

CHAPTER 5

GLOBALIZATIONS

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THE revival of world history towards the end of the twentieth century was intimately connected with the rise of a new master concept in the social sciences: 'globalization.' Historians and social scientists responded to the same generational experience—the impression, shared by intellectuals and many other people round the world, that the interconnectedness of social life on the planet had arrived at a new level of intensity. The world seemed to be a 'smaller' place in the 1990s than it had been a quarter-century before. The conclusions drawn from this insight in the various academic disciplines, however, diverged considerably. The early theorists of globalization in sociology, political science, and economics disdained a historical perspective. The new concept seemed ideally suited to grasp the characteristic features of *contemporary* society. It helped to pinpoint the very essence of present-day modernity. Historians, on their part, were less reluctant to envisage a new kind of conceptual partnership. An earlier meeting of world history and sociology had taken place under the auspices of 'world-system theory.' Since that theory came along with a good deal of formalisms and strong assumptions, few historians went so far as to embrace it wholeheartedly. The idiom of 'globalization,' by contrast, made fewer specific demands, left more room for individuality and innovation and seemed to avoid the dogmatic pitfalls that surrounded world-system theory. 'Globalization' looked like a godsend for world historians. It opened up a way towards the social science mainstream, provided elements of a fresh terminology to a field that had suffered for a long time from an excess of descriptive simplicity, and even spawned the emergence of a special and up-to-date variant of world history—'global history.' Yet this story sounds too good to be true. In fact, historians soon learned to dampen their enthusiasm. Rather than being blessed with an instantly usable kit of analytical tools, they had to learn to navigate the treacherous waters of globalization theory. They also came to understand that global history is not just a globalization approach projected onto the past. It demands its own intellectual foundations.

A CONCEPT FROM SOCIAL SCIENCE APPLIED TO HISTORY

When it was invented in the 1960s and as it slowly gained currency in the 1970s and 1980s, the term 'globalization' referred to the present-day state of the world and did not imply a narrative in the *longue durée*. Its proponents neither suggested a theory of societal evolution nor an interpretation that would make sense of the last couple of centuries of world history—as Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory had attempted to do. In the theoretical debates exploding in the early 1990s, the primary concern lay with defining the concept and using it to describe, still in very general terms, processes of worldwide societal change that had recently brought about a rapidly increasing integration between national economies and societies. Critical undertones were present from the very beginning while at the other end of the spectrum of opinions a number of prominent authors felt confident enough to hail the arrival of a new 'global age.'¹

In a second stage, only a few years later, the initial intuitions were put to empirical test. This turn to the data led invariably to a glance at earlier developments inaugurating the new state of affairs. Contemporary globalization could only be considered novel or unique if it was viewed against the backdrop of the worldwide social landscape as it existed before the 1970s, a decade that was generally assumed to be of pivotal importance. Globalization came to be seen as the result of transformative processes that had to be traced back to 1945, to the turn of the century, or even beyond. As the number of publications rocketed and the debate began to transcend the geographical limits of North Atlantic social science, the spectrum of positions diversified to a degree that makes it impossible to discern simple and orderly patterns. Still it can be argued, following David Held and Anthony McGrew, that the early 2000s were characterized by a 'third wave' of thinking about globalization.² In contrast to the earlier euphoria with unbound mobility and transformation, the literature of this wave emphasized the resilience of institutions, social structures, and localized traditions. A fourth wave then took up constructivist concerns and focused on communication, worldviews, and the normative underpinnings of globalization. It moved from globalization as a social process to globality as a state of mind. Even before the onset of the global financial crisis in September 2008, new debates flared up concerning not just the political consequences of 'real' globalization, but also the viability of the term as an instrument of theory.³ The crisis confirmed the doubts of those critics who felt that 'globalization' still lacks the maturity to dethrone the well-established master concept of 'modernity' as the central trope of the social sciences.

Confronted with a bewildering variety of theoretical offers and with a rapid change of intellectual fashions, the historian looks in vain for a reliable synthesis that might guide his or her own efforts.⁴ 'Globalization' may be the buzzword of our age, but there is still 'no clear sense—not even an approximate sense—of what this word means.'⁵

Another authority, Salvatore Babones, writing for a leading work of reference, arrives at the same kind of sober conclusion: 'Globalization means many things to many people, so many things that it hardly seems worth offering yet one more definition of the term.' And he suggests that of a wide variety of globalization indicators none 'can be judged theoretically superior to any other.'⁶ Historians would be unwise to skirt the term altogether. At the same time, they should not take it for granted, and they should be careful not to employ it with a confidence and naiveté unwarranted in the light of ongoing and inconclusive debates.⁷

A number of general observations can be made. First, it is an obvious though somewhat unsurprising and trivial fact that the world has been 'growing together' and that a 'human web' has been thickening for a long time.⁸ When it was originally put forward, this insight startled those who had been thinking in terms of secluded and unconnected 'civilizations' as well as those oblivious of the old Enlightenment idea of a basic unity of mankind. Moving beyond such truisms as the ever-growing number of human bonds in an expanding world population, the crucial question is: which empirical criteria have to be fulfilled for processes of growing connectivity to be labeled 'globalization'? If that concept is applied to all sorts of border-transgressing interaction across 'large' spaces, it loses the specificity indispensable for any notion of analytical value.

