1 Global lives

The world changed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. It changed in directions that can be described using some of our current ideas of globalisation. Parts of the world that were previously disconnected became connected in novel ways; important reconfigurations of empires and trade routes were established that operated beyond the confines of nation-states; the lives of many people were increasingly shaped by the decisions made by others who lived far away in new centres of power and control; cultures and landscapes were reworked as people, ideas and material objects were transported and recombined elsewhere in unprecedented ways. It was a world that offered striking possibilities for power and profit for some and new dangers and forms of oppression and exploitation for others. The processes that created this world were shaped by many people, and, in turn, these processes themselves changed many lives.

Contemporary mapmakers sought to interpret this changing geography. Herman Moll, a late seventeenth-century migrant to London from war-torn northern Europe, presented to a British audience *A New Map of the Whole World* (Figure 1.1) that was simultaneously one of confidence and trepidation. It offered a globe whose geography was ordered by the trade winds that could carry merchant and naval ships to its four corners. Yet what is known to Europeans is obviously incomplete. There are many gaps on the map. The different implications of this new world of trade for people, real and imagined, are also illustrated on the map. Engraved at the bottom are allegorical male figures representing each of the four continents: America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Each is dressed as if for war, with weapons to hand. Between them is the Roman goddess Fortuna. Held with her right arm, a cornucopia pours forth symbols of sovereignty and wealth. On her left, she also brings to the world the instruments of violence and terror: a dagger, a whip, a hatchet, shackles and the hangman's noose. Lives would now be bound together across the lands and seas of the world by trade, war, money, power and pain.

This book sets out to demonstrate the ways in which these historical and geographical changes happened. It weaves together accounts of the making of this new world of global connection and, in order to bring that to life, the

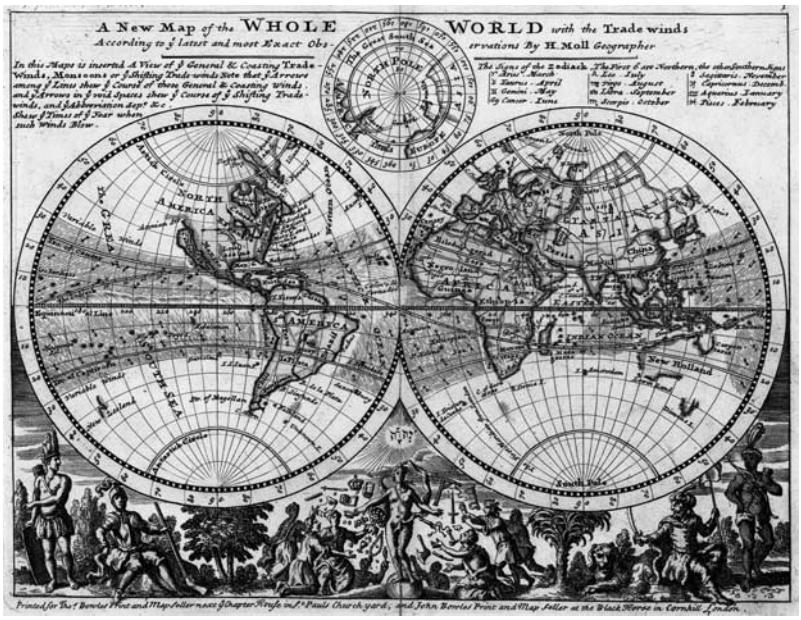

Figure 1.1 *A New Map of the Whole World*, by Herman Moll, 1736. This was one of many maps that were drawn, printed and sold to a broad European audience from the late seventeenth century onwards. Using the latest cartographic information and a range of allegorical figures it offered its viewers a vision of their place in the world.

biographies of some of those whose work, ideas, relationships and struggles made all of this come about. In what follows the histories and geographies of trade, settlement, colonisation, empire building, piracy, slavery and science are set out to demonstrate the variety of forms of global connection that made this world. The organisation and the implications of these histories and geographies are traced out through the lives of figures both well known – such as Queen Elizabeth, Captain Cook and Toussaint L'Ouverture – and previously more obscure – La Belinguere, Anne Bonny and Tupaia. Telling the tales of their lives as part of these global changes sheds new light on how we think of their biographies, and it offers a renewed perspective on the history of globalisation and on global history.

