PRESENTATION

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It may come as a surprise that the rise of the field of global history has been accompanied by a renaissance in microhistory. "Global" —as opposed to "world"— history burst on the scene in the first decade of the twenty-first century preoccupied with the history of globalization. It was propelled forth by a series of paradigm-shifting volumes authored by distinguished and veteran historians who had returned to grand narratives and structural transformations. They tackled large issues such as capitalism, statebuilding, industrialization, and empire. Such works included Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (2004), Christopher Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004), and Jürgen Osterhammel's *Die Verwandlung der Welt* (2009)[1]. In the words of one early theorist of the burgeoning field, the challenge was to address globalizing themes such as "migration, social development, trade, imperialism, biological exchange, and cultural diffusion"[2].

In these heady years, many scholars not only left microhistory off the agenda but cast it aside. It was considered part of a clutch of cultural and post-structural historical approaches of the 1990s that, to borrow the words

1 Pomeranz (2000); Bayly (2004), and Osterhammel (2009). For a nice overview of these and other earlier contributions, see Berg (2013).

2 Bentley (2004: 78).

of Lynn Hunt, "had failed to offer a compelling alternative to early social theories"[3]. As its promoters explained, global history explored connections and comparisons across frontiers and seas. By so doing, it overcame the methodological patriotism implicit in national and local history, and avoided getting bogged down in *mentalités* and context. In the inaugural essay of the *Journal of Global History* in 2006, the economic historian Patrick O'Brien grouped micro-history, local history, and postcolonial deconstruction into a series of scholarly retreats. Historians had abnegated their responsibilities to address, "environmental degradation, malnutrition, human rights, and other problems of universal concern"[4]. In a like manner, Jo Guldi and David Armitage, in their widely-read and translated *History Manifesto,* were equally categorical. Although they lauded the role that microhistorians had played "in testing *longue-durée* narratives" and helping delegitimate totalizing Marxist historiographies, they felt that the field had long been producing diminishing returns. In an era in which the profession should be addressing "big questions" and marshalling "big data", microhistory generated a "suspicion toward grand narratives" and embraced "the local and the personal at the expense of engagement with larger public and political issues"[5].

Contrary to expectation, then, the relationship between global and microhistory quickly changed. This was the result of two factors. First, the grand expectations initially generated by global history began to deflate as they tend do with any burgeoning field. In a relatively short period of time, it became apparent that many publications of dubious originality and patchy quality sought shelter under its umbrage. As articles and monographs poured off the presses and onto digital pdfs, poignant critiques emerged. David Bell, Jeremy Adelman, and Giovanni Levi argued that global history —despite claims to the contrary— was Eurocentric and "Anglospheric". It was overly dependent on secondary sources, and often dressed up trenchant, established research in thinner garments. Global historians often pursued "connections" to no identifiable end, and made grand claims of explanatory power that had proven specious[6]. Second, practitioners of microhistory smoothly adapted to the thematic priorities of the twenty-first century. They swept aside critiques, addressed pressing issues, and added innovative methodological contributions. In 2007, Linda Colley's *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in*

[3] Hunt (2014: 10).

[4] O'Brien (2006: 37).

[5] Guldi and Armitage (2014): 46, citing Phillips (2013: 206).

[6] Bell (2014); Adelman (2017), and Levi (2019). For a response to the Bell and Adelman critiques and a response to the response, see Drayton and Motadel (2018).

World History received critical acclaim, became a best seller, and reached the general public, a clear indicator that microhistory also could make weighty contributions amid the "global turn"[7]. By 2019, *Past and Present* —a bell weather of best-practice scholarship— issued a special edition on "global history and microhistory". The editor John-Paul Ghobrial observed that some considered "global microhistory" a "savior" of global history. By playing with scales ("zooming in and zooming out"), connecting spaces, and anchoring research in the archives, microhistory had the potential to help bring us "one step closer to a more rigorous, reflexive and critical form of global history"[8]. As Lara Putnam succinctly stated, the goal was "to use microhistorical inquiry to answer macrolevel questions"[9].

