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PREFACE

This book was first published as *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* by C. H. Beck publishers in Munich in January 2009. It rapidly went through five editions and two unnumbered special editions and is now being translated into Chinese, French, Polish, and Russian. For the American edition the manuscript was revised and brought up to date as far as that could be done without adding to the book's considerable length.

For a single author to tackle a one-volume global history of a "very long" nineteenth century borders on the foolhardy and may require if not an apology, then at least some explanation. Several of my previous books have been crisp and concise, and I fully appreciate the value of collaborative work, having the privilege of being, with Akira Iriye, one of the editors-in-chief of a multivolume "New History of the World" that is written by a distinguished group of scholars from several countries. Thus, *The Transformation of the World* should not be seen as a product of solipsism and conceit.

My own research experience has focused on two different fields: the final phase of British informal imperialism in China, and the role of Asia in the thinking of the European Enlightenment. I never wrote a source-based monograph on any aspect of the nineteenth century, but I have long been involved in teaching its history, and the present book draws on a lifetime of reading about the period. Two other ingredients went into the making of this book: One of them is a deep respect for historical sociology, especially the tradition going back to Max Weber, with whose works I was made familiar by two of my teachers: Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Wilhelm Hennis. Later, I had the chance to discuss issues of historical sociology with S. N. Eisenstadt on the occasion of his visits to the University of Konstanz, and today I enjoy the regular exchange of ideas with Wolfgang Knöbl at Göttingen, a sociologist with a deep understanding of how historians think. The second formative influence has been an interest in the history and theory of world history writing kindled by yet another of my teachers: Ernst Schulin at the University of Freiburg. A collection of my articles on historiographical topics was published in 2001. However, theorizing about

world history can never be more than a preparation for historical analysis. In this sense, the present book is an attempt to put my own recipes into practice.

The book is an experiment in writing a rich and detailed but structured, nontrivial, and nonschematic account of a crucial period in the history of humanity. It was not commissioned by a publisher and has therefore been written oblivious to marketing constraints. Though easily accessible to students, it was never intended as a textbook. It does not disguise personal idiosyncrasies such as a special interest in animals, the opera, and the old-fashioned—though, as I hope to show, highly important—field of international relations. Uneven coverage would be an inexcusable sin in a textbook, whereas this work does not deny the fact that its author is more familiar with some parts of the world than with others. General and summary statements, frequent as they have to be in this particular kind of synthesis, derive from the logic of analysis and not from a pedagogical urge to simplify complex things for the benefit of the reader.

Work on the manuscript began in 2002 when I was a fellow of the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS) at Wassenaar, an excellent institution whose rector at the time, H. L. Wesseling, counts as one of the godfathers of the project. A first sketch of some of my emerging ideas was presented in November 2002 as the Sixteenth Annual Lecture at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC (and later published in the institute's bulletin), given at the invitation of its then director, Christof Mauch. During the following years, regular teaching duties, relatively substantial as they are at German universities, slowed down work on the manuscript. Unsurprisingly, the publication of C. A. Bayly's magisterial *The Birth of the Modern World* early in 2004 caused me to reassess the project and threw its continuation into doubt. Ultimately, I wrote a review essay on Bayly and decided to carry on. There are already several world histories of the "age of extremes" (Eric Hobsbawm)—why not two of its predecessor, the nineteenth century? I was able to complete the manuscript when Heinrich Meier invited me to come to Munich for a year as a fellow of the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Foundation, whose far-sighted director he is.

The German edition owes its existence to the confidence and courage of the great publisher Wolfgang Beck and his editor-in-chief, Detlef Felken, both of whom learned about the unwieldy manuscript—any publisher's nightmare—at an advanced stage of writing. Contact with Princeton University Press had already been established on the occasion of a previous book with the help of Sven Beckert, and I am most grateful to him and Jeremi Suri for including *The Transformation of the World* in their prestigious series *America and the World*. At Princeton University Press, Brigitta van Rheinberg, Molan Goldstein, and Mark Bellis did everything in their power to turn the revised manuscript into an attractive volume. Patrick Camiller's translation was funded by the program Geisteswissenschaften International–Translation Funding for Humanities and Social Sciences from Germany.

