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A HISTORY THAT “DARES NOT SPEAK ITS NAME”? ATLANTIC HISTORY, GLOBAL HISTORY AND THE MODERN ATLANTIC SPACE

Is there such a thing as an Atlantic history of the modern world? Or a modern dimension of Atlantic history? A good amount of empirical research falls into this broad, vague historiographical category, but this abundance in itself does not define the contours, tools and direction of this subfield of research. Studies on modern transatlantic relations reveal a paradox, or at least a significant gap between the empirical and theoretical levels, whereby the research being done on specific aspects of transatlantic exchange over the last two centuries is rich and thriving yet efforts to conceptualize and define the modern Atlantic as a unit of historical analysis are weak and inadequate. In fact, approaches that are having a deep impact on historical studies – namely Atlantic history and global history – are based on cultural trends and methodological assumptions that call into question the very possibility and usefulness of such a conceptualization due to matters of time, space and ideology.

As far as periodization is concerned, the time frame within which the Atlantic space is considered a unit of historical analysis is seen to end in the early decades of the 19th century at the latest, due to the collapse of an international order based on transatlantic empires, the end of the so-called Atlantic revolutions and the decline of the slave trade. As for geography, the very notion of a 19th and 20th century Atlantic space or basin is contested on the grounds that it was reduced to a North Atlantic corridor by the declining role of Africa and the gradual subordination of Latin America to North Atlantic economic and strategic interests. Finally, conceptualizing the modern Atlantic space as a distinctively dense field of interactions with remarkable diffusional power can be seen as providing new ammunition to old, discredited discourses related to the primacy of the West and Cold War ideology. According to the dominant schools of historiography, then, the global scale is more relevant and useful than the Atlantic one for making sense of international and transnational interdependencies without falling prey to ideological agendas.

However, a significant number of original research outputs, mostly stemming from scholars of US history, are providing a multifaceted account of the dense networks created across the Atlantic by economic-technological and political-cultural exchanges, as well as reciprocal attempts at imitation and hybridization, and therefore by multiple analogies and convergences throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This has been the outcome of a transnational challenge to the exceptionalist/nationalist paradigm that is successfully internationalizing the study of US history. While it relies on multiple (i.e. hemispheric, Atlantic, Pacific, global) scales, I believe that this effort *de facto* sheds light on the peculiarities of the transatlantic space of interaction within the global context. European historians of the US are making a specific contribution to this effort. While they may not embrace a deliberately Atlantic outlook, they are affected by a geographical, cultural and institutional positionality that encourages the adoption of comparative and relational perspectives. These in turn help to highlight the specificity of the Atlantic space in the modern world.¹

This essay aims to reveal the gap that exists between a theoretical stalemate and the empirical dynamism of the study of modern transatlantic relations by situating that gap within the historiographical and cultural context from which it originated and discussing its causes, in the hopes of facilitating a more fruitful dialogue among different yet interrelated approaches to international history.

1. Atlantic lost

The prevailing assumption is that Atlantic history disintegrates at the threshold of the modern world, as if it faded away inside a global 19th and 20th century framework in which the internal dynamics that shaped the Atlantic “system” studied by many early modern historians could no longer hold. The theoretical and methodological discourse on the modern Atlantic world is unworthy of remark, notwithstanding a few exceptions.

In Europe, the Transatlantic Studies Association is one of only entities attempting a multidisciplinary effort to redefine the “Atlantic paradigm”. Among the many US based historical research centers and foundations, only the German Marshall Fund and the German Historical Institute seem to have a consistent focus on the history of transatlantic relations.

¹ Nicolas Barreyre, Michael Heale, Stephen Tuck and Cécile Vidal (eds), *Historians Across Borders. Writing American History in a Global Age*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

While Mary Nolan's *The Transatlantic Century. Europe and America, 1890-2010* elicited a lively conversation among historians, its echo was largely confined to specialists, mostly American scholars of European history and European scholars of American history². There is no discussion list devoted to transatlantic relations in the 19th and 20th centuries among the over 200 lists available on H-Net. Finally, there are no textbooks, encyclopedias, readers or, with some partial exceptions, journals on the history of the modern Atlantic world. In other words, we have almost nothing to certify the existence of a subfield in international academia.

This situation is due to an interplay of causes both external and internal to the prevailing trends in historical studies. The relevance of and concern for the Euro-American connection in the public arena has been declining ever since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent acceleration of financial and strategic globalization. However, the cultural context and the methodological development of current historical research are the main reasons the post-early-modern Atlantic world is no longer considered a relevant and legitimate field of study. It is as if the legacy of the 1940s and 1950s, when Atlantic history amounted to the study of political and economic institutions, elites and white men and was instrumental in shaping a Eurocentric view of history and the world, hampers any new approach to the modern Atlantic.

When does Atlantic history as we know it end? How important is periodization in defining its contours, scope and goals? As Philip Morgan and Jack Greene stated in their authoritative assessment of the state of the art, "the presumption seems to be that the expansion of European imperialism and the spread of commerce after 1800 make a global framework of more utility than an Atlantic one for those who are not content to continue to operate within traditional national and imperial frameworks". Similarly, according to Emma Rothschild, after the transportation and communication innovations of the 1830s "Atlantic history ends because the Atlantic is no longer distinct, in a new world of literally worldwide or global

² M. Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century. Europe and America, 1890-2010*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2010; "The Transatlantic Paradigm Reconsidered: Multidisciplinary Perspectives", TSA Annual Meeting, Middelburg, 6-8 July 2015. Besides the German Historical Institute conference "More Atlantic Crossings?" Washington, 7-9 June 2012 other recent events tackling these issues include "America: Still a European Power?", University of Bologna, December 7-8 2012; "Rethinking the West in a Post-Cold War World", University of Maryland – College Park, 7 April 2015; "European Perspectives on the History of Transatlantic Relations. New Directions and Case Studies", University of Eastern Piedmont, 14-15 December 2015.

connections.” While these authors have made the case for a more flexible interpretation of the chronological boundaries of this subfield, its prevailing terminus *ad quem* by and large overlaps with that of early modern history³. The International Center for the History of the Atlantic World founded by Bernard Bailyn at Harvard University in 1995, which was crucial for the emergence of the new Atlantic history, focuses on the timespan between 1500 and 1825, similar to that used in the discussion list H-Atlantic (1500-1800). In the significant amount of publications falling under this category, the Atlantic world of the early decades of the 19th century, if tackled at all, is usually considered as an appendix, a waning stream destined to lose strength amid the high seas of 19th century globalization. A few scholars have stressed how the effects of crucial elements of the Atlantic system like slavery continued to be on display several decades *after* the disintegrating process triggered by the revolutions, the collapse of transatlantic empires and the partial, gradual emergence of the nation-state⁴. However, little to no attention is being paid to those voices calling for a reconsideration of the Atlantic world not just as a sum of interactions between individuals and cultures connected by commercial, migratory and religious networks – a view indebted to social history and its dialogue with anthropology and the social sciences – but also as an epistemic space, a worldview to be tackled through a new socio-cultural history of ideas or rather a “history of meaning.”⁵

