

“FROM TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY TO TRANSNATIONAL OPERA.
QUESTIONING NATIONAL CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS”

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Based on a critical assessment of debates within the field of transnational history, this article seeks to offer a set of methodological and theoretical considerations to promote a transnational turn in opera studies. While making occasional references to music and opera, the article is written in the perspective of a historian with interests in music theatre, without claiming academic competence in all aspects of musical scholarship. While many musicologists are well read in their neighbouring disciplines – history, art history, literature –, some (but by no means all) academic historians working on opera are often rather reluctant to engage with musicological research, ignoring for instance their colleagues’ specialised periodicals or the excellent work that has gone into the critical editions of the operatic repertoire. As a consequence, opera scholars working on the historical context of stylistic developments or musical performance have often been the better historians when it comes to methodological rigour and cross-disciplinary exchanges. Moreover, thinking about music in transnational perspective is by no means new: Pietro Verri, writing for the Milanese eighteenth-century periodical *Il Caffè*, investigated the connections between nationality and the effects of music on the senses, (although to no convincing result). Earlier still, the *Querelle des Bouffons* in eighteenth-century France led to Rousseau to investigate the relationship between language, drama and music, resulting in his only surviving opera *Le devin du village*.¹

Historians share a certain degree of responsibility if over the past thirty years musicology has followed the national turn in the humanities and social sciences, marked by the publication of the works by Benedict Anderson, Hobsbawm, Gellner, Miroslav Hroch and others. While close connections between the rise of nineteenth-century nationalism on the one side and developments in the aesthetics and social function of music on the other side constitute an important and rich territory of research, there is a danger if the creation, performance and reception of nineteenth-century opera is narrowly reduced to its national meaning. After several decades of acute academic interest in the role of music in the spread of national ideology and the rise of national movements, particularly in Europe, opera scholars today might wish to

question the importance we have accorded to nationalism within our frameworks of analysis. Transnationalism can help to think about nineteenth-century music beyond the age of nationalism and to question the validity of national categories of analysis. If a critical discussion of transnational approaches in history is able to make a contribution to the transnational turn in opera studies, it is hopefully worth the cross-disciplinary experiment of this article. This discussion will start by providing an overview of what the transnational turn has achieved in the discipline of history by addressing the issue of transnational transfers and their actors. A second point will debate whether transnational history constitutes a theory in its own right or whether it requires a separate methodology through an examination of its relationship to other historical sub-disciplines. A third section will discuss transnational history as a way of reconceptualising spaces, in particular in relation to imperial and global history. A final point will push the established boundaries of approaches to transnational history further, using transnationalism to question the validity of national categories of analysis. Each of these points will refer to the performance and reception of music, in particular nineteenth-century opera.

I. Transnational transfers and their actors. Over the past twenty-five years, some of the most exciting and innovative work of historical research has emerged in the field of transnational history.² The history of international relations in particular has been affected by a transnational turn, leading to a significant reorientation of themes and research questions, as well as to the identification of new historical agents impacting upon existing relations between states. As a consequence, transnational historians have carved deeply into the territory of diplomatic history, while at the same time transcending the discipline's conventional focus on connections between states. The role played by transnational actors in international organisations describes another field, which some historians of international relations tended to neglect in the past. Good examples of this field of research are works on the impact on international relations of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and transnational networks of activists. In the field of global health, NGOs have challenged the role of conventional health diplomacy based on relations between states or intergovernmental agreements. New forms of transnational agency in this sector have contributed to the recognition of bio-socialities, characterised by shared medical conditions such as Aids or tropical diseases. Applied to the study of music, cultural diplomacy would be the closest area of connections.

While transnational approaches to diplomatic history is what most academic historians understand transnational history to be, a more unusual and exciting field of scholarship is concerned with the travelling of ideas, goods and people across national borders, or across mental maps that are determined by concepts of nationality. Studying these movements constitutes an area that is directly relevant to the transnational reception of opera and to the internationalisation of the repertoire. When examining those exchanges we notice that spatial categories such as Empire or the city can be much more important to the opera scholar than the nation state. Many years ago, before moving herself into the field of opera studies, Carlotta Sorba reminded us in her book on Parma that the Age of Nationalism was also an Age of Municipalities.³ And this Age of Nationalism also was an Age of Empires, of exchanges within and between Empires. When examining the history of cultural and intellectual transfers we too

often take national parameters of analysis for granted, assuming for instance that a particular opera retains a national significance when traveling across borders. This is what this article wishes to question. Transnational history can become a tool to overcome national and cultural determinism, and to rethink the hybridity of nationality, for instance when the Czech nationalists considered an opera by Dvořak or Smetana too Germanic (or too Wagnerian), whereas German audiences and critics protested against the same works, because they resented the cultural advance of artists associated with the Czech national revival.⁴

Thinking transnationally means to trace people, ideas and goods beyond and across the boundaries between nationalities, and to rethink established spatial categories of historical analysis in order to engage with hitherto neglected socio-cultural entities. Transnational exchange generates cultural experiences that are difficult to capture within national categories. There are numerous areas of historical research that are inadequately described within the framework of national, international or inter-governmental histories: migration, the slave trade, statelessness, piracy or organised crime. The same claim proves correct for different areas of opera studies, from the circulation of the repertoire to the teaching of composition and transnational stylistic influences. The training of musicians and the internationalisation of the opera industry provide similar examples. The stage for such encounters is usually a particular city or a court, not the nation.

