The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World

Valerie Hansen

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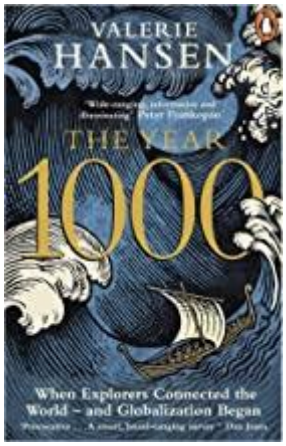

Globalization – the increasing homogeneity of production and consumption around the world – is often written of as if it began towards the end of the last century when, in reality, it has been taking place for much longer in one form or another. Quite how much longer has been a subject of debate. Some have considered the beginning of the period of European colonization to have been the spur to growth of this sort, although the developments were mainly limited to trade and investment for members of the same country, albeit with some scope for local actors to find a role for themselves. Proponents of world systems theory (e.g., Wallenstein, 2004) generally refer to the year 1450, at which the capitalist system is considered to have begun in earnest. Valerie Hansen, in The Year 1000, argues for an earlier date, as the title of the book might suggest. Her argument is that increased mobility through boat technology enabled some intrepid people more easily to move to every part of the world and to be able to insert themselves into pre-existing local trade and influence networks. As she puts it:

> "The events set in motion by the year 1000 were a significant point in humanity's evolution, and they've produced booth good and bad effects. The blazing of global pathways caused fertilization and infection, intellectual enrichment and cultural fragmentation, the speed of new technologies and the extinction of traditional crafts. The pathway encouraged *both* fraternization and conflict. They opened some people's eyes to possibilities they'd never glimpsed but also hastened the subjugation of those who were less able to fend off domination (pp.4-5)."

She correctly identifies this form of confrontation as leading to a from of Schumpeterian creative destruction, with winners and losers being created. This is presented through the prism of individual episodes: Vikings travel to North America (and possibly further south) and kill the first people they meet, while then apparently suffering the same fate in due course. Captain

Cook, on the other hand (and sometime later), treats the Tahitian navigator Tupaia with respect and in return is given knowledge that allows him to draw a map with 130 island locations accurately depicted. There is, in other words, little ideology in these meetings other than individual virtue or vice (or perhaps a learned form of behaviour from a successful predecessor). No doubt there has always been a role for the actions of an individual but this approach does little to explain the creation of empires, the suppression of local people and the systematic extraction of resources that we have seen so many times throughout history. Instead, people are pragmatic – kings and rulers change religions based on what may bring them advantage rather than through conviction and their people tend to use the same calculus for their own decisions. There is extensive use of slavery (she seems to have been influenced in this regard by the recent work of Scott, 2017) but this is presented as a means of solving a lack of labour. There are no slaves in China, therefore, because of the huge numbers of people who can be put to work when necessary. While she acknowledges the scale of the trade in slaves, it does appear that she has a tendency to see it, at least in part, as another example of the ingenuity of entrepreneurial establishment of new networks or by joining together new and existing networks. On the other hand, she does point out some of the instances of violence against the incomers and their agents who are associated with change and loss of privilege and status for some. However, these are also presented as being human nature and a more or less rational response to the situation as it exists.

The book takes the form of a travelogue around the world in the eponymous year. Of course, that actual year is somewhat symbolic as the date of the various events slides back and forth a little bit as it proves necessary. Hansen does not provide any explanation for why a global phenomenon such as globalization should have taken such an important stride forward in a single period of time and there does not seem to be any particular connection between, for example, the Viking expansions by sea to the west and by land to the east and the ability of South Sea islander people to travel beyond the horizon to previously unexplored islands. There have been more convincing attempts to explain change as the result of technology or diseases, for example in the case of the Mongol Empire and the creation of a post system that enabled information to flow across the length and breadth of the Eurasian land mass at unprecedented speed (Man, 2016). Being able to take advantage of that facility would enable a business leader to create competitive advantages in ways that are described by established international business models (e.g. Dunning, 2015).

The style of the book is one of popular history – the author is a Professor of History at Yale University and it is certainly welcome to see world-leading academics presenting their accumulated knowledge to the public in an accessible form. There are no footnotes. I know that it is often said that general readers do not like footnotes but here there are none at all when they might have been tucked away discreetly at the end of a chapter or even the end of the book. Instead, there is a section of endnotes with page numbers and the text which would have been given a footnote rendered in bold. Is this really better? I imagine the publishers must know what they are doing.

Overall, this is quite an enjoyable book to read and if it inspires a greater interest in history, especially global history, then that is surely a good thing. It is nevertheless true that the main premise remains flawed.

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