This reluctance to challenge established chronological patterns reflects both the methodological premises of new Atlantic historians and their cultural-political assumptions, namely their urge to distance themselves from a previous generation of scholars who framed the Atlantic (i.e. American and French) revolutions as milestones in the rise of “Western civilization”, according to a teleological view of history that, in the words of David Armitage, “owed to NATO more than it did to Plato.”⁶

³ P. Morgan-J. Greene, *The Present State of Atlantic History* in ID, *Atlantic History. A Critical Appraisal*, Oxford UP, New York 2009, p. 21 (see also N. Canny, *Atlantic History and Global History* in the same volume); E. Rothschild, *Late Atlantic History*, in N. Canny-P. Morgan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World (c. 1450 – c. 1850)*, Oxford UP, New York 2011, p. 637. C. Strobel, *The Global Atlantic, 1400 to 1900*, Routledge, New York 2015 stresses the interplay between the Atlantic and global scale in early modern history. On the emergence of the new Atlantic history see D. Armitage, *Three Concepts of Atlantic History*, in D. Armitage-M. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2002; B. Bailyn, *The Idea of Atlantic History*, “Itinerario”, 20 (1996), pp. 19-44 later expanded in *Atlantic History. Concepts and Contours*, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2005; A. Games, *Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities*, “American Historical Review”, 111, 3, June 2006, pp. 764-81; W. O’Reilly, *Genealogies of Atlantic History*, “Atlantic Studies” 1, 1, 2004, pp. 66-84.

⁴ for Alan Karras the terminus *ad quem* is the 1880s, which the abolition of slavery in Cuba and Brazil, see *The Atlantic World as Unit of Study* in A. Karras-J.R. McNeill (eds.), *Atlantic American Societies. From Columbus through Abolition 1492-1888*, Routledge, New York 1992, pp. 1-15.

⁵ E. Rothschild, *Late Atlantic History*, p. 640.

⁶ D. Armitage, *Three Concepts of Atlantic History*, p. 14.

As a consequence, the Atlantic history that has come of age in the last few decades, while aimed at being a “history without borders,” has only barely scratched the surface of challenging, when not downright reinforcing, the traditional chronological boundaries between early modern and modern history. It has, however, significantly altered its spatial boundaries. If applied to the period between 1500 and 1800, the Atlantic scale highlights characteristic early features of globalization – imperial structures; means of communication and transportation; mobility of merchants, slaves and workers; and the circulation of capital, goods and ideas – that would later inform the history of the world.

While from this perspective the Atlantic field of interaction ends up being swallowed up by the global integration of the major world regions by the end of the early modern period, from the perspective of global history it has hardly ever been a historical or geographical unit of analysis, even less so since the 19th century, **which allegedly marked** “the birth of the modern world” or “the transformation of the world.”⁷

Just like the new Atlantic history, this new approach to world history stems from the methodological and cultural critique of the work of an earlier generation of scholars – exemplified by William McNeill’s *The Rise of the West* (1963) and revived in the post-9/11 climate of opinion thanks the works of renowned scholars like Niall Ferguson – for adopting what is seen as a Eurocentric outlook and an essentialist view of history predicated on the linear, inevitable and triumphant “rise of the West.”⁸

In fact, many distinct threads and sensibilities overlap within global history. Some not only question the idea of a European/Western specificity in the context of world history but also challenge the very notion that European expansion and the consequent Atlantic exchanges and interactions in the early modern era are significant precedents of modern globalization. Christopher Bayly, for example, singles out the decades between 1760 and 1830 – “the first age of truly global imperialism” – as the crucial phase for the integration of international society, while he considers earlier European expansion as part of a multipolar and poorly

⁷ C. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford, Blackwell 2004; J. Osterhammel, (*The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton UP, Princeton 2014 (*Die Verwandlung der Welt : eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* C.H. Beck: Munchen 2009).

⁸ Critical discussions of the notion of “the West” are provided by C. Browning-M. Lehti (eds.), *The Struggle for the West. A Divided and Contested Legacy*, Routledge, New York 2010 and by a special issue of *Telos* on “The West: Its Past and Its Prospects” n. 168, Fall 2014 edited by Russell A. Berman, which includes engaging essays by Jeffrey Herf and Michael Kimmage.

integrated “archaic globalization” and dismisses the exchanges of the early modern Atlantic economy, including the slave trade, as proto-capitalistic developments.⁹

While projecting this globalist outlook onto the 19th and first half of the 20th century helps shed light on obscured chapters and silenced people, it seems ill-equipped to tackle, let alone answer, several crucial questions. What is the significance of the partial, gradual rise of the modern state with respect to the “world without borders” and the multiple transnational circulations that lie at the core of the global history agenda? More importantly, how can we reconcile this global, decentered and anti-Eurocentric gaze with the need to make sense of European (and later Euro-American) hegemony after the “great divergence” of the late 18th century created an enduring gap in economic growth between England and China and by extension between the West and Asia?

In *The Birth of the Modern World* Bayly tackles the latter question as follows: “No world history of this period could possibly sidestep the central importance of the growing economic dominance of Western Europe and North America ... A history of this period, therefore, has to demonstrate a number of different and apparently contradictory things. It has to chart the interdependence of world events, while allowing for the brute fact of Western domination. At the same time it has to show how, over large parts of the world, this European domination was only partial and temporary.”¹⁰

In his brilliant overview of the controversies surrounding global history, **Sebastian Conrad** similarly argues that since the late 18th century transnational contacts and exchanges can be understood only in the light of the hegemonic role played by Europe and, later, by the US: the integration of capitalist markets, technological and military superiority, and the pretense of superiority of the universalistic value system of the West displayed their effects worldwide. While Western hegemony is undeniable, Conrad maintains, it is important to stress its spatial and chronological limits and its nature as accidental rather than inevitable.¹¹

In fact, with the notable exception of Sven Beckert’s *Empire of Cotton*, major studies in global history often struggle to make sense of the modern Atlantic world as a field of interactions

⁹ N. Canny, *Atlantic History and Global History*, pp. 322-23; Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 45, 41. Bayly maintains that “In its early stages, the ‘expansion of Europe’ was simply one among several contemporary examples of globalization, rather than a world system in the making,” p. 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ S. Conrad, *What is Global History?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2016.

with a peculiar role in the global context because of the multiplicity and density of its connections and its expansive, diffusional power. This is especially true of the “American century” and the rise of the United States as a great world power. As American historian Andrew Cayton put it, “to incorporate the United States ... into world history is like incorporating Starbucks into the history of coffee. It has to be done, but at what price? Even if there is no celebration of Starbucks, its history will define the terms of the larger debate”. The risk is that, in the words of Thomas Bender, “the United States *in* global history might all too easily morph into US history *as* global history”, thus undermining the very foundations of this approach to the history of the world.¹²

Jürgen Osterhammel’s *The Transformation of the World* aptly exemplifies this impasse. Received by critics as more Eurocentric than Bayly’s text (to which it is often compared), his ambitious, outstanding work seems to oscillate between the search for a decentered perspective on the 19th century world and the acknowledgement of specific aspects of European/Western hegemony; as such, it fails to deal adequately with the Atlantic scale. On the one hand, some of the five “visual angles” he proposes address specific aspects of the Euro-American space. He argues that one of the defining features of the 19th century is what he calls “asymmetric efficiency growth”, which involves higher levels of productivity, an articulation of the state structure and military power (a “military great divergence”), first in Western European societies and later in the US and Japan. For all its limitations and exceptions, “the rise of Europe, the United States and Japan in comparison with the rest of the world was more than ever before or since an incontrovertible fact”, writes Osterhammel (910).

