These developments have somehow challenged the role of comparison in academic approaches as exercised since the beginning of the twentieth century. It does not come as a surprise that comparative history experienced its first boom at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century—at the height of nationalism in both society and in the sciences (JESSEN & VOGEL, 2002). Even though representatives of classical historicism insisted on the uniqueness of their national histories and therefore rejected comparative approaches, more innovative scholars suggested a comparative design for the study of world history based on national histories (BLANKE, 1991). Recognizing the differences of other societies meant consolidating the particularities of one's own society—imagined, real, or both (ROZBICKI & NDEGE, 2012). Scholars participated in such comparative practices, but they were by far not the only social actors who recognized differences and/or were involved in measuring them. [7]

In contrast, what they believed to be comparison was not the tool that made history or the social sciences more objective but instead an academic exercise that followed—and still follows to this day—widespread societal practices of comparing all types of social phenomena. Since it is anchored in such generally accepted practices, it gains plausibility—at least among the members of this specific society—when it comes to questions such as with whom we should compare, what are the main categories and criteria for comparison, and how should we measure these dimensions (ARNDT, HÄBERLEN & REINECKE, 2011; EPPLE & ERHART, 2015; KETTUNEN, 2006). While many scholars in the humanities at that time were convinced that they had found, in the comparative historical method, a tool to counter the superiority of physical sciences based upon experimentation, they extended the method from comparison between national features observed within Europe (APOR, IORDACHE & TRENCÉNYI, 2012; HROCH, 2005) to statements about the difference between the European and the non-European world—with Europe or the "West" becoming the domain of sociology and (later on) political science, and the other becoming the empire of ethnology and (later on) area studies. History and geography remained somehow in between the two, albeit more inclined to side with the social sciences as long as they did not turn towards the global. [8]

Evidently, comparison has not been an unproblematic exercise since it is closely related to identity formation processes, providing them with colorful clothes of scholarly evidence. This is particularly true as societies have become nationalized since the nineteenth century, when the units of comparison used as a basis by scholars were undisputedly "nations"—meaning either nation-states or spaces of an assumed nationalized culture (ESPAGNE, 1994). Despite the prevalence of the national lens, older layers of cross-cultural comparisons that originated in the encounter between empires or "civilizations" remained active as well (LIEBERSON, 1991) and amalgamated with (at that time) new ideologies like racism and social Darwinism towards the end of the nineteenth century to create modern forms of "civilizing missions" (BARTH & OSTERHAMMEL, 2005). Although cross-cultural comparison gained importance at various points throughout modern history due to growing connectivity, it became at the same time a highly problematic exercise related to traditions of methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism. [9]

During the twentieth century, the debate about the advantages and risks of comparative research designs often took rather confusing directions due to the fact that most people involved identified with the ideal of comparison. It was not only those who were used to confronting two units of analysis—imagined as completely separate from each other—by comparing them who were convinced to produce evidence for similarities and—particularly—differences. In addition, those who saw the need to analyze modern phenomena as mainly interconnected labelled their historiography as comparative. Comparison to them meant transcending the borders of region and especially nation-states and allowed for a transnational history *avant la lettre*. [10]

Even before World War I, cultural historians, such as the German LAMPRECHT (1910), propagated comparative history while insisting at the same time on the fact that "those in the world history of the twentieth century will prevail who will be able to learn in the most productive ways from others" (p.624). LAMPRECHT (1906), fascinated by the US at least since his own travels to the Midwest, saw in this respect the unique capacity of the North American melting pot to profit from the many entanglements with the countries of origin represented by its immigrants. In his opinion, world history had to embark on the adventure of comparatively measuring such capacities to appropriate foreign cultural achievements. The means for such an exercise, one has to confess, were completely insufficient, the operationalization far from convincing, and the theoretical foundations rather rudimentary—but the ambition was there (for a detailed description of LAMPRECHT's attempts to bring his approach to maturity, see MIDDELL, 2005, pp.604-619). What LAMPRECHT presented as comparative cultural history was often much less comparative than its author thought and in fact it was very much the opposite: an entangled or connected history more interested in entanglements than in differences. It was marked by the ambivalent experience of his time, on the one hand connected by emerging world markets, circulating cultural features, and increasing mass migration, but on the other hand reacting to such connectedness with strong nationalist identities. Transformations of societies depend in his view as much as on external factors and the

interdependencies between societies as on internal drivers towards a more and more coherent nation and national economy. Only a few years after his confession that mutual learning would be more important over the twentieth century than national obstinacy, LAMPRECHT himself wrote in the context of nationalist mobilization during World War I completely different texts supporting now German expansionism. [11]

