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**GERMAN HISTORY
IN GLOBAL AND
TRANSNATIONAL
PERSPECTIVE**

**Edited by
David Lederer**

**With contributions from
Wolfgang Behringer,
Christopher Clark
and Dorothee Wierling**



German History in Global and Transnational Perspective

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Editor

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*This volume arose from a memorable set of keynote lectures held at the German History Society's annual conference in Maynooth in September 2014. I am delighted it has been possible to publish them in order to bring this research to a wider audience and at the same time to highlight the work of the German History Society, which represents scholars based in the UK and the Republic of Ireland with research interests in German history, broadly defined, from the medieval period to the present day. The GHS, whose journal **German History** has become a leader in its field, seeks to foster and supports the work of members at all stages of their careers. It also aims to promote communication and collaboration among scholars of German history internationally. I hope that this volume will play its part in fulfilling that purpose and I would like to thank David Lederer, who also hosted the Maynooth conference, for seeing it through to publication.*

Elizabeth Harvey, Chair, German History Society

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Introduction: The Return of the Nation

David Lederer

Germany First?

In 1888, world traveller and journalist Eugen Wolf recorded a legendary conversation with then ‘iron’ Chancellor Bismarck. In the course of a meeting, the two discussed Wolf’s plans to join a German relief column to rescue Emin Pasha, invested by Mahdist forces in Equatoria. An intervention led by renowned fellow explorer and journalist, Henry Morton Stanley, troubled Wolf who mused that the British rescue mission was hardly philanthropic and, if successful, seriously threatened Germany’s reputation as a global colonial player. Famously, Bismarck casually retorted, ‘*Your map of Africa is all very nice, but my map of Africa lies in Europe. Here is Russia and here*’—pointing to the left—‘*lies France, and we are, here in the middle; that is my map of Africa*’.¹

At first glance, one might dis the anecdote as a relic, or worse still, a nostalgic send-up, a caricature suitable for the satirical weekly *Simplicissimus*, a tired cliché plucked from the proverbial dustbin to cast scornful derision on rabid nineteenth-century jingoism. Fateful historic twists, however, counsel its sober recollection and give us uncomfortable pause for reflection. In a time-span not much longer than Napoleon’s triumphant march from exile

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in Elba to Waterloo and the restoration of King Louis XVIII, our mental map of the world changed. Politically, we are told, Britain is no longer part of Europe. India, the most populous democracy on earth, re-introduces demonetization—not to halt capital flight from the jurisdiction, as we are told, but to fight corruption. The United States cancels an international trade agreement with Asia as unfair and plans to hermetically seal off North America from its neighbours to the south to protect American companies at home; so we are told. The American President has called for Germany to make a greater contribution to NATO, while the German Chancellor responded with the suggestion that Europe needs to look after itself—in effect, insinuations of a need for German rearmament. The twin rallying cries of globalization and internationalization, once heard ringing across corporate and university boardrooms, are muffled by unanticipated calls for anti-globalization and economic nationalism, harbingering the return of the nation. Or as one headline claimed on 9 November 2016, ‘Everything we thought we knew about politics was wrong’.²

For decades, pundits shared the confidence of Stanford political economist Francis Fukuyama: The historical process reached its end when the planet embraced Western-style liberal democracy.³ As recently as 2013, a survey of transnational history by former American Historical Association President Akira Iriye entertained the self-evident presumption that anyone who ignored globalization, ‘clearly lagged behind history in the sense of world realities...’; historians literally risked falling behind history.⁴ Until 2016, transnational concerns guided policy decision-making, both public and private, in government and NGOs, in business and at universities, where global programs expanded exponentially. Transnationalism appeared to achieve ascendancy.

Coupled with an information revolution, the interactive dynamic of world affairs connected the lowliest hovel to the internet and afforded each-and-every consumer an organ for conducting individualised foreign policy in an imagined global community. Intrepid neologisms conjured the stakhanovites of virtual activism: Hackers, pirates, social justice warriors and whistle blowers armed themselves with mobile phone cameras and glibly leaked state secrets into cyberspace. Today, one safely uploads videos from war torn regions in homely comfort, smugly tweeting indignation upon so-called deplorables while conducting virtual resistance through social media chatrooms. Few contemplated the possibility that the deplored, a cohort far larger and better organized than the random crank, availed of the very same methods.

Liberal views on the tolerant acceptance of diversity achieved orthodox status until, in 2016, this imagined world fell apart, prey to the dictum that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. How did it come to this? Are proponents of globalization and transnationalism not guilty of the same short-sightedness with which they formerly charged devotees of nationalism; ironically, are they not themselves guilty of atavism and narcissism? Should institutions such as the Centre for Transnational History at the University of London or the St. Andrews Institute for Transnational and Spatial History fear for their funding? Should aspiring Ph.Ds in these fields transition to others?

One obvious answer is that the nation never went away. It remains the fundamental building block of international relations today. Bureaucracies continue to fill vacancies with national specialists. Even the global historian Mark Mazower identified predominantly national interests behind the foundation of that most international of organizations, the United Nations—so-called for good reason.⁵ Not coincidentally, Mazower traced the lineage of a world governance to the Concert of Europe, an international balance of power designed in Vienna after the Restoration in 1815. After World War One, world governance materialised in the League of Nations; ironically, Jan Smuts became one of its chief advocates. However, the legal concept of national sovereignty as the cornerstone of international relations originated much earlier in Germany, in the Treaty of Westphalia/Osnabrück of 1648 (a document still studied by candidates for entry into Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service in Great Britain) ending the Thirty Years War. The doctrine of national sovereignty too is unlikely to lose significance in the foreseeable future.

Not surprisingly, transnational and global histories have had both proponents as well as unexpected critics. For example, seminal articles highlighting the transnational figure prominently in a field journal particularly relevant to our present consideration: *German History*. In 2016, articles in that journal addressed early reports of Nazi concentration camps and gay men's periodicals from a transnational perspective.⁶ Conversely, critical voices of transnational and global theory have been especially forthright from subaltern studies.⁷ Some see the global endeavours of European historians as thinly-veiled attempts to reassert a neo-imperialist paradigm of core and periphery as a form of intellectual domination, simply adding former colonies to the standard mix of Western historical interpretations and stirring, blissful ignoring the local perspectives of specialists from the former colonies themselves.

To an extent, these critiques are legitimate complaints. Nonetheless, as emotions scholar William Reddy points out, philologists across the globe shared critical views from the sixteenth century onwards that legitimize their depiction as ‘modern’.⁸ In other words, intellectuals from divergent regions and cultures share common languages with which to render temporality in a universally comprehensible form. So long as people read, the world of ideas is ultimately too porous to contain within national boundaries.

In fact, strategically, only the emphasis and tone of intellectual debate, and not its substance, has shifted. Even as transnational and global history became legitimate fields of study, national studies flourished side-by-side and the former will continue to flourish under the current regime. Fashions may come and go, but fundamental shifts over the longer duration move rather more glacially. Climate change sceptics may have their day in court, but so long as natural calamities, epidemics and famines persist in their indifference to political borders, they require globally coordinated responses. National finger-pointing, as a purely consolatory exercise, can never solve international crime, terror and the threat of war, only international cooperation can. Like corporate multi-nationals and independent entrepreneurs, mass migrations by political and economic refugees defy containment, while economic supply-and-demand transcends political boundaries. Thus, the following humble collection of contributions from three leading scholars of German history underscores how the transnational could hardly be a more appropriate or timely issue for the nation of today.

Tea or Coffee?

For example, in a provocative analysis of the Tambora crisis, Wolfgang Behringer introduces a truly global interpretation of a singular natural catastrophe into mainstream historiography. He convincingly argues that climate change moves history by conclusively demonstrating how something as outwardly banal as weather dictates fundamental political, economic and cultural reactions. Regionally contingent as responses may be, the ubiquity of reaction evidences the global significance of climate change. Contemporaries may have reacted differently to the eruption of Gunung Tambora on the island of Sumbawa in April 1815, the greatest volcanic explosion in human memory, but historians failed to notice the omnipresence of their observations. As a cloud of volcanic ash spread across the skies of the planet, contemporaries lamented 1816 as ‘the year without a summer’.

In the post-Congress Confederation of the Rhine, social unrest, politically motivated assassinations and rising anti-Semitism and popular hostility toward perceived grain-hoarding and usury are all attributable to the economic and demographic fallout from the climatic phenomenon. In the longer term, technical advances in flood control alleviated demographic pressures, as did the escape valve of massive emigration from Germany to Australia, Canada, South America and the United States. Controversially, Behringer expresses less concern with the enormity of the actual catastrophe than with the stubborn decision of historians to ignore well-documented evidence and cling to a traditional narrative of the unfolding of political events on the stage of human affairs. He calls for a careful reassessment of the sources in the orthodox meta-narrative of the nineteenth century.

Similarly, prior to the outbreak of the First World War, a reassessment of international relations reveals systemic indicators of transnational patterns that one might dub ‘trans-imperial’. For, as Christopher Clark points out, internationally shared political systems facilitated the coming of war by empowering individual actors to fog the national and international landscapes with diplomatic subterfuge and thinly veiled media interference. Clark’s transnational/trans-imperial approach to the events leading up to the Great War raises critical questions about diplomatic best-practice and challenges the Fischer thesis, which shifted blame for the subsequent man-made catastrophe of 1914–1918 on to the Germans and their intrigues.

By shifting debate over German war guilt from the national to the transnational matrix of competition, intrigue and secrecy, he identifies internationally shared bureaucratic structures that enabled rogue opportunists to bend national policies to their careerist advantage. As illustrated by our initial anecdote relating the conversation between Bismarck and Wolf, colonial imbroglios and diplomatic flare-ups roused whirlwinds of suspicions and paranoia surrounding potential imbalances on the map of Europe, prompting the Great Powers to assume a more aggressive posture during the lead-up to open war. In both the European and imperial theatres, as he suggests, systemic weakness was hardly limited to Germany alone and, more than any other factor, contributed to heightened transnational tensions across the continent and trans-imperial tensions around the world.

In 2016, Germany posted yet another record trade surplus of exports, with a considerable portion stemming from the re-exportation of imported commodities as finished products and manufactured goods. The

international commodity trade has a formative influence on social relationships, both in areas where the raw materials are produced and in the metropolitan transshipment depots and production centres. The social ripples of commerce and exchange defy national containment. In a dynastic study of Hamburg coffee importers from 1900 to 1970, Dorothee Wierling analyses their lives and fortunes through the prism of regional and international events to create a transnational history of society. The global analysis of the people who operated commodity chains reifies the otherwise abstract mechanisms integrating the nations of the colonial and post-colonial eras into a modern world system. International networks of German merchants representing their own interests at home and abroad insinuated them as agents of globalization while their economic activities fuelled by the European appetite for coffee altered social structures both at home and abroad. Their significant holdings in the production centres of South America impacted directly upon indigenous populations by modifying existing relations to the modes of production. Simultaneously, with some 200 companies occupying warehouses along Hamburg's Sandgate Quay (Sandtorkai), the coffee exchange became the major transshipment depot for green coffee into Central Europe and contributed to Hamburg's international reputation as an economic force and a centre for entrepreneurial networking. Urbane, well-travelled and outward looking, these coffee dynasties evolved into a unique *Gemeinschaft*, both within the city and the world of trade. They cultivated a self-fashioned Anglophile image among Hamburg's bourgeois elite, at once adopting English manners at home, encouraging perceptions of Hamburg as the gateway to the world, and transplanting a German *Heimat* to their colonial enclaves, perceptively adapting to the exigencies of the post-colonial world.

The collation of these three articles into a collection arises from an annual conference of the German History Society of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland held at the National University of Ireland Maynooth; a significant transnational event in-and-of itself. Generous support was forthcoming from both the German Embassy in Dublin and Fáilte Ireland. In light of the Society's ongoing commitment to post-graduate studies, it was subsequently decided to offer up the keynote lectures by Wolfgang Behringer, Chris Clark and Dorothee Wierling as a strong and coherent argument in favour of transnational methods for future scholars in a field nominally associated with the national history of Germany. Paul Betts, then Chairperson of the Society, undertook to secure the support of Palgrave Macmillan, an obvious choice as publisher given

its record as producer of an academic series of monographs on transnational history and *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*.⁹ Subsequently, current Chairperson Elizabeth Harvey continued to support the endeavour on behalf of the German History Society. As organizer of the conference, it fell to me as both an honour to be charged with editing the collection and a privilege to work with three such distinguished scholars. The Society has a standing history of cooperation with the German Historical Institutes in London and Washington, DC, and we wish to express our special thanks to Richard Wetzels, editor of the *Bulletin* of the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, for kindly arranging permission to reproduce the article by Dorothée Wierling in this collection.

Like the national, the transnational and global remain with us and will continue to do so in the future. In history, as in other scientific, political, demographic and economic endeavours, over-simplified ‘either/or’ choices are clearly unsatisfying kneejerk responses to complex issues. With that in mind, we offer up the following nuanced transnational perspectives on German history since the nineteenth century, both before and after it became a modern nation, humbly submitting our commitment to the continued pertinence of transnational methodology during an age witnessing the return of the nation.

NOTES

1. ‘*Ihre Karte von Afrika ist ja sehr schön, aber meine Karte von Afrika liegt in Europa. Hier liegt Rußland, und hier “nach links deutend—” liegt Frankreich, und wir sind in der Mitte; das ist meine Karte von Afrika.*’: Eugen Wolf, *Vom Fürsten Bismarck und seinem Haus. Tagebuchblätter* (Berlin, 1904), 16. Online at: <http://archive.org/stream/vomfrstenbismar00wolfgoog#page/n34/mode/2up>; last viewed on 12.1.16.
2. Joan Walsh, ‘Everything We Thought We Knew About Politics Was Wrong’, *The Nation* (9.11.16) at: <https://www.thenation.com/article/everything-we-thought-we-knew-about-politics-was-wrong/>; last viewed on 1.12.16.
3. His controversial *The End of History and the Last Man* (London/New York, 1992) fleshed out arguments from a previous article which initiated a major debate in 1989.
4. Akira Iriye’s *Global and Transnational History: The Past, the Present and Future* (Houndmills, Basingstoke/New York, 2013) also appears in the Palgrave Pivot series; here pg. 19.

5. *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London/New York, 2012), the basis for a series of lectures held at Princeton University in 2008, themselves published as *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2013).
6. Paul Moore, “‘The Truth about Concentration Camps’: Werner Schäfer’s *Anti-Brown Book* and the Transnational Debate on Early Nazi Terror’, *German History* 34 (2016), 579–607; “‘Männer wie Du und Ich’: Gay Magazines from the National to the Transnational’, *German History* 34 (2016), 468–485.
7. Kris Manjapra, ‘Transnational Approaches to Global History: A View from the Study of German-Indian Entanglement’, *German History* 32 (2014), 274–293.
8. William Reddy, ‘The Eurasian Origins of Empty Time and Space: Modernity as Temporality Reconsidered’, in: *History and Theory* 55 (2016), 325–356.
9. Akire Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke/New York, 2009).

Climate and History: Hunger, Anti-Semitism, and Reform During the Tambora Crisis of 1815–1820

Wolfgang Behringer

Abstract Wolfgang Behringer introduces a truly global interpretation of a singular natural catastrophe into mainstream historiography. He reminds us that climate change moves history, conclusively demonstrating how something as seemingly banal as the weather can evoke fundamental political, economic and cultural change. Even if historical responses were regionally contingent, the ubiquity of reaction evidences the historical significance of climate change. Thus was the reaction to the eruption of Gunung Tambora on the island of Sumbawa in April 1815, the greatest volcanic explosion in human history. As a cloud of volcanic ash spread across the skies of the planet, contemporaries lamented 1816 as ‘the year without a summer’. The Confederation of the Rhine too witnessed social unrest during the Restoration in post-Congress Europe, while in

See Wolfgang Behringer, *Tambora und das Jahr ohne Sommer. Wie ein Vulkan die Welt in die Krise stürzte*, C. H. Beck-Verlag, München 2015, 3rd ed. München 2016.

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the long-term, technical advances in flood control and massive emigration from Germany to Australia, Canada, South America and the United States resulted. Controversially, Behringer expresses less concern with the enormity of the actual event than with the conscious decision of historians to ignore the well-documented consequences of climate change.