Questioning global history

Global history – or world history, or universal history – takes many forms. It has been around for a long time, but has gained a new life in the context of an expanding interest in processes of contemporary globalisation within

both the social sciences and the wider media. Social theorists and media commentators have propounded views of a new globalised economy, society and culture emerging in the late twentieth century. At the same time those concerned with the past have engaged in efforts to put these contemporary forms of globalisation into a longer-term – and sometimes very long-term indeed – history of modes of global connection. Globalisation, it is stressed, has a past. It has a history. The world of increasing global connections and interconnections involving trade, violence and cultural encounter is not something unprecedented. What is going on now can be understood on the basis of what happened in the past. Yet giving globalisation a history also means recognising that it changes over time. There are different sorts of globalisation. There are different global histories that have to be set out, and there are comparisons that can be made to illuminate the implications of these histories.

Much global history needs to operate on the largest scales of space and time in order to make evident the connections and comparisons that it seeks to draw out. Its advantage is that it operates beyond the scale of the locality, the region or the nation-state, drawing comparisons between world regions, civilisations or empires, or tracing the connections made by warfare, long-distance trade or disease across oceans and continents. These entities and these connections arise, change and decline on the timescale of centuries. It must also be said that global history cannot avoid questions of geography. In seeking to be truly global, and in aiming to transcend the blinkers of the taken-for-granted geographies of smaller spatial scales, particularly that of the nation-state, historians have to redefine the geographies that they are working with. The two most prominent forms of global history – the tracing of connections and the making of comparisons – are both defined geographically. The argument that history proceeds through long-term webs of connection, either positive or negative, which produce economic, political, social and cultural change requires the recognition of both the 'political frontiers, spatial units and geographical boundaries' that are crossed, and the shape, scale and impact of the networks or webs of connection that do the crossing.[1] Comparative global history, by contrast, has to establish a new (or renewed) geographical basis for comparison. Once again, this is a geography that is beyond the scale of the nation-state. In one of the most celebrated cases, this involves comparing the economic histories of China and Europe over four centuries in order to demonstrate the relatively recent 'Great Divergence' between them, and its basis in the contingent circumstances of the availability of sources of energy rather than in long-term social or cultural structures.

The long chronologies and large scales of these forms of global history have often demanded big arguments too. A central debate has been over the 'Rise of the West', with global historians disagreeing over the reasons for the growing hegemony, achieved by the nineteenth century, of 'the West' over 'the rest'. Here global history necessarily intersects with, and even becomes, the history of empires, particularly the history of European empires and their rise and fall. Recent debates among imperial historians have taken a global perspective to debate the legacies of the British Empire across the globe, and its role in the making of the modern world. Interpretations of the 'rise of the West' have also been caught up in debates over the historical development of capitalism. For historians, social theorists and anthropologists seeking a central motor for global history and a central organising principle for global geography, the organisation of production, distribution and consumption through capital's profit-seeking forms of economic activity since at least the sixteenth century seems to fit the bill. As Karl Marx, the nineteenth century's keenest critic of capitalism, put it, drawing the histories of four continents together in characteristically dramatic and ironic terms, 'The discovery of silver and gold in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre.'[2] Using these ideas it has been argued that global history can be told in terms of the development of a single capitalist world system whose changing geography of core, periphery and semi-periphery defines the fortunes of different parts of the globe.

Yet these big arguments are also unsubtle and unstable ones. The grand narratives both of the 'Rise of the West' and of singular economic explanations have been undermined in various ways. Their assumptions of singularity have been challenged by increased attention to the histories of other parts of the world – to the dependence of European development on broader Afro-Eurasian changes, and to the multiple origins of capitalism – and by a questioning of whether categories such as 'the West' or 'capitalism' are not just terms of convenience, used by people now and in the past for particular purposes, which obscure a multiplicity of differences. There are two connected implications of this: first, gathering in the different trajectories that can be traced in arenas as diverse as material life, warfare, religion, culture, gender and politics under the broad umbrella headings of 'the West' or 'capitalism' seems to do damage to the different ways in which they might be explained and used to write global histories. Second, seeking a single global historical

geography – the West's 'rise' or the capitalist world system – that eventually operates across the whole globe seems to do equal damage to the range of spatial forms, relationships and connections that might be studied, so that new ways of describing these geographies need to be found.