LAMPRECHT was far from alone in his attempt to find a new equilibrium between comparison and the study of entanglements—the French historian BERR and the Belgian historian PIRENNE inspired an entire school of thought and one of the most innovative book series in world history writing, and Lord ACTON had already founded the tradition of Cambridge world histories (MIDDELL, 2008; SCHÖTTLER, 2004). French historian BLOCH followed in PIRENNE's and BERR's steps when introducing the 1928 congress of the newly founded "International Committee of Historical Sciences." His plea for comparative history as a way to overcome the horrifying nationalism of World War I and the period immediately thereafter has been read by many as the ultimate text making the case for comparison. And it is true that BLOCH (1928) presented in the first part of his lecture all the arguments outlining the advantages of comparative history, whereas in the second part (unfortunately often overlooked by subsequent comparatists) he rather problematized the comparative method for very fundamental reasons (ATSMA & BURGUIÈRE, 1990; MIDDELL, 2000). Both arguments were directly related to the unavoidable entanglements between modern societies—BLOCH (1928) tackled examples of agrarian history since the Middle Ages with a mythical past when societies were completely separated from each other and therefore not able to exercise any influence on each other. The first argument concerned terminology, and BLOCH reminded his audience that there is no such thing as faultless terminology, as it is always derived based on certain terms from a historically and geographically specific reality, which is then translated into abstract notions that are used to describe realities other than the original one. Similarly, with his second argument, he hints at the fact that no historical actors lived without being in touch with the interwoven realities of their times, framing their perception of these realities in a deeply entangled way and not in a culturally pure (whatever that may mean) way. [12]

BLOCH was not the only one to struggle with the difficulties of comparative history in the years between the two World Wars of the twentieth century. Paradoxically, it was *Volksgeschichte* [ethnonational history] that made concentrated efforts to develop indicators for a cross-cultural comparison—using statistics, mapping strategies, socio-linguistics, and onomastic techniques—in order to demonstrate that there were regions where the population was essentially ethnically homogenous (OBERKROME, 1993). At the borders of such regions, scholars claimed a *Kulturgefälle* [cultural gap] between a superior and an inferior culture. Such statements served as a way to legitimize expansion, occupation, and eventually even genocide. As a by-product of such efforts, however, the same scholars produced, unintentionally, a great deal of knowledge about the effects of migration and ethnic mixing in regions they tried to characterize as natural *Lebensraum* [Habitat]. While BLOCH and others were

guided by the assumption that cross-cultural comparison becomes unavoidably complicated due to entanglements, ethnonationalist historiography tried (ultimately unsuccessfully) to demonstrate the purity of ethnic communities and national cultures. [13]

I will begin with a description of the role of comparison during the second half of the twentieth century (Section 2), to be followed by a look at the move towards the study of entanglements (Section 3). After that, my conclusion will come in two parts, the first one dealing with the combination of comparative work and the study of entanglements in the focus on comparing entanglements (Section 4), and the second looking at the connection between the previously analyzed methodologies and the spatial turn (Section 5). [14]

2. Comparison after World War II—From the Three Worlds of the Cold War Era to Increasing Transnationalism

After World War II, the ethnonationalist variant of comparison remained popular in the public eye but became marginalized in academia. But a cultural gap lived on, now transformed into another version of diffusionist centrism, this time organized around the notion of the West. Under the conditions of the Cold War, it was echoed by Marxist-Leninist holism, which placed the socialist world at the center of its normative practice of comparison. Both versions contained strong features of continued Eurocentrism when disqualifying the majority of societies in the world as *developing*, *on the road towards socialist transformation*, or simply as *underdeveloped* (ENGERMAN, 2011). A particular version of Western-centric historiography flourished in West Germany, where historians searched for reasons why Germany was not immune to national socialism as France and Britain seemed to have been. In the practice of comparison, all these cases largely confused the concrete investigation of real types and the confrontation with ideal types—of the West, of a developed world, of democracy in the West, and so on. Initial interest in cross-cultural comparison in the late nineteenth century grew under the dual influence of emergent nation-states and ongoing colonial and imperialist features in the relationship between Europe and North America, on the one hand, and Africa and large parts of Asia, on the other. [15]

