

Article

# From Global Studies to Global Humanities

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**Abstract:** In contrast to the field of global studies, which has seen spectacular expansion and institutionalisation since the turn of the twenty-first century, there have to date been only a few attempts to promote or institutionalise global humanities as a field of study or research. Moreover, even though several disciplines in the humanities have undergone global turns in recent years, the humanities, with the exception of a certain brand of global history, are not prominent within the field of global studies. Against this background, this article surveys the various attempts that have been made in recent years to promote the concept of global humanities in the form of international scholarly networks, departments, and study programs, and the handful of attempts to sketch the outlines of a research agenda for global humanities. The strengths and limitations of the current approaches are discussed, and the articles advocating the notion of global humanities as a field or framework of research are brought into conversation with one another. Some common themes are identified in the literature on global humanities to date, such as the ambition for the field to be globally inclusive, critical, and transdisciplinary. Building on the recent global turns in some of the humanities disciplines and the steps that have been taken to purge these of traditional national and Eurocentric biases, global humanities should aim to develop frameworks of analysis that can be used to study all cultural expressions of humankind and to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding. Such an undertaking goes beyond the study of modern globalisation, which is the subject matter of global studies.

**Keywords:** global humanities; global studies; Eurocentrism; methodological nationalism; transdisciplinary research; global perspectives



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## 1. Introduction

Humanity today is facing several global challenges in areas such as biodiversity, climate change, health, war, international migration, economic and social inequality, democracy, and human rights, and dealing with them requires international and cross-cultural collaboration (e.g., [United Nations \[2015\] 2023](#)). To a large extent, the prospect for success of such collaboration depends on the abilities of people from different backgrounds to communicate and understand each other across national, linguistic, and cultural borders. Mutual understanding and meaningful cross-border communication in turn is facilitated by—and indeed often requires—knowledge of other societies' history, culture, and languages, as well as skills in translation and cross-cultural communication (cf. [Classen 2022](#)).

Such skills and knowledge are at the very heart of the humanities, and one might thus reasonably have expected the humanities to be thriving and to be top priorities in research and higher education across the world in recent years. Paradoxically, however, the opposite seems to be the case. As the need to find global solutions to humanity's major challenges has become ever more important, and as cross-cultural understanding and communication skills seem to be increasingly in demand in all kinds of international economic, social, political, and cultural contexts, the humanities have been constantly embattled and become ever more marginalised. Since the end of the twentieth century, if not before, the humanities have come under attack for, among other things, allegedly being irrelevant and instrumentally useless, tainted by political and ideological biases and

lacking in scientific rigour. Combined with funding cuts, lay-offs of tenured staff, and decreasing enrolments of undergraduate students, particularly in the United States, the attacks have led to a widespread and much debated feeling of a more or less perennial crisis in the humanities (e.g., [D'haen 2018](#); [Ahlburg 2019](#); [Reitter and Wellmon 2021](#)).

The purpose of this article, however, is not to contribute further to these lamentations or the discourse of crisis, but rather to turn the attention to one of the most promising attempts in recent years to break free from the discourse of crisis, namely the concept of global humanities. Based on the attempts that have been made to date to define global humanities, the article sets out to sketch a direction for future teaching and research in the field. Three main understandings of the concept of global humanities as it is being used today are identified, pertaining to academic networks, higher education and institutions, and frameworks of research. The article also highlights some of the problems and limitations associated with the ostensibly close or overlapping field of global studies and the marginal role of most humanities disciplines in that context. It is concluded that global humanities have the potential to flourish as a field of study separate from that of global studies. This can be achieved by embracing global perspectives but not confining them to the study of modern globalisation. It is also argued that the time is ripe for a broader conversation centred around the notion of global humanities with the aim of promoting global, inclusive, and transdisciplinary frameworks of analysis in the humanities. The purpose is for the humanities to take on the study of cultural and historical processes without geographic or chronological limitations and unfettered from the bonds of Eurocentrism and methodological nationalism, which often are associated with the traditional humanities disciplines as they have developed in the West (e.g., [Bhambra et al. 2018](#); [Trüper 2022](#)).

