



Analysis of the Journal of Global History

2006-2010

Daniela Tenger

This review is part of the Journal Review project of the research-master Modern History and International Relations (MHIR) at the University of Groningen. For more information, visit www.rug.nl/research/MHIR-journalreview

© 2013 the author and the University of Groningen. All rights reserved.



Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. General Information on the Journal.....	4
Editors, Editorial Board and Editorial Process	4
Reputation	5
2. Structure of the Journal.....	7
Editorial and Review Articles	7
Book Reviews	8
3. Content of the Journal.....	10
Geographical Focus	10
Temporal Focus	11
Thematic Focus	13
Special Issues	15
Authors.....	15
4. Discussion of the Journal.....	17
Conclusion	18

Introduction

In 2006, the *Journal of Global History* was newly established and became, according to prof. Jerry Bentley of the University of Hawaii, a “publication of the first water”.¹ Is this journal indeed a valuable new input for the academic world or just another average contribution to the already vast amounts of scholarly journals?

The journal has ambitious aims; it intends to be an important platform for the current historical debate on global history. In the editorial of the first issue of May 2006, the editors explain the applied concept of globalization and the different intentions of the journal. Firstly, their concept of globalization does not just include the developments since the late 20th century but is seen as an ongoing process of growth and decline as old as mankind itself. Hence, the editors aim to overcome the idea that globalization only took place in the recent decades. Secondly and linked, their understanding of globalization does not just include traditional economic or political themes but comprehends all possible aspects of this process. Thirdly, they want to contribute to the deconstruction of a western-focused framework of global history by transcending the gap within historiography between the West and the rest of the world. Fourthly, they aim to overcome the traditional concept of boundaries. Therefore, they do not understand global history as only the history of the nation states and their impact on the whole globe.² Finally, they also have a few methodological goals: They seek for more interdisciplinary approaches towards global history and want to provide space for all those scholars of social or natural sciences who are interested in the historical implications of their field. Additionally, they aim to transcend the ongoing fragmentation in the discipline of historiography into subthemes, regions or specific time-periods by omitting limitations on the scope of the period or the region for the published articles.

In this report, I try to examine whether the *Journal of Global History* achieves to fulfil its ambitious targets. Therefore, the 15 issues published between 2006 and 2010 (volume one to five) are taken into consideration. After a general overview on the editors and the reputation of the journal, the analysis focuses on structural and thematic aspects.

¹ Website of the *Journal of Global History*, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/newsTop?jid=JGH>, [accessed 6th April 2011].

² The use of the term ‘global’ in this report should be understood according to this definition. Global does not necessarily mean the whole world but can also be used to describe regions or spaces.



The structural analysis considers the different sections of the journal with a special emphasis on the numerous amounts of book reviews. The thematic analysis, however, only concentrates on the articles. Their themes and the regional and temporal focus are compared to the above described targets. Finally, the geographical origin and the disciplines of the authors are investigated. This quantitative analysis is rounded off with a qualitative discussion of the main trends within the journal.

1. General Information on the Journal

The *Journal of Global History* was launched in May 2006. Since then, one volume per year consisting of three issues has been published. The last issue appeared in March 2011 but for this report, only the five volumes and accordingly the 15 issues of 2006 to 2010 are taken into account. The journal is published by the Cambridge University Press and is therefore hosted by one of the worldwide leading research institutes, which publishes around 240 journals.³

Founded was the journal by some scholars of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), which also owns the journal. Again, the LSE enjoys an outstanding academic reputation as it is the university with the highest percentage of world leading research in the UK.⁴ Hence, the *Journal of Global History* is situated in an academic environment with an excellent reputation.

Editors, Editorial Board and Editorial Process

Three editors share the responsibility for the journal, a fourth one is in charge of the book reviews. The chief-editor prof. William Gervase Clarence-Smith is a Professor of Economic History at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, UK with specialization in South East Asia. His colleagues, prof. Kenneth Pomeranz and prof. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, work at the departments of history in American Universities (California and Wisconsin-Milwaukee). Pomeranz focuses his research on modern China

³ Website of Cambridge University Press, www.cambridge.org, [accessed 5th April 2011].

⁴ Website of the London School of Economics and Political Science, www2.lse.ac.uk, [accessed 5th April 2011].



and the origin of the world economy. Wiesner-Hanks in contrast started her career with studies on early-modern Europe and religious topics and extended her focus towards global themes of history in all time-periods. The editor of the reviews, dr John Chalcraft, works at the Department of Government at the LSE. He holds the position of a reader in the History and Politics of the Empire/Imperialism and concentrates his research on a history of below in the African and Arab regions. Thus, the editors conduct research on typical topics of global history and represent a broad field of interest in economic and cultural history from all parts of the world. However, the British-American bias of the editors is striking even though probably consequential for a journal which is founded and published in the UK.

