

Is Globalisation Yesterday's News?

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Globalisation is now a fashionable topic of historical research. Books and articles routinely use the term, though often in a loose manner that has yet to realise the full potential of the subject. The question arises as to whether globalisation, as currently applied by historians, is sufficiently robust to resist inevitable changes in historiographical fashion. The fact that globalisation is a process and not a single theory opens the way, not only to over-general applications of the term, but also to rich research possibilities derived in particular from other social sciences. One such prospect, which ought to be at the centre of all historians' interests, is how to categorise the evolution of the process. This question, which has yet to stimulate the lively debate it needs, is explored here by identifying three successive phases or sequences between the eighteenth century and the present, and joining them to the history of the empires that were their principal agents. These phases, termed proto-globalisation, modern globalisation, and postcolonial globalisation provide the context for reviewing the history of the West, including the United States, and in principle of the wider world too.

Keywords: globalisation, global history, empire, historiography, postcolonial.

Introduction

Historiographical phases have a life span of about ten years. Elements of each phase are incubated while its predecessor enjoys prominence; each disappears shortly after its successor emerges. Despite being relegated to obscurity, every phase continues to carry the embryo of life and can be rediscovered and resuscitated when world conditions and opinion demand fresh answers to new problems. This seemingly paradoxical outcome is possible because the problems are new in their particulars rather than in their essence. Consequently, discarded answers, suitably dressed for the occasion, are capable of re-establishing their relevance. The existence of this sequence is central to the definition of contributions that become known as "classic" works. Classics may fall out of favour but are rediscovered or re-emphasised over generations, and in some cases many centuries. However, because few historians now read the classics, the intellectual origins of the latest phase are typically disguised or unknown.

One consequence is an exaggerated sense of the originality of the phase in question; another limits its advocates from perceiving alternatives, and so prevents them from guarding against criticisms that eventually lead to their downfall.

Historiographical sequences ensure that every generation gets the history it needs. The branch of the subject that deals with global and imperial history illustrates the oscillations of the last half century with particular clarity. Modernisation theory, which was profoundly ahistorical, gave way to the dependency thesis, which enticed social scientists to embrace the past with unguarded passion. Marxism corrected the over-flexible radicalism of the dependency thesis by reasserting the paramountcy of production over exchange. Postmodernism inverted the prevailing hierarchy of causes by elevating the ideal over the material. Today, historians are busily globalising continents, empires, and islands.

The changing mood of the profession obliges scholars to find their place among shifting priorities. If they fail to move with the times, they risk being trapped, as Marxists used to say, in an “outdated problematic.” If they follow fashion, they are in danger of losing their individuality. Those who buy stock at the outset do well. Those who join when the market is at its peak suffer in the collapse that follows. Each fashion appeals because it offers a seemingly comprehensive response to a pressing current issue. Each ends when it is laid low by contrary evidence or is beaten into submission by incessant repetition. After the event, it becomes clear that the issue of the day was not, after all, the riddle of the ages.

The ability to forecast the next trend would greatly ease the difficulty of choosing priorities. Unfortunately, past performance, as financial advisors are obliged to say, does not guarantee future returns. Nevertheless, historians can still use their knowledge of previous and current priorities to help configure their work. It would be unwise, for example, to assign globalisation a central place in the interpretation that follows without recognising that the term now has a prominent, indeed almost mandatory, place in publications written by historians. Similarly, empire studies have enjoyed a revival that has been stimulated by the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the further rise of the United States, which commentators regard as the superpower of the day, notwithstanding the sudden appearance of China.¹ The present danger is not that of being caught handling an outdated problematic, but of repeating a message that has already been received. Once the boredom threshold is crossed, the latest approach becomes redundant and alternatives, typically antonyms, come to the fore.² As Oscar Wilde observed, “it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned.”³

Clearing the Decks

It is curious that historians should have allowed the study of globalisation pass them by for so long, given that the theme is evidently one that invites the exercise of their professional expertise in so many diverse and appealing ways. Ignore it, however, they did. Although social scientists of all stripes pioneered the subject in the 1990s, most historians were unaware of the literature until after the turn of the present

century. By about 2010, however, studies of the history of globalisation had multiplied, taken off, and ballooned across the world. Today, courses dealing with globalisation abound, centres have been established, new journals have appeared. Appearances to the contrary, however, the current “problematic” has not yet passed its sell-by date. Although globalisation has attracted the attention of scholars, it has made only a limited impression on the curriculum, which remains resolutely national.⁴ Moreover, publications that respond to the demands of fashion often have more appeal than substance. Some authors have inserted “global” in the titles of books and articles to achieve topicality and add gravitas to otherwise orthodox empirical narratives. Others have raised the term to a macro-level that is superficial rather than insightful. As yet, few historians have connected their work to the relevant analytical literature in ways that command the attention of other social scientists.

Despite these weaknesses, which are common to all historiographical trends, there have also been significant advances. Research on the non-Western world has shown that globalisation had multcentred origins and was not simply another long chapter in the story of the Rise of the West. The realisation that globalisation can create heterogeneity as well as homogeneity has had the dual effect of showing how localities contributed to global processes, and how supranational influences shaped diverse national histories.⁵ Other work has opened routes to the past that have still to be explored. One central issue is whether the history of globalisation is the record of a process that has grown larger with the passage of time without fundamentally changing its character, or whether it is viewed more accurately as the evolution of different types in successive sequences.⁶ This essay, which takes the latter position, sets out in a schematic fashion three phases of globalisation that have occupied what historians conventionally regard as the modern period, that is from the early eighteenth century to the present.

