

# *Global and Quantitative Economic History*

**Joel Mokyr**

**2015 Balzan Prize for Economic History**

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**Researchers:** Michael Andrews, Nicola Bianchi, Luca Bittarello, Jamie Daubenspeck, José Espin, Carola Frydman, Yutaro Izumi, Riccardo Marchingiglio, Natalya Naumenko, Aniket Panjwani, Yannay Spitzer, Mara Squicciarini, Taco Terpstra, Marlous van Waijenburg, Anthony Wray, Heyu Xiong, Yiling Zhao, Ariell Zimran

**Affiliated Institution:** Northwestern Center for Economic History

**Period:** 2016-

Joel Mokyr is Robert H. Strotz Professor of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Economics and History at Northwestern University, Evanston IL, and Sackler Professorial Fellow at the Eitan Berglas School of Economics at the University of Tel Aviv. The entire second half of his Balzan Prize was allocated to the training and research of younger scholars, and would be channeled through Northwestern's Center for Economic History, directed by himself and Joseph Ferrie. The Center was set up in 2012 with very limited seed money from Northwestern University, and the Balzan Prize enables it to continue this funding at a higher level. In addition to supporting graduate students, the Balzan funds are being used to support other young investigators from all over the world who are affiliated with the Center, including junior faculty at other universities who recently graduated from Northwestern. More specifically, Mokyr's plans include supporting the graduate students' and young investigators' travel to libraries and archives, employing undergraduate research assistance, purchasing and processing data, travelling to conferences, and attending local seminars and workshops.

In addition, postdoctoral fellowships in Economic History have also been established, with requirements for candidates to spend a full year at Northwestern in the Economics or History Department engaged in research under Mokyr's supervision. Part of the position entails teaching one or two courses in global and quantitative economic history.

The Center may also help fund data collection systems, specifically maintaining and extending a data transcription system named d'Entry, originally developed by Dr. Roy Mill at Stanford. This program is critical to the “big-data” projects currently in progress or planned by Northwestern students and recent graduates. It allows an easy and fast transcription of quantitative information from sources such as Ancestry.com and the US Census into machine-readable databases.

Mokyr’s Balzan funds are also being used for two other purposes. First, a week to ten-day residency at Northwestern for a distinguished scholar, wherein he/she interacts with the graduate students and the postdoctoral fellow, engaging in discussions and providing them with in-depth advice on their research projects. The senior scholars will be designated as Balzan Visitors. Second, two small international conferences in economic history – officially designated as Balzan Conferences – are to be held on the Northwestern campus; they will include keynote addresses by distinguished scholars.

### **Postdoctoral Fellows**

During the academic year 2016/17, postdoctoral fellow Mara Squicciarini’s stipend and research were paid for with Balzan funds. Squicciarini was continuously advised by members of the centre, which resulted in her very successful job market paper “Devotion and Development: Religiosity, Education, and Economic Progress in 19th-Century France”, which resulted in tenure-track academic offers from SciencePo (Paris), the University of Warwick, the University of British Columbia, Northwestern University and Bocconi University.

For the academic year 2017/18, the Center appointed two postdoctoral fellows, Michael Andrews, who completed his doctoral studies at the University of Iowa and is working on the economic history of innovation in the United States, and Melanie Meng Xue, who holds a doctorate from George Mason University and is working on the economic history of China. Andrews spent one year at Northwestern as a pre-doctoral student, and his work was supported in part by Mokyr’s Balzan Prize.

### **Graduate Students**

The area of economic history at Northwestern is attracting a significant number of PhD students from both the Economics and the History Departments, whose work is

being supported by Mokyr's Balzan research project through the Center for Economic History. Some of them have already completed research papers and dissertation chapters in which the financial support of the Balzan Foundation is being acknowledged. Marlous van Waijenburg, PhD student, History, is completing a PhD dissertation on the development of fiscal capacity in Africa in the twentieth century, and assumed a position at the prestigious Society of Fellows at the University of Michigan in September 2017. Natalya Naumenko, PhD student, Economics, is completing a PhD dissertation on the economic and demographic effects of Soviet collectivization in the 1930s. Heyu Xiong, PhD student, Economics, is working on a dissertation on the economic history of mass communications, and has completed a number of papers with the acknowledged support of Balzan funding. Aniket Panjwani, PhD student, is working on the economic history of the US newspaper industry and changes in its organization in the twentieth century. Yiling Zhao, PhD student, Economics, is working on the economics of education and religion in nineteenth century America. Luca Bittarello, PhD student, Economics, is working on a dissertation dealing with the economics of labour conflict and unionization in the US economy in the late nineteenth century. Jamie Daubenspeck, PhD student, Economics, is working on a dissertation involving the social and economic organization of nineteenth century Egypt. Riccardo Marchingiglio, PhD student, Economics, is in the early stages of a dissertation involving the political economy of Italian election law changes in the nineteenth century. Yutaro Izumi, PhD student, Economics, is in the early stages of writing a dissertation dealing with social capital and the political economy of Meiji Japan.

## **Faculty and Visitors**

With the help of Balzan Funds, the Center has supported the research of Assistant Professor Taco Terpstra of Northwestern's Classics Department, who is completing a book on the connection between institutional development and trading patterns in the Mediterranean in the ancient world. In addition, the Center will host Professor José Espin from Yale University next year. A former Northwestern Economics graduate student, Ariell Zimran (who finished his degree in 2016, and is now an Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University), was also supported by funding from Mokyr's Balzan Prize during his work at Northwestern, and this support is acknowledged in a paper.

Professor Mokyr's book, *A Culture of Growth* (Princeton University Press, 2017), in which the support of the Balzan Foundation is acknowledged, has already received

a substantial number of highly positive reviews, including the leading journals *The Economist*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Science*.

### **Support and administration**

Balzan funds have also enabled the Center to hire a full-time Research Assistant, who supported the research of both faculty and graduate students. It is currently searching for a part-time administrator who will help with the administration of its rapidly growing activities.

### **Conferences**

With funds from Mokyr's Balzan Prize, two conferences were organized at the Northwestern University campus. In November 2017, there was a conference commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia. During the conference, economic aspects of the communist economies were discussed, with the participation of some of the world's best known experts on the economic history of the Soviet Union.

Another conference will be organized around the manuscript of a new book on *States and Societies* written by leading economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson.

In summary, the Center for Economic History at Northwestern funds, supports and guides the work of young Researchers: six current PhD students, three Northwestern recent graduates, the resident postdoctoral fellow and three Assistant Professors, one in the Classics Department and the two others in the Kellogg School of Management. Their work will lead to the construction of historical databases, completed PhD dissertations, and the publication of articles in refereed journals and books. These publications will acknowledge the support of the Balzan Foundation. All research projects funded by the Balzan Foundation via the Center for Economic History will be carried out by young researchers under the direction of the Prizewinner, Professor Joel Mokyr. Professors Joseph Ferrie (a Professor in the Economics Department) and Louis Cain (an adjunct Professor in the Economics Department) will serve as deputy supervisors, assisting in project implementation and assuming an active role in coordinating research presentations.