What these examples show is that certain social groups, ideas and artefacts are insufficiently understood when pressed into a framework of national analysis. Ideas rarely retain their original meaning when they travel within culturally and historically diverse contexts, where they are amalgamated into existing ways of thinking. The ideas of Herder and Rousseau assume new meanings when they are discussed in North- or Latin America. The reception of Mazzini in India has little in common with the understanding of his works in an Italian or French context.⁵ The reading of Gramsci serves different purposes in Anglo-American cultural studies than in Risorgimento historiography, to the point that at times transnational academic exchange seems almost impossible. Ideas and their authors become less German or French once they travel. In the US Judith Butler's work is sometimes described as "French Studies", a category that is almost as meaningless in a French context as it is for the author herself.⁶ Constitutional borrowing often creates new legal realities, determined by the local conditions of historic, social and economic development within which legal concepts are applied. For instance, the fact that constitutions all over the world quote American constitutional documents tells us little about the ways in which they were understood.⁷ There is a risk of intellectual imperialism to assume that these borrowings stand for the endorsement of American political principles. Moreover, too often we assume that intellectual flows are one-directional, whereas historical research shows that ideas are exchanged in both directions.⁸ Italian exiles exported Swiss federal thought to Latin America during their national revolutions, but the insights they gained from applying these concepts also travelled back into Risorgimento Italy. While capital has no nationality, commodities are often brought to a different use when they are absorbed into a new cultural context. Engaging critically with anthropological research on material culture, transnational historians look at the ways in which commodities are adapted and transformed by different groups of consumers. The world drinks Indian tea, eats American potatoes and

smokes tobacco of the same provenance, but the cultural significance of these patterns of consumption varies according to time and space, differs from its original use.⁹

II. Studying different forms of transnational exchange does not require any particular theoretical framework or methodology. Lacking clear demarcations within the historical profession, transnational history does not represent a historical sub-discipline in its own right. Transnational historians do too many different things to group them into one sub-discipline. They use a whole range of different approaches and methodologies that they share with other historians, depending on their particular area of specialisation; and in many cases they interact closely with scholars in other fields of historical study and employ their theoretical vocabulary. Therefore, transnational history describes a particular way of thinking historically, a way of asking questions and developing innovative frameworks of research. While most transnational historians contribute immensely to our understanding of society, their agenda is also largely uncontroversial if approached with an open mind. According to Benedetto Croce, history is a conceptualisation of the mind; this is what makes the difference between what we call the past, which is anything that happened, and history, which is what we selected in order to craft historical arguments of a particular explanatory value. The past remains, but history is constantly rewritten and therefore changes its agenda. Transnational history responds to this understanding of the past based on a contemporary agenda.

Offering a relatively open definition, transnational history is a history of relations. What appears to be new about this approach is the fact that transnational historians systematically look for and account for these relations, privileging them over work within more narrowly defined territorial boundaries. Therefore, there seems to be one major difference between the transnational approach and other histories of, for instance, economic or diplomatic relations. While conventional histories concentrate on connections between nations or states, transnational approaches attempt to go in between nationally defined categories of analysis, looking for a type of relationship that escapes a mental map based on nationalities. Typical examples of this kind of relationship are seafaring people, such as pirates; the culturally hybrid diaspora of peoples in Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, or perhaps Ben Walton's global opera companies, per- and transforming Rossini in the New World.¹⁰ The sociology and transfer of knowledge is not necessarily limited by national boundaries. Some writers, intellectuals or artists might even see themselves as citizens of the Republic of Letters. This is what makes it problematic to categorise Johann Christoph Willibald Gluck as a German, Czech, Italian or English composer or to use a map of post-Unification Italy to illustrate Mozart's Italian journey between 1769 and 1773, during which the family crossed many of the peninsula's internal borders, but also sojourned for long and repeatedly in traditional Habsburg territory. A conventional approach to cultural history investigates the circulation of a particular book; economic historians quantify the volume of trade between two ports. Transnational historians, instead, look at particular modes of reception, at the adaptation and assimilation of goods and ideas in a changing context. Applied to opera studies, the difference is that between a collection of raw data – when an opera was performed, where and by whom; and an investigation into the specific context of its performance and reception. Excellent examples are Gundula Kreuzer's *Verdi and the Germans*, demonstrating how Verdi, in a different national context, became an

agent of modernism, not obvious at that time in Italy; or Rosamund Bartlett's *Wagner in Russia*, where a Futurist staging of *Lohengrin* launched the October Revolution.¹¹

