

## ***Histoire Globale* in France: The Rise of the French Connection**

Olivier Schouteden

### **Introduction**

Fifteen years ago, *Les Annales* published a special issue focused on the place of *histoire globale* in the French historiographical landscape. This issue's editorial stated that it was welcoming contributions that could serve as foundations for "another global history," while in his final comments, one of the pioneers of French cultural history Roger Chartier asserted that historians had once again sailed for larger horizons.<sup>1</sup> Although not a consecration, the fact that arguably the most influential French journal in the humanities devoted a special issue to world/global history was in many ways a victory for a trend that had long been underrepresented in the French scholarship and university programs. As the authors of this editorial claimed, this embrace of the global was not a new turn but a *retour aux sources*, faithful to the goal of *Les Annales* and Braudel in particular.<sup>2</sup> But was it really a renaissance? The tone is indeed cautious in this editorial, and one can wonder what the true impact of the (re)discovery of the global has been on the way history is thought about and practiced in France. Can one talk about a French *histoire globale*? Is it a new way of looking at the past or simply a recycling of old historiographical recipes? Have French historians jumped on the global bandwagon later than others, and why? Finally, how is *histoire globale* perceived in France today?

This article analyzes the state of global and world history in France and makes two claims in relation to the questions raised above. First, there is a French global history in the making, and

---

<sup>1</sup> "Une Histoire à l'Echelle Globale" in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 56 no 1 (2001), 4; Roger Chartier, "La Conscience de la Globalité (commentaire)" in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 56 no 1 (2001), 123.

<sup>2</sup> "Une Histoire à l'Echelle Globale," 3.

it seems like this trend is here to stay. It seems fair to talk about a French *histoire globale* as French historians for two generations have shaped a largely American and English trend in their own way(s). This French variation is notable for its *Annales* roots, particularly the influence of Fernand Braudel, and for its attention to definitions and concepts, although, as elsewhere, different branches, historiographical interventions and conceptions of the field can be distinguished. Second, the “global turn” has received a lukewarm welcome in France, with some institutions and historians showing obvious signs of reluctance for what feels like an encroachment on French historical practices. The necessity to justify that this trend is very much homegrown and the reliance on a form of “import-substitution,” where foreign ideas in the field are rebranded as French, both partook in the creation of a French *histoire globale*. In their denunciation of the ubiquitous hand of American neo-imperialism, criticisms of the field in France have also revealed the difficulties for French academic history to integrate foreign elements and overcome its institutional rigidities. However, talking from a distance, French historians have raised important points about the field that their Anglophone colleagues might want to take heed of. I conclude with a brief reflection on the possibility of world/global histories that would combine elements of an international discussion while keeping their distinctive national flavors.

### **I. Dynamism and Particularities of French *Histoire Globale*: Discussion and Practice**

In his speech (*leçon inaugurale*) “Aux origines de l’Histoire Globale” given at the Collège de France on November 28, 2013, Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam begins by emphasizing how unusual it is for a foreign historian to be given a platform to express his ideas in the heart of one of France’s most revered intellectual bastions.<sup>3</sup> This first assertion triggers a larger reflection about the progress of *histoire globale* in France since the organization, under Subrahmanyam’s

---

<sup>3</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Aux Origines de l’Histoire Globale (leçon inaugurale prononcée le 28 novembre 2013)* (Paris: Collège de France, Fayard, 2014), 17.

and Serge Gruzinski's care, of the first world history workshop at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales on May 10, 2000.<sup>4</sup> For him, the marginalization of foreign historians within the French cultural landscape is symptomatic of the weight of national traditions in French historical approaches and practices. By extension, as Subrahmanyam seems to imply, this phenomenon explains in many ways some French historians' difficulties in comprehending the novelty of the essentially foreign/Anglophone global turn. Yet, evidence is here that French *histoire globale* has now really taken shape as part of an international trend. The multiplication since 2000 of seminars, publications and special issues of journals covering world history-related themes demonstrate both the newness and dynamism of the field in France.<sup>5</sup> *Histoire globale* in France has now become a field in and of itself, shaped by many external elements but held together by its own national traditions and preoccupations.

