



Sebouh David Aslanian



Joyce E. Chaplin



Kristin Mann



Ann McGrath

# AHR *Conversation* How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History

## PARTICIPANTS:

SEBOUH DAVID ASLANIAN, JOYCE E. CHAPLIN,  
ANN McGRATH, and KRISTIN MANN

In the last few years, the *AHR* has published six “Conversations,” each on a subject of interest to a wide range of historians: “On Transnational History” (2006), “Religious Identities and Violence” (2007), “Environmental Historians and Environmental Crisis” (2008), “Historians and the Study of Material Culture” (2009), “Historical Perspectives on the Circulation of Information” (2011), and “The Historical Study of Emotions” (2012). For each the process has been the same: the Editor convenes a group of scholars with an interest in the topic who, via e-mail over the course of several months, conduct a conversation, which is then lightly edited and footnoted, finally appearing in the December issue. The goal has been to provide readers with a wide-ranging consideration of a topic at a high level of expertise, in which the participants are recruited across several fields and periods. It is the sort of publishing project that this journal is uniquely positioned to undertake.

This year’s topic is “How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History.” Many working historians—perhaps more those of past generations than today—might regard this question as irrelevant if not downright strange. Most traditional history, after all, is spatially defined by categories such as the nation-state, or chronologically constrained by the temporal boundaries of an event or era, or otherwise contextualized in terms of time and space by implicit “givens.” At least since the rise of the *Annales* school of history in the 1970s, however, these assumed categories have been challenged by such concepts as the Braudelian “world” and the *longue durée*, and subsequently by the vogue of “microhistory.” In more recent years there has been the rise of global or world history, as well as, even more recently, “deep” history, which challenges historians to think not only in years or centuries but across the vast spaces of evolutionary and even planetary time. The conversation that follows touches on all of these topics.

Joining the Editor here are Sebouh David Aslanian, a scholar of early modern Armenian and world history at UCLA; Joyce E. Chaplin, a historian of the environment and of science from Harvard University; Kristin Mann, an African historian at Emory University; and Ann McGrath, a scholar of colonialism and Indigenous history at the Australian National University. In addition, all of these

scholars have an active interest in global and world history, which largely provided the theme of the conversation.

**AHR Editor:** Unlike other themes that have been the subject of *AHR* Conversations in the past few years—transnational history, environmental history, material culture, emotions in history, etc.—our topic differs in the sense that it does not conform to a subfield or a well-defined area of concern among historians. One does not see, for example, job postings listed with a preference for candidates with an expertise in “scale.” I would suggest, then, that we are dealing with a question that belongs to a distinctive category of concerns—profoundly methodological (and thus of particular interest to professional historians), but also quite vast in its implications for how we approach historical experience in very basic terms (and thus relevant to anyone who thinks about history). So, to begin the conversation, I would first like to ask why this topic has emerged at this particular time. To reflect in some manner on questions of scale, in terms of both time and space, is clearly not new. And at least implicitly, every historian makes a choice concerning the spatial and chronological dimensions of his or her object of study. But there seems to be a degree of urgency as well as self-consciousness that informs our interest in this question today that was not present before. What factors or aspects of awareness explain this urgency?

**Sebough David Aslanian:** The question of why matters of scale in historical analysis have become an object of scholarly concern and self-reflection in recent years is a fascinating one that provides us with an invitation to reflect on some of the fundamental changes that our discipline has been going through in recent decades. You have yourself suggested elsewhere that the last time there were significant changes in the way historians thought about scale was in the mid-1980s, when the powerful concept of the *longue durée* by the *Annales* historians and the correlative downplaying of narrative and *histoire événementielle* were frontally challenged by Italian microhistorians, and particularly by the work of Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, and others. Yet it seems that in the debates of the period and the important interventions by Lawrence Stone and Peter Burke, in particular, the question of scale was not addressed in a methodical manner, that is to say, in the way it has only recently begun to be probed.<sup>1</sup>

There are probably many factors that have propelled this rising concern with scale, and I have in mind scale in its spatial/geographical, topical, and temporal dimensions. I would like to focus on the factor I feel most competent in, namely the high level

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present* 85 (November 1979): 3–24; Peter Burke, “History of Events and the Revival of Narrative,” in Burke, ed., *New Perspectives in Historical Writing* (University Park, Pa., 1995), 233–248. However, an early recognition and problematization of scale appears in Jacques Revel’s celebrated essay on microhistory and the *Annales*. See Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” in Revel, ed., *Jeux d’échelles: La micro-analyse à l’expérience* (Paris, 1996), 15–36. Surprisingly, more recent reflections on scale have also been quite sparse. For two investigations into the matter, see David Christian, “Scales,” in Marnie Hughes-Warrington, ed., *Palgrave Advances in World Histories* (Basingstoke, 2005), 64–89; and Patrick Manning, “Scale in History: Time and Space,” in Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (Basingstoke, 2003), 265–273.

