



Transparent Global History? The Contribution of *Vienna Global Studies*

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Abstract • Since the 1980s faculty and visiting lecturers at the University of Vienna, have collaborated on and contributed to various study programs and publications in global history and international development. This article explores how the desire to make these writings accessible to a broad spectrum of reading publics has combined with a specific interest in writing emancipatory rather than conservative and affirmative history. I argue that some of the professional dangers associated with writing global history—sometimes read by, and often directed to, less specialist audiences—are much more universal problems of historiography than many would think. Historians with a globalist agenda tend to be particularly well equipped to deal with these problems. This article explores how a number of writings emerging from the Vienna context have handled these problems and sought to combine transparency with accessibility. It also discusses some of the institutional and political contexts that have sustained the particular features of *Vienna Global History*, and some of the more problematic or ambiguous traits and critical evaluations of the Vienna enterprise.

Keywords • global history, historiography, politics of history, *Vienna Global Studies*

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When I first read the title of this special issue—“Writing History for a Variety of Publics”—I noted in my mind’s eye: “This is what global history people in Vienna have been doing all along.” Since the 1990s, together with many colleagues, I have been involved in producing a range of publications, books series, and interdisciplinary textbooks that introduce and elaborate themes and fields in global history. These activities have taken place through various teaching initiatives and study programs in global history, global studies, and international development at the University of Vienna (termed *Vienna Global Studies*). I had always conceived of these efforts as a lucky twist of fate that productively combined a certain field of historiography with certain concepts of writing history. With the encouragement of a few key mentors “we”¹ aimed to do transnational and global history in



such a way that it would invite students and other readers to develop not only their knowledge but also a more critical and reflective historical mind than that envisioned in the many mainstreams of historical writing. Such “transparent historiography” would combine a focus on global history with specific perspectives and an interest to engage a widely varied readership.

This article discusses some of the potentials of this triple approach to contribute to what I label “transparent historiography.” I use some examples from *Vienna Global Studies* to illustrate these points; I have also done two interviews with core protagonists of the flourishing *Vienna* enterprises.

Global Studies in the Orbit of a Large German-Language University in Central Europe

In a recent public lecture given at the launch event for the six hundred-page volume “Global History 1800–2010,” edited and published in Vienna,² Marcel van der Linden, in a rather surprising move, described Vienna as one of the two “centers of global history in the German speaking world,” with Leipzig as its companion.³ In a review of developments in the field of global history in the English and German speaking world between 2008 and 2010, Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann similarly have referred to the “case of Vienna, [which] in recent years through an impressive series of publications has established its role as a center for publications in world and global history.”⁴ Indeed teaching and publishing with a focus on global history and international development broadly defined have been flourishing in Vienna since the beginning of the 1990s.

The focus on non-European history and development—as the terms in use in the early years would have it—was developed with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary co-operation from the very beginning. Students receive credit for taking a so-called thematic lecture series, which can replace a number of traditional classes within the course of studies leading up to the degree. The series runs throughout the semester on a weekly basis, with a dozen or so experts giving lectures on specific topics; historians, experts from area studies—sometimes labeled *Orchideenfächer* (orchid disciplines)—as well as sociologists, political scientists, and others have contributed. Many scholars from different parts of the world have been invited to the lecture series over the years, while at the same time a conscious effort has been made to involve as many different faculty at Vienna University—including adjunct faculty and departments—as well as other local scholars. The lecture series, normally organized by a small group of faculty and adjunct lecturers from Vienna, has also been complemented with volumes edited by the organizers and bringing together studies authored by the individual lecturers. Although not textbooks in the classic sense of the term, these volumes have served as required reading for the exam the students have to take in order to receive credit for the lecture series.

The editors of the thirty volumes published in one of the related series “Historical Social Studies/International Development”—and in other parallel series—more often than not shared a critical and self-reflexive approach to global history and global studies. Many of them would define themselves as progressive, leftist, anti-imperialist, Left-Catholic, or as social critics. I call this positioning “critically globalist,” although I am aware that other colleagues might choose different labels. There was also a shared commitment to discuss with authors, “in the relaxed atmosphere of repeated preparation workshops and meetings,”⁵ the concepts of the volumes as well as draft chapters, and many of the volumes include massive introductions outlining the general theme. After a while, parallel lecture series and a publication series titled “World Regions Edition,” which has published twenty volumes to date, were established. In addition, the journal *Historische Sozialkunde*, which serves the purpose of continued education of high school teachers of history, has frequently taken up themes in global and transnational history. The level of publication of these lecture series has resulted in the growth of undergraduate and graduate fields—through independent studies and minor programs—in global history and global studies. New faculty—although sometimes hesitantly—have been hired in the field because of growing numbers of students interested in it. A growing number of students engaged in various major and minor programs under the rubric of *Vienna Global Studies* are now using these and other volumes and series intensively.