In order to celebrate the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the foundation of the German Empire Richard Wagner wrote his *Kaisermarsch* of 1871. In this particular context, Wagner and his music had become symbols of a particular kind of German nationalism characterised by volkish undertones, associated also with the third act of *Lohengrin* of 1850 or Hans Sachs' final monologue in *Die Meistersinger* of 1868. At the same time when Wagner celebrated the German victory, the *Commune de Paris* excluded the performance of Wagner from the repertoire of the Opéra, but not because of Wagner's German background, but because he was considered a protégé of the French Emperor Napoleon III. In November of the same year, Bologna's Teatro Comunale staged the first Italian performance of an opera by Wagner under Angelo Mariani. The man behind the project was the local leader of the *sinistra storica*, Camillo Casarini, mayor of Bologna and president of the *Deputazione degli spettacoli*.¹² In the Italian context, the same Wagner who in Berlin served as a symbol of German militarism, politicians celebrated the hero of the Dresden barricades during the Revolution of 1848-9, a man who had shared the painful destiny of exile with so many revolutionaries of the Risorgimento. The local newspapers in Bologna introduced Wagner as a friend of Bakunin, associated with the uprisings in the Romagna and allegedly the model for Wagner's Siegfried. In this particular context Wagner was not only presented as a hero of the democratic Left, but - more importantly for the rising democratic middle classes - Wagner stood for the city's cosmopolitan opening after Unification, a city keen to establish itself not just as the Italian capital of Wagnerism but also as one of the cultural capitals of the new Italian nation state. Elsewhere in Europe different nationalities were competing in the performance of Wagner: for one group Wagner stood a reference to the superiority of German culture, for others he became a symbol of a cosmopolitan modernist ambition. These examples demonstrate that the cultural meaning of a particular work is not fixed in its artistic creation, but defined by the specific historic context of its performance and reception demonstrating the importance of studying the transnational circulation of ideas and artefacts.

Some historians react defensively when confronted with transnational challenges to the established conventions of their discipline. This is despite the fact that most proponents of a transnational agenda do not intend to replace existing historical disciplines or approaches. International historians might argue that transnational history adds nothing substantially new to what they have always done. However, by posing questions about agency and about the deterministic reference to borders between states, transnational history pushes the established frontiers of the discipline. Historians of war and conflict might fear that transnational history proposes an idealistic humanism which over-emphasises the friendlier aspects of human relations. Contrary to that, transnational communities are often based on exclusion of and aggression towards others. Borderlands can be bloodlands. Some supporters of macro-comparative approaches defend their territory by wrongly assuming that transnational history presents itself as a substitute for comparative history. Yet comparative and transnational approaches are frequently combined, despite following markedly different objectives.¹³ Comparative history offers new insights through the juxtaposition of more than one historical

example; transnational history would only be critical of this approach if it took the nation as the sole framework for comparative analysis, presenting problems similar to those of any national history.

Another criticism transnational historians encounter is that they simply follow modish trends, imposed on a discipline constantly in search of self-legitimization. New terms, the argument goes, contribute little to historical enquiry while at the same time overloading an empirical discipline with theoretical jargon. As a matter of fact, the term “transnational” is not new. A few decades after Jeremy Bentham introduced the term “international”, Constantin Pecqueur spoke in 1842 about “*considerations d’intérêt transnational*”, as a way of establishing cosmopolitan values and securing international peace.¹⁴ In 1862 the German linguist Georg Curtius used the term as a specific analytic category describing families of languages: “*Eine jede Sprache ist ihrer Grundlage nach etwas Transnationales.*”¹⁵ During the 1930s and 1940s the term entered the vocabulary of lawyers and economists. Finally, a generation ago, Ian Tyrrell and Michael McGerr discussed in the *American Historical Review* the possibilities and opportunities of a transnational approach to US history.¹⁶ As the term’s history demonstrates, transnationality periodically appears in the social sciences, responding to particular junctures of debates. Therefore, accepting transnationality as an epistemological challenge within the social sciences also signals cross-disciplinary awareness. Confronting established fields of research with the transnational agenda does not mean replacing one approach with another, but complementing different ways of writing about the past and asking new questions. What makes transnational history different is the recognition that what we easily describe as an Age of Nationalism was shaped to a considerable extent by transnational exchanges.¹⁷