Two salient points characterize French world/global history. First is the strong emphasis on the French roots of the field and constant references to French *grands maîtres*, in particular Fernand Braudel and Marc Bloch, both representative of the *Annales* School. Referring to these illustrious pioneers of *histoire globale*, some French historians imply the precedence of French historiography in the field of global/world history over other national historical traditions, creating

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 18. This workshop was entitled "Penser le Monde, XVe-XVIIIe siècle." Two related seminars were organized at the EHESS in the following academic year 2000-2001: "De l'Asie à l'Amérique et de l'Amérique à l'Asie: Circuits, Echanges, Représentations (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)" and "Réseaux et Voies de Communication entre l'Asie Centrale, le Proche-Orient et l'Inde du Xe au XIXe siècle"

<sup>5</sup> The list of such recent French contributions to and discussions of the field is long. Among the most important, and in the footsteps of the 2001 special issue of *Les Annales* mentioned above, see the three issues entirely devoted to world and global history by the following French journals: *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* ("Histoire Globale, Histoire Connectée" Numéro spécial no54-4 bis (2007)), *Le Débat* ("Ecrire l'Histoire du Monde" no154, 2009/2 (March-April 2009)) and *Cahiers d'Histoire* ("Pourquoi l'Histoire Globale?" no121 (avril-juin 2013)). In addition to the book-length contributions the present article will delve into, it is worth mentioning the creation in 2012 of the first French world/global history journal *Monde(s): Histoire, Espaces, Relations*. A blog named *Histoire Globale* was also created in 2010 under the direction of historian Philippe Norel. Finally, academic initiatives related to the field have been emerging in recent years; a good example being the series of workshops organized by the EHESS about slavery and bondage in a global context, such as "Domestic Slavery: 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century" that took place in the Collège de France on March 24-25 2016). This latter workshop also demonstrates that French universities are integrated within international academic networks of initiatives related to global studies.

the image of a homegrown French *histoire globale*, or, at least, one whose roots are not to be found on foreign terrain. Chloé Maurel provides an interesting illustration of this historiographical reconstruction in her *Manuel d'Histoire Globale*, the first university publication about world history specifically targeted to undergraduates.<sup>6</sup> She introduces the field by marginalizing pre-twentieth century non-French contributions, to which she devotes no more than two pages, so as to set the stage for the role of forefather of a “true global history” played by Marc Bloch.

This points to the second main element of French *histoire globale*, namely the contradiction that stems from, on the one hand, a loose definition of the field, and on the other the close, almost obsessive attention to definitions. Definitions advanced by French historians to encapsulate the field, and especially the difference between world and global history, tend to be confusing. Caroline Douki, Philippe Minard and Chloé Maurel seem to agree that the difference between global and world history lie in the first being concerned with processes of interdependency whereas the second, while adopting an international approach, does not study the integration of these separate entities within the same system, or as Maurel argues, does not even connect these separate entities.<sup>7</sup> These definitions are both unclear and unsubstantiated, given the priority pioneers of world history like Patrick Manning and Jerry Bentley have given respectively to the idea of connections and encounters in the field.<sup>8</sup> The vagueness of these definitions is common to many countries that practice world/global history, but in the case of France, it contrasts sharply with the painstaking effort to define and differentiate so many sub-trends of the field. Indeed, there seems to be a willingness to deconstruct and break up world and global history into a variety of

---

<sup>6</sup> Chloé Maurel, *Manuel d'Histoire Globale: Comprendre le "Global Turn" des Sciences Humaines* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Douki and Philippe Minard, “Histoire Globale, Histoires Connectées: Un Changement d'Echelle Historiographique?” *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 544, no. 5, (December 12, 2007), 10; Maurel, *Manuel d'Histoire Globale*, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)

approaches with their own methods and theoretical coherence. Thus, Maurel distinguishes the transnational approach from connected and shared history, and adds to the list the field of cultural transfers.<sup>9</sup> This sustained attention to subtleties and differences in definitions has some merit, and has been extended by some French historians and economists like Philippe Norel to terms related to the field, such as globalization, global history and capitalism in the context of global economic history.<sup>10</sup> However, this overemphasis on definitions can also prove sterile. Connected history is, for example, hardly any different from world history as it is defined by the pioneers of the field, and some criticisms of *histoire globale* or of some of its practitioners turn out to be, in the hands of some French historians, a paralyzing quarrel over the usefulness of some terms over others in the quest to understand the past.<sup>11</sup>