These publishing efforts were eventually broadened to encompass new horizons and new genres. First, new series were invented and pre-existing book series enlarged so as to include volumes that do not link to any specific teaching enterprise but rather to themes in global history in general. Since 2002 nineteen thematic volumes have been published in the series “Expansion, Interaction, Acculturation,” which covers the period from the High Middle Ages to late modernity and defines “interaction as the intrinsic mode of expansion and acculturation.” Another series inaugurated in 2005 under the title “Global History and the Politics of Development” aims to “integrate historical perspectives into the analysis of globalization and development processes of the present day.”⁶ These series have been published by various publishers, sometimes in cooperation with the Verein für Geschichte und Sozialkunde (Association for History and Social Studies), which is housed at the university yet is an independent body.

In recent years global studies initiatives have expanded into yet another genre: books that are closer to the classical text book genre, even if most of them aspire to be more than standard introductions. Some of these books bring together experts from many different fields and disciplines in a collaborative way and, while intending to be introductory and comprehensive on a given subject, do not pretend to be exhaustive or authoritative. One example is a more informal series of books grouped under the heading “(Text)Books” on the homepage of the Institute for International Development, including volumes on themes such as “Politics and Periphery,” “International Develop-

ment in Historical Context,” and “Development and Underdevelopment: An Introduction to Problems, Theories, and Strategies.”⁷ Another example is the series “Global History from 1000 to 2000,” comprised of eight volumes overseen by different volume editors and published between 2008 and 2011, with Peter Feldbauer as *spiritus rector* and series co-editor of the enterprise as a whole.⁸ Many of these more recently established series are useful reading for undergraduate and graduate students, fellow academics, high school teachers, and a wider interested public. They combine overview and introduction with a focus on particular themes, regions, epochs, and dimensions of history, incorporating and summarizing original research.

How can an enterprise such as *Vienna Global Studies* forge what I label “transparent history”? How can we translate some of the challenges of a new era into historical writing that carries emancipatory and liberating, rather than conservative and affirmative, potentials and does not simply carry further the relentless commodification and depletion of historical writing?

Global History for Less Specialized Audiences: Transparent and Accessible

I define transparent historiography as historical writing that aims to make visible both its self-positioning within the universe of historical writing and the reasons why it takes this position. Such historiography strives to conform to the following standards. First, it makes visible the political worldview that informs its self-positioning; it points out, for example, larger and more directly political backgrounds to, and implications of, the choice of topic, research questions, and narrative, and engages with the question of how different political leanings may lead to different choices, questions, and narratives. Second, such writing reflects on present-day contexts informing its scholarly outlook; it discusses, for example, what historiography with similar scholarly interests or political leanings might have looked like in a different epoch or if written from another geopolitical location. Third, it aims to make transparent at least some of the “methods” and techniques by which it has translated historical research and evidence into historical narrative: how it has dealt with the sources and texts on which it builds, how it has selected and combined these materials, and so on. Finally, such historiography might explicitly reflect on its own concept of history or historical consciousness and on how it conceives of the function historical writing plays or ought to play in present-day society.

A number of “ingredients,” namely the concern with the global and with less conventional forms of writing, and its sometimes more implicit, sometimes more explicit, political identity, have allowed *Vienna Global History* to achieve some of this transparency. By contrast, historiographic debates of the past two decades have accused both global history and less traditional forms of historical writing of falling behind even the most traditional stan-

dards of professional historiography and professional distance, not to speak of transparency. More precisely, global history, even if written for traditional audiences, has been described even by some of its practitioners as a contradiction in terms if measured against basic skills and requirements professional historians acquire through their primary training: the collection and analysis of primary documents, and understanding of the given context and the knowledge systems that generated these documents. The trouble with global history, according to Pamela Crossley, is that “there is no global context for the generation of evidence.” Global historians cannot work with all available primary evidence, they often need to absorb an unmanageable amount of secondary literature, and this literature—because it is informed by highly diversified research cultures and knowledge systems—is of little help when it comes to establishing core categories that guide the inquiry. Some have suggested that overcoming these challenges will require teamwork and transnational cooperation, the systematic inclusion of area studies specialists, and the promotion of multiple primary research agendas. Whether the most recent trend toward new syntheses signals the success of such strategies, and whether or not global history has successfully professionalized itself according to the above criteria remains a contested issue.⁹ Similar critiques have been voiced in relation to popular genres of historical writing. Many academic historians consider the trouble with popular genres of historical writing to be that “works of popular history ... tell stories well but are thin on analysis and argument. They tend to reaffirm popular beliefs ... They do not discover new sources or offer new interpretations.” Popular histories support pre-existing and retrograde identities and are aimed at making people feel comfortable in their present-day contexts instead of generating critical distance. They do not account for their sources and obscure the reasons why they have chosen a certain perspective and how they arrive at their statements.¹⁰