III. Transnational history is a way of reconceptualising space. The late Chris Bayly’s *Birth of the Modern World*; Jürgen Osterhammel’s *Transformation of the world* (a book with an interesting section on opera); or Anthony Hopkins’ studies of all understand the modern world as an increasingly globalised space.¹⁸ The distinction between global and transnational history is not always clear: global history does not need to be transnational; and transnational history does not need to cover the globe. Meanwhile, for many specialists working in these fields the amalgamation of the two is a deliberate strategy. For instance, Akira Iriye’s *Global and Transnational History* provides an overview of recent scholarship, with particular emphasis on the movement of people across the globe, on human rights, on environmental history as well as on Americanisation.¹⁹ All of these examples represent areas of global history that are by definition transnational. Following a similar approach, Patrick Manning defines World History as “the story of connections within the global human community”.²⁰ It is the notion of a “global human community” which constitutes the main difference to the work of most transnational historians, who tend to question the assumption that exchange necessarily creates communities; that goods and ideas remain the same when they travel across borders.²¹ For instance, the example of Wagner reception discussed in the previous section raises questions whether we can speak of a transnational community of Wagnerians. Iriye’s understanding of this kind of transnational relationships can be challenged when he argues that looking at a painting by Raphael or reading Shakespeare “is a transnational experience that creates a global community of lovers of art and literature.”²² Scholars of the transnational movement of ideas often come

to the conclusion that this is not the case. A community of art lovers, as described by Iriye, is at best an idea. They might share a love for Raphael or Shakespeare, but what a specific work of art means differs according to the context of reception, which is determined by local conditions. A transnational approach to the circulation of ideas, literature or art requires an engagement with methodologies of reception studies, which are not exclusive to transnational historians. We cannot simply assume that a text or a piece of music retains its meaning when it crosses borders.

Some historians of nation states criticise transnational historians for writing the nation or the state out of history; but most transnational historians need both nations and states as constant points of reference. Meanwhile, a transnational agenda might encourage historians to think differently about nations. For instance, nineteenth-century Italian history is too frequently written in isolation and based on teleological assumptions, which accept national Unification as the inevitable outcome of a predefined historical process, applying it to periods when no inhabitant of the peninsula could possibly expect to end up as a subject of the Savoy dynasty.²³ Such an approach risks distorting the extent to which the then-existing Italian states were connected to different parts of Europe, or saw themselves as emerging nations in their own right. For instance, John Robertson's work on the Neapolitan Enlightenment shows that progressive forces within the Kingdom of Naples understood themselves to be part of an emerging Neapolitan nation state.²⁴ When writing about Donizetti or Bellini, or Mozart's Italian journey, we often think about an Italy that did not yet exist. During the earlier period of the Risorgimento, notions of liberty were not necessarily understood in terms of national liberation. In Sicily, the revolution of 1848 was concerned first and foremost with independence from Naples; creating a federation of Italian states was of secondary importance, submission to Piedmont not an option. Moreover, the idea of the Italian nation's "resurgence" responded to developments elsewhere in the world, a process that was informed by a transnational exchange of ideas, which was not simply home-born. In this sense transnational historians can make an important contribution to the rethinking of nation states.

Some practitioners of transnational history insist that their approach makes sense only if practised in the context of established nation states.²⁵ However, a less state-oriented concept of nationality, freed from the constraints of treating every national group as an aspiring nation state, allows the historian to operate with different spatial and territorial configurations. Some transnational historians investigate connections between more loosely defined national groups, confined not by state borders, but by linguistic, cultural or historical boundaries. Meanwhile, we should abstain from the mistake of lumping diasporas, people of the same language scattered over multinational territories together. For instance, German speakers in Transylvania had little in common – and usually did not feel part of the same national community – as German speakers in other parts of the Habsburg monarchy. Slovenes, distributed over six or seven different states and principalities of the monarchy, had some sense of national belonging, but also a strong sense of loyalty towards their respective crownlands. Carlo Cattaneo, the night before the Cinque Giornate, was still writing an article proposing the reorganisation of Lombardy within a federalised Habsburg monarchy, not thinking about Italians elsewhere in the peninsula and certainly not aiming for the annexation of the Austrian Kingdom of

Lombardy-Venetia by Piedmont. Even late in the century, Italian speakers in Fiume sent their daughters to study the piano in Budapest, not in Milan; and talking of Italian speakers in that particular region, most of them were as polyglot as the protagonists of Claudio Magris' *Danubio*.²⁶ As Pieter Judson has demonstrated for the Czech borderlands, nationalist parties and associations had to fight hard battles to convince people to adopt one nationality over another.²⁷ Mixed marriages or sending German-speaking children to live with Czech-speaking relatives was considered an important strategy of subsistence, especially as literacy in Bohemia was higher among Czech than among German speakers. As for the Habsburg Empire, we have to rethink its history beyond what we know about its demise in 1918. Of course there were conflicts between nationalities, but many families first had to learn to which community they actually belonged; others knew that the nation state offered them no future, with the famous leader of the Czech national movement, the historian Frantisek Palacky arguing that the multinational Habsburg Empire would have to be invented if it didn't already exist.²⁸ There is scope to rethink the Age of Nationalism as an Age of trans-nationalism, to rethink our mental maps. Especially the territories of the Habsburg monarchy offer the transnational opera scholar rich hunting grounds.

