

Global Microhistory: Great Expectations?

An International Workshop

DFG-Research Training Group 1608/2 Self-Making
Practices of Subjectivation in Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspective
December 6-7/18 A03 1-109
Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg
organized by Annika Raapke & Lucas Haasis



Johannes Vermeer: The Astronomer, 1668, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

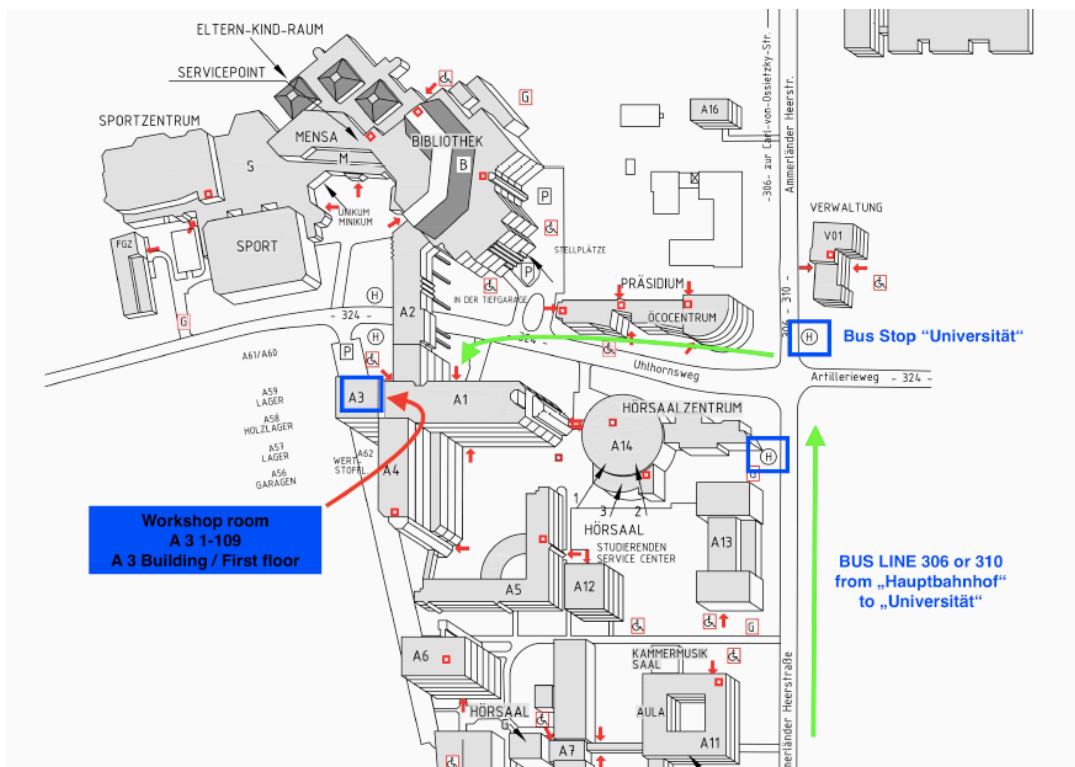
Global Microhistory is, without question, one of the hottest topics in current discussions about the future of historiography. It has been established and promoted as an innovative research perspective, as a new approach that promises to bring together and fruitfully combine the advantages of Global History and Microhistory. Some historians have gone so far as to hail the success of this new approach as a "Renaissance" and as a long-overdue further development of these older, well-established research approaches (Medick 2016). Other, gloomier, historians have suspected that Global Microhistory is barely more than a shiny new label stuck on old perspectives and methods (Levi 2016). Despite this criticism, the last decade has clearly brought some substantial and innovative historiographic results which have proven the significance and relevance of this new approach (Trivellato 2009/2011, Aslanian 2011, Epple 2010, Gerritsen 2012/2016, Hunt 2014, Rothschild 2011, Ghobrial 2014).

Drawing on the new research perspective, these - by now widely known - publications and studies have shown the innovation potential of the approach for maritime and economic history, for family history, for the history of labour or of knowledge transfer etc; and so Global Microhistory has found its place in the canon of historiographic approaches. And yet: While its general significance and relevance appear to have been established, its concrete methodological foundation and agenda still seem unclear and vague to many historians. How is Global Microhistory actually *done*, from an empirical point of view? In terms of methodology, the various books and research projects vary considerably, although they all identify as Global Microhistories.