The present dossier is cast in the same spirit of the *Past and Present Supplement.* There are two important differences. First, the *Supplement* focused on early modern history, while the articles in the present volume address the modern era. They span a period that begins in the 1840s and ends in the 1940s. Second, the present dossier is aimed at the readership of *Historia y Política,* and for this reason, is entitled "Global Microhistories from Spain". As readers will see, the Hispanic dimension is sometimes (although not always) tenuous or secondary to the dramas that unfold elsewhere. Although connected to Spain, the articles take the reader on a tour to Zanzibar, the Argentine Pampa, Cuba, the Chafarinas Islands, Oran, India, and the Chinese province of Ganzhou. It is not a pleasant journey. Themes include battlefield deaths, war crimes, captivity, deportations, imprisonments, the slave trade, exile, civilizing missions, extermination campaigns, and refugees. Stories of hope and voices of redemption also feature.

It is essential to stress that global microhistory, and microhistory more generally, should not be regarded as a single methodology. It is best understood as a bundle of diverse methods. The dossier not only covers different parts of the world but also surveys these methods. The first, and perhaps the most common, approach is the focus on biography or "lives"[10]. Scholars dedicated to this methodology are in good company, but they have also had to parry the most blows. In much the same manner that critics claimed that

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7 Colley (2007). The popularity of this book followed in the footsteps of other best-selling microhistories with women protagonists. See, for example, Davis (1983) and Ulrich (1990).

8 Ghobrial (2019: 22).

9 Putnam (2006: 616).

10 For the relationship between "lives" and traditional "biography", see Gamsa (2017); Cott *et. al.* (2013), and Deacon *et. al.* (2010).

North American microhistory of the 1990s was fixated upon the exceptional lives of subaltern actors hardly representative of the mainstream, the economic historian Jan de Vries has criticized global microhistory for giving undue protagonism to "unusually cosmopolitan individuals". Such individuals, so the argument goes, cross borders avoiding societal constraints, often leaving memoirs and abundant archival traces that serve to distort, rather than clarify, the historical record[11]. In both cases —be they subaltern or unusually cosmopolitan— the protagonists escape limitations on their agency that otherwise harness their peers. John-Paul Ghobrial articulated a version of this critique when he warned against putting too much purchase into microhistories of "faceless globetrotters, colourless chameleons and invisible boundary crossers, individuals stretched so far out of any local, confessional or personal context as to make them little more than panes of glass through which to the view the worlds in which they lived"[12].

In response to this common critique, it is important to note that the study of a life is not always meant to serve as an example of a collectivity. An exceptional life can forge a path to examining a larger "macrohistorical" question. This is demonstrated in Gustau Nerín's fascinating article, "Omertà en Zanzíbar. Un comerciante de esclavos catalán en el Índico, entre el tráfico de esclavos y las dinámicas imperiales". It is centered around an unusually cosmopolitan individual, a man from Sant Feliu de Guíxols named Bonaventura Mas. He served as an agent for two banking houses in Marseille, acted on behalf of the Cuban slaver Julián Zulueta, and collaborated with the slave factor Salim Jubram. He resided in Zanzibar, in the sultanate of Oman, where he trafficked *engagés* and slaves to La Réunion and Cuba. The purpose of unearthing his life, however, is not to examine a collectivity but to explore a related issue. As Nerín demonstrates, the persecution of Mas in Zanzibar shows how British consuls used the moral imperative of abolition to extend informal imperial authority even in those zones where the French dominated commercially. It also explains that the illegal slave traffic to Cuba was not limited to the Hispanic or Atlantic worlds, but also included the Indian Ocean. These "connections" are not anecdotal, peripheral, or coincidental. Rather, they show how the Sultanate of Oman, which had been involved in the East African and Indian Ocean slave-trade for decades, became caught in the interstices of global and imperial forces in the nineteenth century.

Another such unusually cosmopolitan individual was the Barcelona stage designer Oleguer Junyent who traveled around the world with the textile

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[11] de Vries (2019).

[12] Ghobrial (2014: 59).

heir Marià Recolons in 1908. They are the subjects of Teresa Segura-Garcia's elegant and multi-layered article, "A Barcelona Stage Designer in Colonial India: Catalan Travellers, Transimperial Mobility and the British Raj in Spain, c. 1908". Their journey was published as a serialized travelogue in newspapers and periodicals, including *La Ilustració Catalana*. In the article, the subjects are not portrayed as representatives of the collectivity of stage designers or banking heirs. Rather, their story contributes various fields, including that of the global tourism industry. Within the context of Spain, it demonstrates the dual narratives of imperialism that circulated in Catalonia. On the one hand, the travelers contributed to the orientalization of Asia by expressing admiration for British enterprise and empire in an era of Spanish imperial decline. On the other hand, the stage designer also documented the deleterious effects of empire on the national theatre and architecture of "Hindustan", while simultaneously portraying the princely states as unspoiled lands. This message resonated with the Catalan bourgeoisie and voters of the Lliga Regionalista concerned with Spanish cultural imperialism, and who sought a return to the political autonomy of the ancient principality[13].