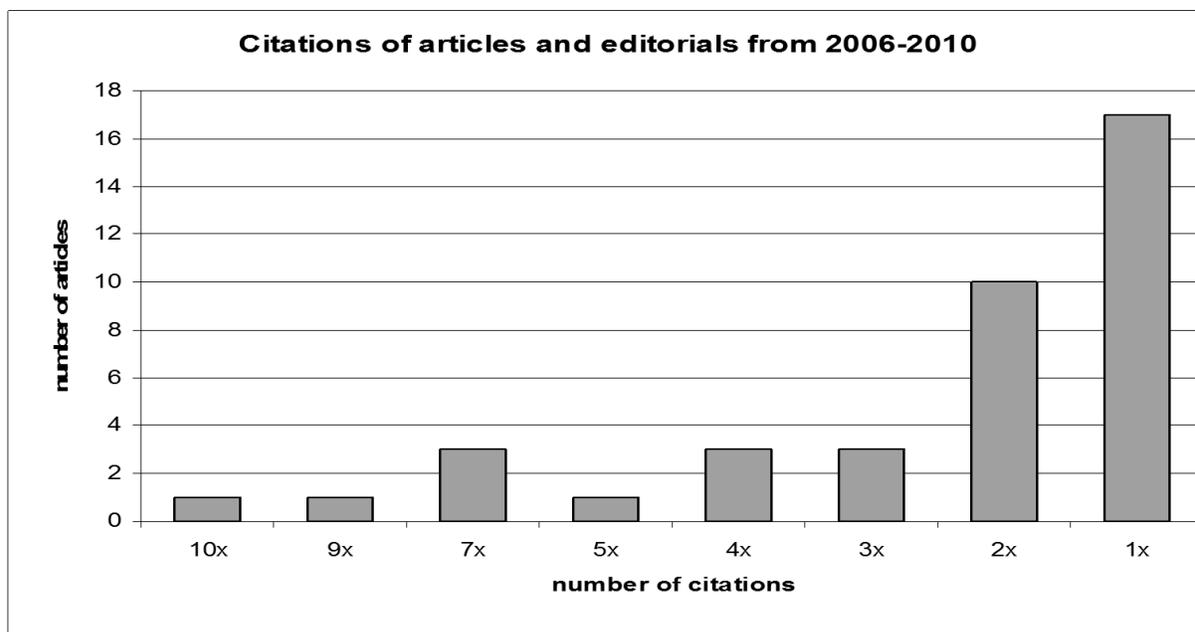
These four main editors get support by the editorial board consisting of 21 members. This editorial board is better balanced; it consists of nine women and eleven men (compared to three male and one female editor), from whom four live in Britain and six in the United States. The other members come from the European continent (seven), from Australia (two) and from Asia and Africa (each one member). Gender is represented more or less equally and even though there is an Anglo-American bias, efforts to include other regions of the world are visible in the editorial board.

Reputation

According to the quotations of well-known scholars published on the website of the CUP, the *Journal of Global History* enjoys a good reputation. So states Prof. Akira Iriye from Harvard University, that ‘...this is a splendid publication: extensive in coverage, refreshing in approach, and reflective of some of the significant achievements and trends in the study of history.’⁵ Indeed, in the rankings of the European Science Foundation as well as in the ERA-Ranking, the journal is listed in the category A. Additionally, the journal got accepted in the Thomson Reuters Citation index in 2010. Unfortunately, the latest available Journal Citation Report only comprehends data from 2009 and therefore, the *Journal of Global History* is not yet considered.

⁵ Website of the *Journal of Global History*, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/newsTop?jid=JGH>, [accessed 6th April 2011].

A closer look on the numbers of citations indicates that especially the first volume receives a lot of attention. Nine of all the articles from the past five years are four times or more often cited and seven of them belong to the first volume of 2006. The decline of number of citations after 2006 is partly logical, since the chance for a citation rises the longer an article is published. Nevertheless, it probably also indicates an increased interest in the journal shortly after its emergence. The following graph provides an overview of all the cited articles from 2006 up to 2010. Only 39 articles out of 91 publications are once or more often cited and 13 out of these 39 citations are self-citations.⁶ Whether this number is outstanding small cannot be evaluated, only a comparison to other journals could help interpreting and contextualising the data.



⁶ The evaluation is based on: www.webofknowledge.com, [accessed 6th April 2011]. The total amount consists of 91 publications, as the four editorials are also considered in this database.