## 2. The Humanities and the Rise of Global Studies

Traditionally, the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*) consist of the academic disciplines, such as archaeology, art history, history, linguistics, literature studies, musicology, philology, philosophy, and religious studies, that investigate the expressions of the human mind ([Dilthey 1883](#)). As such, the humanities often trace their origins back to Antiquity, particularly Ancient Greece, but also—and increasingly in recent years—to the traditions of scholarship that emerged in other cultures and civilizations across the world, such as those of China, India, and Persia, as well as earlier in human history ([Bod 2013, 2022](#)). However, most of the humanities disciplines as we know them today were forged during the nineteenth century, when they were institutionalised under the influence of the German academic model formulated and promoted by, among others, Wilhelm von Humboldt. The program emphasised *Bildung* (generally translated as self-cultivation), much in contrast to the more practical and instrumentalist natural sciences. The study of the humanities was an important part of the nineteenth-century universities, not only in Germany but across the world, in part because the subject matters of the humanities, such as language, history, and culture, were instrumental in the nation-building processes at the time. The humanities thus came to occupy a prominent position, not only in research and higher education, but also in schools, museums, books, and print media ([Östling 2018](#); [Sorkin 1983](#)).

As a consequence of this historical development, the humanities, more than most other academic fields, became intimately linked to the nation-states. The fields of research and the analytical frameworks of the humanities were for the most part delimited by national borders, whether these were geographical, historical, cultural, or linguistic. The focus of interest was on European or Western history and culture, whereas the study of the rest of humanity often was relegated to a few specialised and relatively minor disciplines such as Oriental studies, religious studies, and certain sections of philology (cf. [Said 1978](#); [Shumway 1998](#)).

In the twentieth century, particularly after 1945, the humanities tended to become more critical of the nation-states and of nationalism, but these developments did not, for the most part, mean that the national frameworks of analysis were discarded. Only toward the end of the twentieth century, under the influence of globalisation and increasing criticism

against Eurocentric, colonial, and other exclusionary biases in academia, was the national paradigm challenged in more fundamental ways. By the early 2000s, the tendency to apply, without reflection or motivation, national frameworks of analysis in the humanities and social sciences came to be widely denoted by the negatively loaded term ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

Against this background, and under the influence of the intensified globalisation in the last decades of the twentieth century, several disciplines in the humanities (and the social sciences) began to turn toward more global perspectives. New disciplinary paradigms, such as global archaeology, global history, and world literature, came to the fore, emphasising connectivity and interaction across national, regional, cultural, linguistic, and religious borders and comparisons on regional, continental, or global scales. A central pillar of these new paradigms was (and is) the concerted attempts to do away with Eurocentrism and methodological nationalism.

History and archaeology are probably the two disciplines in the humanities in which this global turn has been most pronounced. With regard to history, advocates of global history have argued that the historiographical developments since the end of the twentieth century are nothing less than a paradigm shift (Manning 2003; cf. Conrad 2016). Today, global history has become institutionalised, with several international associations, recurring conferences, journals, study programs, and research centres being dedicated to the field. Similarly, the rise of global archaeology meant that the discipline moved from being a largely conservative endeavour linked to national heritage and narratives to become more globally inclusive and to put greater emphasis on interconnections and the relation between global processes and local developments (e.g., Orser et al. 2020). More recently, other disciplines have followed suit. The field of world literature, for example, has undergone a rapid institutionalisation since the beginning of the 2000s, and other disciplines, such as art history and philosophy, have also started to be affected by similar global imperatives (Damrosch 2003; Mukherji 2014; Brooks 2013; cf. Denecke 2021).

These developments in the humanities are sometimes subsumed under a broader, so-called global turn in the humanities and social sciences, the most obvious manifestation of which is the rapid rise and institutionalisation of global studies from around 1995. Fifteen years later, around 2010, the field had already become institutionalised, with several journals dedicated to global studies, scholarly associations, regular conferences, numerous research centres, and schools of global studies around the world, as well as hundreds of study programs in global studies at all levels (Juergensmeyer 2019). However, according to Eve Darian-Smith and Philip C. McCarty, the global turn was not delimited only to the field of global studies but was a “collective turn” across the humanities and social sciences disciplines to “engage with contemporary and historical processes of globalization, and their related global issues” (Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017, p. 2).

Many leading proponents of global studies are keen to point out that the field is inter- or multidisciplinary and that it spans not only the social sciences but also the humanities (e.g., Juergensmeyer 2013a, p. 767; Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017, p. 2; Steger 2019, p. 5). However, there is in fact a heavy bias toward the social sciences in global studies, both in research and in education. In that vein, Manfred B. Steger, in a recent attempt to define the field of global studies, singles out sociology, economics, anthropology, geography, history, and political science (in that order) as the key disciplines in the field (Steger 2019, p. 3; see also Pieterse 2013, p. 502). Of these, only history is generally classified and organised as a humanities discipline—although non unambiguously so, as historians are often found in faculties and schools of the social sciences, law, business, and economics as well. Moreover, as Wiebke Denecke has pointed out, history is the only core discipline of the humanities that is represented in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Global Studies* (Denecke 2021, p. 493; Juergensmeyer et al. 2019). Of the forty-six contributors to the handbook, only three are presented as scholars of a humanities discipline, all of whom are historians. The overwhelming majority of the contributors instead hold positions and/or degrees in

one or more of the social sciences, particularly sociology and political science, or adjacent disciplines such as international relations or international studies.<sup>1</sup>

