

JAH Forum

AFRICAN AND WORLD HISTORIOGRAPHY*

PATRICK MANNING

University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

African history and world history each became substantial fields of historical study in the aftermath of the Second World War. African history organized rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, an era dominated by modernization-thinking. World history developed slowly until the 1990s, then quickly expanded and generated institutional homes in a time of globalization-thinking. This piece considers issues of time, scale, and scholarly diversity within the two fields. The conclusion argues that world historians should pay more attention to Africa and that African historians should do more to set the African past in a global context.

Key Words

Historiography, method, regional, world.

The fields of African history and world history each arose, in recent decades, to achieve prominence within historical studies. Impressively, both fields have expanded the breadth of their documentation and the sophistication of their analyses. African historiography highlights a prominent but imbalanced set of global interactions in the African past, with disproportionate emphasis on Europe. Interpretations in world history, meanwhile, include only modest attention to Africa and its place in the world. Thus, while links between the two fields are expanding, especially as a result of the work of Africanists who have become active in world historical studies, the gaps remain uncomfortably large – in documentation and especially in interpretation.

Both African history and world history were in a sense insurgent fields, but their insurgency came less from political critique than from surmounting the narrowness of the historical canon: both fields pushed historical studies beyond the limits of nationally-focused studies of western Europe and the United States.¹ Despite this shared insurgency, certain distinctions and interactions of African and world history become clearer when their trajectories are separated into two periods. The first period, from 1945 to 1990, developed during a social and academic focus on *modernization*; the second, since 1990, has unfolded with a focus on *globalization*. For each period, I trace the responses of historians

* Author's email: pmanning@pitt.edu

1 The focus here is on the fields of African and world history as they interacted with each other and with European and US history. Area studies fields arose for other world regions, including Russia and Eastern Europe, at much the same time.

of Africa and the world to shifts in the historical profession and broader changes in social conditions. I also examine spatial and temporal priorities in history, social scales from the local to the global, issues of social inequality, and the varying standpoints from which historians write. In the conclusion, I argue that world historians should read more deeply in African historiography and give more attention to African linkages and comparisons in world history, whilst African historians should invest more in the study of large-scale African interactions both within the continent and with other world regions.

HISTORY AND MODERNIZATION, 1945–90

The years after the Second World War brought recovery from widespread devastation, processes of political decolonization, critiques of racism, and the emergence of the Cold War. Economic growth fed the expansion of welfare states and education systems in most of the world, resulting in an unusually even distribution of income and wealth. Powerful social movements arose in industrial labor, in claims for national sovereignty, in calls for civil rights along racial and ethnic lines, and in claims for gender equality. By the 1970s, however, stagnation had replaced economic growth, many social movements had reached the limits of their strength, and counter-movements by the wealthy and powerful had begun to expand economic and social inequality.

A postwar vision of modernization prevailed in social and academic affairs, all the way to the 1980s.² This conceptualization divided the world into societies, then divided societies into the traditional and modern. Modern societies, typically led by self-conscious elites, were seen to encourage economic investment and educational advance. Traditional societies, caught in inherited patterns of stasis, were measured by their responsiveness to innovative interventions – presumably from the West. The modernization outlook was optimistic in assuming that any ethnic or national group could get on the path to modernization but was pessimistic in assuming the default human condition to be tradition and stasis. In the social sciences, the vision of modernization relied on positivist analysis of cause and effect, presumed Western hegemony, focused on relatively short-term analysis of social change, and assumed that social change was strongly conditioned by the specifics of national units.

This vision of modernization, however, provoked both revisions from within its framework and the development of new social visions that opposed it. Some of the revisions called for more detailed study of regions throughout the world, thus supporting the formalization of area studies programs.³ Other revisions to modernization brought consideration

2 In my view ‘modernization theory’, a formalized analysis, was surrounded by a more informal, popularized, and metaphorical ‘vision of modernization’. The latter, informal view was arguably more influential and longer lasting. There were even capitalist and communist versions of modernization. For the foundations of modernization theory, see T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers* (2nd edn, Glencoe, IL, 1949); and also M. E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000).

