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Introduction by Daniel Sargent, University of California, Berkeley

Since 1945, the world has lived what the United Nations (UN) estimates to be the lifespan of an average newborn baby today, about 71 years. This era has witnessed great upheaval. An average child born in 1945 could expect to live 47 years, until 1991. Girls born in Japan today can expect to see the twenty-second century. Since 1945, Earth’s population has soared from 2.5 to almost 7.5 billion people. In 1945, nearly a billion human beings were colonial subjects; today nearly all people inhabit independent nation-states, many of them democracies.1

The Cold War came and went after 1945, leaving weapons capable of obliterating life. The fruits of industrial modernity—artificial light, refrigeration, and the automobile—disseminated worldwide, and an information revolution penetrated human societies. People became more equal, as income differentials between societies narrowed, and less equal, as income differentials within societies widened. Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide soared from under 320 parts per million in 1958 (when measurements began) to over 400 ppm today. The temperature of the earth’s surface increased by over 0.6°C, and sea levels rose by several millimeters per year.2 The ecological sustainability of human societies became an open question.

This world transforming is the focus of Global Interdependence: The World after 1945, a big book on a vast topic. A thousand pages in length, the volume comprises five independent parts, each readily publishable as a freestanding book. The volume is the latest installment in Harvard University Press’s History of the World series, which is co-produced with Beck Verlag and published simultaneously in German.

Akira Iriye edited Global Interdependence. He also contributes “The Making of a Transnational World,” a chapter that posits the rise of transnational connections—cultural, social, economic, and institutional—as the overarching logic of the post-1945 era. Wilfried Loth’s chapter, “States and the Changing Equations of Power,” traces the course of world politics and the evolution of the international state system. Thomas Zeiler in “Opening Doors in the World Economy” follows the development of the global economic order that the United States built. J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke contemplate the ecological impact of human societies in “Into the Anthropocene,” a title that evokes the arrival of a distinctive new era in the natural history of Earth. Petra Goedde, in “Global Cultures,” offers a panoramic vantage on cultural change, spanning themes that range from belief and ideology to consumerism and human rights.

The four reviewers provide contrasting responses to Global Interdependence. Mary Nolan’s review is the most critical. Nolan faults the volume’s organization, indicating that she would have preferred more dialogue between the book’s constituent chapters. She also critiques what she calls the “confident and often celebratory” tone of several authors. Less convinced than they are of globalization’s benefits, she is more “pessimistic” about the future. Nolan also questions the term “interdependence,” suggesting that the word

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1 For global demographic data, see United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, at http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/.

does not convey the dynamics of coercion and imposition that are, in her view, an integral part of the globalization process.

Stefan Rimner, while praising what he calls “a remarkable team of historians,” raises questions that in some ways echo Nolan’s. Global Interdependence downplays the historical contributions of actors who “contributed to interdependence” only “against their will,” Rimner observes. Rimner also speculates that globalization’s advance has been stealthier than the authors of Global Interdependence are willing to concede. The technical complexity of high finance, international law, and information technology, Rimner suggests, may have crucially facilitated globalization’s rise, insofar as technical complexity inhibits political resistance.

Xu Guoqi delivers an enthusiastic appraisal of what he calls “a timely and much-needed book.” In Guoqi’s assessment, the five parts of Global Interdependence cohere effectively to provide an overarching historical interpretation. The book’s authors he explains, “brilliantly show us how the world of nation-states and international politics and world order became a shared community of global interdependence.” Guoqi highlights the influence of Akira Iriye on the volume overall. Iriye edited the book and wrote a chapter, but his intellectual influence is also imprinted in the sections that other authors contribute, Guoqi suggests.

Patrick Manning, similarly, calls Iriye the volume’s “guiding light” and credits the Harvard historian with pioneering a historical method that is oriented to “large-scale change and interconnected approaches.” Iriye, Manning writes, “makes a forceful claim for ‘transnationalization’ as a historical process.” While Iriye foregrounds transnationalization, the volume’s other authors, Manning notes, emphasize other processes: geopolitics and the Cold War, economic liberalization, environmental degradation, and cultural change. Manning asks what alternative conceptualizations beyond these might have yielded. He also raises an important point about periodization. Situating the post-1945 world within a broader concept of world history, Manning suggests, might have yielded fuller understanding of how world-historical changes such as decolonization played out in the postwar era.

Taken as a whole, the four reviews raise big and substantive questions about a big and substantive book. Whether transnationalization suffices to comprehend world-historical change since 1945, whether it was a progressive or retrograde development, and what a broader canvas would reveal are among the probing questions that emerge from a roundtable discussion in which readers will encounter both illumination and provocation.

Participants:

Akira Iriye is Charles Warren Professor of American History, Emeritus, Harvard University. His most recent publications include Global and Transnational History (Palgrave, 2013) and (editor) Global Interdependence (Cambridge, MA, 2011). He is working on a book dealing with the cultural dimension of international history.

Patrick Manning is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of World History at the University of Pittsburgh. He received his PhD in History of Africa at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, served 2008-2015 as founding director of the World History Center at Pitt, and is President of the American Historical Association in 2016. His books include *Slavery and African Life* (1990); *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (2003); *Migration in World History* (2004); *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (2009); and *Big Data in History* (2013). His current research centers on creating a global historical data resource, African populations 1650-1950, and an interpretive survey of the history of humanity. Manning now directs the Collaborative for Historical Information and Analysis (CHIA), for work on creating a world-historical data resource.


Steffen Rimner is currently a Postdoctoral Research Scholar at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and has held fellowships at Yale University, the University of Oxford and the National Humanities Center. His book on the Asian origins of global narcotics control is under contract with Harvard University Press. His interests concern U.S.-Asian relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, transnational history and changing criteria of global political legitimacy.

World history from 1945 to the present seems short and contemporary, but it developed breathtakingly fast and was extremely complicated. Europe, the birthplace of world wars and conflicts, and a place that used to be full of divisions, now becomes one European Community. The United States, which historically declared that it was different from the rest of the world and refused to play a leading role politically after the First World War, ended up voluntarily and eagerly being a superpower and world leader after the Second World War. China, the most populous nation on the earth, evolved from a hotheaded monster of communist revolution which once had the distinction of being enemy of the two superpowers to become a devoted and eager practitioner of open-door policies and a key player of world affairs. The historically isolated so-called Middle Kingdom now sends its capital, human resources, and talents to all over the world and probably has become a new ‘sun-never-sets’ power where one finds Chinese and Chinese-made goods wherever sun rises or sets. Japan, the nation which once was proud of its samurai tradition and militarism became the only nation on earth with a constitution which renounced the use of a military and surprisingly enjoyed a peace dividend and more prosperity than at any time in its history. The Soviet Union, which once was a superpower and a key player in the cold war world order, ceased to exist.