Definitions of globalisation and empire abound; all of them are open to criticism. There is general agreement, however, that globalisation involves an increase in the flow and velocity of goods, people, and ideas across the world, though continuing uncertainty about how the process can be measured satisfactorily and fitted to an appropriate chronology.⁷ As used here, the term “empire” refers to extensions of national sovereignty that incorporate foreign territory but without creating a unified nation state. The argument that follows links the two terms by suggesting that empires were the principal agents of globalisation between 1750 and 1950.

Empires had a distinctive role in this regard because of their ability to extend public goods across existing boundaries. Public goods include a wide range of services, such as administration, security, infrastructure, and the provision of legal, educational, and monetary systems, all of which are essential to the process of integrating the world. Technological advances encouraged the idea that international trade could increase and development become cumulative. The benefits of what became known as progress, however, depended (among other factors) on the provision of public goods. Seen from this perspective, imperialism was an assertive attempt to increase global integration by delivering public goods to newly-colonised regions. The supply of

public goods involved taxation, subsidies and, in some cases, changes in property rights. These demands, in turn, had implications for the sovereignty of the recipients. The act of providing public goods to foreign countries and often alien societies readily led to territorial incursions and demands for institutional changes. This process, conventionally summarised as imperialism, diminished the independence of the recipient state. Where successful integration required ownership of the subordinated country, the outcome was incorporation into the empire of the expanding power. Amid their many differences, the Western empires that spanned the period 1750–1950 were defined by having a visible territorial base, which some of them supplemented with spheres of informal influence.

Globalisation is a process, not a theory, though it sprouts many often conflicting theories about its causes and consequences. As a process, globalisation needs an impulse to give it a trajectory. The evolution of empires is the impulse that best fits the historical process considered here. Empires were not, of course, exclusive agents of globalisation, nor were they all capable of accelerating the process. They shared the role with diaspora, mercantile networks, and universal systems of belief, such as Islam, in ways that were both complementary and competitive. Nevertheless, the British Empire, to cite the example of the greatest of the modern empires, gave globalisation unrivalled impetus by annexing territory throughout the world and extending its influence informally into Latin America, the Ottoman Empire, and China. Admittedly, empires could be restrictive as well as expansive, and their writ did not cover all parts of the globe. Yet, it is as well to remember that, even in the twenty-first century, national governments continue to restrict the free flow of goods, people, and services, and large swathes of territory remain insulated from globalising influences.⁸ Accordingly, the incomplete character of the process is not a disqualification: empires can still serve as an exceptionally valuable means of reconstructing the history of globalisation since the eighteenth century.

The analysis that follows identifies three overlapping sequences, termed proto-globalisation, modern globalisation, and postcolonial globalisation, which encompass the last two centuries.⁹ The terms and the periodization relate primarily to Western Europe and the United States, the regions covered here, though with some chronological adjustments the categories could also be applied to empires in other parts of the world. Each phase advanced through a dialectical process: successful expansion created countervailing or competing forces; the struggle between them culminated in successive crises, which occurred in the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries, and the mid-twentieth century. These were transformative events. Each ushered in a new phase that resolved one major conflict before eventually giving rise to another.

This sequence suggests a way of reviewing large segments of the history of the Western world. The three examples cited here are intended to illustrate an approach that other scholars might wish to consider. For obvious reasons of space, the chosen samples are indicative rather than comprehensive. The concluding phase of proto-globalisation provides a means of placing the upheaval that initiated the transformation of the Western world at the end of the eighteenth century.

The developments at the close of the nineteenth century that led to “new imperialism” were expressions overseas of the transition to modern globalisation. The conventional story of decolonisation after World War II can be recast and enlarged to reflect its significance as the crisis that transformed modern globalisation into its current phase: postcolonial globalisation.

Proto-Globalisation

The term “proto-globalisation” is used here to refer to the type of expansion promoted by military-fiscal states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These were dynastic states dominated by landed elites who drew their wealth and position from economies that were based primarily on agriculture, but had also sprouted substantial market sectors. Military imperatives following the “gunpowder revolution” encouraged centralisation and expansion to secure and manage the growing revenue needs of the state. These ambitions acquired an effective maritime dimension as technological improvements carried oceanic exploration across the globe. Military-fiscal states were highly geared in the sense that their investment in warfare far exceeded the financial resources at their disposal. Fiscal imperatives arising from massive and invariably underestimated war expenditures compelled often desperate searches for enlarged revenues by increasing taxes and raising loans. Taxation, however, touched minds as well as pockets and became joined to wider issues of sovereignty and representative government at home and abroad. Proto-globalisation reached its highest stage of development in the second half of the eighteenth century, when a series of wars among the leading military-fiscal states reverberated around the world and ended in large-scale mutual destruction. Revenue needs arising from a costly arms race and related expenditure on public goods intensified the search for new and increased taxes.¹⁰

Events in the late eighteenth century culminated in what might be called a “great convergence,” which drew the large imperial states towards a common fiscal fate. Britain’s costly victory in the Seven Years’ War was followed by widespread expressions of discontent at the burden of taxation, the corruption of office, and the lack of accountability in the political process. The upshot was a serious challenge in the 1760s and 1770s to the Revolution Settlement of 1689. Britain’s difficulties had parallels in continental Europe. The Seven Years’ War undermined French finances; France then wrecked her fiscal health by declaring war on Britain in 1778. One consequence was to help the mainland colonies gain their independence; another was to prepare France for her own revolution in 1789.¹¹ Spain and the Netherlands suffered similar fates. Both supported the American Revolution and joined the war against Britain; both were defeated and greatly weakened as a result.¹²

Britain had two large advantages over her continental rivals: she had achieved a far greater degree of fiscal unity than other European states and was able to combine increasing per capita revenues with efficient borrowing techniques; she also had much better prospects of limiting impositions on domestic taxpayers by raising revenues

from her colonies.¹³ In the 1760s, when domestic taxation had reached the protest point and the size of the national debt was causing commentators to sound the alarm, the British government turned to the empire to provide the solution.