The bias is visible in other influential books within global studies as well. Like in the *Oxford Handbook*, history is the only humanities discipline that is visibly represented in the reader *Thinking Globally* (Juergensmeyer 2013b). Eve Darian-Smith's and Philip C. McCarty's widely used introduction to the theories, research designs, and methods of global studies also lacks perspectives from the humanities, with the exception of a brief section about "Historical-Archival Research" in a chapter entitled "Global Methods and Methodologies" (Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017, pp. 133–36).

Given the focus of global studies on processes of globalization and related issues, the historical scholarship that is integrated in the field is dominated by one particular type of global history, that is, global history understood as the history of globalisation. This understanding of global history gained some influence in the 1990s, when some historians argued for a distinction between global history, understood as the history of globalisation, in contrast to world history, which was understood as a broader and more vague concept indicating an interest in "systematic processes and patterns among a wide variety of historical and natural phenomena that affected diverse populations" (Mazlish 1998, cit p. 387).

However, this narrow understanding of global history as the history of globalisation has few followers among global historians today, most of whom, by contrast, understand global history as defined by the focus on global connections and the ambition to link processes on different scales, particularly by means of microhistorical methods and perspectives (e.g., Wenzelhuemer 2019; Ghobrial 2019). Global history thus spans much more of human history than the history of globalisation, including premodern history, and most of what is currently in the frontlines of the field is consequently beyond the purview of global studies.

Another indication of the relative weight of the humanities and social sciences in global studies is the orientation of the study programs currently on offer in the field of global studies. A search for such programs in one of the major online directories of study programs on offer in Europe renders thirty-five hits, twenty-seven of which are listed as belonging to the social sciences, media studies, or law. Only two programs are listed in the humanities (Study.eu 2022).

These scattered observations should suffice to highlight the marginal position of the humanities in the field of global studies. The problem is further exacerbated by the weak influence, at least until very recently, of postcolonial or decolonial perspectives in global studies, which seems to be linked to a general lack of critical theory in the field (Hosseini et al. 2021, p. 6; cf. Pieterse 2013, pp. 504–5; Darian-Smith 2019). Moreover, on a different note, some humanities scholars seem to worry that the expansion of global studies has entailed a process of appropriation of the traditional fields of research of the humanities in which the social sciences have increasingly come to claim culture as 'their' field, resulting in a marginalisation of the humanities (e.g., Mersmann and Kippenberg 2016, p. 272).

For the present purposes, two problems associated with the rapid rise of global studies in relation to the humanities are of particular interest. The first concerns the scope of global studies, which is much narrower than that of the humanities. Whereas the former is dedicated to the "exploration of the many dimensions of globalization and other transnational phenomena", as put by Manfred Steger (Steger 2019, p. 3), the humanities are concerned with the expressions of the human mind without any inherent thematic, chronological, or geographical limitations. This is obviously a much vaster undertaking than studying modern globalisation and related transnational phenomena. Consequently, the global paradigms that have emerged in the humanities over the past thirty to forty years have generally not confined themselves only to the study of globalisation or transnational phenomena. Instead, scholars in fields such as global archaeology, global history, and world literature argue that their fields are defined by their global perspectives and

frameworks of analysis. By focusing on connectivity, circulation, and cultural exchange, and by moving away from Eurocentric and national paradigms, a better understanding of historical or cultural processes can be achieved compared with more narrow national or regional approaches. The scope of fields such as global archaeology, global history, and world literature are thus not limited to the study of globalisation (or its history), nor to transnational phenomena (which presupposes the existence of nations, often understood in the sense of modern nation-states), but can in principle be applied to any historical or cultural context.