No one could have predicted these events in 1945. It also seems that there has been no time in human history like the post-WW II world which has become so interdependent economically, environmentally, technologically and culturally, yet no history is more relevant to us than contemporary history. Global warming and global terrorism have become more and more serious issues to the world. Urbanization occurred at breathtaking speed in countries like China and elsewhere. The history of 1945 to the present is largely a series of ‘ends’ of history, such as the end of the cold war, the end of the Soviet Union, and the end of traditional colonialism. It is also the history of ‘rises’: the rise of China, the rise of transnational and international organizations, the rise of globalization through the internet, the free flow of information and the rise of shared economies. It is an era of global inter-dependence, as the book title is revealingly and appropriately called. How to understand this world history which was so complicated yet is so relevant today is a great challenge for all of us. We all have to be grateful for Professor Akira Iriye and his colleagues, who have presented a timely and much-needed book to help us out to understand our shared world and shared community and shared planet earth. It seems to me that this book can help us understand the history and present by explaining how we have collectively reached this point.

The complicated history deserves a big book such as this one. This volume is actually comprised of five books which are masterfully edited and organized into one through the lens of global interdependence. It presents to us with a five-dimensional view of the modern world, namely economic, political, environmental, cultural, and transnational perspectives. Through this multi-dimensional analysis, the authors and editor brilliantly show us how the world of nation-states and international politics and world order became a shared community of global interdependence. Unlike most history books, this one is special since it deals not only with politics and economies but also the history of the environment and environmentalism. The book skillfully juxtaposed environmental history with the history of political, economic, and cultural affairs and demonstrated “that the natural habitat is as much humankind’s ‘home’ as are nations, families, and other manmade creations” (7). Like the book’s well-chosen content and perspectives, the authors of the book are well chosen and transnational and multi-dimensional in their backgrounds; they are multi-national male and female scholars with expertise including sports history, international politics, and the environment. Nobody is better equipped to be the author and editor of this volume than Iriye, who was born in Japan just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, educated in U.S., and has been one of most influential masters of
transnational and transcultural history. As the editor, Iriye organized a volume which provides “a fresh perspective” with “global context” and “a fuller understanding” of contemporary history (3). The volume is intended to explain and analyze the closely-linked “unprecedented degree of interactions across borders, among people and their communities, ideas, and goods” (4). It seems to me that they largely succeeded. The keywords in this volume are “global”, “interdependence,” and “shared destiny,” in the sense of global politics, global economy, global cultures as well as the transnational world.

The overall structure of the book is balanced and excellent. The book begins with a chapter on international politics, followed by one on the economy, then a chapter on the environment, followed by one on global culture and Iriye’s own chapter on transnational world. This arrangement clearly reveals the editor’s emphasis on the importance of the human habitat and the environment. Chapter one informs us of how the world power center shifted from Europe to the U.S. after the Second World War and European losses were everyone’s gain especially for the former colonies, and how the Cold War defined the political order for a quite long time in the interdependent world after 1945. Wilfried Loth is also good at explaining how the transnational and international organizations such as the United Nations and European Union came to fore. Nation-states, international politics, and conflicts are naturally part of this political world history. It is old-fashioned history, but necessary and unavoidable all the same.

In the next chapter, Thomas W. Zeiler, although understandably still giving U.S. a major role and space, made the smart decision to examine “the co-optation, absorption, and rejection of the U.S. market model by states, transnational entities, and people over the decades as globalization emerged to dominate the world economy” (205). In this chapter, trade, market, and wealth, etc. became keywords. I appreciate the author’s concluding words that “In the world economy, there was no longer any room for the unilateralism of the immediate postwar or even the heavy-handed policies of the Nixon period. Globalization required global collaboration, no person, corporation, or country was an island” (359).

I read the third chapter with great interest and expectations. J. R. McNeil and Peter Engelke have done a fine job in explaining how “a new chapter in the history of the Earth has begun: the Anthropocene” (365). The chapter demonstrates how mankind shifted to fossil fuels from coal and how the adoption of the fossil fuels “inaugurated the Anthropocene” (371). The chapter also examines the intricate links between energy and population, between climate and environment, between urbanization and nature. The authors inform us clearly of the dilemma between economy and ecology and the challenge of balancing between them. This chapter gives us a lot of food for thought about mankind and its future, about the meaning of joy, happiness, and healthy development. To serve human interest, we have to pay attention to the wellbeing of the earth.

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1 Wilfried Loth, “States and the Changing Equations of Power” (translated from the German by Peter Lewis), 11-199.


Chapter four deals with global cultures. Petra Goedde argues that although the process of cultural homogenization undoubtedly accelerated after 1945, the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century was still characterized by cultural diversity rather than uniformity (541). The key theme of this chapter is the symbiotic relationship between homogeneity and heterogeneity, between universal and particular human experiences, and between conformism and dissidence.

The last chapter serves as a concluding one and brings previous chapters neatly together in a coherent and logically sound way. In this chapter, Akira Iriye emphasizes the “growth of the sense of independence, of humankind’s shared destiny” as “one of the remarkable aspects of contemporary history” (8). It emphasizes the trans-nationalization of the world after 1945, ranging from the study of history, the third world, to the economy, cultures, as well as the existence of many transnational organizations. The author suggests that with humans landing on the moon and activities to other planets, humankind has even been trans-nationalized in a new category. He also reminds us that even nationalism was trans-nationalized. Based on the emergence of transnational civil societies, justice, and criminals, and emigration, the author suggests that the process of making a more fully global community is under way. The author clearly demonstrates that all countries, people, religions, and cultures are interconnected and “[t]he transnationalization of humankind was in clear evidence, a product of all the forces that had moved history after the Second World War” (847).

From the brief summary of the chapters above we can see that the layout and contents of the book gives us a fresh and multi-dimensional perspectives of our world. The stories and arguments in the book might be familiar to most historians, but the authors and editor of this volume brilliantly demonstrated to us a remarkable post-WW II world by refocusing on certain areas and issues through the lens of global interdependence. Some readers might demand more, but the authorship and contents are as good as it gets. Iriye’s volume (including others in the series) will join the ranks of the masterpieces of world history such as the volumes from Arnold J. Toynbee and William H. McNeill, the only difference being that compared to Toynbee’s A Study of History and McNeill’s The Rise of the West, Iriye’s volumes have modern, multi-colored details, and the relevant and contemporary touch of a master’s brush. In short, although it is a lengthy book with almost one thousand pages, this is the book everyone should read for academic enrichment, for the sake of our collective and shared future, and for a better world and planet earth.