This is, perhaps, unsurprising. After a flurry of apocalyptic or utopian pronouncements about contemporary globalisation as heralding 'the end of geography': either as the dream of a world in which distance no longer mattered, and local differentiation no longer stood in the way of global flows, or as the nightmare of a world made homogeneous by the domination of finance capital and American culture, a different picture has emerged. Contemporary globalisation is understood not as singular and undifferentiated but as partial, multiple and diverse. There are different relationships and varied geographies to be traced depending on where we look and what we look at. Economic analyses of trade and money look different from cultural analyses of religion or language. Different places and different people are involved in particular ways in globalising processes. The imperative is to trace the specific and distinct relationships and the forms of connection that are made over time and space.

For many, understanding global changes in the past – for example, tracing histories of migrations, the development of trade, the building of empires or the uses of technologies – is also a matter of the many geographies of globalisation. Thinking about this can usefully develop ideas of networks or webs of global connection that are built in various ways to link people, places, ideas and objects together in dynamic configurations. The advantage of thinking in this way is that it allows for multiple webs or networks to come into view, all with different shapes and different sorts of connections, rather than trying to construct a single big picture into which all must fit. It allows for many different ways of being global, or of doing globalisation. For instance, the set of connections formed by merchants trading over long distances could be quite different from that made by imperial administrators governing overseas territories, although they also intersected at some points. Each web or network can also be seen as connecting different sorts of things in different ways, with particular implications for those involved. They can also be seen to have meshed or clashed with each other in ways that might be either complementary or contradictory. This means that we can be attentive to complex processes of change over time, and also to the shifting geographies of where people are located within and between these different webs or networks. This produces much more nuanced historical geographies than ones that speak simply of core and periphery. Thinking in this way means that the accounts produced by those undertaking global history are themselves becoming increasingly diverse and differentiated. They may no

longer speak of the whole world as one, or even of the whole world, but their intentions are no less global for all that.

Geographies of global connection

Global Lives aims to provide just this sort of history. The time-span that it covers is a long one, but at the same time it is also limited to the two and half centuries between around 1550 and about 1800 during which Britain became a global power with well-developed connections to Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. This means that the geographical scope of this global historical geography is a wide one, but one that is delimited by the focus on England's, and then Britain's, involvement with the wider world. These considerations of scale and scope mean that this is, therefore, a book in which the concerns of global history and the history of empire closely intersect. Quite simply, the British 'empire' became a global matter during this period. In the middle of the sixteenth century England had significant extra-territorial interests only in the British Isles, especially over Ireland, and some claims to pockets of territory in France. By the end of the eighteenth century an empire had been gained and then lost in North America (although Canada remained within the fold); a new empire was being created in large parts of India; there were imperial designs on the Pacific; and the vast wealth of the sugar-producing islands of the Caribbean was integrated into a network of Atlantic trade which shipped unprecedented numbers of enslaved Africans across the ocean on British ships.

This extensive empire was put together through warfare, primarily through those wars fought in the eighteenth century against the French and the Spanish. Britain was at war for much of that century. The balance of European power and the control over territories beyond Europe shifted between these great powers as a result of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the American War of Independence (1775–1783) and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815). In general, and over time, power and territory shifted in favour of the British Empire. One of the main aims of the book is to show how this particular history and geography was created. By attending to the many forms of connection forged between Britain and other places it shows how new and often fragile relationships were established, how these links were made routine, and how they were integrated in a way that pulled Britain away from the margins and into the centre of a global network.