Second, historians have always been wary of the mega-processes so dear to evolutionists of all persuasions. They rarely deal with humankind as such. It is intuitively obvious to them that globalization manifests itself differently in the various dimensions of historical reality. Migrations, the extension of market relations, long-distance warfare, the diffusion of plants and animals and its consequences for human livelihood, the spread of religions and other worldviews, the growth of global media—these and many similar processes follow their distinctive kinds of logic and their own trajectories in time and space. 'Globalization' is not observable as such, but only as an attribute of more specific processes of change. It requires *something* to be globalized. Individual processes unfolding within concrete contexts of space and time can usually be studied in themselves. They should, however, be placed within the global arena in order to be understood more fully. Their relation to one another, for example of migration to empire-building, seems to be largely contingent or, at least, a subject of further inquiry. General theories of globalization tend to be reductionist and to privilege one field over others, most frequently the economic sphere. This renders them quite useless to historians, the avowed foes of monocausal simplicity. As Raymond Grew has warned, 'globalization is not quite a theory in itself.'⁹ It should rather be seen as an epistemological framework that bundles more particular models of change and directs attention to their largest possible spatial contexts. A globalization perspective by itself provides little in the way of explanatory power, and the common objection to globalization theory, that it blurs the distinction between cause and effect, is difficult to refute. Yet such a perspective helps to restate historical problems and to frame more adequate strategies of explanation. These strategies then incorporate theories of a more limited range and of greater precision.

Third, one of the most important results of the vast social science literature on globalization has been to enrich the vocabulary available to historians. They have learned to speak a new language of 'networks,' 'flows,' 'currents,' 'transfers,' 'mobilities,' 'diasporas,' 'hybridities,' and all sorts of 'transnational' phenomena.¹⁰ The 'spatial turn' in geography and cultural studies has enhanced their sensitivity to territories, landscapes, distances, boundaries, and locations.¹¹ Not always do historians go along all the way with the theorists. To mention just one example: few words are nowadays more popular with global historians than 'network.' However, not everything that at first sight looks like a regular pattern of interaction qualifies as a 'network' in the technical sense of sociological network theory. Some of these patterns may be too loose or too thinly woven to be a network proper; others are of a complexity that cannot be reduced to flows of information and resources between nodes—the essential feature of a network.¹²

Fourth, there seems to be agreement among writers on globalization that the process should be seen as self-reflective. The debates on globalization form part of globalization itself. This may even lead to a rule of exclusion: relationships between cause and effect totally concealed to the understanding of the contemporary actors involved should not come under the heading of 'globalization.' Thus, the transfer of microbes around the planet was 'objectively' of a global nature, but it remained obscure as late as the great cholera pandemics of the nineteenth century and therefore lacked the qualities of true globalization. Even those who are not prepared to go that far are likely to support the argument that in an adequate concept of globalization increasing connectivity in the real world of migration, trade, or war should go hand in hand with a growing global consciousness.¹³ Worldviews and the practice of expansion and exchange form two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the wide-spread disjunction between the study of globalization by economists, political scientists, and international relations specialists on the one hand, by sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural studies scholars on the other, is unfortunate and should be overcome in global history.

Fifth, one of the most fruitful lines of inquiry has been the link between the global and the local.¹⁴ Historians, mostly trained in the careful examination of specific circumstances, find that idea immediately appealing. They tend to work from the bottom up, whereas sociological theorists often have to be told not to disregard the particular case. 'Glocalism,' as some prefer to call it in a somewhat pseudo-theoretical way, has found numerous successful adherents among historians. Timothy Brook's *Vermeer's Hat* (2008) is just one of several virtuoso performances where the local and the global—in Brook's case, the town Delft where the painter Vermeer lived and the forces connecting it to China and other parts of Asia—are artfully intertwined.¹⁵ It remains to be discussed, however, whether a separate level of 'the global' ought to be presupposed as given. In such a view, the global exists beforehand and is 'appropriated' by local actors. A different way of conceptualization would regard both 'the local' and 'the global' as products of the activities of specific actors in their daily practice, of a permanent drawing and redrawing of boundaries between 'internal' and 'external.'¹⁶ How are local worlds penetrated by forces of 'the global?' When and why do people's

primary worlds cease to be local? Under which circumstances do human groups or macro-collectives arise that define themselves in terms of supra-national or global identities?¹⁷ Questions such as these make the abstract concept of 'glocalization' palatable to historians.