The second method present in global microhistory is what Sebastian Conrad has labeled the study of "global processes and their local manifestations"[14]. This method is faithful to the practices of the founders of "Italian microhistory", particularly Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg. They posited that microhistory was a powerful tool for uncovering large-scale tendencies that had been obscured by broader (and often teleological) narratives and assumptions. By reducing the scale of the study, engaging in deep archival research, and following small clues (that may initially appear exceptional), larger and sometimes unexpected patterns emerge[15]. Such studies often focus on seemingly extreme cases that leave a long archival trail. Once explored, they provided insight into more general phenomena. As Nathalie Zemon Davis, another pioneer of microhistory, observed, "an extreme case can often reveal patterns available for more everyday experience"[16].

The article most representative of this strategy is Jeanne Moisand's innovative, "Revisitar El Cantón de Cartagena: Microespacio revolucionario y

13 For a parallel example of "transnational nationalism" in Catalonia around the same time, see Mallart (2021).

14 Conrad (2016: 129).

15 Ginzburg (1989) and Levi (1991). For a discussion of the continued relevance of Italian microhistory during the global turn, see de Vivo (2010) and Trivellato (2011).

16 Davis (2006: 11). For an interesting exploration of the relationship between the exceptional and the normal in global microhistory, see Smith (2019).

conexiones globales". The author addresses an undoubtedly "extreme" occurrence — the Cantonalist Revolt of Cartagena (1873). This had long been considered a utopian revolt that was too local and exceptional to provoke interest outside the Spanish academy. However, by delving into biography, and surveying accompanying information on migration, incarceration, and contraband, she reveals a hidden, interconnected, and cosmopolitan world not unlike those uncovered by Ginzburg. Many revolutionaries had strong connections to Oran (Algeria) and Cuba, while others had served as forced laborers in military or punitive institutions. Although the local context remained important, so was the international one. Some men and women were influenced by the Paris Commune, Cuban separatism, and international socialism. Ultimately, a microhistorical approach allows her to make a strong case for including the Cantonalist Revolt within a broad narrative of transnational resistance to imperial states that sent boys to die in colonial wars, turned working women out on the streets where many were forced into prostitution, and sent revolutionary actors and other undesirables to prison, forced labor camps, front-line military service, and into exile[17].

Another microhistorical methodology that has adapted well to global history is the focus on a *cause-célèbre* or a scandal. These often leave behind a trove of documentation that provide an entrée into an unexplored subject[18]. In his brilliant, "Las Tres Fugas de José Maceo, insurrecto Cubano, 1879-1885: Guerra colonial y Leyes de la Guerra en la España global de finales del siglo XIX", Albert Garcia-Balañà begins with a scandal, which appeared in the Spanish, British, and French press in 1882. British authorities in Gibraltar had handed over José Maceo and two other Cuban insurrectionists to Spanish officials, without a judicial procedure, even though they had solicited political asylum. They had escaped the harshest of imprisonments on the Chafarinas Islands as the result of a disputed postwar deportation. By following the threads of this scandal, Garcia-Balañà is not only able to recreate the plight and suffering of Maceo, and the women and children imprisoned with him. Rather, he also shows how Spanish authorities in Cuba and the Peninsula systematically ignored the Geneva Convention (1864) and subsequent international agreements concerning terms of surrender, prisoners of war, and non-combatants. By so doing, he demonstrates how the actions of Spain in Cuba set the stage for other countries who later justified the waving of international law in colonial wars by claiming that "guerrilla combatants" did not enjoy ordinary juridical protections.