of success the world history movement has enjoyed since the 1980s, both as an up-and-coming research field and especially as an undergraduate-level teaching field.<sup>2</sup>

More than any other factor, perhaps, the creation of the subdiscipline of world or global history over the last few decades has compelled us historians to come face to face with the importance of scale or size in our discipline. Chief among the reasons for this is the fact that on the face of it, world history does not uphold what might be called the default scale of analysis privileged by conventional historians since the discipline was professionalized during the nineteenth century, namely the modern nation-state or its national communities, to which history as a professionalized activity was, one is tempted to say, “handcuffed” almost from the moment of its birth. Yet I think the reasons why we may initiate this conversation by linking our profession’s self-reflexivity on “the question of scale in history” goes beyond just this “shift upwards of geographical scale” from the unit of the nation-state to larger and more encompassing units that the world history movement has set in motion.<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember that spatially, temporally, and topically, world historians have shifted scales on *numerous* occasions, and quite dramatically, over the last few decades alone. Since the 1980s, at least, spatial or geographic scales have ranged from supranational units such as continents, oceans and seas, hemispheres, and the entire globe to eventually the whole galaxy. Temporally, large-scale analyses, usually favored by world historians, have also varied in scope, from the Braudelian *longue durée* of several millennia to the recent interest in “deep” history, which embraces what one of its founders calls the “biological or cognitive turn” in historical thinking and pushes the time scale back to several hundred thousand years, well beyond the few millennia usually associated with the post-nineteenth-century professionalization of our discipline.<sup>4</sup> Finally, of course, there is “big history,” in which, according to its most famous proponent, David Christian, the unit usually operates on “a scale of between 10 and 20 billion years!”<sup>5</sup> So to answer your question, I would say that the *sheer degree and speed* with which world historians of different stripes have experimented with size and scale in history from roughly the 1980s to the present must be one of the reasons why matters of scale have now begun to attract methodological scrutiny. I might be wrong, but I cannot remember a comparable time in the past when the discipline was subjected to such a staggering variety of scales to choose from, to so many optical ranges to consider. I have addressed only one possible reason for the emergent interest in the question of scale and size in our discipline. No doubt my distinguished colleagues will tackle other, equally compelling perspectives.

**Joyce E. Chaplin:** Sebouh gives an excellent overview of what we might call the endogenous trends that have made academic historians more aware of matters of

<sup>2</sup> See the marvelous assessment in Kenneth Pomeranz and Daniel A. Segal, “World History: Departures and Variations,” in Douglas Northrop, ed., *A Companion to World History* (Chichester, 2012), 15–31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley, Calif., 2008), 7.

<sup>5</sup> David Christian, “The Case for ‘Big History,’” *Journal of World History* 2, no. 2 (1991): 223–238, here 223. See also Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2004).

scale in their analyses.<sup>6</sup> I would like to add to those developments some exogenous trends, meaning those from other disciplines and from public debate, which have also affected how historians do their work and have imparted a sense of urgency about how much they can (and possibly should) take on at a time. Just as a start, I will mention how increased interest in larger scales, of both time and space, has had clear inspiration from the sciences and social sciences, as well as from public discourse more broadly defined.

Although there is much talk about the recent rise of “big data,” in fact historians have been following a longer trend in the social sciences to use computers in their work. Since the end of World War II, it has become easier to collect and manipulate quantifiable information; scientists were the first to work this way, but social scientists soon followed. Some of the first social historians who used computers, starting with punch cards and large mainframe services, contributed to deeper analyses of small places (such as towns or parishes), but it is not surprising that the ever-easier amassment of data sets would encourage subsequent generations of historians to define projects on larger geographic and temporal scales. Once again, historians are following scientists in this regard. Digital humanities is a new name for one evolving version of big data. Text mining, for example, is the Internet-assisted search for and analysis of linguistic information. Google Ngram, the best-known example so far, represents the frequency of words or phrases that were used in “lots of books,” meaning the ever-expanding database represented in Google Books.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, social scientists have been defining and analyzing global society, and they have encouraged attention to phenomena that can credibly be defined on this large scale. This is true of economics and anthropology, to name two parallel academic fields that have, albeit in quite different ways, examined globalization. Sociologists, likewise, have for some time been examining long-term and global trends; many historians trained in social history are likely to be familiar with the large-scaled work of sociologist Charles Tilly. Historians are not alone in seeing promise in “big” stuff, therefore. Indeed, many global historians actively engage literatures in other social science fields, with an ongoing, if sometimes vexed, relationship with the original and econometric definition of “globalization.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of how larger and longer units of analysis have entered historical interpretations in the West and beyond, see Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, with Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harrow, UK, 2008), 256–261, 331–338, 364–366, 387–401.