These spatial figurations changed, at least partially, with the advent of the Cold War in the late 1940s and decolonization, reaching its peak in 1960/61. However, this figuration of spatial formats (MARUNG & MIDDELL, 2019) was not stable for very long, and a new crisis of spatial semantics soon arose in 1970s. The terminology of the "transnational"—at the level of organizations as well as of companies—indicated a process of rebuilding spatial orders. Spatial orders not only refer to nation-states and empires but also to all sorts of configurations of spatial formats, such as territorial ones and chains, networks, or enclaves. Such orders had never existed in the singular, but rather only as a set of competing—and often overlapping—spatial orders organized by powerful but never omnipotent actors trying to dominate a process of re-ordering in response to the porousness of past orders in history (ibid.). [16]

Consequently, the previously dominant version of comparison came under strong critique in the 1970s, with postmodern attacks on the ideological character of historical master narratives (LYOTARD, 1979). Cultural historians called attention to the structuralist form of arguments and argued for overcoming them by focusing on individuals and their worldviews instead of on the determinism of class structures. The methodological nationalism inherent in a type of comparison that confronts states and nations no longer seemed entirely appropriate, and it was not by accident that this turn towards greater attention to border-crossing processes and phenomena went hand in hand with the debate about a "cultural turn" or many cultural turns (BACHMANN-MEDICK, 2016; JAMESON, 1998). Cross-cultural comparison from World War II to the 1970s was driven by two major cleavages: one between democracy and totalitarianism and the other between the developed and the underdeveloped world. Modernization theory had left two questions unanswered.

1. The first question addressed the problem of why some societies had managed to advance to modern industrialization and the corresponding social structures, while only a few latecomers were able to catch up successfully (like Japan), and why so many societies had failed to modernize (LANDES, 1998).
2. The second question dealt with the problem of why some modern (Western) societies had failed to develop the predicted democratic political regime, instead becoming autocratic and fascist, with all the cruel consequences people were very conscious of following World War II (IGGERS, 1968). [17]

It is evident that these questions were particularly pertinent when raised within the framework of a master narrative based on two assumptions.

1. The first saw methodological nationalism as unproblematic since it worked with the idea that societies are primarily driven by their internal structures and that such societies have been perpetually existing entities throughout the entire process of modernization since, at least, early modern times. For example, what had been relatively unquestioned in the case of modern France needed some intellectual creativity, as in the case of Germany, which became a unified state only in 1871 (most often authors solve the problem of a lacking German nation-state before 1871 by confusing Prussia with Germany), and even more so in the case of larger empires such as the Russian, Chinese, or Ottoman empires.
2. The second assumption concerned the undisputable final goal of any historical development—the modern democratic society—which was first achieved in the West and was to be followed as a blueprint by non-Western societies. [18]

Opponents of such a master narrative were in search of an alternative story that insisted on the revolutionary origin of modernity and the necessity of a second revolution towards socialism after the first one had established capitalism. Ideally, in the Marxist interpretation, capitalism had a tendency to erase from societies all premodern and non-capitalist elements. At the same time, it reproduced social

inequality at an even higher level, not only within a given society but also between societies. From this perspective, comparison was instrumentalized to demonstrate how far the fundamentally contradictory character of capitalism in the society under investigation had already emerged. The structuralist character of these ways of thinking of cross-cultural comparison was met with criticism in the late 1970s. Many historians became less and less convinced that reducing social groups to a few characteristics such as income would help in predicting the outcome of political conflict, and they turned their attention to cultural features and cultural milieus rather than continuing to focus on classes and class-conflict as the basis for understanding society. The cultural turn concentrated on subjectivity and examined the emergence of new social movements—ranging from feminism to environmentalism—as border-crossing phenomena that no longer fit the rigorous understanding of "society" that had been prominent in structuralist social sciences until then. [19]

At the same time, the promises of modernization theory as well as of Marxist-Leninist visions of a rapid transformation blatantly clashed with the realities in those regions, where the majority of countries had gone through the process of decolonization. It became clear that development remained dependent on historical entanglements (colonialism) and current alliances—as apparent in a global Cold War (WESTAD, 2008). Postcolonialism insisted on the systematically entangled character of the world and the resulting political responsibilities to ensure development opportunities (HUGGAN, 2013). Evidently, this was not without consequences because the tradition of cross-cultural comparison served, as postcolonial critics remarked, to keep the Third World in an inferior position by repeating a framework within which African, Asian, and Latin American societies had already been assigned seats at the end of the train heading into the future. [20]