Sixth, few types of globalization are likely to unfold without conflict and violence. Historians will view with a good deal of skepticism any theory that equates globalization with peaceful change. The idea of expansion is inherent in the concept of globalization. At one extreme it involves conquest, subjugation, and the destruction of existing forms of social and political life, at the other extreme, the peaceful one, the slow diffusion of elements of culture such as language, religion, or law. Expansion of any kind touches upon the interests of specific groups, unsettles equilibria, creates new asymmetries of power, and necessitates negotiation. It causes tensions and instabilities.¹⁸

Seventh, social science theory does not always draw a clear analytical distinction between globalization and modernization. Are these two macro-processes identical? Is globalization a special case or sub-category of modernization? Is it the defining feature of modernization in a particular period, in the sense, for example, that *contemporary* modernity is said to be quintessentially global? Does it transcend a kind of modernity and modernization that is too closely identified with the European or Western model? Does 'globalization' put a stronger emphasis than 'modernization' on non-linear types of social change? Does it provide a better grasp of developments at peripheries and in-between spaces, of 'liminality' and cultural dissonance? Historians are not required to solve these problems on a theoretical plane. Yet they should not expect too much support from theorists.

GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL HISTORY

Many general works on globalization offer some kind of historical narrative, sometimes in briefest and most general outline. Those narratives, basically, come in two different versions:¹⁹ according to a 'weak' version, globalization prolongs earlier long-term developments and is linked to them through a variety of 'path-dependencies.' On this view, the increasing interconnectedness between people across vast spaces, mainly driven by technological innovation, was accompanied by a growing density within sub-spheres of society. The world became gradually more complex on various levels. The horizon of personal experience widened for many people, and the consequences of localized decisions and events were felt across ever-growing distances. The 'strong' version envisages the world as a single system, originating in the final decades of the twentieth century. At that time, a radical transformation surpassed anything known in previous history. It created entirely new spatial and temporal frameworks. Faced with a condition of unprecedented novelty, 'historical' modes of thought, self-evident to historians and many other scholars in the humanities, are rendered useless.

The strong version relegates historical scholarship to an antiquarian delight in bygone ages. Is the weak version a suitable template for global history? To put it more generally: what is the difference between the history of globalization and global history?

Global history is a distinctive perspective on the past. It does not necessarily examine long-term developments. On the contrary, one especially successful way of writing global history has been to make a cross section at one particular point in time, a procedure that is not interested in macro-processes.²⁰ It highlights the simultaneity of societies in various parts of the world without making any claims as to mutual influences and common causal factors operating in the background. Few literary devices have been more successful in overcoming Eurocentric habits of seeing.

A second difference between global history and the history of globalization pertains to methodology. The very idea of globalization as the growth of transgressive connectivity dissolves established units of analysis. The idiom of flows and interaction diverts attention away from settled units such as local communities or nation-states. The relations between nodes within a network become more interesting than the nodes themselves. This devalues comparison, the old master method of historical sociology and of certain forms of world history writing. Global history is to a lesser degree committed to the central idea of interaction. It therefore retains comparative methods, disengages them from an association with the 'Spenglerian' notion of concrete and clearly bounded 'civilizations,' refines them, and puts them to new uses in innovative combinations of comparative and relationist analysis.²¹

A third difference between global history and the history of globalization derives from the treatment of difference. Even if a globalization perspective takes account of conflict and contradiction, it is, at a fundamental level, wedded to the vision of a homogenizing trend in (modern) history. Convergence and the growth of shared experience are construed as the overall tendency of world development, divergence, and fragmentation, though up to a point contributing to multicultural plurality, as an aberration from the normal course of events. Global history makes no such assumptions. Characteristically, one of its most important debates has centered on the problem of a 'Great Divergence'—the observation that the 'global rift' between rich and poor parts of the world, especially between Europe and Asia, is of fairly recent origin. Few participants in the controversy surrounding this topic have suggested that the Great Divergence might be accounted for in terms of globalization. This classic *problématique* of global history is being discussed with hardly any reference to theories and histories of globalization.²²

Yet another difference becomes obvious when we look at the more specific claims usually bound up with the concept of globalization. To give just one example: even those who shy away from predicting the imminent death of the nation-state would probably agree that globalization erodes state power and leads to a 'de-territorialization' of politics.²³ If globalization theory aims at elaborating substantial diagnoses of the present, it cannot avoid propositions like this one. Global history, however, does not require assumptions of such a kind. It is more 'neutral' and more open to specific interpretations of particular cases.

