

FOREWORD

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The papers collected in this section of the *Annals* focus in many ways on the multifaceted relationship between ‘globalization and ‘global history’. They assume that globalization as a historical process has changed our way of conceiving and writing history, inspiring a radical turn in historiographical theory and in historical research. At the same time, they indirectly suggest that this ‘global turn’ has substantially modified our way of understanding globalization and its history, which is – contrary to any kind of ‘presentism’ – a very long-run history.

The contributors discuss some major theoretical and ideological premises of this ‘global turn’ and its impact on various fields of historical research. On the basis of a wide and consolidated literature, they characterize ‘global history’ as an attempt to frame historical phenomena and processes in a global context, rejecting any sort of ‘centrism’ (especially European and Western) and rather reconstructing an ‘entangled’ or ‘mestizo history’ in which different civilizations, spaces, economies, biographies, knowledges, practices, goods, lifestyles, and so on, are strictly connected.

Some authors stress the new and rich perspectives opened by this approach. Marco Meriggi, for example, emphasizes that global history has allowed historians to criticize and recast the traditional notion of Eurocentrism and the idea itself of Europe. In the same way, for Laura Di Fiore the global view is very appropriate to deconstructing and rethinking the idea of the nation-state as the sole frame of reference for historical interpretation. In these fields, it is unquestionable that the global approach has furnished significant results with which to reconceptualise old and to some extent obsolete categories, stimulating very interesting and original research.

At the same time, however, this kind of approach is liable to major errors of perspective, especially if connected with a prevailing attention to short-term conjunctures or phenomena. In this sense, of great interest is

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the debate on the so-called 'Great Divergence' in the past two decades, analysed by Vittorio Beonio Brocchieri. In this case, a global and short-term outlook has led to overestimation of the horizontal connections among different spaces, economies and civilizations and to an evident underestimation of Europe's distinctive cultural, social, political and economic features developed during the two or three centuries preceding the Industrial Revolution.

More in general – as Patrizia Delpiano correctly stresses – global history is always exposed to three different risks: the risk of incompetence of historians, which arises alongside the lengthening of timeframes and broadening of spaces considered, especially in relation to the problem of documentary evidence; the risk of anachronism, which consists in asking the wrong question about the past; and the risk of assuming an “ideological” or “moral” standpoint connected to the needs of a globalizing world.

It is therefore indubitable that global history has opened new and very rich fields of research. But it is less clear if it can give us also a convincing and well-grounded representation of the making of the global world.

The papers that follow – including, from a different point of view, the article by Giovanni Gozzini, which analyses and compares the 'Great Depression' (1929) and the 'Great Contraction' (2008) stressing the 'natural' role of finance in world history – try to address this question.