Keywords Anti-Semitism · Climate Change · Confederation of the Rhine · Congress of Vienna · Karlsbad Decrees · Tambora

Introduction

A painting by Caspar David Friedrich, the *Wanderer over the Sea of Fog* (*Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*) in the Hamburger Kunsthalle depicts a man watching a sunrise above a misty landscape, without caption, possibly suggesting a historian meditating the fogs of German history. Presently, I would replace him with the painting of a woman watching the sunset by the same painter, not as a contribution to gender politics, but more pertinent to my present concern, the Tambora Crisis. This tiny little piece in the Folkwang Museum was painted in 1818, and climate historians have compared it to sunset photographs after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, when the atmosphere was still veiled by airborne particles that caused spectacular sunsets with a specific afterglow. After the eruption of Mount Tambora, similar sunsets were observed throughout Europe, in parts of the United States and Asia. Historians and the interested public are preoccupied at present with the First World War. But 1815–1819, rather than 1914–1918, will be the anniversary that climatologists and at least some cultural historians celebrate over the next few years. Therefore, what I wish to address here is a climate experiment, the so-called “Year without a Summer.”¹

Of course, in reality there has never been a “year without a summer” for the past 10,000 years, not even in 1816. But clearly this was an extraordinary summer. Mary Godwin (1797–1851), as a member of a colony of English expatriots who spent June and July telling stories near the fireplace in their residence at Lake Geneva, Switzerland, remembered that “incessant rain often confined” them “for days to the house.”² Inspired by certain German-language ghost stories,³ the future Mary Shelley invented “Frankenstein,”⁴ while John Polidori (1795–1824) and Lord Byron (1788–1824) concocted their Vampire Stories.⁵

We can also find weather impressions in the diaries of Polidori and of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), or the letters of Lord Byron,⁶ or many other diarists of 1816 or 1817, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)⁷ or Luke Howard (1772–1864, the “father of meteorology”), who were travelling through Germany and Switzerland at the time.⁸ There were of course some bright days, on which one could sail on Lake Geneva or travel to the advancing glaciers of Mont Blanc, as Shelley and Byron indeed did that summer.⁹ But there were also many dark days, when “the bright sun was extinguish’d”, to quote one of Byron’s poems of that particular summer.¹⁰ During one sailing excursion, the two Englishmen experienced heavy storms and almost died, and their trip to the glaciers of Chamonix was hampered by flooding and blocked roads. Due to heavy precipitation and cold, the Alpine glaciers advanced quickly from about 1812, culminating in the winter of 1816–1817, becoming a major tourist attraction.¹¹

What I call the Tambora Crisis was truly a social and economic crisis of the first order. It was caused by the most powerful volcanic eruption in human history, an eruption that altered the world’s climate for a several years.¹² However, while this exercise in “Climate and History” is indeed global, it has very much to do with Germany, for at that time the areas of the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*) became an epicenter of the crisis—although Western and Southern Europe—Switzerland,¹³ France,¹⁴ Spain,¹⁵ Italy,¹⁶ and the United Kingdom,¹⁷—suffered likewise. The Tambora explosion brought about a worldwide crisis: North America,¹⁸ India,¹⁹ China,²⁰ and at least parts of Africa²¹ faced equally serious problems. But here we shall focus on the crisis from a German perspective. In this paper I first lay down the framework of the experiment, then characterize the immediate effects on the area which is now Germany, consider secondary effects, and finally touch upon some possible long-term effects. In traditional German historiography, such as the celebrated syntheses of Thomas Nipperdey and Hans Ulrich Wehler, the Tambora Crisis passes without mention.²² Copious references in archival sources and printed books which do mention it remain largely untouched by these—and later—historians. In my conclusion I will boldly suggest that this omission is methodologically significant.

The Experiment

I come to my experiment: A clearly defined climatic event on the other side of the globe, commencing with the explosion of Gunung

Tambora on the island of Sumbawa—one of the Lesser Sunda Islands—in April 1815. What makes it so unique is its magnitude: the Tambora explosion is by far the greatest in human history,²³ if we define history as the period covered by written sources. From 1815 more sources exist than ever before: periodical newspapers and journals worldwide;²⁴ administrative documents from professional administrations; private letters; diaries; memoirs; specialist reports, etc. Owing to the availability of this veritable plethora of evidence, we can easily reconstruct what happened and how people reacted in large parts of the world. In Germany in particular, contemporaries published whole books on the crisis, most of them now available digitally on the internet. The Lesser Sunda Islands, now part of Indonesia, were part of Dutch East India at that time. However, since the Netherlands—like Germany—had been occupied by Napoleonic France²⁵ and the British could not accept French colonies in their Asian backyard, the whole region was conquered by British troops and governed by a British governor from Batavia, today's Jakarta. When Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) first heard the Tambora explosions, he mistook them for cannon fire from French warships and ordered out an armada. But when ash started falling, he quickly understood there had been an enormous volcanic explosion. Using a standard questionnaire, Raffles mounted a formal enquiry among all British residents in Indonesia, thus creating an unprecedented body of evidence. He also commissioned articles in journals and reports to the colonial authorities in London, helping to inform the rest of the world.²⁶

From his investigation we know exactly which parts of East India were affected and in what ways at which time and what the consequences were. Only recently, when systematic excavations on the island of Sumbawa began,²⁷ it turned out that the five sultanates on the island had indeed been as wealthy as claimed in Raffles' report and in his *History of Java*, (published in 1817²⁸ and subsequently translated into German), as well as in his memoirs published a few years later.²⁹ Thanks to Raffles' activities, the Tambora explosion was the first such event noticed worldwide. His reports were published in the *Batavian Transactions* in August 1816, as well as in the British East India Companies' *Asiatic Journal*.³⁰ The Swiss scholar August Pictet (1752–1825), a member of the British Royal Society, summarized these reports in his *Bibliothèque Universelle*,³¹ and—according to his diary—Goethe read about the eruption on Sumbawa in Johann Friedrich Cottas' (1764–1832) *Morgenblatt für die gebildeten Stände* on the morning of February 20, 1817.³²

As could be expected from such an enormous volcanic explosion, large amounts of ash and gases were injected into the stratosphere, possibly as far up as 45 km, if we can believe contemporary captains' reports. Airborne particles were distributed around the world, starting with mainland Asia, which stood in the path of the prevailing westerly winds that blew in that direction. As a consequence, temperature and precipitation started to evince anomalies worldwide. Parts of Asia were directly affected in 1815, but by 1816 the weather worldwide reacted chaotically. India and South Africa, North America and Western Europe (Spain and Britain) experienced severe droughts, whereas Southern China and Central Europe (France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Western Austria) suffered from heavy and sustained precipitation and severe flooding. Most parts of the globe suffered from cooling, although some regions, as for instance Russia, benefitted from a peculiarly warm season.³³

Effects on "Germany"

Now let us return to Germany. In Karlsruhe, capital of the Grand Duchy of Baden, summer temperatures were 3°C lower than average. We can see that from 1812 a number of cold summers occurred, but 1816 was particularly unpleasant. In many towns of Europe and North America this was the coldest summer of the last 1000 years. And in central Europe it was one of the wettest as well. This weather was the topic of the day: cartoonists such as George Cruikshank (1792–1878) illustrated proverbial folk expressions, such as "raining cats and dogs". In the mountains of Central Europe, heavy snow falls augmented the generally incessant precipitation, contributing to the repeated flooding of farmland in the plains. As in China in 1816 or India in 1817, all major river systems in Central Europe brimmed over their banks. And in the following year, 1817, the flooding was similarly awful, since the snows of the previous years started melting. The Elbe, Danube, the Rhine and all its tributaries—including the Main, Mosel and Neckar—swamped large areas.³⁴

As a consequence, the failure of all major crops, such as wheat, rye, oats, potatoes and, in Italy, sweetcorn and rice, was widespread. The grape harvest and even ordinary fruits like apples failed, as did the hay harvest in 1816. This resulted in near universal inflation. Lists from all over Europe show how the price of corn and bread increased, usually by at least 100%—as was the case in Italy, Spain, Prussia, and England. But in Central Europe, prices went up by an enormous 500%—as for instance

in Heilbronn—by June 1817. And these price increases in 1816–1817 came on top of relatively high prices on the rise since 1812.³⁵

1816–1817 differed from ordinary pre-modern hunger crises in societies dependent on subsistence agriculture, since agrarian workers as well as urban day laborers fell into unemployment and temporarily became reliant on poor relief. The precariousness of nascent industrialization meant that workers in the factories had to be fired due to lack of demand for their products. Whole industries collapsed, such as the textile industries of Swabia and Switzerland, and would never recover. And, due to its severity, the middle classes were also affected. They had to sell property in order to survive, and were thrown into poverty. A whole new class of people emerged who were no longer able to sustain themselves. They were not disabled, nor aged, nor minors, but were simply unable to find any employment. They had to sell their belongings, furniture, clothes, and sometimes, in desperation, even their beds and cooking utensils. Many lost everything—and society had no choice but to support them. They were not poor, but pauperized: they became paupers.³⁶ Most of the new states created at the beginning of the nineteenth century were without traditional social security systems. Almost everywhere, private charities jumped in. In Elberfeld in 1816, wealthy citizens founded the “Kornverein”, which imported corn and gave it to the paupers, who were entitled to receive support in exchange for coupons in the form of minted coins.³⁷ Johann Caspar Engels, grandfather of the socialist Friedrich Engels, was a leading figure in these activities.³⁸ And everywhere in the Rhineland, forms of civil society self-help filled gaps caused by the failure of state welfare.³⁹ Indeed, pauperism as a phenomenon was a product of the Tambora Crisis, and—contrary to many historians’ claims—the term was first coined at this time: in New York, the “Society for the Prevention of Pauperism” was founded in 1817,⁴⁰ and similar societies emerged almost everywhere. These societies offered food, clothing, shoes, sometimes employment, and always education in matters of self-help.⁴¹

All over Western Europe, North America, South Africa, India and China, price rises in combination with unemployment meant malnourishment of the poor and the impoverished. This contributed to a rise in rates of mortality, as well as epidemics of typhoid fever,⁴² typhus,⁴³ pellagra,⁴⁴ and diarrhea. In India, the spread of a terrible new plague began: cholera.⁴⁵ From the European core areas of the crisis we have convincing reports of starvation, as well as from remote parts of Switzerland and

Southwest Germany. People were so desperate that they ate grass like cattle, or tried to fabricate bread out of roots and sawdust. They were so exhausted that they were no longer able to work, and some appeared like ghosts in the streets of wealthy towns like Zürich. Some were so depleted, and also so ashamed, that they would no longer leave their huts. Some died in the open fields.⁴⁶

Secondary Effects

In Europe, many governments had difficulty understanding what was going on. I take as an example the Bavarian King Maximilian I Joseph (1756–1825) and his government. Despite alarming reports from most parts of the kingdom, prime minister Maximilian Graf von Montgelas (1759–1838) could not believe that there was indeed a severe scarcity, because in the markets there was plenty of corn. Apparently, for those who could afford it, there was no scarcity at all. The government recognized the high prices but blamed profiteering and speculation.⁴⁷ And profiteering there most certainly was: One member of the Bavarian royal family, Marie Leopoldine von Österreich-Este (1776–1848), widow of the last Prince-Elector Karl Theodor (1724–1799), bought up huge quantities of grain with the support of her Jewish banker Simon Spiro.⁴⁸ The owners of grain—peasants and noblemen, but also bakers, millers and so on—tried to sell grain at such obviously inflated prices that violence resulted. Some usurers like the Straußenwirt, a farmer from the village Hohenaltheim near Nördlingen, were attacked in public.⁴⁹

Here we can apply the ideas of the economist Amartya Sen (born 1933), based on the West Bengal famine of 1943 and subsequent Indian famines: “Famine occurs not only from a lack of food, but from inequalities built into mechanisms for distributing food.”⁵⁰ For the rich, foodstuff was not expensive, whether for members of the nobility or for English tourists such as Thomas Stamford Raffles, Luke Howard or Lord Byron, who were all travelling in Europe in the “year without a summer”. Bread was always available, just not for everyone. In some European countries, such as the United Kingdom, laws were passed that disadvantaged ordinary people even further, to preserve the income of landowners, who had a secure majority in Parliament.⁵¹ As a consequence of the rising inequality, all over Western Europe, from Portugal to Denmark, discontent and rebellion spread. The main issue was grain exportation, which people tried to stop in order to sell the corn

to ordinary people for a price they themselves deemed reasonable—the type of bread riot described by Edward P. Thompson (1924–1993) and labeled the “moral economy”.⁵²

In England, mass demonstrations were invented as a new form of protest, and some of these assemblies—“riots” according to the riot acts of 1714–1715⁵³—turned into open street fighting and local political takeovers.⁵⁴ In France, the situation was as desperate as in the year before the great revolution, when widespread fear lingered over the land⁵⁵; streets were blocked, infrastructure destroyed, and cities besieged or taken.⁵⁶ A good number of such riots are well-documented for Germany as well, for instance in aforementioned Bavaria.⁵⁷ For there were even more violent forms of protest. All over Europe, the wealthy and powerful were threatened with fire: Arson became the characteristic crime of the Tambora Crisis. Typically barns were burned to scare the owners of grain stores. But in April 1817, a fire was lit right behind the royal residence in Munich, where timber for the construction of the Bavarian National Theatre was stored. Leaflets proclaimed an open threat: “Bread or Fire!” Throughout the “year without a summer”, threats to burn residences or attack the Oktoberfest kept the police on high alert.⁵⁸

Discontent and riots continued for a number of years and led to violent mass protests in the main European countries, including such confrontations as the Peterloo massacre, where troops killed a dozen demonstrators protesting against the Corn Laws.⁵⁹ The specter of political radicalism loomed over Europe; ever since the French Revolution only a few years earlier, the fear of radicalism was associated everywhere with Jacobinism and terror, as portrayed by Cruikshank.⁶⁰ And there were indeed political conspiracies: for instance, the Cato Street Conspiracy, where malcontent radicals such as Arthur Thistlewood (1774–1820), frustrated by the failure of demonstrations from about 1816 onwards, schemed to kill Prime Minister Robert Jenkinson, the second Earl of Liverpool (1770–1828), with his entire cabinet during a dinner party. The conspiracy was detected and the conspirators hanged.⁶¹ At about the same time, an uprising in Scotland had to be suppressed.⁶² In France and Germany, political murder did succeed in some cases. A possible successor to the French throne—Charles-Ferdinand d’Artois, Duc de Berry (1778–1820)—was indeed assassinated,⁶³ as well as the German playwright August von Kotzebue (1761–1819), who was considered a Russian spy by radical members of the German student leagues, the *Burschenschaften*. These student activists had already targeted von

Kotzebue at the *Wartburgfeier* (Wartburg Festival) in 1817, an event still praised as a manifestation of liberty by the German public.⁶⁴

At this combined celebration of the Reformation jubilee and the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Leipzig (16–19 October 1813), leading German politicians and intellectuals who—like Kotzebue—had promoted equal rights for Jews⁶⁵ were attacked. This was just at the time when leading politicians such as Clemens Wenzel Lothar von Metternich (1773–1859) and Karl August Freiherr von Hardenberg (1750–1822), the Chancellors of Prussia and Austria-Hungary respectively, were about to introduce equal rights for Jews throughout Central Europe. In contrast to his killer, Karl August Sand (1795–1820) and his other co-conspirators,⁶⁶ Kotzebue was “an enlightened, independent and liberal spirit.”⁶⁷ The *Wartburgfeier* was xenophobic, a manifestation of anti-Semitic and anti-French sentiments. Political observers—such as the Jewish intellectual Saul Ascher (1767–1822), whose books were likewise burnt at the Wartburg—immediately concluded that those who burned books would also burn people.⁶⁸ And Heinrich Heine’s (1797–1856) judgment was similarly harsh.⁶⁹ Anti-Semitic riots—the so-called Hep-Hep riots—flared up throughout Germany, Denmark and parts of Poland in 1819, instigated by a belief that Jews had caused the corn price inflation of 1816–1817 through speculative investment, and were also responsible for the economic depression afterwards. Eleonore Sterling (1925–1968) interpreted these riots as a “displacement of social protest.”⁷⁰ But it was more than that. These protesters had found their scapegoat and aimed at killing the Jews.⁷¹

Rahel Varnhagen, born Levin (1771–1833), wife of the Prussian ambassador in Karlsruhe, Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, reacted to the riots with the claim that she had already predicted such consequences during the social crisis of 1816, which was exploited by certain anti-Semitic rabble-rousers at the universities.⁷² The Hep-Hep riots were directed against Jews and their protectors, the German princes and liberal politicians. They began in Würzburg, the capitol of an independent state until 1815,⁷³ when it was annexed to Bavaria by the Congress of Vienna. Locals perceived the annexation as the intervention of a foreign state in a regional power struggle. Their protests first targeted Bavarian civil servants and threatened the Bavarian crown prince Ludwig (1786–1868) with arson at his Würzburg residence. When Bavaria introduced Jewish emancipation laws in 1816, and the Würzburg banker Salomon Hirsch⁷⁴ appealed to the first Bavarian parliament in April 1819 to grant

unrestricted civil rights,⁷⁵ a fierce debate in the local newspaper—the *Würzburger Intelligenzblatt*—followed. One local MP, Wilhelm Joseph Behr,⁷⁶ professors at the university and leading Bavarian civil servants clearly supported the initiative, but were threatened by anonymous letters throughout the summer. The letters referred to a “secret society” of “more than 3000”, who would use “dagger and fire” and did not even fear death—thus referring to the suicide attack on Kotzebue.⁷⁷ And liberal-minded politicians like Friedrich von Gentz (1764–1832) were likewise threatened with murder⁷⁸ and even attacked by assassins, as was the Prime Minister of Hessen-Nassau, Carl von Ibell (1780–1834).⁷⁹

At the beginning of August 1819, on the night of Behr’s triumphal return from a session of parliament in Munich, he was celebrated by his supporters. However, the celebratory mood quickly changed: Later that same night a pogrom was launched, targeting the houses of rich Jews and destroying shops in the town that had first been allowed to open by the Bavarian state. All Jews and some of their Bavarian supporters fled Würzburg; one of the rioters, the merchant Josef Konrad, was shot by the police; whereas a shoemaker named Lambrecht wounded a Bavarian soldier. All the captured rioters were local landlords, shopkeepers, craftsmen, journeymen and apprentices. The ringleader, however, was a Würzburg civil servant and local treasurer, Hermann Fleckenstein.⁸⁰ The Jews and their Bavarian supporters were able to return after a few days, secured by a Bavarian garrison bivouacked in the streets of the town. King and government threatened the local authorities with serious consequences and ordered compensation for the damage. Local civil servants had to swear an oath to actively oppose further anti-Semitic riots in town.