2. Structure of the Journal

The archive of the *Journal of Global History* is 2385 pages long and contains 207 publications over the past five years. These publications consist of scholarly articles (87 or 84 % of the pages), review articles (12 or 7% of the pages), book reviews (102 or 7% of the pages) as well as editorials and others (6 or 2% of the pages).⁷

Editorial and Review Articles

Even though there are only four editorials in 15 issues, these editorials provide valuable information about the intention of the journal. Most important is the editorial of the very first issue which explains the intentions and purposes of this journal.⁸ Additionally, there are three more editorials for special issues, which appeared in July 2007, May 2009 and July 2010. These issues are devoted to a particular theme which is explained and introduced by the editorial. In my opinion, the other issues could gain from such an introductory editorial as well. It provides a helpful guideline to see to context of different articles. Without it, the articles – which cover admittedly very broad themes and are therefore probably hard to connect to each other – seem more as a loose collection. Hence, more editorials could help to see the link between the articles and the scope of the journal. The same goes for the review articles. Their position within the journal and the location of their topics within the journal is not always clear, a problem which could probably also be solved by an introduction to each issue in form of an editorial. Indeed, the article reviews of the three special issues, which do have an editorial, fit perfectly well into the context of the particular issue.

Furthermore, these review articles are an interesting section of the journal. They review and compare either several publications on the same topic or elaborate more comprehensively on one book than ordinary book reviews do. Hence, they provide a glimpse of ongoing debates in the field of global history or put particular publications into a wider, transnational context. The twelve review articles which appeared between 2006 and 2010 cover mostly broad topics of global history such as the question of Africa and globalization, approaches to world history, ocean history or also global food history.

⁷ The category ‘others’ consists of one erratum (two pages) and one editorial note (two pages).

⁸ See introduction, p. 3.

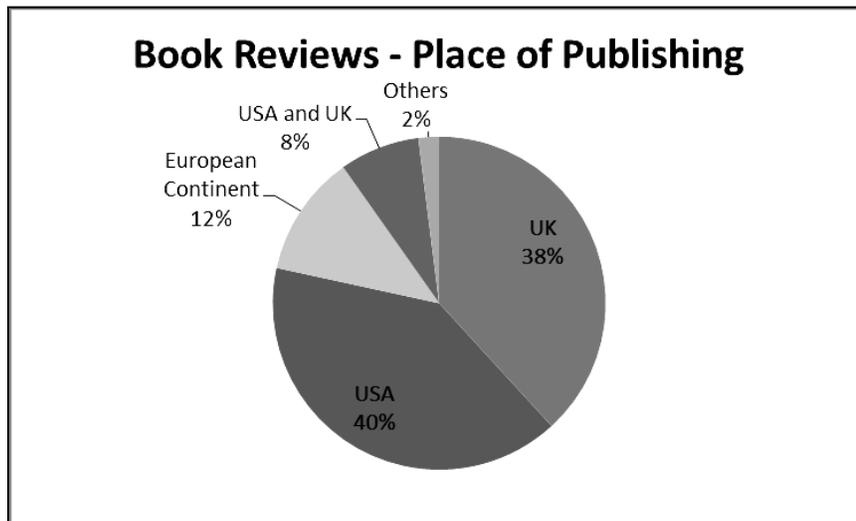


In my opinion, it is a pity that there are only so few of those comprehensive reviews on debates of global history as they are at least as useful and enlightening as the very numerous book reviews.⁹

Book Reviews

For the purpose of this report, it is also worthwhile to give a closer look at the book reviews. 7% of the pages or 102 out of a total of 207 publications within the 15 issues are book reviews. Suggestions for book reviews are evaluated by the responsible editor, dr. John Chalcraft. After approval, a printed version of the book can be submitted to the journal and a short review (usually around one page) is published. The reviewed books comprehend a wide methodological, geographical and periodical scope. Most of them apply a macro-level approach towards cultural and economic history but some also contain micro-level case-studies of specific subjects. All the reviewed books share a global or transnational focus in the tradition of the journal. However, there are no books which touch the topic of global history from another discipline than historiography itself, even though the journal aims to support interdisciplinary cooperation. In addition, it is also interesting to look at the countries in which the reviewed books are published. Out of 102 books, 40.2% are published in the United States, 38.2% in the UK, 11.8% in several countries of the European continent and the others in cooperation either between the USA and the UK or the European continent and the USA.

⁹ Naturally, debates themselves would also be very interesting for the reader. Unfortunately, they are not part of this journal.



This obvious bias reflects on the one hand reality, as it is a simple fact that most of the scientific books are published in the Anglo-American world. On the other hand, this bias should be of serious concern for the editors, as it is a clear aim of the journal to support a non-western scope of global history and to overcome a western-biased historiography.