Methodological nationalism, as practiced and popular until the 1970s, clashed with new trends and observations—postcolonialism received increasing attention in less territorialized social categories such as gender with a focus on border-crossing trends in modern capitalism (for example, economic integration within the triangle between the US, Japan, and Western Europe, or the growing importance of financial institutions active across continents). Optimism for a supranational organization of political interests, such as the European Community, played a role as well—at least in facilitating a transnational practice of study and research with exchange programs. In retrospect, the height of confrontational comparison of national cases appears, first of all, to be characterized by methodological Eurocentrism and its normative assumptions. Whereas to some the criticism of the epistemological foundations of such comparison appears fatal (WALLERSTEIN, 1996), others are not convinced, and they hint at the advantages of a practice that can serve as a point of reference, especially in times of globalization in an ever-growing number of cases. While cross-cultural comparison came under attack in academic debate, the practice of ranking expanded at a phenomenal rate and demonstrates that comparison has not lost its value in everyday practices (HEINTZ, 2012). [21]

An entire industry of social scientists invented more and more sophisticated sets of indicators to measure social phenomena: from democracy to corruption, from pollution to exposure to health risks, from criminality to demographic features, from migration to leisure activities, and so on. Once a seemingly qualitative feature had been transformed into measurable quantities, an exponentially greater number of possibilities for correlations opened up (RAGIN, 1989). While there was academic reflection on the pitfalls of such a trend (SKOCPOL & SOMERS, 1980), new possibilities to translate statistics into maps helped to visualize the results of this industry, which resonated well with the demand from media to sum up complex research in a few graphs that are easy to comprehend. That is why we are surrounded by diagrams based on all kinds of comparative work. The critical debate about methods and specifically cross-cultural comparisons has become increasingly disconnected from an ever more generalized practice of comparison that seems to provide "objective" knowledge that is objective precisely because it is derived from measurements (NOVICK, 1988). However, the question remains: What is measured and who defines the items to be measured? [22]

3. From Cross-Cultural Comparison to the Study of Entanglements

As illustrated in the first section, the unavoidable dilemma of how to deal with entanglements in any cross-cultural comparison was already well known throughout the twentieth century. However, since the beginning of the 1980s, this dilemma has received greater attention and has been addressed in various ways. What is different now compared to previous periods of methodological debates is the fact that those distancing themselves from confrontational comparison as the ultimate tool in the humanities and social sciences have started searching for new labels, thus marking a clear methodological difference. During this time, the debate has drawn inspiration not only from the (again) ongoing transnationalization of economies and societies caused by flows of capital, growing trade, and the effects of migration but also from the experience that increasing exchange has not resulted in convergence as both modernization theory and Marxism had predicted (KAELBLE & SCHRIEWER, 2003; PAULMANN, 1998). [23]

Looking at these two trends simultaneously, the French cultural historians ESPAGNE and WERNER (1985, 1987) came to the conclusion that appropriation—or intercultural transfer—was much more important in modern history than diffusion. Based on the example of French-German entanglements, they demonstrated that both societies were closely interwoven, despite whatever intellectuals had said about fundamental differences and eternal enmity. They argued in favor of a research program that could make these often-hidden connections visible in order to overcome methodological nationalism. [24]

One can consider the foundational texts, published symbolically in parallel by a German and a French journal, as the origin of transnational history, but the story is more complicated than that. It took another decade before the discussion about the transnational character of modern societies took off, starting this time in North

America and slowly spreading via American and German studies to Europe (CONRAD & OSTERHAMMEL, 2004; PATEL, 2004), forming a bridge between national and global histories. In the meantime, the North American world history movement around the *Journal of World History*, and its editor BENTLEY, had experimented with a similar approach using the terminology "encounters," which turned out to be more neutral and encompassed any moments of coming into contact—be it premodern or modern contacts (BENTLEY, 1993, BENTLEY & ZIEGLER, 2000). Cultural studies both in Europe and North America propagated at roughly the same time the idea of traveling concepts (BAL, 2002; BEHRENDS, PARK & ROTTENBURG, 2014), insisting on the circulation of ideas across cultural borders. Scholars from the Caribbean, Brazil, and Canada demonstrated the long tradition of hybrid cultures in those particular regions, claiming the origin of modern forms of multiculturalism. They hinted at the colonial situation as the point of departure for such hybridization and strengthened the ties in the debate to postcolonial arguments (GORDON & NEWFIELD, 1996). [25]