In sum, 'global history' is a more general and more inclusive concept than 'the history of globalization.' Not all global history is history of globalization, whereas the history of globalization inscribes itself by necessity into global history. If treated in a highly technical manner, for example, as a quantitative study in market integration, it can, however, lose sight of the attractions of global history and end up with an impoverished and reduced picture.²⁴

EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION AS RECURRENT PHENOMENA

The plural 'globalizations' signifies a *double* plurality: the breaking down of an overarching master process into several different fields and types of globalization, and the fact that expansion beyond the confines of locality has taken place repeatedly throughout human history. It is a moot point whether migrations, the creation of market systems and empires, or the emergence of religious ecumenes and other forms of universalism should come under the heading of 'globalization'. Especially scholars who previously tended to apply the notion of the 'world-system' to early constellations from ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, or India onwards argue in favor of a similarly extended concept of globalization.²⁵ Not everyone will share the obsession with origins evident in this kind of literature. It is one thing to acknowledge the complexity of early civilizations, quite another to place such complexity into a temporal continuum linking vastly different societies across the millennia. The question of when globalization can be said actually to begin may lead to a dissipation of intellectual energies and has a taste of naive reification of what is more a matter of perspective than of real existence. As Barry K. Gills and William R. Thompson, themselves fond of the big picture, succinctly put it: 'Global perspectives yield global histories.'²⁶ Moreover, labeling early examples of human communities drawing together as 'globalization' does not help to *explain* anything. Only in a very general sense—*sub specie aeternitatis*—is it reasonable to see world history as a continuous process of macro-social integration. Upon closer inspection, large-scale structures behave in a much more specific and disorderly fashion.

The questions, concepts, and methods of global history can easily be applied to *all* periods of history. However, it makes little sense to speak of 'globalization' before the emergence of regular communication between the continents on both sides of the Atlantic. This kind of logistic globality did not arrive overnight, but the sixteenth century was certainly a pivotal age. It has also been argued, with good reason, that the preconditions for global trade were created precisely in the year 1571 when Manila was founded as a Spanish *entrepôt*. Only then, a 'world' market became practically possible.²⁷ Trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific trade were linked for the first time, although it took three centuries for them to evolve into one unified system.

Prior to the sixteenth century, world history was full of different processes of expansion and contraction. The forces of expansion were conquest, trade, and the

complicated mechanisms of religious transfer. The outcomes were empires, trading networks, and large spaces where individual religions predominated. Contemporary observers described the fate of these structures by using cyclical models of rise, blooming, and fall. All of these structures underwent permanent metamorphoses. Their external and internal boundaries changed all the time. Some of them existed for many centuries; others disappeared after a few decades. Some gave room to chaos; others to fragmented configurations of equal or greater stability. In the twentieth century, sociologists and a few historians showed a new interest in cyclical models of military and commercial hegemony. Yet they failed to establish general patterns of rise and decline. Historical scholarship uses sophisticated tools to analyze pre-modern macro-structures and has displayed a growing interest in comparing them. Laws that govern such processes of integration and fragmentation have not been discovered. Several periods have been identified when religious or commercial innovation, empire building, or state formation occurred in clusters simultaneously in different parts of the world. These tendencies do not easily add up to a long-term pass towards growing connectivity on the surface of the earth. What happened within different contexts is too complex to be subsumed under the all too general title of 'globalization.'

For those who insist on a general use of the term, A. G. Hopkins's and C. A. Bayly's category of 'archaic' globalization might offer a solution. But it adds little to the terminology already available for the analysis of pre-modern forms of political, economic, and cultural integration across vast spaces. Before the sixteenth century, the numerous processes of expansion and contraction going on in the world do not fall into a discernable pattern. From the time when the first regular trading links across all the oceans were established, it becomes easier to grasp elements of globalization. For the two centuries between 1600 and 1800, Hopkins and Bayly suggest the cautious term 'proto-globalization.' In their view it includes not only the rise of new commercial networks through the expansion of the slave trade, the activities of the European chartered companies, and the intensification of Arab and Chinese commerce in the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas, but also the reconfiguration of state power in Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa.²⁸

Throughout the period conventionally dubbed as 'early modern,' a greater number of actors than before operated within an extending geographical horizon: merchants, soldiers, colonial administrators, explorers, missionaries, and pilgrims. Driven by the rise of commercial capitalism (in a Braudelian sense), by the improved management of seaborne commerce, and by increasingly globalist visions of empire, the degree of connectivity in the world rose, with the Atlantic as the most important arena. It cannot be taken for granted that this early modern proto-globalization was a radical break with the past rather than a modified continuation of earlier trends of expansion and contraction. Cyclical trajectories of empires resembled familiar patterns. Differently constructed empires like the Mughal empire and the Portuguese empire rose and declined within the fairly limited time-span of about two centuries. Claims about the peculiarity of a special early modern form of globalization face two issues that continue to be hotly debated.

