

Chapter 8

A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY AND ITS GLOBAL DIS:CONNECTIONS

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Introduction

In the early autumn of 1782, the ship *Zeldenrust* made a trip from Hamburg to St. Thomas in the West Indies.¹ The ship was owned by a group of five merchants and held cargo worth seventy thousand marks. Upon arrival in the Caribbean, the ship's supercargo, Friedrich Wever (or Weber), set to work, selling the cargo of manufactured goods, some of which had been produced in the small town of Elberfeld. Wever, who incidentally was also one of the ship's shareholders, used the proceeds to acquire agricultural products as return goods. These were then loaded onto the *Zeldenrust* and a couple of other ships ready to return and were successively shipped back to Hamburg. Insurance was taken out in Hamburg for both journeys. Wever himself returned to Hamburg in January 1783, and some of the return goods arrived somewhat later in the spring.

When it comes to chronology and mechanics, this series of transactions was unremarkable. It involved a range of commercial practices characteristic of early modern global trade: a consortium of ship owners, the use of commission agents and insurance brokers, the exchange of manufactured goods for raw materials, as well as the lengthy transaction times involved. However, the *Zeldenrust's* journey spawned lengthy court proceedings that took place not in Hamburg or any other center of global trade but rather in the two towns of Elberfeld and Düsseldorf, in the landlocked Duchy of Berg. These extensive court records, along with those of another case relating to a shipment of goods to the West Indies around the same time—likewise heard by the privy council in Düsseldorf—are here used to

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scrutinize the global entanglements of Elberfeld, the proverbial hometown in the Holy Roman Empire.² By reading them closely, I will show that in Elberfeld, as elsewhere, global entanglements were always impacted by both global and local forces, so that the form globalization took there was unique, even as it shared common characteristics with the globalization of other towns.

While historians of Germany and the Holy Roman Empire have long downplayed or outright denied the importance of global interactions for developments in the German lands prior to the mid-nineteenth century, there have been a number of attempts to showcase the global connections of Central Europe in recent years.³ Researchers have focused mainly on industries and commodity trade, but changes in material culture and in consumption habits have also been highlighted.⁴ Further topics under investigation are early modern German experiences and practices of slavery, as well as the impact of missions.⁵ In dealing with the supposed hinterlands and peripheries of the early modern world, this growing field of research profoundly challenges hasty relegations of any such region to the backwaters of history.⁶

As is so often the case with global history undertakings, most of these endeavors are committed to proving the connections between distant places and the transformations effected by these connections within an increasingly integrated world.⁷ So far, historians of a global early modern Germany have seldom inquired into the actual qualities and peculiarities of these connections; nor do they generally question the contemporaneous desirability of these links or assess their effectuality.⁸ In the following case study, I want to go beyond these early engagements with a globalized early modern Germany, including my own, by looking at both connections and disconnections, aiming to offer a nuanced assessment of Elberfeld as “a small town in Germany,” a town that has remained comparatively small up to this very day yet has nevertheless had to grapple with global concerns too.⁹ While, in the early modern period, the town’s industries were heavily integrated into the world economy, its connections to the world at large were still fragile and held meaning only to some. As expressed by the term “dis:connection,” my intention is to raise awareness for the (historic) fact that global connections are often accompanied by disconnections and that they are two sides of the same coin.

In its aim to provide a dense description of the situation in Elberfeld and its inhabitants’ far-reaching economic and social interactions, this study is very much indebted to recent undertakings in global microhistory. Bringing together the proven microhistorical method of “following” beings, things, or ideas through the archives and global history’s love of mobility and circulation, many studies have been devoted to tracing the global lives of “exceptional normals” and to revealing the inner workings of global processes.¹⁰ However, my method of studying the intersections of distant places and revealing the “fragmentation and multiplicity of contexts” of a “global hometown” will be centered around staying rather than following.¹¹ As such, this chapter is somewhat of a sedentary global history.¹²

Local Dynamism, Global Connections: The Wupper Valley in the Eighteenth Century

When the *Zeldenrust* started its journey in 1782, the town of Elberfeld on the Wupper River had close to nine thousand inhabitants. It was one of several hundred mid-sized towns in the Holy Roman Empire. What set it apart was its rapid population increase—numbers had tripled since the turn of the eighteenth century—so that, together with the neighboring settlement in Barmen, the urban population of the Wupper Valley reached almost twenty thousand people; as such, it was equal in size to more prominent cities like Stuttgart, Lübeck, Mainz, and indeed the duchy's capital, Düsseldorf.¹³ The population increase also meant that Elberfeld had, in fact, become a tri-confessional town as both Lutherans and Catholics had flocked to the Calvinist stronghold. In 1792, 45.8 percent of the valley's inhabitants adhered to the Calvinist belief, 44.3 percent to the Lutheran confession, and 10 percent belonged to the Catholic Church. The Elberfeld city government remained resolutely in Calvinist hands, however, and intermarriage even between the two Protestant confessions continued to be rare.¹⁴

