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Educational networks, educational identities: connecting national and global perspectives¹

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The brothers, Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, active in the last years of the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth century, are excellent examples of the cosmopolitan scholar and *Universalgelehrter* (polymath). Wilhelm, a Prussian diplomat and government administrator, is chiefly remembered as a linguist who made important contributions to the philosophy of the world's languages as well as the theory and practice of education. He is seen as the architect of the Humboldtian education ideal which spread from Germany all across the world and as far as the United States and Japan.² Above all, this ideal recommends the integration of formal instruction in arts and sciences with active research to achieve both a broad general education and the acquisition of cultural knowledge. Wilhelm's younger brother, Alexander, a geographer, naturalist, and explorer, travelled widely across Central and South America developing the ideas for his multi-volume treatise, *Kosmos*, in which he attempted to identify connections between the various scientific disciplines and human culture.³ When he returned to Europe in 1804 he was one of the most celebrated scientists of his day, exercising a profound influence on the next generation of scientists including Charles Darwin.⁴ Both Humboldt brothers were part of an international network of scholars with global reach. They served as foreign members in multiple learned societies including the American Academy of Science and Art, the American Antiquarian Society and the Royal Swedish Academy of Science. Likewise, they corresponded

¹ We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on draft versions of the articles included in the cluster as well as the original proposal. We are grateful to the contributors for all their hard work and patience over the last three years as the cluster has been prepared. Finally, we would like to thank all those who took part in the international conference on the analytical value of actor networks which we organized at the Freie Universität Berlin back in August 2013. It was at this conference, generally sponsored by the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung, that plans for the cluster were first discussed and the focus on educational networks was decided upon.

² Lothar Gall, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: ein Preuße von Welt*, Berlin: Propyläen-Verl, 2011.

³ Alexander von Humboldt, *Alexander von Humboldts Kosmos*, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1870.

⁴ John van Wyhe, 'Humboldt's *Personal Narrative* and its influence on Darwin', in John van Wyhe, ed., *The complete work of Charles Darwin online*, 2002, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/> (consulted 30 March 2016)

extensively with an international network of eminent scientists, thinkers and writers ranging from Thomas Jefferson to Johann Wilhelm von Goethe. Alexander von Humboldt's wide-ranging correspondence even includes letters from the Guaraní, an indigenous group in today's Brazil.⁵ When Alexander died in 1859, his friends declared him to have been 'the pride and the delight of his contemporaries in both hemispheres', one of 'those few powerful minds, who...appear only once in the course of centuries, and represent, combined in them, the Science of their times, in its many branches.'⁶ Rarely have two brothers shaped their day and age so thoroughly through their scholarly curiosity and universal knowledge about the world.⁷

Much later, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Humboldt brothers came to represent a particular tension which occupied German historians writing at the time, such as Friedrich Meinecke. In 1908, Meinecke published his famous book, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*. In it he described the genesis of the German nation state (with analogies to other European states) as a process driven by the tension between the 'universal and the national idea'.⁸ The German nation, so Meinecke argued, had emerged over the course of the nineteenth century as the organizational idea of the nation had gradually overturned the older cosmopolitan idea, dominant in the eighteenth century.⁹ Early Humboldt biographers, such as Meinecke's student, Siegfried Kaehler, attempted to explain how the two cosmopolitan brothers fitted into Meinecke's paradigm. While, on the one hand, Kaehler saw Wilhelm as having developed a deep consciousness of and pride in his German identity, he argued, by contrast, that Alexander, had remained a cultural cosmopolitan who felt equally at home in Germany as in France or many other countries.¹⁰ Puzzled by this difference, Kaehler, writing in 1916, mused over who had been the 'better' brother.¹¹

The question of how the 'national' relates to the 'global', or 'universal', in Meinecke's terms, existed not only for the historical actors themselves, but persists today as an analytical

⁵ Manfred Ringmacher, 'Zwei Briefe auf Guaraní in Alexander von Humboldts Handschrift', *International Review for Humboldt Studies*, 15, 29, 2014, pp. 90-101.

⁶ Bodleian Library, Dep. BAAS 5, p. 222.

⁷ Nicolaas A. Rupke, *Alexander von Humboldt: a metabiography*, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2005; Manfred Geier, *Die Brüder Humboldt: eine Biographie*, Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2009.

⁸ Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates*, München: Oldenbourg, 1908.

⁹ Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Rupke, *Alexander von Humboldt: a metabiography*, p. 74.