As part of this broader intellectual movement, a substantial change took place within the large field of imperial histories. Instead of following old diffusionist concepts that were based on the idea of a cultural gap between the metropolis and the colonies and saw the colonies as being primarily influenced by the more advanced societies of the colonizers (BLAUT, 1993), the analysis of multidirectional influences and of the colonies' impact on the metropolis ("the empire strikes back") gained ground. Connected histories, proposed at the end of the 1990s by SUBRAHMANYAM (1997), became popularized both in the US and in France, where the Indian historian figured prominently among the leading representatives of his discipline. This was accompanied by a crisis surrounding area studies, particularly in the US, where they were criticized for not having been able to predict the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 or the ascendance of Islamist movements at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A broad debate started about the role of area studies and the conceptual dependency on modernization theory. As a result, new approaches echoing the idea of multilateralism and the end of a unipolar world order gained prominence, asking how to operationalize such research scenarios from a methodological standpoint. [26]

These are the main ingredients for the increasing interest in the study of entanglements, but they are not all of them by far. It is difficult to list them all since many of them made substantial efforts to drive their own terminology and to insist on the originality of a particular approach while becoming part of a larger family well anchored in the debate over globalization and the need for new methods. What makes the story so complex and complicated is the fact that different world regions and their respective academic cultures, as well as different (sub)disciplines, were affected by these new trends at different moments (MIDDELL, 2014). [27]

As a consequence of the growing interest in the study of entanglements, more and more pressure was placed on comparative approaches, at least in some disciplines. A volume from a conference in 1993 can be read as the last major endeavor to highlight the great past of comparative social history (HAUPT &

KOCKA, 2009), while a chapter presented at the same conference, although excluded from the volume and therefore published separately, summarized the points of this devastating critique (ESPAGNE, 1994). In this chapter, ESPAGNE insisted on the contradiction between the ambition of comparatists to stimulate a transnational historiography while, at the same time, further constructing national societies as closed entities and therefore contributing to a kind of academic nationalism. He underlined the fact that such comparative history tends to overlook the many foreign elements in any national or regional culture not by chance but systematically, since such mutual constituency makes comparisons more challenging if not almost completely impossible (ESPAGNE, 1999). But it was not only historians discussing the problems of comparison in times of heightened connectedness who were involved. A similar debate was sparked by cultural sociologists MATTHES (1992) and TENBRUCK (1992), who heavily criticized (and at the same time historicized) cross-cultural comparison as practiced in sociology, where it represented the central method to compare societal developments that were understood solely as an effect of internal causations. MATTHES and TENBRUCK, alternatively, claimed that societies are entangled with each other, especially by practices of cross-societal comparison. [28]

The debate between the two schools of thought went on for years, and global historian OSTERHAMMEL (2003) seemed to have found the formula for a compromise. As an academic method anchored in the tradition of the social sciences, comparison isolates certain aspects of the two or more objects under investigation in order to find by way of abstraction those features that can be classified as general ones and then aid in measuring differences between these objects. The study of intercultural transfers, in contrast, places these objects into the contexts of origin and of appropriation, which are both necessarily entangled ones. [29]

This compromise has inspired a great many debates among global historians to this day, since the new field is an intriguing mix of social and economic historians, who work to some extent on the age-old question from the 1960s and 1970s of "why some grow rich while many remain poor" as an effect of the so-called "Great Divergence," and historians of border-crossing processes, who are much more concerned with the people who transcend the limitations of a given society (be it national, imperial, urban, or regional) by means of mobility or the use of media. It is therefore no wonder that "comparisons and connections" has become the slogan of a sort of "ecumenical" academic coalition, which only very recently was criticized for its lack of methodological rigidity and tendency to avoid deep theoretical controversies (OSTERHAMMEL, 2019). However, one should not forget that neither comparative strategies nor those addressing entanglements have simply remained as they were in the 1990s. Instead, they have developed in various directions. I will take a closer look at these developments in the two concluding sections of this article. [30]

4. Conclusion I: From the Study of Entanglements to the Comparison of Entanglements

The academic assault on comparison from the camp of researchers who pay special attention to connections and entanglements was fierce, but they never forgot that, in fact, there are no connections without comparing the actors. The mechanism of intercultural transfers is based on several such comparative acts. This can easily be seen in a scheme in which intercultural transfers are broken down into four stages.

