

# Against the World: Anti-Globalism and Mass Politics between the World Wars

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In 1916, feminist and internationalist Mary Sheepshanks declared that the era of globalism was over. She lamented that even committed internationalists “have lost faith and join in the chorus of those who never sympathized with our ideals and say internationalism has failed.” Although she was confident that the spirit of internationalism would return once “the fumes cleared from men’s brains,” she argued that it had been replaced for the moment by “race hatred and national jealousy, leading to tariffs, militarism, armaments, crushing taxation, restricted intercourse, mutual butchery, and the ruin of all progress.”<sup>1</sup>

But the fumes did not clear quickly. More than twenty-five years later, the Austrian-Jewish writer Stefan Zweig would publish his memoir, *The World of Yesterday*. It was a nostalgic eulogy for a lost era of globalism. Zweig, a self-described “citizen of the world,” recalled “Before 1914, the earth had belonged

<sup>1</sup> Mary Sheepshanks, “Is Internationalism Dead?” *Jus Suffragii, Monthly Organ of the International Woman*, June 1, 1916, 1.

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**2** Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (London, 1943), 308–310.

**3** John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919; repr., New York, 1971), 10–11.

to all ... There were no permits, no visas, and it always gives me pleasure to astonish the young by telling them that before 1914 I travelled from Europe to India and to America without passport and without ever having seen one.” After the war, everything changed. “The world was on the defensive against strangers ... The humiliations which once had been devised with criminals alone in mind now were imposed upon the traveler, before and during every journey.” Zweig linked these bureaucratic humiliations to a loss of human dignity and the lost dream of a united world.<sup>2</sup>

In Britain, economist John Maynard Keynes penned his own famous obituary for globalization shortly after the war ended. “What an extraordinary episode in the economic progress of man that age was which came to an end in August 1914!” he wrote. In the golden age before the war, “The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth, in such quantity as he might see fit, and reasonably expect their early delivery upon his doorstep.” It was an age in which “the projects of militarism and imperialism, of racial and cultural rivalries, of monopolies, restrictions, and exclusion, which were to play the serpent to this paradise, were little more than the amusements of his daily newspaper.” These looming threats “appeared to exercise almost no influence at all on the ordinary course of his social and economic life, the internationalization of which was nearly complete in practice.”<sup>3</sup>

Stefan Zweig and John Maynard Keynes remain among the most famous analysts of the changes brought by the First World War. They both understood these changes in terms of the end of a golden era of globalization, during which people, goods, and capital had breezed across international frontiers. But their very nostalgia for a lost world of globalism offers an important clue as to the causes of its downfall. Both men were myopic about the extent to which the freedoms they associated with globalization had been privileges of a narrow elite. The earth had not belonged to everyone

before 1914. It had, however, belonged to people like Keynes and Zweig.

Zweig and Keynes traveled the world unmolested by bureaucrats before World War I largely because they were wealthy, highly educated, white European men. They traveled freely for business and pleasure, with no concern for their physical safety. Nor did they worry about the meddlesome interference of husbands, fathers, or state authorities.

In steorage, the “World of Yesterday” looked very different. Migrants heading toward the United States around 1900 were subjected to the poking and prodding of doctors charged with excluding sick, disabled, and “undesirable” migrants. Non-whites were categorically excluded. Millions of people in the world lived in deep poverty, in regions that were denied political sovereignty and exploited economically for the benefit of Europeans and North Americans. While international trade may have benefited all parties in the aggregate, it exacerbated inequality between rich countries and poor countries. Likewise, within industrialized countries, globalization did not benefit everyone equally: there were clear winners and losers.<sup>4</sup>

Keynes frankly acknowledged all this. The bounty of globalization was not shared equally. But inequality, he claimed, had been seen as a necessary corollary to progress in the nineteenth century. “The greater part of the population, it is true, worked hard and lived at a low standard of comfort, yet were, to all appearances, reasonably contented with this lot.” This was because they believed in the prospect of social mobility. “Escape was possible,” he insisted, “for any man of capacity or character at all exceeding the average.”<sup>5</sup>

The First World War shattered those illusions. The magnitude of wartime sacrifices bred popular demands for immediate justice. Across Europe and across the world, workers, women, and colonial subjects took to the streets, demanding sovereignty and greater equality. The wheels of global integration ground to a halt. The era of anti-globalism lasted another two

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Trade and Poverty: When the Third World Fell Behind* (Cambridge, MA, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Keynes, *Economic Consequences*, 21–22.

**6** Dorothy Thompson, "The Gray Squirrel," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 20, 1932, 7.

**7** Christopher A. Casey, "Deglobalization and the Disintegration of the European News System, 1918–34," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018), 267–91; Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy* (New York, 2011), 34–46.