In a more affirmative turn, popular history has been described as keeping and constructing “the memory of those marginalized by history,” by displaying empathy for ordinary people and their concerns and presenting the historical past in a lively and imaginative way.¹¹ A growing group of historians argues that professional historians would be well advised to systematically engage in more popular historical writing, instead of distancing themselves because of the alleged superiority of the writings they produce.¹²

In my view, when reflecting on both the potentials and the dangers of the turn to both global history and less traditional forms of writing history, we need to argue with and go beyond these critiques on three levels. First, I maintain that the problems addressed by these critiques are not specific to less conventional genres of historical writing such as global history and historical writing for less specialist audiences. Rather than signaling an unbridgeable gap between conventional and less conventional historical writing, the difficulties and dangers addressed above may simply be more obvious in the latter genre. These forms of writing do not often have—or are

not concerned with presenting—the apparatus by which more traditional professional historiography arms itself against charges of “subjectivism,” partiality, or lack of scientific grounding. In other words they cannot or do not want to hide behind their sources and methods so as to veil the fact that their writing is an interpretation rather than a discovery of reality represented by the sources.¹³

Second, the very fact that some of the difficulties and dangers inherent in the work of the historian seem to be more obvious to observers of and historians engaged with less traditional historical writing could serve as a productive starting point for turning such writing into transparent history. The unconcealed appearance of these dangers can be conceived of as an opportunity to find innovative solutions for problems inherent in all historical writing; turning to more transparent history might be one of these solutions. Margarete Grandner, a core member of the *Vienna* group, argues that

working with archival material is and remains indispensable; yet this material will always remain—in a sense—very specific. In turn, the problem historians have with getting the relationship between global history and the sources right can be productively turned into a critical interrogation of the faith in the sources so characteristic for traditional historiography. We can then discuss in new ways the principle question of what we historians do, and what we ought to do, in cases when no such source-based historical tradition is out there, or when we don't have access, or only limited access, to related types of evidence.¹⁴

In other words, global historians' struggle with the problem of sources might open new horizons, or at least generate productive debate on possible new horizons, for historiography as a whole.

In addition, some global historians involved with the *Vienna* group have felt the need to include subjects and research questions that go beyond securely established knowledge and knowledge boundaries.¹⁵ This could foster a specific interest in making the resulting texts as transparent as possible: such global historians might consider transparency as a method of self-representation that explicitly accounts for the professional risk they are taking in pursuing their border-crossing interests. Transparency thus might function as a strategy to maintain their very professionalism or protect them against the charge of non-professionalism.¹⁶

Third, obvious problems can be turned into productive innovations if historians are willing to go beyond classical standards of method and process. Post-modern and post-structuralist historians have long argued that the profession needs to acknowledge that history is an interpretation inevitably driven by the choice of sources, the imagination of the historian, and her or his particular perspective and agenda. Post-empiricist historiography suggests that we should be transparent about our perspectives and choices, and that this can be accommodated in historical writing that lives up to certain professional standards. Instead of asking “whether a particular

narrative is ideologically motivated," we should ask "whether it acknowledges the viewpoint from which it is written and the functions it hopes to have."¹⁷ Moreover, we should "implicate our audiences in the history we write, making them see *how we see* as well as what we see."¹⁸ It seems obvious to me that there will be more historians in the critically globalist camp—as compared to more mainstream historians in general and more mainstream global historians in particular—willing to make their politics explicit in their writing in this way. Those in authority have often tended to naturalize their politics as self-evident standards. Their politics tend to disappear behind a veil of silence exactly because they speak from a dominant position. In contrast, non-mainstream historians tend to explicate their political claims in order to make visible how their politics differs from and criticizes the mainstream.