London's need for revenue matched the East India Company's need to find new ways of improving its fortunes. Robert Clive's success in the battle of Plassey in 1757 opened the prospect of securing revenues from conquered territories.¹⁴ Since revenues from Bengal alone amounted to about one-quarter of the public revenue of Britain, it looked as if conservative plans for an extractive empire were about to be realised.¹⁵ It soon became apparent, however, that India was not going to solve the revenue problem.¹⁶ By 1772, continuing military expenditure, amplified by other commitments, had brought the Company close to bankruptcy. Creative accountancy could no longer disguise reality.¹⁷ No British government was willing to raise land taxes at home; excise taxes had passed the resentment point; Scotland and Ireland had been squeezed. Additional revenues would have to be found and robust means applied, if necessary, to secure them. The mainland colonies were the only remaining possibility with the potential to meet the need.

Adam Smith observed that the fledgling mainland settlements had increased in size and wealth in the course of the century; modern research has confirmed the accuracy of his judgment. The success of the colonising venture, however, not only raised the revenue potential of the colonies, but also increased the aspirations of the settlers and provided the means of realising them. The home government could control discontent in its inner provinces, including Scotland and Ireland, but struggled to manage distant settlements across the Atlantic. What followed in 1776 was a revolution of falling expectations. It was a protest against increases in revenue demands, attempts to curtail acquired political rights, and the imposition of controls on the expansion of inland settlement, all of which the colonists judged to be unjust. In the widest setting, the American Revolution can be understood as the product of a dialectical process. Britain's version of the military-fiscal state promoted economic growth, even though it reached limits that ultimately constrained enterprise and exceeded effective political control. Smith was right: Britain had a "project" of empire on the American mainland, but not established sovereignty. Proto-globalisation had sufficient penetrative depth to mark the societies it touched, but lacked the transforming power delivered by industrialisation in the nineteenth century. The Revolution was a reaction to imperial overstretch before the term was invented.

After 1783, historians of empire retreat from the United States and a new set of specialists, who tell the national story, take command. After 1789, or 1815 at the latest, historians of Europe hand the baton to fresh runners who carry it into the modern world. These familiar divisions do not provide a good fit with the three phases of globalisation explored here. It is undoubtedly the case that the wars that followed the revolt of the mainland colonies and the French Revolution brought down the overseas empires of the great continental powers and reshaped much of Europe. What followed, however, was not simply the story of the "rise of liberalism." Continental monarchs allied to large landowners fought hard to re-establish

absolutism; governments everywhere perpetuated mercantilist regulations. Against expectations, the military-fiscal state survived these upheavals. The peace settlement in 1815 entrenched the power of the victors. Liberal voices were raised; conservative responses prevailed. The years down to the middle of the century were characterised by determined attempts to restore the world that existed before 1789. Efforts to dismantle military-fiscal states, though visible and vigorous, were halted in 1848. The conservative reaction that followed ensured that the battle for reform would continue for the rest of the century. By 1850, only one major European power, Britain, had achieved significant liberal reform, and then only after a long struggle. The era of the military-fiscal state extended far into the nineteenth century.

This analysis suggests that conventional approaches to Western imperialism that focus on overseas acquisitions need to be widened to include events in continental Europe.¹⁸ Following his coronation as emperor in 1804, Napoleon demonstrated, with military decisiveness, how a republic could become an empire. He overran large swathes of Europe and established forms of government in conquered territories that distinguished among incorporated states, satellites, and allies. Strategies of management sought out collaborators, suppressed “insurgents,” applied techniques of direct and indirect rule, and reformed existing legal systems.¹⁹ Napoleon’s consuls established networks of informers and created paramilitary units (*gendarmeries*) to control the populace. They also showed a very modern awareness of the power of symbolism in art, architecture, styles, and public displays, and demonstrated, to their own satisfaction, the matchless superiority of their culture. Napoleon himself personified Hegel’s “Hero,” promoted an imperial cult that elevated martial values, assigned power to himself, and justified authoritarian government as a necessary means of bringing development to backward peoples. All these features of French rule in Europe anticipated much that was to come later in the century, when other Western states acquired or expanded overseas empires and adopted similar policies.

In proclaiming liberty, the French wars set in train a series of convulsions that included the decolonisation of Austrian territories in the Southern Netherlands and parts of Germany, the occupation of Spain and parts of Italy, and the exodus of the Portuguese monarchy to its refuge in Brazil. In imposing autocracy and creating new imperial states, Napoleon provoked the formation of what, in effect, were anticolonial resistance movements. The German states were first trampled over in the 1790s and then pushed into an unwanted confederation. The resulting proto-nationalist reaction eventually led to the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership. The effects of the long wars were also felt in the far north and south of the continent. The Nordic countries experienced political upheaval and economic disruption; the Italian states were freed from Austrian rule but placed under French colonial control. Resistance movements made their appearance in both regions. Norway rose against the imposition of Swedish control; *patrioti* in Italy rose against both Austrian and French rule and thereby laid the foundation of the Risorgimento; guerrilla activity in Spain helped to defeat the French army and opened the way for a new era of postcolonial politics.