3 Ultimately, area studies programs developed (in rough chronological order) for Latin America, East Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

of social processes beyond politics and beyond social elites, so that the study of social history arose to address the lives of families and communities and the related concerns of class, gender, and race. Still other reconsiderations raised the possibility that modernization had emerged earlier—even centuries earlier.⁴ More vigorous reactions against the vision of modernization sprung up especially through the New Left thinking of the 1960s. The 1974 world-systems analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein, a sociologist of contemporary Africa, articulated an alternative social science approach, replacing the notion of modernization with an understanding of the world as an interactive political economy.⁵

The fields of European and American history underwent booms in the postwar years, fueled by economic and educational growth. They focused heavily on the development of national political communities—and on their modernization. At the fringes of Euro-American national history lay the frameworks of imperial and colonial history, universal or civilizational history, Western Civilization, and the expanding area studies programs. From these fringes emerged the academic fields of African and world history.

African history arose as a professional field in the 1950s, notably in Western Europe, North America, and anglophone and francophone Africa—but also in the USSR and Japan. With remarkable rapidity, leaders in the field set up institutions for graduate study, often promoting interdisciplinary approaches; they also offered undergraduate courses.⁶ The initial focus of historical research was on the precolonial years of the nineteenth century (emphasizing the character of African societies) and studies of the colonial era (evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of colonial rule).⁷ In addition, a smaller but crucial quantity of work addressed earlier time periods, through the disciplines of archaeology and linguistics, demonstrating the depth of African history.⁸

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- 4 The *Journal of Social History* was founded in 1967. On historical modernization, see R. D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (New York, 1976).
 - 5 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974). The New Left and Black Power–led student strike at Columbia University in 1968 was important in shifting Wallerstein’s outlook and research agenda.
 - 6 African studies became part of the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1938; the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University opened in 1948; the African Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin opened in 1961. Journals appeared: *Transactions of the Gold Coast & Togoland Historical Society* (1952); *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1956); *The Journal of African History* (1960); *Cahiers d’études africaines* (1960); and *African Historical Studies* (1968). The African Studies Association of the US formed in 1957; the African Studies Association of the UK formed in 1963; the Canadian Association of African Studies/*Association Canadienne des Etudes Africaines* formed in 1970. For major synthetic works assembling comprehensive interpretations of African history, see J. Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l’Afrique noire, d’hier à demain* (Paris, 1972); J. D. Fage and R. Oliver (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volumes 1–8* (Cambridge, 1975–86); and UNESCO, *General History of Africa, Volumes 1–8*. (London, 1981–93).
 - 7 K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford, 1956); J. F. A. Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1964); B. A. Ogot (ed.), *History of the Southern Luo, Volume 1, Migration and Settlement, 1500–1900* (Nairobi, 1967); J. Vansina, *De la tradition orale: essai de méthode historique* (Tervuren, 1961); R. Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa* (Baltimore, 1962); P. D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850* (Madison, WI, 1964). The level of scholarship on the continent remained an indicator of the advance of Africanist historical scholarship generally.
 - 8 J. H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa* (Bloomington, IN, 1963); J. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, WI, 1990); C. Ehret, *An African*

World history grew more slowly. The immediate postwar era brought a brief period of interest in global analysis, as had happened after previous wars.⁹ Later, an outstanding 1963 synthetic work by William H. McNeill linked civilizational history to professional history with a narrative that owed a great deal to modernization.¹⁰ World history developed quietly as a secondary and undergraduate teaching field with no clear institutions and virtually no programs of graduate study; its curriculum relied on such springboards as imperial, civilizational, and environmental history (but not social history or gender history).¹¹ Historians of Africa became important early on in adding an area studies component to world historiography, notably Philip Curtin (who first studied imperial history) and Joseph Harris (whose focus moved from West Africa to Africans in Asia).¹² Africanist scholars from fields other than history contributed to the expansion of world history: Joseph Greenberg in linguistics, Immanuel Wallerstein in sociology, Jack Goody in anthropology, Samir Amin in economics, Ali Mazrui in political science, and J. Desmond Clark in archaeology.¹³ Africanists contributed to the study of Atlantic history and Indian Ocean history.¹⁴ World history made rather fewer contributions to African history in this era.

Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B. C. to A. D. 400 (Charlottesville, VA, 1998).

- 9 After the First World War, H. G. Wells wrote his *Outline of History* (1920); after the Napoleonic wars, G. W. F. Hegel composed his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1822–3); Voltaire's multivolume world history (*Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*) appeared in 1756 in the midst of a great Anglo-French war.
- 10 By 'civilizational history', I mean works by such authors as A. J. Toynbee and W. and A. Durant, aimed at general readers; by 'professional history', I mean university-based academic history. A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History, Volumes 1–12* (London, 1934–61); W. and A. Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Volumes 1–11* (New York, 1935–75). W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago, 1963). McNeill's own second thoughts, especially on the Cold War in recent history and on China in the long term, appear in his introduction to the 1990 edition of this work.
- 11 Among the influential world-historical works of the era from 1960 to 1980 were E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (Cleveland, 1962); L. S. Stavrianos, *A Global History of Man* (Boston, 1962); McNeill, *Rise of the West*; P. Bairoch, *Diagnostic de l'évolution économique du Tiers-monde, 1900–1966* (Paris, 1967); S. Amin, *L'Accumulation à l'échelle mondiale: critique de la théorie du sous-développement* (Dakar, 1970); A. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT, 1972); L. S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age* (New York, 1981). For earlier studies, see Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit*; H. G. Wells, *Outline of History* (London, 1920); Toynbee, *A Study of History*. An important example of a distinctive world-historical interpretation from the perspective of an African scholar is that of Cameroonian Victor Julius Ngoh, especially in his *The World Since 1919: A Short History* (Yaounde, 1989).
- 12 P. D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI, 1969); J. E. Harris (ed.), *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, DC, 1982); P. D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984); P. D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (New York, 1990). For succeeding examples, see A. I. Asiwaju (ed.), *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884–1984* (New York, 1985); R. E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1986); D. Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1995); P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000* (2nd edn, Harlow, England, 2002).
- 13 Greenberg, *Languages of Africa*; J. H. Greenberg, *Indo-European and its Closest Relatives: The Eurasiatic Language Family, Volumes 1–2*. (Stanford, CA 2000–2); Wallerstein, *Modern World-System*; J. Goody, *Ghana Observed, Africa Reconsidered* (Legon, 2007); S. Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, trans. B. Pearce (New York, 1976); A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston, 1986); J. Desmond Clark, *The Prehistory of Africa* (New York, 1970).
- 14 For the Atlantic, see Curtin, *Plantation Complex*; J. C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, WI, 1988); P. Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental,*

The continuing predominance of Euro-American historiography within universities kept the practitioners of African history and world history in the position of campaigning for recognition and resources. African history positions were created from the 1950s; world history positions were created from the 1990s; courses in African history and especially world history were taught, commonly, by instructors without formal training in those fields. Africanists faced questions about the paucity of written sources and the dearth of social and political institutions comparable to those found in the European past. World historians, for their part, faced allegations that the scope of their studies encouraged speculation and that their work was too reliant on secondary sources and, therefore, derivative.

African historiography had to grapple with the modernization-era presumption that the continent was historically and socially ‘behind’. How was this condition defined? For the twentieth century, Africa seemed to deviate too far from European norms. When considering the period from the fifteenth century onwards, the continent seemed to be ‘behind’ or outside of the growing network of global linkages. For the era from roughly 3,000 BCE forward, Africa appeared to be lagging ‘behind’ the level of state building, literacy, and military readiness of competitors across the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Yet if earlier periods – the time of the expansion of production in ceramics, in cereals, in home construction – were considered, Africa appeared to have been on a par with the rest of the eastern hemisphere. In recent years, the academic conceptualization of Africa as ‘behind’ has become less prominent as scholars in the many subfields of African history have documented the complexity and dynamism of the continent’s past.