What are, then, the particularities of *histoire globale* in the way it is practiced in France? The influence of Fernand Braudel in particular is evident in the work of many French practitioners of the field, although Braudel's work is mostly used as a steppingstone to reach broader and newer horizons. One can discern an economic school interested in the emergence of a world-economy (from *economie-monde* to *economie mondiale*) centered around a moving core, shaped by exchanges and whose parts are interconnected through a global market. Philippe Norel is the most famous representative of this trend that, although inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory, owes primarily to Braudel's *Civilisation Matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, historians like Norel are also conscious of being part of a more recent, post-Braudelian historiographical landscape that sprouts from a renewed interest since 1980s in

---

<sup>9</sup> Chloé Maurel, "Pourquoi l'Histoire Globale?" *Cahiers d'Histoire*, no121 (avril-juin 2013), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Norel, "La Dimension Globale en Histoire Economique" in Laurent Testot, *Histoire Globale: Un Nouveau Regard sur le Monde* (Auxerre: Sciences Humaines, 2008), 183.

<sup>11</sup> See for example: Vincent Capdepuy, "Pourquoi l'Histoire Globale?" *Histoire Globale: Le Blog* (blog), April 14 2014, [http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/pourquoi-lhistoire-globale\\_3814](http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/pourquoi-lhistoire-globale_3814).

<sup>12</sup> Philippe Norel, *L'Invention du Marché: Une Histoire Economique de la Mondialisation* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004) and Philippe Norel, *L'Histoire Economique Globale* (Paris: Seuil, DL 2009); see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy: Essays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation Matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme: XVe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Colin, 1979).

© 2018 *The Middle Ground Journal* Number 17, Fall 2018 <http://TheMiddleGroundJournal.org>  
See Submission Guidelines page for the journal's not-for-profit educational open-access policy

globalization processes and from an effort to decenter (or provincialize, to quote Chakrabarty) Europe in the study of the construction of a world economy.<sup>13</sup> Philippe Beaujard's study of the Indian Ocean's *économie-monde* from the early centuries A.D. to the sixteenth century recalls Braudel's conception of the Mediterranean, in that it takes the Indian ocean as a unit of analysis constituting a zone of contact and exchanges with porous contours.<sup>14</sup> The strong influence of Braudel in Beaujard's work is found in the emphasis on the effects of the environment (*milieu*), attention to economic cycles, discussions about the importance of cities and their commercial networks in structuring the area through the integration of new goods. However, Beaujard also relies on new ideas about the spread of religions and the role of private institutions and intermediaries (or connecting agents) such as merchants and private institutions. The question of shifting perspectives and scales dear to Patrick Manning has been recently explored from a different angle by geographer Christian Grataloup.<sup>15</sup> In his work, he combines historical and geographical tools to understand the world from the perspective of Braudel's *longue durée*. Grataloup also borrows Braudel's concept of *géohistoire* to engage scholars to locate periods and date regions, explaining that history and geography ought to be thought about simultaneously. Although the term *géohistoire* was coined by Braudel to denote this hybridity of time and space, Grataloup adds his own twist to it by pointing to the necessity of using this concept in the context of the globalization of modern societies.

The example of Grataloup not only points to the looming presence of Braudel in French *histoire globale* but also of the place of interdisciplinarity in world and global approaches to the past in France. Social sciences went global recently in France and in turn infused new dynamism

---

<sup>13</sup> Norel, "La Dimension Globale en Histoire Economique," pp 177-187.

<sup>14</sup> Philippe Beaujard, *Les Mondes de l'Océan Indien* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012); see also "Un Espace Mondialisé: L'Océan Indien" in Testot, *Histoire Globale*, pp 91-104. Beaujard also participated in: Philippe Beaujard, Laurent Berger and Philippe Norel, *Histoire Globale, Mondialisations et Capitalisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009). Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II* (Paris, A. Colin, 1966)

<sup>15</sup> Christian Grataloup, *Géohistoire de la Mondialisation: Le Temps Long du Monde* (Paris: A. Colin, 2007); Christian Grataloup, "Des Mondes au Monde: La Géohistoire" in Testot, *Histoire Globale*, pp 197-205.

into world and global history. The phenomenon is such that Alain Caillé and Stéphane Dufoix, both sociologists, devoted an edited volume to the global turn of the social sciences in 2013.<sup>16</sup> The global turn in France has also contributed greatly to French historiography since 2000 by boosting fields that were lagging behind or at least showed less development than elsewhere. It is the case with imperial and colonial history, that seems to be coming out of its dormant stage in France in part thanks to the global twist given by some of its practitioners like Romain Bertrand, and encouraged by recent publication such as *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*.<sup>17</sup> In 2017, it is safe to say that French *histoire globale* is alive and well.