The concept of self-determination was formulated and acted upon in Europe long before Woodrow Wilson made it part of his programme for a peaceful settlement of World War I. Most of the continental European states that joined the rush into “new” imperialism at the close of the century were, in one way or another, former French colonies. Viewed from this perspective, many of the nation states that arose in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century were products of decolonisation. The ex-empire struck back in Europe against France before striking out across the wider world in an expression of “new” imperialism at the close of the century.

If developments in continental Europe need to be incorporated into studies of imperialism, so too do events in the United States after the achievement of independence in 1783. Formal decolonisation did not signify the passing of imperial influence. There are grounds for thinking that the United States had still to attain effective independence by the time the Civil War began in 1861. British influence in particular was felt throughout the economic, political, and cultural life of the new republic. Accordingly, standard approaches to the period that focus on the rise of a liberal, nation state may be wide of the mark. Seen from an imperial perspective, the United States appears in a new guise as the first important exemplar of Britain’s emerging global informal influence and also the first to devise and dispute strategies for achieving genuine independence. Moreover, the mounting quarrel between North and South over the character of the new state reflected the contest between progressive and conservative forces in Europe after 1815. The political dominance of Southern interests entrenched a dependent, free-trading relationship with Britain. Northern interests devised an alternative programme that ranged from plans for tariff protection to ambitions for attaining cultural independence. The divisions between these forces led to civil war in the United States, as they did in parts of Europe, and as they were to do in other new states that succumbed to centrifugal forces after achieving formal independence in the mid-twentieth century.

The unity of the period 1750–1850 helps to explain the limits to European overseas expansion. The continent’s economy remained predominantly agricultural; key technological innovations, especially in communications, lay in the future. Britain was virtually alone in developing modern manufacturing on a substantial scale and adding to her territorial possessions. Even so, before the advent of railways and steamships imperial intentions were far more evident than results. Britain was undoubtedly the superpower of the time, but the time and its technology limited the penetrative capacity of even the greatest of the Western empires.

Modern Globalisation

The second great crisis, which struck the Western world in the late nineteenth century, arose from what is termed here “modern globalisation,” which was the product of two well-known processes: the spread of industrialisation and the creation of nation states. Military-fiscal states battled on, in some cases down to World War I, but lost ground to forces that aimed to reshape the economy, society, and the state itself.

Industrialisation had greater capacity than agriculture to add value to the economy and hence to meet the employment needs of an increasing population. Nation states sought fiscal unity to raise the revenues needed to bind new social groups together. Warfare states added welfare to their mandate; parliamentary government replaced dynastic control over revenue and policy. These changes were products of a process of uneven development. The conversion of agricultural societies to those based on towns and manufacturing was a fraught event as well as a momentous one. Established hierarchies were weakened or overturned; new class divisions appeared. Politicians cultivated nationalism to create loyalties that would span divisions of region, class, and religion, and supersede or confine dynastic bonds. States that led the way in this process gained international power; states that lagged became vulnerable to predators.

Uneven economic development manifested itself most evidently in the contrast between Britain, which stood at one end of a continuum of development, and states such as Italy and Spain, which were at the other end; countries such as France occupied a midpoint. Britain had become an industrial power with an unmatched financial and service sector, and a secure central government that had moved gradually in the direction of reform. Italy and Spain remained largely rural and retained strong regional affiliations that made national unity and progressive reform difficult, and sometimes contested by force of arms. The transition to modern globalisation, as the name implies, was also associated with increasing global integration as technological improvements cut the costs of production, distribution, and coercion. Britain again led the way by expanding world trade, encouraging international specialisation, advertising preferred forms of constitutional government, and raising aspirations. The British Empire became the principal mechanism for managing multilateral exchanges, policing financial flows, and enforcing order on the high seas. Free trade carried Britain's empire of influence well beyond the formal empire. As the century advanced, the influences that had penetrated the United States extended to the Ottoman Empire, Latin America, and East Asia. Imperialism, formal and informal, was the leading globalising agent of its time. Spain and Italy, on the other hand, struggled to keep up. Spain lost the remaining parts of her once vast empire in the New World to the United States in 1898. Italy's attempt to build an empire in North Africa ended in a military disaster; remnants of her ambition were salvaged subsequently in the Horn of Africa only with British support.

The strains of structural transformation were exacerbated by a long period of deflation, which depressed expectations and increased unemployment during the last quarter of the century. These pressures fuelled civil unrest and tested the unity of embryonic nation states. Politicians charged with the duty of upholding civil order and maintaining social cohesion experimented with a range of possible solutions, including welfare reform, repression, and imperialism. From this perspective, the dramatic imperial ventures that ended in the occupation and annexation of large parts of the world at the close of the century were a form of enforced globalisation, which was undertaken as a partial remedy for domestic problems in the Western world.

A global view of this transition offers more than a restatement of what is already known. It suggests two innovations. The first provides an answer to the long-standing

question of whether the powers that participated in “new” imperialism had similar motives, but varied in their ability to realise them, or whether the “lions” were driven by impulses that were different in kind from those Lenin referred to as “jackals.” Britain, which was in the vanguard of the transition, could count on a strong degree of national unity, and had developed advanced industrial and financial sectors that depended heavily on international connections. British motives for imperial expansion were predominantly economic in representing both sectional lobbies and, plausibly, the national interest too. Spain and Italy, on the other hand, had only limited investments in the global economy and were still struggling to attain national unity. Imperialism for them was an opportunity to bang the drum to nationalist tunes in the hope that success abroad would unite dissident elements at home. This taxonomy of motives allows the United States to be included in the ranks of Western imperial powers and compared to the European imperial powers. In 1898, the United States defeated Spain after a short war, acquired Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, and annexed Hawai‘i for good measure. This dramatic intervention has long been discussed by historians of the United States but principally within a domestic context. Yet, the United States was experiencing exactly the same problems of transition as the states of Western Europe. National unity had to be forged after the divisive Civil War; the economy was undergoing a rapid transition to manufacturing and faced the attendant social problems that Europe was also dealing with. The United States, unlike Britain, was a late-start country. It had a huge economy but limited connections overseas apart from Europe. The U.S., though very different from Italy in many ways, had a similar motivation: special interests played their part, but the main motive for war with Spain was the desire to seal national unity.