**8** Harold James, *The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 12; Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (New York, 2009); Adam McKeown, "Global Migration, 1846–1940," *Journal of World History* 15 (2004): 155–89, 167.

decades, punctuated by the greatest global economic crisis in world history, the Great Depression. Nor would the strife be overcome with a new treaty or a peaceful handshake. Rather, as American journalist Dorothy Thompson would observe from Berlin in 1931, "Looking at Europe, from the British Isles to the Balkans, one is forced to the admission that after twelve years of the League of Nations, the International Court ... multilateral treaties, Kellogg Pacts, the International Bank and disarmament conferences, the whole world is retreating from the international position and is taking its dolls and going home."<sup>6</sup>

There is no question about the decline of global mobility and trade in this period: in 1914, international trade accounted for 30 percent of the world economy, an all-time high. By 1933 it had slumped to a low of 10 percent and did not recover until the 1970s. Transatlantic migration, which reached its peak of 2.1 million in 1913, came to a sputtering halt during the war. Global communication also broke down between the wars. News that had traveled via telegraph from Europe to North America and Australia in a day in 1913 took weeks to arrive in 1920. The gold standard, the motor of global financial integration, broke down during the First World War and was abandoned roadside during the 1930s, first by Great Britain (1931), then the United States (1933), and finally by France and other European powers.<sup>7</sup> While trade, migration, and international cooperation recovered briefly during the late 1920s, the Great Depression dealt a decisive blow.<sup>8</sup>

What name should we give to this age of disconnection? I use the term "anti-globalism" to refer to movements that sought to insulate societies from the global economy by mobilizing against policies, people, and institutions associated with globalization or internationalism. Sometimes, these movements produced "deglobalization," the actual slowdown or curtailment of the transnational flows of people, ideas, goods, or capital. But people at the time did not use the terms globalization or deglobalization. They spoke instead of "freedom" vs.

dependence on the global economy, “nationalism” vs. “internationalism,” “sovereignty” and its violation. They sought “self-sufficiency,” “economic insulation,” and “autarky.”

I therefore use the terms “globalization” and “deglobalization” critically and with some caveats. These terms came into widespread use in the 1990s, at a moment when a certain kind of free-market capitalism and global integration appeared to be the unstoppable victors of History. After Communism’s collapse in Eastern Europe in 1989, many social scientists and journalists began to talk about “globalization” like they once spoke of “modernization.” It seemed to be an irrepressible force that moved in only one direction. McDonald’s opened in Moscow, global finance was ascendant, and an innovation called the World Wide Web was bringing people into ever more constant communication. But we only needed to look backward to see forward: the history of Europe between 1918 and 1939 reveals very clearly that the history of globalization was punctuated by pauses and (attempted) reversals. Yet many analysts in the 1990s and beyond maintained that “globalization” was a “natural economic process,” which would accelerate indefinitely if only left unmolested by government intervention. They saw deglobalization, by contrast (including interwar deglobalization) as the product of “unnatural” political interference with that process.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the history of global integration in the nineteenth century reveals that there was nothing “natural” or apolitical about it. Nor was it directed by an invisible hand. Imperial states and armies guaranteed that their colonies would be hospitable to foreign investments, and that debtors would pay back international loans.<sup>10</sup> Even during globalization’s most rapid acceleration, “free trade” was more a British exception than the rule. The United States, for one, maintained high tariffs right up to the eve of the First World War.<sup>11</sup>

Another issue is that “globalization” and “deglobalization” sound like binary opposites. Yet, as we will see, deglobalization

**9** Douglas Irwin, *Against the Tide: An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (Princeton, NJ, 1996).

**10** Stefan Link, “How Might 21st-Century De-Globalization Unfold? Some Historical Reflections,” *New Global Studies* 12 (2018): 5–6; on “free trade” as a political doctrine in Britain, Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, UK, 2009); on British imperial power and free trade, see Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade, and Imperialism, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, UK, 1970), 152–54; Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Oxford, UK, 1997); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014); Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox*, 32–33.

**11** Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox*, 29.

**12** Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History*, trans. Dona Geyer (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 81. On globalization/internationalism and nationalism, see also Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, trans. Sorchá O'Hagan (Cambridge, UK, 2010); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2015); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (Cambridge, UK, 2019).

**13** For a critique of the “pendulum” theory, see Link, “How Might 21st-Century De-Globalization Unfold?,” 343–65. See also Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, “World History in a Global Age,” *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1034–60.