In countering arguments about Africa being ‘behind’, historians positioned the continent as ‘below’, particularly for recent centuries. They did so by identifying with African protagonists rather than with European colonizers.¹⁵ This African history from below ran parallel to developments in social, working class, and gender history on Europe and the United States but remained a largely separate discourse until the development of institutional connections through the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Heinemann book series on African social history.¹⁶

Oriental, and African Slave Trades (Cambridge, 1990); J. K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, 1992). For the Indian Ocean, see J. E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston, IL, 1971); G. Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750–1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge, 2004); P. M. Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (New York, 2009); A. Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce, and Islam* (New York, 2010).

15 In another response to the vision of Africa as ‘below’, African popular audiences and supporters of African nationalism sought historical symbols of African leadership; hence D. T. Niane’s *Sundiata*, celebrating African empire and civilization, became a great favorite on the continent and in the diaspora. D. T. Niane, *Soundjata: ou, l’épopée mandingue* (Paris, 1960); translated as *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, trans. G. D. Pickett (Harlow, England, 1965).

16 The extensive African literature on oral tradition, which could reach back multiple generations, remained separate from the Euro-American literature on oral history, which centered on individual life histories. J. Vansina, *De la tradition orale*.

HISTORY AND GLOBALIZATION, SINCE 1990

At the turn of the 1990s, the world underwent shocks of political change but also waves of economic and cultural interplay. The political shocks centered in China, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Persian Gulf, southern Africa, and (more quietly) Latin America and francophone Africa. Calls for political democracy enlivened huge social movements. Meanwhile, economic and cultural interactions gained steadily wider attention, notably through the impact of the Internet on financial transactions, personal communication, and the exchange of musical and visual culture. For Africa, as elsewhere, mobile telephones expanded elite and popular modes of communication.

One serious conflict within the process of economic globalization was the expansion of social inequality – coming as it did at a time when intellectual and political thought valued social equality. An outstanding symptom of this contradiction lay in the HIV/AIDS epidemic, for which the international response – initially slow and biased – revealed the continued racialized disregard for black people, whether in Haiti or sub-Saharan Africa. High mortality rates from the disease confirmed the ongoing neglect of Africa by global powers and the continuing weakness of African institutions.¹⁷ Globalization appeared simultaneously to bring tighter connection and greater differentiation.

The term ‘globalization’ arose especially in academic discourse of the 1980s and achieved widespread popular usage by the mid-1990s. It assumed a sudden expansion in global connections, especially economic but also cultural. Globalization rapidly became a leading paradigm in social science theory, interpreting the world as an interactive system, yet without incorporating all of the relevant advances in systems theory.¹⁸ Globalization extended to the complex and interactive analyses of the natural sciences (as in climatological study) and in the social sciences (as in analysis of social movements), and most interestingly to cultural studies (as in the complexity of musical interaction and in the development of visual arts, both mediated by the expanding internet community). Various visions of globalization shared an emphasis on short-term change, connection through diffusion, and top-down directions of change. The vision of globalization that gained social hegemony turned out to be that of neoliberal economics, with its simple positivistic understanding of markets and hostility to any social regulation of them.

As had been the case previously for modernization, both revisions and rejections developed in response to the vision of globalization. A. G. Hopkins and C. A. Bayly modified the present-bound notion, proposing that successive waves of globalization had taken place for centuries, indeed millennia: archaic globalization, proto-globalization, and modern globalization. In another revision, certain groups of economists turned to considering long-term economic processes and to rethinking economic change in Africa.¹⁹ Fiercer opposition to

17 J. Iliffe, *The African AIDS Epidemic: A History* (Oxford, 2006).

18 Elaborations of systems theory included the study of open and closed systems, emergent properties, and the functioning of subsystems. L. von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (New York, 1969); R. Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London, 1992).