First, there is the question of quantities and proportions. When do quantities cross thresholds of significance? When does a circuit become a system? When do separate economies develop a level of exchange and of the division of labor that justify them to be called 'integrated?' The contention that this already happened, at least in the Atlantic region, during the early modern period remains open to question. Pieter Emmer sums up a more detailed argument by pointing out that 'all shipping tonnage in Europe around 1500 could fit into only two present-day super tankers and that we would need five such tankers to arrive at the tonnage available around 1800.'²⁹ World trade did not multiply in value and volume and progress from luxury goods to bulk commodities until the nineteenth century.³⁰

Second to consider is the problem of the cultural integration of the world and the universalisms that are expected to go with it. What constitutes genuine 'global' awareness? How many people are necessary to form a socially relevant group of intellectual 'globalizers?' During the early modern period, Europeans launched unprecedented projects in the cross-cultural gathering of secular knowledge. Earlier ages had seen transfers of religions and laws, of languages and scripts; the European initiatives since the early 1500s were unique in their reach and comprehensiveness. European travelers and missionaries—especially the Jesuits—collected information on languages, beliefs, customs, political systems, and the natural world and accumulated huge treasures of artifacts and manuscripts from those parts of the world that were accessible to them. They measured and mapped the surface of the planet. Early modern thought in Europe was pervaded with knowledge about other civilizations. New discourses arose, later crystallized into academic disciplines: ethnography, comparative philology, archaeology, and the various branches of 'oriental studies.'³¹ But did all this amount to cultural globalization? How much of European culture was actually exported or rather adopted beyond Europe and its colonies of expatriate settlement? Even the efforts of the Jesuits to win adherents to the Christian faith remained disappointing, given the enormous human input that went into the grand missionary enterprise. Few members of the European intellectual classes gained first-hand experience of non-Christian civilizations. Leibniz never went to China, Montesquieu never visited Persia, Diderot never traveled to the South Seas. The great majority of the population of Europe had only hazy and extremely stereotyped ideas of other continents, if any. Hardly any active cultural exploration took place in the opposite direction. By 1800, the educated and the powerful in countries like China, Japan, or the Ottoman empire remained as ignorant of 'the West' as they had been 300 or 600 years before. Cultural contacts multiplied during the early modern period, but they did not assume a new quality that deserves the name even of 'proto'-globalization.

MODERN GLOBALIZATION

Attempts to find a periodization for the bundle of processes we have come to call 'globalization' should abandon all hope for an all-encompassing solution. As Raymond

Grew has pointed out, 'each periodization follows from a particular interpretation of the essence of globalization.'³² From the insight that various types of globalization are unlikely to evolve synchronically follows the conclusion that it is impossible to posit a neatly demarcated sequence of 'stages.' Most historians and historically-minded sociologists prefer the idea of several 'waves'—short periods of intensified worldwide integration followed by intervals of reduced integrative dynamism. However, there is no consensus about the number of such waves and their place in long-term chronology. Few scholars defend the view that waves of globalization resemble the 'long cycles' of theories of economic growth in the tradition of Nicolai Kondratiev and Joseph A. Schumpeter. A recent metaphorical approach to the concept of 'waves' does not employ structural criteria, but sees them as clusters of representative *experiences* shared in distant regions of the planet.³³ Rhetorically persuasive as this suggestion may be, its charm results from a degree of impressionistic fuzziness unfit for a social science concept.