Most of the people living in Elberfeld were engaged in the textile industries in one way or another. Since the granting of a privilege for the commercial bleaching of yarn in 1527, Elberfeld and Barmen had continuously expanded their trade by adding further finishing steps, such as twisting and weaving narrow tape on the engine loom. The growing class of merchant-manufacturers continued to diversify and expanded their palette of products, introducing not only linen fabrics but also cotton-linen mixes and inexpensive silks to the valley's portfolio. In 1780, the local linen weavers' guild counted almost a thousand master weavers, to which the same number of journeymen and apprentices needs to be added.¹⁵ This compared to about two hundred merchant-manufacturers registered in Elberfeld and Barmen who not only brought work to the urban weavers but also employed people widely in the countryside. In 1792, the engineer and ducal councillor Carl Friedrich Wiebeking estimated that a total of 7,600 looms were running on their behalf, producing more than 19.3 million ells of fabrics annually.¹⁶

Time and again, travelers and officials—as well as historians—took great interest in the Wupper Valley and its neighboring towns, Solingen and Remscheid.¹⁷ Contemporaries already considered Elberfeld a rather remote stretch of land and thus admired it even more as one of the most impressive sights in the Holy Roman Empire, if not in Europe, thanks to the industriousness of its inhabitants, as in the following description:

The ribbon and tape manufactories, the factories for silk ribbon, stockings and blankets, the considerable commerce in iron by the people of Remscheid directed towards Spain, Portugal, India and America, the silk manufactories in Mülheim, the vinegar, soap and tobacco factories, the spinning jennies etc. bring a wealth to the country which one can find hard to believe if one doesn't take a look for oneself.¹⁸

Qualitative observations such as this one were also borne out by quantitative assessments: In 1773/74, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, an economic adviser to the duke of Berg and an avid reader of Adam Smith's writings, calculated that the textile industries in Elberfeld and Barmen imported about forty-one thousand hundredweights of raw textiles annually (linen, cotton, and woolen yarn), to which further raw materials need to be added.¹⁹ Their processing set in motion the swinging of dozens of bleachers' shovels, the rattle of thousands of looms, and the turning of dozens of calendering mills as well as the stirring of fibers in numerous dyers' vats. All of this generated constant mobility and activity: Thousands of cottage workers came and went with panniers on their back, picking up raw materials and delivering finished goods, coopers processed wood into barrels for packing, and blacksmiths hammered horseshoes and iron rings. More than seven thousand heavily loaded carts passed through the town each year, taking and bringing fibers, dye stuffs, wood ash, coals, soaps, and the finished products.²⁰ In addition, there was a constant stream of wagons full of stones, planks, and mortar needed to sustain the building boom. The clopping of hooves and whinnying of horses, along with the wagoner's shouts and general hustle and bustle on the roads, only added to the auditory background of this busy place.

The various travelers' delight in this hustle and bustle was outweighed, however, by their discomfort in reaching this hive of industry. Both Elberfeld and Barmen were notoriously hard to reach because large holes in the roads threatened to overturn and break carriages throughout the year. Even on horseback, visitors feared for their life on the steep tracks.²¹ The roads in the hilly countryside were, in fact, so bad that in some instances the most direct route was hardly the shortest—the Rhine port in Hirtorf, by sheer distance the most proximate to the Wupper Valley, was little used because the road leading there was infamous for overturned carts and broken axles.²² This did not prevent the existing roads from being full of high-sided open wagons, piled to the top with bales or barrels full of goods, and usually drawn by one or two horses. For better or worse, they served as the arteries of global trade as reported by none other than the alert Prussian official, reformer, and supposed spy Justus Gruner: "Already on the military road we can detect this region's character . . . in the frequent approach and passing of heavily loaded wagons pulling themselves laboriously out of a narrow valley to provide the better part of Germany and even the most remote regions of the world with its inhabitants' products."²³