¹¹ Siegfried Kaehler, *Wilhelm und Alexander von Humboldt in den Jahren der Napoleonischen Krise: Dr. Walter Sohm zum Gedächtnis*, München: Oldenbourg, 1916, p. 231.

challenge for historians writing about them. In this special cluster, 'Educational networks, educational identities: connecting "national" and global perspectives', our three authors revisit the question that so interested Kaehler: how do 'cosmopolitan' scholars construct their identity when situated in an environment where both 'universal' and 'national' ideas are exerting pressure and influence over them? A first important point made by the essays in this cluster, is that the tension between processes of 'universal' integration and 'national' separation are in no way confined to the classic 'age of nationalism' in the nineteenth century but constitute important features of both earlier and later periods, in particular, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, on the one hand, and the twentieth century, on the other.¹² As well as expanding the analytical timeframe for such investigations, the essays engage with and develop further recent discussions among historians about how we can write history *beyond* the nation state.

As summed up by Merry Wiesner, global history has been largely concerned with exploring 'connections within the global human community...the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past.' It is, she writes, citing David Northrup, the story of the 'great convergence.'¹³ The new cultural history, by contrast, has 'spent much more time on divergence, making categories of difference ever more complex' and highlighting the importance of an increasingly varied array of cultural markers including 'race', gender, class, age-group, religion and nationality.¹⁴ As Wiesner points out, both global history and the new cultural history are attempts to write history 'beyond the nation state', and both seek to do so by shifting analytical perspective: one 'zooms out' to view events from the macro level, while the other moves inward to focus on the micro. Until relatively recently, historians working at both these levels pronounced the old history, written from a national perspective, to be more or less

¹² See, for instance, debates on early global modernities. Charles H. Parker and Jerry H. Bentley, eds., *Between the middle ages and modernity: individual and community in the early modern world*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007; David Porter, *Comparative early modernities: 1100 – 1800*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹³ Merry E. Wiesner, 'World history and the history of women, Gender and Sexuality', *Journal of World History* 18, 1, 2007, pp. 54-5; on global history see Jürgen Osterhammel, *The transformation of the world: a global history of the nineteenth century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014; Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global perspectives on global history: theories and approaches in a connected world*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Christopher A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world: 1780 - 1914*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2009; Sebastian Conrad, *What is global history?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016.

¹⁴ Wiesner, 'World history and the history of women, gender and sexuality', pp. 54-5; for the new cultural history, see Lynn Hunt and Aletta Biersack, *The new cultural history*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

defunct.¹⁵

In the last few years, however, there has been an important drive to recover and reposition the ‘national’ perspective both within and between the level of the individual or small group, on the one hand, and the transnational or global, on the other.¹⁶ It is increasingly acknowledged that the tendency of historians to adopt a global perspective does not destroy the historical influence and cultural resonance of the ‘nation’ and the ‘national’ any more than a focus on individual or small group identity construction does. Instead, we should rather be exploring how these different levels relate to each other, or more precisely, how they help to constitute each other.

The three articles brought together in this special cluster employ the actor network as a methodological tool to link national and global perspectives. While actor-network theory and its application in historical research is not new in itself, we see its particular value for global history in helping to dissolve the longstanding binary relationship between the ‘universal’ and the ‘national’.¹⁷ Our authors all confirm Thomas Weber’s assertion, which he made when writing on early twentieth-century educational networks, that national and transnational identities have never been mutually exclusive concepts and that a marriage of ‘transnational and national identities’ has been ‘more common than we have hitherto thought.’¹⁸

The challenge of integrating different analytical perspectives and spatial scales is especially acute in the history of education and educational exchange; and this makes historical actors in educational networks particularly interesting as case studies for studying the relationship between the national and the global. Historically, the world of education, particularly higher education and universities, has been constituted and experienced simultaneously as both national and international. This is clearly seen with the early modern

¹⁵ Akira Iriye, ‘The internationalization of history’, *The American Historical Review*, 94, 1, 1989, pp. 1-10; Ian R. Tyrrell, ‘American exceptionalism in an age of international history’, *American Historical Review*, 96, 1991, pp. 1031-55; Organization of American Historians/ Thomas Bender, ‘La Pietra report: a report to the profession’, 2007.

¹⁶ See, for example, Roland Wenzlhuemer and Isabella Löhr, eds., *The nation state and beyond: governing globalization processes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*, Heidelberg: Springer, 2012; Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871 - 1914*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006; Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the nation in Imperial Germany*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010; Jonathan Neem, ‘American history in a global age’, *History and Theory*, 50 2011, pp. 41-70.

¹⁷ See, for instance, the series of workshops on historical network analysis organized within the context of the research group *Historical Network Research* (<http://historicalnetworkresearch.org/>); also Marten Düring, Ulrich Eumann, Martin Stark, Linda von Keyserlingk, eds., *Handbuch historische Netzwerkforschung. Grundlagen und Anwendungen*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2016; Bonnie H. Erickson, ‘Social networks and history: a review essay’, *Historical Methods*, 30, 3, 1997, pp. 149–57; Peter S. Bearman, James Moody and Robert Faris, ‘Networks and history’, *Complexity*, 8, 2002, pp. 61–71.