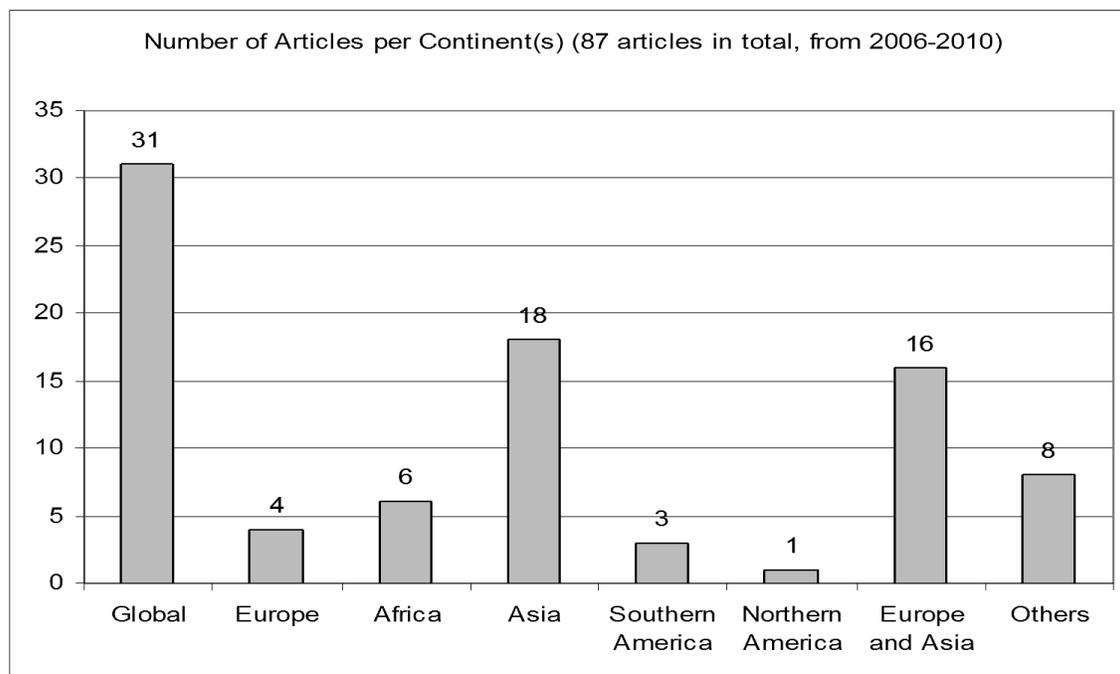
However, the editorials, book reviews and review articles are only minor parts from the journal. The most important sections are clearly the articles, which form the core of every issue.

3. Content of the Journal

This section presents a closer look at different thematic aspects of the articles in the *Journal of Global History* in order to investigate whether or not the editors meet their aim. After this, the authors are also subject of consideration

Geographical Focus

Firstly, it is interesting to investigate the regions which are covered by the articles. According to the initial idea of the journal, global history is understood as a history of transcending borders, of transnational societies or spaces. Hence, one expects a focus on broader regions instead of single countries but in the same time, the articles do not have to cover the whole world. Additionally, the journal aims to support a non-western point framework. Therefore, all the regions of the world should be taken into account.



This graph indicates the number of articles per continent.¹⁰ As expected, the majority of the articles takes a focus on the global level that is to say covers regions of three

¹⁰ The articles are categorized along continents, as they usually treat regions beyond the scope of nation-states. The category “global” includes all those articles which cover more than two continents. The