The author also uses the term “asymmetric reference density” (911) to refer to the amount and circulation of ideas in a given society and its cultural production, including its ability to absorb what is produced elsewhere through translations and the press. The peculiar nature of the Atlantic space emerges in this respect as well: “instead of a multiplicity of cultural models, the West now appeared as the global standard”, both as a model to be imitated and as a reference against which identities were shaped in other world regions through selective identification and opposition (912).

¹² A. Cayton, *Putting the United States in Its Place*, “Reviews of American History”, vol. 34 n. 4 (Dec. 2006), pp. 573-580; T. Bender, *A Nation Among Nations. America’s Place in World History*, Hill & Wang, New York 2006, p. 298. Si veda anche M. Adas, *From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon. Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History*, “American Historical Review”, vol. 106 n. 5 (Dec. 2001), pp. 1692-1720.

However, these insights do not lead the author to acknowledge the modern Atlantic as a unit of analysis, which he sees as an increasingly disarticulated space vis à vis an increasingly integrated Pacific area: “In the nineteenth century, the Atlantic and the Pacific were subject to different tendencies. The ‘peaceful’ ocean experimented a phase of integration in every domain; the two sides of the Atlantic drifted apart in reality and in people’s minds” (100).

Even though Osterhammel acknowledges the impact of mass mobility and the transportation revolution on transatlantic relations in the second half of the 19th century, he still reinforces the notion that the Atlantic space was submerged by the high seas of modern globalization. Remarkably, he relegates the North American experience to a rather marginal position precisely during the decades that saw the US evolving from a postcolonial outpost to a great economic and technological power closely integrated with the major global transnational currents, at least from the time of the Civil War. It is no accident that *The Transformation of the World* lists about 30 entries on the US and 90 on China in its rich table of contents. To Osterhammel, focusing on what makes the modern Atlantic world peculiar and how modernity plays a role in defining the contours of this world seem irrelevant if not utterly unacceptable, tainted by the bias of present-mindedness: “Historians today need not allow political rhetoric to drive them into making essentialist statements about Europe. Their discipline is in the fortunate position of being able to leave behind political-ideological struggles over the conception of Europe” (906).

Thus, not only does the crucial issue of the origins and causes of Western hegemony in the modern world go inevitably unanswered, as Enzo Traverso has remarked,¹³ but the very possibility to conceptualize the modern Atlantic as a subfield of study is also undermined. Just like in Atlantic history, patterns of periodization and the issue (or specter?) of presentism in global history make it very problematic to look at the modern Atlantic as a historical unit of analysis. As a result, the critique of the West as a civilizational block and an imperial ideology, and the challenge to traditional, Eurocentric visions and practices of historical research based on political history and the primacy of the nation-state end up implicitly ignoring, if not openly contesting, the modern Atlantic space as both a “mental map” adopted by those who lived during the 19th and 20th centuries and a relevant scale for the study of modern international history.

¹³ E. Traverso, *Rethinking the Nineteenth Century. On Jürgen Osterhammel's The Transformation of the World, "Constellations"*, vol. 21, 3, 2014, pp. 425-431.

2. The modern Atlantic as mental map

Before it became a tool for historians, the Atlantic space had been a metageographical notion by which actors from all walks of life on both sides of the ocean situated their experience in a context that could hardly be understood through local or national lenses. The awareness of being part of a dense international and transnational network of exchanges, risks, opportunities, actions and reactions spread across the Atlantic throughout the “long 19th century” and beyond.

Unexpected and somewhat obscure yet unequivocal evidence of such Atlantic awareness is provided by the history of the Italian states in the 1830s. When Piedmont established diplomatic relations with the US, Foreign Affairs Minister Clemente Solaro della Margarita wrote the following in his instructions to his *chargé d'affaires* in Washington, Augusto Avogadro di Collobiano:

Nos relations avec l'Amérique septentrionale paraîtraient au premier coup d'œil ne devoir être que des relations purement commerciales, vue la distance qui nous sépare, mais les distances se rapprochent aujourd'hui par la multiplication des voies de communication et les rapports sans nombre qui se sont établis entre l'ancien et le nouveau monde ont créé entre eux une telle complication d'intérêt que toute commotion politique qui se prépare ou qui surgit dans l'un des deux continents doit avoir, nécessairement un grand retentissement dans l'autre. Les traités de commerce cachent souvent des vues politiques ou du moins peuvent leur être associés¹⁴.

By the end of the 1830s the transportation revolution was in full swing as steamers dramatically cut short the duration and increased the regularity of transatlantic crossings, thus deeply affecting the circulation of goods and people in terms of cost and volume. The instructions given to the first *chargé d'affaires* of an Italian state in the New World must be read in the light of this transformation, as well as in the context of the “Western question” originated by the collapse of the Spanish empire in the Americas, the wave of Latin American independence movements and the consequent competition for commercial and political influence in the region. The US government and European monarchies all greatly extended their consular and

¹⁴ Solaro della Margarita, Instructions to Avogadro di Collobiano, Chargé d'affaires of the Kingdom of Sardinia in the United States, 7 December 1838, registro 292, Archivio del Ministero degli Esteri del Regno di Sardegna, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma.

diplomatic networks at a time when trade was recovering and liberal and republican ideas were spreading across the ocean, thus creating a vital connective tissue that proved instrumental for the integration of the modern Atlantic world.¹⁵

A few years later, the shrinking of the Atlantic that so alarmed the champion of legitimist reaction Solaro della Margarita was greeted with hope by the great African American leader and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. In 1846 he crossed the Atlantic to participate in the World's Temperance Convention in London. His subsequent triumphant tour through England helped inspire one of his most influential speeches, delivered in 1852:

A change has now come over the affairs of mankind. Walled cities and empires have become unfashionable. The arm of commerce has borne away the gates of the strong city. Intelligence is penetrating the darkest corners of the globe. It makes its pathway over and under the sea, as well as on the earth. Wind, steam, and lightning are its chartered agents. Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together. From Boston to London is now a holiday excursion. Space is comparatively annihilated. -- Thoughts expressed on one side of the Atlantic are distinctly heard on the other.¹⁶

In fact, Douglass had made his ocean crossing aboard a segregated Cunard Lines steamer where he had barely survived an attempt by American travelers to throw him off the boat. However, his two-year stay overseas helped shape his vision as well as the transnational character and international influence of the abolitionist movement, which by 1848 was part of a larger transatlantic exchange between reformist and revolutionary movements.