**14** Thompson, “The Gray Squirrel,” 7.

and globalization, like nationalism and internationalism, were often flip sides of the same coin. This simultaneity was nothing new in 1914 or 1918. It was baked into the foundation of internationalist projects and accelerating global connection in the late nineteenth century. Globalization and anti-globalism rose in tandem.<sup>12</sup> Even between the two World Wars, global flows often moved into new channels and morphed into new shapes, rather than rising and falling. The most radical anti-globalists rarely sought (let alone achieved) total isolation from the global economy, or autarky: they sought globalization on their own terms, or at least better terms.<sup>13</sup> And anti-globalists themselves organized in transnational networks, a phenomenon frequently noted by contemporaries. “The only international which seems to be winning these days is the international of the anti-internationalists,” quipped Dorothy Thompson in 1931.<sup>14</sup>

So, what did anti-globalism look like between the World Wars? When and why did it begin? While 1914 was a clear breaking point, there were real signs of trouble well before then. Anti-globalism was a product of two developments that coincided in the late nineteenth century: first, the acceleration of globalization itself, and second, the rise of mass politics, which meant that the people negatively affected by global integration (or who felt like they were negatively affected) had the ability to talk back, at the ballot box or in the streets.

By the turn of the twentieth century, it was already clear to many that the gains from free trade, imperial expansion, and mass migration were not shared equally. In Germany, economists began to sound alarm bells about a globalizing food market, arguing that reliance on imports would compromise both the economy and national security. The United States began to impose limits on immigration in the 1880s, with an all-out ban of Chinese migrants in 1882, followed by prohibitions of individuals seen as morally, mentally, or physically deficient; Germany reinforced its borders and ports against the influx of allegedly diseased East European Jews, and

countries of mass emigration mobilized to stop what they saw as the massive hemorrhaging of human capital.

The First World War prompted further skepticism about the risks and rewards of global interdependence.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, it was a “global” war. World War I mobilized human and material resources around the world, set soldiers adrift to far flung locations, and increased international financial entanglement through a massive web of international debt (especially debts to the United States).<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the war produced unprecedented supply-chain issues. The cost of shipping tripled, and inflation soared. Warring states sought to cut off supplies to their enemies. Many measures introduced during wartime for one purpose continued or became models for anti-global policies and politics after the war. In the name of security, states required travelers to carry passports when they traveled abroad, a new innovation. It was supposed to be temporary, but the requirement was not lifted after the war.

Demobilized soldiers took their weapons home. Some were inspired by the Bolshevik revolution and joined radical internationalists, pacifist, Socialist and Communist movements and parties. But the reaction to left-wing forms of globalism—real and imagined—was immediate and intensely violent. In Budapest and Munich, counterrevolutionary paramilitary groups hunted Jews in the street, as anti-Semites linked Jews to global capitalism and international Bolshevism. In the United States, a Red Scare was underway and the Ku Klux Klan was on the rise; Prohibition reflected animosity toward Catholic immigrants, who were believed to abuse alcohol. The so-called “Spanish flu” pandemic intensified popular xenophobia, as migrants were associated with disease. New laws further restricted mobility. The Johnson-Reed Act, passed in 1924, choked off immigration for decades based on racist quotas.

In Europe, states and regions that had once traded freely quickly erected protective barriers against one another. Europe now

**15** Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

**16** Adam Tooze and Ted Fertik, “The World Economy and the Great War,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40 (2014): 214–238.

**17** John Maynard Keynes, "National Self-Sufficiency," *Yale Review* 22 (1933): 78.

**18** Mahatma Gandhi, *The Wheel of Fortune* (Madras, 1922), 8, 12; Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun in Modern India* (Bloomington, IN, 2007), quotation, 1.

**19** On anti-colonial "worldmaking," see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ, 2019).

had 38 economic units instead of 26, 27 different currencies instead of 13, and customs frontiers that extended an additional 6000–7000 kilometers. After a brief period of recovery and growth in the late 1920s, the Great Depression unsettled the convictions of many former advocates of free trade. John Maynard Keynes famously wrote in 1932, "I sympathize ... with those who would minimize, rather than those who would maximize, economic entanglement between nations. Ideas, knowledge, art, hospitality, travel—these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible; and above all, let finance be primarily national."<sup>17</sup>

Anti-global movements were closely linked to the collapse of continental empires and challenges to overseas empires. One of the most obvious parallels to interwar campaigns for autarky in Europe was the Swadeshi movement in India. The goal was a complete boycott of British goods and the increased production of homespun cloth (*khadi*) and clothing. "Our freedom will be won through the spinning-wheel," Mahatma Gandhi declared in 1921. He argued that spinning would protect female virtue, prevent famine, and promote Indian independence. "The revival of hand-spinning is the least penance we must do for the sin of our forefathers in having succumbed to the satanic influences of the foreign manufacturer."<sup>18</sup> Yet anti-colonial advocates of economic self-sufficiency in interwar India preached a self-consciously "globalist" political agenda. They argued that more economic independence would produce a more genuine form of internationalism based on cooperation rather than exploitation.<sup>19</sup>

In Ireland, the conservative government of Eamon de Valera promoted self-sufficiency in the name of independence from Britain. "I have said repeatedly that our guiding principle will be to make Ireland as self-contained and as self-supporting as possible," de Valera emphasized. But it would come at the cost of austerity. "If a man makes up his mind to go out into a cottage, he must remember that he cannot have in the cottage