The second problem concerns the object and scale of analysis. Global studies indeed covers a broad range of themes, including finance, labour, trafficking, migration, war and security, human rights, democracy, poverty, religion, art, urbanisation, multiculturalism, digitalisation, media, sport, food, health, climate, and the environment.<sup>2</sup> However, few scholars in the field of global studies seem interested in, for example, global philosophy, world literature, translation, or cross-cultural diplomacy in historical perspectives. Moreover, when themes that usually are within the scope of the humanities, such as art, music, or religion, are dealt with within the field of global studies, the focus tends to be on how these have been affected by economic globalisation and marketisation in modern or contemporary times. For example, a chapter of the *Oxford Handbook of Global Studies* on art confines itself to “art originating in a system of largely Western aesthetic values that, by default, are clearly located *within* the field of global capital” (Williams 2019, p. 495; emphasis in original). In other words, the expressions of the human mind, as seen from the perspective of global studies, can seem rather narrow, as they are studied through the lens of recent capitalist globalisation. This delimitation entails an obvious risk of tunnel vision and teleologism, which does little to foster deeper cross-cultural understanding based on long historical and truly global—as opposed to Western or European—perspectives.

For the humanities, these shortcomings of global studies can be seen an opportunity. By focusing not only on global macroprocesses in recent decades or centuries but on the expressions of the human mind globally and without chronological restraints or teleological biases, the humanities can produce globally useful knowledge, ultimately for the purpose of fostering mutual understanding and communication across national, regional, cultural, and linguistic borders.

### 3. The Meanings of Global Humanities

Whereas global studies is firmly established as a field of research and education, global humanities as a transdisciplinary field of study have not (yet) become institutionalised. The concept in itself only began to be used more frequently in the scholarly literature from around 2010, but there has to date been little discussion of its precise meaning and definition.<sup>3</sup> Global humanities can thus be seen as a “rather vague, amorphous notion,” as put by a recent critic (Theodore Hughes in Choi et al. 2019, p. 393).

Nonetheless, there have been a few concerted attempts to fill the concept of global humanities with more substance and to promote it as a point of departure for scholarly endeavours. In the current international scholarly context, the term global humanities is used in three major different ways: to denote international networks of scholars and institutions in the humanities; as a title of departments, programs, and majors in higher education; and as a new direction of studies and research in the humanities. More rarely, global humanities is also sometimes used to denote international surveys and studies of the state of the humanities in different parts of the world, such as the Columbia Global Humanities Project, which in 2014 assembled a group of scholars and policymakers from Africa, the Arab world, South Asia, East Asia, and the United States in order to discuss and compare the state of the humanities in these regions and countries against the backdrop of the perceived crisis in the humanities across the world (Pollock 2017). For the most part, however, the preferred term in such surveys and global comparisons seems to be world humanities. For example, the result of a Dutch-Swedish initiative to assess the state of the humanities worldwide was published under the title *Humanities World Report*

2015 (Holm et al. 2015). Another similar initiative, commissioned by the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI) and the International Council of Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH), is currently underway and will be published under the title of *World Humanities Report* (Guyer, forthcoming; see also Guyer 2022).

Returning to the three main uses of the concept of global humanities, there is considerable variation in how the term is understood. First, regarding networks of scholars and institutions, global humanities seems to be used as a relatively broad label for initiatives that involve some kind of international collaboration within the humanities. For example, the Global Humanities Network, established in 2020, consists of eight universities in Chile, China, India, Lebanon, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The network organises virtual seminars and runs a mobility scheme for faculty and students with the aim of promoting global connections, structures, and energy that “will enable radical new ways of engaging in and directing the Humanities for the benefit of all” (Global Humanities Network 2022).

Another initiative is the Academy of Global Humanities and Critical Theory, a collaboration between the University of Bologna, Duke University, and the University of Virginia, and which aims to provide an “intellectual space for scholars coming from different research fields and geographical regions to work together on the redefinition of the humanities in a global age” (Academy of Global Humanities and Critical Theory 2022). The Global Humanities Project, meanwhile, is a collaboration between George Washington University in the United States, Bogazici University in Turkey, and Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, and has a similar objective (George Washington University 2022). Yet another initiative is a program, run by the CHCI with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, that funds so-called Global Humanities Institutes. The institutes enable researchers in the humanities to meet and collaborate around a specific research theme, practice, problem, or method, preferably involving scholars from three or four humanities centre or institutes in three different regions of the world. All of the four current institutes involve research institutions both in the Global North (particularly the United States but also Europe and Australia) and the Global South (in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) (CHCI 2022).

These and other similar initiatives have some common characteristics. All of the networks and programs are coordinated by resource-strong universities or consortia located or based in the Global North, although most of them also involve partners in the Global South. The focus is on stimulating research collaboration in the form of meetings, workshops, or longer institutes, and to encourage international mobility of faculty and students. The degree to which the concept of global humanities is defined varies, but generally it seems to be understood as a broad term that can include very different research themes and perspectives as long as the activities involve international collaboration.