As connections between the Old World and the New were reinforced by technological progress, a new, modern Atlantic space took shape and replaced the old one based on colonial empires and the slave trade. It is therefore unsurprising that more and more people began adopting an Atlantic mindset just as technology began transforming the circulation of information to such an extent that the ocean started being seen as not only a barrier but also a bridge. The inauguration of the transatlantic cable in 1858 triggered a wave of celebrations

¹⁵ P. Butel, *Histoire de l'Atlantique de l'antiquité à nos jours*, Perrin, Paris 1997, pp. 243-47; G. Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution 1815-60*, Rinehart, New York 1951; R. Blaufarb, *The Western Question. The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence*, "American Historical Review", 112, 3 (June 2007), pp. 742-763. On 19th-century consular and diplomatic networks see M.S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy 1450-1919*, London-New York: Longman, 1993; F. de Goey, *Consuls and the Institutions of Global Capitalism, 1783-1914*, Pickering & Chatto, London 2014 e D.C.M. Platt, *The Cinderella service. British consuls since 1825*, Longman, London 1971.

¹⁶ F.J. Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York on July 5 1852" in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 1, ed. J. Blassingame et al., (5 voll., Yale UP, New Haven 1979-1992), II, pp. 359-388.

carrying unmistakable emotional and ideological overtones. According to the London *Times*, “The Atlantic is dried up, and we become in reality as well as in wish one country. The Atlantic Telegraph has half undone the Declaration of 1776, and has gone far to make us once again, in spite of ourselves, one people”¹⁷. While the beginnings of this modern Atlantic space were to some extent Anglo-American, in the decades between the mid-19th century and World War I it came to include large chunks of Western Europe and Latin America thanks to dense networks of commercial, financial and migratory flows as well as cultural and political exchanges.

Mass migration from Europe to the Americas is a case in point, both for its magnitude (51 million Europeans moved to the New World from the time of the Napoleonic wars to the Great Depression) and because it reflected and amplified multiple connections (technological, economic, demographic, political and cultural) spanning the Northern and Southern Atlantic. This unprecedented access to transoceanic mobility accounts for “the widespread and deep-rooted habit to see America as a possible resource” by those living in 19th century Liguria, as documented by Italian historian Antonio Gibelli. Increased mobility helped create bonds of affection that intertwined with the impersonal forces of the Atlantic economy. As a progressive priest working on the education of poor peasants in the Vara Valley wrote in 1875: “my pupils are scattered all over the world, some of them are soldiers, many are in Prussia, Russia, France, in the United States, many in California, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Lima and not even one that I know is oblivious of my affection, and all, all of them write me letters.”¹⁸ The rise of nation-states and the consequent increase of borders stopped neither mass migrations nor any other force behind Atlantic integration. On the contrary, ideologies and practices of “nation building”, while inevitably particularistic in their outlook, shared several important traits, and their widespread circulation through Europe and the Americas in the mid-19th century helped shape a sense of belonging to a community of modern and “civilized” nations that defined itself by its opposition to a barbarian “other.” In the second half of the 19th century colonial power took a new direction, as J.R. McNeill wrote: “within the confines of the Atlantic world, colonialism had begun to take on a north-south profile more than an east-west one ... It was as if geopolitics now recognized the tectonic plates that underlie the

¹⁷ quoted in I. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation. US History in Global Perspective since 1789*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007, p. 25.

¹⁸ quoted in A. Gibelli, *La risorsa America*, in A. Gibelli e P. Rugafiori (a cura di), *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Liguria*, Einaudi, Torino 1994, p. 601.

continents, separating the Old World from the New.”¹⁹ However, far from disintegrating the Atlantic world, the transition from a longitudinal to a latitudinal axis as the organizing principle of international power gave it a geopolitical and ideological dimension eventually encapsulated by Walter Lippmann’s enduring notion of an “Atlantic community.” In 1917, as the civilized West was being devastated by total war, he wrote in *The New Republic*: “Britain, France, even Spain, Belgium, Holland, the Scandinavian nations and Pan-America are in the main one community in their deepest needs and their deepest purposes . . . we cannot betray the Atlantic Community by submitting . . . what we must fight for is the common interest of the Western world, the integrity of the Atlantic powers.”²⁰

In sum, during the so-called long 19th century a new awareness of Atlantic connections took shape and helped mold the mental maps of reactionaries, revolutionaries, migrants and pundits across class, political, national and racial lines. It was a sort of transatlantic “imagined community” circulated mostly, but not exclusively, by the printed media. These mental maps helped shape a modern Atlantic space that gradually shifted to the North throughout the 20th century as a consequence of the marginalization of Africa and the increasingly peripheral role played by Latin America in the world economy, though we cannot dismiss this shift as a Anglo-American special relationship writ large. Finally, this modern Atlantic space was neither a civilizational block nor the advanced stage of linear, inevitable progress but, rather, a field of interactions whose distinctive features were the density of its connections and its ability to stimulate attraction as well as revulsion in other world regions.

3. The modern Atlantic: long, dense, connected

Mental maps help bring to light the qualitative and subjective factor, which is rarely investigated, if not totally ignored, by those who maintain that the modern Atlantic space fades away amid the undifferentiated ocean of globalization. Scholars taking globalist and quantitative approaches have shown how innovations in transportation and communication tested out in the Atlantic space were applied elsewhere just a few decades later. They have also stressed that areas of intense circulation of goods and people existed in other world regions as

¹⁹ J.R. McNeill, “The End of the Old Atlantic World. America, Africa, Europe, 1770-1888” in Karras-McNeil, *Atlantic American Societies*, p. 265.

²⁰ W. Lippmann, *The Defense of the Atlantic World*, “The New Republic”, 17 February 1917.

well. However, a quantitative approach focused mainly on the volume of demographic and commercial flows, the mileage of railways, the tonnage of merchant ships and the convergence of commodities prices seems ill-equipped to capture the peculiar density, multiplicity and diffusional power of Atlantic connections throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The transnational turn that has been transforming the study of American history over the last twenty years has helped bring these Atlantic peculiarities to light. Two broad-ranging, groundbreaking volumes by Thomas Bender and Ian Tyrrell have successfully provided a new synthesis that challenges the exceptionalist narrative and the primacy of the nation-state in the understanding of American history. While not explicitly embracing an Atlantic framework, these works *de facto* shed light on how the Atlantic space has helped shape the American experience throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and, consequently, point to the need to problematize the modern Atlantic as a unit of historical analysis²¹. In fact, Bender has argued elsewhere that the periodization of Atlantic history should be recast so as to include modern history: “If most of those scholars who sail under the flag of the Atlantic world do not carry their inquiries beyond the age of revolution, the topic remains ... The Atlantic and global connections and comparisons that have been so illuminating from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries need to be carried forward into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where they promise to be just as fruitful.”²²

In a similar vein, Donna Gabaccia has explicitly addressed the need for a new periodization and spatialization of the Atlantic world in an important essay published in the first issue of *Atlantic Studies*, a journal dedicated to promoting a multidisciplinary, transnational approach to the Atlantic space and defying rigid periodization patterns.²³ Her essay launched a three-fold challenge: a long-term analysis of specific features of Atlantic flows across established chronological boundaries; interaction between different research currents focusing on the Atlantic economy, the circulation of goods and workers, and the African diaspora, respectively; and, finally, the quest for an interdisciplinary approach to the modern Atlantic. However, even a cursory look at the recent literature shows how these challenges have been only partially met. Over ten years later there remains a gap between the amount of new research tackling single

²¹ T. Bender, *A Nation among Nations. America's Place in World History*, Hill & Wang, New York 2006; Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation*.