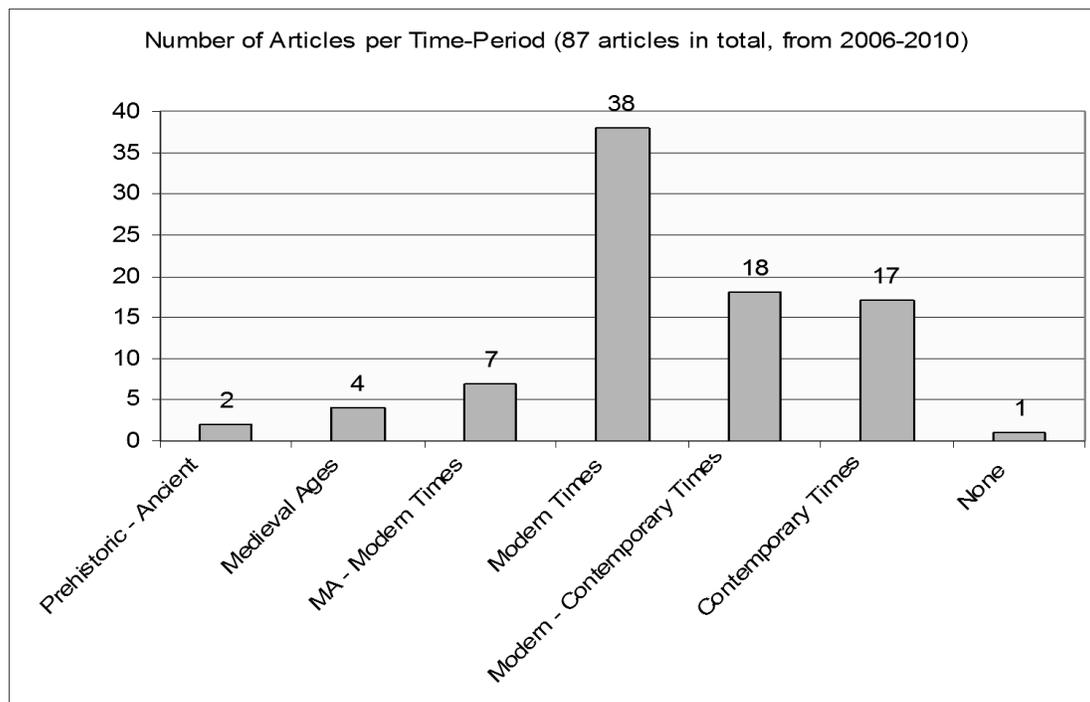


continents or more. Interestingly, the second biggest continent to be considered is Asia (20.7%) and the third biggest category includes all those articles which treat Europe and Asia – usually in a comparative approach (18.3%). This seems to be an indicator that the journal indeed tries to contribute to a deconstruction of a non-western framework. Europe or America are with less than 5% only of marginal importance, even Africa with 7% enjoys more attention. Especially the lack of American-focused studies is remarkable, even though the United States do play a role in the articles of the category ‘global’. Hence, concerning its geographical focus, the *Journal of Global history* achieves to represent on the one hand a global approach that often includes more than two continents, on the other hand it also overcomes a western-focused historiography as it has a clear emphasis on the eastern part of the world. Nevertheless, other non-western regions such as Africa or Southern America are hardly represented. Even though the journal achieves to be global, there is therefore again a bias towards specific regions recognizable.

Temporal Focus

On a temporal level, the journal explicitly aims to cover the whole history of mankind. It defines globalization not as a recent movement of the late 20th century but as a permanent concept with growths and declines over time.

category “others” includes the few articles which cover two continents but not Europe and Asia (Africa and Asia, Europe and Southern America, Africa and Northern America: each 1 article. Europe and Africa: 2 articles) and the three articles which cover ocean-studies.



As this graph indicates, there are indeed all time-periods from the prehistoric up to the contemporary history represented. Many of the articles investigate long time-periods, therefore it was necessary to make categories which combine two time-periods. All those articles, in which the four main periods (Ancient Times, Medieval Times, Modern Times and Contemporary Times) overlap, belong into these categories.¹¹

Around 80% of all the 87 articles cover the Modern or/and Contemporary Times, so the 16th to the 21st century. On the one hand, this emphasis is probably a logic consequence of the high interest of historians in these periods and can therefore not be avoided. On the other hand, this bias is contradictory to the idea of globalization as a long-term concept. If the journal aims to overcome the definition of globalization as a recent phenomenon, it should try to shift the attention towards time-periods which are less-popular for those historians who are dealing with global aspects of historiography. Effectively, those few articles which cover another time-period often contain inspiring

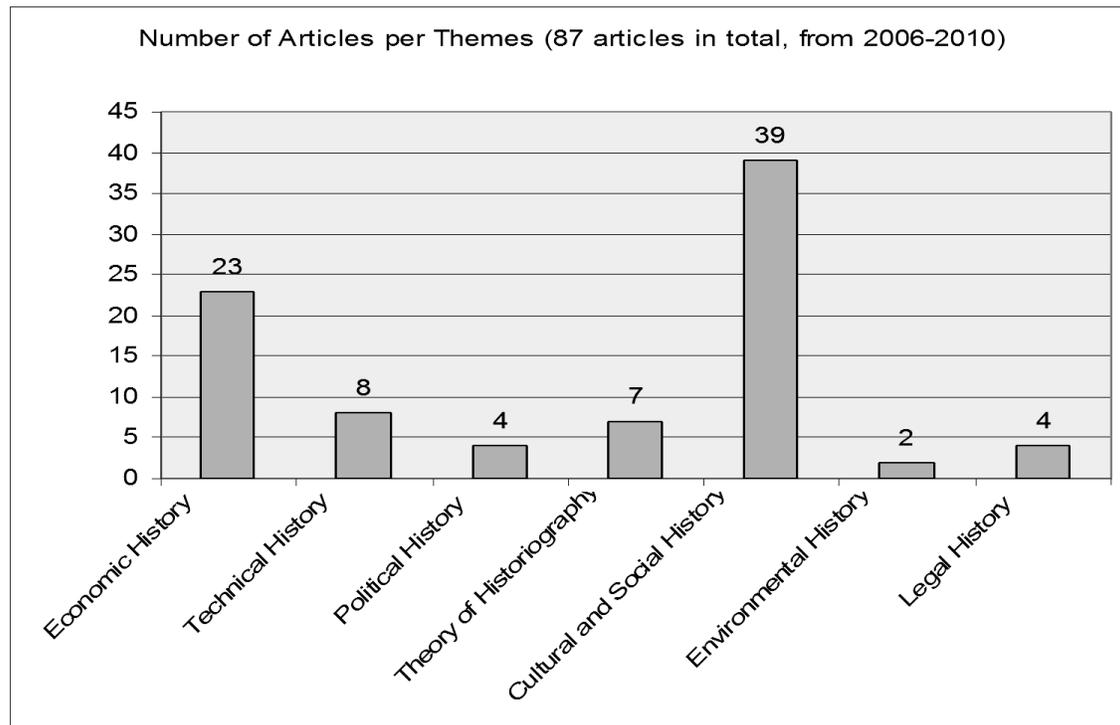
¹¹ Prehistoric – Ancient times: until the 5th century, Medieval Times: 5 – 15th century, Medieval – Modern Times: 5th – 19th century, Modern Times: 16th – 19th century, Modern – Contemporary Times: 16th – 21st century, Contemporary Times: 20th – 21st century. This categorization is based on historical periods commonly used within historiography (for example in encyclopedias, www.enzyklo.de).