Over the past few decades, French scholars have produced works of world history that are worthy of a special place within the field. In *Le Carrefour Javanais. Essai d'Histoire Globale*, published in 1990, Denys Lombard planted the first important seed for the development of the field in France.<sup>18</sup> Looking at the island of Java, Lombard then asserted the necessity to operate “a triangulation of the gaze” (*triangulation des regards*) to discern areas where regions overlap, where routes are drawn and contacts are made.<sup>19</sup> His work has been followed through since then in various ways. Most notably, Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau has attempted in his *Les Traités Négrières. Essai d'Histoire Globale* published in 2004 to fully grasp slavery and slave trade from a global approach, relying on anthropological history to find defining criteria of slavery through time and space.<sup>20</sup> Probably closest to world history as it is practiced in the United States is the work of Serge Gruzinski.<sup>21</sup> In his study of early modern Europe in the world, Gruzinski sets out to

---

<sup>16</sup> Alain Caillé and Stéphane Dufoix, *Le Tournant Global des Sciences Sociales* (Paris: Découverte, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Romain Bertrand, “Rencontres Impériales. L’Histoire Connectée et les Relations Euro-Asiatiques” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, Numéro Spécial no54-4 bis (2007), 69-89.

<sup>18</sup> Denys Lombard, *Le Carrefour Javanais. Essai d’Histoire Globale* (Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1990)

<sup>19</sup> See Caroline Douki and Philippe Minard, “Pour un Changement d’Echelle Historiographique” in Testot, *Histoire Globale*, pp 161-176.

<sup>20</sup> Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les Traités Négrières: Essai d’Histoire Globale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, “Jalons pour ne Histoire Globale de l’Esclavage” in Testot, *Histoire Globale*, pp 131-138

<sup>21</sup> His latest and most notable effort in the field is probably: Serge Gruzinski, *L’Aigle et le Dragon: Démesure Européenne et Mondialisation au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2011)

make connections between “the four corners of the world” visible.<sup>22</sup> This entails breaking up the traditional national and regional borders to understand how places were built as much from the inside as from the outside, and looking closely at processes of *métissage* and syncretism. Looking exclusively at these recent positive developments of French *histoire globale* is however misleading. As Subrahmanyam states in his speech in the Collège de France, French historiography remains very cautious about accepting external ideas about how to approach history. In spite of the recent progress of the field, *histoire globale* is still very much debated in France and encounters many obstacles that the next section of this article will delve into.

## II. Debates and Obstacles to the Spread of World/Global History in France

The development and spread of world and global history in France has taken longer than in most Western countries, and has encountered significant obstacles that are still potent today.<sup>23</sup> On an empirical level, efforts toward the institutional development of *histoire globale* seem very limited: no university chair or program in world/global history exists in France, and world history courses at the university level are not only uncommon but are also reduced to an examination of globalization processes.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in addition to a dearth of French studies in the field, few of those that exist have been translated into English, and fewer, with the exception of the pre-global-turn pioneers, have had a substantial influence on the way world and global history is thought and practiced outside of France. No place, institution or association in France is specifically devoted to discussing the current state and future of *histoire globale*, and no publishing house or specific university collection is currently in existence in France to welcome and spread contribution to the

---

<sup>22</sup> Serge Gruzinski, *Les Quatre Parties du Monde: Histoire d'une Mondialisation* (Paris: Éditions de La Martinière, 2004)

<sup>23</sup> See Chloé Maurel, “La World/Global History: Questions et Débats” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’Histoire* no 104 (Oct-Dec 2009), 153.