Most of the networks—with the exception of the CHCI, which gathers around 250 humanities centres and institutes around the world—are closed and in principle limited to the institutions involved. Moreover, the conferences and workshops about the concept of global humanities that have been organised by the networks mentioned above and other organisations during the past decade have for the most part also been closed events with invited speakers and participants from certain institutions only.<sup>4</sup> All of this stands in contrast to the major international networks and organisations in the field of global studies. For example, the Global Studies Research Network and the Global Studies Association (and their annual conferences) are both open to individual members regardless of institutional affiliation (Global Studies Research Network 2022; Global Studies Association 2022).

Another common indicator of the institutionalisation of a field of research is the establishment of scholarly journals, and there are as of yet no influential international journals dedicated to global humanities. For example, the citation database Scopus contains no journals containing both of the words ‘global’ and ‘humanities’ in the title. By contrast, the database indexes eleven journals which have both the words ‘global’ and ‘studies’ in the title.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, in the second understanding of the concept of global humanities, as a field of higher education, there are signs of institutionalisation. Many universities now offer programs and degrees in global humanities, from the BA to the PhD levels. Most of these seem to be based in North America, where dozens of universities and colleges offer majors and programs in global humanities, but there are also global humanities programs in, for example, Italy, Sweden, and Japan. However, there is considerable variation regarding the contents of the programs, and the label 'global humanities' seems at times to be used as an umbrella term for a wide range of disciplines and themes in the humanities. For example, at the Department of Global Humanities at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada, students can study "texts from the East to the West, from Ancient Greece to Modern Germany, from Taoism to Christianity, from the Italian fresco to Chinese film", according to the presentation at the department's website ([Simon Fraser University 2022](#)). In other places, 'global humanities' seems to mean the study of the non-Western world, such as at Rutgers University, where global humanities comprise the study of the languages, literatures, and cultures of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia ([Rutgers University 2022](#)). Yet another interpretation is offered by Sapienza Università di Roma, where the BA program in global humanities comprises a broad range of humanities and social sciences, such as history, sociology, anthropology, arts, literatures, law, economics, psychology, and health ([Sapienza Università di Roma 2022](#)). The latter approach, with its strong emphasis on training in the social sciences, seems in fact to be close to that of global studies albeit under a different name.

With regard to postgraduate training, there is at least one PhD program in global humanities, at Linnaeus University, Sweden, which was launched in 2022. The program aims to integrate some of the main global turns in the humanities in recent years, such as "environmental humanities, world archaeology, global history, world literature, postcolonial studies, and [the] greater interest among researchers in religious studies in the global and transcultural aspects." The program's orientation toward the global humanities also aims "to highlight non-European and Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems and to promote dialogue between these and the traditional humanities" and to stimulate "comparative, cross-border, intercultural, and interdisciplinary research" ([Linnaeus University 2022](#)).

In summary, global humanities seems to be used in disparate ways to denote study programs and humanities departments around the world, particularly in North America, Europe and East Asia. There is considerable diversity in the contents of the study programs on offer, with the only apparent common denominator being the inclusion of the study of the non-Western world.

#### 4. Global Humanities as an Emerging Framework of Research

The third meaning of global humanities aims at establishing or promoting it as a field of research, or a framework or perspective for research in the humanities. These attempts began about ten years ago and have not yet coalesced into a consensus about what global humanities are or should be. The discussion so far has been relatively limited, with a total of around a dozen publications in English during the past decade arguing for global humanities as a new field of research, framework, or paradigm.

One of the most ambitious attempts to conceptualise a new global humanities framework was made by Birgit Mersmann and Hans G. Kippenberg, who edited a volume published in 2016 and entitled *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity* ([Mersmann and Kippenberg 2016](#)). The book was an explicit attempt to "make an innovative contribution to the contemporary history of science of the humanities (including the social sciences) from the perspective of modernity and globalization research" (*ibid.*, p. 4). The thrust of the book's argument was that the humanities needed to transgress their traditional "nation- and language-anchored constitution and colonial burden of Euro- and West-centrism" and to "move on to a condition of globality emancipated from the discourse of historical, conceptual, and institutional modernity" (*ibid.*, p. 271). The book's emphasis on the shift from modernisation to globalisation implied that a major task of the

global humanities would be to contribute to the field of global studies by highlighting the diversity of cultural expressions in the contemporary era of globalisation (e.g., *ibid.*, p. 2).