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4 Petra Goedde, “Global Cultures,” 537-678.


The five chapters of this edited volume, each of nearly 200 pages, address the world since 1945 through the categories of states, the world economy, environmentalism, aspects of global popular culture, and transnationalism. The chapters start in 1945 and chart processes of accelerating global connections up to the present; the authors of all but the chapter on the environment have disciplinary backgrounds in international relations.

The book is part of a six-volume collection on the history of the world, co-edited by Akira Iriye and Jürgen Osterhammel. This 2014 volume is the last one, chronologically, but is the second to appear. It has been accompanied so far by two others, edited by Emily S. Rosenberg on the period 1870-1945, and by Wolfgang Reinhard on the period 1350-1750. It appears that another volume is to appear on the period from 1750 to 1870, and that two more volumes will appear on the period before 1350. These volumes, emphasizing what might be called a transnational approach to world history, are appearing at much the same time as the 7-volume *Cambridge World History*, which appeared all at once in 2015. The Harvard Belknap collection, with volumes nearly the size of those of the *Cambridge World History*, emphasizes essays of greater length on a more selective set of themes.

Iriye is the guiding light of this synthetic volume on history of the world since 1945. He grew up in Japan, then pursued undergraduate and graduate studies in the U.S., completing his PhD at Harvard in 1961. He trained as a historian of international relations, focusing on U.S.-Japan relations, but soon expanded his outlook to encompass a broader international outlook; he taught at several institutions and returned to Harvard as a professor in 1989, one year after he had served as president of the American Historical Association, where he delivered a presidential address on “The Internationalization of History.”

Iriye has been an immensely productive scholar: writing in both English and Japanese, his books have moved incrementally from diplomatic history to international organizations and to a transnational view of the world. While few other historians took up Iriye’s interest in international organizations, the 1990s saw a growing number of historians exploring approaches to large-scale history. Those working under the label of world history had an early start and continued their modest growth, while those preferring the term global history grew rapidly in number, especially in Europe. Both groups, as they debated with each other, raised challenges to the Eurocentrism of the existing historical literature. Parallel but distinctive approaches took on the labels of connected history, entangled history, new global studies, deep history, and more. These were

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3 I came to know him in the 1990s, partly through attending the annual conferences in International History that he organized at Harvard. He and colleagues directed Harvard graduate students working on international historical topics in labor history, diplomacy, and social history, and they were happy to welcome into their midst both students and faculty from the fledgling World History program at Northeastern University, across the Charles River. It was clear in those conferences that he is an immensely skillful and influential mentor.
factions or affinity groups of historians, not discrete fields of study: the overlapping labels referred both to the ways that historians assembled their tales and to their models of the ways in which history itself unfolded. Iriye and his Harvard colleagues sustained the vision of international history as part of a broader expansion in attention to large-scale and interconnected approaches to the past. A full statement of Iriye’s view of internationalization of history came in his 1997 book on the early twentieth century, *Cultural internationalism and World Order*.4

Around 2000, a new term began to catch on. The notion of ‘transnational’ arose as yet another way of talking about history beyond the national level. (For instance, the University of Pittsburgh decided in 2002 to redefine its graduate History program in terms of transnational themes.) In my opinion, the transnational approach came to mean a step that historians in the national tradition could take with ease, involving little in the way of the conceptual formulation that has been prominent among global historians and world historians. For historians who did not want to leave national history but did want to gain entry into wider complications, the term ‘transnational’ grew in attraction.5

Iriye adopted the term ‘transnational’ in his 2002 book, *Global Community*. This book made a signal contribution by giving full attention to the expanded role of international organizations in the postwar world, escaping the exclusive concentration on big-power conflict that dominated so many interpretations of postwar history.6 In this work he emphasized ‘transnational networks’ of governmental and non-governmental international organizations as they linked to each other in forming new patterns of cooperation, above the strife of national struggles. Thus he used the term ‘transnational’ not to label his overall historiographical approach—as many did—but to identify a particular empirical dynamic. In one sense, Iriye gave up reliance on the ‘international’ to accept the now-popular term ‘transnational.’ In another sense he added to his lexicon by identifying the ‘transnational’ as a specific level of interaction within a global framework. Iriye confirmed his acceptance of the new terminology – indeed, his generalization of its relevance—with the publication of his *Dictionary of Transnational History*, co-edited with Pierre-Yves Saunier.7

Iriye’s chapter in *Global Interdependence* shows that he has taken a step further.8 He makes a forceful claim for ‘transnationalization’ as a historical process, going beyond the formation and linkage of international organizations to the transnationalization of many processes in human society. In so doing, he offers his impression both of the analytical approach of transnational historians and his interpretation of the historical trajectory of a transnational world.

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As a rubric for assessing the strengths and gaps in this and other works cast at a large-scale historical level, I propose considering the comprehensiveness, disciplinary depth, and coherence of the historical interpretation—followed by an assessment of the work’s rhetoric. I find Iriye’s approach to be comprehensive, in that his view of the transnationalizing world goes beyond diplomacy to address civil society, justice, and the layers of the transnational. The latter point indicates that his transnational history includes an effort to consider the changing past on various scales. In terms of disciplinary depth—that is, drawing on one or another analytical discipline to permit specific testing of arguments that are cast at a worldwide level—he has chosen to subordinate analysis to narrative. That is, he has chosen not to deploy formally the theories and analysis of various disciplines relevant to the world since 1945, making it a bit more difficult to verify his conclusions. As for coherence, however, his systematic effort to identify processes of transnationalization yields a recurring and tightly-woven case for growing global interconnection.

Iriye opens his chapter in 1940 with Paris at the center of his stage, and with a young Japanese diplomat in the foreground. The diplomat remained in Paris until moving to Berlin in 1944, undergoing detention in Austria by the Americans, displacement to Pennsylvania, then return to Japan in late 1945. This capsule sets the focus of the chapter on Europe, North America, and East Asia, aiming the text at English-language readers from those regions. Rhetorically, Iriye balances those situations he places at center stage with those offstage, for which the narrative is implied. Iriye traces links to all areas of the world, as in his section on “Transnationalizing the Third World” (716-722), but the clearest voices remain those from the Global North.