As this book is based on secondary literature, my main debt is to the marvelous historians and social scientists in many countries who have, almost within one generation, hugely increased our knowledge, deepened our understanding, and thus radically transformed our view of the global nineteenth century. I only managed to sample a tiny fraction of their work, and in this I had to limit myself to the small number of languages that I am able to read. Among numerous reviews of the German edition, those by Steven Beller, Norbert Finzsch, Jonathan Sperber, Enzo Traverso, Peer Vries, and Tobias Werron were particularly useful in pointing out errors of fact and problems with the overall conception. Etienne François, Christian Jansen, and H. Glenn Penny provided critical comments that describe my methods and literary stratagems much better than I could have done it myself. Folker Reichert and Hans Schneider gave detailed advice on how to improve the accuracy of the book.

Not every suggestion could be heeded. A pervasive disregard of gender issues remains a serious drawback that will, hopefully, be remedied in a forthcoming attempt to expand chapter 15 of this book into a global social history of the period from the 1760s to the 1880s. A certain weakness of explanatory power may rest at the heart of the project, although in principle I disagree with a post-modernist aversion to causality. Readers who were—and are—vainly looking for insights into literature, music, the visual arts, and philosophical thinking may like to know that I am now doing some work on the social and cultural history of music. A more general response would be that world history should avoid the mirage of encyclopedic completeness and that the danger of superficiality never looms larger than when the historian is confronted with works of art and philosophy that require careful and elaborate interpretation.

At the University of Konstanz, the revision of the manuscript benefited enormously from the atmosphere of intellectual excitement created by the members of the Research Unit “Global Processes (18th to 20th Centuries)” that I was able to establish with generous funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation). I mention only Boris Barth, Franz L. Fillafer, Stefanie Gänger, Jan C. Jansen, and Martin Rempe. New work by these young scholars, by several PhD students, and also by myself, is emerging out of this stimulating context.

My family has been living with the book ever since our year at NIAS. It is a great joy to renew the original dedication to my son Philipp Dabringhaus and to add the dedicatee of a previous book, my wife Sabine Dabringhaus, an accomplished historian of China.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST GERMAN EDITION (2009)

All history inclines toward being world history. Sociological theories tell us that the world is the “environment of all environments,” the ultimate possible context for what happens in history and the account we give of it. The tendency to transcend the local becomes stronger in the *longue durée* of historical development. A history of the Neolithic age does not report intensive contacts over long distances, but a history of the twentieth century confronts the basic fact of a densely knit web of global connections—a “human web,” as John R. and William H. McNeill have called it, or better still, a multiplicity of such webs.¹

For historians, the writing of world history has particular legitimacy when it can link up with human consciousness in the past. Even today, in the age of the Internet and boundless telecommunications, billions of people live in narrowly local conditions from which they can escape neither in reality nor in their imagination. Only privileged minorities think and act “globally.” But contemporary historians on the lookout for early traces of “globalization” are not the first to have discovered transnational, transcontinental, or transcultural elements in the nineteenth century, often described as the century of nationalism and the nation-state. Many people living at the time already saw expanded horizons of thought and action as a distinguishing feature of their epoch, and dissatisfied members of the middle and lower strata of society in Europe and Asia turned their eyes and hopes toward distant lands. Many millions did not shrink from undertaking an actual journey into the unknown. Statesmen and military leaders learned to think in categories of “world politics.” The British Empire became the first in history to span the entire globe, while other empires ambitiously measured themselves by its model. More than in the early modern period, trade and finance condensed into integrated and interconnected worldwide webs, so that by 1910, economic vibrations in Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, or Tokyo were immediately registered in Hamburg, London, or New York, and vice versa. Scholars collected information and objects from all over the world; they studied the languages, customs, and religions of the remotest peoples. Critics of the prevailing order—workers, women, peace activists, anti-racists, opponents of colonialism—began

to organize internationally, often far beyond the confines of Europe. The nineteenth century reflected its own emergent globality.