Rather than emphasising theories of globalisation or modernisation, however, most advocates of global humanities to date have taken their cue from postcolonial studies. For example, several linguists and other scholars have argued for global humanities that focus on translation, understood—in line with influential postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Susan Bassnett—not only as textual or linguistic, but also as cultural, translation. Probably the most articulated argument for a focus on translation in global humanities is an article by English literary scholar Simona Bertacco entitled “On Translation: Between Postcolonialism and the Global Humanities” (Bertacco 2016; see also Starosta 2013 and Doris Bachman-Medick’s contribution in Mersmann and Kippenberg 2016; Bachman-Medick 2016, originally published in German). With reference to David Bellos, Bertacco argues that translation, rather than being an activity of peripheral importance, is at the centre of human civilisation, and that focusing on translation encourages a humanistic understanding of globalisation. At the same time, Bertacco criticises postcolonial studies for allegedly being limited by the “borders of *one* colonial empire, *one* European language, and *one* academic discipline” (Bertacco 2016, p. 181; emphases in original). Against that background, she argues that translation offers a theoretical framework for critical reading in the global humanities.

Another approach influenced by postcolonial (or decolonial) perspectives is offered by Lisa Lowe and Kris Manjapra in an article in the journal *Theory, Culture and Society* from 2019, entitled “Comparative Global Humanities After Man: Alternatives to the Coloniality of Knowledge.” The relatively well-cited article is probably the most influential attempt to date to promote the notion of global humanities. The point of departure is a critique of the concept of the human, as it is used in the traditional humanities disciplines, for being based on a “very particular modern European definition of Man”. Overrepresenting Man as the human, the definition presumes that man is the central agent of history, thereby producing a “coloniality of knowledge” that legitimises settler colonial and imperial projects in the non-European parts of the world (Lowe and Manjapra 2019, pp. 23–24).

The authors reject established comparative methods, which tend to reify entities such as nation, region, or culture. Their program for a “Comparative Global Humanities After Man” instead suggests a “range of critical practices that radically unsettle the subject position and the objects of humanities study” (*ibid.*, p. 43). In order to achieve this, the authors argue for an “analytic of relation,” emphasising “the interdependence, relatedness, and coproduction of communities” (*ibid.*, p. 26). Lowe and Manjapra also advocate a focus on different relations of scale, including “unlikely and perhaps even asymmetrical and incommensurable scales”, as well as the inclusion of sources in multiple languages and derived not only from traditional (colonial) archives but from a broader range of “alternative repositories and practices of knowledge and collection”. Doing so enables scholars to highlight different forms of “submarine” (a term borrowed from W. E. B. Du Bois) and occluded relationality (*ibid.*, pp. 27–29; 32–33; *cit.* p. 29). Lowe’s and Manjapra’s suggestions for a new framework of Comparative Global Humanities After Man echo many of the central premisses of global history and postcolonial studies as these emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century, although the two authors do not necessarily refer to these (e.g., Spivak 1988; Subrahmanyam 1997; Revel 1996; see also Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, the latter of which is the only of these works cited by Lowe and Manjapra).

A third attempt to sketch the outlines of a framework for global humanities from critical theoretical and postcolonial points of departure is a recent article entitled “Global Humanities: Pursuing New Discourses and New Institutions for Life on Earth” by German literary scholar John Noyes and historian Bo Strath. With reference to Spivak, the authors criticise the “inherent bias” in knowledge production “away from the global South, indigenous knowledge, [. . .] ‘useless knowledge’ and the embodied knowledge of socially disadvantaged and side-lined groups within globally privileged societies”. They identify a crisis, not only in the humanities, but in scientific knowledge more broadly, including in its

relationship to economics and politics, against the background of the damage caused by capitalist globalisation to the environment and its undermining of any attempts to bring about planetary social justice (Noyes and Strath 2021).

Noyes and Straht echo some of the criticism against the field of global studies, such as the recent call for “Transformative Global Studies”, which challenges current epistemic limitations of the field, as well as the epistemological boundaries of a modernity that excludes racialised and feminised Indigenous and other colonised peoples as well as their knowledges and life worlds (Hosseini et al. 2021, esp. p. 6; cf. Darian-Smith 2019). However, whereas the humanities receive very scant attention by the contributors to the *Routledge Handbook of Transformative Global Studies*—the vast majority of whom are social scientists—Noyes and Straht see the humanities as the mode of inquiry best suited to address current crises in scientific knowledge. They argue that the task of global humanities is to answer to the “need to elaborate normative frameworks that transcend the teleological Western mono-norms with their very specific understanding of modernization, globalization and democratization, and to discern global meta-norms in the plural, contentious but communicating with each other” (Noyes and Strath 2021, conclusion).

