Rethinking Cross-Border Connections: An Introduction

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Cross-border connections have long been a central topic at the German Historical Institute (GHI) Washington; not only in its daily life but also in its research program. Founded with a focus on transatlantic history, the Institute has always been concerned with political relations, cultural ties, and economic networks across the United States, Germany, and Europe. Likewise, connections in the form of migration remain a core research field at the GHI. Its longstanding engagement with the migration of German-speakers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has culminated in the recent launch of *Migrant Connections*, a digital research infrastructure for historical sources on German immigration to the United States.[1]

Since the mid-2010s, the GHI has considerably expanded its geographical scope and put an even greater emphasis on transnational connections through new research projects situated within the fields of global history/transregional history as well as Latin American and transpacific history.

Migration became a central pillar of this geographically broadened approach as GHI-affiliated researchers now look beyond the flows of European migrants across the Atlantic and analyze migrant groups and receiving societies around the world, especially in an inter-American and transpacific perspective. The GHI's Pacific Office at UC Berkeley, California, founded in 2017, serves as a hub for these endeavors. Mobility has become the second central pillar of this research program. Studying different mobile groups, objects, information, and ideas, recent and current GHI researchers have worked on expanding the study of migration history to include the history of mobility flows in a broader sense. The conference series and standing working group *In Global Transit,* for instance, puts refugees' experiences of mobility and travel front and center and explores the spatial and temporal dimensions of transit – the peculiar phase between departure and arrival.[2]

The three co-editors of this thematic forum on "Rethinking Cross-Border Connections" joined the ranks of the GHI in 2020/2021 – itself a time of heightened immobility due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Spatial mobility and its social impacts and asymmetries are at the core of our individual research projects, which all investigate global mobility infrastructure systems. Mario Peters, marrying mobility studies with the history of knowledge, studies the history of the Pan-American Railroad, a never completed railroad from Canada to Patagonia. He examines the cooperation and exchange of knowledge between North American and Latin American experts working on this transcontinental infrastructure project in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Andreas Greiner and Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş both focus on airborne

infrastructure. Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş explores the changing role of air routes and airports in global refugee movements and asylum migration. Covering the period from the 1930s to the 1990s and focusing on the Rhine-Main Airport Frankfurt, the project investigates both the specific humanitarian potentials linked to airborne escapes and their limitations in the face of tightening migration regimes. Andreas Greiner's project studies the development of world-spanning airline services in the interwar period. Focusing on the commercial airlines of imperial states and their route networks to overseas colonies and dominions, Andreas Greiner applies a multi-layered approach to infrastructure history and investigates how local conditions and actors could exert decisive impacts on global structures.

Besides a mutual interest in large-scale infrastructure, there is one theme common to all our projects, namely the deficiencies of these logistical systems and the weakness of the connections they engender. Carefully planned railroad tracks were never laid; airports in tropical areas succumbed to the annual rainy season; the airplane's promise of moving people across large distances only pertains to a fraction of the world's population, and certainly not to those needing it most. Our research on cross-border infrastructures, therefore, is not only about connectivity, mobility, and exchange, but also about their presumed opposites: fissures, disruptions, and blockages in infrastructures and thus in the flows of mobility proceeding along them. The blind spots in global networks caught our attention, and we believe that disintegration and disentanglement are equally important keystones in the history of mobilities and migrations as the flows of goods and people themselves.

With this shift in focus, our research joins a growing corpus of literature in the field of global history writing. Ever since the rising trend of global history in the early 2000s, numerous studies have celebrated the exploration of past border-crossings and far-reaching transregional relations. The reassessment of

3 Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

4 Skeptical voices: Sebastian Conrad, *Globalgeschichte. Eine Einführung* (Munich, 2013), 27; Richard Drayton and David Mortadel, "Discussion: The Futures of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018) 1: 1-21; Jeremy Adelman, "What is Global History Now?" *Aeon*, March 2, 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment; Andreas Eckert, "Die Globalgeschichte wirft den Anker aus. Globalgeschichte ist mit dem erstarkenden Nationalbewusstsein in die Kritik geraten. Hat sie zu sehr im Globalen geschwelgt?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 10, 2017. For a critical analysis of the vocabulary of Global History: Stefanie Gänger, "Circulation. Reflections on Circularity, Entity and Liquidity in the Language of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 12, 3 (2017): 303–318. For a critical reflection on the concept of global history from the perspective of area studies, see Gabriela de Lima Grecco/Sven Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American

Käte Hamburger Kolleg *global dis:connect – Dis:connectivity in Processes of Globalization* at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. Held at the German Historical Institute from September 8 to 10, 2022, this conference explored the intended and unintended dynamics of inclusion and exclusion entailed in transportation infrastructures around the globe. Coming from academic institutions on four continents, the conference participants discussed the exclusionary effects in infrastructure planning, its spatial and social practices, its effects on marginalized groups, as well as the resilience and resistance of these groups.[7] Several participants could not travel to Washington due to visa restrictions and took part via Zoom. Organizing a conference with participants from all around the world, therefore, was also a very practical experience of exclusive and inclusive infrastructures.

