

Preface

This book is the contribution of two historians to an ever-widening debate about globalization. Few subjects are more important for understanding the contemporary world, and few are more contested and more in need of careful empirical investigation. The debate on globalization takes place in many different fields and academic disciplines. Economics, sociology, political science, and cultural studies are only the most important among them. What historians have to offer is close attention to change. When they look at the world in the early twenty-first century, they ask how our present condition came about. They are interested in the emergence of the present, in historical parallels and precedents, and in possible alternatives and paths not taken.

Change can be described along various temporal scales, ranging from instantaneous events to long-term developments spanning centuries or even millennia. The word “globalization” indicates change and dynamism over time. It refers to a process or, as we will try to show, to a bundle of related processes that do not necessarily progress at the same speed or move in the same direction. Moreover, they affect the various parts of the world in quite different ways. When did globalization begin? The world did not turn “global” overnight. No single event, neither the invention of the Internet nor the fall of the iron curtain,

inaugurated an entirely new age out of the blue. Globality has a history reaching back far before modern times. This book traces the emergence of relations between communities across vast spaces and long distances over the past seven or eight centuries. It grows more detailed as globalizing tendencies intensify in the more recent past. We do not deny that already in early ages travelers and traders performed feats of voyaging and land-bound transport. It is also obvious that several major civilizations, for example, China or the early the Arab-Muslim civilization, had good reasons to regard themselves as centers of the "world" as it was known to them. Yet we detect incipient globalization not before the epoch that, in Western terms, is known as the High Middle Ages. The Mongol world-empire of the thirteenth century, originating in Inner Asia, for the first time opened up the chance to spread goods and ideas across a huge space from the Yellow Sea to present-day Poland. It connected Latin and Orthodox Christendom, the Islamic world, and China in an unprecedented way.

"Globalization" implies more than just the existence of relations between distant places on earth. The term should only be used where such relations acquire a certain degree of regularity and stability and where they affect more than tiny numbers of people. Relations have to crystallize into institutions in order to gain permanence. The Mongolian empire was fragile and disintegrated after a few decades. Nowhere did it create a durable political order. This transience was different from the new empires of the sixteenth century. European overseas expansion resulted in large-scale colonization and state-building in the New

World and in the emergence of the Atlantic as a new arena of trade—in goods and enslaved people—between many different civilizations. At the same time, mighty continental empires were established or consolidated by indigenous rulers across Asia, while Europeans entered Asia as merchants and missionaries. Their early trading empires later grew into territorial dominion in India, Indonesia, and elsewhere.

However, the early history of globalization is not merely about imperial expansion. It is also about the emergence and growth of a world economy. The various empires slowly became enmeshed into even more extended webs of exchange. While long-distance trade by land and by sea is an ancient phenomenon, integrated world markets for goods, capital, and labor were unknown before the middle of the nineteenth century. Since that time, their evolution and their impact on individual countries and societies has been one of the major factors forging links across the planet. Yet another important aspect of globalization is an outlook that seeks to transcend parochialism and ethnocentrism, in other words, a “global consciousness.” Even today, few people “think globally,” and even fewer did so in the past. However, these cosmopolitan minorities who did possess a global perspective, for example, the early Jesuit missionaries or the philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment, were pioneers who grappled with the tension between universal values and the plurality of cultures on earth. Such a tension is still very much with us.

The chapters in this book are arranged in chronological sequence. We distinguish between four major periods. Until the mid-eighteenth century, empire-building, trade,

and religious solidarity encouraged intercontinental exchange on an expanding scale. From about the 1750s onward, political revolution in the Americas and in Europe intensified imperial rivalry, and the industrialization of some parts of the Northern Hemisphere created networks of traffic, communication, migration, and commerce that in density and strength surpassed anything known up to that time. Our third period begins in the 1880s and lasts until the end of World War II. Its main features were the politicization of globalization through attempts to turn it into an instrument of national policies; the seemingly final division of the world among the imperialist great powers; and the growth of global flows of capital and the rise of programs envisaging the reordering of the entire globe in terms of liberalism (Woodrow Wilson) or revolutionary socialism (Lenin). The 1930s and early 1940s witnessed a catastrophic breakdown of globalization. Characteristically, however, the crises and conflicts of those years were of a truly worldwide scope. The fourth period, beginning in 1945, was dominated by attempts to avoid the mistakes made during the period between the two world wars. While the world economy was reconstructed along liberal lines, the antagonism of the American-led "free world" and the Soviet bloc during the Cold War prevented many potential relations and linkages from unfolding. This is why we speak of "globalization split in two." During this fourth period, mass tourism, the rise of global media and global forms of entertainment, and the universal spread of Western patterns of consumption were already pointing toward the kind of everyday experience characteristic of the early twenty-first century. Problems such as environmental

damage, competition over scarce resources (oil, for example), and even terrorism began to assume a transcontinental character. By the early 1980s many of the elements of contemporary globalization were in place.

This book is very short. The format allows us to develop our historical arguments as concisely as possible. At each stage we provide examples without trying to be exhaustive. Encyclopedic completeness cannot possibly be a goal of an interpretive and introductory text. A list of Recommended Literature will direct readers to a universe of historical detail. If this were a brief history of the world as a whole, the authors would have an obligation to deal evenhandedly with all civilizations and all parts of the planet. In a history of globalization, by contrast, we are free to choose where to place our emphasis. To give just one example, in writing about the later nineteenth century, it would simply be wrong not to be "Eurocentric." For other, both earlier and later, periods of history such a Eurocentric perspective is quite misguided.

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"Globalization" has become a popular buzzword for explaining today's world. The word achieved stardom in the 1990s and was soon embraced by the general public and integrated into numerous languages. But is this much-discussed phenomenon really an invention of modern times? In this work, Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson make the case that globalization is not so new, after all.

Arguing that the world did not turn "global" overnight, the book traces the emergence of globalization over the past seven or eight centuries. In the end, the authors write, today's globalization is part of a long-running transformation and not a new "global age" that is radically different from anything that came before.

"[*Globalization*] stands out in the proliferation of textbooks and surveys on world history and globalization. It is a concise and, especially noteworthy, a precise essay on the time and place of globalization. . . . [T]his is a quick and intelligent little book."

—Michael Geyer, H-Net

"[Osterhammel and Petersson] have produced a short and extremely helpful introduction to the history of globalization. . . . [The book] rightly tries to reach far beyond the more narrow confines of economic history . . . [to] draw on migration history, the history of slavery and of empires, and . . . international relations theory."

—Harold James, *International History Review*

"This brief book provides an easy-to-read, well-organized addition to the globalization debate."

—Colin Rowan, *Journal of World History*

"In this crisp account, two historians examine the long roots of globalization. . . . Scholars of world history will gain a great deal from this lucid, jargon-free analysis of globalization that is in many ways a most welcomed update of William H. McNeill's *The Global Condition*."

—*Historian*

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