19 A. G. Hopkins, ‘The history of globalization – and the globalization of history?’ in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2002), 11–46; C. A. Bayly, ‘“Archaic” and “modern” globalization in the Eurasian and African arena, c. 1750–1850’, in *Ibid.* 47–74; D. Acemoglu, S. Johnson,

the vision of globalization developed in a range of philosophic, cultural, and historical outlooks that rejected the encompassing view of globalization by emphasizing cultural specificity while rejecting hierarchical views of the world.²⁰

The field of world history coalesced in the 1990s, and for multiple reasons. First, economic and cultural globalization, accompanied by worldwide social movements, sparked global historical insights. Second, academic world history emerged victorious over its rivals civilizational and imperial studies, and tended to incorporate both. Third, world history also emerged out of the confluence of area studies traditions, as scholars in expanding area studies fields gave increasing attention to inter-regional comparisons and connections. Institutions for professional study of world history, at last set in place, began to grow.²¹ The increasingly forceful development of a world-historical perspective produced a critique of Eurocentrism in both teaching and research, which encountered some equally sharp responses. From this time forward, one can speak of the existence of a world history literature.

At its moment of unprecedented expansion, world history also underwent a terminological fragmentation: participating groups labeled their approaches as world, global, new global, connected, international, transnational, entangled, *histoire croisée*, and, later, deep history.²² Because of the breadth and complexity of history at the global level, none of these could be advanced as the single best approach to world history. Instead, they reflected different thematic and methodological priorities. Perhaps more than any other field of history, world history has had to recognize the inevitability and

and J. A. Robinson, 'Reversal of fortune: geography and institutions in the making of the modern world income distribution', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117:4 (2002), 1231–94; N. Nunn, 'Historical legacies: a model linking Africa's past to its current underdevelopment', *Journal of Development Economics*, 83:1 (2007), 157–75.

- 20 E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN, 1988); G. C. Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. S. Harasym (New York, 1990); M.-R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995); D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).
- 21 World-historian journals include the *Journal of World History* (1990); *Comparativ* (1991); *World History Connected* (2003); and *Journal of Global History* (2006). Earlier journals in comparative and transnational history included *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1958) and *Itinerario* (1977). Overviews of world history appeared after 2000: R. E. Dunn, *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion* (Boston, 2000); and P. Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York, 2003). Another set of overviews appeared after 2010, notably J. H. Bentley (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of World History* (Oxford, 2011); and D. Northrop (ed.), *A Companion to World History* (Chichester, West Sussex, 2012).
- 22 Among the various approaches to large-scale history are J. H. Bentley, 'The new world history', in L. Kramer and S. Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2002), 393–416; B. Mazlish, 'Comparing global history to world history', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 28:3 (1998), 385–95; S. Subrahmanyam, 'Connected histories: notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31:3 (1997), 735–62; A. Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA, 2002); M. Werner and B. Zimmermann, 'Beyond comparison: *histoire croisée* and the challenge of reflexivity', *History and Theory*, 45:1 (2006), 30–50; P. K. Crossley, *What is Global History?* (Cambridge, 2008); A. Shryock and D. L. Smail, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley, CA, 2011).

the validity of multiple perspectives.²³ Meanwhile world history, despite the academic expansion of its various versions, did not develop a social constituency parallel to those that had earlier developed for women's history or ethnic histories: those with a particular interest in world history were diffused among many subgroups. Both in the sites of its study and in the loci of its interpretation, however, world history remained focused on the northern hemisphere. For instance, few world historians – beyond those originally trained in African history – made detailed investigation of Africa a part of their studies.²⁴

As with African history a generation earlier, the initial world-historical research monographs were relatively restricted in geographic and temporal scope. Nonetheless, the authors explicitly emphasized the broad framework of world history and developed a shared discourse through conferences and journals. Subfields began to develop within world history, including studies of environment, politics, law, commerce, migration, and the 'big history' of the cosmos and natural phenomena.²⁵

The African continent underwent important post-1989 changes with the political transformation of South Africa and the national conferences of francophone Africa. The HIV/AIDS crisis reached its peak while a major war was fought in the Great Lakes region. As before, policymakers showed little interest in long-term patterns. Nevertheless, the maturation of African historiography brought steady changes in the field. Study of African history expanded in South America in response to social change on that continent.²⁶ While published studies continued to be dominated by localized studies, especially on the twentieth century, the exceptions made African history into a field that was largely parallel in its sophistication to the other fields of regional history. A growing number of scholars conducted research that elucidated links and comparisons within Africa.²⁷ In addition, scholars have combined research on Africa with that on overseas regions.²⁸

23 Diego Holstein is preparing a volume discussing as many as twelve 'macrohistories' or approaches to large-scale interpretation, showing how they are substantially complementary. Holstein, *Macrohistories: Global Horizons for a Global Age*, forthcoming.