1. There are individual actors who discuss deficiencies in domestic culture and point out that there are attractive solutions abroad for the underlying problem. Evidently, such a step cannot be exercised without comparison between the assumed domestic and foreign cultures, and, even more, this requires specialists of such comparative strategies who master the language and the cultural environment with which they compare their own background. It is therefore necessary that we find mediators of intercultural transfers especially among translators, travelers, migrants, missionaries, exhibitors, academic specialists of foreign cultures, and similar people (ESPAGNE & GREILING, 1996).
2. There is the transfer itself, which is a moment of selection and transformation in a mediatized product, such as a report for ministries, an article for newspapers, a book for the relevant intellectual market, an exhibition for a specific audience, a new recipe to be integrated into a regional cooking style, a new art form, a way of accounting to be merged with traditional forms of building or organizing economy, etc.—in short, a broad set of practices and forms to be attuned to the new context. Again, this step presupposes a comparative strategic thinking on how to make an offer work in a context different from the context of origin.
3. There has to be a willingness to appropriate the foreign cultural element and to give it a place among the already existing cultural forms. This happens with recognition of this process of appropriation and initiates the fourth step.
4. This involves the decision as to whether the foreign origin of the imported cultural element will remain visible as such or whether said origin will be hidden by the assertion that this element has always been part of the local or national culture's tradition. Undoubtedly, such a claim can be made only with another reference of comparison between one's own culture and the other. And it is not important for that matter if this claim holds true or not; it has to be comparatively legitimized either way. [31]

A simple example may suffice to demonstrate this seemingly abstract scheme. French elites inquired in the 1880s with great concern about the reasons behind their defeat in the war of 1870 against Prussia, and they came to the conclusion that the organization of the educational system had played an important role because the lower ranks of the Prussian army were capable of making more independent decisions in the complexity of the military confrontation (CHARLE, 1988). Based on this analysis, French politicians identified the seminar, held with

small groups of students, at German universities as the foundation of this new educational superiority. Consequently, they sent young, promising intellectuals to German universities to review this hypothesis and report on their experiences with this type of training. Many of these travelers later became founders of innovative academic schools in France, and their reports also formed the basis for a far-reaching teaching reform after the reforms of the 1890s in France. At least several elite institutions had now introduced the convention of small groups of students independently reading sources and specialist literature as well as discussing amongst themselves, rather than only listening to the monologues of their professors. In the end, the German origin of this major change in the character of the French system of higher education was not emphasized, but rather it was underlined that this teaching method had already characterized the Collège de France for many centuries. A cultural element was incorporated into the French academic landscape, but the reference to the foreign origin was blurred as much as possible. None of the steps in this intercultural transfer would have been feasible without the very specific comparative perspectives of the central actors behind them. It is important to realize that it is not only the researcher doing comparison, but the historical actors themselves. As said earlier the central point in this debate is to recognize that comparison is not above all a scientific method but a daily life practice which is repeated by scientists both as a highly reflexive method and as a largely unreflected practice. What historians have (re-)discovered over the past decades is exactly this relationship to this dual character of which at least one can fusion easily with ideologies such as nationalism, racism or other feelings of superiority. A similar self-observation remains relatively rare in sociology (with the exception for example of TENBRUCK, 1992). The reason for this difference is probably the different ways historians and sociologists observe their own historicity. [32]

Another dimension of the relationship between comparative history and the study of entanglements arises from the observation that such intercultural transfers often do not simply run between two cultures but rather are triangular or involve even more stations (DMITRIEVA & ESPAGNE, 1996). For example, Central European actors have often acted as intermediaries between Western and Eastern Europe (ESPAGNE, 2005). The Ottoman Empire played a similar mediator role between Africa and Europe. In such a relationship, which has more than two poles, there is also the question of an increasing or decreasing amount of interest in the cultural elements to be appropriated as well as the changes in direction and new attributions of meaning. By considering the mobile carriers of new cultural meanings attributed to the imported patterns instead of analyzing intercultural transfers from the territorial states involved, there are certain diasporic groups that make such a comparison of the several interconnected stations intriguing. One well-researched example is the Huguenots, who were expelled from France at the end of the seventeenth century, re-settled in many parts of the world, and brought with them certain practices, including the silk trade, winegrowing, and various other forms of intensive farming. Their integration into their new homelands took a variety of routes, and, accordingly, they have left their mark from Prussia to Geneva and from South Africa to Louisiana in terms of language, sociability, and architecture. This heritage was

later interpreted, quite frequently, as a "French" influence, although the Huguenots no longer spoke French (RANDALL, 2009). This one example invites, of course, comparison with other diasporic groups, such as Chinese or West African (QUAYSON & DASWANI, 2013). [33]