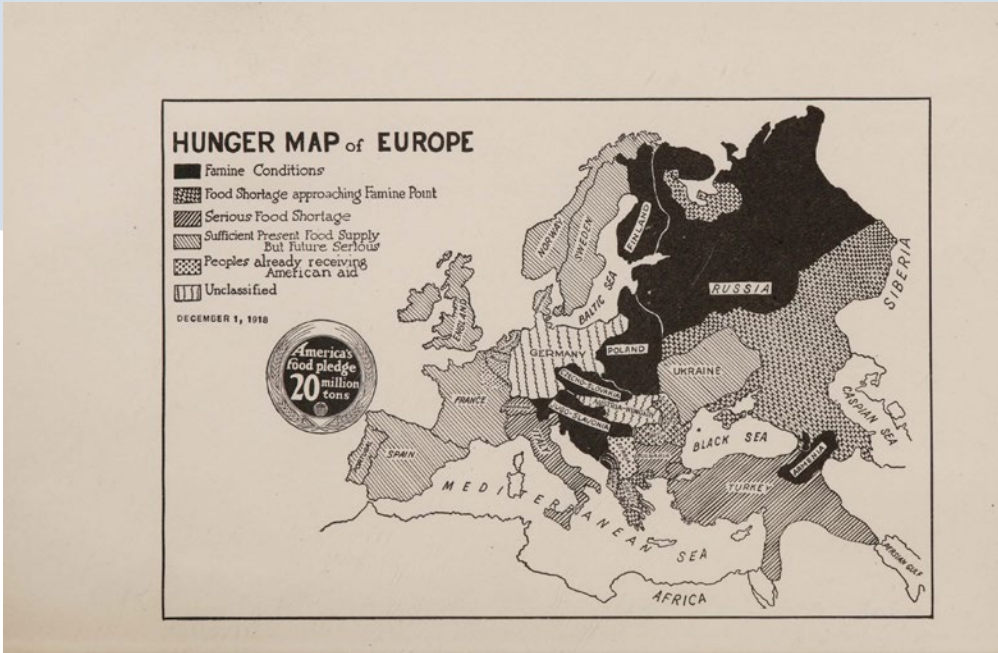
the luxuries around him which he had when he was bearing the kicks of the master," he preached.<sup>20</sup>

The problem was that while anti-colonial nationalists demanded an end to Empire, many states began to see the expansion and consolidation of empires as their best route to achieving their own "freedom" from the global economy. Britain and France both attempted to rely more on raw materials from their empires during the Great Depression. "Empire Shopping" became a mass movement in Great Britain in the 1920s, encouraging women to purchase, cook, and eat only foods grown in the Empire—which really meant supporting white farmers in places like Canada, Australia, and Kenya. In 1932, the Ottawa Agreement officially established the principle of "Imperial free-trade" in Britain, creating a system of preferential tariffs for trade within the Empire. Japan meanwhile strove to create an anti-colonial autarkic empire in East Asia. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was intended to be a self-sufficient regional bloc that was free of white, Western domination, led, of course, by Japan. Nazi geopolitical experts such as Karl Haushofer saw the Japanese empire (along with the United States and Russia) as a model for what Germany would achieve in Central Europe. Hitler and Mussolini are remembered for their efforts to conquer the world, rather than as anti-globalists. But the drive for Empire in interwar Italy, Germany, Japan, and elsewhere was justified in the name of achieving economic self-sufficiency—these were anti-global empires.<sup>21</sup>

The revolt against globalization was particularly fierce in states that had either lost their empires at the end of World War I, like Germany and Austria, or felt as though they had lost, like Italy. The Paris Peace Treaties transformed large sectors of the German, Italian and Austrian populations into bitter critics of globalization and liberal internationalism. That bitterness was exacerbated by hunger. During the First World War, Britain had imposed a successful naval blockade on Germany and Austria-Hungary, preventing food and crucial

**20** Eamon de Valera, "A Constructive Policy," August 22, 1927, *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera, 1917–73*, ed. Maurice Moynihan (New York, 1980), 153.

**21** Sven Beckert, "American Danger: US Empire, Eurafica, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism, 1870–1950," *American Historical Review* 122 (2017): 1137–70.