This requires a global historical geography, but *Global Lives* is only one of the many global historical geographies that might be written. It is left to others to use this account of Britain and the world to help provide a comparative history of European empires, or to evaluate Britain's global connections and forms of social, cultural and economic change in relation to what was happening elsewhere in the world or in other time periods. What this book aims to do is to set out the changing historical geographies of Britain's modes of global connection and engagement in these crucial centuries. Each chapter takes as its focus a particular process or set of processes explored through their changing geographies: Elizabethan England's forays into trade, empire and colonialism; settlement in early North America; trade with the East Indies; trade in the Atlantic world; the organisation of maritime labour; the changing forms of piracy; the transatlantic slave trade; plantation slavery in the Caribbean; the movement to abolish the slave trade; and the voyages of 'discovery' in the Pacific Ocean. These are judged to be the most significant processes and relationships involved in shaping Britain's engagement with the world. The intention has not been to cover all geographical areas, so there is nothing here, for example, on Britain's relationship with China or with northern Europe. Neither is the intention to provide a political or administrative history of the British Empire. There is no chapter on the American Revolution and its implications. Overall, in my choice of subject matter I have tried to combine the thematic and the geographical. I have sought out constellations, networks or configurations of people, ideas and things whose organisation and movements shaped Britain's changing place in and involvement with the rest of the world.

Each chapter sets out the shifting dimensions and shape of the history and geography of the processes under consideration. Each aims to outline the ways in which that form of global connection worked, and how it changed over time and space. Who was involved? What were their relationships to each other? How were places connected? How did relationships, connections and places change? Each chapter's intention is global, its geographical coverage stretching as far as the relationships discussed take it. Yet it is also partial, concerned with only one of the many webs or networks. What are being followed are particular forms of connection and engagement. This means that each chapter can easily be read separately: each is relatively self-contained. While the book as a whole is organised in a broadly chronological order the reader can switch back and forth between chapters, reading thematically as much as chronologically.

This focus on different modes of global connection also means that the forms of interpretation shift between chapters. Some are undoubtedly more

focused on questions of economics, such as the discussion of the dynamics of merchant involvement in the Atlantic trades. Others pay more attention to social and cultural questions, such as the analysis of the organisation of maritime labour, or the questions of intercultural relationships in the settlement of North America. Another, the discussion of the abolition of the slave trade, centres on questions of politics. This is in recognition of the differences between the subject matter of each chapter, and what is required for understanding and interpretation in each one. There is an intention here to treat each process in parity with the others, not prioritising one over the other, but exploring how each works. Yet at the same time this differentiation of focus between the chapters is never exclusive. The overall intention to explain the historical geography of a particular form of global connection or engagement means that this cannot be simply an economic history, or a social, cultural or political one. This breadth of approach is also an outcome of the book's focus on the individual lives of those involved in these processes.

Telling global lives

The shift of global history away from singular 'master narratives' focused on the longest spans of time, the largest scales and the broadest comparisons opens up a variety of new questions. Once the emphasis is on the differentiation of global processes, networks and webs these forms of history are opened more fully to other modes of historical enquiry, such as the history of empire or the history of slavery. They are also opened up to the question of the actions of the people who were part of these processes. While it is important not simply to associate the large scale with the constraints imposed by political, economic and social structures, it is easier to see the effects of human action, and the effects on human action, once that global scale is understood as the on-going organisation of different and partial relationships, networks and webs. These modes of connection may stretch across vast areas, but they always do so via particular forms of action, perhaps the translation between languages, the filling in of an account book, the sailing of a ship or the signing of a petition. They also meet particular forms of action understood as collaboration or resistance.

What makes this book distinctive is that it gives due weight to the actions of all sorts of people in exploring these global histories and geographies. It does so by setting out the 'global lives' of over forty different individuals across the different chapters (those chosen are also summarised in the 'Brief

lives' section at the beginning of the book, and displayed all together, against the background of Britain's history of warfare, on the chronological 'Life lines' diagram, p. xx). This biographical approach serves to give some life to the accounts presented in each chapter, first, by dramatising the issues for the reader by introducing them to specific individuals and, second, by animating the more abstract processes, histories and geographies through showing that they involved all those things that make up individual lives: personal relationships, difficult choices, the making of identities and the conditions and implications of action. Indeed, another main aim of this book is to emphasise the role of the actions – what we call the 'agency' – of all people involved in these global processes. People can and do make a difference for themselves and others.