Threatening letters now spread through the countryside, particularly in towns with Jewish minorities—for instance, Heidingsfeld, the rabbinic center of Franconia, to which many Jews from Würzburg had fled. In Heidingsfeld the local mayor prevented riots, but there were arson attacks in surrounding “Jew villages” and anonymous calls for pogroms, and even massacres, on a daily basis. Agitated locals destroyed synagogues in the market towns of Rimpfing and Leinach (an event which recurred in 1938), and in small towns such as Pottenstein, Hollfeld or Ebermannstadt close to the Bohemian border. On August 12, larger Franconian towns such as Bamberg, Ansbach and Bayreuth—like Würzburg, former capitols of independent states—were seized by the anti-Semitic frenzy. Populist riots were supported by many locals, businessmen as well as craftsmen and malcontent students who incited the

rabble, and sometimes even by local police. These locally-supported riots usually had to be quelled by the army and the Bavarian state.⁸¹

While many towns and villages in Franconia were in agitation, the Hep-Hep riots spread westwards. As early as August 5, insurrection started in Frankfurt am Main, home of one of the largest Jewish communities in Western Europe. Frankfurt, only miles down the river Main from Würzburg, already had very liberal laws, but contrary to the ideas of the constitution of the Confederation, the local citizenship wished to repeal them. Attacks on the Jewish quarter lasted several days and only came to an end when the Austrian president of the German Bundestag, Count Johann Rudolf von Buol-Schauenstein (1763–1834), ordered military support from the Garrison of Mainz. On August 12, riots sprang up in both new states of Hesse, in Fulda (Kurhessen), Marburg, Kassel and Darmstadt (Großherzogtum Hessen), and continued for several weeks.⁸² The liberal Grand Duchy of Baden was affected by serious riots in many places. In Thuringia, Jews were ousted from Meiningen; in the kingdom of Saxony, both Leipzig and Dresden were convulsed by severe riots. In Prussian Rhineland towns including Koblenz, Kreuznach, Hamm, Kleve Düsseldorf and Dormagen suffered riots,⁸³ and in Prussian Poland there were riots in Lissa/Lesno, Grünberg/Zielona Gora and Breslau/Wrocław. Around the Baltic Sea, severe insurrections broke out in Güstrow, Danzig/Gdansk, Helsinki, and Copenhagen, Odense, Helsingör, and other Danish towns.⁸⁴

Leading German politicians—notably Metternich in Vienna and Hardenberg in Berlin—and German princes reliably defended the Jews. The Grand Duke of Baden even moved into the house of his court banker Salomon von Haber (1769–1839), in order to demonstrate his unswerving protection.⁸⁵ German Jewish bankers were in close contact with the ruling dynasties, since they had managed much state debt throughout the Napoleonic Wars and beyond. In return, bankers such as Rothschild in Frankfurt, Seligman-Eichthal in Munich, Hirsch in Würzburg and Haber in Karlsruhe had been elevated to the rank of nobility, as Jews, and during the very years of the Tambora Crisis. These close contacts contributed to support and guaranteed the process of legal emancipation. Nonetheless, although the Hep-Hep riots were quelled within weeks,⁸⁶ there were long-term repercussions. A wave of conversions began, some in conjunction with a change of name: Löw Baruch, son of a Frankfurt rabbi, became Ludwig Börne (1786–1837); and Joel Jolson became Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802–1861), a leading

conservative intellectual of later years. Bankers like Amschel Mayer von Rothschild (1773–1855) from Frankfurt set up branches in other European countries, possibly not just for economic reasons.⁸⁷

In Germany, as in France and England, more restrictive laws were introduced in late-1819 and confirmed in 1820.⁸⁸ Historians usually relate these restrictions to the Kotzebue murder. Few have remarked that the Conference of Karlsbad (6–31 August 1819), in Bohemia—today Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic—started in the same week that the Hep-Hep riots began in Franconia, just a few miles away, and were raging throughout the conference. Furthermore, the Prussian-owned town of Wunsiedel, birthplace of the anti-Semitic assassin Karl Ludwig Sand, was also geographically in Franconia, next to the Bohemian border. Decisions made at Karlsbad (31 August 1819) were later deemed illiberal, but the German ministers felt pressured to restore order. Although all sides tried to avoid the subject, it is likely that it was not only political assassinations like Kotzebue's, but also the popular anti-Semitic insurrection throughout Central Europe that had to be stopped. And since these pogroms could be linked to academic demagogues such as Fries and Rühls, Oken and Follen, the German governments further targeted the universities. Earlier that year, when a Russian diplomat Alexander von Stourdza (1791–1854) publically condemned German universities as hotbeds of revolution,⁸⁹ he immediately received death threats. Varnhagen von Ense suggested that the advisor of Czar Alexander I had to flee back to Russia afterwards.⁹⁰ If demagogues such as the loathsome author Joachim Hartwig Hundt (1780–1835) could publicly demand the extermination of all Jews,⁹¹ regional governments clearly felt obliged to intervene.

Historians like Wehler have claimed that the *Karlsbader Beschlüsse* (Karlsbad Decrees) were manufactured clandestinely and introduced in the manner of a *coup d'état*.⁹² But this is pure nonsense. Nothing was done in secret, everybody could read in the newspapers that the leading politicians of the ten largest member states of the German Confederation were gathering at the Bohemian spa. Europe's eyes were watching what went on in Karlsbad, a high profile resort known for its mineral springs which politicians such as Metternich or intellectuals like Goethe frequented every summer. But in 1819, the ministers convened a political summit, because there was an obvious political agenda. It was the representatives of liberal states such as Baden or Nassau in particular who urged harsh and coordinated measures, whereas large monarchies like

Prussia, Austria, or even Bavaria had no difficulty in restoring order by themselves. The Austrian chancellor Metternich brought the decisions of Karlsbad to the Bundestag in Frankfurt, and the representatives of the member states of the German Confederation accepted the proposed law by majority decision on September 20. This was certainly no *coup d'état*, but a high profile meeting. We should remember how harshly and quickly the USA reacted to the September 11 attacks in 2001 in order to understand why political murder, secret societies, and terror attacks alarmed governments all over Europe in the course of the Tambora Crisis. In the introduction to his *Philosophie des Rechts*, philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831) justified the prosecution of the demagogues in the necessary self-defense of the state.⁹³ It is not by coincidence that Hegel tackled the anti-Semitic philosopher Fries head on, for Fries wanted to build a state on subjective beliefs and allowed for, even demanded, the killing of minorities.⁹⁴ It is true that the Karlsbad Decrees restricted civil rights, but these rights had been granted only a few years earlier by the same politicians, who obviously had their minds changed by intervening contingencies. Similar restrictions were being introduced in France and England and for similar reasons. These restrictions were in no way the simple result of the Holy Alliance, which English politicians regarded as foolish in any case. Rather, they were a direct reaction to an actual state of emergency. In practical terms, some of the restrictions were never introduced; others were repealed within a few years.⁹⁵

During the Tambora crisis, fanaticism sprang up almost everywhere, in Europe and in India, China and North America. In Europe, sectarian groups gained momentum.⁹⁶ The Baroness Juliane von Kruedener (1764–1824), famous for her spiritual relationship to Czar Alexander I,⁹⁷ criss-crossed Switzerland and Southern Germany on a missionary trip, blaming the governments for their inability to fight poverty, attacking them for the increasing social divide, and predicting the end of the world. The Savior would come from the East, and believers should go to meet him. What started as an impeachment of the local elites ended up as advice to emigrate to Russia.⁹⁸

Russia was by then closer to Europe than ever before or since. Alexander I had sponsored the wars of liberation from Napoleon, had hired scores of French, Austrian and German intellectuals for his army and administration, and had attended the conferences in Vienna and Paris in person. His mother, Maria Feodorowna, was a princess of

Württemberg; his wife Elisabeth Alexejewna, had been born princess Louise von Baden (1779–1826)⁹⁹; and his sister Katharina Pawlowna (1788–1819), as Queen of Württemberg became famous for her relief programs for the poor.¹⁰⁰ Russia appeared as a promised-land to many Germans: there was an abundance of land on the Black Sea, only recently conquered from the Ottomans, and there was an abundance of corn, due to an exceptionally favorable climatic shift in 1816.¹⁰¹ Every country in Western Europe bought corn from Russia, either in the Baltics or in Odessa. Only recently founded by Catharine the Great, the city of Odessa was transformed into Russia's most important port during the Tambora Crisis.¹⁰²

In fact, Odessa became the main destination for foreign immigrants. As a consequence of the Tambora Crisis, the migrant wave began suddenly in summer 1816.¹⁰³ Tens of thousands of Germans sailed down the river Danube to settle in Russian territory,¹⁰⁴ mainly between the Danube and the Volga, around Odessa and on the Crimean Peninsula.¹⁰⁵ Religious sectarians moved even further, to the Caucasus Region, to be closer to the imagined point of return for their Savior at the time of the second coming.¹⁰⁶ Immigrants to Russia enjoyed religious freedom, economic support, free land, and tax reductions. Model Southern German and Swiss villages sprang up around Odessa: The new settlements were called Mannheim and Landau, Worms and Speyer, Heidelberg and Höchstädt, Stuttgart and Munich, and also Straßburg and Zürich, St. Gallen and Lucerne.

There was also mass emigration to the Americas—for instance to Brazil, which had just gained independence from Portugal, as had Argentina, Chile and Colombia from Spain, and whose crown Prince Peter I (1798–1834) was married to an Austrian princess.¹⁰⁷ Of course, there was also emigration to North America from all over Western Europe. French emigrants seem to have favored francophone Canada, but tens of thousands of Irish,¹⁰⁸ Scottish and British emigrated to the USA. Morris Birkbeck, who organized emigration companies and published a bestselling handbook for emigrants, confirmed that the USA was just as open to Scandinavians, French and Germans as to British immigrants.¹⁰⁹ Emigration to the USA set in suddenly in 1816 as a consequence of the Tambora Crisis.¹¹⁰ German and Swiss emigrants booked their journey from local travel agents, went down the Rhine by ship, and generally departed from Amsterdam, where thousands of poor migrants were stranded. Moritz von Fürstenwärther (1781–1826), envoy

of the German parliament in Frankfurt (the *Bundestag*), officially scrutinized the conditions of emigration and even tried to negotiate with American politicians, although with little success.¹¹¹ He recommended the “Western Gazeteer, or Emigrant’s Directory, containing a geographical Description of the western States and Territories, viz: Kentucky, Indiana, Luisiana, Ohio, Tennessee and Mississippi, with the Territories of Illinois, Missouri, Alabama, Michicau [sic!] and Northwestern [territory]” as a kind of handbook for emigration.¹¹²

Still, emigrants to the USA faced an unexpected problem: Americans had suffered a severe crop failure themselves and many families lost—or were in fear of losing—their subsistence. As Europeans migrated to the USA, Americans left the states of New England and started moving westwards. Morris Birkbeck wrote in his diary: “Old America seems to be breaking up, and moving westward.”¹¹³ Also in North America, the Tabora Crisis caused mass migration towards the “open frontier” and, to the surprise of many, “the first Western land rush” started.¹¹⁴ Crop failure and unemployment along the east coast made “America Rising”, and from 1816–1821 a new state was founded every year as, within North America, the USA expanded faster than ever before or after.¹¹⁵

Long Term Effects

Huge unemployment, increased by immigrants from Germany and the rest of Europe, incited the American magistrates to develop a number of programs. The most ambitious was the construction of the Erie Canal, which was meant by governor DeWitt Clinton (1769–1828) to secure New York’s grain supply as well as improving westward migration to Michigan and Illinois, and to turn New York into the “focus of great moneyed operations.”¹¹⁶ Along the way, not only unemployed farmers but also German and Irish immigrants found employment. Transport costs to the Great Lakes sank by 95%, and new cities like Buffalo, Chicago and Milwaukee mushroomed within just a few years. Canal construction inaugurated a culture of technical improvement and material progress.¹¹⁷ And there were similarly ambitious programs in Europe, like the regulation of the Rhine, started in the same year (1817), which was also meant to provide employment, improve grain supply, travel and commerce, and prevent flooding. The regulation of many other rivers was under discussion, and in some places work began immediately.¹¹⁸

Here lies a methodological challenge, however. Although there is an obvious causal relationship between these events and the Tabora

Crisis, river regulation would possibly have taken place anyway, just as emigration from Europe to the frontiers of the Western World and its colonies, whether in the West, the East or to and within North America and Russia, would have expanded anyway. To give another example of this methodological problem, consider the long-term effects of cholera: in 1817 cholera emerged in Bengal¹¹⁹ and immediately spread through Asia, Arabia, the Near East,¹²⁰ Iran, and Russia.¹²¹ The next pandemic reached Europe¹²² and both Americas as well as Russia, killing many of the Germans who had fled the hunger crisis. Out of 550 German colonists in Saratov, only 150 in the town survived. Pastor Huber celebrated mass with them, but few survived the epidemic.¹²³ Medical research could have relied on reports from British India in 1817, but the bacterium *vibrio cholerae* was only isolated during the third pandemic in 1847, and it took another 20 years to draw the conclusions that led to the famous canalization of London, which became the model for sewage systems across the planet.¹²⁴ Should all this still be considered a consequence of the cholera outbreak of 1817?

Climate and History: or Historiography?

Let me conclude with some ruminations on the significance of climate for historiography. The hunger crisis of 1816–1817 was marked by contemporaries like no other before or since. The production of memory had already started in the summer of 1817, when the harvest throughout Germany was memorialized and reported in scores of illustrated prints.¹²⁵ On a local level, all manner of memorabilia were produced: married couples incorporated price lists in their furniture to remind them of the “hunger year” (*Hungerkasten*)¹²⁶; house owners inserted memorial stones into the walls of their houses; and communities set up memorial “hunger stones” (*Hungersteine*) in public places.¹²⁷ This desire to memorialize was exploited commercially, but we can only date the various products exactly in scattered cases. In 1825, for example, the painter Johann Bartholomäus Thäler (1806–1850) produced a memorial painting for the community of Hundwil near St. Gallen, titled *The Great Price Rise and Dearth of 1817*,¹²⁸ depicting the activities of the corn and other forms of trade up to that year’s harvest time. The painter obviously made use of one of many printed series of pictures available from the time. The first of these prints was probably designed in 1817 by the Augsburg engraver Vinzenz Zanna (1772–1827),¹²⁹ and was afterwards plagiarized by the Munich printer Carl Hohfelder, who reprinted these

memorial posters until the 1840s.¹³⁰ *Teuerungstafeln* (inflation panels) became widespread, but have not yet been sufficiently explored.¹³¹ Similarly successful were the memorial coins designed by the Nuremberg medal designer Johann Thomas Stettner (1785–1872), which usually contained a religious message as well. Particularly sophisticated were memorial medallions that could be opened to reveal a series of pictures and poems reflecting on all stages of the catastrophe, from the climate changes in the summer 1816 to the failed harvests of 1817.¹³² There is hardly a local museum in Central Europe without mementos of 1816–1817: even songs circulated about the event.¹³³ Local tradition reflected upon these hard times on anniversaries, particularly in 1846 and again in 1916. Quite recently—in 2008—another memorial stone was erected in Stuttgart-Hohenheim, celebrating the activities of Katharina Pawlowna, Queen of Württemberg, during the crisis of 1816–1817.