Inherited orthodoxy treats World War I as a watershed: the century before 1914 was one of imperial expansion; the half century that followed was one of contraction. Attention shifts from the assertive initiatives of freebooters and proconsuls to the rebellious activities of nationalist leaders as they gathered momentum and eventually led their countries to independence. As the long retreat began, the United States stepped forward to carry the banner of liberty across the world. The contrasting position taken here emphasises the powerful continuities that attended the imperial presence after World War I. In 1918, contemporaries did not assume that the age of great empires was at its close. On the contrary, the Western empires reached their greatest extent after World War I, when newly mandated territories swelled their holdings. The civilising mission continued to inspire imperial policy; belief in the supremacy of the white race remained the unwavering justification of colonial rule. The imperial mentality remained unaltered even in the 1930s, when the reflex action of politicians seeking to appease potential aggressors was to offer, as tribute, other people’s territories. The aim of what became known as the “have” powers was to extend modern globalisation after World War I. Empires were to be preserved because they were functional to the process.

The tendency to read the present into the past can be seen in studies that trace the origins of U.S. predominance to World War I, or even earlier. Yet, when Henry Luce

coined the term “American Century” in 1941, he was identifying a possible future, not commenting on an inherited past. Subsequent research has confirmed the wisdom of his judgment. On the eve of World War II, the European empires were still intact, and the zeal of their presiding emperors remained undiminished. Britain in particular possessed the greatest empire of the modern era and enjoyed unmatched standing as a global power. In 1938, Britain controlled no less than 59 percent of the total area held by the Western empires and 69 percent of all colonial peoples, which represented almost 500 million subjects.²⁰ World War I, the traditional turning point between expansion and decline, anticipates events that were not still apparent even in the embattled 1930s. Similarly, in 1939 the imperial powers went to war to preserve their empires, not to see them dismantled, and the allies planned the peace to consolidate their victory. Buoyed by U.S. support, the victors revitalised the imperial mission and looked forward to extending their dominance indefinitely. A co-operative Commonwealth would keep the “Great” in Britain for the rest of the century, if not beyond it; a rebranded *Union française* would rescue France from a costly victory and maintain her status as a major power. Seen from this perspective, the era of modern globalisation and its imperial counterpart extended into the second half of the twentieth century, and the end of empire, when it came, was quite sudden.

The imperial continuities that characterised the first half of the twentieth century nevertheless included signposts that, in retrospect, can be seen to point towards the ultimate dissolution of the West’s territorial empires. The upheaval brought by World War II is an obvious and a familiar candidate. The emphasis here, however, is on the crisis of the 1930s, when developments that were to be decisive after World War II began to alter the colonial landscape. The Western empires were undermined by forces they themselves had conjured into being. The overproduction of primary products created widespread economic distress; the overselling of the rhetoric of freedom and democracy created hope among the disenfranchised. This cocktail stirred unrest into sustained political action and gave self-determination the vitality it had previously lacked. A “green uprising” brought the rural majority into the political arena and attached them to parties that voiced their opposition to colonial rule. By the close of the decade the challenge had obliged the colonial powers to rethink inherited attitudes and policies. World War II undoubtedly moved these developments on, but it did not “shatter” a period of “colonial calm,” either in Africa or Asia.²¹ Colonial turbulence had its counterpart in gathering imperialist rivalries. National enmities within Europe were one very evident cause of hostilities; competition between “have” and “have-not” powers over the non-Western world was another. It is the latter that entitles the conflict to be thought of as an imperialist war on a global scale.

Postcolonial Globalisation

In the 1950s, the movement towards decolonisation became swift and irreversible. The assumption of imperial permanence was swept aside as if it had never been

contemplated. The world, almost unknowingly, entered on a new era, that of postcolonial globalisation.

Changes in the international economy altered the patterns of integration the Western empires had created in the nineteenth century and perpetuated during the first half of the twentieth. Changes in international values undermined the moral authority of the West and eroded its claims to imperial legitimacy. Territorial empires became either redundant or unworkable. An imperial dialectic was again in operation: global integration of the kind that had fitted the needs of national-industrial states since 1850 had served its purpose. Imperial policy was obliged to adapt to changing circumstances: shifts in the world economy; the needs of the Cold War; the costs of holding on; the demand for self-determination.

The established pattern of colonial exchange, which traded manufactured goods for raw materials, started to fragment in the 1950s. Alternative types of specialisation and integration made their appearance. Inter-industry trade drew advanced economies together; finance and commercial services displaced old manufacturing occupations; manufacturing clusters arose in former colonies in Asia. World trade no longer radiated from imperial centres but entered new regional connections. The direction of migratory flows changed, too: the movement that carried Europeans to other parts of the world in the nineteenth century was largely reversed in the second half of the twentieth century when large numbers of immigrants from former colonies settled not only in the West but also in other new regional zones of co-operation. Supranational commercial and political organisations enlarged their roles, and acquired elements of sovereignty. Transnational corporations exerted influence on small states and aligned themselves with large ones. The United Nations exerted an unprecedented degree of influence over issues affecting human rights, which included colonialism. Ideas of racial equality spread; the belief in white supremacy that had justified imperialism and facilitated colonial rule lost ground. By the 1960s, the conditions that had favoured the creation of territorial empires had receded. Power in international relations had to be exercised in other ways. Strategy had to be realigned to fit new structures, as Montesquieu had predicted. The United States, the emerging superpower, was neither a new Rome nor a new Britain; after 1945, it was an aspiring hegemon, not a territorial imperial power.