<sup>24</sup> Caillié and Dufoix, *Le Tournant Global des Sciences Sociales*, 14.

field of world and global history.<sup>25</sup> The institutionalization of *histoire globale* in France is less than embryonic.<sup>26</sup> Added and related to the latter point, outside the academia the understanding of what world/global history really is and entails seems far less sophisticated in France than in the Anglophone world. If Wikipedia is any indicator, then the French page about “histoire globale,” considerably shorter than the two English pages “world history” and “global history”, and yet containing blatantly misleading information, can be seen as the reflection of serious issues France is having in its timid attempt at including the field within its intellectual landscape.<sup>27</sup> The real question, then, is to know whether France is simply lagging behind or if this situation is the reflection of a reluctance to accept the field of world and global history. Moreover, if it is a case of reluctance, does it stem from the fact that France is defending its own world/global history tradition against more dominant Anglophone trends?

Criticisms about the field of world/global history in France have been recurring but never unified under one common denominator. Of course, there are some similarities in these criticisms but they echo an academic skepticism that is found outside of France as well. Indeed, the blurry contours of *histoire globale*, the issues the field raises as a unifying theory and methodology, the overly selective use of primary sources and the overall lack of rigor tie together French comments about the global and world history, but they are not specific to the French response to it.<sup>28</sup> The reception of the field in France has been, until recently, lukewarm, but some historians, in particular Chloé Maurel and Pierre Grosser, have made acerbic criticisms that seem to constitute a specifically French reaction. They both denounce the global turn as not only nothing new but

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>26</sup> Maurel, “Pourquoi l’Histoire Globale?”, 8.

<sup>27</sup> See: “Histoire Globale”, Wikipedia, accessed September 20, 2016. For example, in this inchoate page, world history and global history are seen as different because the first compares various civilizations and the second focuses on global interactions.

<sup>28</sup> These criticisms, in various degrees, are found in the three main publications this section will rely on: Maurel, *Manuel d’Histoire Globale*; Douki and Minard, “Histoire Globale, Histoires Connectées”; and Pierre Grosser, “L’Histoire Mondiale/Globale, Une Jeunesse Exubérante mais Difficile” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’Histoire* no 110 (April-June 2011), pp 3-18.

also a vain attempt by Americans at re-appropriating an idea that comes essentially from French pioneers like Bloch and Braudel.<sup>29</sup> Maurel and Grosser, therefore, do not believe that there is a gap separating French from Anglophone and Germanophone literature on global and world history. Maurel's *Manuel*, the first overview of the field, can be read as an attempt to both advocate for the field of *histoire globale* and justify French scholars' place and role within it. This effort, albeit important for the future of the field in France, leads to severe contradictions and issues. A problem that arises in both Grosser's and Maurel's reflection on world history is the misrepresentation of French participation within the field of world/global history, creating in turn a distorted story about the origins and development of the field itself. Maurel's willingness to see Marc Bloch as a pioneer of world history because of his comparative approach, for example, is misplaced. Bloch's failure to make connections visible between the various areas under study disqualifies his approach as a form of world or global history as commonly defined by American figures of the field.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Maurel's identification of Romain Bertrand as a "pioneer of connected history" and of his book *L'Histoire à Parts Egales* as "a true historiographical turn" reveals that world history as practiced, say in the United States, has yet to take hold in France.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Bertrand's study of the global connections that tie Southeast Asia with the rest of the world, and his call for the examination of non-European sources to delve into transnational and asymmetrical relationships could hardly seem novel to Anglophone practitioners of world and global history, or of history at large for that

---

<sup>29</sup> For Maurel, see *Manuel d'Histoire Globale*: "Ainsi, l'histoire globale apparaît comme un courant interdisciplinaire qui met à contribution d'autres disciplines comme la géographie et la biologie. En cela, elle s'inscrit dans la lignée de l'école des Annales, qui avait rassemblé aussi bien des historiens comme Marc Bloch que des philosophes comme Lucien Levy-Bruhl, des ethnologues comme Marcel Mauss, des psychologues comme Jean Piaget et des sociologues comme François Simiand." (54). For the dubious attitude toward the novelty of world/global history, see Maurel, *Manuel d'Histoire Globale*, 113-114. For Grosser, see "L'Histoire Mondiale/Globale": "Il est d'ailleurs tentant en France de considérer que l'histoire mondiale n'est en rien nouvelle, puisque les historiens français des Annales l'auraient inventée" (9).