Other chapters in the book, alternating in themes, are parallel in structure to Iriye’s conclusion. None of them, however, gives as much emphasis as Iriye’s to transnationalization as a central theme. The order of chapters conveys the priorities in interpretation. Wilfried Loth’s opening chapter on big-power politics, and the wider global patterns of international relations suggests the Cold War as the central element of postwar history; decolonization, the other great postwar trend, appears in terms of its relationship to the Cold War. Thomas W. Zeller’s interpretation of the ‘open door’ in the world economy highlights the strengths and benefits of American policies; African economies, at the other end of the scale, appear as self-inflicted disasters. J. R. McNeill and Peter Engelke give more attention to the decolonizing world, to the environment, and especially to environmentalism as a social movement. Petra Goedde’s treatment of cultural change works its way out from the spread of the American dream. Iriye’s concluding chapter links earlier themes and adds such new themes as religion.

Works of history now range in scale more widely than ever before: from micro levels to the universe. Historical debates focus increasingly on the appropriate scale of interpretation. What should be the discussion elicited by this book? My own temptation would be to engage Iriye in discussion over the complexities of the

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12 Petra Goedde, “Global Cultures,” in Iriye, Global Interdependence, 537-678.
global system. Since the book is limited to the period after 1945, does one narrow the argument by excluding consideration of longer-term historical change? Could it be that decolonization was equal in significance to the Cold War for the long term of historical change? Would readers in Brazil, Nigeria, and India argue that initiatives in their regions have been underemphasized? How far might global civil society extend? Does transnationalization take place continuously or does it undergo turns and reversals? Thus, from where I sit, I would rather discuss with Iriye the option of a more systematically world-historical framework, linking current transformations to longer-term changes and incorporating more explicitly the knowledge of adjoining social science and natural science disciplines.

Yet I see that Iriye and his colleagues, in this volume, have emphasized a different discussion, one oriented toward winning over those who continue to think of history from the standpoint of one or two single nations. Indeed, I found it easy to scan the internet and locate high-selling books on America and the world, on Europe on the world, and on the world as seen from China, Japan, and Russia. As a balance to the influence of such works among opinion-makers, *Global Interdependence* is a transnational history intended to be persuasive with “the still influential mono-nationalistic thinking.” (847)

Iriye’s rhetoric, framework of analysis, and interpretation combine to give an optimistic view of the future, conveying his vision that continuing global integration will do far more to bring resolution of the world’s problems than it will do to open up new problems. Two concise sentences on his penultimate page summarize effectively his terminology, his analysis and the imagery with which he conveys their import:

“Perhaps the deepest meaning of Obama’s presidency was that it demonstrated the possibility that transnationalism could be promoted in a world still consisting of nations. Indeed, major events that shook the world in the year 2011 indicated that the transnational framework was the only way in which to understand contemporary history” (846).

As he argues, the contrasts among visions and realities at the national level and those at the transnational level are the key elements of current change on our complex planet.
It is a daunting challenge to write a history of the world since 1945, and a daunting task to review *Global Interdependence*, an ambitious attempt to do so. Rather than being an integrated synthesis, this multi-authored work juxtaposes assessments of different layers of global history and the transnational activities, movements, ideas, and consciousness associated with them. These range from the predictable state power and the economy to a capacious definition of cultural level and the frequently ignored environmental one. A concluding section depicts the complex contours of transnational organizations, activities, and beings.

The five separately authored, book-length studies that comprise *Global Interdependence* regretfully do not speak directly to one another, and thus do not complicate and contest each other’s arguments explicitly. Each part, however, contributes to the work’s overall aims of decentering the nation-state as the fundamental unit of analysis of twentieth-century history and challenging the two dominant metanarratives of the post 1945 decades, the Cold War and decolonization. It offers instead growing global interdependence and transnational connections as the overarching story or context into which the Cold War, decolonization, and the history of capitalism should be put. The authors are more ambivalent about a third metanarrative, that of the American century and Americanization.

To different degrees, the authors view interdependence and transnationalism in all their variations as positive developments. While not inevitable, interconnections and interdependence had multiple determinants and are likely to continue because the global movement of people, ideas, products, and cultural forms has grown exponentially since 1945. For Wilfried Loth¹, Thomas Zeiler², and Akire Iriye³, the United States, and to a lesser extent Western Europe, are the principle creators of this interconnected world. It was an American (half) century, one that persists after 1989 and 9/11 in a more attenuated and transnational form. The tone of their chapters is complacent, confident, and often celebratory; the perceived accomplishments of globalization are stressed, while its costs to individuals, groups, and democratic institutions are downplayed. The environmental and cultural chapters offer more complex accounts of American hard and soft power. Petra Goedde⁴ focuses on hybridity and the multiplicity of actors and outcomes in the transnational flow of people, money, values and practices; J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke⁵ call the post-1945 decades the Anthropocene rather than the American century in order to foreground worldwide processes of energy use, population growth, and urbanization that fundamentally altered the relationship of humans with the natural

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environment. The world they depict is unquestionably interconnected and interdependent, but messier, more conflict-ridden and problem-riddled, its future less predictable and positive than other sections portray.

The book’s title reflects its interpretive focus, but conceals as much as it reveals. Yes, there may have been an “unprecedented degree of interactions across borders, among people and their communities, ideas, and goods,” (4) although the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were certainly similar. But has the world since 1945 “transformed itself into a series of interlocking relationships in such a way as to bridge the gap, although never entirely, between human unity and human division” (4)? The rather murky concept of interdependence implies harmony, reciprocity, a sort of mutuality; it discourages analyses of hegemony and domination, of the complex workings of power and manifestations of powerlessness. It masks the conflicts, inequalities, and exclusions that are integral to transnational processes and ideologies. It is too unpolitical a term for decades that were and still are deeply political, ideological, and conflictual.

No work of such sweeping ambition can give equal weight to all areas of the globe or all subjects, but the challenge of showing the multidirectionality of transnational movements is unevenly met. Loth, Zeiler, and Iriye pay more attention to the Global North than to Africa, Latin America or many parts of Asia and the Middle East. If this focus reflects economic, political, and military power relations immediately after 1945, it pays too little attention to the multiple global changes in them in subsequent decades. Although the second half of the twentieth century saw no global wars, for many parts of the world military interventions and wars were a central, if not the central, form of transnational encounter. Yet, they receive relatively little attention, which reflects and reinforces the work’s geographic unevenness. While urbanization, population growth, and migration are thematized, inequality, changing class structures, and shifting manifestations of class power, transnationally as well as nationally, are not. Nor do race and gender feature as central categories of analysis outside of the cultural section.