¹⁸ Thomas Weber, *Our friend “the enemy”: elite education in Britain and Germany before world war I*, Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2008, p. 9.

Republic of Letters, as well as in later forms of transnational scholarly exchange, where the interchange of ideas, objects and personnel took place between individual scholars and institutions operating across national, regional and imperial borders.¹⁹ Students were keen to study abroad, attracted by the most famous scholars, bursaries and the reputations of particular universities; scholars themselves travelled to carry out research, collaborate with colleagues and exchange ideas. Recent approaches developed within digital history have helped us visualize the far reach of these transnational scholarly networks.²⁰ Ideas also travelled through the creation of complex international networks of correspondence, and exchanges of books, maps and other objects.²¹ At the same time, as we saw earlier in the case of the Humboldt brothers, these exchanges were shaped by the national contexts and systems of education in which these individuals and institutions were based and from which they set out on their border-crossing journeys.²² Educational exchange has, therefore, been continually inscribed with both national and international meanings, which have by no means always been compatible with each other. Frequently, indeed, they have come into open conflict.

In her essay in this cluster, Elisabeth Kuebler-Wolf shows clearly the very different meanings that were associated with particular objects linked to Elihu Yale, the benefactor of Yale University, in different national contexts. Items that were imbued with deep educational significance for students and faculty at Yale University in the United States, were valued completely differently in India – for their military and religious significance – given Yale’s nearly three decades as an East India Company official in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. There is no trace of the great educational benefactor here. Likewise, the organization of education and scholarly activity internationally has often jarred with the construction of ‘national’ territoriality and governance; indeed, the two have co-existed uneasily for many centuries. As Steffen Rimmer

¹⁹ The ‘Republic of Letters’ is the name given to a transnational community of scholars in late seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe and America. It facilitated communication and exchange between intellectuals and scholars across national, cultural and linguistic borders. For more on the Republic of Letters, see Dena Goodman, *The republic of letters: A cultural history of the French enlightenment*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994.

²⁰ See the digital history project *Mapping the Republic of Letters* at Stanford University, <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/> (consulted 8 April 2016); Matthew Potolsky, *The decadent republic of letters: taste, politics, and cosmopolitan community from Baudelaire to Beardsley*, Philadelphia, PA.: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

²¹ See the mapping of Benjamin Franklin’s correspondence in Caroline Winterer, ‘Where is America in the Republic of Letters’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 9, 3, 2012, pp. 597-623.

²² For more on the interaction between national, regional and international scales in the context of the Republic of Letters, see Laurence Brockliss, *Calvet’s web: enlightenment and the republic of letters in eighteenth-century France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

shows in his essay for the cluster, the original ‘self-strengthening’ motivations of the Chinese government, which lay behind the establishment of the Chinese Education Mission (CEM) in the United States in the mid nineteenth century were significantly undercut by the cultural identification that many of the students sent by China to be educated in America developed with their host country and with the West more broadly. The final essay in the cluster by Tomás Irish examines the comparable tensions that existed between the internationalist ethos and transnational collaborative tradition of the scholars employed in an advisory capacity by the different nations represented at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and the specific priorities and agendas of their respective national governments in the post-war landscape.

The original conference that gave rise to this special cluster concerned itself specifically with the challenge of developing analytical tools, which allow us to successfully combine a range of different perspectives or levels of analysis, in particular, the national and the global. This might be compared with the ability of an individual to imagine him or herself simultaneously as a member of multiple, overlapping groups of differing size and significance. At the original conference held at the Freie Universität Berlin in August 2013, we sought to evaluate the actor-network as a potentially valuable tool of analysis for this project of integration. We began by considering the Science and Technology Studies concept of the actor network as developed by Bruno Latour, John Law and Michael Callon, which has a number of theoretical and methodological advantages.²³ Firstly, and most significantly, for our purposes, as a constructivist concept, building on French poststructuralist thought, actor-network theory seeks to overcome essentialist explanations of social behaviour. Through a focus on the complexity and multilocal nature of cultural interactions, integrating many different spatial scales, actor-network theory, as developed by Latour and others, has often been used to disrupt and to challenge traditional analytical binaries, including national vs. global. As Latour himself has written:

A network notion is ideally suited to follow the change of scales since it does not require the analyst to partition her world with any priori scale. The scale, that is, the type, number and topography of connections is left to the actors themselves...Instead of having to choose between the local and the global view, the notion of network allows us to think of