This is so not only when it comes to the politics *of* history but also to the politics *in* history. For example, in the pre-1914 women's movement those who desired to preserve the imperial status quo within Europe refused to discuss the Norwegian demand for independence, whereas those who supported this demand did speak up—and were promptly reprimanded for being "political" instead of silent and "neutral."¹⁹ The willingness to admit and consequently make transparent how a certain historical interpretation is "political" therefore will be distributed quite unevenly among different groups of historians. In addition, there is no shared or common standard of what counts as "political" in historical writing, with non-dominant approaches struggling especially with the charge of being "political" instead of "professional." Many post-modernists and post-structuralists try to escape these charges by repeating the mantra that all history is situated, and is thus political history—perhaps in the hopes that by repeating this assertion dominant histories will finally acknowledge how they are dominant. I think that many in the *Vienna* group are convinced that it is incomparably more productive if historians make transparent their own politics in their writing, than to endlessly repeat these claims. Less traditional genres of historiography, such as global history written for more varied publics, lend themselves to the pursuit of such projects. The girdle of inherited empiricist standards tends to be pulled less tightly on these genres, and there is nothing in particular that would hinder them "to construct ... interpretations responsibly, with care, and with a high degree of self-consciousness about our disabilities and the disabilities of our sources."²⁰

Margarete Grandner, in my interview with her, points to two specific contexts that have contributed to the continuous interest of *Vienna Global Studies* in combining the transparent discussion of its politics with accessible writing. The fact that *Vienna Global Studies* has always been in a precarious position in terms of institutionalization and recognition of the relevance of its perspectives has contributed to the interest in making its argument about the uses of global history explicit and open for scrutiny for non-insiders. This institutionally precarious status has helped to keep at bay internal

power struggles, which in turn have allowed the *Vienna* group—“if there is one”—to hold onto its foundational commitment to open-ended discussion and making divergent positions explicit in writing. At the same time, this commitment to making multiple approaches and theoretical backgrounds visible has not been at the expense of accessibility. Grandner underlines that student interest to learn about global history and international development from a critical point of view was a key factor in the origin of the whole *Vienna* enterprise. Addressing student audiences remains key for *Vienna Global Studies*; most scholars involved in the project agree that professional writing, whether based in or merely referring to primary research, should not consider these audiences “mindless just because they are students.”²¹ Peter Feldbauer explains that early volumes, such as the path-breaking “Colonialism, Imperialism, and the Third World,” published in 1977,²² were a direct response to the pressure of students taking his classes who wanted to learn about “colonialism” and “things other than Europe.”²³

Has *Vienna Global Studies* Done It, and If So, How?

This section highlights how *Vienna Global Studies* strives to do transparent history and also mentions readers’ responses to that project. I have focused on some of the more “properly historical” volumes rather than trying to include the entire body of work produced in the series. As such, I am able to provide an analysis of only some of the achievements and failures of *Vienna Global Studies*; a more complete discussion would require exhaustive analysis of the publications emerging from the *Vienna* circles.

One standard feature of the volumes I reviewed is explicit reference to three facts: that there are many concepts of “what global history is or should be”; that “its specific questions and preferred methods” are a matter of debate; and that the authors writing in the *Vienna* publications do not agree among themselves about the answers to these questions.²⁴ This framing usually combines with explicit reflections, often in introductory chapters but also in individual contributions, on grand theories and the scholarly political vision informing the work of different authors, as well as of history in general. The introduction of the new edited volume “Global History 1800–2010” enlists a whole range of scholarly authorities and theories—modernization theories, theories of multiple modernities, the world system perspective, regulation theory, historical materialism—informing the different chapters. It then goes on to say: “This *pluralism of theories* is a characteristic of all human, social, and cultural sciences and not necessarily a mishap. Theories are indispensable instruments of thinking and as such stand the test, insofar as they allow for coherent interpretation and explanation of phenomena. In this sense each chapter of this volume is its own, theoretically primed experiment.” The editors point to commonalities—“despite all the differences”—among the chapters; these are united by the idea that globalization has not been a

unifying process by which the world would be subordinated to a single capitalist logic or a universal law of development. This strikes us as pure teleology ... and would ascribe total power to colonialist, imperialist, and capitalist strategies. We assume instead—as presumably all authors of the volume do—that the transfers and generating of networks explored in each case are navigated by capitalist “cores,” yet that [the same developments] simultaneously trigger processes of *regionalization* everywhere (in regions belonging to the first, second, and third world). If carried to the logical conclusion this implies that capitalist relations of production that in the end acquire the status of exclusive hegemony assert themselves everywhere, but not to the effect of an end of history—to the contrary.²⁵

