



Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers and Warriors Shaped Globalization

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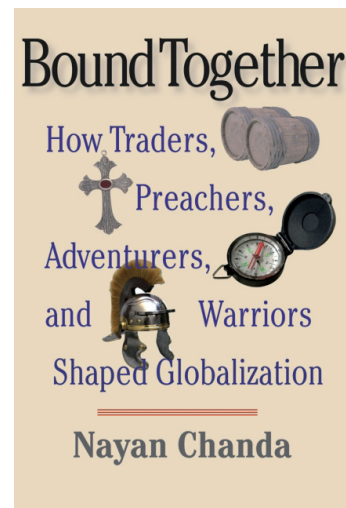
Review by Eckart Woertz
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In his book *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers and Warriors Shaped Globalization*, Nayan Chanda gives a fascinating account of globalization. He understands globalization not as a phenomenon that has emerged in the recent past, but rather as a process that is broad sweeping indeed: The first wave of globalization for him is the dispersal of mankind over the globe, which started with its migration out of Africa 50,000 years ago and ended when humans reached the southern tip of America by 12,000 B.C. He then dwells on empire building and the expansion of world trade over the ages before addressing the negative effects and controversies surrounding globalization such as workers' exploitation or environmental pollution.

Traders, preachers, adventurers and warriors are the driving forces of globalization for Chanda and he deals with each of them in a separate chapter. With the help of vividly told anecdotes he describes how improved telecommunication and logistical innovations like container shipping or the wide bodied Boeing 777 helped the expansion of

world trade. Cross border fertilization of trade in turn led to new products, from the cappuccino to the pocket calculator. By taking a detailed look at cotton, coffee and semiconductors, the various political and cultural ramifications of the process are outlined. The linguistic remnants of these globalized exchanges make entertaining reading over the whole book, be it the origin of the term 'dollar' from a small German silver mining town in the 16th century or the Arab mathematician Al Khwarizimi fathering the term 'algorithms,' which have become so indispensable for today's software industry.

Preachers, on the other hand, provided a cultural level playing field for mutual exchange, as "a faith that did not call for worshipping any object or local gods was perfectly suited for the life of itinerant traders." In the case of the universal and proselytizing religions of Christianity, Islam and



Buddhism they also integrated the formerly other within a common cultural identity and helped with numerous translations and scholarship beyond the religious realm to spur cultural exchange. As the idea of a universal humanity under one God shares similarities with the notion of human rights or ecological concerns that equally apply to all mankind as well, modern advocacy groups like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch are subsumed under the Preacher category as “secular religions” (Elie Wiesel).

Adventurers and warriors integrated new areas in the globalizing world and contributed to administrative formalizations such as the introduction of law codes. Yet Chanda does not deny the negative effects of processes ranging from slavery and exploitation to the distribution of germs and plagues. In a specific chapter he deals with modern day manifestations of globalization such as sweat shops in third world countries, the plight of migrant workers or circumvention of environmental standards. He gives opponents of globalization such as Attac some points while critically discussing their sometimes crude and changing lines of reasoning, but overall he subscribes to a benign Washington Consensus view of globalization and trade as welfare enhancing and inevitable as it “stem[s] from a basic human urge to seek a better and more fulfilling life.”

The broad framework is both the strength and a weakness of the book. On the one hand, it provides an intriguing account about how human migration can be traced in our genes, how a fruit like the coffee bean developed into a global commodity and how the concept of zero, invented by

Indians and developed by Arabs, laid the foundation for today’s semiconductor industry. On the other hand, the author paints with too broad a brush and the rich empirical facts he outlines are sometimes only scantily held together by the rather nebulous analytical tool of “globalization.”

Chanda seems to be aware of this pitfall as he reserves a whole chapter for a discussion of the term and how it has developed between 1995 and 2001 from a mere description of globalization of standards or tariffs to a buzzword describing the internationalization of business and cultural expression. After 2001 the usage of the term globalization has receded and given way to “outsourcing” as the new darling of journalists and academics. Could it be that globalization is more suitable to describe a certain stage of capitalist development characterized by internationalization of value chains and globalization of cultural tastes rather than using it as a *passé partout* for the history of mankind since time immemorial? Chanda acknowledges that “the big differences that mark the globalization of the early years with that of the present are the *velocity* with which products and ideas are transferred, the ever-growing *volume* of consumers and products and their *variety*, and the resultant increase in the *visibility* of the process.” Such quantity arguably brings a different quality with it as well; comparing globalization with the emergence of capitalist agriculture in the 16th century or the industrial revolution in the 19th century makes sense. Describing it as a process since the Stone Age makes a fascinating empirical mosaic, but sometimes it also means stretching the facts.