The monumental explosion of Tambora has always been remembered as one of the most powerful volcanic eruptions in history. However, since 1913, there has also been increasing recognition of how Tambora influenced the world's climate in subsequent years. William Jackson Humphreys (1862–1949) of the US Weather Bureau published considerable evidence on that account,¹³⁴ and subsequent re-examinations add ever more. Robert Marjolin (1911–1986), later a leading European diplomat and politician, portrayed France as a society in upheaval, a situation resembling the pre-revolutionary crisis of 1788. However, in France from 1816–1820, few longed for another Robespierre or Napoleon.¹³⁵ Another postwar politician, Henry Kissinger (born 1923), was fascinated by the political system established after the Council of Vienna, having graduated from Harvard on this subject. He focused on foreign policy, thereby completely missing the reason for the political unrest following the Napoleonic Wars.¹³⁶ Edward P. Thompson on the other hand focused on social unrest, and promoted the idea of a pre-modern “moral economy”. As a Marxist, he remained unable to understand the importance of the crisis of 1816–1817 as an extreme climatic event, and misunderstood the protest movements as a necessary stage in class formation. In his work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, he carefully concealed that the sources he quoted did not derive from the full spread of years from the 1780s to 1830, but were mostly rooted in the years of the Tambora Crisis. In 1974, the social historian Wilhelm Abel (1904–1985) for the first time acknowledged a major crisis during the years 1816–1817, but—like all previous authors—he did not recognize

its extent or precise cause.¹³⁷ The first historian to comprehend at least the European magnitude of the crisis was American historian Gordon Craig (1913–2005). However, he was looking for individual reasons in each country involved, and failed to understand the global nature of all the calamities had the same agent.¹³⁸

Only in the 1970s did an academic historian establish the link between Tambora and *The Last Great Subsistence Crisis in the Western World*. John Dexter Post (1925–2012) focused on climate, food shortage, and epidemic diseases, as indicated in the title of his second book.¹³⁹ What came from this important impulse? Hans Ulrich Wehler (1931–2014) and Thomas Nipperdey (1927–1992) both acknowledged the existence of the “last great subsistence crisis”, but simply had no place for it in their histories. This crisis did not make any sense to them. In 1789, 1830 and 1848, misery had fostered revolutions, whereas in 1816–1817 it did not. In order to include it somewhere, Nipperdey generously placed it in the prehistory of 1848.¹⁴⁰ Obviously, their master narrative prevented them from understanding the importance of the Tambora Crisis, because they—and Wehler in particular—mistook it for just another subsistence crisis¹⁴¹ or, like Dieter Langewiesche, speculated that this might have been a kind of post-war depression.¹⁴²

However, the “Year without a Summer” is more than that: It challenges the Durkheimian foundation of the social sciences.¹⁴³ The very idea that social facts are exclusively explained by collective consciousness is exploded by a volcano interfering with human history, unexpectedly, unforeseeable, and apparently unwanted by historians. In order to value the significance of this event it is necessary to abandon fairy tales about human progress and reconsider the relationship of climate to history, and in historiography. Rethinking history in terms of both human vulnerability and resilience redraws the chronology of the period.¹⁴⁴ Wehler and Nipperdey occasionally mention employment programs or elsewhere the foundation of savings banks, river regulation, the return to communal self-government, or pauperism, but in reference to the 1830s. Their ignorance of the Tambora Crisis prevents them from understanding that there was a common ground underlying these phenomena. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has remarked, climate events can indeed open a global perspective.¹⁴⁵

From this global perspective we can see that, in fact, crisis management in Germany was so successful that no large scale epidemics broke out, even though they were predicted by contemporaries as soon as

inflation set in. No violent rebellions occurred and anti-Semitic riots were successfully contained, as were street fighting in France and mass demonstrations in Britain. What we discover here are highly resilient societies. Despite the religious revival, popular discontent led to political and economic reforms, technical innovations and improvement in the sciences: constitutions were granted, parliaments elected, communal self-government re-introduced where it had been destroyed by the revolution. Welfare and employment programs mitigated immediate hardship; savings banks and societies for the prevention of pauperism were founded to support self-help. Agrarian reforms and technical innovations prevented future calamities; steam ships improved transport and communication. And the rapid establishment of Meteorology and Geology as new sciences improved the understanding of nature. Europeans as well as Americans had expected an economic boom in 1816: instead, a major crisis came and lasted until about 1820. But despite all such troubles, these societies were propelled by their enlightened optimism and managed to master the crisis not just without harm, but by generating even more energy for future projects. Germany stands here *pars pro toto* for the West. Europe and the USA stood the test of our experiment.

These efforts cannot be taken as self-evident. China, for instance, was less fortunate. Recent debates on the “Great Divergence” have suggested that failure to reform and to maintain public order hastened the downward spiral of the Q’ing dynasty.¹⁴⁶ More recent Chinese research has demonstrated that the Tambora Crisis may have played an important part in this story, dating the decline back to the catastrophes in the late years of Emperor Jiaqing (1760–1820, r. 1796–1820). 1817 was China’s “year without a summer”.¹⁴⁷ Afterwards, the Chinese Empire failed to restore order and disintegrated under the pressure of secret societies, robber gangs and British invasions.¹⁴⁸ Like the great river systems in Europe and China, India too suffered heavily from precipitation and flooding, first in 1815 and again in 1817, when a terrible new cholera epidemic emerged in the Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta. The same year, resistance against British colonial troops collapsed and the whole continent lost its independence.¹⁴⁹ South Africa, on the other hand, suffered from drought, since the monsoon failed to arrive. Cattle died, hunger began, and mistrust and witchcraft accusations spread. Zulu King Shaka ka Senzangakhona (ca. 1787–1828) began burning witches and forging his military state,¹⁵⁰ slaughtering everyone in his path. A period of war, civil war and genocide commenced, known in African history as the

period of *Mfecane* (“crushing”), throwing the whole region from the Cape up to the great lakes in the north into turmoil. African historians are currently discussing all manner of reason for this traumatic period, but have not yet discovered the Tambora Crisis.¹⁵¹

Maintaining order was a decisive contribution to resilience in freak years of climate change. In this sense the English “Six Acts” were as necessary as the Karlsbad Decrees, even if they made liberal contemporaries uneasy—as uneasy as we feel nowadays regarding George W. Bush’s “war on terror”, or Barack Obama’s drone war, or the presidency of Donald Trump. In comparison, the Chinese example may demonstrate what happened when order was not restored and maintained. Society fell prey to robber gangs, war lords, and foreign invaders. Q’ing China was disintegrating, or to frame it in more recent language: China was on the path to becoming a failed state. Failure was a possibility in Europe as well, but after a period of revolution and war, the political élites were not only ready to find solutions for international policy concerns and to reshape Central Europe by removing hundreds of states from the political landscape, but also to cope with one of the severest ecological crises in history, a climate crisis. What I would like to establish is a willingness to take into account the relationship between climate and history, not only on the occasion of Global Warming, but also with respect to earlier external challenges. The Tambora Crisis hit Europe hard, but the German example shows that political reform was possible even under the most difficult of circumstances.¹⁵²

NOTES

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1914 in Transnational Perspective

Christopher Clark

Abstract Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, international relations exhibited systemic indicators of transnational patterns that might also be called ‘trans-imperial’. For, as Christopher Clark suggests, systems played as significant a role in the coming of war as the actions of the individual actors who fogged the national and international landscape through diplomatic subterfuge and thinly veiled media interference. His transnational approach to the events leading up to the War raise critical questions about the Fischer thesis and the adjudication of blame for the subsequent events of 1914–1918. By relocating debate over German war guilt from the national to the transnational matrix of competition, intrigue and secrecy, he identifies bureaucratic structures enabling rogue opportunists to bend national policies to their careerist advantage. In both the European and imperial theatres, he suggests, considerable systemic weaknesses were hardly limited to Germany alone and, more than any other factor, contributed to a state of heightened tension across the boundaries of all the Great Powers.

Keywords Diplomacy · First World War · Fisher Thesis · Press Railways · Transimperial

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Ever since it entered wide use among historians in the 1990s, the term 'transnational' has been beset by definitional uncertainties. In a 2006 Forum debate for the *American Historical Review*, Ingrid Hofmeyr observed that the meaning of the term was not yet "stable or self-evident." Christopher Bayly agreed: the distinctions between world, global and transnational history had never, he suggested, been adequately explained. Nor was it clear how transnational history differed from international history. The two words seemed virtually synonymous, "except that the term 'transnational' gives a sense of movement and interpenetration." What distinguished transnational history from other cognate formations within the discipline, Sven Beckert proposed in a contribution to the same conversation, was its interest in exploring "a whole range of connections that transcend politically bounded territories and connect various parts of the world to one another," though Beckert added that global, world and transnational history were all defined by the common aspiration to reconstruct features of the human past that transcended any one nation-state or other politically defined territory.¹

Drawing a line of demarcation between transnational and international history is especially difficult. Transnational history has sometimes been seen as a more virtuous alternative to international history. Yet international history was itself born in part out of frustration with diplomatic history, a discipline dependent on nation-state archives that had in effect become a sub-field of national history. The move in the 1970s and 1980s from diplomatic to international history signalled an interest in "going beyond examining how nations devised their policies and strategies towards one another and in conceptualising some sort of world order in which they pursued their respective interests."² And indeed the best works in the international history tradition are marked by the parallel analysis of archives across a plurality of states, attention to multiple layers of interaction and reciprocity and an aspiration to plot the behaviour of specific actors against the evolution of the system within which all actors are constrained to operate.³ Works in this mode have already done much to sophisticate our understanding of the background to the outbreak of war in 1914. Thomas Otte's study of the China Question globalised the field of vision, showing how developments on a volatile imperial periphery could deepen tensions among the continental powers. Paul Kennedy's classic study of the Anglo-German antagonism anchored relations between the two states in a deep context encompassing political parties, mass movements and the press. Keith Neilson and Keith

Wilson focused attention on how British relations with Russia shaped London's relationships with other powers (and the other way around). Patricia Weitsman's book on the pre-war alliances showed, conversely, that Russian perceptions of the threat posed by Germany were in part a function of Russian assessments of the threat posed to Russian interests by Britain. And Holger Afflerbach's monumental analysis of the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy revealed a system criss-crossed by powerful currents, in which the relations between any two individual powers were a function of each power's relations with all of the other powers. Applying this insight with rigour brings to light the complexity of pre-war geopolitics; it renders visible a systemic dynamic that was only partly under the control of any one state actor.⁴

The journey away from a nation-state-dominated approach has led historians down a variety of distinct paths. Some have focused on those borderlands whose hybrid identities defy the claims of the state to territorial sovereignty and cultural homogeneity.⁵ Others have focused on transnational networks of experts or global non-state actors or professional bodies, or have tracked the circulation of commodities and consumer goods across the national and imperial boundaries.⁶ Work of this kind has the potential to unsettle the hermeneutic primacy of the nation by denying it the status of an originary category and depicting it instead as the product of flows and exchanges of information and technical knowledge. And whereas international history has focused on the upward transcendence of nation-state actors, sublating, as it were, the complex relations among them within a systemic or multi-state perspective, some work in the transnational mode has pushed in the other direction, focusing on those actors and phenomena marginalised, concealed or 'excluded' by national narratives.⁷ Sunil Amrith's *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* was organised around the idea of an oceanic space as a field in which a range of forces—poverty, drought, import-export flows, urbanisation, steam power, winds and currents—converged to shape the destinies of millions of Indian migrants. Timothy Harper's study of the "Asian Revolutionary Underground" focuses on multi-ethnic anarchist and radical networks connecting the semi-colonial peripheries of the larger Asian cities and occupying a time and a space between empire and nation.⁸ Migrants occupy a privileged place in transnational studies precisely because their flows across political boundaries are only partly, if at all, triggered or steered by state actors—charting their movements and mapping the networks they build when they arrive at their destination

illuminates an archipelago of diasporic spaces beyond, within and between nation-states. Migrants also matter because they exemplify the concern with “flows and circulations among sites rather than with historical processes in distinct places” that has become a defining feature of the transnational approach.⁹

How can one make this diverse menu of interests fruitful for the study of ‘1914’, by which I mean the problem of accounting for the outbreak of a continental war in the summer of 1914? A number of potential problems present themselves. The first is that the key actors in the crisis of 1914 were not merely the representatives of ‘nations’, let alone nation-states, but also of empires encompassing multi-ethnic patchworks of nations, a strand of the war’s aetiology on which Dominic Lieven in particular has written compellingly.¹⁰ The presence of empires does in itself not cancel out the nation as a unit of analysis, but it does complicate the story. National aspirations generated tensions *within* imperial polities such as Britain, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Germany as well as between them, and a transnational analysis should not prevent us from the discerning the impact of transimperial phenomena, such as the management of the Polish national question in Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia.

A further difficulty arises from the structure of the historiography. Although there have been a number of authoritative pan-European treatises on the pre-war crisis, Albertini’s being the most influential, the great majority of studies on 1914 have been ‘national’ studies.¹¹ And this approach was in a sense licensed by Fritz Fischer, for if Fischer was right in suggesting that the actions of a single nation-state caused the war, or indeed even that that state planned the war and determined the timing of its outbreak in advance, then that was not just a powerful claim about the location of moral culpability, but also a kind of plea for the supreme importance of the nation-state, or rather of a specific nation-state, whose errant path towards modernity generated unique dangers for European peace and comity. Fischer’s development as an historian after 1945 was driven by his conviction that the roots of the ‘German catastrophe’ of 1933–1945 lay deep in a specifically German past—his first speech to the German *Historikertag* in 1949 located this continuity in the malformations of the Lutheran tradition; only in the 1950s did he begin to seek in German foreign policy and war-planning threads of a fateful continuity between the *Kaiserreich* and the Third Reich. The teleology of the Sonderweg, which became entangled with the arguments of Fischer and

his historiographical allies in the 1970s and 1980s, was itself trenchantly national in focus. It proposed a pattern of emphasis that was perfectly compatible with ‘comparative history’ of a kind that aimed to juxtapose different national narratives (though mostly only to reaffirm the fundamental differences between them), but offered little in the way of incentives to adopt a genuinely transnational perspective on the outbreak of war.

Typical for historical writing in this mode was the landmark series on the origins of the First World War that appeared with Macmillan between 1973 and 1991.¹² The studies—all of them by outstanding scholars—bore the imprint of the transformations wrought by the Fischer controversy. Berghahn’s account was informed not just by Fischer’s theses, but also by the ‘social imperialism’ critique of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and the Sonderweg school, which discerned the roots of German adventurism and external aggression in the unique deformations of a society whose ‘traditional elites’ had become an impediment to political modernisation. Dominic Lieven, John Keiger and Zara Steiner all noted in their respective studies that as the Fischer thesis had effectively resolved the question of culpability for the war’s outbreak, the questions remaining to be addressed by the non-German national studies were of a lesser order, having to do with how the other states on the continent managed and responded to the problem of German aggression.¹³

There have, of course, been excellent studies that exposed transnational features of the pre-war crisis. James Joll’s famous article on the ‘unspoken assumptions’ focused on the ideas, fears and prejudices that lived in the minds of all the European policy makers and his *Origins of the First World War* moved back and forth between the different government establishments, weaving a thick skein of common structures and approaches. He noted, for example, the preference of all the continental executives for ‘secret diplomacy’, a feature of government denounced by ‘liberals and radicals all over Europe, but especially in Britain. The elevated social status of those entrusted with representing their countries abroad was another common trait: “although conventions concerning the recruitment and training of diplomats varied from country to country, they shared a reputation for being—and perhaps a desire to be—members of an exclusive club.”¹⁴ Throughout this book, Joll juxtaposed the utterances of decision-makers so as to highlight shared attitudes.

Avner Offer’s incisive discussion of honour as a motif in decision-making was another distinguished example of the insights to be won from

a synchronic and transnational mode of analysis, and his argument has since been further elaborated by Ute Frevert in connection with the early twentieth-century evolution of European elite masculinities.¹⁵ In a brilliant analysis of the politics of rearmament across the continent, David Stevenson subjected the structures, processes and outcomes of defence policy to rigorous comparative scrutiny, highlighting commonalities, differences and interactions in ways that complicated the Fischerite narrative.¹⁶ Jan Rieger's *Great Naval Game* offered subtle readings of naval displays, a form of spectacular politics that literally occupied the space in-between nation-states and explored processes of reciprocal emulation and competition, though the book's framing argument was underpinned by a binational comparison whose purpose was ultimately to accentuate difference.¹⁷ And Dominik Geppert's analysis of Anglo-German press wars exemplified one of the key virtues of the transnational approach: his densely researched and highly textured account of press polemics revealed not just the relative autonomy of the press on both sides of 'the Anglo-German antagonism', but also the vividness of the interactions within and between the two press establishments. In his reading, the 'space in-between' acquired constitutive significance.¹⁸

As these examples suggest, the relationship between international and transnational history can be better understood if we acknowledge that they denote different categories. International history was and remains a field and a thematic focus encompassing, for example, international organisations or the international as a systemic space within which nations are established or define themselves. By contrast, transnational refers to a certain methodological approach; it is not, as Pierre-Yves Saunier has put it, 'about moving to a different field of study', but about 'adopting a perspective, an angle'.¹⁹ Rather than superseding its putative rivals in the discipline, transnational history can act as a methodological enhancement, supplementing existing formations 'with the idea of exchanges, flows, and streams'.²⁰

Bearing all of this in mind, how might one go about addressing the transnational features of the crises that brought war in 1914? One approach might be to identify dynamics that were common to the various European executives. One can think of July 1914 as an 'international' crisis, a term that suggests an array of nation-states, conceived as compact, autonomous, discrete entities, like billiard balls on a table. But the sovereign structures that generated policy during the crisis were in reality profoundly disunified, a state of affairs that did much to shape

pre-war relations among the continental powers. There was uncertainty (and has been ever since among historians) about where exactly the power to shape policy was located within the various executives. ‘Policies’—or at least policy-driving initiatives of various kinds—did not necessarily come from the apex of the system; they could emanate from quite peripheral locations in the diplomatic apparatus, from military commanders, ministerial officials and even ambassadors, who were often ‘policy-makers’ in their own right. Examining these features of the pre-war executive in parallel can illuminate features of the pre-war political environment that were ‘systemic’, not in the sense that they were *generated* by the interaction of autonomous state actors, but because they shaped the character of those relations.