A related characteristic particular to *Vienna Global Studies* is the aspiration to connect the theme of a given volume explicitly to larger, principle questions and concepts of global history. For example, the summary in the volume “Global Life Histories: People as Actors in World Historical Events/Developments” explains that global history, because it “wishes to emancipate itself from the deterministic ideologies of earlier historiography,” is “centrally concerned with attesting human agency.”²⁶ Such statements obviously are not always as transparent as they first appear to be. How they construct the connection between a given theme and global history at large is more opaque than they would like to admit. In this case, in an effort to demonstrate the relevance for global history for a given theme or perspective, global history seems to be (re-)defined in such a way as to make the volume at hand appear particularly relevant. At the same time, readers who are well acquainted with the written products of *Vienna Global Studies* do not seem to miss or demand more of such generalizing statements. One graduate student pointed out that the fact that the different book series—with their focuses on world regions and large themes respectively—are designed to “complement each other” is itself a statement about what global history is or could be.²⁷

Another feature that contributes to making *Vienna Global Studies* into a transparent enterprise is its explicit reflection on the ways in which the very concepts and contexts shaping global historical writing have been based in or represent certain non-global, historically changing or non-enduring, power-laden assumptions and traditions. Such geo/temporal politics of location are usually discussed in an accessible style with repeated reference to examples. In addition, these considerations tend to be integrated into discussions of clearly circumscribed themes. As a result, readers who might automatically pass over any article focusing explicitly on theories of historiography could stumble into theoretical discussions they might more easily be able to “digest.” Even if they resist this strategy of forging familiarity with theory, readers might at least understand that narrative and theory can go together “somehow.” The introduction of the edited volume “Global Life Histories” could serve as an example for the strategy of talking about geo/temporal location by combining integration and example.

After discussing the potential of historical global biography to contribute to global history as a whole, and numerous differences among and perspectives on such biographies in time and space, Bernd Hausberger adds:

If [in this volume] biographies are narrated as global life histories they could be put differently. In my own contribution ... I have tried to demonstrate how the missionary from Trentino [1645–1711] has been differently positioned spatially and culturally since the eighteenth century. After the emergence of nationalism and the nation state it became probably almost impossible to conceive of life history as globally oriented. By contrast, in interpretations of present day globalization it seems as if [the authors] are literally obsessed with observing transgressive and thus transnational phenomena and developments. In pursuing a biographical perspective one should—in terms of the history of historiography and in terms of discourse history and ... literary history—be keenly aware of these positionings.²⁸

The uneasy relationship between global history and Eurocentrism is a recurrent theme in many of the volumes and contributions, and is frequently approached in terms of the politics of geo/temporal location. My partial review of the publications regarding this issue found that, in some cases, the technique of interspersing thematic introductions and contributions with theoretical considerations tends to highlight the method's limitations.²⁹ Nevertheless, individual contributions at times deal in a remarkably accessible manner with the complex issue of Eurocentrism, especially where the focus is on making readers more familiar with theoretical considerations, or when the authors introduce large themes from a more theoretical point of view. These contributions exploit the potentials of global history written for wider publics to leave behind Eurocentrism, rather than explaining once again the inescapability and pervasiveness of Eurocentrism. One example is a short article on "Global History 1450–1620: From the History of Expansion to the History of Interaction." This thematic essay combines a comparative focus on world regions with a core argument about how European expansion combined with interaction and influence between civilizations.

The article convincingly demonstrates that an adequate answer to the big question of why "the strong expansionist momentum of the fifteenth century in the end emanated from Western Europe and not, for example, from China or the Islamic Mediterranean" needs to build on "trans-cultural comparison" done "patiently and with a sense of proportion." Instead of focusing on what was "missing" from the societies of Africa, America, and Asia, as compared to expansionist Europe, such comparison will give rise to the "historical analysis of the gradual coalescence of the world regions" while carefully "considering quite diverse problem areas and perspectives."³⁰ Another example for discussing Eurocentrism in a refreshingly concrete manner is contained in a more theory-based contribution on "Global History and the History of Globalization." Referring to Ludwik Fleck and Thomas Kuhn, the section "Hegemony of Western Science and Global Science" ex-

plains how each culture produces its own “styles of thinking” and “thinking collectives.” Dietmar Rothermund then argues: “Representatives of non-European scholarly traditions can come in here and demonstrate that there have been ‘styles of thinking’ and ‘thinking collectives’ in their cultures, too, which have generated remarkable achievements that however, due to the hegemonic pretensions of Western science, have been so to speak edited out.” The author then talks about Sri Lankan engineer and sociologist Sushanta Goonatilake, whose thinking unmistakably is “connected to Buddhist philosophy, which in terms of epistemology was far ahead of the West,” and who has highlighted the value of incorporating non-European “styles of thinking” and “thinking collectives” in fields such as information and bio-technology. To be sure, Rothermund adds,

the hegemony of Western science was not purely a question of procedure but also a consequence of verifiable results—from the steam engine to the atom bomb. Yet here the critique comes in. Didn’t the focus on the technically doable lead to a dead end? Advocates of a global science presumably advocate a more humane utilization of scientific insights. I have pointed earlier to values that set objectives and create borders. Arguably the new global science ascribes importance to such values.³¹