If much social and cultural history still refers predominantly to national developments, the profession follows nineteenth-century parameters of modernisation theory, which assumed that societies will automatically constitute themselves as nation states; that local and regional identities will disappear, along with religious and other markers of traditional identity. This assumption is empirically incorrect, even for the modern period. If defined by their economic, social or even political activity, or by cultural signifiers, most societies are characterised by transterritorial connections between sub-national groups, including trade across political borders, labour migration and other strategies of guaranteeing subsistence and reproduction.²⁹ These transterritorial exchanges are not only used to meet demands in moments of crisis, but constitute the essence of how societies understand themselves.

Another Italian example serves to illustrate the role of transterritorial exchanges. In the case of Venice and Venetia, the legacy of transterritoriality helps to explain the region's late and difficult integration into the Italian nation state after 1866, and the provincial isolation which characterised Venice after a liberation to which the city's population contributed relatively little. Much of its fate was decided hundreds of miles North on Bohemian battlefields. While in 1848-49 Venice fought heroically for its independence from Austria and for the reconstitution of its Republican rights, in 1866 it made no significant contribution to its liberation. Instead, the Prussian and Austrian armies decided much of Italy's so-called Third War of Liberation. At the time, the social, economic and cultural boundaries of Venetian society hardly overlapped with those of the new nation state. Despite the long decline of the Republic of Venice, cultural and economic connections still linked it to different parts of the Habsburg monarchy, but also to the wider Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean; Ugo Foscolo and his campaign for the Ionian Islands serves as a powerful example.³⁰ Most of the city's transterritorial connections were lost as a consequence of Unification. Even cultural institutions, such as *La Fenice*, were adversely affected by the city's integration into the Italian nation state. As Jutta Toelle has shown, over decades the famous theatre was run with great

success in a kind of joint venture with Vienna, as one of the most prestigious opera houses in Europe.³¹ After 1866 it shared the misery of most Italian theatres post-Unification. The new nation state refused to take on responsibility for the theatres of the former capital cities, and as a consequence *La Fenice* was unable to find impresarios prepared to take the financial risk of organising a season without adequate subsidies. Over the following decades its doors remained closed for eleven out of twenty-four years. Similarly, Naples' *San Carlo*, accustomed to the generosity of its Bourbon rulers before 1860, remained closed for three successive years during the 1870s; the *Pergola* in Florence ceased to produce regular opera performances after 1877; and *la Scala*, another of the Habsburgs' great opera houses, remained shut for several years because the municipality was unwilling to provide subsidies.³² While historians continue to debate *Italian opera* as well as *opera in Italy* – to use Rosselli's distinction – in terms of “national culture”, as soon as this culture was pressed into the straightjacket of the nation state it declined, threatened with immediate suffocation.³³ Many of Italy's great theatres remained just shadows of themselves; Italian musicians emigrated to Latin America; for much of the century's remaining decades the centre of operatic attention became French opera and European Wagnerism. The greatest successes of Verdi pre-dated Unification; after *Un ballo in maschera*, he mostly wrote for foreign stages. In Bologna, between 1871 and 1915, *Lohengrin* became the most frequently performed opera, followed by *La Traviata*, but with *Tristan* in the third place.³⁴ When Puccini and *la giovine scuola* tried to revive Italian opera, most critics rejected his works as effeminate and “un-Italian”, as Alexandra Wilson has eloquently demonstrated in *The Puccini Problem*.³⁵ Italy had been unified, but one of the principal features which defined Italy as a *Kulturnation* – opera – was seriously undermined by the whole enterprise. Even in an age of nationalism music does not easily fit national categories. Italian Unification is often studied as a problem of international history. The example illustrates how transnational approaches can change the narrative.

The Age of Nationalism is also an Age of Empire. Colonial administration provides an even more obvious example where territorial identities do not coincide with the boundaries of nation states. In two rather different bodies of work the British post-colonial scholar Catherine Hall and the Russianist Geoffrey Hosking have demonstrated how the experience of empire is essential to the understanding of national identity, including concepts of citizenship and patterns of inclusion and exclusion.³⁶ Historians often treat Britain or Russia as nation states, but what defines their peoples' identity, their motivation, their social hierarchies and their economic strategies, is the fact that they live in states that constitute Empires. The pasts of these peoples have to be written as imperial histories, rather than in national terms. This also affects the ways we write about opera, for instance the history of theatres such as *la Scala* or *la Fenice* within their imperial context. The new imperial history challenges the focus on relations between sovereign states by discussing cross-cultural encounters, though not always explicitly in transnational terms. This historiography has immensely enhanced our understanding of imperial connections and their economic rationale. What sets the transnational agenda of this approach is the emphasis on the metropole as the product of imperial connections. Postcolonial theory has helped to shift the emphasis from Empires within international relations to research on Empire and metropole as a transnational relationship, where Empire is no longer seen as happening far away but as an experience which constitutes the understanding of the imperial

nation back home. Through literature, music, material culture and education, Empire constructed notions of citizenship, gender, class, religion and race.³⁷ Opera studies can take meaningful inspiration from this body of work: in addition to the internationalisation of the opera industry, mentioned above, the analysis of the representation of imperial hierarchies in opera provides only one example.³⁸