The most globally inclusive and persuasive chapters are Goedde’s on Global Culture and McNeill and Engelke’s on People and their Planet. Let me turn to each separately before raising concerns about the remaining sections.

Goedde has a very capacious definition of culture that includes everything from Cold-War cultural diplomacy and debates on nègritude to youth protest, human rights movements, and feminist challenges to family and gender norms. Goedde rightly refuses to tell a simple story of Americanization or Westernization, arguing instead for the constant presence of and tension between the forces of “global homogenization and local heterogenization” (541). The result is hybridity in multiple forms. Global brands, for example, coexist with rather than displace local and national material diversity. There are creolized global cultures—the use of the plural is significant. A guiding thread of Goedde’s analysis is the assertion she borrows from Michael Geyer and Charles Bright that “difference is reproduced locally not as an assertion of traditional meanings or practices, but as a product of engagement with the global processes of change that are played out in everyday life” (674). 6

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Goedde traces three phrases in the evolution of post-1945 global cultures, each of which was shaped by and helped shape the shifting political contexts of the last seventy years. In the first postwar decades, global cultures were profoundly influenced by and integral to Cold-War conflicts and decolonization; from the 1960s on cultural diversification within and among countries proliferated. After 1989 diversification and hybridity continued, but two new phenomena, human rights and religious fundamentalisms of all sorts, rose to prominence, the former challenging difference, the latter creating it in new forms. The end of the Cold War thus reshaped the rhetoric and substance of universalism and particularism, homogeneity and heterogeneity, but not their ongoing simultaneous reproduction.

Goedde frames her various themes in terms of the vigorous historiographical and political debates that surrounded and still surround them, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of either excessive description or a too consensual narrative. Her discussions move among the local, national, and transnational levels in appropriately complex ways. She is attentive to gender and race throughout her chapter and class, which is ignored by others, features prominently in her discussion of different experiences of consumption. This approach shows that multiplying transnational movements of goods, ideas, and practices took on distinctive meanings in particular local and national contexts and in different decades. Global interconnections did not produce a shared consciousness or identical ways of life, and certainly not a homogeneously Americanized world, despite the popularity of jeans and Coke, Elvis Presley and Ipdads. Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, and Africans did not passively absorb these, giving them the same meanings as Americans did, any more than Americans passively accepted and were totally transformed by their increasing consumption of foreign goods, their travel abroad, and the presence of immigrants from the global South.

If cultural diplomacy and consumption are staples of discussions of global cultures after World War II, putting the 1960s youth protests and the national and international women’s movements from the 1970s on under the label “challenging cultural norms,” is both accurate and limiting (589). They certainly did contest and offer alternatives to existing family values, sexual mores, and consumption habits, but they were also deeply political in their criticisms and demands. They focused on the Vietnam War, criticized the inadequacies of democracies, and demanded reforms in work, wages, and the global balance of economic power. Goedde lays out some of these debates clearly, especially those among women from different parts of the world, suggesting the many deep and enduring conflicts that were part of transnational encounters. It is only in the culture chapter that women and youth make more than cameo appearances, showing that gender and generation remain marginal categories in all too much post-1945 global history.

Goedde, like a growing number of scholars, argues against secularization as a feature of the post-World War II order; rather religion, increasingly in fundamentalist forms, has been a constant part of globalization and not merely a response to it. Whether the continued importance of religion has contributed to a commitment to religious pluralism, however, seems more a pious hope than a feature of the present world, marked as it is by bitter religious debates and divisions in places like India, Iraq, Israel, and the U.S. Human rights are the latest iteration of universalism in opposition to the particularism of religions and the local cultures in which they are embedded. It is by no means clear which has the upper hand, and whether they are compatible.

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“Into the Anthropocene” represents the sharpest break with the usual narratives of the post 1945 decades. McNeill and Engelke insist that the newness of this era comes less from global interconnections than from the fact that “human actions overshadow the quiet persistence of microbes and the endless wobbles and eccentricities in the Earth’s orbit and therefore define the age”(365). They portray how the shift to fossil fuels, population growth, and urbanization has deeply impacted the environment everywhere, for if economic activity that was initially centered in the global North made humankind “a geological force,” industrialization, and the procurement of materials and energy for it, have spread across the globe as have cities and population growth (370). This section is rich in statistics, offers compelling examples of such phenomenon as deforestation, oil exploration, and energy use per capita across different nations, and lays out debates about the dangers of population growth, and the complexities of biodiversity and threats to it. McNeill and Engelke analyze the multiple forms of environmental criticism and activism that have sprung up around the globe, bringing a welcome acknowledgement that not all politics are elite and governmental.

The authors situate the birth of the Anthropocene in the unprecedented economic expansion since 1945, but that is discussed with abstract references to growth rather than through an assessment of how capitalist imperatives, Communist aspirations, and Third-World developmental goals—all of which shared the same faith in technology and desire to conquer nature—shaped environmental transformations. If the Anthropocene is a metanarrative, how are we to understand the political histories of the Cold War or decolonization or Americanization differently? Where does causality lie? Do oil or deforestation or urbanization have agency? Who or what set the policies and processes that have reshaped the natural environment so strongly and often problematically? As McNeill and Engelke show, the Cold War, with its nuclear arms race, economic competition, and environmentally destructive wars in the Third World was the context and in part the cause of the particular shape the Anthropocene has taken. But has the end of the Cold War substantially altered these environmentally impactful dynamics? The push for unregulated free trade, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Syria, and the pervasive denial of climate change among so many Americans suggest not. While by no means embracing doomsday scenarios, McNeill and Engelke are wisely more wary of predicting that the transnational world will develop in positive ways than are the other authors in Global Interdependence.