These two examples, though positioned differently on the map of the *Vienna* enterprises, with the former focusing on big historical questions characteristic of one epoch and the latter on issues of knowledge production, do have in common a number of characteristics. Both authors make a case that meaningful global history must be based in sustained interest in and respect for world regions that—their variety notwithstanding—have found themselves for centuries in a dominated position. They then demonstrate that this is possible by serious and open-ended engagement with the history of, and knowledge production emerging from, these regions. Both authors present these ideas in a way that readers with little knowledge of complex historiographic debates will be able to follow and relate to on their own terms. This style of writing would be impossible without an interest in and need to write for a wider public in an accessible style, combined with an emancipatory attitude regarding the history and knowledge traditions of world regions other than the West. At the same time, I believe that the statements about historical and historiographic “facts” found in these articles should not be subjected to either greater or lesser critique simply because they differ from—even challenge—classical standards of historical writing and the classical historical tradition of what constitutes “truth.” On the contrary, both contributions make more transparent what they profess to want to do and why, as compared to much of the more mainstream historical writing. Finally, they eschew purely deconstructivist approaches even as they acknowledge how they build on them.

It needs to be added that many student readers are less impressed by these features and writing strategies that, in my reading, are rather success-

fully employed in some of the *Vienna* products. The question of Eurocentrism in particular remains a contested terrain in *Vienna Global Studies* in terms of readers' responses. This is one of the conclusions Peter Feldbauer draws from his review of the written work that his students have submitted over the years. One of his regular assignments has been for students to complete a critical literature review of some of the products of *Vienna Global History*. First-year students, as well as students espousing leftist or anti-imperialist politics, have often criticized many volumes, or contributions in these volumes, as Eurocentric and merely "descriptive." As students moved closer to writing their final papers and theses, the evaluations took on more positive tones, with some *Vienna* contributions now revalued as helpful springboards enabling students to engage with more specialized literature in an informed and effective manner. Students enrolled in non-European area studies programs, many of them female, on average voiced more positive views and gave a more informed critique of Eurocentrism from the start.³² It might well be, then, that more advanced students or students who themselves draw on a global perspective to engage with knowledge production related to different world regions might be more sympathetic to what I have described above as a pragmatic and exemplifying—rather than declamatory—style of going beyond Eurocentrism.

Last but not least, and not unrelated to the strong focus on non-Western histories characterizing *Vienna Global History*, it is anything but accidental and contingent that many *Vienna* volumes assemble thematic contributions from many different authors, not just when tackling a particular theme but also when producing volumes designed more as textbooks. Despite coming from different disciplines and highly diverse scholarly traditions, many of these authors have been united by their sustained intellectual curiosity in addressing certain themes or understanding better certain historical periods. The border-crossing combined authorship of many volumes has important consequences for how global history is presented to and perceived by the readers. One student (who himself is now working on twentieth-century socialist internationalism) highlights, for instance, the fact that the volume "Baltic Sea 700–2000" "aroused [my] interest in a topic that was inaccessible to me beforehand," and that one contribution on "Friesians, Vikings, and Arabs" in the Early Middle Ages in particular "opened an extremely exciting perspective on early intercultural and transregional interaction at the peripheries of the great empires at that time."³³

Although the volumes do not and cannot pretend to be "overviews" or coherent general "introductions," their tables of contents convey a highly up-to-date and realistic picture of the developing landscapes of research, and encourage the reader to consider the separate chapters as interconnected. In other words, even the "near-textbook" publications do not pretend to be textbooks, although they strive to address in a visibly composite manner what their titles promise to cover. In this way they provide an opportunity for any interested and open-minded reader to create, rethink, or develop

her or his own picture of the landscape of global history without producing the impression that global history can be seen as an “anything goes” field of historical writing, or one that is simply unmanageable.

Vienna Ingredients

In the past twenty years *Vienna Global Studies* has combined its interest in a less traditional field of history with a less traditional and more transparent style of writing and publishing, which at least in the German-speaking world appears to be rather unusual. The (relative) success of this enterprise is grounded in a number of institutional and political factors.