<sup>30</sup> Starting with the pioneering (although largely criticized since) work of William McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

<sup>31</sup> Maurel, *Manuel d'Histoire Globale*, 88-89 (my translation). Romain Bertrand, *L'Histoire à Parts Egales: Récits d'une Rencontre Orient-Occident, XVIe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2011).

matter.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Bertrand's contribution to world history, like P  tre Grenouilleau's or Beaujard's, is quite unique and should not be read as a mere repetition of what has been done by historians from other countries. This also raises an important question: does world history or global history have to be practiced in the same way everywhere to produce interesting new insights and knowledge?

This element complicates the discussion about the state of *histoire globale* in France, and brings about another issue some French historians have with the field. The last major criticism made by Grosser and Maurel of (American) world and global history is that the field bears the imprint of American imperialism. For Grosser, the fact that the field was born in the U.S. during the Cold War cannot be separated from an American *prise de conscience* of its central position in the world economy and capacity to intervene militarily in other countries.<sup>33</sup> Maurel identifies a tendency to homogenize various ways of making history in the period of global-conscious post-Cold War American soft power, and believes global/world history to be a product of this tendency.<sup>34</sup> She also underscores the teleological reading of history in world history, that obviously puts the U.S. under the spotlight. For her, American world/global history tries to depoliticize globalization to exculpate American responsibility for the larger inequality gap created by untamed globalization or in its participation in major global disasters.<sup>35</sup> While this criticism is not without foundation, and even creates a healthy distance from an American-only viewpoint that could be myopic and/or (un)consciously partisan, it focuses solely on the London School of Economist approach to global history—which tends to consider globalization under the governance of the West as a natural and even positive process—and conveniently sets aside the liberal/Marxist roots

---

<sup>32</sup> Among the many examples of works that dig into the question of unequal/colonial relationships East-West and the question of unbalanced sources, see the pioneering works of Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992)

<sup>33</sup> See in particular Grosser's discussion of Patrick Manning's work in Grosser, "L'Histoire Mondiale/Globale", 7.

<sup>34</sup> Maurel, "La World/Global History," 166.

<sup>35</sup> Maurel, *Manuel d'Histoire Globale*, 115-116.

of world history represented by some pioneers of the field like Wallerstein and Hodgson.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the decentering of the West and criticism of both the nation-state paradigm and teleological readings discussed in nearly every world history contribution fits quite uneasily with the theory of American imperialism at play in the shaping of the field. Finally, Maurel in particular seems to have misconstrued world/global history as essentially American, forgetting about the many international contributions to the field.

Thus, some of Maurel's and Grosser's criticisms seem far-fetched and uninformed at best, and sometimes merely the result of an instinctive reaction to what is identified as a foreign threat. There is however more to it than a fear of Americanization of French historical practices. More than a mere attempt at debunking the idea that France caught the global/world history bandwagon much later than most countries, in Maurel's and Grosser's discussion of French historical works as sources of the "global turn" lies a clear willingness to integrate France within a global discussion of this historiographical phenomenon. French historiography did not develop along a different line, parallel to world history, because it was informed by it as well as discussed many of its key elements, although the terms of this discussion were not framed in the same way. Seen in this light, Maurel and Grosser's panorama of world/global history make important contributions to the understanding of the genealogy of the discipline. They suggest indeed that world/global history is not an old French trend revived by American historians in the 1980s, suddenly conscious of their place and role in the world, but the product of larger transformations of history, on both sides of the Atlantic, that led to a merging together of theories and methodologies that were *en miettes* before, disjointed.<sup>37</sup> These two French historians bring attention, then, to the fact that world history

---

<sup>36</sup> For Wallerstein, see footnote 13. Marshall S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> I refer here to the important work of French historian François Dosse, *L'Histoire en Miettes: Des "Annales" à la "Nouvelle Histoire"* (Paris: La Découverte, 1987).

is and should be, in more than one way, the fruit of deliberate connections that might not otherwise have been made.