This certainly leaves room for criticism. Are Global Microhistories the familiar histories of individual or everyday lives, distinctive only because of their global setting? Or - on the other end of the spectrum - is Global Microhistory maybe just a clever stratagem to adorn or supplement the often seemingly anonymous and structural, and sometimes seemingly static, large scale approaches such as Global History through the human factor, through the experiences and actions of historical agents? Since Global Microhistories often focus on cross-cultural encounters, the permeability of social and cultural boundaries as experienced by various individuals, and on people and things on the move (Trivellato 2011, Putnam 2006), another important question would be how this kind of historiography still allows us to acknowledge the clear existence of power structures and institutional practices, borders and boundaries which were an undeniable and relatively constant factor which shaped Early Modern global encounters? In general, one of the more pressing questions that still needs to be answered is what research unit should and could best be chosen as a suitable basis for investigation when doing Global Microhistory? Is, for example, a focus on social practices a possible and suitable approach to integrate both the more structural and the more individual and contingent elements of social global life in the Early Modern Era? Equally pressing is the question of how we actually define the "global" and the "micro" in the approach. Is Global Microhistory in the end primarily a question of scale, with us simply expanding the scope of our investigations to global phenomena? Or does the chosen research focus also entail changes of what is possible in terms of historical narratives? From a methodological point of view, how do we ensure and actually go about the "decentering" of our Eurocentric perspectives, something which has frequently been postulated in past and current discussions (Zemon Davis 2011)? How is it methodologically possible to "address multiple contexts, and consider the flexibility and variability of scale and distance" (Warwick conference call for the *Global Microhistory Conference 1*, 2018)?

All of these questions (and likely more) will be addressed during the workshop. Over the course of two days, we will discuss different ways and methods of doing Global Microhistory, from data analysis to network analysis to Historical Anthropology or materiality studies. We want to try and identify a red thread for Global Microhistory on the basis of nine papers/presentations from very different fields of Early Modern History; there will be a diversity of subjects, sources and methodologies, and hopefully also of positions towards the concept of Global Microhistory. We would like to invite you to approach this workshop not as a tiny conference, but rather as a “History Lab”, in which work in progress is presented and discussed. Papers should not exceed 20-25 minutes, which will be followed by 40 minutes of discussion for each paper.

We have deliberately chosen this format for the workshop to also address a much more general issue with regard to Global Microhistory, which is how this approach might, in the end, affect future ways of doing research, sharing knowledge and cooperating with each other in our “globalized” world. We believe that Global Microhistory thrives through international cooperation and joint research projects – and pursuing such projects would mean counteracting current political and cultural developments that increasingly favour a return to, or a continuation of, nation-based historiography and nationalist historical narratives.



Programme

Thursday, 6 December 2018

Chair: Annika Raapke

11 Welcome

11-12 **Lucas Haasis** (Oldenburg): Why Global Microhistory?

12-13 **Richard Blakemore** (Reading): Writing global, writing local: two seventeenth-century sailors and their autobiographies

13-14 Lunch Break

14-15 **Wim de Winter** (Ostend): Unseen identities on the seas: 18th century Southern-Netherlandish microhistories in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic

15-16 **Soile Ylivuori** (London/Helsinki): "Incoherent, Superficial Buffoon": William Beckford and West-Indian Self-Fashioning in 18th-Century London

16 Coffee Break

16.30 -17.30 **Oliver Finnegan** (Oldenburg): The maritime convergence point as a site for global microhistory, the case of Madagascar c. 1680-1705

19 Dinner Mamma Mia Oldenburg

Friday, 7 December 2018

Chair: Lucas Haasis

10-11 **Annika Raapke** (Oldenburg): Doin' it for themselves? Work and power in white women's letters from the 18th century French Caribbean

11-12 **Aske Brock** (Aalborg): Global Connections? Women's role in the English East India Company

12-13 Lunch Break

13-14 **John Gallagher** (Leeds): Looking through the glass window: immigrant notaries in early modern London

14-15 **Christina Beckers** (Oldenburg): Telling (no) lies? Historians of 'global microhistories' in (digital) archives

15 Wrap-Up

18 Dinner Caldero Oldenburg