These changes were global in scope and require a corresponding expansion of the conventional understanding of decolonisation. The literature on this subject adheres to formal colonial borders located in Africa and Asia. Parallel research on the Cold War extends to other regions but treats decolonisation as a subsidiary part of an epic that focuses on the high politics of West-East diplomacy. Instead of fitting decolonisation into the Cold War, however, the Cold War needs to be fitted into decolonisation, which in turn needs to be placed in the even wider context of the global transformation of power, interests, and values in the post-war era.²² Movements to assert or reassert national sovereignty spread far beyond the current framework of discussion. An enlarged conception of decolonisation encompasses a range of countries—from China to Australia—that are currently omitted from consideration,

and also includes unambiguous cases of internal colonialism, of which the United States serves as a prime exemplar.

The story of post-war decolonisation usually begins with the independence of India in 1947, but it could as well start with the upheaval in East Asia during and after World War II, following China's long struggle to free itself from foreign control. Although never formally colonised, China was subordinated to Western influences from the time of the Opium Wars onwards. The maritime customs duties were placed under foreign management; the treaty ports gave Europeans special privileges; defeat at the hands of Japan in 1894–95 was followed by the creation of spheres of influence and accompanied by railway and mining concessions. The series of humiliations continued in the twentieth century: foreign powers, headed by Britain, influenced the selection of China's leaders after the revolution of 1911 and supported Chiang Kai-shek's successful bid for power in 1929. The lowest points were reached when Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and mounted its second invasion of China in 1937. There is a strong case for saying that World War II began in Shanghai in 1937 rather than in Poland in 1939.

The nationalist revolt against colonial and neocolonial influences triumphed with the defeat of Japan and the success of the Chinese Revolution in 1949. The fateful involvement of the United States in trying to control a related nationalist revolt in Indochina was a reaction to the fear that Chinese expansion would inject the region with the poison of communism while also damaging France's prospects of becoming an effective ally in Europe.²³ A parallel situation arose in Korea, where the expulsion of the Japanese and the heavy-handed division of the country into two parts both aroused and frustrated nationalist sentiments. Similar considerations drew Washington into first supporting and then supplanting the Dutch in Indonesia, in backing (for a time) Sukarno in Indonesia, in co-operating with Britain in "holding the line" in Malaya, and in seeking to re-establish informal influence in its own former colony, the Philippines, which had been granted independence in 1946. In short, it was the effective decolonisation of China that fuelled the Cold War in Asia, drew the superpowers into the region, and ultimately pulled the rug from under the colonial order in the Far East.²⁴ Yet, though China features prominently in studies of the Cold War, it rarely features, except as "background," in the literature on post-war decolonisation.

Britain's dominions have also been excluded from conventional surveys of decolonisation after World War II.²⁵ Most historians have taken the view that, by 1945, their story is best told as one of new nation states rather than of continuing components of empire. The dominions had already achieved internal self-government, almost complete legislative autonomy, and exercised a measure of influence on British foreign policy. Nevertheless, in 1945 the old dominions had still to make the transition from formal to effective independence. Most political leaders in the dominions were still keen to play their part in helping to strengthen the empire. Ethnic affinities sustained connections that were independent of legislation or imperial command. Nationalism in the dominions was combined with a powerful sense of what was known

as, in the language of the day, “race patriotism” and empire loyalism. Continuing cultural dependence in literature and the performing arts was well summarised in the notable Australian phrase, coined in the 1950s: “cultural cringe.”²⁶ Material considerations underpinned these sentiments. Overseas trade links continued to orient the dominions towards Britain and provide markets for British manufactures, as did their commitment to the sterling area (with the exception of Canada).

The ties that bound did not begin to unravel until the 1960s. There followed an almost unnoticed decolonisation, as the old dominions began to look to themselves rather to the “mother country” for directions to their future. The attempt to restock the settler parts of the empire with emigrants from Britain achieved very limited success. Alternative sources of immigration transformed the social structures of the old British world.²⁷ At the same time, commercial ties with Britain weakened and alternative regional connections expanded. Australia and New Zealand developed new relationships with Japan and South East Asia;²⁸ Canada’s existing links with the United States strengthened. A further regional development, the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC), accelerated these trends. Britain’s decision to apply for membership in 1961 gave the dominions an unexpected shock. The application failed, but the fact that it was made at all signalled Britain’s intention of casting off from her imperial moorings, and confirmed the need for the dominions to do the same.²⁹ Cuts in Britain’s defence budget obliged the dominions to provide their own security, often in association with the United States. Vigorous expressions of cultural assertiveness made their appearance. Today, Australians cringe no more. By the 1960s, too, the last loyalist leaders had given way to a generation whose priorities reflected the new imperatives. Constitutional changes affecting citizenship and the monarchy completed the separation from the “old country.” Taken together, these developments shook established verities: the dominions had struck out on their own and could no longer be considered British.