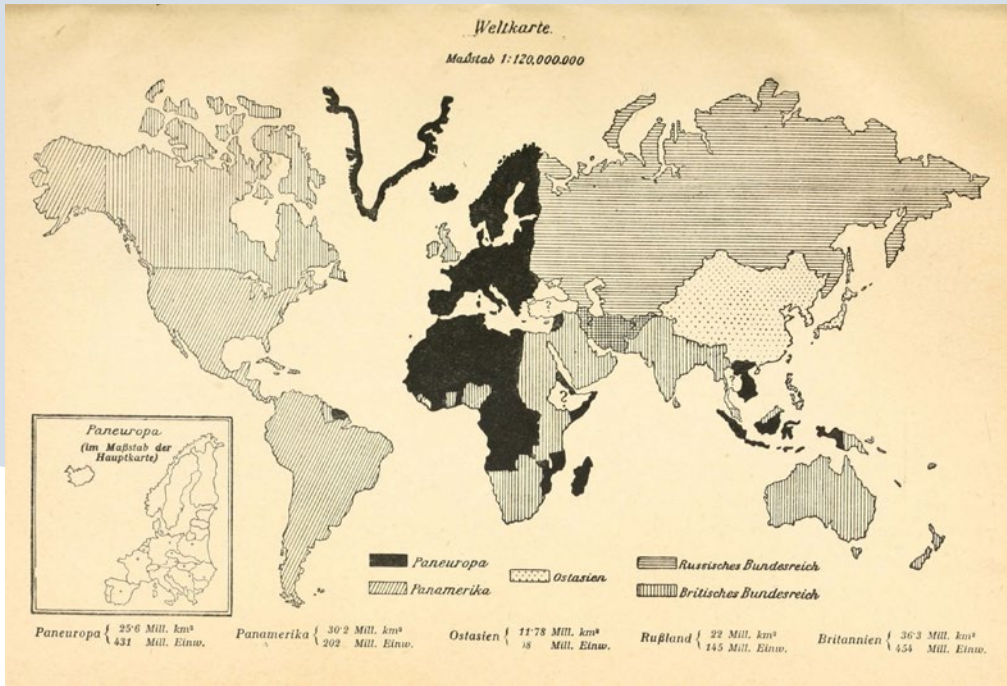
**Figure 1.** “Hunger Map of Europe,” from: U.S. Food Administration, *Food Sharing and Food Saving*, Garden City, N.Y., 1918. Source: Internet Archive.

**22** “Die wirtschaftliche Lage. Nach der Rede des Abg. Dr. Renner beim Metallarbeiter-Verbandstag in Linz am 13 Juli 1921,” *Tagblatt* (Linz), July 22, 1921, 2.

**23** “Der Massenaufmarch der Siedler und Siedlerfreude am 3. April,” *Der Siedler*, May 1921, 22.

supplies from reaching civilians. They continued the blockade after the war to force the losers to accept the terms of the Peace Treaties. The number of Germans and Austrians who starved to death is still being debated. But it is undebatable that many Central Europeans blamed the blockade for their defeat and vowed that they would never again be dependent for their security or survival on imported food.

Austria-Hungary had once been the largest free-trade zone in Europe. Its dissolution at the end of the war left consumers cut off from producers in successor states that erected high tariffs against one another. Austrians insisted that their new rump state was not viable. Social Democratic Chancellor Karl Renner declared: “As a consequence of the war we not only have no free trade, but protective tariffs in every country, direct barriers against foreign goods in every country, and often against foreign people as well.”<sup>22</sup> In Vienna, citizens took matters into their own hands. So-called “wild settlements” appeared around the city before the war ended, as unemployed workers and returning soldiers illegally occupied land, built dwellings out of wood planks, waste material, and dirt, and ate what they could grow. These radical gardeners organized themselves into a mass movement, demanding support from the government.<sup>23</sup> The settlement movement in Austria was explicitly about turning



inward rather than outward, colonizing the homeland *instead* of the rest of the world. “Inner colonization is pure colonial politics,” explained the Austrian *Kronenzeitung*. “The only difference is that it does not involve the colonization of some foreign land, but rather the colonization of our own homeland.”<sup>24</sup>

Initially the settlement movement had strong ties to Social Democracy. In 1920, Otto Neurath, the Vienna Circle philosopher (and Social Democrat), co-founded the Austrian Association for Settlement and Small Gardens with Hans Kampfmeier, a founder of the German garden city movement. The association employed Adolf Loos and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, a Communist and the first female architect in Austria, to design homes for settlers. Autarkic ideals were fundamental to Loos’s vision. “One often used to speak of Austrian cuisine,” he wrote. “Only today we have realized that this cuisine was only possible because there was a state-form called the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy ... we have now lost everything that nourished us. And that means re-education. We need to create our own national cuisine. The Bohemian dumpling, the Moravian Buchtel, the Italian schnitzel, all things that were an unshakable part of Viennese cuisine for centuries, must now be replaced by local foods.”<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 2.** Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi’s 1925 book *Panuropa* presented one vision of how the world might in the future be divided into five future regional blocs. Source: Internet Archive.

<sup>24</sup> Emil Magschiß, “Was ist Innenkolonisation?,” *Mein Stückchen Land, Wochenbeilage der Illustrierten Kronen-Zeitung für Gartenbau, Kleintierzucht und Tierliebhaberei*, December 2, 1932, 5

<sup>25</sup> Adolf Loos, “Wohnen lernen!,” 1921, reprinted in Adolf Loos, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna, 2010), 557–60.