The section on “States and the Changing Equations of Power” is the most traditional in its methodological approach and geographic focus. The Cold War in its Euro-American aspects takes center stage; elite officials and politicians are the principle actors, and foreign policy and international relations are discussed as being divorced from domestic economic, social, and political forces. The primary concentration on the post-1945 problems of Europe and the complexities of its recovery, integration, and new roles in international relations is rather idiosyncratic. The unquestionable global hegemon of the first postwar decades, the U.S., receives relatively less attention for reasons never explained. Although the chapter briefly discusses some wars, such as Korea, and nods to the global Cold War, it is weak on decolonization and on the competitive economic, cultural, and military interventions in the Third World by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but also by other states in each bloc, that were so much a part of the Cold War, making it catastrophically hot in parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. By a rough count, twice as many pages are devoted to Europe and the U.S. than to the entire rest of the globe. Latin America is virtually absent; Africa’s decolonization is only briefly discussed as a “disaster,” the rise of China is allotted a mere two pages (650). The replacement of bipolarity by multipolarity is traced within Europe and across the Atlantic, but not globally. Interdependencies within Europe and across the North Atlantic emerge clearly; global ones do not.
The interpretation of the Cold War is largely orthodox, the U. S. being depicted as reactive rather than motivated by visionary globalism, national interests, or capitalist economic concerns. The concept of empire—by invitation or not, depending on what part of the world is being considered—is never explored. Although Loth discusses the rise of Japan and the Asian Tigers, oil crises, and new currency accords, there is no systematic analysis of how the changing nature of the global economy, especially in its dominant capitalist forms, shaped state power and policies. How did the prolonged transnational crises of the 1970s and the emergence of neoliberalism, deregulation, and financialization alter the equations of power between the market and the state, and between corporations and financial institutions on the one hand and the citizenry of democracies on the other? What has the growing prominence of international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF meant for the power of some states and the powerlessness of others?

Zeiler's analysis of the global economy puts U.S. intentions and actions center stage, for America was the dominant force in enhancing market access, freeing trade and capital flows, and promoting free enterprise, all of which created global interdependence. The process of “opening doors,” was not, he shows, without obstacles and detours. The Cold War promoted competing blocs, and a “deglobalization of markets,” even as each bloc was increasingly integrated (217). Despite its rhetorical commitment to free trade, the U.S. used export controls and economic boycotts against Communist states and pressured its allies to do likewise. Third-World development also became a cold war weapon, one wielded by both sides, albeit with uneven resources and success. The emergence of regional economic groupings was not simply a stepping stone to an open global economy; Western European integration, for example, both promoted trade among members and restricted trade with outsiders. Yet, Zeiler argues, the momentum toward openness, whose value is accepted as self-evident, continued. In the wake of the 1970s crises, capital moved freely, Western economies focused on finance, and trade barriers were lowered, culminating in the establishment of the WTO. Keynesianism was rejected in favor of neoliberal visions of global flows, small states, deregulation, and diminished social policies.

Through much of his analysis Zeiler rightly stresses that state action rather than impersonal market forces alone played a key role in opening doors. Nation states, above all the U.S., remained important, not just alongside of multinational corporations and international financial institutions but in interaction with them and, in the case of the IMF and World Bank, in control of them. His section supports the argument that the transnational and the national are hardly mutually exclusive; nor has the former replaced the latter. This has been true not only for the U.S. as it sought to restructure the world economy but also for the European Community/European Union EC/EU and for export-oriented economies, such as Japan, the Asian Tigers, and China more recently. By his post 1989 section, however, Zeiler uncritically asserts that “the process of globalisation promoted convergence, growth, transparency, and democratization of the world economy. The nation-state came second to the transnational corporation; the agent of change was no longer government but firms, producers, bankers, immigrants, travelers—in short, private citizens of the world”(326). Leaving aside how problematic it is to regard firms and banks as citizens, according equal agency to immigrants, most of whom are poor and working class, many of whom are undocumented, and to corporations ignores the inequalities and power dynamics of global capitalism. Certainly, the influence of multinationals has grown, and will likely be enhanced by the Trans Pacific Partnership, which nation-states negotiated in 2015, and the Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership that is under discussion. But they can hardly do without nation states, as the 2008 crisis showed so clearly.

To understand why and how the relative power of states and markets has shifted, one must look at more than the movement of a dizzying array of material goods, cultural and intellectual products, currencies, and ever more esoteric financial vehicles. Openness and growth alone hardly capture everything about how the global
economy functions on the local, national, and transnational levels, about who is included and excluded, and how power and powerlessness are interrelated. They do not explain, for example, how industrialized Suzhou and rustbelt and depopulated Detroit are linked and interdependent or the Washington Consensus imposed on Latin America and the austerity implemented in the EU or Western neocolonialism in Africa and more recent Chinese economic expansion there.

While trade and capital flows are important aspects of globalization, so too are questions of production. Yet, the varied forms of Fordism and post Fordism, the global relocation of manufacturing, the demise of strong unions and stable blue and white collar careers are neglected, as are the varieties of capitalism that existed and still exist and the systemic dynamics and contradictions that have plagued them since the 1970s. And while many doors have been opened for goods and capital, relatively few have been for labor, and those are often available on precarious and disadvantageous terms.

While the economic chapter advocates an open global economy, it recognizes its costs, even if it fails to explore or explain those in detail. The plight of women workers in Asian factories is documented, for example, and the protests of developing nations at every round of WTO talks noted. (But in Zeiler’s words, they were “a problem,” they “balked” and “resentfully walked out” (341, 343). Given the spread of manufacturing and distribution around the globe, debates between the friends and foes of globalization seem “increasingly irrelevant” (338). Had this study been completed before the 2008 crisis, its assessment may well have been consistently upbeat. Post crisis it is more mixed. The crisis stemmed not only “from greed and overreach,” but also from “the fundamentals of transnational production, vast capital transfers, and other elements of the globalization process that enriched hundreds of millions of people but did not help billions more” (352). America created such an open global economy that even its own strength was diminished. And whether this era of globalization, like its predecessor before WWI, will end by war and postwar politics remains an open question. Perhaps it will succumb to its own internal contradictions or fall victim to the environmental damage it inflicts.

Global Interdependence concludes with Iriye’s exploration of the role of non-state actors, both individuals and organizations, which have created “layers of cross-border activities and emotions” (813). “The American Century…transnationalized the world to an extent never seen earlier,” he argues (802). The nation state has steadily diminished in importance, and humanity has been transnationalized; global memories and transnational consciousness have become possible. Iriye grounds his enthusiastic depiction of the making of a transnational world in a reconstruction of the movements of all sorts of people in multiple circuits of travel, temporary or permanent migration, study, and work. He investigates the transnational circulation of protests, sports, and crime. He assesses the new communications technologies linking diverse parts of the globe and the dramatic transformations of education and scholarship. The empirical material is rich, but the underlying analytical categories are problematic.