The Wupper Valley's textile industry was, indeed, globally oriented—the duchy's two hundred fifty thousand inhabitants could never have consumed these masses of textiles, nor could the raw materials be sourced in the German territories. Linen thread, cotton yarn, silk, and wool, preferably from merino sheep, French and Italian soap, as well as safflower, indigo, and cochineal came into the valley from all over the world. Finished goods were exported to the German lands and the adjacent Dutch and French territories, where the Wupper Valley goods were highly competitive due to low production costs. Moreover, the Iberian Pen-

insula had emerged as a market of particular significance for the Wupper Valley in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Spain's poorly developed manufacturing sector, as well as the Iberian colonies' high demand for precisely these kinds of products, sustained the valley's involvement there. The rapidly increasing plantation economies, and the Atlantic slave trade fueling their development, also increased the demand for the durable but inexpensive fabrics produced in Elberfeld and Barmen. Intermediaries in port towns such as Amsterdam, Bordeaux, Cadiz, and Seville helped the valley's industries to overcome the barriers of the nominally shut-off markets of the Atlantic empires.²⁴ In the Caribbean, too, a highly developed smuggling network effectively circumvented trade restrictions. While there are no exact numbers, it can be safely assumed that at least a third of the annually exported goods—that is, merchandise worth one million guilders—was transported to the Iberian Peninsula and its colonies.²⁵

This dependence on outlets overseas, however, also meant that Wupper Valley industries were severely impacted when trade routes were blocked, whether for the import of raw materials or the export of finished goods. This was certainly the case when Spain prohibited the import of any “English goods” in 1779 as an accompanying measure to its entering the War of American Independence alongside its ally, France. The crisis was heightened by the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, which had been caused by disagreements on the legality and conduct of Dutch trade with Britain's enemies in that ongoing war. In the Wupper Valley, the economic dangers posed by these wars could even be conveyed with exact numbers. In a concurrent struggle over a minimum wage, the weavers' guild explained: “As long as the Dutch stayed out of the war, weaving a number 2 linen was paid with 3¼ Reichstaler. . . . But when war broke out between the Netherlands and England, and the manufacturers could not place any of their stock of merchandise in Holland, they cut the wage for the number 2 down to 2½ Reichstaler.” This change placed the war's burden on the weavers' shoulders.²⁶ Both manufacturers and weavers certainly feared the “standstill of trade,” as contemporaries put it. Hence, Wupper Valley merchants were eager to accept any proffered opportunities to reconnect to their hitherto very dependable outlets. Not all of these undertakings went smoothly, though, as we will see.

West Indian Promises

In early 1782, the young merchant Friedrich Wever came to Elberfeld to offer his services in mending the broken chains of trade. He had previously worked as a clerk with the company of Franz Henrich Pauli in Lübeck but had recently become a member of the Hamburg consortium that had bought the *Zeldenrust*.²⁷ Wever lacked the capital to fill up his fifth of the ship's storage, so he was on the

lookout for commission goods. To find them, he ventured far to the south of Hamburg, touring the provinces and contacting local merchant-manufacturers. In this effort, which points to the deep inland connections of international shipping, he was assisted by the *Zeldenrust's* other owners as two of them stemmed from the landlocked Duchy of Berg.²⁸ One of them was Johann Osenberg, who was an associate of the Hamburg firm Osenberg & Beck but lived in Elberfeld. He was originally from Remscheid but had settled in Elberfeld some years prior upon his marriage to Maria Magdalena Honsberg in 1775. Concomitantly, he had taken over his father-in-law's company, which traded in Augsburg calicos, but kept an interest in his Hamburg-based firm.²⁹ Osenberg regularly toured the big trade fairs in the Holy Roman Empire where he sold these Augsburg-made imitations of Asian cotton fabrics.³⁰ Incidentally, it is quite possible that Osenberg used his share in the *Zeldenrust's* load to send these global goods to the Caribbean too.³¹

According to statements, albeit contradictory ones, Osenberg introduced Wever as a prospective commission agent to fellow merchants in Elberfeld and gave him his endorsement—a critical advantage in a world of commercial dealings based on trust. Three companies in Elberfeld (Bros. Braselmann, Bros. Wuppermann & Metzger, and Johann Plücker Werners Sohn) followed up on the offer and provided goods worth thirteen thousand guilders (*fl.*), tempted, no doubt, largely by the prospect of doubling their investment—a return widely deemed to be possible in West Indies trade at that point in time due to the effects of warfare.³² Johann Plücker belonged to one of the town's most eminent families and owned a very substantial business, which enabled him to buy a landed estate in 1784. The other two companies did not rank quite so high in either the town's economic or social hierarchy; rather, they cultivated the middle ground—where Joh. Plücker had up to 600 hundredweights (cwt.) of linen yarn on the bleaching grounds, Bros. Braselmann's annual yield was 100 cwt., and Bros. Wuppermann & Metzger had to content themselves with 68 cwt. Although the families of all three companies had long since settled in the valley, the latter two did not figure prominently in any of the town's mercantile institutions; rather, they are representative of the several dozen small to mid-sized companies.³³