Something changed during the nineteenth century, probably since about the 1820s or 1830s: but what? Economic historians, able to draw on better statistical evidence than for the more distant past, single out three developments. First, the sheer bulk and value of long-distance trade reached unprecedented heights. Improved shipping and the beginning of the railway age created the logistic foundations for an expansion that, after the European colonization of Australia and New Zealand and the development of new export enclaves in West Africa and South Africa, left no part of the world untouched. This, of course, is a very simple empirical observation. Second, connections between markets for labor, commodities, and—much later—capital matured into integration. 'Integration' in turn is measured in terms of the long-term convergence of prices in distant markets.³⁴ Yet, price levels did not by any means coalesce all over the world, and the simple quantitative indicator of functional relations between prices ought to form part of a richer concept of 'convergence.' As Steve Dowrick and J. Bradford DeLong understand it, convergence means 'the assimilation of countries outside northwest Europe of the institutions, technologies, and productivity levels currently in use in northwest Europe and in the rest of the industrial core.'³⁵ By 1900, only Western Europe, the United States, Canada, three Latin American countries, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and, in a way, South Africa belonged to a 'convergence club.'³⁶ The growth of global capitalism, evident in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, transformed the lives of millions of people on Earth—and left a greater number undisturbed in their accustomed ways of subsistence.³⁷ Countless peasants in India or in the interior provinces of China did not produce for export, never bought foreign consumer goods, and knew next to nothing about the outside world.

Forms of globalization other than economic globalization are even more difficult to pin down for a long nineteenth century up to 1914 or even a *very* long one until 1945. Few traces of global governance, the political scientists' main criterion for globalization, are to be found before World War I. The European 'concert of powers' was in shambles after the Crimean War of 1854–7, and the emergence of the earliest international organizations could not hide the fact that no normative consensus curbed the

sovereignty of militarized nation-states. Most of the inhabitants of Asia and Africa were politically voiceless as colonial subjects or citizens of 'semi-colonial' countries. The League of Nations was not the complete failure it has often been reputed to be, but it certainly did not function as an effective guarantor of international peace. The inter-war years saw a fragmentation of the world economy into quasi-self-contained blocs (although it is at issue how dramatic economic de-globalization actually was) as well as a challenge to a peaceful world order from ultra-nationalism in Germany, Japan, and Italy.

Cultural globalization between the 1830s and 1945, a vast subject, is impossible to summarize in a few sentences. European civilization attained a maximum of its worldwide influence in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, thereafter losing much of its prestige in an age of mature imperialism and, even more so, during World War I. Still, colonialism left a long-term legacy particularly in education and the bilingualism of post-colonial elites. Europeans and North Americans remained curious about the rest of the world, but their perceptions were colored by a kind of structural arrogance that is nowadays known as 'orientalism.' Universalist programs like that of an all-embracing canon of *Weltliteratur* ('world literature'), advocated in the 1820s by the German poet and polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, kindled little enthusiasm in Germany or elsewhere. 'Culture' invariably became a program of national soul-searching. The crucial difference between the period up to 1945 and the most recent decades is the absence of truly global media accessible for mass audiences. The fact that news agencies like Reuters cabled information from any major city in the world and that a daily newspaper like the *Times* of London was read by the powerful almost everywhere dwindles in importance when set alongside the impact of the electronic media today.

'Modern globalization' is a category wide enough to capture what went on in an age commonly described as that of industrialization, empire, and the nation-state, and the great economic spurt during the decades before 1914 laid the foundations for various post-1950 waves of global economic integration. At the same time, it remains to be discussed whether the various types of globalization really constituted *the* defining feature of the one and a half centuries after about 1800. Modernity before the mid-twentieth century was probably *not* quintessentially 'global.'

CONTEMPORARY GLOBALIZATION

With 'contemporary' or, to some, 'post-colonial' or 'post-Cold War' globalization we enter the realm of the social sciences. For twenty years it has been their principal thematic concern. The historian can only peddle a trivial kind of wisdom: the globalization(s) we are experiencing today are in some respects of revolutionary novelty. They are so new and exciting that historians should spend at least as much time on the origins of recent global capitalism as on controversies about the very first stirrings of

globalization at the dawn of history. On the other hand, some characteristics of contemporary globalization are not as singular as they appear to the historically innocent eye.

Not all changes that have taken place in the world during the last two or three decades can be credited to globalization. Thus, it remains an open question to what extent forces of globalization contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states. Trends in the international economy and subversion by media from the 'free' or capitalist West certainly were not the only, perhaps not even the most important, causes of the disappearance of organized communism in Europe. The military logic of the nuclear Cold War, the civil rights movements in several countries of the Eastern bloc, nationality problems peculiar to the Soviet Union, and severe miscalculations on the part of the Soviet leadership both before and after Mikhail S. Gorbachev's assumption of power are just several among many factors unrelated to globalization that have to be considered when the end of bipolarity in world politics is to be explained.³⁸ The impact of globalization is more obvious in other fields:³⁹ first, innovations in communication and information technology, in particular computers, satellite telephones, and the Internet, and their rapid spread down to the individual household user; second, the affordability, for the first time in history, of cheap long-distance transport to middle- and lower-income groups in the 'developed' parts of the world and, as a consequence, the further growth of fuel-based mass transport; third, the creation of a unified global capital market working in real time; fourth, the convergence across countries and continents of preferences and patterns of consumption—although claims about a general 'McDonaldization' of the world should be taken with a pinch of salt; fifth, the massively enhanced importance of knowledge as a factor of production and a resource that confers competitive advantages on societies which cast themselves as 'knowledge societies'; sixth, the consolidation of a basic set of internationally accepted norms delegitimizing violations of human rights and a broad range of specific forms of violence and discrimination.