**Figure 3.** Flooded streets in a settlement on the outskirts of Vienna, 1930. Source: Austrian National Library.

**26** Max Ermers, *Österreichs Wirtschaftsverfall und Wiedergeburt. Ein Wirtschaftsprogramm zur Selbstretterung* (Vienna, 1922); Heinrich Jungbauer, *Unabhängigkeit durch Landwirtschaft* (Vienna, 1920), 32–35.

**27** Margit Altfahrt, “Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Realität einer Arbeitslosensiedlung am Beispiel Leopoldau,” in *Die Zukunft liegt in der Vergangenheit. Studien zum Siedlungswesen der Zwischenkriegszeit*, ed. Margit Altfahrt et al. (Vienna, 1983), 77–100.

**28** Klara Friedländer, “Die neue Frauenfrage,” *Das Wort der Frau*, December 18, 1932, 3.

Loos, Neurath, and Schütte-Lihotzky promoted a utopian vision of settlers’ lives in modern, healthy, well-planned homes and communities. In reality, however, the settlement movement—and the broader movement for autarky—required sacrifice—of convenience, luxury, and variety—for the sake of independence. One settlement advocate suggested that settlers trade meat and potatoes for a local diet consisting solely of chestnuts, goat’s milk, and apples.<sup>26</sup>

These projects had mixed results. Many settlers still collected unemployment payments in the 1930s. Settlers in Leopoldau, on the outskirts of Vienna, had no schools, doctors, public transit, gas, electricity, sewage, or stores in the 1930s. Settlers interviewed decades later recalled hunger and bone-chilling cold, due to a lack of real heating in the winter.<sup>27</sup> Female settlers often had a particularly rough life, working 13- to 14-hour days. The entire settlement idea was premised on the unpaid labor of women and children.<sup>28</sup>

In Italy, achieving “freedom” from the global economy was one of Mussolini’s goals from the outset. Mussolini’s “Battle for Grain” began in 1925, partly as a response to the world’s closing borders. Achieving autarky became an official goal of the Italian state after the League of Nations imposed economic



**Figure 4.** Fascist propaganda poster publicizing the “National Competition for the Victory of Wheat,” c. 1926. Credit: Marka/Universal Images Group via Getty Images.

sanctions on Italy in 1936, in response to its invasion of Abyssinia. In fascist Italy, relentless propaganda instructed Italians (and particularly women) on the value of autarky. Weeks were designated to celebrate Italian products, such as the Festival of Bread, the Festival of the Grape, and the National Day for Rice.<sup>29</sup> Deglobalization also inspired the invention of synthetic technologies and materials that could replace imported goods (such as chinotto to replace Coca-Cola, and a textile made out of milk products called lanital—rayon was more successful).<sup>30</sup>

Italy had long maintained a global presence through the millions of emigrants who settled in Europe, North, and South America. Emigration had been the dominant solution to the

<sup>29</sup> Carol Helstosky, “Fascist Food Politics: Mussolini’s Policy of Alimentary Sovereignty,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9 (2004): 6.

<sup>30</sup> Tiago Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

**31** Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle, 2000).

**32** Quoted in Frank Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria: Italy, 1900–1962* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 146–47.

**33** Giuseppe Tassinari, *Ten Years of Integral Land-Reclamation Under the Mussolini Act* (Faenza, 1939), 11.

**34** Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria*, 144–45.

**35** *Relazione sull'attività della Delegazione di Littoria in Agro Pontino, nell'Anno 1939*, busta 35g, Records of the Commissariato Generale per Le Migrazioni e la colonizzazione Interna (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, Italy).

**36** Diane Ghirardo, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ, 1989).

**37** Helstosky, "Fascist Food Politics," 1–26.

problems of poverty and underemployment. Until the fascist era, the Italian government sought to transform emigrant communities into a diasporic empire that would substitute for formal colonies.<sup>31</sup> But in the 1920s, thanks to new American restrictions on immigration, Italians could no longer emigrate easily. Mussolini now wanted to deglobalize Italians—by actively preventing emigration and resettling potential migrants internally, repatriating migrants from abroad, and acquiring his own formal empire in Africa. These efforts fed one of the most ambitious “internal colonization” projects of the interwar period: the “reclamation” and settlement of the Pontine Marshes, just outside Rome. The *New York Times* described these marshes as “inhabited by only a few fever-racked wretches.”<sup>32</sup> For Mussolini, literally “draining the swamp” became the regime’s showcase project. Giuseppe Tassinari, the undersecretary of state in charge of this project, declared that the Pontine settlements represented the “foundation for the self-sufficiency in food that is the basis of our battle for autarky.”<sup>33</sup> At its peak in 1933, close to 125,000 workers were employed on the land reclamation project in the marshes. Many died in abhorrent working conditions. In keeping with the regime’s focus on autarky, settlement workers who contracted malaria were sometimes treated with mercury, an ineffective and painful treatment used to replace imported quinine.<sup>34</sup>