Another, even more local, opportunity to send goods overseas was provided by the brothers Jacob and Caspar von Carnap, Elberfeld born and bred, who made the decision to set themselves up as commission agents on the island of St. Thomas, a Danish possession in the Caribbean, in 1781.³⁴ Their targeted destination island was well known even in Elberfeld for its free port and participation in the smuggling trade.³⁵ The Carnap brothers followed in the footsteps of earlier Elberfeldian merchants who had settled in London, a migratory pattern that had, however, ceased by the mid-1700s.³⁶ By the way, unlike merchant families in Remscheid, Solingen, and various Westphalian towns, Elberfeld merchants

had never tried to install family members in French or Spanish trading hubs but used the existing networks that these other families had established instead.³⁷ Nevertheless, this tendency to favor a sedentary life over movement slowly started to crumble in the 1780s.³⁸ Like Wever, the Carnap brothers solicited their compatriots to entrust them with commission goods for their initial journey. Among their clients was Abraham Schwan, a merchant-manufacturer engaged in the traditional tape and laces industry. In the 1760s, Schwan had come from Urdenbach, a town close to Düsseldorf and an important Protestant enclave, to Elberfeld, where he had married Maria Gertrud Sackermann in 1768, acquiring full citizenship in 1769.³⁹ He must have become a respected member of the city's elite as he was elected alderman in 1785 and was nominated twice (1790, 1794) as a candidate for the mayor's office, while economically ranging among the mid-sized tape manufacturers.⁴⁰ He entrusted the Carnaps with goods valued at 4,267 *fl.*—the cost of a respectable townhouse in the booming city.⁴¹

Whereas the trips to the Caribbean took an uneventful course, in Wever's case the trouble began upon the landing of the return goods in Europe. At first, Wever's clients felt that he, as their agent, had not informed them sufficiently; he had himself returned to Europe at the end of January 1783. They repeatedly asked about the West Indian bill of sale as well as his expense account. When they finally received the latter after seven months of waiting, they were also informed that the expenses had already been paid by Osenberg & Beck in Hamburg. Osenberg & Beck announced that the return goods from the Caribbean should be held as security until the rather substantial expenses were reimbursed. Unhappy by this turn of events, two of Wever's Elberfeld clients sent a notary to Johann Osenberg in Elberfeld to claim their goods. Not unreasonably, Osenberg referred them to Wever or his Hamburg firm Osenberg & Beck. Wever, however, had already left Hamburg in February to travel on business to Copenhagen.⁴² On November 10, 1783, in their endeavor to get hold of their possessions, the two disgruntled Elberfeld clients were joined by Johann Plücker. Plücker had previously tried to have his share of the return goods delivered to a business contact in Amsterdam, albeit to no avail. Now the three of them sent a writ, by way of the Elberfeld municipal court, to Osenberg, demanding that the the Caribbean goods be delivered to Elberfeld within fourteen days. Osenberg complied and sent a letter to Hamburg, which arrived on November 14. On that very day, however, the commission goods held by Osenberg & Beck had already been sold to raise the money owed for the expenses. Enraged and feeling duped, Wever's Elberfeld clients filed a complaint with the municipal court, demanding compensation for the loss of their goods and the expected return of investment, claiming twenty-six thousand guilders from Osenberg.

In the case of Abraham Schwan vs. Carnap, the sum involved did not reach quite such heights. Here, the dispute was sparked by Jacob von Carnap's return to Elberfeld in 1795 to settle his outstanding accounts. Originally, after selling

Schwan's goods partly in St. Thomas, partly on Martinique, the Carnap brothers had followed good procedure: they promptly sent in bills of sale, as well as reports, and shipped back return goods (coffee and sugar). The value of these goods was, however, a little short of the proceeds netted on Schwan's goods. While Carnap had hoped to simply settle by handing over the missing sum in hard currency in Elberfeld in 1795, Schwan was not satisfied. He protested the settlement on four points: the exchange rate now used for the currencies involved (piaster into Brabant crowns) was less favorable than the rate had been in 1784/85, so he felt interest was due for the sum owed over ten years and also wanted to be reimbursed for an insurance policy whose purchase he had not authorized. Furthermore, Schwan held that the commission the Carnaps charged for procuring return goods was unwarranted. All in all, he claimed that the Carnaps not only owed him the 361 *Reichstaler* (*Rtl.*) already handed over but also a further 663 *Rtl.* Since Schwan feared that Jacob von Carnap would leave again for the West Indies without paying the amount claimed, he took the case to court. A lengthy lawsuit ensued that, just like the Osenberg case, ended before the Berg *Hofrat*, the privy council serving as the duchy's high court in Düsseldorf. As the following analysis shows, a close reading of the substantial case records—in the Osenberg case amounting to 263 folios, in the Schwan case to sixty-six folios—encompassing detailed justifications, expert opinions, as well as legal comments, provides new insights into a small town's place and placement in the world.