²² T. Bender, *Foreword*, in J. Cañizares Eguerra-E. Seeman (eds), *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000*, Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River 2007, pp. xx-xxi.

²³ D. Gabaccia, *A Long Atlantic in a Wider World*, “Atlantic Studies”, vol. 1, 1, 2004, pp. 1-27.

aspects of transatlantic relations and the lack of a methodological debate on the modern Atlantic. What follows is an overview of the three major currents of this vast, diverse literature, with an emphasis on research addressing 19th century developments, which is somewhat less circulated and discussed.

The contribution of the cliometric approach to the study of the 19th century Atlantic economy as a crucial step towards modern globalization has resonated in the public sphere, for example in debates over international trade and migrations, but it seems a bit removed from the conversation with other historical approaches. In their influential study based on international commodities prices, Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson maintain that the decline in transportation costs and consequently prices that took place in the North Atlantic in the first half of the 19th century was a turning point in the history of economic globalization: “the date for big bang theories of global economic history should be the 1820s, not the 1490s.”²⁴ This reading sheds light on the periodization of globalization, but it overlooks its spatial dimension. The geographic contours of the Atlantic economy are taken for granted and the transition from the Atlantic to the global scale is hardly problematized, as it seems to occur according to a natural pattern of “evolution.”²⁵

Similarly, several works by global historians acknowledge the pivotal role played by the North Atlantic economy during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. In the words of Steven C. Topik and Allen Wells, “our approach acknowledges the central role that Western European and North American capitalists, laborers, and technology played in the metamorphosis of world trade and finance and agrees that entrepreneurs on both sides of the North Atlantic were fundamental to the era’s profound transformations.”²⁶ However, they also stress how the recognition of such a central role has been exaggerated and has helped obscure developments in other world regions often described as passive and static according to a typically Eurocentric and orientalist view of the “other.”

²⁴ K. O’Rourke-J. Williamson, *When Did Globalization Begin?*, “European Review of Economic History”, vol. 6, 1, 2002, p. 37. On the relation between quantitative approaches and exceptionalism see E. Rauchway, *More Means Different: Quantifying American Exceptionalism*, “Reviews in American History”, vol. 30 (2002), pp. 504-516.

²⁵ K. O’Rourke-J. Williamson, *Globalization and History: the Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1999.

²⁶ S. Topik, A. Wells, *Commodity Chains in a Global Economy*, in E. Rosenberg, *A World Connecting, 1870-1945*, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2012, p. 596.

Another challenge to prevailing patterns of Atlantic periodization and spatialization comes from the transnational approach to Latin American independence. From this perspective, far from being a rigid demarcation separating the old colonial regime from the rise of republican nation-states, the 1810s and 1820s were a time of transition in which the intertwining of preexisting imperial structures with new political, economic and social dynamics transformed relations between Latin America and Europe. The critique of prevailing nation-based and teleological approaches to independence movements allows us to tackle the hybrids that were created out of the old imperial structures and the new national states, the quest for abolition and the enduring legacy of slavery. Undermining the rigid partition between early modern and modern eras leads one to think in terms of a “long Atlantic” that, in the case of Latin America, embraces the abolitions of the 1880s and, according to some, the Spanish-American War.²⁷

Finally, the third and, as stated above, most influential body of literature that significantly contributed to a rethinking of the modern Atlantic space is provided by the transnational turn in the study of US history. The internationalization of American history often ends up illuminating an Atlantic landscape that, while closely integrated with the global context, is also a discrete unit of analysis. Economic connections are once again a case in point. Already in the early 1990s Ian Tyrrell was arguing that “the Atlantic trading network is, for much of American history, a key region within which to explore links of a transnational kind. This need not entail the old project of the United States as an extension of European civilization or, still less, English colonialism”²⁸. Since then, scholars have made significant progress in exploring the links connecting the modern Atlantic world by taking a transnational approach to American history understood as a “way of seeing,”²⁹ a reading of the national past that cuts across both national boundaries and barriers between subfields.

While research on the economic and financial integration of the US in the Atlantic and global space has focused mostly on the post-Civil War era, recent studies show how such integration was already affecting antebellum America. Jay Sexton argues that mid-19th century US foreign

²⁷ M. Brown, G. Paquette (eds.), *Connections after Colonialism. Europe and Latin America since the 1820s*, U. of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa 2013; C. Thibaud-G. Entin-A. Gómez-F. Morelli, *L'Atlantique Révolutionnaire. Une Perspective Ibéro-Américaine*, Les Perséides, Bêcherel 2013.

²⁸ I. Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review*, 96 (4) 1991, p. 1040. See also Sven Beckert’s remarks in *AHR Conversation: on Transnational History*, “American Historical Review”, (Dec. 2006), p. 1463.

²⁹ “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review*, December 2006, p. 1454.

policy was influenced by American financial dependence on British banks, and that this financial link between London and New York was part of a complex pattern of integration and competition that lasted for much of the 19th century. Similarly, Sam Haynes has investigated the financial dependence and “commercial slavery” of the US within the framework of the “unfinished revolution”, that is, American cultural and political subordination vis à vis the British empire. And Gabaccia has studied the implications of US activism in commercial diplomacy throughout the prewar decades. Indeed, the signing of dozens of bilateral treaties with countries around the world (14 in Europe, 8 in the Americas, 4 in Asia and 2 in Africa signed between 1815 and 1848) laid the legal and material foundations for the massive flows of goods and people that encompassed a mostly Atlantic space for decades and eventually spilt over into the global scale.³⁰

These economic links intertwined with others to help shape an Atlantic space that was by no means exclusively “white.” The recent surge of research on the Haitian revolution, long forgotten and not included by historians among the “Atlantic revolutions,” shows that a transatlantic framework informed the fears and the hopes fueled by that event. On the one hand, the widespread dread that the contagion of racial revolution might spread to the Western hemisphere and eventually to North American shores turned into a legitimization of white supremacy in the American South, which billed itself as the bulwark against miscegenation and abolitionism, considered tools of British imperialism. On the other hand, the Haitian precedent inspired the radical wings of the abolitionist movement and reinforced the opinion held in moderate circles that a gradual process towards emancipation was needed to prevent a revolutionary outcome.³¹

The transnational approach to abolitionism reinforces the notion that the modern Atlantic was also a “black Atlantic” and, at the same time, it rescues from oblivion the connections

³⁰ J. Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy. Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873*, Oxford UP, New York 2005 e *The Monroe Doctrine. Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America*, Hill & Wang, New York 2011; S. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World*, U. of Virginia Press, Charlottesville 2010; D. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations. American Immigration in Global Perspective*, Princeton UP, Princeton 2012, cap. 1 which stresses the relevance of the global scale. Jessica Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis*, Cambridge. Eng., Cambridge UP 2013.