24 Two outstanding exceptions are R. J. Barendse and Marcus Rediker, each working within maritime history. R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (Armonk, NY, 2002); M. Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York, 2007).

25 J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York, 2000); L. A. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York, 2010); J. Burbank and F. Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010); D. Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, CA, 2004). On institutional change in world history, see P. Manning (ed.), *Global Practice in World History: Advances Worldwide* (Princeton, NJ, 2008).

26 Legal changes in Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, and other South American countries beginning in 1990 gave recognition to their African heritage and launched both scholarship and curriculum on Africa and the African diaspora. See especially the journal *América Negra* (Bogotá), published from 1991 through 1998.

27 For studies emphasizing links within Africa, see J.-P. Chrétien, *L'invention de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs: une histoire du XXe siècle* (Paris, 2010); Iliffe, *African AIDS epidemic*; C. Kriger, *Cloth in West African History* (Lanham, MD, 2006).

28 Scholars who have conducted research on Africa and on overseas regions include M. A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York, 2005); and L. Heywood and J. K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge, 2007). Gwyn Campbell has led in editing numerous wide-ranging volumes, including G. Campbell, S. Miers, and J. C. Miller (eds.), *Child Slaves in the Modern World*, (Athens, OH, 2011). For recent works on the African diaspora worldwide, see M. A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History*

Further, synthetic studies linking regions throughout the African continent have been developed for several themes.²⁹

In some instances, the rise of world history made it possible to connect African history more fully to what lay beyond it.³⁰ But not always. One of the most successful and influential interpretations of world history, *The Great Divergence* by Kenneth Pomeranz, had the advantage of developing ‘reciprocal comparisons’ of north-western Europe and China’s Yangzi Valley in eighteenth-century industrial production and economic welfare. Yet the resulting comparisons of Europe and China tended to encourage a bipolar discourse in world history, in which Africa could be neglected for new reasons.³¹

The influence of world history may have been more profound on temporal thinking than on spatial thinking. Historical scholarship focuses principally on recent centuries and contemporary times, but also gives attention to iconic earlier moments. Historians select and shift the balance of their temporal focus in response to social conditions, philosophical orientation, and existing understandings of the past. Recent methodological advances – notably in climatic and genetic studies – have expanded our knowledge about longer time-frames. Only in the era of globalization has the full range of human ancestry been accepted as relevant to history. Here is a simplified list of the currently understood periods in human history:³²

Since 200,000 years ago: The early human experience, ancestral to all.³³

Since 70,000 years ago: The experience of humanity in occupying the world.

Since 15,000 years ago: The Holocene era, a warm and wet time bringing social expansion and change in many parts of the world.

Since 5,000 years ago (3000 BCE): African and Eurasian experiences diverged considerably as large-scale civilizations dominated Eurasia.

Since 500 years ago (1500 CE): Increased interaction among Africa, Eurasia, and the Americas, leading to convergence.

Since 1850 CE: Global industrialization and the economic and social differentiation of the Great Divergence.

Since 1960: Policymakers (although not historians) have tended to treat the eras of modernization and globalization as the beginning of history for Africa.

of the African Diaspora (New York, 2005); and P. Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (New York, 2009).

29 Thematic syntheses for the African continent include P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (New York, 1983); J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987); B. Freund, *The African Worker* (New York, 1988); Manning, *Slavery and African Life*; C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Les africaines: histoire des femmes d’Afrique noire: du XIXe au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1994); and E. Gilbert and J. T. Reynolds, *Africa in World History* (3rd edn, New York, 2011).

30 For a book on Africa that is popular with teachers of world history because of its attention to the interaction of multiple scales, see D. R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Armonk, NY, 1997).

