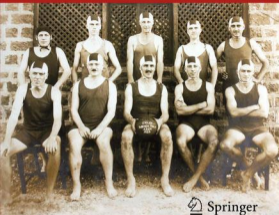


# The Nation State and Beyond

## Governing Globalization Processes in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Isabella Löhr · Roland Wenzlhuemer *Editors*



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Governing Globalization Processes in the  
Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: The Nation State and Beyond. Governing Globalization Processes in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Isabella Löhr and Roland Wenzlhuemer

**Abstract** The history of globalisation is anything but a no-frills affair that moves smoothly along a clear-cut, unidirectional path of development and eventually leads to seamless global integration. Consequently, scholarship in the social sciences increasingly argued against equating the history of globalisation processes and transcultural entanglements with the master narrative of the gradual homogenisation of the world. A strong common ground these concepts share is the objective of transcending the national as an analytical category and replacing it by focusing on interaction and flows, transfers, and exchanges as the core categories in the study of history. Examining the shifting patterns of global connections has, therefore, become the main challenge for all those who seek to understand the past, the present, and the future of modern societies. And this challenge includes finding a place for the nation state—a form of social organisation that no longer seem to fit into the new analytical framework despite its obvious historical and current significance. Against this background, the introductory chapter argues that the authors assembled in the volume suggest another reading of the role and significance of the nation state in the development of the modern world. The studies presented here argue that looking at the nation state from the perspective of global entanglements gives way to its interpretation as a dynamic and multi-layered structure that partakes in globalisation processes and plays different and at times even contradictory roles at the same time. Accordingly, it is not the nation state that ceases to exist, due to increasing processes of global exchange, but a certain perspective on the nation state which can no longer be upheld.

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## Globalization

The history of globalization is anything but a no-frills affair that moves smoothly along a clear-cut and unidirectional path of development and eventually leads to seamless global integration. Following this, authors such as Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert have argued against equating the history of globalization processes and transcultural entanglements with the master narrative of the gradual homogenization of the world.<sup>1</sup> In a similar manner, Ian Clark observed for the twentieth century that the willingness of states either to enhance or to boycott processes of global integration by means of specific policy strategies can both foster global integration and trigger dissent and resistance to a considerable degree.<sup>2</sup> Against this background, Michael Geyer and Charles Bright proposed a double-layered understanding of the development of the modern world. They suggested making a distinction between empirically describable processes of integration and fragmentation on the one hand and globality on the other as the basic condition which ultimately frames and embeds all actions taken within the “human community”<sup>3</sup> – whether or not they generate, reshape, transform or dissolve encounters, contacts, interaction and exchange. The “global age”, as Geyer and Bright have put it, describes the horizon within which we live and act under global conditions, which continuously and irrevocably create path dependencies with a global reach. In turn, the historical actors retain the possibility to decide between different forms and varying degrees of integrative dynamics or a struggle for partial autonomy when it comes to political and economic sovereignty and questions of identity.<sup>4</sup>

Departing from this particular dialectic of integration and fragmentation and assuming that the development of the modern world can only be understood adequately as both a connected and a decentralized process, consideration should be given as to how such a macro-perspective on the history of a global modernity can be adequately reflected in the empirical research on globalization and global integration since the modern period. In recent years, the term globalization has increasingly been used as a kind of shorthand in several disciplines within the social sciences and the humanities: it gives expression to the analytical challenge of studying the plurality of actors, places and decision-making levels that appear when attention is increasingly directed towards border-crossing or border-ignoring flows of people, goods and information. In this sense, the shorthand ‘globalization’ points to the impossibility of continuing to work with theoretical approaches based on clear-cut differentiations between centre and periphery, the evaluation of primary and secondary acting groups and clear analytical distinctions between the political, the economic, the social and the cultural field which for a long time served as the main frame of reference in the analysis of inter-societal relationships. On the

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<sup>1</sup> Conrad and Eckert 2007, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Clark 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Manning 2003, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Geyer and Bright 1995.