Among the advocates of the global humanities, Wiebke Denecke, a Sinologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, differs from both Lowe and Manjapra and Noyes and Straht through her more critical view of postcolonial studies in her recent plea for “Comparative Global Humanities” (Denecke 2021). Rather than embracing postcolonial theory as a cornerstone of such a project, she warns that a too-strong focus on colonial and postcolonial contexts in the humanities risks overemphasising the significance of Europe and its “global colonial and postcolonial footprint” to the detriment of the study of expressions of the human mind in other, pre- or noncolonial contexts. She also warns against the risk of “Western (postcolonial) presentism” and argues that more attention should be paid to the “great diversity of premodern non-Western worlds” (Denecke 2021, pp. 482, 496, 503).

In Denecke’s view, global humanities should instead be characterised by three points of departure. First, she argues that global humanities should be globally inclusive, both in terms of subject matter and participants. Second, global humanities should be “conceptually comparative” and engage in nonhegemonic comparison rather than analyses of connectivity (Denecke 2021, pp. 495–96; cf. Pollock 2010). Third, Denecke argues that global humanities should be “based on rigorous historical and philological research” (Denecke 2021, p. 282). The article was written in connection with a conference, hosted by Denecke and two of her colleagues at the MIT School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, held in November 2021, which aimed at promoting comparative global humanities as a way of transforming and expanding the humanities (MIT 2021).

Finally, a short recent article by Sara Guyer, Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, and the director of the World Humanities Report, argues for the global humanities as a new framework for understanding the survival (rather than the crisis) of the humanities. Criticising the European and Christological underpinnings of the discourse of crisis in the humanities in recent years, Guyer argues that global humanities should instead be based on alternative frameworks, such as those that have emerged in the humanities in China, South Africa, and Argentina (Guyer 2022, p. 54, abstract). Somewhat disappointingly, however, Guyer fails to discuss the humanities in South Africa and Argentina in the article, and her brief treatment of the humanities in China indicates that the lack of academic freedom may be a serious impediment to the flourishing of the humanities there, despite their being increasingly well-endowed and supported by the state (Guyer 2022, p. 63). Moreover, Guyer does not elaborate on what the potential intellectual contributions of the humanities as studied in China or any other non-Western humanities traditions may be to the new framework of global humanities. This line of thought seems well worth pursuing, however, in view of the ancient strong traditions of humanistic scholarship in, for example, China, India, and the Arabic world. These could probably be fruitfully confronted with the Western humanities and used to challenge some of its core

assumptions and concepts in order to contribute to the development of global humanities (cf. Bod 2013). Similar challenges to Western systems of knowledge are also being raised by Indigenous perspectives and traditions of knowledge (e.g., Silverstein 2022).

The initiatives to formulate a research agenda for global humanities have not yet developed into a scholarly conversation about which direction such a field of study should take or which challenges and opportunities are involved. However, from the review of the literature, some central aspects are apparent. First of these is the ambition to include all of humankind in the study of the humanities and to transcend Eurocentric and colonial worldviews. Inter- or transdisciplinarity and global collaboration are also central, which implies a challenging of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Another prominent feature of global humanities is its critical potential in relation to, for example, colonialism, globalisation, modernisation, and capitalism. In these respects, global humanities has the potential to develop into something very different than the field of global studies as it is defined and studied today.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Since the mid-1990s, global studies has become established as a field of study in its own right around the world, with numerous institutions dedicated to research and higher education in the field, as well as international conferences, associations, journals, and other publications. Global studies is often described as a broad interdisciplinary field spanning many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, but in practice the field tends to be dominated by the social sciences, particularly sociology, economics, anthropology, geography, and political science. Despite the global turn in many humanities disciplines in recent years, history is the only major humanities discipline that has a prominent place in global studies. However, the historical scholarship which is integrated in global studies is in principle confined to a particular type of global history, understood as the history of globalisation, which is a much narrower field of study than that of global history as a whole.

The marginal role of the humanities in global studies, combined with the indispensability of the humanities for fostering intercultural understanding and learning, suggests that a field of studies centred around the concept of global humanities has a great but hitherto unrealised potential. However, the discussion of what global humanities as a field of study may encompass is still in its infancy, and the concept is frequently used in disparate ways. Global humanities can thus, for example, signify projects aiming to enhance international collaboration and mobility within the humanities, or it can denote the study of non-Western cultures and languages. Sometimes, global humanities seems akin to global studies, possibly with the former having a slightly larger representation of humanities disciplines.

Regarding the attempts to stake out a direction for global humanities as a new paradigm, field of study, or framework of research, a handful of publications have appeared over the past five to ten years that try to define, or at least stake out a direction for, what global humanities should be. However, none of the authors and articles discussed here cite or refer to any of the others. This circumstance not only points to a lack of consensus about what global humanities is or should be (despite the common themes raised by several of the advocates of the concept), but above all to a lack of dialogue and engagement.

