

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL AND NIELS PETERSSON, *Globalization: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, xi + 179 p.

Although the concept is relatively recent, globalization itself is certainly not a new phenomenon. From the conquest of the New World during the Renaissance to the first campaign in favor of free trade in the mid-19th century, globalization is a direct consequence of long-term political, social, economic, and technological changes. From this perspective, only an historical approach to globalization can prevent scholars from embracing the superficial “global talk” now proliferating within and outside academia.

Globalization: A Short History is the perfect antidote against such “global talk.” Avoiding excessive jargon, historians Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson wrote a concise and elegant book that distinguishes between different aspects of globalization before exploring the historical emergence of worldwide connections and integration. Acknowledging the genuine impact of recent trends like the advent of the Internet, the authors argue that the turning point “at which globalization becomes a central feature of history and of many human experiences (...) occurred in the early modern period of discovery, slave trade, and ‘ecological imperialism,’ not in the late twentieth century” (p. 146). At the time, people would obviously not have understood these developments as emerging forms of globalization, as the term had not yet been invented. In a way, what Osterhammel and Petersson successfully attempt in their book is what Hans Georg Gadamer labeled a “fusion of horizon.” Starting from contemporary notions like globalization and modernization, they trace historical processes related to them as far as the early medieval era. Because the authors recognize that the concept of globalization refers to sometimes-unrelated transformations, they avoid depicting globalization as a coherent and well-integrated historical fate, which it is not.

The book is structured in a straightforward manner: after two brief theoretical chapters defining the different aspects of globalization, the exposition of the rather dense historical material is essentially chronological. The authors divide this into four somewhat unusual periods: the increase in intercontinental exchanges up to the mid-eighteenth century; the early industrial era leading to the first push for free trade in the mid-nineteenth century; the period beginning in the 1880s witnessing a “politization of globalization” leading to the two world wars; and, finally, the contemporary period starting in 1945 and, until 1989, characterized by the Cold War as “globalization split in two.” In the concluding chapter,

Osterhammel and Petersson discuss events such as the collapse of the Soviet empire and the advent of the Internet but they do not go as far as mentioning the emergence of a fifth historical period in the development of global connections and integration. Some readers may disapprove of this choice but one could argue that this cautious approach is appropriate on the part of historians who rightly criticize globalization theorists refusing to draw a clear line between empirical analysis and theory-driven speculation.

Although this is a great book, it is not without flaws. First, the authors fail to discuss the case of the Roman Empire. This is problematic because this empire and later attempts to rebuild it constituted early forms of large-scale integration. Second, the authors' main arguments on globalization only become entirely clear in the book's conclusion, which may frustrate some readers. Finally, in part because it is so brief, the book says relatively little about major historical developments like Napoleon's conquests and the Second World War. Fortunately, the "Recommended Literature" section at the end of the book offers a fair if incomplete survey of the literature on globalization and, more specifically, on the featured historical periods covered in the book. Sociologists interested in globalization should read this historical account, which is grounded in a fine knowledge of the social science literature on this issue. *Globalization: A Short History* contains valuable insights about apparently unrelated issues such as the rise of the Mongolian empire in the thirteenth century, the advent of the telegraph in the mid-nineteenth, and the emergence of a global, largely US-based entertainment industry in the last century. Yet, because Osterhammel and Petersson draw on a clear analytical framework throughout the book, their "world history" is surprisingly coherent. This book would also make an excellent supplementary reading for any social science course on globalization.

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