A third aspect where the study of entanglements leads to the need for in-depth comparison is the study of the very different intensities of such ties to other parts of the world. It turned out very early on in the historiography of intercultural transfers that some places stood out in terms of the multi-directionality of their entanglements and the long-lasting tradition of such connections. One can characterize them as "portals of globalization," and it is not by chance that port cities rank high on the list of such portals, in addition to (old and new) trade centers, and centers of finance (BAUMANN, DIETZE & MARUSCHKE, 2017). Imperial centers with their role as a hub to the many dependent and colonized branches of the empire also come close to the two main characteristics of such portals: a strong connectedness in terms of goods, capital, and people flowing in and out, and a strong sense of connectedness resulting from the many generations having experienced the exposure to the profits and losses of being in touch with faraway parts of the world and their strangeness. Multilingualism; early attempts to systematize the knowledge gained from contact with the other (in the form of cabinets of curiosity, botanical gardens, palaces full of art from different places, natural museums, and colonial exhibitions, to mention but a few); particular techniques to calculate risks that stem from investment in year-long shipping to bring the most profitable products home; a sense for geopolitical consideration long before technologies allowed such far-reaching strategies to be formed—all of this develops at portals of globalization rather than at remote places. Therefore, such portals are particularly suitable for intense intercultural transfers. Drawing a comparison between them as well as between them and remote areas that do not fulfill the criteria of portals of globalization is an appropriate strategy for developing the observation into an evidence-based category for further investigation. It goes without saying that such portals are not a privilege of the Global North or the West but are necessarily present on all continents in order for globalization to work. [34]

However, researchers have shown that it is not only cities that can be distinguished by how intensively they share and intertwine with other parts of the world, but also whole regions. Both the direction and the intensity of entanglements are part of a region's historical characteristic as proven by examples ranging from Saxony or the French Bordelais to the Canadian region of Quebec (ESPAGNE, 1991, 2000; TURGEON, DELÂGE & OUELLET, 1996). The explanatory factors for the specific features of such interregional connectedness include social groups—being particularly active with another part of the world due to their own migratory history, their business, or their family ties—and infrastructure—such as shipping lines, railroads, or other forms of trade routes, which help us to understand the directionality of particular regional activities in the realm of intercultural transfers. The geopolitical belonging of the region to a certain colonial empire or to a specific linguistic sphere (like the English-, Arabic-,

Spanish-, Russian-, Japanese-, or the French-speaking world) is another important factor. [35]

However, we can also flip the argument around and claim that regions are comprised of such intercultural transfers. When following one of the central assumptions of the so-called spatial turn, we come to the conclusion that space is created by social activities and by giving meaning to the spatial framework of these activities—a definition that properly fits the regionality of intercultural transfers as described above. Actors in such transfers construct one realm as their home culture and another realm as a foreign culture—sometimes in a territorializing wording but not necessarily. Importing from and appropriating the foreign culture involves defining it in spatial terms and produces the understanding of a somehow territorialized culture, for instance "the French," "the Chinese," or "the Quebecois" culture. These examples demonstrate that "territorializing cultures" does not necessarily mean "nationalizing cultures," whereas describing spaces as "imperial," "national," or "regional" does not necessarily mean that the imagined cultures span the entire territory of the described societal entity. Obviously, thorough investigation is required instead of abstract definitions to understand properly the diversity of spatial formats produced by such processes of connecting cultures. [36]