other hand, however, the use of a shorthand often entails difficulties of mutual understanding. At times, the term *globalization* is used in an all-encompassing, almost arbitrary way and its meaning has, therefore, become more and more elusive. Attempts to define the term by stating what it does not refer to have rightly been criticized. Complaints have been raised about the blurring of the term as soon as globalization is not applied to something specific but used to subsume nearly all phenomena that somehow transcend state borders. Frederick Cooper, for example, considers globalization to be a “powerful juggernaut”<sup>5</sup> and vehemently criticizes the notion’s universality. His criticism mainly concentrates on its unsuitability as an analytical tool because in his view it provides only vague explanations of how and why different world regions were connected. Primarily, Cooper goes on, the term contributes to concealing both the understanding of concrete mechanisms that trigger cultural flows or movements of people and the understanding of institutions for regulating them. Instead, he seeks to draw attention to the limits of interrelations over long distances and argues for a close look at specific countermovements and processes that resist or at least redirect spatial interrelations, and thereby lead to the emergence of new patterns of re-territorialization.<sup>6</sup>

Where Cooper campaigns for exact analysis and close descriptions of processes of exchange and entanglement between regions and continents, strong arguments remain for the term *globalization* not to be abandoned. In contrast to other notions that describe long-term macro-processes – for example modernization, industrialization or urbanization – globalization is the only approach which bundles up together all kinds of research that treat interaction between societies as the default condition. We should, however, heed Cooper’s advice not to equate processes of global integration with teleological notions of universalization and homogenization and steer clear of such quasi-deterministic interpretations of globalization which sometimes even entail visions of a world society or a world government.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the term should be clearly defined in a way that permits it to be used as an analytical tool in hands-on empirical research, while at the same time providing a level of abstraction that allows for a more general diagnosis of modern socio-cultural trajectories. We suggest the following: in a nutshell, globalization comprises the process of the gradual detachment of patterns of socio-cultural interaction from geographical proximity. Only in very rare and isolated cases of globalization processes will such a detachment eventually lead to the correlation between socio-cultural interaction and geographical proximity becoming superseded. Usually, this correlation is merely weakened to different degrees and at different paces. Despite the word’s etymological roots, globalization does not automatically (or necessarily) aim at covering the whole globe. Instead, the root “global” refers to the increasing number of personal or institutional connections that transcend local horizons and let actors across the entire globe interact with each other. In this

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<sup>5</sup> Cooper 2001, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 189–213.

<sup>7</sup> Anghel et al. 2008; Krücken 2009; Lechner 2009.

regard, globalization processes add more and more global connections to the mix of personal and institutional relations that constitute the networks of historical actors. It is important to see that globalization evolves not in a deterministic but often in an erratic fashion as it does not aim at systematically establishing a particular order but rather at departing from an established pattern.

Looking at the other end of the process, this also means that globalization can be understood as a default mode of the development of human interaction. And yet, of course, processes of globalization have not always been equally pronounced and influential. At various times they have either been painstakingly slow and almost imperceptible, or have gained sudden momentum and become historically potent – for instance, at the beginning of the sixteenth century that saw European colonial and economic expansion and brought a long period of almost undetectable movement in this regard to an end.<sup>8</sup> From there followed alternating phases between a slowing-down of the processes, the disintegration of certain world regions and at the same time an almost incredible acceleration of the process as has been observed from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>9</sup> These phases are typically the ones most readily perceived in the field of global history and, therefore, historians have usually tried to define globalization on the basis of them alone. Here, however, we suggest looking at globalization from a more holistic perspective that acknowledges that the process can only be understood by looking beyond its high-speed phases and by bearing in mind the various opposing forces that aim at a reversal of the process.

Following this (or a related) definition of the term, globalization signifies both a multitude of entangled processes of the transformation of social relations as well as an analytical perspective that guides research on a global past and acknowledges the non-linearity of the aforementioned processes along with the alternation between phases of slow, fast or reversed global integration. Globalization as a perspective, therefore, draws on the simultaneity and the multitude of global encounters and searches for the interfaces, conflicts and unexpected consequences that occur when processes of global integration are juxtaposed by reverse tendencies that advocate the correlation between social relations and notions such as ethnicity, nationality or religion (to name but a few examples). In this perspective, the term has at least two additional benefits. First, it makes us aware that at least since the middle of the nineteenth century interaction has inevitably taken place in a framework of a global reach so that, conversely, each measure designed either to reinforce or reduce connectivity should be interpreted as a reaction to the overarching global conditions the historical actors could not escape from but had to deal with. Second, the term subsumes and nominates these various processes of global integration that are decentralized in character and sometimes even contradictory, that can influence each other but are not driven by some universal force or

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<sup>8</sup> Hopkins 2002, pp. 11–46; Gunn 2003; for studies covering the early modern and the modern era see for example: Darwin 2008; Fernández-Armesto 2007; Wendt 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Bayly 2004; Osterhammel 2009.