

[Global Histories]

A student journal

Review: Global History Student Conference, Sehir University Istanbul, June 2018

Author: Lea Kröner

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2018.271>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Oct. 2018), pp. 209-210

ISSN: 2366-780X

Copyright © 2018 Lea Kröner



License URL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Publisher information:

'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

Freie Universität Berlin
Global Histories: A Student Journal
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut
Koserstraße 20
14195 Berlin

Contact information:

For more information, please consult our website www.globalhistories.com or contact the editor at: admin@globalhistories.com.

Global History Student Conference Istanbul

Şehir Üniversitesi, June 2018

REVIEWED BY LEA KRÖNER

This summer, a team of undergraduate students from the History Department of the Istanbul Şehir University organized their first Global History Student Conference. Along with similar conferences in Berlin and London, this conference in Istanbul represents one of the few opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate students interested in global history to meet and discuss their research. Following their motto “Less Borders, More History!,” the conference brought together 22 participants from 17 different universities who presented their research between June 22nd and 24th, 2018.

Apart from the opening remarks by Professor Abdulhamit Kırmızı (Istanbul Şehir University), the conference also featured keynote speeches by Dr. Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins (Yale University) and Professor Jon Davidann (Hawai’i Pacific University). Steinmetz-Jenkins’ speech drew attention to the relationship between modern and secular states and the regulation of religion. He examined the historical scope of the concept “religious freedom,” arguing that it has to be understood as a “compromise” that became necessary only with the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 1930s but might have lost its relevance today. Davidann’s speech compared Japanese and Ottoman ideas about modernization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Analyzing the works of leading Japanese and Ottoman intellectuals, Davidann also critically reflected on the limit of “Westernization” as a concept itself. The lively debates that followed both keynotes reflected the high quality of discussion throughout the conference.

The five panels of student presentations covered a wide array of topics, ranging from an analysis of Ilkhanid historiography in the 13th century Mongol Empire to a discussion of global Maoism in the 1970s. Presenters engaged with a variety of different sources that reflect the different approaches to global history: Mehmet Doğar (Middle East Technical University, Ankara) for instance analyzed cartoons in Turkish newspapers during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, while Aleksandra Babikova (Higher School of Economics St. Petersburg) examined Black Sea travel guides. Many participants presented ongoing research projects and were therefore thankful for the friendly and constructive feedback, which helped them to further define and strengthen their main arguments.

Some of the panels revolved around clearly defined topics such as “Global Biographies” and “Diplomacy,” whereas others seemed less coherent. Unfortunately, this made it more difficult for presenters and the audience to discuss broader issues and in some cases led to situations where the panel members were limited to answering questions regarding their individual research. While this is certainly

due to the large variety of topics in the field of global history, it might have been helpful if the papers had been circulated to the panel members in advance. For next year, the organizers could also consider sending abstracts out to allow the audience to draw links to broader methodological themes and larger theoretical debates and might improve the quality of discussion even further.

All panels were chaired by faculty members from different Istanbul universities. While it was great to see that professors and senior researchers from different fields took an interest in the Global History Student Conference, the chairing of panels might have been a valuable experience for the organizing team. However, the faculty members successfully restrained themselves from taking over discussion and thus avoided a hierarchical “classroom atmosphere.” Some students also criticized the uneven gender representation in regard to chairs (and keynote speakers) as only one of the chairs, Professor Nicole Kançal-Ferrari (Istanbul Şehir University), was female.

The official part of the conference closed with a round table discussion on Saturday. The presenters and the organizing team had the opportunity to reflect on wider themes and questions raised throughout the conference. As in most global history conferences, the question of methodological Eurocentrism was also a key theme in Istanbul; participants underlined the necessity of using non-European sources in their work in order to arrive at a non-Eurocentric reading of the global past. Many student presenters also expressed their desire for more collaboration, particularly in regard to languages, and the digitalization of sources. Another subject of discussion was the question of the role and direction of global history in the next years as some students felt that the term and concept are still quite vague and remain open to a number of interpretations.

Alongside the inspiring academic involvement with global history, the conference also included a trip to the historical city center on the third and last day. A generous welcome dinner on the first day and frequent coffee breaks with delicious Turkish baklava provided additional opportunities for networking and further discussion. Overall, the Global History Student Conference at the Istanbul Şehir University was very well executed—especially when considering that this was their very first attempt at organizing a conference. The conference team around Fatma Aladağ did a great job and was always ready to help and answer questions. Students interested in the broad field of global history are highly encouraged to apply for next year’s conference and take the chance to discuss their ideas and collect feedback in a very welcoming surrounding.