Legal Struggles

In a legal tradition inherited from Roman law, it was—and in most places still is—mandatory for a plaintiff to bring his dispute before the court of the defendant. In matters of global exchange and high actor mobility, this can be a challenge.⁴³ It can, indeed, be argued that it was not so much good legal practice that motivated the plaintiffs in our two cases to bring their case to the court in Elberfeld, but rather, they wished to make creative use of this legal principle with a deft interventionist move. While Osenberg was a resident of the city, the company involved in the affair was based and registered in Hamburg. For his part, Carnap actually resided in the West Indies and had only returned to the Wupper Valley for a prolonged visit. Nevertheless, both the municipal court in Elberfeld and the privy council in Düsseldorf felt that they had jurisdiction over this matter of global trade.

As becomes evident from the sources, the two quarrels about goods sent to the West Indies had a large ripple effect in the Duchy of Berg, particularly in the juridical sphere. This was true, first of all, of the various notaries involved in witnessing and sealing the commission treaties.⁴⁴ It becomes even more evident regarding the persons involved in the trial. This included, for one thing, the legal counsel: In Plücker et al. vs. Weber, the contesting parties engaged four

lawyers and two procurators in total, whereas in *Schwan vs. Carnap*, an almost completely different set of two lawyers and three procurators presented their accumulating bills.⁴⁵ For another thing, the cases were heard not only before the municipal court consisting of the city judge (the previous year's mayor), a jury of seven elected for life, the city syndic, and the summoner, but also involved the *Hofrat* in Düsseldorf. It was rather common for the losing party to appeal to this governmental body, which in due course assigned the trial to one of its articulated clerks.⁴⁶ In this way, a dispute in Düsseldorf over goods traded on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean involved provincial officials like the president and three councillors of the *Hofrat*, as well as their various clerks. Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess how much this helped them understand the world more comprehensively. Privy Councillor Bewer, for one, displayed a certain lack of knowledge in mixing up the colonial islands' affiliations when he referred to the *Danish* island of Curacao and the *Dutch* island of St. Thomas in summarizing Abraham Schwan's court case.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that the case, as a global encounter, involved uninformed actors, and this, in turn, should caution us against making snap judgments about "global" knowledge among regional elites.

A common thread in the two cases is the fragility of connections. The stability of connections was not only threatened by spatial distance but just as much by topography, the weather, as well as personal absences and individual behavior. Above, we already discussed the restraining effects of bad roads and rutted streets, which turned efforts to connect Elberfeld to the world beyond the valley very much into a physical exercise, dependent on strong horses and skilled wagoners. In addition, the weather played an all-important and unpredictable role when people tried to travel, even for short distances. While the seasons greatly influenced the riskiness of transatlantic shipping, so that insurance rates changed with them, natural forces could sever much shorter connections on the continent just as effectively—a fact also well known in Elberfeld. For example, Johann Osenberg was not able to produce evidence from Hamburg in time due to floods that disrupted the postal service, which was accepted as a legally valid excuse.⁴⁸ Another accepted excuse was Osenberg's prolonged absences resulting from his participation in the circuit of trade fairs. His lawyer postponed his defense statement time after time on account of these absences, claiming that Osenberg's statement could only be handed in after he had conferred in person with him. Physical presence and face-to-face communication, at times enacted by deputies, were still deemed indispensable in this "society of attendees,"⁴⁹ even though communication by media such as bills of sale, reports, and letters, often filled with standardized formulas, was a *sine qua non* of long-distance trade.⁵⁰ But if agents like Wever did not comply, there was little that could be done.⁵¹ Despite long-distance trade's perfunctory effectiveness, it remained a brittle and risky affair and full of disconnections along the trajectory.

