

[1996] 1997; Schäfer 1995). Indeed, we felt compelled to attempt a new *Ortsbestimmung der Gegenwart*[3] or a determination of the character of the present time. Arguing that “postmodernity” was pointing only to the end of modernity without declaring what was developing in its stead, we rejected postmodernity as an epochal designation and searched for a proper name, a distinctive expression of the profound historical change that we were observing. *The Global Age* did that for us. Proclaiming “The Global Age has arrived,” Albrow channeled the numerous globalizations that had come to the fore since 1945 into a “Historical Narrative for the New Age” (107, 97).

- 4 I concurred with the critique of metanarratives in my first paper on global history when I wrote, “What must be resisted is the temptation to create a new grand narrative for our time” (1993:50). Twenty years later, I still think the construction of self-serving grand narratives is harmful and their deconstruction a public service. Additionally, I think that it would be wrong to extend the Lyotardian verdict to conceptual models that seek to grasp historical structures. Historical models and frameworks are acceptable, should be tried, and must be allowed, including one-dimensional models like the globalistic “mythistory” that the world is flat (Friedman 2005). Like all scientific theories, models and frameworks invite critical assessment and testing; they operate openly, do not legitimize the powers that be, or totalize regional, national, or tribal aspects.
- 5 In this contribution, I present such a framework and an answer to the question: What is the project of the Global Age? Based on the global history of energy domestications and transitions, my answer is “Pangaea II,” which I understand as the clear and present challenge to domesticate ourselves and the human planet all together.[4] Of course, speaking about a second Pangaea presupposes a first one; let me therefore briefly introduce Pangaea I.

300 Million Years Ago: A Supercontinent Accomplished by Global History I

- 6 *Pan-Gaea* means all-earth, which comes from the name *Gaea* being the goddess of earth in Greek mythology and *pan* indicating “all of something.” Pangaea is also the name for a single supercontinent reaching from pole to pole encircled by Panthalassa, a corresponding superocean. Alfred Wegener (1880-1930), the first scientist to propose an all-earth world, realized one day that South America and Africa must have been connected long ago. He was not the first to think so but he was the one who followed through. Theorizing that earth’s continents might not be fixed, but horizontally mobile, he suggested that they could have formed a coherent landmass during the late Carboniferous Period, about 300 million years ago, and that Pangaea – the *Urkontinent* in his language[5] – must have broken up into Africa, Antarctica, Australia, Eurasia, India as well as North and South America. This was a harebrained scheme. Nevertheless, Wegener was intuitively sure that it was true. In January 1911, he wrote to Else Köppen, his future wife:

Presently an idea came to me. Look at the world map again please: doesn’t the east coast of South America fit precisely with the west coast of Africa, as if they had been connected formerly? ... I must pursue the idea (Drake 1976:44).

- 7 And pursue it he did. Wegener developed his “continental drift” theory in four, steadily expanding editions of *The Origin of Continents and Oceans* ([1915 & 1929] 1980; 1922; 1920; 1915). Yet drift theory was widely derided. Wegener’s “mobilism” was trumped by “fixism,” geology’s reigning dogma of a permanent configuration of continents and ocean basins. It was, therefore, very unlucky that Wegener did not live long enough to see the final acceptance of his Copernican vision of moving continents. In 1930, only fifty years old, Wegener perished in Greenland on a polar expedition. Some thirty years later, plate tectonics delivered moving continents and budding oceans. In 1971, John Tuzo Wilson confirmed that the erstwhile heresy of continental drift had become geology’s new orthodoxy.

Formerly, most scientists regarded the earth as rigid and the continents as fixed, but now the surface of the earth is seen as slowly deformable and the continents as “rafts” floating on a “sea” of denser rock. The continents have repeatedly collided and joined, repeatedly broken and separated in different patterns, and, very likely, they have grown larger in the process. This scientific revolution, as others before it, was long in the making, but it was not until the late 1960s that it began to succeed (Wilson 1972:v).

- 8 Exploration of the cyclic pattern of supercontinental formation and breakup suggests that Wegener’s Pangaea was neither the first nor the last of its kind (Dalziel 1995). North America, for example, is presently moving away from the mid-Atlantic ridge at a rate of roughly four centimeters per year, which amounts to 4,000 kilometers in 100 million years. Considering the movements of all tectonic plates, a new material

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