³¹ M. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Revolution*, U. of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2009; D. Geggus (ed.), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, U. of South Carolina Press, Columbia 2001; A. Gomez, *Le spectre de la révolution noire. L'impact de la révolution haïtienne dans le monde atlantique, 1790-1886*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 2013; Jean M. Hébrand and Rebecca J. Scott, *Freedom Papers. An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation*, Cambridge: Harvard UP 2012; A. White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 2010.

between abolitionism, capitalism and social reform. Seen through an Atlantic lens, the prewar abolitionist movement must also be understood as part of the campaigns for free trade that were part and parcel of the quest for economic freedom typical of 19th century liberalism. That movement was also affected by the European revolutions of 1848, which sent multiple shock waves across the Atlantic with the abolition of slavery in French and Danish possessions as well as the fear of Marxist inspired social revolution spreading to the New World. Finally, framing the history of abolitionism within a larger, Atlantic context is relevant for the study of the causes of the American Civil War, which is better understood in the light of the abolition of slavery in the British empire and its impact in the Caribbean.³²

In sum, these transnational perspectives on prewar America stress how, far from being disarticulated in isolated fragments or submerged by the high tide of globalization, the Atlantic space at midcentury was taking shape as a particularly dense and complex field of interactions. Legacies of the past (slavery and abolition) interacted with new factors like the transportation revolution, the mass circulation of goods people, and cultural products, and finally the transfer of reformist and revolutionary movements formed within Euro-American societies throughout their modernization processes. **Needless to say, these processes did not take place in a vacuum but, rather, were entangled with local, national, and global ones. In a recent, stimulating exchange on pre-Civil War America in the *Journal of American History* several historians argued that the prevailing view which posits the early 19th century as a time of transition “from an Atlantic world to a global one” applies to US history as well. Yet, their engaging discussion of the limits of the globalization framework points to several unresolved issues: an “innocent imagining of the global” that obscures power relations, the ideological implications inherent in the absolutization of any given *scale*, the adoption of a globalizing jargon that obscures Atlantic, Pacific, and other spatially-defined processes of convergence.**³³

³² R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP 1983; E. Dal Lago, ‘We Shared the Same Hostility to Every Form of Tyranny’: *Transatlantic Parallels and Contacts between William Lloyd Garrison and Giuseppe Mazzini, 1846-1872*, “American Nineteenth Century History”, 13 (3, 2012), pp. 1-27; M.W. Palen, *Free-Trade Ideology and Transatlantic Abolitionism: A Historiography*, “Journal of the History of Economic Thought”, vol. 37, n. 2, June 2015, pp. 291-304 e *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade. The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2016; T. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions. 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism*, U. of Virginia Press, Charlottesville 2009; E. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation. The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*, Louisiana State UP, Baton Rouge 2008.

³³ “Interchange: Globalization and Its Limits between the American Revolution and the Civil War”, *Journal of American History*, Sept. 2016, pp. 400-33. See also François Furstenberg, “The Significance of the Trans-

The Atlantic convergence was reinforced in subsequent decades, first with the communication revolution and the acceleration of nation building and later with the Second Industrial Revolution and the imperial turn, all of which had a deep and lasting impact within the Atlantic scale and, later, the global one.

A transnational approach to the American Civil War also contributes to a re-periodization of the Atlantic space that looks ahead towards the major currents of the transatlantic exchange throughout the 19th and 20th centuries at least as much as it looks back at the continuities with the colonial era. This body of literature by no means questions that slavery was the fundamental cause of a war that, in this respect, is still seen as peculiarly American. Rather, it situates that war within the rise of the territorial nation-state, meant as a tool to overcome old imperial patterns and achieve the self-determination typical of 19th century liberalism. In this light, the fact that the Civil War took place at the same time that nation building was occurring in Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Germany and Italy between the 1850s and the 1870s is due to the transnational and at times diasporic circulation of an “Atlantic liberalism” that came of age in 1848 and facilitated transnational convergence in areas like civil and military bureaucracy as well as economic policies until the 1870s, when nationalism began to prevail over liberalism as the organizing principle within old and new national states.³⁴

The recasting of these distinct but analogous cases of nation building within an Atlantic scale has led some historians to list them among the preconditions of modernization processes that took place in the second half of the 19th century and were significantly accelerated by the second industrial revolution. However, do we really have quintessentially Atlantic “trajectories of modernization” culminating between the end of the 19th century and the trauma of World War I?

Hans Jürgen Puhle has maintained that the early modern and modern Atlantic space is characterized by patterns of modernization that, despite national and regional differences, share varying degrees of industrialization, democratization and bureaucratization. According

Apalachian Frontier in Atlantic History,” Vol. 113, n. 3 (June 2008), 647-77; Rosemarie Zagari, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn’ in the Early American Republic: Globalization in the Age of Nation-Building,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 31 (spring 2011), 1-37.

³⁴ T. Bender, *A Nation Among Nations*, cap. 3; D. Gleeson-S. Lewis (eds.), *The Civil War as Global Conflict. Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia 2014; B. Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of the Union. Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War*, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore 2009; D. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War*, Basic Books, New York 2015. For an engaging overview of the state of the art is provided see *Interchange: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War*, “Journal of American History”, Sept. 2011, pp. 455-489.

to this long-term perspective, while the European way prevailed in the early stages of the process, the diffusion of the modern state in the Americas and the rise of the US as a global player later led to the rise of an “Atlantic” or “Western modernization.” Through transatlantic exchange, the European matrix was adapted to the context of the New World and then throughout the 20th century the North American version prevailed and affected modern globalization in significant ways: “The Atlantic system has never been a one-way street, and it has always implied, at some critical junctures more than others, processes of transcontinental, transatlantic learning, though mostly not among equals: at certain points, some had to learn more than others, and for a long time some could afford to learn less.”³⁵

In a somewhat similar vein, although from a vantage point that is much less centered on Europe and political institutions, José Moya has discussed modern transatlantic exchanges as multiple, multidirectional interactions in which the impact of economic, technological, social, demographic, cultural and political modernization processes was more profound than in the past and, until World War I, affected the Atlantic space much more than the global one. In his view, modernity had turned from “ideology” into “way of life” by the turn of the 20th century, thus transforming the everyday life of millions of individuals, while in the early modern era and somewhat beyond that it had only affected elite circles. While such a transformation was becoming a mass phenomenon, its geographic range was mostly limited to Europe and the Americas, with some later extensions to other world regions. Before the turning point of World War I, for example, classic indicators of modernization like postal services and railways remained mostly exclusive to the Atlantic world. And while many of its protagonists felt at the time that they embodied global trends and embraced a universalistic outlook, their range and influence was far from global. While anarchist ideals were circulated by newspapers like *Universal*, *Hijos del Mundo* and *Dos Vraie Vort*, that circulation was mostly Euro-American. The same was true for May Day celebrations, which were typically enveloped by the rhetoric of Marxist internationalism.³⁶

These trajectories of modernization carve out multiple, changing geographies inside and outside the Atlantic space. As they intersect with other trajectories, they help generate the

³⁵ H.J. Puhle, *Trajectories of Western Modernization Around the Atlantic: One World or Many?*, in H. Pietschmann (ed.), *Atlantic History. History of the Atlantic System, 1580-1830*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2002, p. 550.