Furthermore, the court cases demonstrate that the Wupper Valley mercantile networks might have been global in a geographic sense but that the processes through which trade was conducted were always locally situated and dependent on individuals. These people's capricious behavior influenced the ways that goods were exchanged, contracts were made and upheld, and opportunities were used—whether in the Caribbean where Wever claimed to have encountered misfortunes and unnamed dangers, or in Elberfeld.⁵² One reason Osenberg took his case to the *Hofrat* was his frustration about having lost—the municipal court's verdict had found Osenberg guilty on all charges and ordered him to pay the stipulated sum of twenty-six thousand guilders. But another reason was that he found the circumstances of the case highly questionable: it was tried before a court over which Johann Plücker Werners Sohn, one of the plaintiffs, had presided in the past.⁵³ Furthermore, several of his other opponents had either friendship or kinship ties to other individuals then manning the court.⁵⁴ Incidentally, religious affiliations seem to have played only a minor role. Osenberg was Lutheran, but so were his opponents Bros. Wuppermann & Metzger and Bros. Braselmann, whereas Johann Plücker was a Calvinist. Abraham Schwan and the Carnaps, too, were all Calvinists, which did not prevent them from conducting their lawsuit with "utmost bitterness and painful insinuations."⁵⁵ Rather, the factor that seems to have been in play, and what might explain both Osenberg's and Schwan's doggedness in pursuing their cases, was the question of how long one had been in business—newcomers and old-established traders were at odds with one another. After all, both Osenberg and Schwan had only recently come to the city, whereas their opponents came from families that had been engaged in the textile trade and in communal affairs for centuries.

Intrinsically linked to this issue was the question of (good) mercantile practices—specifically, who defined them, and whether the same set of criteria applied for trading in Elberfeld and the Caribbean. In a mercantile setting that lacked strong formal institutions, which was also often at the mercy of natural forces, such as winds and currents, personal trust and adherence to an unwritten but nevertheless binding *ars mercatoria* were key to its smooth functioning. This becomes apparent in the squabbles over whether Osenberg had truly introduced Wever to his fellow Elberfeld merchants. As the plaintiffs succinctly put it: "Without this prior recommendation, we would never have trusted this Wever as a foreign, unknown person whom we had never seen before in our life with one single guilder, not to speak of goods in the value of 13,000 *fl.*"⁵⁶ Regarding Wever's performance as a commission agent, his clients claimed that "other speculating traders of whom we have used several with goods on commission for the West Indies during the American War, have always, as is proper and generally accepted, sent us the bill of sale . . . and told us how they invested the receipts."⁵⁷ By highlighting customary procedure, these merchants strove to demonstrate

both their intimate knowledge of proper procedure as well as their familiarity with the world of global trade.

Mercantile practices were open to interpretation and negotiation, however, and might even lead to a “battle of experts.” To deal with Schwan’s complaints about Carnap’s expenses, the municipal court appointed two Elberfeld merchants “who also have done business in the West Indies and who can provide information on the usages common there.”⁵⁸ Subsequently, the merchant Woeste testified that a 10 percent commission charge was correct in the West Indies trade. Even so, he explained that his own agent for the procurement of Caracas cocoa on Curaçao as a return good had not asked for a percentage on the purchase as the Carnaps had.⁵⁹ To counter this, Jacob von Carnap provided statements from Hamburg and Bremen that showed the Hanseatic correspondents in the West Indies charging 2.5 percent for the storehouse rent, 5 percent commission on sales, and 5 percent commission on purchases, totaling 12.5 percent as charged by Carnap.⁶⁰ All of this resulted in Councillor Bewer in Düsseldorf being out of his depth, asking himself in his deliberations whether the customs concerning commission charges in St. Thomas and Curaçao differed, respectively. There was no good answer to the matter, but in his capacity as a legal expert, Bewer felt certain that Jacob von Carnap could not be accused of “black dealings”—had he not taken upon himself the cumbersome journey from the West Indies to Elberfeld to settle his account?⁶¹ In short, actions spoke louder than words, and physical presence was key in resolving global disputes.

Conclusion: Global Elberfeld?

Almost two decades ago, during the heyday of globalization rhetoric, the anthropologist Anna Tsing evoked the image of a hillside creek, its water moving gravel, switching course, and experiencing slow turns, all the while making and remaking its channels.⁶² She presented it as a contrasting, more accurate picture of “the global situation” than the overused images of arrows, connections, and wide streams pointing or flowing in straight lines across the globe. She advocated, instead, that researchers should pay attention to the shifting landscapes, the contested creation of channels and connections, and the fact “that the cultural processes of all ‘place’ making and all ‘force’ making are *both* local and global, that is, both socially and culturally particular and productive of widely spreading interactions.”⁶³ In a similar vein but more recently, Jeremy Adelman berated global historians for their almost exclusive focus on the latticework of exchanges and encounters and the expansion of personal and social horizons while they overlook the dissolution of neighborhoods and moments of separation and disintegration, that is, the full range of local effects.⁶⁴