The Pontine settlements might be seen as “anti-global cities,” as they were meant to embody autarkic, rural, and fascist values. But as in Austria, the reality was far removed from the propaganda.<sup>35</sup> Administrators constantly complained about settlers. There were high levels of theft, slowdowns, alcohol abuse, and absenteeism.<sup>36</sup> While Italy was 95 percent independent in food production by 1939, this was at the cost of increasing food prices and declining nutrition and caloric intake. By the beginning of the Second World War, massive food shortages contributed to the regime’s growing unpopularity.<sup>37</sup>

Hitler announced his Four-Year Plan to achieve autarky in 1936. But anti-internationalism was always part of the Nazi party platform: in the July 1932 election campaign, Hitler proclaimed, “There’s so much international, so much world conscience ... there’s the League of Nations, the Disarmament Conference, Moscow, the Second International, the Third International—and what did all that produce for Germany?”<sup>38</sup> The Nazi ideal of *Blood and Soil* was formed in opposition to Jewish cosmopolitanism, migration, liberal internationalism, and the global economy. At the first *Reichsbauerntag* (Reich Farmers’ Day) in 1934, Undersecretary of Agriculture Herbert Backe lamented that in previous decades, “The relationship between the Volk and its territory was blown up by the transnational global economy. Individuals no longer felt bound to the Volk to which they belonged by blood, did not feel rooted in their native soil, but instead belonged above all to a global economic community.”<sup>39</sup>

When the Nazis came to power in Germany and eventually in Austria, they did so on a surge of anti-global rhetoric and activism. But there was ongoing disagreement among leading Nazis about the ideal relationship of the Third Reich to the global economy. In 1936, Robert Ley, the leader of the German Worker’s Front, mocked Germans who would ostracize a German housewife “who buys Brazilian coffee or a few Spanish lemons as a traitor to the Volk.” For Ley, autarky meant backwardness. “Cutting ourselves off from the global economy ... over the long run means not only renouncing conveniences of daily life that are provided by foreign goods, it means renouncing participation in the cultural and technological advancement of the world.”<sup>40</sup> The regime conveyed contradictory messages to the German public in the 1930s. German women were flooded with propaganda urging them to cook and eat only local foods, boycott chain stores, and take up spinning to knit their own textiles. Nazi leaders continued to promote settlement. Behind the scenes, however, an expert in the Reichsbank confessed, “Even if we had 20

**38** Klaus A. Langweit, ed., *Hitler: Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen*, vol. 5, pt. 1: *Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933* (Munich, 1996), 284.

**39** Johann Wilhelm Ludowici, *Das Deutsche Siedlungswerk* (Heidelberg, 1935), 26.

**40** Robert Ley, “Autarkie oder Exportförderung? Der Außenhandel als Werkzeug der Wirtschafts und Sozialpolitik,” Berlin, 1936, R2501/6608, Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

**41** “Die Reichsbeauftragten über die Rohstofflage,” August 12, 1936, R2501/6608, Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

**42** Wei Li, *Deutsche Pläne zur Europäischen wirtschaftlichen Neuordnung, 1939–1945* (Hamburg, 2007).

**43** On Ford’s village industries, Howard P. Segal, *Recasting the Machine Age: Henry Ford’s Village Industries* (Amherst, MA, 2005).

**44** Ralph Borsodi, *Flight from the City: An Experiment in Creative Living on the Land* (New York, 1933).

million sheep, we would only be able to produce 20 percent of the wool we consume domestically.”<sup>41</sup> The solution to this problem was imperial expansion, which was pursued in the name of the *Grossraumwirtschaft* (large-regional economy). After 1939, Nazi policymakers shifted from seeking autarky for the German nation toward achieving autarky for continental Europe—dominated of course by Germany—and inspired by the United States, Japan, and Russia.<sup>42</sup>

The interwar quest for greater self-sufficiency ultimately justified racist forms of imperial conquest. But it was never only a far-right fantasy. People rushed back to the land in democracies as well as dictatorships. For example, in the United States during the Great Depression, more people moved from the city to countryside than from country to city, reversing a decades-long trend. Since the United States was one of the only countries in the world which produced enough food to feed its population, the goal was individual, rather than national self-sufficiency. During the Great Depression, Henry Ford required his workers in Michigan to cultivate subsistence gardens to keep “one foot in industry and another on the land.” He was a fierce opponent of the New Deal and saw subsistence farming as an alternative to the dole.<sup>43</sup>