There are good reasons for adding the United States, which also began as a settler colony, to the story of decolonization, even though its own territorial possessions are rarely cited in this connection. Yet, the U.S. decolonised its insular empire after World War II at the same time as the European powers were uncoupling their colonies. The United States also provides an exemplary case of internal decolonisation. After World War II, Washington could no longer ignore increased pressure from African Americans and Native Americans for improved civil rights. Federal and state governments responded, as in the case of the insular empire, first by suppressing “agitators” and then by giving ground. When the Red Scare reached obsessive levels in the early 1950s, even modest progress with civil rights came to a halt. Defeating communism became more important than ending racism. The Federal Bureau of Investigation harassed African American political organisations and effectively shut them down until the McCarthy era came to an end.³⁰ The reform movement revived in 1957, with the notorious crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, over integration. The resulting confrontation captured the attention of the media in the United States and across the world. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sent President Eisenhower an urgent and unvarnished

message: "this situation is ruining our foreign policy." The effect in Asia and Africa, he added, "will be worse for us than Hungary was for the Russians."³¹ The Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first reform of its kind for nearly a century, followed. So, too, did continuing mass demonstrations, which resulted in a more comprehensive Civil Rights Act in 1964. Martin Luther King, Jr., the movement's most famous figure, was assassinated four years later.

Native Americans, though few in number, need to be included in this story, even though conventional accounts deal almost exclusively with the efforts of African Americans to eliminate the version of apartheid that had long been imposed on them. After 1953, Congress abolished the policy of indirect rule (borrowed directly from Lord Lugard) that had governed the reservations since the 1930s and reverted to a form of assimilation that halted the development of separate communities and opened tribal lands to private enterprise. The attack on sovereignty and cultural pluralism galvanised Native Americans and turned their diverse political organisations into a coherent radical movement. A series of highly-publicised demonstrations followed in the 1960s. Washington's initial response was to classify the American Indian Movement as an "extremist" organization and apply counter-insurgency measures to suppress radical dissent.³² In the face of adverse publicity, however, repression gave way to conciliation. In 1968, Congress put an end to assimilation and passed the Indian Civil Rights Act, which was followed in 1975 by the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act. These measures marked the end of a long period of colonial tutelage that had striking similarities with the experience of other colonial powers.

Avoiding Collateral Damage

Globalisation is yesterday's news in the obvious sense that it has an extensive history. This observation, though now taken for granted, is a considerable advance on assumptions made in the 1980s by the World Bank and other bodies, which held that globalisation was a very recent development. A more testing question is whether the subject is yesterday's news in the sense of being an approach that has now in danger of becoming overfamiliar. If this is the case, and studies of globalisation are entering a final stage before being made redundant, new graduate students should be wary of joining a sinking ship and suffering the collateral damage that follows.

Historians now sprinkle the term "globalisation" with the degree of liberality that is reminiscent of previous keywords at points when historiographical phases have reached saturation. By this measure, a reaction may be in sight. At the same time, no competing alternative has emerged from world affairs, and there is no sign either of the subject imploding under the weight of internal contradictions. The fact that globalisation, unlike most previous historiographical phases, is a process and not a theory helps to protect it from refutation. It contains many theories, it is true, but the subject itself does not depend on one master hypothesis that purports to account for all the world's ills. It has neither an ideological commitment nor a specific language.

It is not inherently policy-oriented. You can study globalisation while approving or disapproving of its consequences; you can recommend, where relevant, policy changes, or enter branches of the subject that are removed from all practical applications. In short, globalisation is not just a big tent but a cavernous marquee.

This quality does not mean that historical studies of globalisation will escape the ultimate historiographical fate of being overtaken or bypassed. It means only that the vulnerabilities of the subject are different because its properties are different. The main problem today is that historians are flooding the market with what might be called “soft globalisation,” that is to say, the overgenerous use of the term to describe a wide range of phenomena that often have little in common, apart from being in transit. Some of what is described as globalisation could well be placed under a much older heading: international history. Other movements are not global in any literal sense but extensions of varying lengths and durations of various local and regional impulses.

As currently studied by historians, globalisation will not lose value because it ceases to be part of the world around us or because its multiple hypotheses have been refuted. Rather, it will induce disaffection by its lack of analytical incisiveness, which results from a failure to engage with the relevant social science literature. Since the 1990s, social scientists other than historians have developed hypotheses joining globalisation to a wide range of topics that reach deep into the past. As yet, few historians have shown that they are sufficiently familiar with the segment of the literature relevant to their own work, and so are unable to contribute to wider debates. If historical studies of globalisation lose impetus, it will not be because they are played out, but because they have hardly got into the game.

The aim of this essay has been to apply a specific hypothesis to an issue that social scientists as well as historians regard as being of central concern: how to analyse the historical evolution of globalisation. The argument advanced here has attempted to show that globalisation should be seen as a set of sequences rather than as a story of cumulative, linear development. Most of the events referred to in this essay will be familiar to historians of the Western world. By placing them in three phases, however, they appear in a context that reveals connections that reach far beyond the confines of standard accounts.

Proto-globalisation linked Britain, continental Europe, the United States, and parts of Asia, and extended to other parts of the world that are excluded from consideration here for reasons of space. A reappraisal of the trajectory of the military-fiscal state invites a reconsideration of the American Revolution and Britain’s acquisition of India. More radically, it suggests that the imposition of colonial rule in continental Europe, and the ensuing struggle for independence in the nineteenth century, need to be incorporated into conventional accounts of imperialism and that the United States deserves inclusion as an example of Britain’s first sustained attempt to create an informal empire. The second phase, modern globalisation, initiated a process of uneven development that eventually produced industrial nation states. The staggered character of this phase placed severe strains on

society that found expression in the enforced globalisation of much of the non-Western world at the close of the nineteenth century. This analysis suggests a way of differentiating among the motives of the imperial powers; it includes the United States as a participant in new imperialism; and it emphasises the long lines of continuity that carried the phase beyond two world wars and into the 1950s. The third, and still current phase, postcolonial globalisation, relates changes in the world economy, and what might be called world morality, to decolonisation and the creation of a fresh set of conditions that rendered territorial empires either unnecessary or unworkable. These spacious developments require a correspondingly spacious scholarly response. The Cold War needs to be placed in the broader setting of decolonisation; standard studies of decolonisation need enlarging to encompass countries that are currently excluded from consideration, such as China, the dominions, and the United States.