Historians will be inclined to see behind such novelties antecedents and continuity. While they do not claim that nothing new under the sun has been developing around the recent turn of the millennium, they will tend to restrain the wilder forms of excitement. A massive globalization of trade and investment already took place between the 1870s and 1914, and quite a number of economic analyses from the period read like current comments on globalization once the reader replaces the older terms *Weltwirtschaft* ('world economy')—the Germans were at the forefront of that kind of literature—or 'international economy' with 'globalization.'⁴⁰ In the domain of information technology, the invention and introduction of the Internet looks like a repeat performance of the installation of a worldwide cable network between ca. 1860 and 1902.⁴¹ The two technologies differed in their carrying capacity, their economic contexts, the extent of political control attached to them, and the impact on the habits and cultural outlooks of their users. But the feeling that the new technology marked a 'revolutionary' compression of time and space was widely shared in the 1880s and the 1990s. The impression that life was accelerating is often claimed to be a singular novelty

of an age when communication in real time has become a matter of course. Yet earlier generations, at least in Europe, had similar experiences. They were characteristic for the Age of Revolution since the 1780s, for the boom years of railway building, and for the *fin de siècle* between ca. 1890 and 1914.⁴² In all these cases and up to the present time, it is difficult to find hard data for the alleged speeding up of life; a vague sense of going through exciting times is everything one usually discovers in the sources. A different kind of continuity is to be found where apparent rupture and advance turns out to be superficial. Thus, globalization theorists have often claimed that contemporary globalization successfully produces its own institutional underpinnings in the shape of robust transnational networks and effective global governance. The financial crisis that began in September 2008, however, revealed the fragile institutional basis of global business and reintroduced nation-states and national governments, already proclaimed obsolete or even defunct by many theorists, as indispensable actors guaranteeing the survival of transnational capitalism. History confounded an influential school of contemporary social and political thought.

The tremendous popularity of the concept of 'globalization' and the fact that oceans of ink have been spilled on it are no proof that social scientists will succeed in constructing theories of globalization that stand up to the highest standards of theory formation. Despite the work of important thinkers like Immanuel Wallerstein, Arjun Appadurai, Manuel Castells, or Saskia Sassen, a comprehensive and empirically relevant theory of globalization is nowhere to be seen. Such a theory, complete with ideas about how globalization is able to be identified and measured, would be indispensable to historians. It would help raise the concept from a cliché to an analytical tool. As things stand now, proponents of the concept do not even agree on their interpretation of the present-day world with its boundless availability of data. Is world society growing more equal or more unequal? Is world culture being homogenized, or are cultural differences mounting? Consensus on such seemingly simple empirical questions is still lacking. That does not inspire confidence in the application of the concept of 'globalization' to the past, where hard facts are much more difficult to come by. World historians and global historians will watch the further development of globalization theory. But given their own much more variegated concerns, they are not dependent on it.

NOTES

1. For a good classification of concepts of globalization see Willam I. Robinson, 'Theories of Globalization,' in George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 125–43; on the public career of the concept and the political conflicts surrounding it see Nayan Chanda, *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers, and Warriors Shaped Globalization* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 245–69.