As far as the nineteenth century is concerned, anything but a world-history approach is something of a makeshift solution. However, it is with the help of such makeshifts that history has developed into a science, gauged in terms of the methodological rationality of its procedures. This process of becoming a science, through the intensive and possibly exhaustive examination of sources, took place in the nineteenth century, so it is not surprising that the writing of world history receded into the background at that time. It appeared to be incompatible with the new professionalism that historians embraced. If this is beginning to change today, it certainly does not mean that all historians wish to, or should, take up the writing of world history.² Historical scholarship requires deep and careful study of clearly definable cases, the results of which form the material for broad syntheses that are indispensable for teaching and general orientation. The usual framework for such syntheses, at least in the modern age, is the history of one nation or nation-state, or perhaps of an individual continent such as Europe. World history remains a minority perspective, but no longer one that can be dismissed as esoteric or unserious. The fundamental questions are, of course, the same at every level of spatial scope or logical abstraction: “How does the historian, in interpreting a historical phenomenon, combine the individuality given by his sources with the general, abstract knowledge that makes it possible to interpret the individual in the first place? And how does the historian arrive at empirically secure statements about larger units and processes of history?”³

The professionalization of history, from which there is no going back, has entailed that history on a larger scale is now often left to the social sciences. Sociologists and political theorists who retain an interest in the depths of time and the vastness of space have assumed responsibility for engaging with major historical trends. Historians have an acquired predisposition to shy away from rash generalizations, monocausal explanations, and snappy all-embracing formulas. Under the influence of postmodern thinking, some consider it impossible and illegitimate to draw up “grand narratives” or interpretations of long-range processes. Nevertheless, the writing of world history involves an attempt to retrieve some interpretative competence and authority, visible in the public eye, from minutely detailed work in specialist fields. World history is one possible form of historiography—a register that should be tried out once in a while. The risk falls on the author’s shoulders, not on that of the reading public, which is protected from spuriousness and charlatanry through the alertness of professional criticism. But the question remains of why it should be the work of a single hand. Why should we not be content with multivolume collective products from the “academic factory” (Ernst Troeltsch)? The answer is simple. Only a centralized organization of issues and viewpoints, of material and interpretations, can hope to meet the constructive requirements of the writing of world history.

To know all there is to know is not the key qualification of the world historian or global historian. No one has sufficient knowledge to verify the correctness of every detail, to do equal justice to every region of the world, or to draw fully adequate conclusions from the existing body of research in countless different areas. Two other qualities are the truly important ones: first, to have a feel for proportions, contradictions, and connections as well as a sense of what may be typical and representative; and second, to maintain a humble attitude of deference toward professional research. The historian who temporarily slips into the role of global historian—she or he must remain an expert in one or more special areas—cannot do other than “encapsulate” in a few sentences the arduous, time-consuming work of others. At the same time, the labors of global historians will be worthless if they do not try to keep abreast of the best research, which is not always necessarily the most recent. A world history that unwittingly and uncritically reproduces long-refuted legends with a pontifical sweep of the hand is nothing short of ridiculous. As a synthesis of syntheses, as “the story of everything,”⁴ it would be crude and tiresome.

This book is the portrait of an epoch. Its modes of presentation may in principle be applied in the case of other historical periods. Without presuming to treat a century of world history in a complete and encyclopedic manner, it offers itself as an interpretative account rich in material. It shares this stance with Sir Christopher Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World*, a work published in English in 2004 and in German two years later, which has rightly been praised as one of the few successful syntheses of world history in the *late* modern period.⁵ The present volume is not an anti-Bayly but an alternative from a kindred spirit. Both books forgo a regional breakdown into nations, civilizations, or continents. Both regard colonialism and imperialism as a dimension so important that instead of dealing with it in a separate chapter, they keep it in view throughout. Both assume that there is no sharp distinction between what Bayly, in the subtitle of his book, calls “global connections” and “global comparisons”;⁶ these can and must be combined with each other, and not all comparisons need the protective backup of strict historical methodology. Controlled play with associations and analogies sometimes, though by no means always, yields more than comparisons overloaded with pedantry can do.

Our two books often place the emphasis differently: Professor Bayly’s background is India, mine China, and this shows. Bayly is especially interested in nationalism, religion, and “bodily practices,” which are the themes of superb sections of his work. In my book, migration, economics, the environment, international politics, and science are considered more broadly. I am perhaps a little more “Eurocentrically” inclined than Bayly: I see the nineteenth century even more sharply than he does as the “European century,” and I also cannot conceal a fascination for the history of the United States, a topic I discovered in the course of writing. As regards our theoretical references, my closeness to historical sociology will become apparent.

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