Global history bears similar opportunities for opera studies. According to Akyra Iriye, the “foreign affairs of any country are built on certain ideas and images about a number of communities: national, regional, global, as well as subnational.” In his work on Japan the wider world becomes “the key framework, the mental universe, in which Japanese people and their leaders have sought to understand their place and their role in the international community”.³⁹ He begins his history of modern Japanese diplomacy with a quote from 1869, shortly after the Meiji Restoration, in which the court noble and government official Iwakura Tomomi instructs his fellow countrymen that “all human beings have horizontal eyes and vertical noses. Even if their hair is red and eyes blue, they are all human, endowed with their ideas of loyalty, filial piety, and marital affection. We should not despise them as barbarians but treat them as courteously as we would friends.”⁴⁰ Japan’s modern efforts to position itself in international relations started from the comparability of racial features and their significance for shared behavioural codes. The dramatic change of Japan’s relationship with the world resulted from the transfer of ideas between different parts of the world and from the border crossings of people who had previously lived largely in isolation. Rather than simply emulating the West, Iriye sees this process as a pragmatic approach to perceived realities, a largely non-ideological understanding of the world, which nevertheless met the opposition of those political actors in Japan who favoured a more robust and sometimes a more Asianist orientation to the nation’s foreign policy. What is sometimes simply described as Japan’s modernisation or its westernisation becomes a complex process of cultural and intellectual exchange, which historians cannot fully investigate using the traditional methods of diplomatic history. If transnational opera studies wish to go global, it is these processes it needs to understand.

But did globalisation start with European expansion into the New World? A global approach to transnational connections also helps to challenge Eurocentric prejudice, putting more recent world economic developments and international struggles for supremacy into perspective. The rise of Europe as a global power is a relatively recent phenomenon, which, contrary to many traditional accounts, does not coincide with the “discovery” of the New World several centuries earlier. Around 1900 Britain led worldwide manufacturing output, followed closely by the United States; but as late as 1800 China was still producing more manufactured goods than any other country. This is not only relevant to our understanding of the world economy as such, but also explains China’s political power in that particular part of the world – power that survived China’s own turmoil during the twentieth century. According to Chris Bayly, it is between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth century that uniformities in state administration, trade and political ideologies place the European imperial system and Western cultural models at the centre of a new wave of globalization. These processes made the globalisation of opera possible. For Bayly, globalization as a specific form of modernity is the consequence of Empire-building and emerges from the establishment of transnational connections between

Western Imperial powers, the Islamic world and South Asia. Race, ecological degradation and the use of violence are at the centre of this system. They form the transnational connections that define global power. These are processes from the background to the globalisation of Western music.

The many different trajectories transnational history has taken in recent years suggest that it presents history as a whole within a new epistemological context. Traditionally, few questions were raised when discussing social, cultural and intellectual developments in relation to the nation, usually based on teleological concepts of national history, which take the emergence of the nation state for granted at a time when such outcomes were far from certain. This often still is a history written from the perspective of the winners of history. Transnational perspectives can help to challenge such narratives. Transnational history is therefore more than the history of connections across borders; it also challenges a conceptual prejudice that sees the past primarily through the prism of nationality.

IV. National approaches to the arts and social sciences privilege one aspect of human identity over others. Very different was the approach of sociologist Georg Simmel, who explained the experience of modernity as the tension arising from the overlapping plurality of impressions, identities and associations. Baudelaire's *flaneur* and the traveller in Rilke's Notebook illustrate how different contemporaries lived this experience and responded to it. Contrary to those early sociologists and commentators on the experience of modernity, some social scientists in the later twentieth century tend to reduce modern human experience to single categories, as identities narrowly based on either nationality, religious faith, race or ethnicity. A particularly prominent example of this approach is Samuel Huntington's thesis of the Clash of Civilizations as an attempt to explain modern relationships between groups. The clash is caused by the narrow focus on single identities. Taken to the extreme, this approach leads to dangerous forms of religious, ethnocentric or national determinism. It is perhaps provocative to argue that national prejudice in historical analysis involves similar risks; but the vivid nature of debates on the transnational challenge suggests that historians should engage with those concerns articulated in our neighbouring disciplines.