The sheer lack of faculty members who specialized in global history early on triggered a strong focus on cross-disciplinary cooperation. This in turn meant that if the *Vienna* group was to produce books in which there was at least some dialogue among the different contributions, then all participants needed to take a step back from the conventions of their disciplines and write in a style accessible for representatives of other traditions.

Together with a commitment not only to criticize but to go beyond Eurocentrism, the same foundational constellation contributed to a sustained emphasis on writing strategies that built on a de-centered global approach as a method in order to demonstrate or exemplify how post-Eurocentric writing is actually possible. This strategy simultaneously generates multifocal narratives that, taken one by one, appear to be “easy reading.” Margarete Grandner emphasizes that a comparatively strong narrative and hermeneutic element in *Vienna Global Studies* is brought into “productive tension” with more analytical approaches and “models” of thinking about global history.³⁴ The fact that authors whose focus is Europe tend to be less willing than other regional specialists to integrate the history of interaction systematically in their narratives might be one of the problems of this approach.³⁵

The case made by *Vienna Global Studies* for more popular forms of writing for wider audiences is grounded in the understanding that accessibility or a more “popular” style of writing equals neither a retreat from core standards of the historical profession nor from transparent and self-reflective forms of writing, invoking critical distance to the narratives presented to the reader. Key representatives of the *Vienna* enterprise maintain that the difference between professionally acceptable popular and less popular styles of writing is more a difference of “rhetoric and style,”³⁶ or of self-presentation, than a difference of substance as compared to more traditional genres. “In the end more popular forms of writing are good only if they transport or transform the most current state of research,” argues Peter Feldbauer.³⁷

As it strives to combine a more popular and transparent style of writing with high quality, *Vienna Global Studies* has relied significantly on its teamwork orientation. “Fifty percent of the success—that is, where we have been successful—and in many cases more than this is due to this organizational

principle and practice.”³⁸ Yet what has been done in *Vienna* is not just any kind of teamwork. Rather the *Vienna* enterprise has brought together scholars who have tended to share certain commitments. They share a sustained interest in the circumstances of and a sense of solidarity with the dominated and oppressed worldwide. Against an always insecure and imponderable institutional background, they have tried to develop global studies at Vienna University in such a way as to reflect these commitments. They have been committed to cooperating with and assisting a critical mass of students, who continue to play a key role in carrying the enterprise. It is against these combined backgrounds that *Vienna Global Studies* may claim to have a good record for relating to its audiences as sensible and mindful readers, able and enabled to reflect critically and independently on their reading. This approach to the audience, and the authors’ self-understanding as writing from, or being sensitive to, non-dominant positions, have translated into the authors’ willingness to argue their politics—to “present their politics as a subjective self-positioning”³⁹—in their writing. The fact that those who write, read, and discuss the writings before and after publication share a commitment to “critical globalism” as a non-dominant political position in a rather traditional institution has contributed decisively to establishing a tradition of transparent historical writing on global issues in Vienna.

Notes

1. This article represents my particular reading of a much more layered and diverse history; in other words I am talking about “my” personal *Vienna Global Studies*. For some information in English on Vienna Global History, see <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte-Meta/Globalgeschichte/?lang=en>. All translations from the German originals are mine.
2. Reinhard Sieder and Ernst Langthaler, eds., *Globalgeschichte 1800–2010* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010).
3. Marcel van der Linden, “Globalgeschichte aus interdisziplinärer Sicht” (public lecture, Vienna University, Vienna, Austria, 23 March 2011).
4. Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, “Global History 2008–2010: Empirische Erträge, konzeptionelle Debatten, neue Synthesen,” *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 20, no. 6 (2010): 116.
5. Interviews with Peter Feldbauer, Vienna, 10 November 2011 and 7 December 2011.
6. For (incomplete) descriptions of all the series see University of Vienna, Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, “VGS Buchreihen, http://vgs.univie.ac.at/TCgi/TCgi.cgi?target=home&P_KatSub=14, and “VGS. Zeitschriften,” http://vgs.univie.ac.at/TCgi/TCgi.cgi?target=home&P_Kat=2 (both URLs accessed 2 November 2011). The quotations are taken from the editorial statements contained in the volumes.
7. For these and other titles, see University of Vienna, Institut für Internationale Entwicklung, “(Lehr)Bücher,” <http://ie.univie.ac.at/studieren/materialien-tipps/lehr-buecher/> (accessed 2 November 2011).