This Bulletin *Forum*

With a thematic focus on global connections and simultaneous processes of disruption and disentanglement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Bulletin *Forum* brings together a broad range of historical and geographical settings. Its central aim is to help amend still-dominant narratives of connectivity. It complicates what is usually subsumed under the term "connection" and sheds light on the multiplicity of connections, their different intensity and temporality, the tensions between different types of connections, tight and loose, and their absence. The contributions address topics such as the role of borders, the channeling and limitations of human and non-human mobility and contested or subversive movement that escaped attempts to control. Of equal interest is the grounded character of cross-border connections, that is their specific localities and the ways they affected the larger contexts.

The first article, by Andreas Guidi, provides an engaging example of such a grounded analysis: the spectacular case of

8 *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire. Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. David Labert and Alan Lester (Cambridge, 2006); *Globale Lebensläufe. Menschen als Akteure im weltgeschichtlichen Geschehen*, ed. Bernd Hausberger (Vienna, 2006) 9-27; Isabella Löhr, "Lives Beyond Borders, or: How to Trace Global Biographies, 1880-1950," *Comparativ* 23 (2013), No. 6: 7-21.

Carlos Bacula. Bacula found himself in the middle of a media scandal in the 1930s. Holding a Peruvian diplomatic passport, he was accused of being the key figure of a world-spanning drug trade network. His case points to the importance of individual mobility within larger, cross-border trafficking structures; and it highlights how elite mobility can be both privileged and frail as he lost his diplomatic passport due to political changes in Peru. Moreover, the case reminds us that mobile connections were of both a material *and* a discursive nature: media, police, governments, and Bacula himself spread different, contradictory, and hyperbolic narratives about his connectivity. Those narratives reflected more general views about transborder connections, the threats associated with them, and the measures to be taken against them. Global historians have demonstrated that individual biographies of border-crossers can help to investigate larger global structures.[8] Andreas Guidi's article suggests that the narratives about such an individual, rather than its actual biography, allow us to examine diverging perceptions, fears, and expectations regarding the power of borders and their transgression.

Lars Kury's article investigates the Strait of Malacca – the water corridor connecting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean between what today is Indonesia and Malaysia – and the historical tin trade along the straits. Tin was in very high demand in the nineteenth century and extracted on a large scale on the Malay Peninsula. Lars Kury uses the exploitation, trade, and transportation of tin along and through the Strait of Malacca as a starting point for a reflection on transit and shifting connections in global history. Trade patterns in the region shifted over time due to political changes, economic demands, technological developments, and topological factors. This led to the relative decline of the trade port of Malacca and production sites in the coastal hinterland as well as to the rise of new mining districts and trade hubs, in particular Singapore. The article thus highlights the temporal dimension of spatial con-

nectivity. It overcomes a linear concept of globalization by zooming in on a global transit corridor and showing how connections within this bustling shipping channel transformed and both weakened and strengthened over time, depending on global as well as local factors.

In the last article of this forum, Charlotte Hoes makes a compelling case for the existence of inner ruptures within seemingly "flawless" connections in her study of the German animal trading company L. Ruhe KG, one of the largest wildlife traders in the world at the time. At first glance, the case of Ruhe's animal trade seems like an epitome of global connectivity. But by focusing on the company's activities in the 1920s – the peak of its trade business – the article reveals the many different factors preventing the global wildlife trade from ever becoming a flawless operation. The lack of transport links, such as the much-needed shipping line from Hamburg to Djibouti, as well as the lack of adequate railroad connections within East Africa, which forced the traders to take the animals on long cross-country marches, increased the stress on the animals, and jeopardized profits. Then there were the "administrative challenges": import permits, passports, and examinations by veterinarians. Diseases were impossible to control. And so was the non-compliant or even resistant behavior of caught animals. Charlotte Hoes demonstrates that research on the global wildlife trade can help to critically scrutinize the dominant narrative of global connectivity.

In sum, this special issue highlights the simultaneity of growing connections, ruptures, and disintegration and thus the complexity and multi-layered nature of globalization processes. Writing global history beyond the ubiquitous connectivity-narrative, as all authors of this special issue aptly demonstrate, requires careful, meticulous source-based analysis because the weak or even non-existing connection can easily slip the historian's gaze. And it sometimes requires a bit of luck in the archives, as Roland Wenzlhuemer recognizes in his concluding essay. While we set out with an

institutional history of how the GHI came to its interest in global disentanglements and disintegration, Roland Wenzlhuemer provides a personal account of how the topic came to influence his work. His conclusion, reflecting on his own research and archival experiences, underlines that global connectivity and what he calls "disconnectivity" were not mutually exclusive, but simultaneous and interwoven processes.

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