As presented here, these generalisations lack both evidence and refinement. They are offered as one possible way of providing an analytical frame for studying the history of globalisation in a way that does not merely relabel familiar events, but also shows how they can be recast to be illuminating and possibly even persuasive. If other scholars add to and improve on these thoughts, new studies of the long history of globalisation will have a future and not merely a past.

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Notes

- * This is an expanded and revised version of a keynote lecture delivered at the University of Western Sydney on 20 October 2013. The approach is given extended treatment in the author's book, *American Empire*. Partly for this reason, citations are kept here to a minimum.
- 1 Kramer, "Power and Connection," 1348–91, provides a guide to recent literature.
 - 2 The obvious reaction in the present case is to reassert the value of national, regional, and local studies. Some of the links between globalisation and these units of study are discussed in Hopkins, *Global History*.
 - 3 Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," 44.
 - 4 Bayly, "History and World History," chap. 1.
 - 5 For two thoughtful, but different, reflections on these themes, see Saunier, *Transnational History*, and Perez, "We are the World." Hopkins, *Global History*, suggests how localities react to and reshape global impulses. Sexton, "The Global View," wisely observes (275) that "transnational history has often served to reinforce the distinctiveness of the United States."
 - 6 For one agenda of possible junctions between history and the other social sciences, see Hopkins, *Globalisation in World History*, chap. 1.
 - 7 Held, McGrew, Globlatt, and Perraton, *Global Transformations*, and idem, *Globalisation: Key Concepts* provide a full introduction.
 - 8 Lang, "Globalization and its History."
 - 9 Hopkins, *Globalisation in World History*, chaps. 1–2. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2015*, 706–25, provide a substantial illustration of the British case.
 - 10 Montesquieu observed the results at first hand: "A new distemper has spread itself over Europe, infecting our princes, and inducing them to keep up an exorbitant number of troops. It has its redoublings, and of necessity becomes contagious. For as soon as one prince augments his forces, the rest of course do the same; so that nothing is gained thereby but the public ruin." Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 224–25.
 - 11 Kwas, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation*. For the debate on public debt in France, see Senescher, *Before the Deluge*.
 - 12 There are now admirable correctives to stereotypes of Spain as a backward state, even if the revisionists disagree among themselves about some of the revisions they propose. See Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire*; and Grafe and Irigoien, "A Stakeholder Empire." See also Sánchez, "Military Expenditure," which contrasts Spain's inferior financial institutions with those of Britain.
 - 13 Spain had taxable assets in her Latin American empire; these postponed her fate did but not avert it.
 - 14 Leonard, "'A Theatre of Disputes'."
 - 15 Marshall, "British Society in India," 91.
 - 16 A contemporary historian reported that in 1768, "those who recently contemplated India as a never-failing source of riches, and as a territory sufficiently opulent to provide for all the exigencies of Great Britain, now considered it as a precarious, and perhaps unprofitable tenure." Adolphus, *The History of England*, 342.
 - 17 Hartley, *The Budget*, and others had exposed what they regarded as dubious accounting methods.
 - 18 It is a commonplace for historians of Europe to refer to Napoleon Bonaparte's "empire," but they do so without incorporating the literature on Europe's overseas empires. This is a generalisation with important exceptions, notably the work of Broers, *Europe under Napoleon*, and the further references in Broers, Hicks, and Guimerá, *The Napoleonic Empire*.
 - 19 The term "insurgent" (from the French *insurger*) came into use in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century.

- 20 Etemad, *Possessing the World*, 167, 186, 222, and 225–26.
- 21 As Crowder suggested, “The Second World War,” 20.
- 22 Westad, “The Cold War and International History,” appeals for a global approach, though only two chapters in vols. 1 and 2 deal explicitly with decolonization. Fraser, “Decolonization and the Cold War,” chap. 27, sets the subject in an appropriately global context.
- 23 Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam*. An accessible and up to date guide is Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*.
- 24 McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War*; Cumings, *The Korean War*; and Mitter, “China and the Cold War.”
- 25 What follows is drawn from Hopkins, “Rethinking Decolonisation.” See also Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, chaps. 21 and 26. The pioneering research should be attributed to Ward, especially *Australia and the British Embrace*, and Buckner, *Canada and the British Empire*. The term “dominion” fell out of use in the 1950s. I use it here to refer to subsequent periods as a convenient shorthand reference to Commonwealth countries commonly designated as being of “white settlement” and to exclude new dominions such as India.
- 26 For an assessment of the history of the term written by its author, see Phillips, *A. A. Phillips on the Cultural Cringe*.
- 27 The trend has continued. The figures for New Zealand are especially striking: in 2013, Asians (mainly from China and India) accounted for about one-third of the population born overseas or about 12 per cent of the total population.
- 28 Hopkins, “Rethinking Decolonisation,” summarises the data and provides further references.
- 29 Britain did not gain membership until 1973. Benvenuti, *Anglo-Australian Relations*, follows the process to completion.
- 30 Berg, “Black Rights and Liberal Anti-Communism.”
- 31 24 September 1957. Quoted in Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 131; see also the confirmatory comments on 132–36.
- 32 Mathiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*.