2. David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization Theory: Approaches and Controversies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 6.
3. David Held and Antony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization: Beyond the Great Divide*, (2nd edn., Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
4. Good introductions are: Robert J. Holton, *Making Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Frank J. Lechner, *Globalization: The Making of World Society* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); David Held *et al.*, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999). The early debates are fully documented in Roland Robertson and Kathleen E. White, eds., *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, 6 vols. (London: Routledge, 2003).
5. Michael Lang, 'Globalization and Its History,' *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006), 899–931, at 899.
6. Salvatore Babones, 'Studying Globalization: Methodological Issues,' in Ritzer, ed., *Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, 144–61, at 144.
7. See the strong warning against uncritical uses of the word 'globalization' by one of its earliest proponents: Roland Robertson and Habib Haque Khondker, 'Discourses of Globalization: Preliminary Considerations,' *International Sociology* 13 (1998), 25–40.
8. The standard statement is J. R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003).
9. Raymond Grew, 'Finding Frontiers in Historical Research on Globalization,' in Ino Rossi, ed., *Frontiers of Globalization Research: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches* (New York: Springer, 2008), 271–86, at 276.
10. A basic introduction is Robert J. Holton, *Making Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 55–80.
11. On the consequences of the spatial turn for the study of globalization see Warwick E. Murray, *Geographies of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2006). An excellent overview is Harm J. de Blij, *The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalization's Rough Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
12. Karin Knorr Cetina, 'Microglobalization,' in Rossi, ed., *Frontiers of Globalization Research*, 65–92, at 68.
13. Roland Robertson and Kathleen E. White, 'What Is Globalization?,' in Ritzer, ed., *Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, 54–66, at 56.
14. With a slightly different meaning, the 'global' can also be conceptualized as the 'universal.' See A. G. Hopkins, 'Introduction: Interactions between the Universal and the Local,' in A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1–38, esp. 7–9.
15. Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).
16. Jonathan Friedman, 'Global Systems, Globalization, and Anthropological Theory,' in Rossi, ed., *Frontiers of Globalization Research*, 109–32, at 118–19.
17. See James N. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 80–1.
18. A keen sense of such imbalances is to be found in the excellent textbook of Boike Rehbein and Hermann Schwengel, *Theorien der Globalisierung* (Konstanz: UVK Verlag, 2008).
19. Jörg Dürrschmidt and Graham Taylor, *Globalization, Modernity and Social Change: Hotspots of Transition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4–5.
20. A well-known example is John E. Wills, Jr., *1688: A Global History* (New York: Norton, 2001).
21. This is one of the great virtues of C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
22. On the debate within its wider context see Peer Vries, 'Global Economic History: A Survey,' in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 20 (200), 133–69.
23. Roger King and Gavin Kendall, *The State, Democracy and Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
24. On the relation between global history and globalization see also Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert, 'Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, multiple Modernen: Zur Geschichtsschreibung der modernen Welt,' in Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, and Ulrike Freitag, eds., *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2007), 7–49, esp. 19–22.
25. Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (London: Routledge, 1993); see also the debate in Barry K. Gills and William R. Thompson, eds., *Globalization and Global History* (London: Routledge, 2006).
26. Barry K. Gills and William R. Thompson, 'Globalization, Global Histories, and Historical Globalities,' in Gills and Thompson, eds., *Globalization and Global History*, 1–17, at 2.
27. Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, 'Globalization Began in 1571,' in Gills and Thompson, eds., *Globalization and Global History*, 232–47, at 232–5; Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, 'Born Again: Globalization's Sixteenth-Century Origins (Asian/Global versus European Dynamics),' *Pacific Economic Review* 13 (2008), 359–87.
28. A. G. Hopkins, 'Introduction: Globalization—An Agenda for Historians,' in A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 1–10, at 5. See also C. A. Bayly, 'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750–1850,' in Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History*, 47–73.
29. Pieter C. Emmer, 'The Myth of Early Globalization: The Atlantic Economy, 1500–1800,' *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos: Coloquios* 2008, <<http://nuevomundo.revues.org/index42173.html>>.
30. Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 383–5.
31. See the overview in Geoffrey C. Gunn, *First Globalization: The Eurasian Exchange, 1500–1800* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
32. Grew, 'Finding Frontiers in Historical Research on Globalization,' in Rossi, ed., *Frontiers of Globalization Research*, 277.
33. Lechner, *Globalization: The Making of World Society* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 15–32.
34. Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, 'Commodity Market Integration, 1500–2000,' in Michael D. Bordo, Alan M. Taylor, and Jeffrey G. Williamson, eds., *Globalization in Historical Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 11–64, at 14; Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and the Poor Periphery before 1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 25–36 (mainly on commodity markets).
35. Steve Dowrick and J. Bradford DeLong, 'Globalization and Convergence,' in Bordo *et al.*, eds., *Globalization in Historical Perspective*, 191–226, at 195.

36. Dowrick and DeLong, 'Globalization and Convergence,' in Bordo *et al.*, eds., *Globalization in Historical Perspective*, 198–99.
37. Jeffrey A. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Norton, 2006), chapters 1–5.
38. For a genuinely global approach to the final phase of the Cold War see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
39. Any observer will draw up his or her own list of globalizing innovations. Compare the following one with, for example, that in John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 50 seq.
40. A good example is the classic article by a German economist and sociologist: Moritz Julius Bonn, 'Das Wesen der Weltwirtschaft,' in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 35 (1912), 797–814.
41. See Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).
42. See Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), a book based on ground-breaking work by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 109–30; Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 451–87. For David Christian, acceleration is the mark of the twentieth century as a whole: see his *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2004), 440–63.

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