and creative approaches and themes. For example, one can find a discourse analysis of the historical work of a muslim scholar in the 9th century, a theory on the formation of mega-empires in the prehistoric and ancient ages or an investigation of the exchange of wine and theater-traditions between the Hellenistic and the Buddhist culture. The publication of these kinds of articles in a journal on global history is laudable and an important signal for the importance of transcending the traditional concept of globalization.

Thematic Focus

In this subsection, I turn to the discussion of the content, the themes themselves. I have tried to categorize the different articles according to their main topics. The applied categories are divided into economic, technical, political, cultural/social and environmental history and the theory of historiography – these are traditional sub-disciplines of historiography. The category ‘Economic History’ consists of articles dealing with trade (networks, organization, influence of policy or culture, institutions etc.) and economic developments of regions or countries. Articles of ‘Technical History’ include developments and comparisons of industries or technical knowledge and explain differences in global industrialization. ‘Political History’ deals mainly with colonial policy. The broad category of ‘Cultural and Social History’ comprehends, amongst others, topics such as identity, nationalism, history of ideas, religion or communication. Articles about ecological or geographical issues were categorized within ‘Environmental History’. ‘Legal History’ consists of articles covering legal aspects of global history usually related to colonialism. Finally, ‘Theory of Historiography’ includes all those articles treating theoretical aspects of the field of global history.



The main emphasis lies on topics of cultural and social histories. 39 out of 87 articles cover themes like identity, ideas or religion on a global level. This high interest in other themes than those, which are traditionally linked to globalization, is remarkable. Nevertheless, articles of the economic field also play – as expected - an important role and are the second biggest category in the *Journal of Global History*. Hence, even though the journal achieves to support cultural approaches towards globalization, which is a rather new development in global history, traditional global themes like economy and policy are also adequately considered.

With regard to the initial guidelines of the journal, two more observations are noteworthy. Firstly, the category of theoretical texts on global historiography only includes seven articles. As the journal aims to support an alternative understanding of globalization and of the concept of boundaries, this category seems to be underrepresented. Theoretical thoughts on concepts and methodologies of global history are necessary for the further development of this field and should therefore receive more attention. Secondly, environmental history, a category where the interdisciplinary idea of globalization could be advanced, is only represented with two articles. Hence, even



though the journal comprehends a broad scope of historical themes, efforts to include interdisciplinary articles are still at an early stage.

Special Issues

A closer look at the three special issues supports the view that the *Journal of Global History* achieves to provide a broad scope with traditional, economic and more recent, cultural topics. The first special issue of 2007 deals with Islamic history as global history. Hence, it focuses on a religion which was not traditionally in the focus of western historiography. Similarly, the special issue of 2010 treats Zomia, a region, which includes the Asian highlands. This issue aims to transcend the traditional concept of nation-state boundaries and to indicate the importance of marginal regions for global history. Thus, these two issues clearly have the goal to overcome the traditional idea of globalization as a mainly economic phenomenon and of nation-states as the main entities of global history. Therefore, they are explicitly linked to the initial aims of the journal, which are described in the first editorial. However, the third special issue of 2009 deals with the history of commodities in the British Empire and so with a traditional economic aspect of global history. Even though the *Journal of Global History* is therefore keen to support new approaches towards global history, it does not neglect conventional strands of this field.