Iriye defines transnational history in terms of its focus on individuals, groups, and organizations, whose identities when “involved in history” are not primarily as members of the national community (682). The transnational is distinct from nation states and from organizations such as the United Nations that are involved in international relations. These neat categorical divisions ignore the messiness of how people, practices, organizations, and policies move around the globe. How can one know, for example, if musicians who go on government-sponsored cultural diplomacy tours identify as transnational or non-national or as artists who represent America while pursuing their musical careers? How and where migrants move is profoundly shaped by the nation state of which they are citizens as well as by nation-states at all stages of their
journeys, as we are now seeing so painfully in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the U.S. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments often work hand in hand, reinforcing one another’s policies and goals in many areas, even if NGOs criticize some state actions. And where do powerful multinational corporations fit into the neat distinction between international, transnational, and national? The most interesting and complicated issue does not involve finding the “truly” transnational, but rather untangling how the international, transnational, and national interact and shape one another at the global, national, and local levels, in the lives of individuals as well as groups, organizations, institutions, and corporations.

Downplaying the importance of the nation state, a staple of globalization writing since the 1990s, seems less persuasive in the wake of 9/11, the 2008 economic crisis, and the recent terror attacks in Paris and across the Middle East. Yes, regional institutional groupings now exist in several areas of the globe, but the fragility of the strongest, the EU, is evident to members and outsiders alike. While non-state actors engage primarily in terrorism transnationally as well as locally, as opposed to domestically, as was the case in the 1970s, the central locus of military power remains nation states, and both wars and terrorism intensify loyalty to them. While in theory there is “no inherent contradiction or irreconcilable opposition between nationalism and transnationalism,” there are often substantive and situational ones that are perceived as such (787).

The terms “global civil society,” “transnational memory,” and above all, “transnational beings” abound in this section. Such designations—comforting to some, disturbing to others—homogenize much more complex and contradictory phenomena. Take, for example, ideas of globally shared generational memory. Interestingly, the possibilities of such memory center on traumatic events—war, genocide, the Holocaust. But the experience of World War II, the individual meanings assigned to it as well as the public memories constructed around it, differs profoundly not only in Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa, but within Europe and between Europeans and Americans. There now exists, as Iriye writes, a “kaleidoscope of transnational beings” (813). But what do a Syrian refugee, a Philippine housemaid in the United Arab Emirates a Davos man, and a South American drug trafficker, to name but a few of such “transnational beings,” have in common beside the fact that they move across borders. Class, race, gender, generation, and nationality create vastly different, indeed incommensurable, life worlds, material conditions, emotions, and prospects.

Iriye concludes by noting several factors that bode well for a further transnationalization of the world: the American tolerance for diversity, the proliferation of regional economic and in some cases political organizations, shared concerns about the environment, and human rights. He acknowledges that religious revivals and a turn against the West have occurred, but is reassured that they have not severed all links to the West. And he is buoyed by “the Obama moment” as the embodiment of transnational trends and hopes (842).

When venturing onto the treacherous terrain of predicting the future, the moment of forecasting is as decisive as one’s angle of vision or disposition. I write this review in the late fall of 2015, a time of economic

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slowdown among the BRICS-Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, especially China, of challenges to the EU from the euro crisis, refugees, and terrorism, and of growing inequality within and among nations. There are ongoing civil wars and international military conflicts, and terrorism in the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Nation states remain powerful, and where not, the absence means failure and chaos. No part of the globe remains immune from human rights violations or from strident nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Surveillance, tightened borders, and restrictions on the movement of people—but not capital and commodities— are widely advocated and increasingly practiced. It is hard to feel anything but deeply pessimistic about the prospects for positive, peaceful, and mutually beneficial transnational relations, emotions, and commitments.
If history had once to be rescued from the nation, global history has now been rescued again: this time, from the nimbus of naïveté.¹ The chivalrous credit goes to a remarkable team of historians who have run the whole gamut of postwar macro-phenomena: from the increasingly integrative magnetism of power politics (Wilfried Loth) to the cycles of readjustment necessary in the world economy (Thomas Zeiler), from the inescapability and slipperiness of global culture (Petra Goedde) to the growing numbers of individuals and collectivities around the world who feel the pressure to challenge their own, fundamental assumptions about the world in order to embrace globalisms in many different hues (Akira Iriye).² John R. McNeill and Peter Engelke have contributed a study of the ‘anthropocene’ that stands apart in its cast of historical actors or agents.³ The global environment as a system of considerably greater magnitude than any economic, political, or cultural arrangement is a perspective rife with heuristic promise. On similar analytic foundations as Iriye’s chapter, this one foregrounds the social fabric of human relationships. This social history sensibility, augmented beyond the homo sapiens, reappears here as a more encompassing category which includes non-human factors like energy and the climate as historical actors (indeed inter-actors) in their own right. Implicitly, social connections are the very fabric that holds together the political, economic, cultural, and intellectual and emotional transformations scrutinized by Loth, Zeiler, Goedde and Iriye. This is in line with the initial turn to transnational history as a search for new, social actors between societies and states. But like political conflict, the question of social consolidation across borders also represents one of the toughest test cases for global interdependence and for the overarching concentration on convergence that frames this tome. Within that frame, the themes and arguments recast, for the most part, historical experiences that emerged because of global interdependence, not in spite of it. The image that emerges is one of historical forces emerging in a plethora of local, national or regional contexts but directly converging on the central objective of greater, global cohesion. Likewise, the majority of historical snapshots from the human past can be read as expressions of global interdependence. Readers learn far less, however, about those actions that contributed to interdependence in our contemporary world against their will. The speed of the arguments throughout the book must have been a necessity of keeping the book just under 1,000 pages, but the contradictory elements of global interdependence are part of the story, the argument, and the plaidoyer. Interdependence is driven both by logic and by paradox.

To be sure, many actors here enter the scene because they opposed a subset of global interdependence as particularists: the fight against hegemony along racial and economic lines from the affinities of independence at Bandung to those of the Non-Aligned Movement in the Belgrade of 1961 (254-255), from the Soviet critique of American racism (549) to the terrorists in West Germany, Ireland, Iraq, Turkey, Spain and

¹ Prasenjit Duara. Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago University Press, 1995).


elsewhere (758-759). If global independence, however, has an irrefutability and ineluctability to it, this becomes most visible in the actions of those who attack global interdependence as such – and spectacularly fail to become anything other than a part of the targeted phenomenon. Anti-globalization activists, radicals, and globally-minded terrorists, to mention only the most obvious candidates, are products of the forces that they disavow. The recent years and months have offered a remarkable proof of global interdependence: Never before have opponents of worldwide change known so much about others elsewhere who agree with them.