²³ John Law and John Hassard, *Actor network theory and after*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

a global entity - a highly connected one - which remains nevertheless continuously local.²⁴

Another hallmark of actor-network theory as developed by Latour, in particular, is the integration of human and non-human (object) actors within social and cultural networks.²⁵ It is important to note that the 'agency' attributed to object-actors is not intentional in nature, but rather passive: they are best understood as items which can be inscribed by human actors with a variety of cultural meanings depending upon the particular sets of connections and contexts of which they are a part. In this cluster, Elisabeth Kuebler-Wolf engages closely with this aspect of actor-network theory arguing that it allows the complexity and multifaceted nature of the different meanings attributed to and associated with the various items and artworks in the extensive collections of Elihu Yale to be more deeply and accurately understood. She fully embraces the concept of passive agency, treating the items (or object-actors) she examines, from portraits of Yale to ornamental sundials and Oriental screens, as critical in generating new narratives of meaning for a variety of actors across both space and time. The figure of Yale himself is left at a certain point in time, while the objects associated with him continue to generate new connections and significances down the centuries to the present day.

Steffen Rimner and Tomás Irish also acknowledge the important role of objects in the networks they study - above all, books, maps and other scholarly apparatus. However, they chiefly approach their respective subjects from the perspective of social network analysis, which focuses on connections between human actors – individuals, groups, organizations and societies rather than objects. Thus, Steffen concentrates his analysis on the personal and institutional ties which bound members of the Chinese Educational Mission, Chinese students sent by the Chinese government to be educated at American universities, as they developed their careers and personal relationships in afterlife. In particular, he focuses on the deployment of the CEM and the successful harnessing of their cultural capital by the Chinese government in the 1874 investigations of coolie conditions in the forced labour regimes of Cuba and Peru. However, he also explores the development of an intimate and convivial atmosphere of cosmopolitan sociability between members of the CEM and their American hosts beyond

²⁴ Bruno Latour, 'On actor-network theory: a few clarifications', *Soziale Welt*, 47, 4, 1996, pp. 371-2.

²⁵ Thomas Hugh Crawford, 'Networking the (non) human: Moby-Dick, Matthew Fontaine Maury, and Bruno Latour', *Configurations*, 5, 1, 1997, pp. 1-21.

anything anticipated or intended by their Chinese government sponsors.

Moving forward in time to the period immediately following the First World War and the attempts to broker a lasting peace at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Tomás Irish traces the complex transnational networks connecting scholars from many different disciplines called upon by their respective national governments to provide expert advice on various aspects of the peace deal. He teases out the tensions and contradictions between their international identities as scholars, bound by their various disciplinary cultures, conventions and long-standing collaborations, and their increasingly prominent role as servants of the very different, political and economic agendas of their respective countries.

In 2003, Patrick Manning insisted that world (or global) history needs to clarify what distinguishes it from other fields, thematically, conceptually, and methodologically.²⁶ The multifaceted approach to the actor-network adopted by the different essays in this cluster is, we argue, one answer to Manning's challenge. While we do not intend to represent the approach as a catch-all methodology, it does allow scholars to engage with processes of scaling in historical analysis, and to grapple more effectively with investigating the ways in which pressures and influences were directed at the individual historical actor from 'universal', national and local levels at the same time. The actor-network approach helps to dissolve a long-standing binary that has been assumed to exist between the national and the global. In contrast to Friedrich Kaehler's assessment of the Humboldt brothers as inherently different, one 'national' the other 'cosmopolitan', the authors in this cluster use the actor-network approach to analyse the myriad forms which the process of identity formation across borders could assume. In place of a simple binary, we must think instead, with Thomas Weber, in terms of complex 'marriages' of 'national' and 'universal', involving repeated contextual switching between the two levels rather than a hybrid mixing of the two. The authors focus on the aims of networks as well as their content and structures, on the individual actors as well as the actor groups and institutions of which they are a part. Small and large, all of these networks represent important units and building blocks without which larger, global networks are not fully comprehensible.

Through the publication of this thematic cluster we seek to insert the actor network as a key methodological link between the micro and macro levels of analysis in global history.

²⁶ Patrick Manning, *Navigating world history: historians create a global past*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Focusing on the actor network, on the individual as well as upon actor groups, helps us to marry a global history approach with that of the 'new cultural history'. It allows us to explore the interlinkages between the micro and macro levels more fully. At the macro level, the concept of the network traces connections and linkages which oftentimes cross national and cultural boundaries, while at the micro level, the actors' perspective brings to light the different negotiation processes involved in constituting the meaning of these networks for the individuals traversing their highways. Finally, our focus on educational networks highlights the continuity and longevity of certain forms of network throughout the early modern and modern eras, marking educational networks as one of the oldest forms of global connectedness.