The Back to the Land movement was also popularized by lifestyle reformers such as Ralph Borsodi. On his farm in upstate New York, Borsodi, his wife, and their two children produced almost everything they needed. “We weave suitings, blankets, carpets, and draperies, we make some of our own clothing; we do all our own laundry work; we grind flour, corn meal, and breakfast cereals; we have our own workshops, including a printing plant, and we have a swimming pool, tennis court, and even a billiard-room.” Their diet consisted almost entirely of foods they grew themselves. Borsodi, like Ford, denounced the welfare state, insisting that subsistence farming was a great alternative to unemployment insurance.<sup>44</sup> Ford and Borsodi were both staunch opponents of the New Deal, but President Roosevelt actually agreed with many of their prin-



principles. One New Deal initiative resettled tens of thousands of unemployed workers on what were called “subsistence homesteads,” where they were supposed to grow their own food. As in Europe, these back-to-the-land movements were rarely successful on their own terms. In the United States, critics immediately remarked that Borsodi’s vision required a huge initial investment in equipment, far beyond the means of most workers. As public housing advocate Catherine Bauer noted, it also required “a husky wife with a positive taste for domestic production, no desire to do anything else with her time, and a gift for home education.”<sup>45</sup>

But the fact that these settlement schemes failed does not mean that they were not consequential. As it turns out, the Great Depression was not the beginning of a permanent return to the land or to farming in America. But it may have accelerated the shift of populations toward the suburbs. It did not take much time for the subsistence gardens and poultry sheds envisioned by planners to be transformed into flower gardens and green backyards with swing sets and barbecues.

Interwar anti-globalism had many unexpected, long-term consequences. Often, it produced new and unexpected forms

**Figure 5.** The Jersey Homestead project was developed near Hightstown, New Jersey, by the U.S. Resettlement Administration in an attempt to establish a self-sufficient agricultural community. Photograph by Russell Lee, 1936. Source: Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>45</sup> Catherine Bauer, “The Swiss Family Borsodi,” *The Nation*, October 25, 1933, 489–90.



**Figure 6.** “Keeping a Promise” advertisement, *Batanagar News*, 1938. Courtesy of the author.

<sup>46</sup> On Bat’a, see Zachary Doleshal, *In the Kingdom of Shoes: Bat’a, Zlín, and Globalization, 1894–1945* (Toronto, 2021).

of globalization or internationalism. In the 1930s, for example, companies like the Czechoslovak shoe company Bat’a and the Ford Motor Company responded to anti-foreign sentiment and high tariffs by moving production overseas and using local labor. They exported factories, instead of shoes and cars, and advertised themselves as “local firms.” Ford ceded more and more control over his plants to governments and managers abroad, including Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Bat’a’s advertisements in India in the 1930s boasted that Bat’a shoes were all “Made in India” by Indians—and many Indians still think Bat’a is an Indian company. It was the beginning of the multinational corporation as we know it.<sup>46</sup>

There were many other lasting consequences of anti-globalism, big and small. New technologies and products were developed in the quest for self-sufficiency, from synthetic fabrics to artificial fertilizers to the synthetic rubber and fuel

manufactured at Auschwitz. Meanwhile, internationalists did not simply pack up and go home. Experts in organizations like the League of Nations developed new initiatives to aid victims of deglobalization, such as minorities and stateless people. Economists in the late 1930s also promoted new ideas which they hoped would spread the benefits of globalization more equally. They set the stage for the construction of the postwar welfare state and institutions for economic development that aimed to reduce inequality domestically and internationally (such as the Bretton Woods system).

I have attempted to reframe the history of interwar Europe in terms of a history of anti-globalism. I have inevitably raised questions about our own moment. This project was inspired by contemporary events. I began my research in 2016. There was a refugee crisis, Donald Trump was elected, British citizens voted for Brexit, and right-wing populist regimes were on the rise everywhere. Still, I would not have predicted when I began this research on deglobalization that our lives would be interrupted by a disruption in global travel and trade on an unprecedented scale. Nor could I have predicted a war in Ukraine that would disrupt global supply chains and bring a new focus on energy independence. During the pandemic in the United States, people reportedly fled cities, seeking homes with gardens where they could socially distance. Local foods and homespun goods have never been more popular, as anti-globalism has acquired a new focus on environmental sustainability. As in the interwar era, anti-globalism and deglobalization are resurgent on the left and right, in democracies and in authoritarian states.

It is certainly a good moment to examine the last major era of anti-globalism, to remember the extent to which globalization is not unstoppable or inevitable. As a historian, however, I do not see this only as a story about what the past can teach us about the present. Rather, I have been even more struck by the ways in which the present has reshaped my understanding of the past—everything from the effects of the First World

War and the Great Depression to the rise of fascism. Between the two World Wars, the continent was rebuilt to insulate and protect people from globalization's perceived and real negative consequences. Those efforts were halted only by the Second World War, after which no one wanted to return to 1918 or 1929. It is still unclear when or how today's campaign against the world will end, but we can be certain that our own world will be transformed by it.

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