8. See (incompletely) under University of Vienna, Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, "Publikationen. Unsere Buchreihen. Globalgeschichte," <http://www.univie.ac.at/VSIG/site/category/buch/globalgeschichte/> (accessed 2 November 2011).
9. See, for example, Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), esp. ch. 22; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What Is Global History?* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2008), esp. 103–106 (incl. quote); Middell and Naumann, "Empirische Erträge," esp. 93–95, 116–133.
10. The phrase quoted is intended to give a summary of standard critiques. Ann Curthoys, "Crossing Over: Academic and Popular History" *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 1, no. 1 (2011), <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Article,id=10825/> (accessed 20 October 2011). See also Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 118.
11. See, for example, the discussion of the perception of the popular historian in Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 42–44.
12. Donnelly and Norton, *Doing History*, ch. 9.
13. Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 146–150.
14. Interview with Margarete Grandner, Vienna, 10 November 2011.
15. Interview Feldbauer, December 2011.
16. This argument of course is based on a post-empiricist concept of professionalism as a set of "protocols, rules or practices" which, on the one hand, give professional historiography a particular status among other genres of dealing with the past while, on the other hand, these protocols themselves are understood as being "socially determined" and "subject to modification and change." Donnelly and Norton, *Doing History*, 107–108, 111.
17. *Ibid.*, 134–135.
18. Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 148.
19. This point is developed more fully in my forthcoming "Exclusionary Inclusion. Peace Activism and the Struggle over Inter/national and Domestic Order in the International Council of Women, 1899–1914" (paper, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland, 18 May 2011).
20. Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 148.
21. Interview Grandner.
22. Alfred Bergmiller and Peter Feldbauer, eds., *Kolonialismus, Imperialismus, Dritte Welt*, (Salzburg: Braumüller, 1977). In 1978 an accompanying volume containing documents was published.
23. Interview Feldbauer, November 2011.
24. Margarete Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund, and Wolfgang Schwentker, "Vorwort," in their *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2005), 10.
25. Reinhard Sieder and Ernst Langthaler, "Einleitung," in *Globalgeschichte 1800–2010*, 13–14 (emphasis in original).
26. Dietmar Rothermund, "Unsichere Transaktionen in globalen Lebensläufen," in *Globale Lebensläufe. Menschen als Akteure im weltgeschichtlichen Geschehen*, ed. Bernd Hausberger (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2006), 287.
27. E-mail exchange with Evelyne Wollner, 11–15 December 2011. I had inquired

- about how readers of the Vienna products “appreciate and critique” these writings, without giving further information about the present article.
28. Bernd Hausberger, “Globalgeschichte als Lebensgeschichte(n),” in *Globale Lebensläufe*, 23; Bernd Hausberger, “Die universale Sendung des P. Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J. (1645–1711),” in *ibid.*, 63.
 29. For example, I could not really make sense of how the introduction conceives of the connection between Hegelian Eurocentric “European universalism” and the Eurocentrism affecting the book. Margarete Grandner and Andrea Komlosy, “Das 18. Jahrhundert—eine globalhistorische Epoche? ” in *Vom Weltgeist beseelt. Globalgeschichte 1700–1815*, ed. Margarete Grandner and Andrea Komlosy (Vienna: Promedia, 2004).
 30. Peter Feldbauer, “Globalgeschichte 1450–1620. Von der Expansions- zur Interaktionsgeschichte,” in *Globalgeschichte 1450–1620. Anfänge und Perspektiven*, ed. Friedrich Edelmayr, Peter Feldbauer, and Marija Wakounig (Vienna: Promedia, 2004), 23–32.
 31. Dietmar Rothermund, “Globalgeschichte und Globalisierung,” in *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte*, 33–35.
 32. Interview Feldbauer, December 2011.
 33. E-mail exchange with Ramin Taghian, 11–13 December 2011. See also n. 27. The volume referred to is Andrea Komlosy, Hans Heinrich Nolte, Imbi Sooman, eds., *Ostsee 700–2000. Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Kultur* (Vienna: Promedia, 2007); the study addressed in particular is Dariusz Adamczyk, “Friesen, Wikinger, Araber. Die Ostseewelt zwischen Dorestad und Samarkand, ca. 700–1100.”
 34. Interview Grandner.
 35. Interview Feldbauer, November 2011.
 36. Interview Grandner.
 37. Feldbauer in the interview (November 2011) referred for example to the proportion between text and footnotes and the inclusion or omission of reference to ongoing (debate about) revision as distinguishing features; he underlined that he would evaluate primary research differently.
 38. Interview Feldbauer, November 2011.
 39. Interview Feldbauer, November 2011, who underlined that some *Vienna* series are closer to this idea than others.