Against that background, a major purpose of the review of the literature about global humanities provided here has been to bring the advocates of global humanities as a field or framework of research into conversation with one another. Such a conversation, centring on the as-of-yet unfixed concept of global humanities, is both timely and essential. Global studies has been an established field of research and teaching for more than a decade, but has to date shown little interest in integrating the humanities (with history, understood as the history of globalisation, being the main exception), and has at times even promoted presentist, teleological, and Eurocentric understandings of global cultural processes, excluding or obscuring the importance of many non-Western cultural expressions

as well as ancient, textual and nontextual, sources. Global humanities has the potential not only to address the shortcomings of global studies in these respects, but also to develop into a field of its own, with a broader and more inclusive scope and a more pronounced critical orientation.

Many of the main disciplines in the humanities—particularly archaeology, history, and literature, but more recently also other disciplines, such as art history and philosophy—have already made distinct turns towards more global perspectives. These developments—rather than the field of global studies—should be the point of departure for the proposed conversation about global humanities. Such a conversation should aim to develop common concepts, methods, and frameworks of analysis that can be applied to the study of all of humanity, including all of its cultural, historical, and linguistic expressions. By combining this effort with the expertise and specialised knowledge that exists within different sections of the humanities, global humanities can provide essential new knowledge for dealing with the global challenges facing humanity.

I hope to come back to the question of what I think global humanities should be in another context, but some brief points of departure can be sketched here. Global humanities should build on the efforts that have been made in archaeology, history, literature, and other humanities disciplines to date to break away from their traditional national and Eurocentric biases. Furthermore, global humanities should question and challenge the disciplinary boundaries that were created as the modern humanities disciplines were forged, mainly in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, based on a particular European conceptual division between different types of cultural expressions, which became the subject matter of particular disciplines, such as history, literature, art, and religion. Global humanities should thus be conceived as a trans- (rather than inter-) disciplinary field, involving not only traditional humanities disciplines but also other branches of science, such as the social and natural sciences. Moreover, the project should involve constant interaction with other scientific traditions and systems of knowledge that have developed around the world throughout human history, as well as engagement with nonacademic and holistic ways of seeing and understanding the world.

By these means, global humanities has the potential to develop into a dynamic and highly relevant orientation in research and higher education that in principle can take on any historical or cultural process or expression of the human mind without chronological or geographical limitations. Such a globally inclusive, transdisciplinary, and critical humanistic scholarship will be instrumental for providing the cross-cultural knowledge and understanding that are required to deal with the great challenges of our time.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Staff pages and presentations of the contributors at the Internet websites of their respective universities (27 October 2022).
- <sup>2</sup> These are the issues and themes identified as being at the core of global research and teaching in Part III of the *Oxford Handbook of Global Studies*.
- <sup>3</sup> A search at JSTOR's analytical tool Constellate renders 155 hits for the keyword "global humanities" in scholarly publications during the 2010s, compared with 26 during the first decade of the 2000s. By comparison, the phrase "digital humanities" renders 11,525 hits during the 2010s and "global studies" 13,677. <https://constellate.org/> (25 October 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> The meetings include the aforementioned workshop organised by the Colombia Global Humanities Project in Mumbai, India, in March 2014, a Symposium on Global Humanities held in Hannover, Germany, in June 2014, supported the Volkswagen Stiftung, a series of three Global Humanities Conferences organised by the Global Humanities Project held at George Washington University,

Bagazici University and Al Akhawayn University (the last of which was held in June 2015), and a recent (November 2021) conference organised by the MIT School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences entitled “*Worlds Enough and Time: Towards a Comparative Global Humanities*”.

- <sup>5</sup> Search on Scopus ([www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com)), 2 November 2022. A couple of journals exist, however, that are not indexed in Scopus. The *Global Journal of Humanities*, published since 2002, has its editorial office at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, but is a general humanities journal and the bulk of the articles in the journal seem to concern Africa. The *Journal of Global Humanities and Social Sciences*, hosted at the Multimedia University in Malaysia, has appeared since 2020 and has a general orientation toward the social sciences and related fields. The biannual *Global Humanities: Studies in Histories, Cultures, and Societies* positions itself as a journal for globalisation studies, being, in the words of the editors of the latest issue, “considered an interdisciplinary journal for the study of questions and aspects of human life that determined past centuries and still determine life in the globalized context of the 21st century” (Jacob and Magiapane 2021, p. 7).

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