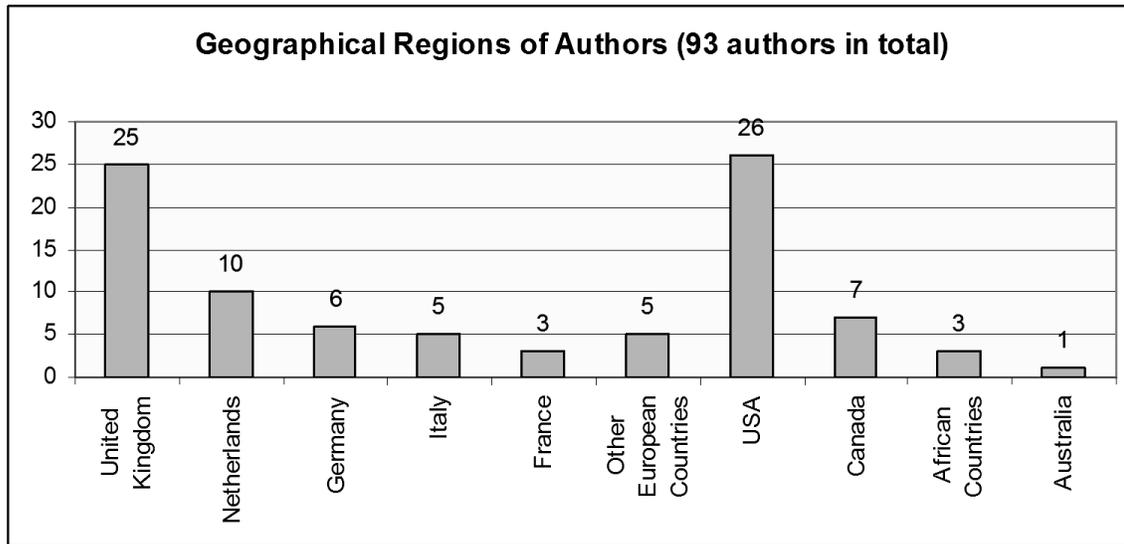
Authors

As a last point of investigation, I focus on the authors of the articles. Their background might be interesting in order to evaluate the journal's policy. First of all, it is remarkable that none of the authors publishes more than one article. Therefore, the 87 articles of the past five years were written by 93 scholars, so six articles were the result of cooperation. The gender-equality is not at all given; only 24% of all the authors are women.

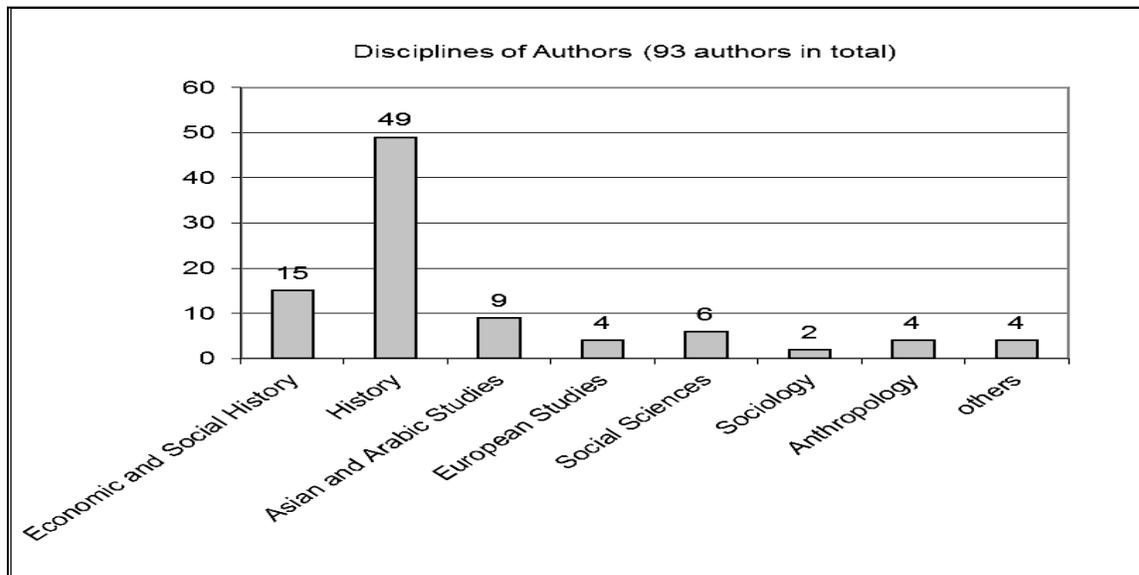
The following graph indicates the geographical regions, where these authors are working at the time when their articles are published. Again, there is definitely an Anglo-American bias; 26 authors work in the United States and 25 in the UK. Most of the European countries are represented with one author, only the Netherlands stands out with ten participating authors. It is startling that the African and Asian continent are only



represented with 3 or accordingly 2 authors. This is not a good indicator for a contribution to a non-western framework and should be a call to include more non-western scholars.



As a last step, the disciplines of the authors are examined. This is not an easy task, as scholars often specialize themselves in more than one subject. In this case, I had to categorize them as general historians. Hence, only those who clearly concentrate on one specific sub discipline are listed as such.