Take the case of Russia. One of the most striking aspects of Russian foreign policy during the last 10 years before the outbreak of war was the rapid alternation of power, its tendency to flow from one part of the executive apparatus to another. In the years from around 1900 until the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, it was above all the tsar who imparted a certain direction to Russian foreign policy. Nicholas II firmly believed that the future of Russia lay in Siberia and the Far East and ensured that the exponents of his eastern policy prevailed over their opponents. Despite some initial misgivings, he supported the policy of seizing the Chinese bridgehead at Port Arthur (today Lüshun) on the Liaodong Peninsula in 1898. In Korea, Nicholas came to support a policy of Russian penetration that placed St Petersburg on a collision course with Tokyo. In 1904, on the eve of the Russo-Japanese war, one could say that the Tsar’s influence was up, while that of his ministers was down. But this state of affairs turned out to be short-lived, because the catastrophic outcome of the Tsar’s policy sharply diminished his ability to set the agenda. As the news of successive defeats sank in and social unrest engulfed Russia, a group of ministers led by Sergei Witte pushed through reforms designed to unify government. Power was concentrated in a Council of Ministers, headed for the first time by a ‘Chairman’ or Prime Minister. Under Witte and his successor P.A. Stolypin (1906–1911), the executive was shielded to some extent against arbitrary interventions by the monarch. Stolypin in particular, a man of immense determination, intelligence, charisma and tireless industry, managed to assert his personal authority over most of the ministers, achieving a degree of coherence in government that had been unknown before 1905. The prime

minister was in charge and the tsar seemed ‘curiously absent from political activity’.²¹

The advent of a new foreign minister sufficed to upset this balance, at least temporarily: exploiting his right to report personally to the sovereign and working behind the backs of his ministerial colleagues, Izvolsky launched his ill-fated negotiations with Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Aehrenthal, in which he promised Russian approval for the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in return for Austrian support for a revision of the Straits settlement. It was the highpoint of the foreign minister’s political independence—an independence acquired by playing the margins between the different power centres in the system. But the triumph was short-lived. Since there was no deal to be had from London, the Straits policy failed. Izvolsky was disgraced in Russian public opinion and returned to face the ire of Stolypin and his fellow ministers. In the short term, then, the debacle of the Bosnian Annexation Crisis (like the débacle of the Japanese war) led to a reassertion of the collective authority of the Council of Ministers. The Tsar lost the initiative, at least for the moment. Izvolsky was forced to back down and to submit to the discipline of ‘united government’; he was later transferred to the embassy in Paris. Stolypin, on the other hand, reached the peak of his power. The minister’s assassination in September 1911 inaugurated a new period of flux: Stolypin’s removal and the weakness of the new foreign minister, Sergei Sazonov, who was still finding his feet, amplified a further potential instability within the system; the most experienced and confident Russian agents abroad were free to play a more independent role. Two envoys in particular, N.V. Charykov in Constantinople and Nikolai Hartwig in Belgrade, sensing a loosening of control from St Petersburg, embarked on potentially hazardous independent initiatives in order to capitalize on the worsening political situation in the Balkans. Meanwhile, the Russian ambassador to France was none other than former foreign minister Alexander Izvolsky, whose determination to shape policy—on the Balkans especially—remained undiminished after his transfer back into the diplomatic service. Izvolsky hatched his own intrigues in Paris, all the while ‘hectoring Sazonov through the diplomatic pouch’.²²

As this brief excursion into the Russian foreign policy establishment reveals, power relations between the various nodes in the system were anything but stable. We can see the same instability in Paris, where a kind of guerrilla warfare raged between the Centrale, meaning the permanent functionaries of the Quai d’Orsay, the foreign minister and the

long-serving senior ambassadors. French foreign ministers tended to be weak, weaker indeed than their own ministerial staff. One reason for this was the relatively rapid turnover of ministers, a consequence of the perennially high levels of political turbulence in pre-war France. Between 1 January 1913 and the outbreak of war, for example, there were no fewer than six different foreign ministers. Ministerial office was a more transitory and less important stage in the life cycle of French politicians than in Britain, Germany or Austria-Hungary. And in the absence of any code of cabinet solidarity, the energies and ambition of ministers tended to be consumed in the bitter factional strife that was part of the everyday life of government in the Third Republic.

In France, as elsewhere in Europe, the waxing and waning of specific offices within the system produced hydraulic adjustments in the distribution of power. Under a forceful minister like Delcassé, the power-share of the senior civil-service functionaries known collectively as the *Centrale* tended to shrink, while the ambassadors, freed from the constraints imposed by the centre, flourished, just as Izvolsky and Hartwig did during the early years of Sazonov. Under a weak minister, by contrast, the confidence and aggression of the central functionaries tended to swell, exerting pressure on the ambassadors. The ambassadors wielded the authority of age and the experience acquired over long years in the field. The men of the *Centrale*, on the other hand, possessed formidable institutional and structural advantages. They could issue press releases, they controlled the transmission of official documents, and above all, they had access to the *cabinet noir* within the ministerial office—a small but important department responsible for opening letters and intercepting and deciphering diplomatic traffic. And just as in Russia, these structural and adversarial divisions coincided with divergent views of external relations. The agitations of the internal struggle for influence could thus have a direct impact on the orientation of policy, especially when the *Centrale* used the strategic leaking of classified diplomatic communications to undermine the reputation of a minister, as happened when Joseph Caillaux was prime minister in 1913, or manipulated the publication of announcements bearing on French foreign relations.²³

In both these executives, the power to shape foreign policy was constantly slipping from one node to another. Similar conditions prevailed elsewhere. The hive-like structure of the Austro-Hungarian executive was not conducive to the formulation of decisions through the careful sifting and balancing of contradictory information. The contributors to the

debate tended to indulge in strong statements of opinion, often sharpened by mutual recriminations, rather than attempting to view the problems facing Vienna in the round, and the outcomes of discussions tended to depend on the relative strength of groupings whose membership was anything but stable.²⁴ Even in Britain, despite the strong constitutional position of Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, the longest-serving foreign minister of 1914, there was uncertainty about the extent of the minister's capacity to rein in dissenting voices within his own government. Grey's personal commitment to the Entente (and thus, by extension, to the Franco-Russian alliance) was not shared by the majority of his party, nor by the majority of parliamentarians, or even the majority of his own cabinet colleagues. When, in November 1911, the extent of Grey's undertakings to Paris became clear, attempts by cabinet to wrest back control of British foreign policy resulted in a public clarification that amounted to a public disavowal of private assurances. Grey never succumbed to the intrigues of the 'Grey-must-go' brigade, but these tensions within the executive produced uncertainty among friends and potential opponents alike about the extent and direction of British commitments.

These struggles for power within the state executives could on occasion complicate the relations between them. During the Agadir crisis, for example, the foreign minister Justin de Selves was under pressure from his ministry to send French cruisers to Agadir, a move that might have triggered a serious escalation. After the prime minister, Joseph Caillaux vetoed this option, the hawks in the Centrale began to organise against him. Press releases were used to discredit the champions of conciliation. Caillaux was eventually able to achieve an agreement with Germany, but only by conducting confidential and unofficial talks with Berlin (through the German Embassy in Paris, through Jules Cambon in Berlin and through the mediation of a businessman called Fondère) that successfully circumvented the minister and his officials. The result was that by the beginning of August, Caillaux had secretly accepted a compensation deal with Berlin to which de Selves remained adamantly opposed.²⁵ One could produce a long list of such cases, where the (sometimes temporary) victory of one player over another within the executive produced a change in the orientation of policy. Indeed, the question arises of whether the term 'policy' is always helpful in a context where many voices were competing for influence over the decision-making process. It is highly doubtful whether one can really speak, for example, of a consistent Russian 'Balkan policy' between, say, 1911 and the summer of 1914.

The resulting uncertainties heightened the apprehensions of policy makers, because they made the system as a whole less transparent, less legible. It is worth noting how fragile and flux-prone many of the key decision-makers felt the alliance system was. The Austrians intermittently feared that the Germans were on the point of settling their differences with Russia and leaving their Habsburg allies in the lurch. In Paris, there were fears lest Sergei Witte re-launch his career and pull Russian foreign policy back in a pro-Berlin direction. In the spring of 1913, there was even irritation in Paris at the current ‘flirtation’ between the courts of St James and Berlin, King George V being suspected of seeking warmer relations with Germany. As late as the early summer of 1914, some British policy makers were worried that a return to power of the dovish former prime minister Vladimir Kokovtsov might incline Russia to seek an understanding with Germany. For Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador in St Petersburg, the slightest evidence of a thaw between Vienna and St Petersburg sufficed to conjure up the horrifying prospect that Russia would abandon the Entente and join forces with Germany and Austria, as it had done in the days of the Three Emperors’ Leagues of the 1870s and 1880s. One might have expected that this ambient unpredictability would discourage decision-makers from taking risks, but it could also have the opposite effect, creating the illusion that time was running out and that only precipitate action would ensure that alliance partners acted in concert. Had the fabric of the alliances seemed more dependable and enduring, the key decision-makers might have felt less under pressure to act as they did in the summer of 1914.²⁶

Acknowledging these parallels may not qualify as transnational history in the canonical sense: we are not dealing with ‘spaces in between’, nor with ‘flows’ and ‘streams’. But on the other hand, it does highlight the limitations of a narrowly international approach, in the sense of one grounded in the assumption that nation-states provoked and responded to each as unitary actors in the manner envisaged by those contemporary caricatures in which each state or empire was represented by a single allegorical person. The task of diplomats (one they performed with varying degrees of success) was precisely to probe the moving parts of these executives and to assess their relative weight within the structure as whole. Above all, the transnational analysis of decision-making cultures reveals a dynamic in the continental system that is lost to view if we confine our gaze to the official messaging between states.

To this one might add that these executives interpenetrated each other to some extent through the deployment of espionage networks. In the early summer of 1913, the authority of the Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorff, was gravely undermined by the discovery that Colonel Alfred Redl, former chief of military counter intelligence and chief of staff of Eighth Army Corps in Prague, had been routinely passing top-level Austrian military secrets to St Petersburg, including entire mobilisation schedules. The scandal shed an unflattering light on Conrad's skills as a military administrator, to say the least, for all appointments at this level were his responsibility. But to make matters worse, it was soon revealed that the persons involved in trafficking Austrian military secrets included a staff officer of South Slav heritage by the name of Čedomil Jandrić, who happened to be a close friend of Conrad's son, Kurt. Čedomil and Kurt had been classmates at the Military Academy and often went out drinking and merry-making together. Evidence emerged to suggest that Jandrić, together with the Italian mistress of Hötzendorff junior and various other friends from their circle had been involved in selling military secrets to the Italians, most of which were then passed by the Italians to St Petersburg. Kurt von Hötzendorff may himself have been directly implicated in espionage activity for the Russians, if we are to believe the claims of the then military intelligence chief for the St Petersburg military district. He later recalled that the Austrian agents supplying Russia with high-quality intelligence included the chief of staff's son, who, it was claimed, had stolen into his father's study and removed general staff war-planning documents for copying.

The consequences of this breakdown in Austrian security were profound. It meant, among other things, that the Russians possessed a detailed *internal* view of Austrian preparations, albeit one that was already slightly outdated by the summer of 1914. And precisely because they were so well acquainted with Austrian mobilization schedules, the Russians tended, on the one hand, to read individual measures as part of a coherent whole and, on the other, to view any departure from the expected sequence as potentially threatening. The leaked documents shaped Russian threat analysis well into the summer of 1914 and help to explain the Russian decision to respond to Austrian troops' movements on the Balkan frontier with an order for general mobilisation. This was a classic example of the misreading that can arise when a dose of high-level, textured intelligence tempts the receiver to

shoehorn incoming data into a pattern that is denuded of context and may be outdated.²⁷ The same can be said of German readings of intelligence from Benno von Siebert, a Baltic German employed as second secretary at the Russian embassy in London. Through this source, the Germans were well informed on the Anglo-Russian naval talks taking place in May 1914. They learned, among other things, that London and St Petersburg had discussed the possibility that in the event of war, the British fleet would support the landing of a Russian Expeditionary Corps in Pomerania. The discrepancies between Edward Grey's evasive replies to enquiries by the German ambassador in London and the details filed by Siebert conveyed the alarming impression that British had something to hide. And this, in turn, produced a crisis in trust between Berlin and London, just as the crisis triggered by the assassinations on Sarajevo broke out. Here, too, the combination of textured inside knowledge with a poor understanding of the wider context deepened the mood of paranoia and fatalism in Berlin.²⁸

The networks and institutions that cross political boundaries have traditionally been of interest to transnational historians.²⁹ In a study of the evolution of Europe-wide transport, communication and power networks, Erik van der Vleuten and Arne Kaijser examined the role of what they described as 'transnational infrastructures' both in integrating Europe and in crystallizing perceptions of it. The planning, financing and construction of such 'large technological systems', the editors argue, were marked by 'ambiguities and tensions' and encompassed, beyond their narrower technical objectives, 'ideological socio-technical and contested aspects'.³⁰ Could this kind of research be used to illuminate the background to the outbreak of war? Certainly transnational (or more precisely, transimperial) railway projects were among the neuralgic issues troubling the pre-war community of states in Europe. In the 1890s, London's hostility to the plan to construct a German-financed railway between the independent Republic of the Transvaal and Delagoa Bay, then in Portuguese Mozambique, led to a cooling in relations between Britain and Germany, set the scene for the 'Kruger Telegram' crisis of 1895–1896 and helped to motivate the transition in Berlin to a major programme of naval rearmament.

There was consternation in 1903 when it became known that a company owned by German banks had been entrusted by the Ottoman government with the construction of a gigantic railway line that would extend from the Ankara end of the Anatolian Railway via Adana and

Aleppo across Mesopotamia to Baghdad and (ultimately) Basra on the Persian gulf. The project, which in theory would one day make it possible to travel by train directly from Berlin to Baghdad, met with suspicion and obstruction from the other imperial powers. The British were concerned at the prospect of the Germans acquiring privileged access to the oil fields of Ottoman Iraq, whose importance was growing at a time when the British navy was planning the transition from coal-to oil-fired ships. They feared that the Germans, freed through a land route to the east from the constraints imposed by British global naval dominance, might come to threaten Britain's dominance in colonial trade.

Although the route of the railway had been laid—at great inconvenience to the engineers and investors—as far as possible from Russian areas of interest, St Petersburg feared that it would place the Germans in a position to pose a threat to Russian control of the Caucasus and Northern Persia. Seeking to neutralise the threat posed by this project, London initially responded with a claim to exclusive British control of the Mesopotamian section of the line—the most strategically sensitive from Britain's point of view—with the support of the French and Russian governments. When this arrangement broke down, a contentious process of brokering began, in which the Ottoman, German, British, French and Russian governments were all involved, and in which a complex mix of continental geopolitical bargaining and 'imperial trade-offs' were in play.³¹ Much less well known, because preparations were broken off in 1914, is the trans-Persian railway from the Russian to the Indian frontiers. Like the Baghdad Railway, this trans-imperial project was deeply intertwined with the geopolitics of the continental powers, though it touched above all on Anglo-Russian tensions, rather than Anglo-German ones.³² In the Balkans, Austrian efforts in 1907–1908 to finance a railway heading south-east through the Sanjak of Novibazar into Ottoman Macedonia aroused the suspicions of the Russians and the French, who were backing an alternative railway that would cut *across* the Balkans from a port on the Danube to a port on the Adriatic Sea.³³

Prestigious and expensive projects of this kind were transnational by their nature: internationally financed, situated at geopolitical chokepoints and charged with hyperbolic strategic assumptions. They could trigger flareups, but they could also provide a mechanism for the conciliation of interests. After long negotiations, a sequence of international accords neutralised tension over the Baghdad Railway. A Franco-German agreement of 15 February 1914 marked out the boundaries between the

spheres of interest of the key German and French investors (French capital was crucial to the financing of the project). On 15 June 1914, the Germans were able to overcome British objections by conceding, among many other things, British control of the crucial Basra-Persian Gulf section of the future railway—a concession that robbed the project of much of its supposed geostrategic value to the Germans. And in the spring of 1914, the Austrian and Serbian governments began to confer on how to manage the transfer of the Austrian stake in the Oriental Railway Company (an international concern previously operating on a Turkish concession in Macedonia) to Serbian ownership. The discussions were complex, difficult and occasionally rancorous, but they received some positive coverage in the Austrian and Serbian press, and they were still underway when Archduke Franz Ferdinand travelled to Sarajevo.³⁴ A systematic comparative analysis of these projects, one that integrated not just the politicians, but also the planners, financiers and engineers, would enable us to develop a more sophisticated account of how the ‘international’ and the ‘transnational’ shaped and interacted with each other in the last years before the outbreak of war.

International credit is another area of transnational exchange that would merit attention. International loans were in this era a political issue of the highest importance, inextricably wound up with diplomacy and power politics. French international lending in particular was highly politicised. Paris vetoed loans to governments whose policies were deemed unfriendly to French interests; it facilitated loans in return for economic or political concessions; on occasion it reluctantly conceded a loan to unreliable but strategically important clients in order to prevent them from seeking relief elsewhere. It pursued potential clients aggressively—in Serbia’s case the government was given to understand in the summer of 1905 that if they did not give France first refusal on the loan, the Paris money markets would be closed altogether to Serbia. And for vulnerable debtors, like the Ottoman Empire or the Balkan states, securing such loans often involved the partial hypothecation of sovereignty, as debtor states placed core revenue streams as ‘collateral’ under foreign supervision. Recognising this nexus between strategy and finance, the French foreign ministry merged its commercial and political divisions in 1907.³⁵ The ‘Bulgarian Loan’ of 1914 was of comparable import, since it locked Bulgaria into the policy of the Triple Alliance, just as Serbia had been integrated by the credit policy of the western powers into the political system of the Entente.³⁶ In this area, too, there have been

distinguished individual studies, but no synthetic and comparative analysis of how the weaponization of international credit affected the relations among the powers after 1900.