Writing a global history of Elberfeld would make little sense without acknowledging the commodity flows departing and entering this place. These commodity flows—a prime characteristic of global histories—are the feature that most obviously connected Elberfeld to the world at large and, at first sight, contradict older notions of it being a proverbial provincial, inward-looking German hometown. Furthermore, as a result of these commodity flows and trading activities, places such as Hamburg, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and even Caribbean islands like St. Thomas, Curaçao, and Martinique, became a part of the lexis of the extended town, just as exotic consumables like coffee, tea, and sugar had once become part of the daily diet. This circumstance puts into stark relief how unexceptional global encounters and global entanglements happened to be even for sedentary people in a landlocked territory in the Holy Roman Empire. The forces of global commercialization drew them in.

But these global forces were dependent on local circumstances and individual agents, creating a particular blend of connections and disconnections, as demonstrated by the two lengthy court cases. Government decisions could create obstructions where previously there had been none, potentially severing ties and redirecting commodity flows. The challenges of mastering distance, of establishing and maintaining links in spite of both natural and human imponderables, made Elberfeld's global experience a multifaceted one with its own particular global landscape. In its form, it was unique to that place, yet it was likewise typical of global entanglements in its shifting quality. In short, as the Elberfeld example shows us, global connections are always mediated in a local setting whose social, religious, economic, and personal components impact them, generating both integrative and disintegrative forces. Commercial and legal skills, knowledge of the world, and even simply imagination were important features of world-making and negotiating dis:connections in a small town in Germany.

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Notes

1. The title is inspired by the recently opened research center “global dis:connect” at the University of Munich. At the center, the term “dis:connect” aims to emphasize the “co-constitutive, dynamic relationship of global integration, disintegration, and absent connections, which only become relevant in relation to each other.” (<https://www.globaldisconnect.org/forschung/diskonnektivitat/?lang=en>), last accessed 30 January 2024.
2. Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland (LA NRW R) AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93; LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 107. For a discussion of the term “hometown,” see the introduction to this volume and the chapter by Renate Dürr. On the globality of “hometowns,” see also Penny, *German History Unbound*.
3. For a comprehensive overview, see the edited volumes Lachenicht, *Europeans Engaging the Atlantic*; Siebenhüner et al., *Cotton in Context*; Weber and Wimmer, *Globalized Peripheries*.
4. See Hyden-Hanscho et al., *Cultural Exchange*; Bovenkerk and Fertig, *Consumer Revolution*.
5. Brahm and Rosenhaft, *Slavery Hinterland*; Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, and Lenz, *Beyond Exceptionalism*; Cronshagen, “Herrnhuter Diaspora.” See also the ongoing book project “Decentering the Enlightenment: Religion, Emotions and Global Knowledge Transfer,” jointly written by Renate Dürr and Ulrike Strasser.
6. Rosenhaft and Brahm, “Towards a Comprehensive European History”; Weber and Wimmer, “Constructing Atlantic Peripheries”; Dürr, “The World in the German Hinterlands.”
7. On this take of global history, see, for example, Conrad, *What Is Global History?*
8. For stimulating discussions of this, see Wenzlhuemer, “Connections”; Gänger and Osterhammel, “Denkpause.”
9. The reference here is, of course, to John le Carré’s novel bearing the same title and dealing with postwar Bonn.
10. For an accomplished example, see Colley, *Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*. On global microhistory, cf. Bertrand and Calafat, “Microanalysis and Global History”; Trivellato, “Microstoria”; Ghobrial, “Introduction.”
11. On “following” in this context, see Bertrand and Calafat, “Global Microhistory,” 12–14, quote 13.
12. On this, I have drawn much inspiration from Rothschild, “Isolation”; and Sachsenmaier, *Global Entanglements*.
13. Schilling and Ehrenpreis, *Die Stadt in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 7, 12–13.
14. Murayama, *Konfession und Gesellschaft*, 136–37, 234–40.
15. Dietz, *Wuppertaler Garmahrung*; Kisch, “From Monopoly”; Gorißen, “Gewerbe im Herzogtum Berg.”
16. Wiebeking, *Beiträge*, 6. For the number of merchants, see Mannes, *Gülich und bergischer Kaufmannskalender*.
17. A range of these travel reports is collected in Huck and Reulecke, . . . und reges Leben; Dietz and Reulecke, *Mit Kutsche, Dampfproß, Schwebebahn*. For the most recent overview of the historiography, see Overkamp, *Fleiß*, 13–16.
18. Illner, “Aus Jacob Christian Gottlieb Schaeffers Briefen,” 48.
19. Gebhard, “Bericht.” Most of the linen thread came from Ravensburg, Saxony, and Silesia; the woolen yarn, in turn, was sourced in Thuringia.
20. This is a conservative estimate, supposing one cart to be transporting twelve hundredweights. See Wacker, *Verkehrswesen*, 278–80; Krünitz, “Karren.”
21. See the travel reports in Huck and Reulecke, . . . und reges Leben; Dietz and Reulecke, *Mit Kutsche, Dampfproß, Schwebebahn*.
22. Reulecke, “Abbild,” 19–20.
23. Gruner, *Meine Wallfahrt*, 2:308.

24. Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*; Schulte-Beerbühl and Vögele, *Spinning*. On the various national “Atlantics,” see Morgan and Canny, *Handbook*.
25. Gebhard, “Bericht”; LA NRW R AA 0637 Großherzogtum Berg 5592.
26. LA NRW R AA 0031 JB II 1806 vol. II, fol. 96, cited in Henkel, *Zunftmißbräuche*, 233. On the wider context, see *ibid.*; Overkamp, *Fleiß*, 138–45.
27. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 95r.
28. *Ibid.*, fol. 95r. See also Haenger, “Basel and the Slave Trade”; Ressel, “Das Alte Reich.”
29. Strutz, *Geschichte der Rübel*, 197; Ernestus, *Familien der eu.-luth. Gemeinde*, 291; LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 148r.
30. On Augsburg calicos, see Breil and Murr, *Textile Printing*.
31. For another German firm sending large quantities of Augsburg calicos to the Caribbean, see Häberlein and Schmolz-Häberlein, *Erben der Welser*.
32. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 200r, 202v.
33. Strutz, *Ahnentafeln*, 135; Dietz, *Chronik*, 1:307–10; Stadtarchiv Wuppertal (STAW) JB J I 6; LA NRW R AA 0031 Jülich-Berg II, 1807 vol. II, fol. 143–145.
34. It is not possible to positively identify the two brothers in the church records as none of the entries seems to match their age, nor the brother Abraham mentioned further down. The Carnap family had been particularly influential in the 1600s and consisted of several branches. Cf. Strutz, *Ahnentafeln*.
35. See Gøbel, “Shipping”; Jordaan and Wilson, “Eighteenth-Century Danish, Dutch, and Swedish Free Ports”; Overkamp, “Of Tape and Ties,” 133–35.
36. Schulte-Beerbühl, *Forgotten Majority*.
37. Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*.
38. For further examples, see Overkamp, “Of Tape and Ties.”
39. Strutz, *Ahnentafeln*, 153.
40. Brüning, *Elberfeld*, 132, 134, 136.
41. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 107, fol. 34v.
42. Wever had, incidentally, become a naturalized Danish citizen prior to his departure to St. Thomas to facilitate his trade there. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 101r.
43. For an intriguing case, see Calafat, “Jurisdictional Pluralism.”
44. For example, in 1782, the notary Andreas Rieger had authenticated the commission treaty between Schwan and the Carnaps. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 107, fol. 35r.
45. This information is gathered through the various signatures beneath the claims and counter-claims in the file. On legal personnel and procedures, see Flechsig, *Von Causenflickern*.
46. Brüning, *Elberfeld*, 52; Engelbrecht, *Herzogtum Berg*, 53–56.
47. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 107, fol. 47v.
48. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 2v.
49. A seminal source on this is Schlögl, *Anwesende und Abwesende*.
50. See Trivellato, *Familiarity*; Haggerty, ‘Merely for Money’; Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust*.
51. On the complex role of commission agents, see Trivellato, *Familiarity*, 153–76; Häberlein and Schmolz-Häberlein, *Erben der Welser*, 89–93.
52. For a similar argument on scientific networks, see Easterby-Smith, “Recalcitrant Seeds,” 217.
53. Plücker had served as mayor in both 1774 and 1781, subsequently moving on to the post of city judge.
54. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 6v.
55. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 107, fol. 58v. Even in long-distance trade, religious affiliations were of less importance than has been hitherto assumed. For a succinct discussion, see Trivellato, *Familiarity*, 155–57.

56. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 93, fol. 200r, 200v.
57. Ibid., fol. 203r, 203v.
58. LA NRW R AA 0036 Jülich-Berg, Hofrat, B VIII 107, fol. 40 v.
59. Ibid., fol. 43v.
60. Ibid., fol. 46v., 52v.
61. Ibid., fol. 47v.
62. Tsing, "Global Situation," 327.
63. Original emphasis, Tsing, 352.
64. Adelman, "What Is Global History Now?"

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