As one can see, there are only few authors from a primarily a-historic field (six social scientists, one environmental scholar and one geographer in the category ‘others’, two sociologists and four anthropologists). Therefore, the journal seems to be far away from providing a platform for interdisciplinary approaches towards global history.

4. Discussion of the Journal

As the articles are the most important part of the journal, they are the focus of this section. The majority of them treats topics of cultural and social history but economic history is also notably represented as the second biggest part of the articles. Hence, the journal balances between older and newer approaches within global history, even though there is a tendency to shift increasingly towards social and cultural topics. In my opinion, this balance is laudable, as both fields are important for a broad development of global history. Nevertheless there is also one criticism regarding the themes of the articles; theoretical articles on historiography should receive more attention.

The geographical trend in this journal is directed towards non-western regions, as 18 out of 87 articles investigate the Asian continent. However, the major part of the articles still applies a global focus (they consider more than two continents) – as it is expected for a journal of global history. Even though it is great that Asia is such an important region in the journal, other non-western parts of the world like Africa or Southern-America are only very marginally represented. According to me, this undermines the journal’s effort to deconstruct a western framework. It is of great importance that these regions receive more attention in the future volumes.

The most popular time-periods are the 16th to the 21st century, again unsurprisingly. Nevertheless, the journal tries to provide alternative aspects of global history. Therefore, time-periods like the Prehistoric Times, which are rather atypical for global history, are also represented. Even though they only receive little space, it is still remarkable that those periods are at all taken into account in a journal of global history. For the coming issues, it would be interesting to advance publications which focus on



other than the Modern or Contemporary Times. Thereby, new approaches and themes of global history might be discovered.

From an organizational point of view, the *Journal of Global History* shows an Anglo-American bias. Editors and authors of the UK and the USA are overrepresented, even though small efforts to include other parts of the globe are visible. Surely, these efforts have to be enforced, even though I must admit that it can be difficult to find adequate authors in regions, where the academic environment is less developed than in the western world.

In general, the journal could gain from giving more emphasis to other sections than the articles. There are only very few review articles, even though they provide interesting insights into ongoing debates of global history. Additionally, editorials are a useful tool to advance the theory of global history, which serves as guideline of the journal. More of those two sections could importantly strengthen the journal.

I find the content of the *Journal of Global History* enlightening, because it provides more than just mainstream articles on globalization. The great advantage of this journal is its modern approach towards global history which contributes to new concept of spaces, boundaries or identities. A good example is the special issue on Zomia of July 2010, a perfect contribution towards a new understanding of global history. In the contemporary world, articles that advance our understanding of culture and society on a global scope are important and valuable for the scholarly as well as for the private reader.

Conclusion

The invention of the *Journal of Global History* in 2006 reflects the rising interest in global approaches towards history. The economic and cultural impacts of globalization on our daily-life and the fading importance of state-boundaries draw the attention of historians and other scholars to global history. This journal aims to promote a broad understanding of global history, including all periods and all regions of the world without any bias. At the beginning of this report, I have asked the question whether the *Journal of Global History* is capable of achieving its ambitious goals and whether it is a valuable contribution to the academic world; now is the moment to give an answer.



The acceptance of the journal for the Thomson Reuters ranking indicates that it enjoys a good reputation. Additionally, it is situated in an excellent academic environment and overseen by well-known scholars with some expertise on the global level. Hence, the structural preconditions for being a scientific valuable journal are there. Furthermore, the thematic plan is also persuasive. The journal applies an alternative concept of globalization, which does not just focus on traditional themes like economy or power and which is regionally and temporally unlimited in scope. In addition, the journal is also exemplary in its scientific openness towards interdisciplinary viewpoints of global history and towards creative and sometimes also unfamiliar approaches in that field.

The analysis of the content in chapter four indicates that the journal indeed does fulfill these targets, even though not always comprehensively. Attempts to be broad in scope and modern in approach clearly exist. However, a few criticisms remain, which prevent the journal from being an outstanding new contribution to the academic world. Most importantly to mention is the Anglo-American bias which exists not only regarding the editors and authors but also for example concerning the reviewed books. Additionally, some of the journal's explicit aims are only minimally achieved.

To conclude, the *Journal of Global History* definitely is a valuable contribution to the already existing discourse on global history. The fast development of this field results in divergent approaches, definitions and methodologies. Thus, the discipline of global history needs conceptual clarification and clear points of reference and this is exactly provided by the *Journal of Global History*. It is a platform for new approaches and theories but in the same time also advances traditional themes and authors. With its broad scope, it is interesting for the general public as well as for historians and other scientists. Furthermore, due to its comprehensive amount of themes and fields, the journal can stimulate the students of History and International Relations to use creative new approaches for their study. However, to remain an attractive, modern oriented journal, the editors should put more effort into the achievement of their initial objectives and additionally, they should try to overcome the Anglo-American bias of the journal.