Furthermore, not all French historians agree with the position adopted by Grosser and Maurel. For Laurent Testot, Caroline Douki and Philippe Minard, there is no doubt that France is lagging behind in regards to the field of world and global history, and they all underscore the urgent necessity to catch up with a trend that Anglophone historiography has mostly contributed to forge. For Testot, writing the first panorama of French historians' contributions to *histoire globale* in 2008, argues that, with the exception of a few pioneers like Pétré-Grenouilleau, French historiography has for long perpetuated the cycle of closed off (from the French word *cloisonné*, word often used by him and Maurel) national histories, detached from their surroundings.<sup>38</sup> While Douki and Minard are cautious about adopting global and world history wholesale, in part because of the process of Americanization it represents, they prove very critical, especially compared to Maurel and Grosser, of France's refusal to catch the global train and of the puzzling skeptical condescension of the French toward the trend.<sup>39</sup> Testot adds that the question of scale in French *histoire globale* needs to be further explored, and laments the lag between the diffusion of new ideas within the field of world and global history in "Anglo-Saxon" countries and their reception in France. Testot's point, which centers around the lack of translation of English works into French, is in itself the reflection, I believe, of another issue that plagues French academia and its permeability to new historiographical trends, namely its inadaptability to foreign scholarship and related overreliance on French language. Douki and Minard in particular demonstrate a willingness to overcome the conservative national frameworks that stifled intellectual imagination in French universities. In almost complete opposition to Maurel, they believe that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 caused a revival of American imperialism that led to a decline in world history,

---

<sup>38</sup> Laurent Testot, *Histoire Globale*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Douki and Minard, "Histoire Globale, Histoires Connectées", 13.

suddenly seen as guilty of cultural relativism at a time when the national spirit had to be re-ignited.<sup>40</sup> This reaction cannot fail to evoke in the mind of those who studied French history the reactionary turn of 1870 France, when the defeat against Prussia triggered a major campaign in which history and geography were to become the pillars of French patriotism and nationalism. I argue that, in some ways, the enduring effect of this conservative vision of history is still felt in France's reluctance to adopt world and global history.

Besides, while Maurel and Grosser are keen on analyzing the social and political roots of world/global history in the United States, and carry out an autopsy of world history as a medium of imperialism disguised under pacifist/internationalist consciousness, they seem much less inclined to delve into the reasons for France's reluctant attitude toward the field. So why is it that French historians have not studied the reasons why global history took so long to penetrate their country? Maurel and Grosser invoke the fear of Americanization, the imperialist and neo-liberalist mindset French historians have consciously resisted by resisting global and world history. This is a convenient answer, but what happens when we turn things upside down and look at the social and political dimension of this resistance? Recurring attempts at distancing French historiography from contemporary economics and politics is quite typical of the way history is seen in France. After all, history is still widely considered a social science in France, with precise methods implying a neutral stance. But isn't the refusal to adopt world history in France a symptom of the same phenomenon, namely of France's fear of Americanization and willingness to protect the "cultural exception" from outsider's pernicious influence, that can be seen in France's politics and mindset since at least the Cold War, but with even more force since the collapse of the USSR?<sup>41</sup>

I argue that five reasons stand out to explain why world and global history have been met with many obstacles on their way to the French intellectual landscape. The first reason is not a

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>41</sup> For an enlightening discussion of this phenomenon, see Tony Chafer and Emmanuel Godin, *The French Exception* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

direct mark of disapproval but lays bare deep-seated issues with French historiography. It is the fact that the most important world and global history books were originally published in English, and that some are still awaiting a French translation.<sup>42</sup> Fifteen years ago, Roger Chartier lamented this situation that he saw as a symbol of French lateness in the field.<sup>43</sup> I would argue that the concern with limited French translations also means that, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, many French historians are still reluctant to read in English, an assessment that separates them from German or Dutch historians and that could explain the dynamism of global history in such universities as Leipzig compared to France.<sup>44</sup> Douki and Minard identify a second factor that has to do with the ossification of French institutions and universities and lack of adaptation to anything foreign. They mention the budget cuts that have aggravated the conservatism and provincialism of French institutions and universities, and the related enduring legacy of monographs.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, within these institutions, the boundaries separating the various humanities and social sciences sub-fields are still quite rigid and complicate further interdisciplinary discussions around global-oriented questions.<sup>46</sup>

Third, some French historians still cling to the scientific roots of their discipline, which often means that they present their work as following a rather apolitical trajectory. This of course is a political stance in itself. Postcolonial studies have been met with major reluctance in France in part because they represented a multicultural model of thoughts that did not bode well with French model of integration and the related little emphasis in French historiography on questions of identity politics. The refusal to adopt wholesale global and world history is also a political stance in that it gives credence to the idea of national/homegrown historical cultures, but this is something few French historians seem to acknowledge. Related to this is the fourth reason: a potent anti-

---

<sup>42</sup> Caillié and Dufoix, *Le Tournant Global des Sciences Sociales*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Roger Chartier, "La Conscience de la Globalité (commentaire)," 120.