If we are interested in those zones in which ideas and perceptions circulated across the borders of states, then the European press is surely promising terrain for transnational study. By this, I do not mean comparative studies of the belligerence expressed by various press establishments,³⁷ but rather a multi-state analysis of the interface between policy makers and the press. Sheaves of newspaper cuttings and translations fattened the files flowing into foreign ministries from every European legation. The press was of interest to those who were tasked with formulating policy as the mirror of public opinion in the host country—even politicians who were confident of their own governments' ability to sail against the current of prevailing opinion tended to assume that other governments were more easily manipulated. In any case, a close examination of how press cuttings were actually read and at why they were filed in the first place shows that what policy-makers were primarily after were not soundings from the general public, but coded signals from within the state executive of the country in question. Across Europe, press cuttings were trawled for pieces 'inspired' by the Ministry of War, the Foreign Minister or other key functionaries.

And this made sense in a world in which semi-official newspapers and 'inspired' articles planted in the domestic press to test the climate of opinion were familiar tools of continental diplomacy. It was universally understood in Serbia, for example, that *Samoprava* represented the views of the government; the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* was considered the official organ of the German Foreign Office; in Russia, the government made its views known through its own semi-official journal, *Rossiya*, but also ran occasional inspired campaigns in other more popular papers, like *Novoye Vremya*. The French Foreign Ministry, like the German, disbursed cash to journalists from a secret fund and maintained close ties with *Le Temps* and the *Agence Havas*, while using the less serious-minded *Le Matin* to launch 'trial balloons'. The Russian Foreign Ministry acquired a press department in 1906 and from 1910, Sazonov orchestrated regular tea-time meetings at the ministry with the most important editors and Duma leaders. Relations between the Russian diplomats and some favoured newspapers were so close, one journalist reported in 1911, that the ministry of foreign affairs in St Petersburg 'often seemed a mere branch office of the *Novoye Vremya*'.

The newspaper's editor, Jegorov, was often to be seen in the ministry's press bureau, and Nelidov, chief of the bureau and himself a former journalist, was a frequent visitor to the paper's editorial offices. In France, the relationship between diplomats and journalists was especially intimate: nearly half of the foreign ministers of the Third Republic were former writers or journalists and the 'lines of communication' between foreign ministers and the press were 'almost always open'.³⁸ The press is another area where there exist many distinguished individual studies, but little on the way of a synthetic transnational analysis of how decision-makers processed and responded to material culled from the newspapers.

Finally, it is worth dwelling briefly on the transnational attitudes and mentalities that animated the statesmen of the pre-war years. James Joll's influential essay, discussed above, on the 'unspoken assumptions' held in common by Europe key decision-makers mapped out the potential for a study of this kind and there have been some excellent studies of ideological change in specific states. What is less well understood is how certain ideas and arguments were promulgated across the diplomatic networks and how they changed behaviour. A full list of these might well become very long, but two in particular spring to mind. The first is the collapse of political solidarity with Austria-Hungary. In the Restoration era, Austria had been viewed by all the great powers as a mainstay of the international system, simply by virtue of its value as an ordering presence in the multi-ethnic south-east of Europe. By 1914, however, it had come in the eyes of some Entente statesmen to seem dispensable. This waning inclination to take Austria and its interests seriously as constitutive features of the system had a profound effect on how decision-makers acted in the summer of 1914.³⁹

A second idea whose triumphal progress across the system would be worth exploring is the tendency to overrate the striking power and economic might of Russia. In 1914, the reports of the French military attaché in St Petersburg, General de Laguiche, evoked a Russian 'colossus' supplied with 'inexhaustible resources', armed with 'first-class' soldiers and wielding a 'limitless power'. After attending the spring manoeuvres of that year, Laguiche positively bubbled over with enthusiasm: 'the more I go, the more I admire this material, the Russian man is superior to any I know. There's a source of strength and power there than I have never encountered in any other army'. In France, such perceptions had an ambivalent impact, stirring pride in the alliance with Russia, but also prompting fears that an overly powerful and independent Russia might I

day come to find France dispensable as a strategic partner. In Berlin, by contrast, the very same misprision deepened the fatalism and paranoia of the military and political leadership, reinforcing the forebodings of those who believed that Germany's chances of winning a contest with the Entente were shrinking with each passing year.⁴⁰ These (and there were many others⁴¹) were the 'memes' that proliferated across the networks of early-twentieth-century Europe. They were not 'unspoken assumptions' but open avowals that, if they were repeated often enough, could constitute a virtual reality for those who traded in them.

One final thought in conclusion: if transnational studies of the aetiology of the war of 1914–1918 have been rarer than national studies, this is partly because they impose on scholars the burden of working across different national archives and historiographies in a range of languages. But a deeper reason for the relative reluctance of historians to cross-cut national narratives in this way must surely lie in the idea of 'origins' that has lain at the heart of the vast historiography on the outbreak of this war. The beauty of the Fischer thesis lay in its ability to anchor the story of 1914 in a long and elaborate narrative that tracked the journey of a great but flawed nation towards a policy of aggression and self-destruction. Its abiding flaw lay in its complete lack of interest in what the other powers were doing, in how their behaviour might also have amplified risks within the system and its dependence upon unexamined assumptions about the uniquely egregious character of Germany's approach to international relations. In pursuit of a powerful diachronic causal chain, the Fischer thesis blotted out the interactive features of pre-war European politics, focusing intention instead on how a dysfunctional political culture exported its inner mayhem into a policy of adventurism and ultimately of war.

Which brings us to the point at which the relationship between international and transnational approaches may be less harmonious than some transnational enthusiasts have suggested. Dominik Geppert's study of the the Anglo-German press wars closed in 1912, because the era of the Anglo-German press wars came to an end in that year; the last two pre-war years were marked, as Geppert showed, by relative harmony. In freeing his subject matter from the constraints of a purely national approach, Geppert also loosened the hermeneutic grip of a teleology focused on 1914 as the culmination of deepening pre-war tensions. The enhancement of synchronic texture was attended, in other words, by a diminution of diachronic explanatory momentum. It

may be that, in shifting attention from the search for ‘origins’ (whose hermeneutic status is in any case highly problematic) to the question of *how* peace gave way to war, synchronically oriented transnational analyses complicate or weaken narratives that work through the diachronic accumulation of causes. At the very least, they render it difficult to return to the morally polarised certainties of narratives focused on the culpability of one state. This trade-off should not be lost from view when we consider how transnational studies might enrich our understanding of 1914.

NOTES

1. C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, ‘AHR Conversation: On Transnational History’, *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), pp. 1441–1464, here pp. 1442, 1443.
2. Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present and Future* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), p. 6; see also Akira Iriye, “The Internationalization of History,” *American Historical Review*, February 1989, pp. 1–10.
3. See, for example, Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 To 2000* (New York, 1987); Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York, 1967); id., *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese-American Expansion, 1897–1911* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1972); id., *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941–1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981); Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994).
4. Thomas Otte, *The China Question. Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894–1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007; Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Patricia A. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances. Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, 2004); Holger Afflerbach, *Der Dreibund. Europäische Grossmacht- und Allianzpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna, 2002).
5. For powerful studies in this mode, see Glenda Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border: Difference, Identity and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe* (State University of New York Press:

- Albany, 2001) and Hugo Service, *From Germans to Poles. Communism, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing after the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2013).
6. See, for example, Joseph W. Konvitz, *Cartography in France, 1660–1848: Science, Engineering and Statecraft* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1987); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford University press: Oxford, 2015); Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy. The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2013); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2004); Hoi-Eun Kim, *Doctors of Empire: Medical and Cultural Encounters Between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2014); Anne Gerritsen and Stephen McDowall, ‘Material Culture and the Other: European Encounters with Chinese Porcelain, ca. 1650–1800’, *Journal of World History*, 23/1 (2012), pp. 87–113.
 7. Olivier Wieviorka, ‘Mapping the Transnational’, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 105 (2010), pp. 234–235.
 8. Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal. The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass, 2013); Tim Harper.
 9. Tamara Loos, ‘Transnational Histories of Sexualities in Asia’, *AHR*, 114/5 (2009), pp. 1309–1324. For examples of transnational research focused on migration, see for example, Brian J.L. Berry, ‘Transnational Urbanward Migration, 1830–1980’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83/3, (1993), pp. 389–405; Wendy Webster, ‘Transnational Journeys and Domestic Histories’, *Journal of Social History*, 39/3 (2006), pp. 651–666; Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community Since 1870* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2012).
 10. Dominic Lieven, ‘Dilemmas of Empire 1850–1918. Power, Territory, Identity’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 34/2 (1999), pp. 163–200; this is also a central theme of his *Towards the Flame. Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (Allen Lane: London, 2014).
 11. Luigi Albertini, *Origins of the War of 1914*, trans. and ed. Isabella Massey (3 vols.; Oxford University Press: London, 1952–1957). This was and remains a magnificent and immensely readable study. But even Albertini’s account was inter—rather than transnational. It moved from one chancellery to another, rarely subjecting the actors or the structures within which they operated to comparative scrutiny.

12. Volker Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1973) Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1977); D.C.B. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983); John F.V. Keiger, *France and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Richard Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Samuel R. Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1991).
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German History as Global History: The Case of Coffee

Dorothee Wierling

Abstract The international commodity trade has a formative social power. In her study of Hamburg coffee importers from 1900 to 1970, Dorothee Wierling traces their lives and fortunes through a transnational history of society. Her global analysis of commodity chains deepens our understanding of the mechanisms which integrated the nations of the colonial and post-colonial eras into a modern world system. International networks of German merchants acted as agents of globalization and, through their economic activity fuelled by the European taste for coffee, they changed social structures both at home and abroad. Their significant holdings in the production centres of South America impacted directly upon indigenous populations. Simultaneously, with some 200 companies occupying warehouses on the local Sandtorkai, the Hamburg coffee exchange became the major transshipment point for green coffee into Central Europe. Urbane, well-travelled and outward looking,

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entrepreneurial coffee dynasties formed a *Gemeinschaft*, cultivating self-fashioned Anglophile values among Hamburg's bourgeois elite, transplanting a German *Heimat* to their colonial enclaves and perceptively adapting to the exigencies of a post-colonial world.

Keywords Global Commodity Chains · Habitus · Hamburg · Heimat Sandtorkai · Transnational History of Society

Introduction

German historiography has long centered on the nation state. For British or U.S.-American historians the empire or an immigrant society served as important reference points for looking beyond the borders of the nation state whereas the birth of German historiography coincided with the yearning for the nation as a homogenous community. However, transnational and even global history have, at least in the last decade, become a growing and already important new field in German historiography, both conceptually and empirically.¹ The degree to which Germany, or rather specific places and regions in Germany, have been involved in global history, especially in the economic transformations of the nineteenth century, has been well documented in recent scholarship.

One of the connections between industrializing and urbanizing societies in Europe and North America on the one hand, and areas in the global South and East on the other, consists in specific commodities such as sugar, cotton, and other “colonial” products. These commodities not only transformed consumption in Europe and the United States, but they were the basis for creating industrial societies in the consumer countries, where—to take the British example—the textile industry laid the foundations for swift and powerful industrialization and urbanization, and sugar became an important food item for the new working class, especially in connection with tea.²

Through the analysis of global commodity chains, these connections have been made visible and have deepened our understanding of the mechanisms that created the industrial as well as the colonial or post-colonial worlds and the factors responsible for this historical transformation. As Sven Beckert has shown in his study of cotton, this process of transformation has not come to an end with the creation of industrial societies in the global North, but could also lead to their eventual

de-industrialization by shifting the center of industrial production to those countries that had originally acted as mere suppliers of raw products.³ Historical studies of commodity chains have highlighted the central role of colonial commodities as the driving forces behind the complex and uneven process we now call globalization. However, commodity chains as a concept are sometimes used to describe structures that seem to function almost by themselves once the “chain” is established. The result can be an abstract and macro-economic approach to the history of globalization that “flattens” the phenomenon. Other studies, such as the groundbreaking work of anthropologist Steven Mintz on sugar, juxtapose the colonial world of production and the industrial world of consumers with a focus on their interconnected changes in regard to ways of working and consuming. But such studies seldom refer to the individuals and professional groups involved in creating these connections.⁴

In an inspiring essay, the historian of Africa Fred Cooper has recently challenged the usefulness of “globalization” as a concept because it, as he states bluntly, suffers from two problems: one being “global,” the other “ization.”⁵ As to the former, Cooper argues that the idea of a global network including each part of the world is quite misleading because in reality, large sections of the globe and whole continents were more or less excluded from the process. And the second half of the term, “ization,” according to Cooper, falsely suggests an almost teleological development from an unconnected world to an ever more connected one, a suggestion of an ongoing progress very similar to the modernization theory of the 1960s. Instead, according to Cooper, these processes are not only uneven with regard to region, but also with regard to time: breaks and movements into different directions are quite common. This is certainly true for coffee in the twentieth century; the impact of two world wars and the economic crises in their aftermath led to dramatic interruptions of the transatlantic trade, and states began to heavily intervene in foreign trade. The result, at least in Europe, was a long process of de-globalization which only turned around again in the 1950s.

Nevertheless I do believe that the concept of globalization is helpful for understanding the processes I am interested in: as a social historian, I particularly aim at what Jürgen Osterhammel has called a “transnational history of society” (*transnationale Gesellschaftsgeschichte*), without assuming the existence of a “transnational society” or even *Weltgesellschaft*, but rather looking for a repertoire of transnational practices of socialization

(*Vergesellschaftung*) in a broad sense of the word: the creation of ever closer systems of (social) interaction.⁶

As a consequence, I am not so much interested in coffee as a product, a commodity or a consumer good as such, but in the role it plays as a *mediator* of social relations among the various actors along the commodity chain.⁷ Coffee, growing in the global South and being mostly consumed in the industrialized North, is a commodity which involves a large number of actors who inhabit very different, often distant yet closely connected worlds, geographically, culturally, and socially. Looking at one group of actors will be helpful for understanding the process of global connections and disconnections as motivated by interests, expectations, experiences, practices, and networks. I am taking the role and perspective of the merchants engaged in overseas trade with green coffee as my starting point. Merchants as actors have long been neglected by historians of modern history and, oddly enough, especially in the analysis of global trade since the nineteenth century, a period for which the research of both economic and social historians has been dominated by industrialization and urbanization. Only recently have scholars of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century examined the crucial role that merchants played in creating a closely connected web of interactions and exchange as the stuff that global history is made of.⁸ What Sven Beckert states for the cotton merchants—that *they* were the ones who kept the commodity flow moving and who personified the global networks based on credit, trade, information, social connections, and a never-ending hunger for profit—also applies to the coffee merchants. I therefore regard them as true “agents of globalization.” Before examining more closely the global aspects of overseas merchants’ practices, it is important to stress, however, to what degree this group was first and foremost locally grounded.⁹

My case study examines Hamburg-based coffee importers between 1900 and the 1970s.¹⁰ Since the late nineteenth century Hamburg and its free port had become the main hub for importing green coffee to central Europe. In the huge warehouse district, around two hundred coffee merchants at a time occupied the Sandtorkai, their offices and the coffee exchange just a short walk away from the city center, the town hall, and the chamber of commerce.

For Hamburg, a port city and a state in Imperial Germany’s (and later the Weimar Republic’s) federal system, trade played an important role in the economy as well as in local politics, and the personal connections between both spheres were close. At the same time, international

relations were crucial for the city, which took pride in calling itself the “gate to the world” (*Tor zur Welt*) *even* in 1939, when the gate was located in a country seeking to dominate the globe rather than open up to it.¹¹

The city’s bourgeois class, shaped by the ideal of the virtuous Hanseatic merchant, considered itself liberal, open-minded, and urbane.¹² The merchants’ interests in Hamburg were politically supported by a number of institutions of bourgeois self-regulation, such as the *Verein der am Caffeehandel beteiligten Firmen* [Association of Companies Engaged in the Coffee Trade]. At the same time, the city had many consulates, and international trading partners frequently visited, established agencies, and shared a culture of transnational sociability with their local hosts. As a result, Hamburg was an internationally oriented city whose politics were shaped more by its overseas connections and interests than by its role as part of the German national state.

Keeping the local basis in mind will deepen our understanding of the coffee merchants’ overseas relations, global connections, and transnational practices. Those practices, while based on the economic logic of trade, were largely social in character and formed a complex context for the economic dealings around coffee. At the same time, the actors themselves saw no contradiction between their local and global activities, but thought of them as connected worlds. In the following section, I will briefly sketch the coffee commodity chain in order to give an impression of the variety of actors and places that determined the basic economic practices in the coffee trade as well as the specific role of the overseas merchants. This will be followed by an analysis of “transnational” travel and socializing as practices that played a key role in keeping business connections alive and running. Transnational families and their role in the global coffee trade were also crucial for establishing stable and reliable connections around the globe. While focusing on typical structures and practices, it is important to consider the changes they underwent in the course of the twentieth century. By way of conclusion, the merchants’ sense of community and belonging will be discussed.