³⁶ J. Moya, *Modernization, Modernity, and the Trans/formation of the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century*, in J. Cañizares Eguerra-E. Seaman (eds), *The Atlantic in Global History*, pp. 179-198.

networks and patterns of exchanges that global historians have brought to light. These networks, however, are not center-less. Their centers are, rather, connected by multiple links as well as by hierarchies of political, cultural and economic power. The transnational turn in American history has made another significant contribution here. By stressing the continuities, transformation and growing influence of Atlantic connections in the modern world, it has also shed light on the differences and hierarchies of power among the centers of globalization. In this respect, scholars who have shaped the research in their subfields include Samuel Baily, Donna Gabaccia, Dick Hoerder and Jose Moya on mass migrations to the Americas³⁷ and James Kloppenberg, Daniel Rodgers and Axel Schafer on the social policies and reformist experiences that developed in response to the Second Industrial Revolution.³⁸

In a similar way, much of the recent literature on the turn-of-the-century imperial turn in the US points to the way that trajectories of modernization and geographies of power overlapped within the Atlantic space, with significant consequences outside of it. While several studies have emphasized how US imperialism in the Caribbean and the Pacific was informed by attitudes and policies forged during the westward expansion and the “Indian removal”, others are now showing how the US borrowed imperial policies from European colonial powers, especially the British empire. By questioning the primacy of the national tradition and the domestic realm, this transnational way of seeing has illuminated the role played by “transatlantic adaptation”³⁹ in expansionist policies and other fields.

In fact, the intensification of the transatlantic exchange at the turn of the century also had a strong cultural and ideological dimension, since it strongly undermined the oppositional dynamic between the New World and the Old that had been a foundational element of the political culture and public discourse of American republicanism for over a century. In the words of Daniel Rodgers, “for social policies to be borrowable across political boundaries,

³⁷ S. Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise. Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914*, Cornell UP, Ithaca 2004; D. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, University College London Press, London 2000; D. Hoerder (ed.), *Labor Migrations in the Atlantic Economies. The European and North-American Working Classes during the Period of Industrialization*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1985; J. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers. Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930*, U. of California Press, Berkeley 1998.

³⁸ J. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory. Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920*, Oxford UP, New York 1986; A. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875-1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context*, Steiner, Stuttgart 2000.

³⁹ F. Schumacher, *The American Way of Empire. National Tradition and Transatlantic Adaptation in America's Search for Imperial Identity, 1898-1910*, “German Historical Institut Bulletin”, Fall 2002, pp. 35-50. P. Kramer, *Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World*, “American Historical Review”, vol. 116 n. 5, December 2011, pp. 1348-1391; Hans Krabbendam and John M. Thompson, eds., *America's Transatlantic Turn: Theodore Roosevelt and the "Discovery" of Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

there must be not only a foundation of common economic and social experience but also a recognition of underlying kinship. The politics in question must be seen to face similar needs and problems, to move within shared historical frames, and to strive toward a commonly imagined future.”⁴⁰

To be sure, as a real field of interactions but also as an imagined community, this Atlantic world was tragically shaken but not obliterated by the first total war. In fact, a growing body of literature shows how the 1920s anticipated many of the fundamental forces that shaped post-World War II transatlantic relations such as financial interdependence, cooperation in international organizations, the impact of Americanization on mass culture and consumption, and the circulation of African American culture.

Finally, the enormous amount of research available on the international history of the decades after World War II can hardly be summarized here. Both the increasing adoption of a global outlook aimed at “provincializing” Europe and the West as well as the impact of sweeping methodological tides like the cultural turn have enriched and complicated the picture enormously⁴¹. The years between 1945 and the 1970s – a decade now widely acknowledged as a turning point for contemporary globalization⁴² – appear more complex and multifaceted than ever. Yet, despite the declining importance of Europe in the postwar era, these years also seem to witness the same tension between the Atlantic and the global scale that we have seen take place earlier.

The historiography of the Cold War is a case in point. As a subfield it is going through a dramatic renewal and an expansion of its research areas thanks to both a dialogue with cultural, social, gender and environmental history and the adoption of global scales and perspectives, as exemplified by Odd Arne Westad’s *The Global Cold War* and the multivolume *Cambridge History of the Cold War*.⁴³ While it is undeniable that this global turn has vastly increased our understanding of the connections between the Cold War, on the one hand, and

⁴⁰ D. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, p. 33.

⁴¹ J. Logemann-M. Nolan (eds), *More Atlantic Crossings? Europe’s Role in an Entangled History of the Atlantic World*, “German Historical Institute Bulletin”, Supplement 10 (2014). Per uno sguardo sistematico alla storiografia prodotti in vari settori delle relazioni transatlantiche si veda M. Vaudagna (ed.), *Modern European-American Relations in the Transatlantic Space. Recent Trends in History Writings*, Otto, Torino 2015.

⁴² T. Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*, Princeton UP, Princeton 2012; N. Ferguson-C. Maier-E. Manela (eds.), *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective*, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2010.

⁴³ O.A. Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Time*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2005. The best example of the expansion and diversification Cold war history is M. Leffler-O.A. Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2010.

decolonization, modernization, race, civil rights, etc. on the other, it is nonetheless questionable to view the global South as the crucial battlefield of a conflict whose epicenter was Europe. As Federico Romero maintains, “provincializing Europe is an epistemological necessity for global and international history, but hardly a scholarly strategy applicable to a conflict spawned in and about Europe, pivoted on the continent’s destiny, and eventually solved where it had its deepest and more relevant roots.”⁴⁴

Emerging from this literature is the need to recast the place of Europe and the Atlantic space within the global framework of the 20th century, including the post-World War II decades. The same is true for other influential studies addressing post-World War II transatlantic relations from different viewpoints. Classic interpretations like Charles Maier’s notion of a “consensual hegemony” exercised by the US over Western Europe or Geir Lundestad’s “empire by invitation” thesis share the implicit assumption that typically Atlantic preconditions and convergences made those relations possible.⁴⁵ Finally, recent, broad-ranging studies by Mary Nolan, Victoria De Grazia and David Ellwood, notwithstanding the significant differences between them, raise similar questions about the relationship between the Atlantic and the global scale, as do numerous works exploring specific issues related to mass society and consumption, political cultures and movements, European integration and the role played by “non state actors.”

We can discern three broad trends within this vast, diverse historiographical landscape: the impact of European perspectives, that is, of scholars whose origin, training or academic affiliation is European; the focus on long- and medium-term continuities in transatlantic convergence and interdependence; and the awareness that the postwar “Atlantic community” is to be situated within an interplay of regional, national and global scales that leaves no room for what Gabaccia has called “Atlantic parochialism.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ F. Romero, *Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads*, “Cold War History”, vol. 14 n.4, 2014, pp. 685-703.