31 K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

32 For an example of a thematic, world-historical interpretation relying on these periods, see P. Manning with T. Trimmer, *Migration in World History* (2nd edn, London, 2012).

33 I have chosen not to include the history of hominids preceding *Homo sapiens sapiens*, though this could reasonably be added. Shifting definitions of ‘human’ sometimes cause confusion at this point.

Which among the above periods should the historian choose to emphasize in telling the tale of human history? When scholars and teachers make choices in the temporal point of departure for their narratives, they consciously or unconsciously set interpretive priorities: here are some possible choices. If the priority is formation of the worldwide human community, then the story might best begin about 70,000 years ago with migrations throughout Africa and the world. Such an approach would focus on general human qualities, evolutionary development, and differentiation. If the priority is interaction of cultural groups, the story might best begin five hundred years ago: the interpretation can then trace conflict and conciliation among presumably distinctive cultural and social groups, thus addressing the rise of ‘modernity’ or the clash of civilizations.

If the priority is the rise of elites and large-scale civilization, then the story might best begin about five thousand years ago. Indeed, world historians writing before 1990 tended to begin their story in certain centers of innovation about five thousand years ago, with the result that Africa played a marginal role in their stories. Even within that timeframe, however, we can see that human social change includes expansion not only of *hierarchy* but also of *networking*, where the latter was more horizontal than vertical. Thus, if Eurasia advanced in hierarchy from 3000 BCE, it is possible that Africa advanced in networking from that time. For this reason, I have advanced the ‘African web’ as a term for a proposed African style of interconnections.³⁴ Since some point to the great Silk Road as fostering Eurasian integration along its east-west route, one may argue equally that Africa was interconnected with a web of local ties able to pass ideas and material goods in all directions. That is, we should be cautious about judging the *longue durée* of Africa by Eurasian standards.

The fuller documentation of various periods in human history provides a basis for articulating quite different historical perspectives. These perspectives are not arbitrary, but depend on the specifics of human situations and knowledge. Thus, in a great empirical discovery, geneticists showed in 1987 through study of mitochondrial DNA that all humans share common ancestors who lived in Africa some 200,000 years ago.³⁵ This result established the commonality of humankind at a new level. Additional genetic studies showed both the diversity and the recurring mixing of human populations.³⁶ Earlier views, developed within the perspective of eugenics, had assumed that certain families and communities inherited high levels of intelligence and innovative skills, whilst others inherited low levels of each. Such views persisted as part of the vision of modernization. In contrast, the vision of globalization acknowledged the new understanding of human biology and tended to assume that individuals and social groups had no inherent inequalities. In fact, it may be argued that the expanded study of African history was important in challenging essentialized views of human societies that had survived into the era of modernization.

³⁴ Manning, *The African Diaspora*, 40–2 and 51.

³⁵ R. L. Cann, M. Stoneking, and A. C. Wilson, ‘Mitochondrial DNA and human evolution’, *Nature*, 325 (1987), 31–6. The work was confirmed repeatedly thereafter.

³⁶ S. A. Tishkoff *et al.*, ‘The genetic structure and history of Africans and African Americans’, *Science*, 324:5930 (2009), 1035–44.

CURRENT HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

African history developed more rapidly and fully than world history in the years before 1990; after 1990, world history made up much of the deficit. The two fields have contributed substantially to each other and to the expansion and increasing sophistication of historical studies, more generally; they have outgrown any need for tutelage and have become collaborators. Historians of Africa, other regions, and the world now work alongside historians of Europe and North America in identifying new and broader ways to develop their profession.³⁷

Historians of Africa, by noting and pursuing some world-historical principles, can strengthen their analyses and better link them to histories of other regions in a number of ways. First, they should work more seriously to trace the links and parallels among African regions, clarifying regional distinctions, linkages, and commonalities. Second, historians of Africa should trace connections in all directions – to the African diaspora in each region and to society generally in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and Asia.³⁸ Third, they should recognize the maritime experience of Africa, defining maritime history as a field within African history and including it more fully in the continent's interactions.³⁹ Fourth, they should continue their attention to history from below, but should theorize it more fully and clarify their understanding of the interactions among the various levels of social organization.