Trading in a Global Commodity

Coffee is a typical “colonial” product. It grows only in regions with specific climate conditions and was originally cultivated in Africa and later in parts of East Asia. In the mid-nineteenth century, coffee was introduced

to Latin America, where its production was closely linked to nation building processes.¹³ Today, Brazil is still the largest producer of coffee, while Vietnam has risen to become the second largest producer since the late 1980s following the direct intervention of the global coffee industry.¹⁴

At the end of the nineteenth century coffee had become a commodity of mass consumption in the United States and Europe, especially in Germany, and production expanded rapidly. This, however, required huge sums of initial capital. Clearing the land was one issue; the other was economically surviving the first 5 years before new plants would bear fruit or getting through the periodical cycles of overproduction. Planters needed a workforce for picking and preparing the coffee for transport in so-called *beneficios*, where the fruit was washed and dried to separate the green bean from the pulp. In addition, coffee-producing states had to provide the infrastructure, such as railway lines from the highlands, where coffee grew best, to the ports. European (mostly London-based) merchant banks became central to these initial investments, at least before the First World War; after the war U.S. banks steadily increased their economic engagement in the coffee business. To this day, the coffee commodity chain shows typical characteristics of social inequality between societies producing raw products and consumer societies processing these products for the world market.¹⁵

Figure 1 shows a typical illustration of the coffee commodity chain. When it comes to trade and merchants, both importers and exporters, such charts say very little about the kinds of activities necessary to realize the mediation between producers and consumers.

The following sketch shall therefore convey an overview of the many actors involved in “facilitating trade” or at least of those actors with whom importers dealt with on a regular basis. Sometimes planters were also exporters, but as a rule an agent was needed to mediate between the exporter and the European (in my case study: Hamburg-based) importer. These agents would not only take care of negotiating the price of coffee, but also of insurance and freight (cif-agents). Brokers, on the other hand, would arrange business connections with exporters by order of the importers and arrange transactions among several buyers. Both agents and brokers could—and often would—import coffee on their own account and—like importers—deal in futures at the coffee exchanges, be it in Hamburg, Le Havre, London, Santos or New York, i.e. act as hedgers. Once an international deal was decided on, the

Coffee Global Value Chain Input - Output Stages

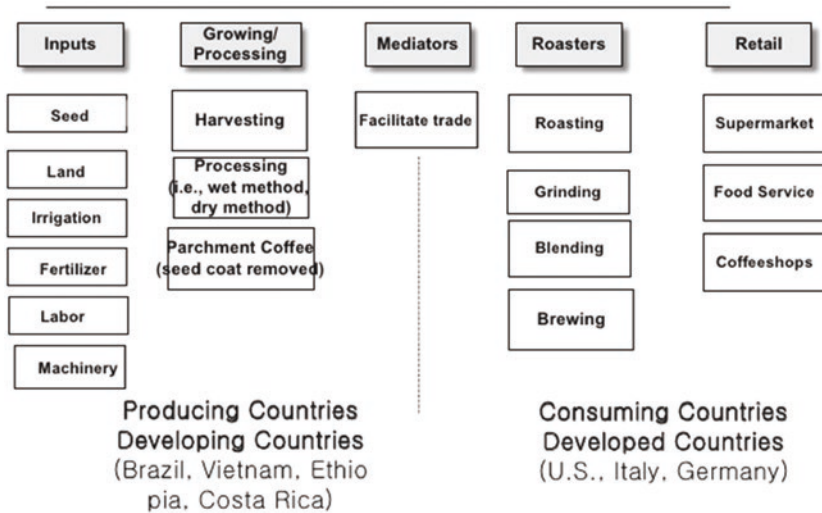


Fig. 1 Coffee global value chain: input/output stages

financial transactions were arranged by a merchant banker, who mediated between exporter and importer through an “acceptance credit”: paying the exporter of coffee based on the “bill of lading” and being paid by the importer as soon as the commodity arrived in the port. Through their own (cif) agents, banks could also take care of shippers and insurers. Once received by Hamburg importers, all of whom were based in the free port area, coffee was taken over by storekeepers and—again through brokers—either re-exported to other European countries, mainly to Scandinavia and to central/eastern/southeast Europe, or imported and sold to wholesale dealers and roasters, from where it went into retail sale or coffee houses.

Apart from the brokers, storekeepers, and possibly local shippers and insurers, all other partners in the importer’s business would typically be based overseas, often out of direct reach, in the remote areas of highland coffee growing regions. Regular communication, initially by letter and

telegraph cable in the nineteenth century, and by telephone, telex, fax, and the internet in the twentieth century, was crucial: even leaving aside disasters such as frost and pest infestation, a great deal of information was needed to minimize the risk of a bad deal: Would the coffee be of the promised quality? Would it arrive in time? Would world market prices rise or fall? Would bills be paid? Would shipping be handled professionally? Would agents and brokers get their share? Would competitors respect established business connections? These and many more issues were often out of the direct control of the parties involved. Although there were internationally accepted trade regulations, these transactions were mostly about trust.¹⁶ Trust, however, had to be gained and secured through a variety of social relations which were embedded in two basic structures: the first was the family firm with its mutual strengthening of economic and kinship ties.¹⁷ The second was the network built on long-term business relationships, on which each partner relied to secure credit both in the literal and the figurative sense and thus build “goodwill,” which represented the core capital of the merchant company.¹⁸ As a result, the coffee trade (like any other overseas trade) comprised a much larger and broader range of interactions than those of simpler economic dealings. In what follows, I will concentrate on two common practices and the way they changed from the late nineteenth into the twentieth century and in particular under the impact of the many economic crises, political disruptions, and two world wars in a century of extremes.

The Grand Coffee Tour

Travel formed an important part not only of bourgeois leisure practices, but also of education, and, in the case of global merchants, of the general introduction into the professional world of global economic activities.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century travel intensified, and as part of their overall business education young European coffee merchants, in particular the sons designated as successors for the company, were expected to make at least one visit to a place of international finance and at least one visit to a “place of origin,” as the coffee producing regions were called.

Thus in the fall of 1893, Alphons Hanssen, eldest son in the family firm Hanssen and Studt, which dealt exclusively with green coffee, left Hamburg for a trip that was to last 5 years, until the spring of 1898. “With peaceful commercial intentions” Hanssen, then probably in his twenties, first went to Le Havre and London, from where he travelled to France, Belgium, Holland, and again to England and Scotland.

Following this pre-study in mobility, he ventured on a much more exciting journey that would lead him around the globe, visiting each and every of the world's coffee growing regions for the following 2 years. It was not "*Wanderlust*" alone that drove him in his endeavor, he defended himself, but primarily "business interests"—and the plan to become a shareholder in his father's company, which had been founded by his grandfather in 1836. Global trade, he argued, had accelerated to such a degree that deals were decided on in the course of a few hours, so that a merchant lacked the time to gather all the relevant information he needed for his decision, and instead had to build up thorough knowledge beforehand—through travelling. "This insight defined the purpose and goal of my journey."²⁰

During his voyage to South America, Hanssen socialized with the other twenty-two passengers, among them the wife of the German ambassador in Brazil, who was just the beginning of an endless chain of new acquaintances he made during his travels. Provided with a letter of recommendation by his uncle, the director of the Hamburg-Südamerika-Dampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft, he met business partners of his father's and other Hamburg companies; he visited various *fincas* or *facendas* in every country where he was welcomed by their owners or managers who would help him to arrange his travels to his next destination. His hosts, mostly Germans, talked business over German beer and took him to the local German club. In the backcountry, he encountered small farmers, former slaves, and the indigenous population. The poverty surrounding him sometimes created feelings of sympathy, but mostly of disgust, especially with the poor quality of food and shelter that he had to share and about the laziness of the "negroes," whereas he was full of respect for the hard labor of the "indios." Thus, although he was always in command of a small group of servants and porters for his extensive luggage, he was by no means shielded from the realities of the countries he visited. But he shared the way the elites, and the Germans in particular, interpreted the country they lived in and judged the people who worked for them. When he returned to Hamburg, Hanssen had acquired a huge amount of knowledge not only about the product itself, but also about the national and regional variations of the global merchant *habitus*. The cultural and social capital he had accumulated during his travels would serve him immensely in the future.²¹

Half a century later, in 1955, another travelogue was published by a Hamburg coffee merchant: Fritz Steinmetz published his "Summarized

Impressions of an 18-Day Journey: From Santos, the World's Largest Coffee Port to Bogota, the Capital of Colombia" in eight parts in the trade journal *Coffee and Tea Market*.²² Steinmetz had joined the coffee brokerage business of Josef Königsberger in 1937 as a third partner with the founder and his own father-in-law.²³ Both Steinmetz and his father-in-law put pressure on Königsberger, whom the Nazis defined as Jewish, to sign the company over to them, which he did. The court battle about restitution was still ongoing when Steinmetz undertook his journey in the mid-1950s. Unsurprisingly, these circumstances are not mentioned in his travelogue, and there is only one very indirect reference to the war when Steinmetz quotes a stewardess calming down anxious passengers over Bolivia by referring to the pilots as "great boys from Texas who had gathered their experience during the war in Germany."²⁴ This silence was in line with the general attitude of the business after 1945. A newspaper article published in the mid-1950s praised the "Hanseatic" German merchant and the "goodwill" he still enjoyed in the world of trade by referring to the aftermath of the *First* World War and the ability of companies *then* to quickly regain the trust of their global partners while there was no reference whatsoever to the *Second* World War.²⁵

The differences between the journey in the 1950s and that in the 1900s are striking in many ways. Times were faster: journeys of multiple years were no longer feasible but also no longer necessary to make the required contact. Whereas Hanssen spent many pages describing the arduousness of the journey, Steinmetz crossed mountain ranges by plane, used well-maintained streets and railways, and enjoyed the luxury of hotels and guesthouses on the various *facendas* he visited. As a consequence, Steinmetz had no contact with people outside the narrow circle of his business partners, no encounters with the poor, the unwashed, and the dark-skinned population, whom he nevertheless described, in sync with his hosts, as "frugal, but lazy."²⁶ There is another striking difference: Steinmetz did not travel along a chain of acquaintances or friends, and none of his contacts seems to have been German.

Steinmetz was probably around 50 years old when he undertook this first postwar journey overseas. He thus represented the second generation of large-scale coffee merchants, newcomers of the 1920s and 1930s, not members of the old and established Hamburg merchant class. His cohort was not "Hanseatic" by tradition or experience, but had learned the business in times of fierce competition and economic crises, Nazi

rule, and war. Germany had not imported coffee between the summer of 1939 and 1948, 7 years before Steinmetz took his trip. The German presence and influence in Latin America had been considerably weakened; German property had been confiscated after 1941, and many German nationals had been deported to and interned in the United States. The latter had now become the most important trading partner for Latin America. The restrained tone of Steinmetz' travelogue reflects, it seems, the ambiguities of the situation 10 years after the war and at the beginning of free trade and the "economic miracle" in West Germany.

But there was also another, younger cohort travelling in the early 1960s, members of a generation nowadays referred to as the "children of war." Klaus Jacobs and Albert Darboven, both born in 1936, were sent by their fathers to the "places of origin" in the early 1960s. In the case of Darboven this was El Salvador, a country experiencing a recent coffee boom. Darboven had a great time in Central America, partying with his peers and being allowed to openly carry a weapon; most importantly, he fell in love with Inès, the "coffee princess" of El Salvador, daughter of a wealthy coffee grower from a Sephardic family.²⁷ Klaus Jacobs was sent to Guatemala and stayed there for several years, building close friendships and likewise falling in love with a young woman.²⁸ Finally, Michael Neumann, also born in the mid-1930s, was sent to New York by his father for an apprenticeship with Leon Israel & Sons, who had maintained a branch in Hamburg until 1934. From there he continued to Colombia, where his father's company had become the exclusive agents for the state-regulated coffee export.²⁹ The postwar travels of these young men brought them experiences of excitement, liberation, and eroticism. Like their grandparents and their parents before World War II, they engaged in what Simone Derix has called "cosmopolitan idleness" (*kosmobiler Müßiggang*),³⁰ practices of shared leisure, providing intra-generational bonding experiences and building friendships, and at the same time renewing the broken ties between families and companies while these "innocent" youngsters enjoyed the "places of origin" with naïve impartiality and curiosity.³¹ Under the circumstances of the postwar era, the relationships they engaged in on their travels were less often with ethnic Germans than with the national elites, whom they now met on a more equal footing since the latter had acquired a level of wealth and luxury comparable to Europe and the United States in the meantime. Their encounters served their mutual business interests very well.

Transnational Families: Kinship and Credit

Recently, historians have become more interested in socio-economic family structures and practices extending beyond and across regional and national boundaries.³² Globalization as a process of connecting ever more regions of the world and creating permanent economic relationships and flexible economic networks depends to a large degree on strategies of industrial, banking, and trade families organizing their own “internationalization.”

This was also the case in the coffee trade, which in Hamburg was still organized in the form of family businesses, and from which global links and networks created through kinship originated. Family members might leave Hamburg for good, establishing family branches abroad or associating themselves with families in their new home country, whether those families were of local or of German origin. How did the structure of these “transnational” families in the coffee business follow the logic of the coffee commodity chain? What was Hamburg’s place in the shifting relationships between center and periphery?

Among the 190 bourgeois Hamburg families who had their genealogies published in the *Hamburger Geschlechterbuch*³³ sixteen were engaged in the coffee trade. They represented the traditional type of the Hanseatic merchant and the first generation in the rapidly growing trade before World War I. All of these families were more or less transnationally organized. In my brief characterization, I will focus on two types of transnational kinship systems. The first one is that of the merchant banking family.³⁴

Some of the most respected members of the Hamburg-based Coffee Association had started as merchant bankers, as in the case of the Schlüter family. In 1820, Ferdinand David, the son of a Hamburg mayor, founded an import company together with his cousin Johann Georg Maack. They traded in various products from the Americas, among them coffee, at least up to the First World War. In all their transactions, Schlüter’s nephew Edmund’s involvement in founding the London banking house Edm. Schlüter & Co. was crucial. The ties between the two family branches were further strengthened by Edmund’s niece marrying into the Maack family. One of her sisters married into a Hamburg merchant family active in Venezuela, another sister married a future Hamburg mayor and board member of Norddeutsche Bank. From their first daughter links go to the Waitz family, akin with the Münchmeyers, another merchant bank that also dealt with coffee and held important

political and economic positions in Hamburg. A brother of Edmund Schluter married the daughter of a banker and Hamburg mayor from the highly respected Amsinck family, merchant bankers with a branch in New York. His oldest daughter married into a Hamburg merchant family in Caracas. Meanwhile, the London family branch—British nationals since the outbreak of the First World War who had anglicized their name to Schluter—prospered and opened branches in Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, and Costa Rica (all coffee producing countries), while also serving as advisers to the British government on matters of the coffee trade.³⁵ As indicated above, merchant banking was crucial for organizing overseas trade in coffee. The ledgers of the Schluter bank show that although the bank itself traded in rubber and coffee, the largest profits were made with the acceptance business, a common technique of overseas trade, in which a bank advanced payment to the exporter and was paid back by the importer upon the delivery of the goods.³⁶ The transnational character of merchant banking shaped not only economic, but also social and kinship relations in Hamburg well into the twentieth century. Whereas many merchant banker family alliances originated in Hamburg, the banks increasingly followed the evolving centers of international finance—from Hamburg to London and from there to New York—while often carefully renewing Hamburg alliances at the same time.

This was also true for a second pattern, coffee families in the “places of origin.” The sixty-three German family names Alphons Hanssen mentions in his travelogue point to larger kinship systems with German roots in the coffee producing countries, especially in Latin America. As a rule, before 1941 Germans in Latin America would socialize mostly amongst themselves and set up a number of ethnic institutions; they did, however, also have a lot in common with the local elites, not least wealth and the elitist isolation from the rest of society. The degree of ethnic and/or class mixing varied considerably. Whereas in Costa Rica, where coffee was mostly grown by small holders, Germans tended to mix much more with the locals, including intermarriage, in Guatemala they formed a close-knit, albeit influential community that owned half of Guatemala’s vast *fincas*. Germans, many of them from Hamburg, had been attracted to Guatemala and its coffee since the 1870s and had massively invested in the country’s infrastructure.³⁷ At the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century it was a common pattern that sons or nephews not eligible for or fit to be successors in the Hamburg family firm went abroad to found their own coffee business in the “place of origin,” either

as agents or planters. However, their business was often less profitable (and quite risky, especially in agricultural production), and they tended to marry into less prestigious, local families. In these cases they formed a mere sideline of the family business, whose economic and power center remained in Hamburg.

The situation was quite different in the case of Hamburg's Nottebohm family. In 1822, Carl Ludwig Nottebohm had founded a company specializing in colonial products of all sorts while his brothers had gone to Antwerp. Carl Ludwig's son, Carl Friedrich Wilhelm, gained immense influence in Hamburg, not only as a merchant banker and political leader, but also as co-founder (and/or chairman) of several important German banks. During the first international overproduction crisis at the end of the nineteenth century, many coffee planters in Guatemala (as elsewhere) lost their property to their creditors; it was probably in this context that the Nottebohms got directly involved in the coffee production business.³⁸ Carl Friedrich Wilhelm had seven sons.

One of them, Carl Ludwig II, took over the Guatemalan coffee business and, in 1894, founded Nottebohm and Hermanos with two of his brothers. While Carl Ludwig himself remained in Hamburg and served as a member and then president of its chamber of commerce as well as on the board of the Reichsbank in Berlin and the Hamburger Commerzbank, his brother Johannes went to live in Guatemala and married the daughter of a Hamburg-born merchant from Santos, whose wife came from the powerful Woermann family, owners of Hamburg's largest shipping company. The three sons from Johannes' marriage went on to expand the family coffee business considerably. One of them founded his own company, which his son, who married a woman from Hamburg, then took over. The couple had five children, three of whom stayed in Guatemala, among them Thomas, born in 1949.