When comparing the various qualities of entanglements, one can hardly circumvent the problem of Eurocentrism arising from the observations of two or more cultures linked by asymmetric power relations. For a long time, as I have already stated, this problem was solved in historical disciplines in a normative way by starting from the European (or Western, if we include the US) case and then stating the deficits of the non-Western cases as a result of comparison. It was not considered necessary to even investigate the Western case properly since it sufficed to take it for granted as an ideal type. The example of statehood is striking in this respect. The ways in which statehood has emerged in non-Western societies are very often compared to Western models and, as a result of comparison, there is nothing other than failed states to be observed in parts of Africa and elsewhere. Furthermore, the notion of "underdevelopment," which is central in this respect, indicates that something primordial is missing. This absence of a particular development or a delay in a particular evolution of the economy, infrastructure, political culture, or mentality is the result of a comparison that was undertaken right from the beginning—with the aim to express, and support, precisely this situation of lagging behind. To escape this fundamental methodological trap, AUSTIN (2007), an African economic historian now teaching in Cambridge, proposed reciprocal comparison as a suitable way out. He suggested turning the comparison upside down and not starting the comparison with the case that runs the risk of representing the norm that is omnipresent in this comparison. Instead, the other case or cases should be used as the point of departure, which are thus brought into the center of focus and may influence the standards of evaluation. Reciprocal comparison works much better with the investigation of entanglements since it makes it possible to question where the norms in a comparison come from, and it includes the issue of the mutual constituency of the entities compared by means of asymmetric power relations. [37]

5. Conclusion II: Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Spatial Turn

POMERANZ (2000, 2002), in his ground breaking monograph on the Great Divergence, not only re-labeled an entire strand of research (BIN WONG & ROSENTHAL, 2011; BRYANT, 2006; RÖSSNER, 2018) but also opened his argument with a remarkable set of methodological questions. He argued that most of his predecessors who had debated the Great Divergence—that is to say, the effects of the late industrialization of East Asia on the economic balance between the two geographic ends of the Eurasian landmass, where the one took off in the nineteenth century due to coal and steel while the other remained underdeveloped until the late twentieth century (with the exception of Japan, which boarded the train to modernity during the Meiji Restoration)—had chosen a spatially biased research design. This became a burning question when China's new rise to power inspired global historians such as FRANK (1998) to claim the need for re-orientation, or paying greater attention to the fact that Asia was for many centuries the leading economic powerhouse of the world and lagged behind the West only for a relatively short period of time. POMERANZ (2000, 2002), who added to the debate the empirical argument that China simply had the misfortune that its centers of proto-industry (as a source of accumulation and capitalist behavior) were located much farther away from coal than was the case in England, where the two were closer together. However, his main argument in the context of our discussion of cross-cultural comparison went far beyond the role of accidents and path dependencies in the history of resource allocation. POMERANZ accused his colleagues of ultimately having carried out an asymmetric comparison by relating the relatively small center of early industrialization in the British Midlands to huge territories in China. Instead, it is important either to compare all of East Asia with the whole of Europe and then to point out that, for example, Southern Spain became industrialized at a much later date, or to focus solely on the pioneering region of the Yangtze River in China. For this region, in turn, a comparable level of proto-industrialization could be identified, and the time lag until the dawn of modern industry based on the production of fossil fuels was much shorter than many traditional narratives of Asian underdevelopment would suggest. [38]

POMERANZ's research strategy has inspired a whole historiography, not only of comparing Britain and China (VRIES, 2003) but also India (PARTHASARATHI, 2011) or Russia (STANZIANI, 2014) and finally a larger spectrum of world regions, including the long-neglected cases of Latin America (BIN WONG, 2016) and Africa (AUSTIN & SUGIHARA, 2013). The Great Divergence debate is by far the largest and most sophisticated debate in current global history when it comes to cross-cultural comparisons. Since most of the contributions deal with early modern economic features, which became relevant before the nation-state and national economies came to the fore, the problem of spatial frames is looked at with particular interest, and methodological nationalism is less present than in many other comparative designs. At the same time, the focus on long-distance trade and colonialism, on circulating bullion, and on traveling expertise makes it clear that the entities compared here were already deeply entangled. [39]

When comparing the current state of the discussion about cross-cultural comparison with the one hundred years or fifty years ago, we see growing awareness for the fact that there is no such thing as an isolated social entity to be compared with a second (or more) and such comparative efforts remain unaffected by the construction of interpretative frameworks that influence the outcome of comparison. However, cross-cultural comparison, regardless of how problematic the approach might be, has by no means lost its public or academic credibility. On the contrary, it remains a tool used more and more often to make sense of increasing global and transregional entanglements. It may have lost some of its impartiality and should therefore no longer be used in a naïve way. Nevertheless, as long as comparison remains a widespread human practice necessary to orient ourselves within and position ourselves towards an interconnected world, it will also find hopefully more and more sophisticated applications in the social sciences and humanities. [40]

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