⁴⁵ C. Maier, *The Politics of Productivity. Foundations of American Economic Policy after World War II*, “International Organization”, vol. 31 n. 4, 1977, pp. 607-633; G. Lundestad, *Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952*, “Journal of Peace Research”, n. 3, September 1986, pp. 263-277.

⁴⁶ M. Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century*; V. De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2005; D. Ellwood, *The Shock of America. Europe and the Challenge of the Century*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2012. See also C. Browning-M. Lehti (eds.) *The Struggle for the West. A Divided and Contested Legacy*, Routledge, New York 2010; F. Fasce-M. Vaudagna-R. Baritono (eds.), *Beyond the Nation: Pushing the Boundaries of U.S. History from a Transatlantic Perspective*, Otto, Torino 2013; M. Mariano (ed.), *Defining the Atlantic Community. Culture, Policies and Intellectuals in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, Routledge, New York 2010; L. Moore-M. Vaudagna (eds.), *The American Century in Europe*, Cornell UP, Ithaca 2003; K. Patel- K. Weisbrode (eds.), *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2013. On more specific aspects see, among others, M. Del Pero on the Europeanization of US foreign policy in *The Eccentric Realist. Henry Kissinger*

4. Conclusions

Global history is on the rise, as demonstrated by the wide acclaim for works like Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton* and the series *A History of the World* edited by Jürgen Osterhammel and Akira Iriye. In her introduction to the fifth volume of the series, Emily Rosenberg pays tribute to Christopher Bayly's attempt to come to terms with the tension between "the West and the rest" during the "great acceleration" that laid the groundwork for globalization between the second half of the 19th and the first half the 20th century. As Rosenberg writes, "although Euro-Americans played a significant role in the creation and spread of modernity in this era, the many social and cultural networks that increasingly crisscrossed the globe helped to coproduce and accelerate the transformations."⁴⁷

Rosenberg's essay is an eloquent demonstration of the great potential of this global outlook, which is revitalizing historical studies by calling into question how the historical profession has conceptualized time and space until now. The same is true for Atlantic history, which shares with global history both an emphasis on transnational trends and a quest for a decentered, non-Eurocentric look at international history.

The potential of these approaches inevitably entails some risks as well. Downplaying power relations as the cause of differences and asymmetries between the hubs of globalization and as the engines of global connections is one of them. Another risk is to read history backwards by over-emphasizing limited, superficial experiences of mobility, hybridization etc. and magnifying them as harbingers of globalization. Finally, as far as the critique of Eurocentrism is concerned, it is hardly surprising that the overtones of some of its proponents turned out to be no less ideological than certain apologists of Western primacy.

The aim of this essay is to stimulate a conversation about the need to conceptualize the modern Atlantic space as a field of interactions that stands out for the density and multiplicity of the connections that shaped it, its diffusional influence and its hegemonic projection vis à

and the Reshaping of American Foreign Policy, Cornell UP, Ithaca 2006; S. Giovacchini on the "celluloid Atlantic" in John Kitzmiller, *Euro-American Difference, and the Cinema of the West*, "Black Camera", 6, 2, Spring 2015, pp. 17-41 and G. Scott-Smith on US cultural diplomacy in Europe in *Networks of Empire: The US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain, 1950-1970*, Peter Lang, Brussels 2008.

⁴⁷ E. Rosenberg, "Transnational currents in a shrinking world," in *A World Connecting, 1870-1945*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012, p. 815.

vis other centers of modern globalization. I argue that the reasons such a conversation is almost nonexistent are related to the rise of Atlantic and global history in international academia, although other causes outside academia are also at play.

As we have seen, anti-exceptionalist approaches to crucial chapters of US history – the post-revolutionary decades, the Civil War, the Second Industrial Revolution, the imperial turn and, finally, the rise of the “American century” with its peak in the globalizing 1970s – has brought to light transnational connections that were often situated within an Atlantic landscape. However, this diverse literature, which shares a way of seeing across national borders more than the adoption of a specific methodology, is not considered an integral part of Atlantic history. This is partly due to institutional factors. As Thomas Bender has noted, the prevailing notion within history departments in American universities is that 1815 represents the chronological endpoint of the Atlantic paradigm⁴⁸ (and in fact the same is true in Europe). However, there are more deeply rooted reasons for the omission of the modern Atlantic world as a unit of analysis, which is all the more striking considering the quantity and quality of studies exploring single aspects of the interactions shaping that space. One of these has to do with a widespread cultural and historiographical climate of opinion in which dealing with transatlantic relations as a legitimate subfield seems suspect by definition. Yet, recognizing the directionality of a given process at a given moment in time does not amount to providing a metahistorical narration or an ideological construct. Neither does acknowledging the peculiarities and diffusional power of the modern Atlantic space both as a field of interactions and as one of several templates for modernity amount to attempting an ex-post invention of a self-contained, isolated world region and even less so a civilizational block sealed by rigid, hermetic borders. While the borders of the modern Atlantic space were obviously porous and mobile, as Josè Moya wrote, “they delineated quite clearly a space where things were happening that were not happening – or happening with much less intensity – elsewhere.”⁴⁹ Emphasizing the porous, flexible nature of these borders should not imply the dissolution of that space in a space-less global world.

Conceptualizing the 19th and 20th century Atlantic as a historical and geographical unit of analysis is thus a difficult yet promising, and to some extent urgent, task. It is difficult because of the burden of “the West”, to which it is immediately associated. The challenge with “the

⁴⁸ T. Bender, *Positionality, Ambidexterity, and Global Frames*, in *Historians across borders*, p. 172.

⁴⁹ J. Moya, *Modernization, Modernity* in J. Cañizares Eguerra-E. Seaman (eds), *The Atlantic in Global History*, p. 195.

West,” as with any other meta-geographical construct, is to distinguish between its ideological uses and its historical and geographical realities; or, as Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen put it, to “point out the conventional and constructed nature of the fundamental ideas of global geography, while yet denying that they are *nothing but* social constructs; [...] [and] to uncover the political motivations behind metageographical conceptualizations, without implying that they are all reducible to strategic interests.”⁵⁰ On the other hand, such efforts to rethink the modern Atlantic are both promising and urgently needed in order to facilitate a more fruitful dialogue between different sub-disciplines, overcome methodological mistrust and suspicions, and eventually achieve the cosmopolitan ideal of a history without, or beyond, borders.

In a very effective passage of her essay in *A World Connecting*, Rosenberg suggests that defying false dichotomies is a precondition for understanding late 19th and early 20th century world history: “the emerging modernism of this increasingly networked era was one in which seemingly binary poles emerged as coproductive counterparts: *homogenization and differentiation, the global and the local, tras- or internationalism and nationalism, reason and spectacle. All of these sets are composed not of opposites but of vested complements that operated in creative tension with each other.*”⁵¹

If we want a similar creative tension to displace false dichotomies – between Atlantic and global scales, between early modern and modern eras – in our study of international history, then we must keep the history of the modern Atlantic world from becoming a history “that dares not speak its name.”

⁵⁰M. Lewis-K. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents. A Critique of Metageography*, U. of California Press, Berkeley 1997, p. 17 (italics in the original).

⁵¹ E. Rosenberg, “Transnational currents,” p. 821 (italics in the original).