World historians, by devoting greater attention to Africa, can achieve more balanced interpretations and can show where specifically African practices fit into the broader human patterns. Further, world historians need to reconsider the nature and sources of innovation, attending to processes propelled by elites and those generated by common people, as both incrementally restructure human society. The literature on African history provides particular strength for documenting innovations and social movements of common people and for demonstrating how these have engaged the power of elites.

One further issue, which I have so far avoided, needs to be addressed: the imbalance in the origins of scholars writing African and world history. Of the great regions of the world, Africa has consistently been the one for which the smallest proportion of published scholars are native to the region. With regard to world history, all are native to this world, but the greatest number of published scholars have been native to the United States and Europe, a major and distinctive imbalance. Studies of European history and US history

37 The leading institutions of the historical profession need periodic reminders on these points. As an example, the *American Historical Review*, which in its articles has published a growing number of pieces on the African past and on global historical change, continues in its review section to marginalize books on world history and especially African history.

38 P. Manning, 'Africa and the African diaspora: new directions of study', *The Journal of African History*, 44:3 (2003), 487–506.

39 On island and maritime history, see I. K. Sundiata, *From Slaving to Neoslavery: The Bight of Biafra and Fernando Po in the Era of Abolition, 1827–1930* (Madison, WI, 1996); R. B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999); A. Pearson, B. Jeffs, A. Witkin, and H. MacQuarrie, *Infernal Traffic: Excavation of a Liberated African Graveyard in Rupert's Valley, St. Helena* (York, 2011). In general, the literature on the oceanic slave trade from Africa can be considered as a part of African maritime history. A key journal in maritime history is the *International Journal of Maritime History* (1989).

have been pursued primarily by natives of those places. One could regard such national specialization as a parallel imbalance, arguing that a wider range of perspectives is needed to counter national biases. Indeed, by the latter standard one may note that the fields of world history and African history, despite the imbalances within them, are practiced by a wider, more multinational range of scholars than most other fields of history.⁴⁰ The international diversity among world historians is productive in that it helps historians remain alert to the multiplicity of perspectives in world history – multiple perspectives among historical protagonists and among historical analysts (during past and present times). The diversity among African historians, despite its limits, has existed for two generations. For world historians, while their diversity is still being established, institutional work aimed at formalizing interactions brings considerable benefits.⁴¹

To conclude, a deeper interplay of the literatures in African and world history would facilitate the exploration of many serious historical questions, both for the continent and the globe. I have framed these as questions of connections, parallels, innovations, responses, hierarchies, networks, unity, and diversity; they can be framed in other ways. Researchers worldwide have been slow to treat Africa as an integral part of the global system, instead treating it (and one sixth of the world's population) as peripheral and outside their analysis. Even in the current era when African culture has become so prominent in globalization-era cultural exchanges, Africanist researchers have been slow to assert an integral place for the continent in world affairs (analysis of Atlantic slave trade and its role in world history is a problematic exception).⁴² For Africans to be understood as important actors in human history, rather than as peripheral peoples, the continent's past must be set more firmly in the context of world history. To develop an understanding of the world that also includes an understanding of the African past, historians of Africa need to clarify both the distinctiveness and the universality of African societies in explicit connection and comparison with other regions. World historians, in turn, need to move beyond narratives that simply neglect Africa, and learn how the continent's dynamics have been both parallel to and distinct from those elsewhere. One may hope for patient and careful work to nurture the linkage of these two important historical literatures.

40 For African history one may note the range of national origins and thus of national perspectives of those born in Africa. One may note that the language of publication for world history is overwhelmingly English. For African history, the language of publication is primarily English, although significant publication takes place in other languages – for instance, French and Portuguese (widely used in Africa).

41 The Network of Global and World History Organizations (NOGWHISTO), (<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~gwhisto/>), founded in 2008, was recognized in 2010 as an affiliate of the UNESCO-linked International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH). NOGWHISTO is composed of organizations based in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

42 This example, while relevant, is not satisfactory in itself, as it might imply that Africans influenced world history mainly by leaving the continent.