The economist and Nobel-prize winner Amartya Sen presents us with a pertinent critique of identity-based thinking, which has important implications for the ways in which some scholars make nationality and ethnicity the sole basis of their analysis. Arguing against the reduction of human experience to single identities, Sen reminds us of "the broad commonality of our shared humanity, but also many other identities that everyone simultaneously has".⁴¹ Sen rejects a view of interpersonal relations reduced to "singular intergroup terms", which pays no attention to the many other social groups to which individuals also belong: based on gender, social, political or cultural connections.⁴² What Sen reformulates here for our modern world has ancient roots in political thought. No one less than Cesare Beccaria warns us of placing tribes above individuals. What he calls "lo spirito di famiglia" is in fact "a spirit of detail, limited to marginal facts." While tribal thinking "inspires submission and fear", recognizing the individual, so Beccaria, offers "courage and freedom."⁴³

Social scientists and scholars in the humanities should take account of these multiple forms of overlapping identities that make humanity, which means to leave the one-way road of cultural and ethnic determinism. More concretely, this means to abstain from reducing the analysis of the operatic practices to nationality. Opera is almost always more than *Nationaloper*. Among the plurality of affiliations characterising producers and consumers of opera - gender, class, ideologies, urban identities, regional or imperial loyalties - many are by nature transnational. Nationality represents a relatively minor aspect of what characterises humanity. Therefore, any historical study that makes the nation or national identity the sole focus of analysis risks diminishing human experience.

In 1781 the Abbé Raynal, in his book on the American Revolution, remarked that "nations in general are made more for feeling than for thinking."⁴⁴ Let us feel when we sit in the theatre, but as opera scholars we ought to think; and thinking doesn't need to be boring. A narrow focus on semantic content in form of national tropes detracts us from what Susan Sontag has called "the erotics of art".⁴⁵ Isn't that what we love about opera?

¹ P. [Pietro Verri], "La musica", in: *Il Caffè. 1764-1766* (Gianni Francioni and Sergio Romagnoli, eds). Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993, 487-494, 487. Axel Körner, "Le devin du village: Language and the aesthetics of music", <http://passionatepolitics.eu/rousseau-devin-du-village/> (accessed 25/08/2015)

² Many periodicals have dedicated special issues, discussions and review articles to these themes. See for instance Matthew Hilton and Rana Miller, eds, *Past and Present Supplement: Transnationalism and Contemporary Global History*, 2013. *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 6/2 (2008), "Technological Innovation and Transnational Networks"; "AHR Conversation: On transnational history", *American Historical Review*, vol.111/5 (2006), 1441-1464; *Contemporary European History*, 14:4 (2005), Transnational Communities in European History

³ Sorba, Carlotta 1993. *L'eredità delle mura. Un caso di municipalismo democratico (Parma 1889-1914)*. Venezia: Marsilio.

⁴ Jan Smaczny, "'That great little man': Dvorak and Wagner", in :Anastasia Belina-Johnson and Stephen Muir, eds, *Wagner in Russia, Poland, and the Czech Lands*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 93-119

⁵ See for instance Herder's philosophy of history in nineteenth-century Latin American political thought: Nicola Miller, "A Theatre of Transformations: Herder and the Writing of History in Spanish America", in: Claire Lindsay, ed., *Traslados/Translations. Essays on Latin America in Honour of Jason Wilson*. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2012, 19-34. For the circulation of the ideas of Mazzini see Christopher A. Bayly and Eugenio F. Biagini, eds, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism 1830-1920*. (Proceedings of the British Academy, 152). Oxford: OUP, 2008. Also Francesco Guida, ed., *Dalla Giovine Europa alla Grande Europa*. Rome: Carocci, 2007.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). New York: Routledge, 2007, X

⁷ David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence. A Global History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007. George Athan Billias, ed., *American Constitutionalism Abroad. Selected essays in comparative constitutional history*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990

⁸ See for instance Christopher A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile. Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁹ For an overview of these dynamics see Felipe Fernández-Armesto / Benjamin Sacks, "The Global Exchange of Food and Drugs", in: Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Consumption*. Oxford: OUP, 2013, 127-144

¹⁰ Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj : piracy, banditry, and holy war in the sixteenth-century Adriatic*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London: Verso, 1993. Herman Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. Idem., *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. Benjamin Walton, "Operatic fantasies in Latin America", *Opera and Nation in nineteenth-century Italy*, Special Issue *JMIS* 17/4, ed. Axel Körner (September 2012), 460-471. On the globalisation of Italian opera see also Jutta Toelle, "Der Duft der großen weiten Welt. Ideen zum weltweiten Siegeszug der italienischen Oper im 19. Jahrhundert.", in: Sven Oliver Müller, Philipp Ther, Jutta Toelle, Gesa zur Nieden, eds, *Die Oper im Wandel der Gesellschaft. Kulturtransfers und Netzwerke des Musiktheaters in Europa*. Wien: Böhlau, 2010, 251-261; John Rosselli, "The Opera Business and the Italian Immigrant Community in Latin America 1820-1930: The Example of Buenos Aires", *Past and Present* 127/1 (1990), 155-182

¹¹ Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans. From Unification to the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹² For a detailed analysis of this performance see Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy. From Unification to Fascism*. New York: Routledge, 2009, chpt. 9

¹³ For a critique of transnational history from a comparative perspective see Heinz Gerhard Haupt, "Une nouvelle sensibilité: la perspective transnationale. Une note critique", in: *Cahiers Jaurès*, 2011/2 (200), 173-180. For a combination of a transnational and a comparative approach see Axel Körner, Nicola Miller, Adam Smith, eds, *America Imagined : Explaining the United States in nineteenth-century Europe and Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹⁴ Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 17.