17 For a similar microhistorical approach to a revolt around the same time, see Riall (2013).

18 Dalmau and Burdiel (2018).

There is one final methodological approach shared by practically all of the articles. Anne Gerritsen and Christian De Vito have argued that "Micro-Spatial History" not only helps explain transformations over time, but is particularly effective at connecting them across space. In so doing, it addresses large historical questions in highly contextualized connected studies that "integrate systematically empirical study and conceptual interpretation"[19]. The dossier brings out such connections between places —Cartagena and Oran; the Río de la Plata and the Mediterranean; Zanzibar and London, Paris, Barcelona, Marseille, Reunion, and Cuba.

Carles Brasó's absorbing "De España a Tuyunguan. La integración de un equipo médico de las Brigadas Internaciones el la Cruz Roja China, 1939-1940", connects spaces —the battlefields of the Spanish Civil War and of the Second World War in China. The heart of the story takes place in the small mountainous village of Tuyunguan on the outskirts of the impoverished city of Guiyang. Indeed, by connecting two places left out of master narratives of World War Two (Spain and China; the Ebro and the province of Guizhou), Brasó narrates the odyssey of a group of international medical volunteers of doctors and nurses who spoke Spanish among themselves. He also explores the difficult fit of communist volunteers in a nationalist zone. If it was not for the work of Brasó, who would have heard of Robert Kho-Seng Lim, the Singapore-born physician trained in the United Kingdom? This remarkable individual abandoned a brilliant career in Beijing to found the CAM (Chinese Medical Aid Committee), which supported nationalist and communist forces in the war against Japan. By linking spaces, following lives and clues, zooming in and zooming out, microhistory can help overcome global history's problem of Eurocentrism.

Global microhistorians have not abandoned the interest in the subaltern whether they analyze lives, scandals, local histories of the global, or spatial connections. As Rebecca Scott has observed, macro-historical approaches tend to concentrate on oppressive actors and institutions while microhistorical ones more effectively bring out the experiences of the oppressed[20]. Women, in particular, frequently feature in archival sources used for microhistories, as evidenced by the articles of Jeanne Moisand and Albert Garcia-Balañà. My article, "Who were the Volunteers? A Spanish Revolutionary and Wanderer in Argentina?" also focuses on a subaltern (in this case male) actor. It is centered around a proletarianized artisan from Barcelona who participated in the Revolution of 1856, and then fled to

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19 de Vito and Gerritsen (2017) and de Vito (2019: 362).

20 Scott (2000).

Buenos Aires from where he joined the Army in a campaign on the southern Pampas that aimed to "exterminate" the Indians. The story of a single, flawed man is complemented by a database of other migrants in the Army that serves to contextualize the extent to which his life was exceptional or normal when compared to other volunteers. Unable to leave memoirs, these snapshots of precarious lives help correct a romantic image left by famous volunteers who narrated novelistic accounts.

There is one methodology that the contributors reject. Sigurður Gyfli Magnússon has positioned himself as an antagonist of "most microhistorians worldwide". He favors a postmodern and a textual approach. In various publications, he has argued that microhistory should strive toward a "singularization of history" in order to liberate historical inquiry from grand narratives (including globalization) and from the unrealizable quest to contextualize small-scale studies within the larger sweep of things[21]. Although Magnússon accepts the rather anodyne observation that global connections affect individual lives, he focusses on the singularity of experience rather on the larger connections, contexts, or generalizations that an individual life may reveal. To be sure, microhistory has the potential to deconstruct or modify grand theories, while the singularity and subjectivity of experience is endemic to the human condition and of course history. All the same, the contributing authors tackle the same penetrating questions as their colleagues in global history who work with larger scales of inquiry.

Global microhistory has one last virtue that scholars are often hesitant to recognize. Microhistories are fantastic teaching tools that engage students by way of narrative. Indeed, it is becoming common to convert microhistories into "graphic histories", which have proven effective in the classroom[22]. Narrative is at the heart of microhistory. Non-experts and students may find global "macro" histories —covering large swaths of time, crunching figures, and employing a bird's eye approach— difficult to penetrate. In contrast, microhistories put human faces on larger trends[23]. The articles in this dossier employ diverse methodologies and address different parts of the world. They serve as an overview to the multiple approaches, appeals, and advantages of global microhistory.

21 For his theory as related to global microhistory, see Magnússon (2017).

22 My favorite include: Getz and Clarke (2016), and Vann and Clarke (2019).

23 For the role of microhistory in "populating" global history with people and stories of agency, see Andrade (2010) and Rothchild (2011).

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