<sup>44</sup> Grosser, "L'Histoire Mondiale/Globale," 10.

<sup>45</sup> Douki and Minard, "Histoire Globale, Histoires Connectées," 15-16.

<sup>46</sup> Caillié and Dufoix, *Le Tournant Global des Sciences Sociales*, 16.

Americanization in 21<sup>st</sup> century France.<sup>47</sup> The myth of the French cultural exception is still strong in the hexagon, and is often built in opposition to a form of American soft power or new imperialism that global studies seem to perfectly embody. This in turn created in France a “Franco-French tightening” and reinforced “the obsession of the national” as Douki and Minard state, that also contributed to further isolate France on the international historiographical debate.<sup>48</sup> Finally, and going one step further, one can wonder how much the French reluctance to adopt *histoire globale*, at least in the first place, was connected to the constant rise of nationalism in France since the 1980s that has created a climate of xenophobia and Islamophobia made evident recently in the 2004 anti-hijab laws and the 2016 burqini affairs. This could seem far-fetched, but here we find the same roots of national and cultural threats, and the effects of a gaze turned progressively inward, of isolationist tendencies and of boundaries increasingly solidified.

## Conclusion

Has the making of the nation state in France left some indelible marks on French historiography? Are French historians afraid of losing control over what is legitimately always a national tradition of writing history? The spread of *histoire globale* in France has been long and difficult, but has raised many interesting points as well. In some sense, it has shown that connected histories tackle subjects across national and regional boundaries but are, in their approach, also shaped by the national traditions of their practitioners. Moreover, some French criticisms of the field, like the denunciation of its teleological biases and the issues contained in rebranding old historical practices as part of a new turn, also need to be taken very seriously by practitioners of

---

<sup>47</sup> French journalist Jean-François Revel even considered this anti-American sentiment in France to verge on obsession. See Jean-François Revel, *L'Obsession Anti-Américaine: Son Fonctionnement, ses Causes, ses Inconséquences* (Paris: Pocket, 2002); and Jean-François Revel (trans. Diarmid Cammell), *Anti-Americanism* (San Francisco, Calif.: Encounter Books, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Douki and Minard, “Histoire Globale, Histoires Connectées,” 16, 17.

world and global history worldwide.<sup>49</sup> And yet, in spite of these reluctances, *histoire globale* has finally made its way to France, and is now generally acknowledged as a new, dynamic field. No best evidence could be found than that of Chloé Maurel. Her first article about the field, published in 2009, showed a profound skepticism about the ideological dimension of *histoire globale*, as seen above, and yet she contributed greatly to make the field known in France, and seems to be orienting her academic career around it.

As Chartier has shown, there has been a recent call in France for historians to look more broadly at the past, and although there were and still are obstacles along the way, the horizon is clearing. This is an important point to counter the tendency of American historians to believe only North American (and secondarily British) historiography (and published exclusively in English) matters. Looking at what is being done on the other side of the Atlantic is a good reminder that North Americans need to start looking south and across oceans. More generally, there is a necessity for world historians across the world to build bridges to keep in touch with the humanistic principles, and in fact also content, of world history.

*Histoire globale* has shown that ideas are never diffused in a sort of one-way relationship, or in a dominant/dominated scheme, and that the creation of the global world, or Oikumene, is the product of exchanges through intellectual and cultural networks of circulation. The same goes for the field of world/global history itself, as stated by Giorgio Riello who sees cross-fertilization among disciplines and, I would add, national historical traditions, as the only right way to practice *histoire globale*.<sup>50</sup> There is a lot to learn from the development of the field in France. The key for the future of the discipline might be to make sure to keep the dialogue about world/global history open and truly global. Bringing together different national historiographical tendencies, with

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> Giorgio Riello (trans. Philippe Minard), “La Globalisation de l’Histoire Globale: Une Questions Disputée” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* no54-4 bis (2007), 29-30.

inclusion of non-European/non-Western perspectives, appears crucial if the field has to live up to its expectations.