Global Lives deploys the tools of biography to explore and understand global and imperial history. In many ways this is nothing new. The biographies of powerful and prominent figures have long been used to chart the histories of exploration and discovery, of empire building, of piracy and of global warfare. Some of these figures feature in this book too: Sir Walter Ralegh, the Elizabethan adventurer who is supposed to have brought tobacco and the potato back from the Americas; Sir William Jones, the 'father' of the Western study of Oriental languages; Captain William Kidd, the pirate hunter turned pirate; and Captain James Cook, whose three voyages charted the Pacific Ocean. Yet there is also a more recent trend amongst historians and others to tell a different set of life stories. This has emerged where global and imperial history meets social and cultural history. Here the lives of those who might otherwise have been left in obscurity, or have slipped back into it, are retold in great detail and situated within the broader sweep of events, and within the complex economic, political and cultural contexts of which they were a part. These are often dramatic stories, and some are retold in what follows: the New England preacher's daughter Eunice Williams's captivity among the native Americans in Kahnawake; the capture, enslavement and freedom of Little Ephraim Robin John and Ancona Robin Robin John, African slave-traders who became slaves; the everyday violence perpetrated by the Jamaican slave overseer Thomas Thistlewood; and the many travels of the former slave and political activist Olaudah Equiano. In turn, this form of life writing has produced new approaches to the biographies of the powerful and prominent too, moving away, as in recent treatments of Captain Cook, from individual motivation to careful anthropological contextualisation. However, in contrast to all these biographies – old, new and renewed – which tell the world through a single life, *Global Lives* offers a variety of lives through which multiple worlds can be told.

The aim is to present the world as seen from many points of view: masters and slaves; men and women; indigenous people and newcomers; the powerful and those who helped or resisted them; the upholders of the law and its breakers. The intention is to use these lives to draw out the implications of different locations and positions within the networks and webs set out in accounting for the histories and geographies of global connection. It gives life to what were often the situations of many, or at least what shaped the situations of many, by focusing on a few. Alongside variety, the other aim is parity. Each life is given roughly the same amount of attention regardless of the prominence accorded to it in other histories or in the surviving sources. All of the chapters are then organised around four or five of these biographical sketches, each one of which is recounted under the heading 'The world of . . . '.

The chapters are, however, organised differently to make use of these lives to explore how individuals fitted into the global processes under consideration, and how their actions shaped them. A few examples will suffice. Chapter 2 offers a more historically grounded introduction to the book than does this one. It shows through the biographies of Walter Ralegh, John Hawkins (England's first slave-trader) and Hugh O'Neill (the Irish rebel lord) that they each responded to a different dimension of the policy towards the world beyond continental Europe produced by Elizabeth I's unique situation as a Protestant queen. In their responses, the tentative, partial, fragile and compromised beginnings of Britain's later global history can be seen. In turn, chapter 4 pairs an English and an Indian merchant who worked together in seventeenth-century Fort St George (later Madras) – Streynsham Master and Kasi Viranna – and then a British and an Indian lawyer – William Jones and Radhakanta Tarkavagisa – who also worked together in late eighteenth-century Bengal, to demonstrate the changing balance of power in India over two centuries of British involvement. Finally, chapter 5 selects merchants operating at different times and in different places in the Atlantic world – William Freeman and Richard Oswald in London, Robert Keayne in Boston and La Belinguere at the mouth of the Gambia River – to show the similarities and differences between their attempts to profit from increasingly transoceanic trades.

Therefore, in different ways in different chapters the intention is always to use these lives to draw comparisons between those in different positions. Sometimes it is to demonstrate the differences between people, such as the contrast drawn in chapter 10 between the different political positions taken on the abolition of the slave trade (and of slavery itself) by the political organiser Thomas Clarkson, the writer Hannah More, the ex-slave Olaudah