The Nottebohms are a unique case for several reasons. One is the long tradition of their Guatemala business, despite the fact that they were—like most Germans—expropriated twice in connection with the two World Wars. After the Second World War Guatemala generally refused to restitute German possessions.³⁹ Only the Nottebohms managed to get their plantations back right after the war—obviously because of their good economic and personal connections with the governing (in this case leftist) elite. More interesting, however, are the shifts in power and influence within the family, which in the nineteenth century had started out as one of the most important Hamburg merchant banking

families. Untypically, in the case of the Nottebohms it was the Hamburg banking branch that lost significance whereas the Guatemala business of coffee production and export became the center of the family business.⁴⁰

The frustrating discretion of the “Hanseatic” merchant class makes it difficult to trace their marriage patterns in the postwar era of the twentieth century. To make things even more difficult, the newcomers who became the global players of the 1950s did not make it into Hamburg’s *Geschlechterbuch*. Some of the emerging global players were roasters big enough to import their own coffee: Albert Darboven, roaster of the famous “Idee-Kaffee,” married the young “coffee princess” of El Salvador and brought her to Hamburg. Klaus Jacobs of the Jacobs Café firm, by contrast, was forced to leave his Guatemalan lover behind and married a respectable Hamburg lady. Both marriages ended in divorce. Darboven then married a German noblewoman while Jacobs took his Italian-Swiss secretary for his second wife, who embodied the exact opposite of the female Hanseatic type. Short of more systematic information about marriage patterns, this anecdotal evidence suggests that by the 1960s traditional marriage norms no longer held sway over all family members, and individual romantic choices began to play a larger role. These choices, however, could still be in line with broader business interests: Michael Neumann married the American he had fallen in love with during his stay in New York; their son David’s wife is from Colombia, still the most important business partner of the Neumann coffee group, which today is the world’s second largest importer of green coffee.

Twentieth-century history calls for a thorough historicization of the way families, kinship, and the international trade interacted. The two world wars, in particular the second one, stand out as the most dramatic events, followed by world economic crises and national restrictions on global trade. As a result, European involvement in the global coffee trade lost its status to the United States of America. While New York emerged as the coffee trade’s financial center and Latin American elites gained status and wealth after World War II, Hamburg lost its significance as the center of the European coffee trade—its coffee exchange, re-founded in 1955, never developed any activities worth mentioning and essentially closed down a few years later. At the same time, as part of a dramatic process of monopolization, Hamburg also lost its exclusive status as the kinship center of coffee merchant companies. Once the impact of the Second World War no longer played a negative role, both in regard to economics and social contacts, center and periphery were renegotiated.⁴¹

Global Belongings

By way of conclusion, I would like to address the issue of a global social history and take up the question whether—and if so—how the global connectedness of Hamburg-based coffee importers shaped their sense of belonging to a larger collective entity beyond family and firm. If we look at the many self-descriptions of individuals and groups, both in oral history interviews and in the coffee association's files, the concept of a "community of the coffee trade" (*Gemeinschaft des Kaffeehandels*) clearly stands out. The German concept of *Gemeinschaft* has a much stronger emotional, if not sentimental connotation than its American equivalent. Thus coffee merchants often identified it with the idea of an extended family. But the strong bonds defining this community ended at the borders of the port city of Hamburg. If the local coffee merchants described themselves as a *Gemeinschaft*, Hamburg clearly was their "home," with the emotional and sentimental connotation of the German term *Heimat*. Well into the 1950s, Hamburg coffee merchants had formed an estate in the Weberian sense of the word, with shared interests, norms, and values formed around the concept of honor.⁴² Membership had been exclusive, and the community had sealed itself off from other branches of the coffee business, such as roasters, from their competitors in other port cities, in particular Bremen, and in general from economic groups not engaged in overseas trade and not represented in Hamburg. For Hamburgers, the notion of Hamburg as *Heimat* applied to family, kinship, and business connections. Yet the ledgers of the London-based Edm. Schluter & Co. do not suggest any preference for Hamburg business partners over those in other port cities; nor did German coffee producers in Latin America stick to Hamburg customers once it became more profitable to sell their coffee to the United States of America. Instead, it was the *cultural capital* Hamburg stood for and the *social capital* it had to offer that made the city so attractive that those abroad would send their sons to Hamburg for professional training and tried to have them marry into a respectable Hamburg family.

At the same time, the focus on Hamburg as *Heimat* was a statement about the nation state. It might be helpful to distinguish between the two parts of the term, since Hamburg's economic elites, and overseas merchants in particular, tended to display an emotional distance to the nation as community while they recognized the state as an institution with certain claims to and services for them. This had become evident

already in the 1880s, when Hamburg refused to enter the Customs Union of the German Reich unless it was granted a free port. Companies based in Hamburg's extraterritorial harbor would thereafter refer to the German nation state as "*Inland*" (domestic territory), with a clearly distancing notion. By contrast, the place of the "coffee community" was the Sandtorkai with its close personal connections and privileges. And while there was strong support for the "free" city of Hamburg, the nation state was perceived mostly as an alien central power eager to control free trade. Under the circumstances of the twentieth century which included an increasingly interfering state, lip service had to be paid to the claims of the state and nation, but even under the Nazis the coffee association continued to value world trade above everything else.⁴³ If the Hamburg coffee merchants did not primarily identify as German, there was, however, another nation that the Hamburg merchants did feel attracted to since the nineteenth century.

Hamburg was known as the most anglophile community outside of Great Britain.⁴⁴ The Hamburg bourgeoisie generally tried to follow a vague gentleman ideal. Indeed, the self-image of being "Hanseatic" was to a large degree based on their idea of "Englishness." Ian Buruma has linked the phenomenon of anglophilia to port cities and the merchant class in general, claiming that "merchants can't afford to be reactionary. Their snobbery is a sign of social mobility, of acquired airs and graces, not of birthright or noble privilege."⁴⁵ But here Buruma is only partly right. The old and established Hamburg families of the nineteenth century had a very strong sense of birthright. His statement thus applies more to the generations that came of age in the twentieth century, who had to "acquire [the] airs and graces" of British gentlemen, and continue to do so to this day. Obviously, this anglophilia was not so much about the English nation as such, but about notions of Empire and of London as the center of international finance, in other words, a kind of imperial cosmopolitanism with which Hamburg coffee merchants liked to identify. The coffee merchants' attitude therefore followed the ideal of a global elite class. It is therefore class—or rather a transnational class *habitus*—that seems central to the merchant group's sense of belonging.⁴⁶ As Alwin Münchmeyer, a merchant banker and coffee merchant who as a young man travelled to London, New York, Antwerp, and Buenos Aires in the early 1930s, laconically writes: "I met people who thought and lived like us. They engaged in trade and sports and stayed amongst themselves."⁴⁷

While this sense of belonging constructed out of multiple elements changed over time—at the cost of the former sense of community once free trade was re-established in the 1950s and towards an intergenerational weakening of Hamburg’s attractiveness—the concept of a transnational class *habitus* grew stronger.

In Hamburg itself, images of coffee’s “place of origin” were continuously reproduced, as in this window at the postwar Hamburg coffee exchange at Sandtorkai. Thus the global and the local have stayed intertwined in mutual sentimental phantasies, pointing to the close connections between the different coffee worlds, both in practical and in cultural terms. Is a global social history possible? Yes it is, but the historian engaged in such an endeavor has to travel herself quite a bit, at least in thought, and keep all the various places in mind: the personal and the social, the economic and the political, the local and the global, and all the places in-between.

NOTES

1. Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, Ulrike Freitag, eds., *Globalgeschichte. Theorien. Ansätze, Themen* (Frankfurt a. M., 2007). Sebastian Conrad, *Globalgeschichte. Eine Einführung* (Munich, 2013).
2. Cotton is a favorite with historians of globalization: Clayton Brown, *King Cotton: A Cultural, Political, and Economic History since 1945* (Jackson, Miss., 2011); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2013), and most recently Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014); for the classic study on sugar by S. Mintz see fn. 4.
3. Sven Beckert’s book on cotton was also published in German as *King Cotton. Eine Geschichte des globalen Kapitalismus* (Munich, 2014).
4. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (New York, 1985). The book was translated into German as *Die süsse Macht. Kulturgeschichte des Zuckers* (Frankfurt/New York, 1987).
5. Fred Cooper, “What is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian’s Perspective,” *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 189–213.
6. Jürgen Osterhammel, “A “Transnational” History of Society: Continuity or New Departure?,” in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (New York/Oxford, 2009), 39–51.
7. On the concept of mediation through “things” see David Sabeau, “Die Produktion von Sinn beim Konsum der Dinge,” in *Fahrrad, Auto*,

- Fernsehschrank. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Alltagsdinge*, ed. Wolfgang Ruppert (Frankfurt, 1993), 37–51.
8. Christoph Dejung, *Die Fäden des globalen Marktes. Eine Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Welthandels am Beispiel der Handelsfirma Gebrüder Volkart 1851–1999* (Cologne, 2013); Sven Beckert, *Cotton*, 200f. Becker devotes one chapter, titled “Making Cotton Global,” to merchants (pp. 199–241).
 9. For more on the local basis of the Hamburg coffee trade, see Dorothee Wierling, “Coffee Worlds. Global Players and Local Actors in Twentieth-Century Germany,” *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* XXXVI, no. 2 (2014): 24–48.
 10. The project on Hamburg coffee merchants is part of a larger research context including two dissertations, one on coffee consumption in the two postwar Germanies: Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum* (Munich, 2015); the other on Germans in the coffee production business in Central America: Christiane Berth, *Biografien und Netzwerke im Kaffeehandel zwischen Deutschland und Zentralamerika 1920–1959* (Hamburg, 2014). All three projects aimed at exploring the many economic, political and social, local, national and international relationships and interactions around coffee as a commodity.
 11. Lars Amenda, Sonja Grünen, „Tor zur Welt“. *Hamburg-Bilder und Hamburg-Werbung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich/Hamburg, 2008).
 12. Lu Seegers, *Hanseaten und das Hanseatische in Diktatur und Demokratie: Politisch-ideologische Zuschreibungen und Praxen*, Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg, ed. Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg (Hamburg, 2014), 71–83.
 13. William Roseberry, ed., *Coffee, Society and Power in Latin America* (Baltimore, 1996).
 14. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Statistics Division, Vietnam produced over 1,500,000 t of green coffee in 2012, half the amount produced in Brazil. http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/rankings/countries_by_commodity/E (last accessed 07/30/2015).
 15. Steven Topik, Alan Wells, “Commodity Chains: Coffee,” in *A World Connecting 1870–1945*, ed. Emily Rosenberg (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), 773–793. The earliest comprehensive attempt to grasp the coffee commodity chain was undertaken by William Ukers, *All About Coffee* (New York, 1935); see also John Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement: The Political Economy of the Coffee Commodity Chain* (Lanham, 2004); William Clarence-Smith, Steven Topik, eds. *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia and Latin America 1500–1989* (New York, 2003).
 16. Trust has developed into a central concept in the history of economics in a cultural perspective. For the basic concept see Paul Seabright, *The*

- Company of Strangers: A Natural History of Economic Life*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 2010).
17. Harold James, *Family Capitalism. Wendels, Haniels, Falcks and the Continental European Model* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006). Although built on the case of three industrial enterprises, James' arguments for the success of the family firm also apply to the coffee trade.
 18. According to the online dictionary Investopedia, goodwill is: "an intangible asset... the value of a company's brand name, solid customer base, good customer relations, good employee relations and any patents or proprietary technology represent goodwill." www.investopedia.com (last accessed 9/12/2015).
 19. The significance of traveling for the education of the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum* is still rather underresearched, compared to the *Bildungsreise* of the young nobility and bourgeoisie in the 1800s. Jürgen Osterhammel, "Von Kolumbus bis Cook. Aspekte einer literatur- und Erfahrungsgeschichte des überseeischen Reisens," in *Neue Impulse der Reiseforschung*, ed. Michael Maurer (Berlin, 1999), 197–233; Birgit Wörner, *Frankfurter Bankiers, Kaufleute und Industrielle. Werte, Lebensstil und Lebenspraxis 1870–1930* (Frankfurt a.M., 2011), 272ff.
 20. Alphons B. Hanssen, *In den Kaffeeländern. Wanderungen durch die Kaffeeländer der Erde. Eine Weltreise in den Jahren 1896–98* (Hamburg, 1902), X.
 21. See above. I found Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and capital extremely helpful to better understand the mechanisms of their economic and social practices. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York, 1986), 241–258.
 22. *Kaffee- und Teemarkt* (KTM) 11, June 2 (1955): 3–7, V/12, June 16, 11–13, V/13, July 2, 14f., V/14, July 18, 18f. V/15, August 3, 10–12, V/16, August 17, 11–13, V/17, September 2, 4–6, V/18, September 20, 14–16, V/19, October 4, 6–8 and V/20, October 18, 11f.
 23. The following description of this case involving "Aryanization" and restitution is based on the files in the Staatsarchiv der Hansestadt Hamburg (StAHH) 213–213 (Landgericht Wiedergutmachung), Z 6159.
 24. *KTM* V/14 (1955): 19. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own).
 25. Dr. Ernst Hieke, "Hanseaten draußen. "Goodwill" als Garant hamburgischen Kaufmannstums," *Die Welt*, Hamburg May 6, 1950.
 26. *KTM* V/20, p. 11.
 27. Jens Meyer-Odenwald, *Albert Darboven. Aus Freude am Leben*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg, 2005).

28. René Lüchinger, Britta Willmann, *Der Jacobsweg. Die autorisierte Biographie des Unternehmers Klaus J. Jacobs* (Zurich, 2007).
29. Life history interview with Michael Neumann, July 13, 2005.
30. Simone Derix, "Transnationale Familien" in *Dimensionen internationaler Geschichte*, ed. Jost Dülffer and Wilfried Loth (Munich, 2012), 335–352, quote p. 343.
31. Life history interview with Albert Darboven, March 2, 2005 transcript p. 47f.
32. Christopher H. Johnson, David W. Sabean, Simon Teuscher, Francesca Trivellato, eds., *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences since the Middle Ages* (New York/Oxford, 2011). For the nineteenth century in particular see David Sabean, "German International Families in the Nineteenth Century: The Siemens Family as a Thought Experiment," *ibid.*, 229–252.
33. The *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch* has been published since 1889 (until 1943 under the title: *Genealogisches Handbuch bürgerlicher Familien*) and comprises 185 volumes so far. Another 35 are in the making.
34. Ulrike Kirchberger, *Aspekte deutsch-britischer Expansion. Die Überseeinteressen der deutschen Migranten in Großbritannien in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1999). For an earlier time period see also Margrit Schulte-Beerbühl, *The Forgotten Majority. German Merchants in London, Naturalization and Global Trade 1660–1815* (Oxford, 2014).
35. *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, 17 (Limburg, 2003), 343–415.
36. London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/B/077/MS 35,977.
37. Regina Wagner, *Los Alemanes en Guatemala 1828–1944*, 2nd ed. (Guatemala City, 1996).
38. On the Nottebohms in Guatemala, see Christiane Berth, "Aus Hamburg in die Kaffee-Welten Zentralamerikas. Die Nottebohms in Guatemala," in *Händler, Pioniere, Wissenschaftler. Hamburger in Lateinamerika*, ed. Ulrich Mücke and Jörn Arfs (Münster, 2010), 67–88.
39. Christiane Berth, "Kaffee als politisches Druckmittel? Der schwierige Aufbau der Handelsnetzwerke zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Guatemala in den 1950er Jahren," in *Kaffeewelten. Historische Perspektiven auf eine globale Ware im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Christiane Berth, Dorothee Wierling, and Volker Wunderlich (Göttingen, 2015), 153–177.
40. Berth, *Biographien und Netzwerke*, interview with Thomas Nottebohm, October 5, 2007.
41. Christof Dejung, "Worldwide Ties: The Role of Family Business in Global Trade in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," *Business History* 55/6 (2013): 1001–1018. Dejung builds his argument on the case of the Swiss Volkart company, which imported cotton as well as green coffee (after 1945).

42. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Günther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York, 1968), 305.
43. This becomes obvious, for example, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebration of the coffee association in 1936. See the respective files in the archive of the Deutscher Kaffeeverband DKV in Hamburg (no call number).
44. Andrew F. Bell, “Anglophilia. The Hamburg Bourgeoisie and the Importation of English Middle Class Culture in the Wilhelmine Era” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2001).
45. Ian Buruma, *Anglomania. A European Love Affair* (New York, 2000), 16.
46. The concept and reality of a transnational capitalist class was developed by Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (London, 2001). Ulrich Beck, “Jenseits von Klasse und Nation,” *Soziale Welt* 59 (2008): 301–325 talks about the group of the “upper third in the global hierarchy, who practice a ‘polygamy of place’” (316). They “dispose of the necessary economic or cultural capital and therefore are in the position to freely choose the optimum context for making use of them.” (317).
47. Stefanie Viereck, *Hinter weißen Fassaden. Alwin Münchmeyer: Ein Bankier betrachtet sein Leben* (Reinbek, 1988), 72.

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