What insights and conclusions, then, can we draw from the chapters to approach the analytic difference between structural interdependence and subjective interdependence globally? How compelling is the prospect of greater interdependence? In addition to cosmopolitan supporters, the ‘separatists’ of globalization reinforce the existing density of interdependence, through acts of resistance and even by voicing particularist concerns, ironically, in the global public sphere. This also means that there are good reasons why convergence produces numerous manifestations beyond global consciousness, why structural independence trumps its subjective recognition. Empirical examples are not lacking. The intricacies of international law, much like the upper echelons of global financial expertise or issues of cybersecurity, could not impinge more immediately on the individual, daily lives of the great majority of humankind, without even an inkling on their part where precisely those interdependencies extend, what they mean, and which roles individual or collective action can play.

The very ignorance concerning globality in these realms, such as the economic and financial distribution of benefits, has played a large part in generating movements that attack globalization and its interconnectedness as a curtailing rather than liberating force, an infringement of individual autonomy rather than a pathway toward peace and prosperity. The populism of anti-globalization movements, moreover, rarely exhibits the ambition to increase an analytic understanding of the issues at hand. Instead, the plight of those who perceive themselves to be victimized by globalization is one where global weakness becomes a virtue in itself. The lack of epistemic integration, the sense of being deliberately kept away from the perks of global interdependence, then, serves as the very basis for refuting interdependence altogether. Ignorance of the workings of globalization becomes an essentially political plight: It assumes that the grand clash of competing interests is determined by an existing antagonism and thus is beyond the individual or collective power to implement change. It appears as if the political stability and social acceptability of global interconnectedness in the postwar era hinged to a very large extent on globalization treading more or less lightly. An undesired push to global exposure of particular groups, on the other hand, has all too often fomented dissatisfaction with the global condition, self-marginalization on top of existing marginalization and exceptionalism as the justification for both of the above.

Throughout the postwar era, global interdependence lost its appeal when it appeared autonomous. To the credit of this book, it features several dozen crises as challenges gradually overcome by global interdependence. They include the hotly contested accession of Britain to the European Economic Community between 1961 and 1972, the Cuban Missile Crisis of and the Vietnam War (101-107) and the crisis of détente resulting from the Soviet assassination of the Afghan Communist leader Hafizullah Amin in Tajbeg Palace on the last days of 1979 (147-150). The series of globally interdependent crises continued with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) which became “its own worst enemy” in the early 1980s (292), the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 (350-351), and, indeed, the interconnected proxy wars that tear apart Syria as we speak. Several crises can converge and make global interdependence the engine behind global dilemmas. An example is the largely unnoticed if cynical competition between destruction by war and destruction by pollution so ably discerned by John R. McNeill and Peter Engelke (384-386). Not only in the
example last given, but especially there, we understand the unease of being forced into a competition against one’s own will – a distinguishing byproduct of interdependence.

None of this would concern historians and scholars of contemporary, global affairs, were it not very much part of the postwar story of global interdependence as conceptualized in what really amounts to five monographs disguised as chapters. The very multiplicity of interconnecting layers – from world politics to the world economy, from world culture to the environment – has arguably brought more uncertainty as to what the rules of the game are, what the game is about or, indeed, whether it is a game at all. The disorienting consequences of globalization have been recently recognized in scores of historical literature. To name but one outstanding study, Daniel Rodger’s *Age of Fracture* has carefully delineated the effect in the case of U.S. society and thought since the 1970s. The abundant literature by policy scholars and policy practitioners on a ‘post-Cold War’ era or order that still has not found its name testifies to the same *aporia* in the realm of global, political analysis.

This is not the place to argue whether or not, or rather, in which cases, unease about ineluctable, globalizing tendencies is politically, socially, or ethically justified and where they are not. The theme of risk is likely to prevail even outside reflections on global, social justice across blatant local, national, and regional asymmetries. Since the Second World War, global interdependence produced fluctuations of promise and peril. But whatever the ratio, the developments unraveling since the end of the Second World War and unfurling on the canvas that is this book are likely to increase in significance, recognition and explanatory value.

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On behalf of the contributors, I would like to express my gratitude to the four reviewers for their insightful comments on the individual chapters as well as on the overall conceptualization of this volume. As they note, we seek to understand the history of the world after the end of the Second World War in a global, transnational framework. This distinguishes the work from the usual accounts of recent history in terms of national and international affairs.

Three of the four reviewers (Steffen Rimner, Patrick Manning, and Xu Guoqi) are supportive of this approach, while the fourth, Mary Nolan, is more critical. She suggests that “Nation states remain powerful,” and, therefore, that “it is hard to feel anything but deeply pessimistic about the prospects for positive, peaceful, and mutually beneficial transnational relations, emotions, and commitments.” Nolan is looking to the future, but the authors of this book are writing about the recent past, where the transnational approach would seem to work much better than nation-centric narratives.

Transnational history, as the term suggests, is an attempt at going beyond the still-prevalent tendency to seek to understand modern and recent history through individual states and their dealings with one another. In the transnational approach, individual nations’ internal and external affairs are considered in relation to the whole of humanity. Several billions of people have lived and died since 1945, and for most of them their respective nationalities are but one of many identities with which they exist and existed. Each individual is distinguished by gender, age, state of health, level of education, and many other distinctions. Why should we single out a person’s national identity as the most important when these other identities might be more relevant?

If I may take a personal example, age seems to be a far more crucial ingredient of my self-identity than anything else. That I am now in my early eighties is the essential framework in which I think and act, beside which such factors as the country of my origin, my nationality, my education, or even my professional career seem less relevant. I am writing this in a retirement community in Pennsylvania, where the average age of the residents is eighty-five. Their age matters far more than their nationality. To the residents including myself, the world of the 1930s, when most of them were born, is the key framework for understanding today’s world, which is obviously different from the framework in which my children’s generation and my grandchildren’s generation operate.

Age is a transnational framework, as are health and medical conditions. To people of my generation worldwide, these factors are far more fundamental to their lives than national or international affairs. But age is not a person’s only transnational identity. One’s gender, religion, education, and many other backgrounds would have meaning across national boundaries.

“Nation states remain powerful,” Nolan writes. Of course, they do. But the question is whether sovereign, independent states remain the fundamental framework in which we may understand today’s world. The authors of this volume are undertaking a fresh approach by suggesting that many non-national identities not only “remain powerful” but are increasingly becoming relevant. The world of 2016 is different from that of 1936, 1946, or 1956 because nation states are no longer as ‘powerful’ as transnational existences and loyalties. May we not say that at least in the world of scholarship, there is a more vibrant global community of historians than ever existed in the past?