¹⁵ Pierre-Yves Saunier, "Learning by Doing: Notes about the Making of Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History", *Journal of Modern European History*, vol.6/2, 2008, 159-179, 165.

¹⁶ Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History", in: *American Historical Review*, 96/4 (1991), 1031-1072.

¹⁷ Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880-1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

- ¹⁸ Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. Anthony G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History*. London: Pimlico, 2002. Idem, ed., *Global History: interactions between the global and the local*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. München: Beck, 2009 (engl. transl. *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.)
- ¹⁹ Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013
- ²⁰ Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History. Historians Create a Global Past*. Basingstoke: Palgrave 2003, 3.
- ²¹ In this respect Sven Beckert's notion of the "interconnectedness of human history" as a starting point for transnational history might be a helpful corrective: Sven Beckert, in: "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History", *American Historical Review*, 111:5 (2006), 1440-1464
- ²² Akira Iriye, *Japan and the wider world: from the mid-nineteenth century to the present*. London: Longman, 1997, 48. On Iriye's notion of "global community" see idem., *Global community: the role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world*. Berkeley, Calif. ; London : University of California Press, 2002
- ²³ On transnational approaches to the history of the Risorgimento see the 2014/1 special issue of *Modern Italy* edited by Oliver Janz and Lucy Riall. Also Dominique Reill, "The Risorgimento: A Multinational Movement", in: Silvana Patriarca / Lucy Riall, eds, *The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 255-269
- ²⁴ John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680-1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005
- ²⁵ For Ian Tyrell, transnational history concerns "the period since the emergence of nation-states as important phenomena in world history" after the treaty of Westphalia: *Transnational nation. United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 3
- ²⁶ Claudio Magris, *Danubio*. Milano: Garzanti, 1986
- ²⁷ Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation. Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006
- ²⁸ For an outline of Palacky's argument see "Letter sent by František Palacky' to Frankfurt." *Slavonic and East European Review* 26 (67): 303–308
- ²⁹ For a case study see the example of interwar Greece: Susanne-Sophia Spiliotis, "Das Konzept der Transterritorialität oder Wo findet Gesellschaft statt?", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001), 480-488.
- ³⁰ Foscolo's principal writings on the subject are collected in the two parts of volume XIII of the Edizione Nazionale: Ugo Foscolo, *Prose politiche e apologetiche, 1817-1827* (Giovanni Gambarin, ed.). Florence: Le Monnier, 1964. For concepts of nationality in the Venetian context see Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation. Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. David Laven and Laura Parker, "Foreign rule? Transnational, national and local perspectives on Venice and Venetia within the 'multinational' Empire", in *Modern Italy* 19/1 (2014), 5-19
- ³¹ Jutta Toelle, "Opera as business? From impresari to the publishing industry", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17/4, 2012, 448-459
- ³² John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi. The role of the Impresario*, Cambridge: Cambridge Paperback Library, 1987, 78. Fiamma Nicolodi, "Il sistema produttivo, dall'Unità a oggi", in: Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, eds, *Storia dell'opera italiana*. Vol. IV: *Il sistema produttivo e le sue competenze*. Turin: EDT, 1987, 167-229, 169-180
- ³³ See on this question the special issue "Opera and Nation in Nineteenth Century Italy" (Axel Körner, ed.), *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17/4, 2012.
- ³⁴ Axel Körner, "Ein soziales „Dramma in musica“? Verdi, alte Notabeln und neue Eliten im Theater des liberalen Italiens", *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol.287 (August 2008), 61-89
- ³⁵ Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem. Opera, Nationalism and Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- ³⁶ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830 – 1867*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917*. London: Harper Collins, 1997.
- ³⁷ See in particular Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds, *At Home with the Empire. Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*. Cambridge: CUP, 2006. Also Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, eds, *Race, nation and empire. Making histories, 1750 to the present*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010
- ³⁸ See for example the establishment of operatic orientalism: Mark Everist, "Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in egitto: mélodrame, opera, orientalism*", in: idem., *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, 101-140
- ³⁹ Iriye, *Japan and the wider world*, VII f

⁴⁰ Iriye, *Japan and the wider world*, 1

⁴¹ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Penguin, 2007, 3 f.

⁴² Sen, *Identity*, XVI, 156.

⁴³ Cesare Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene. Contro le ingiustizie della giustizia* (1764). Milan: Rizzoli, 1994, 111 f

⁴⁴ Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *The Revolution of America*. London: Lockyer Davis, 1781, 17 f

⁴⁵ Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" (1964), in: *idem, Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. London/New York: Penguin, 2009, 14