<sup>7</sup> See the historic methodological exhortations for big history (the first time around) in William O. Aydelotte, Allan G. Bogue, and Robert William Fogel, eds., *The Dimensions of Quantitative Research in History* (Princeton, N.J., 1972); Val R. Lorwin and Jacob M. Price, eds., *The Dimensions of the Past: Materials, Problems, and Opportunities for Quantitative Work in History* (Princeton, N.J., 1972). On the digital humanities, see Daniel J. Cohen et al., “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 452–491; and “Forum on Evidence and Interpretation in the Digital Age,” *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 1 (2011): 63–94. And stay tuned to the Working Group on “Historicizing Big Data” at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, [http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptII\\_Aronova\\_Oertzen\\_Sepkoski\\_Historicizing](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptII_Aronova_Oertzen_Sepkoski_Historicizing).

<sup>8</sup> Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984); Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens, eds., *Conceptualizing Global History* (Boulder, Colo., 1993); Robert W. Cox, “A Perspective on Globalization,” in James H. Mittelman, ed., *Globalization: Critical Reflections* (London, 1996), 21–30, here 21–22; Bruce Mazlish, “Comparing Global History to World History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 3 (1998): 385–395; Emma Rothschild, “Globalization and the Return of

Finally, there is the much-discussed state of the planet. Environmental history used to be a specialized pursuit, and those who wrote in that subspecialty took on discrete environments, sometimes fairly small ones. But more historians are now taking up environmental topics, are tackling them on a much larger scale, and are referring to ongoing discussions of the fate of the entire Earth—the latter factor certainly adds to the sense of urgency that the Editor has asked us to think about. Newspaper headlines (and their new media equivalents) are doubtless important influences here. But again I think that this is a moment in which science is having an impact on academic history, after a period of time when it did not. All this is to say that I don't think historians are redefining scales of analysis all on their own.<sup>9</sup>

**Ann McGrath:** Scale can expand the possibilities of history. The word “scale” denotes more than size and measurement. It also signifies the exteriors of fish and dinosaurs, dental plaque, music, and dry human skin. It can denote climbing up or over and separating things into layers. Its etymology—variously attributed to shell, cup, husk, weighing device, ladders, and stairs—goes back to the thirteenth century A.D.<sup>10</sup> Scale as a relation of distance reminds us of our discipline's increasing interest in deep time. “Why scale now?” The shallow chronology of history as a national project provides a compelling reason to expand historical scale. Speaking for myself, I am keen to explore temporal scale in order to consider why we place walls between the imaginative history of “ourselves” and other peoples and times. Despite the discipline's efforts to de-center nation—especially via transnational, global, and new imperial histories—the historical timelines of today's settler-colonizer states continue to be shaped by national framings. And despite the presence of peoples known to have lived on the same lands, history's restrictive margins relegate whole categories of humankind to a timeless void. Historians may authorize history to be told for the pre-moderns and selected ancients, but not for the too-ancients. For example, the Australian Aboriginal people occupied their continent for about 50,000 years, but they gained “a history” only after the arrival of European boats. Any pre-Pleistocene-era evidence is generally collected and analyzed within scientific discourse and sits outside historical narratives.<sup>11</sup> As Joyce noted, however, historians are in-

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History,” *Foreign Policy* 115 (1999): 106–116; A. G. Hopkins, “The History of Globalization—and the Globalization of History?,” in Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London, 2002), 11–46; David Armitage, “Is There a Pre-History of Globalization?,” in Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York, 2004), 165–176; Michael Lang, “Globalization and Its History,” *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 4 (2006): 899–931.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge, 1986); Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (London, 1991), with subsequent and revised editions; Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge, 1995); Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (London, 1999); J. R. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York, 2000); Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York, 2001); Alfred W. Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (New York, 2006); Anthony N. Penna, *The Human Footprint: A Global Environmental History* (Chichester, 2010); Joyce E. Chaplin, *Round about the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit* (New York, 2012); Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change, and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Conn., 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Webster's New International Dictionary; Oxford English Dictionary; OED Online.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Veth and Susan O'Connor, “The Last 50,000 Years: An Archaeological View,” in Alison

creasingly starting to reengage with big data sets and big science. Recall that in the early nineteenth century the whole field of environmental studies was called “natural history.” Today, perhaps it is the recent breakthroughs to which Sebouh alludes, including biological and neurological research, that best explain why historians are becoming so interested. Recent breakthroughs in genetics research enable scientists to examine long trails of human migration and intermixture over millennia.<sup>12</sup> The history embodied in our cells, in our DNA and our brain structure, potentially holds data to explain the individual and collective human condition on a grand temporal scale in a way that literacy-based archives simply cannot do. Particles of a scale too small to be seen by the human eye reveal clues about the *longue durée* of humankind. Here, as in human history itself, the micro and macro are not only companions, but can also be one and the same creature. A move to the macro scale does not require a move away from the moment, the minute, and the *minute*. Placed alongside each other, they are mutually informative.

Meanwhile, are the scientists taking any interest in what historians are doing? Perhaps, as Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail have demonstrated, we need to make this happen ourselves.<sup>13</sup> These interactions and collaborations will enable us all to think about human history more expansively—and along different registers of temporal scale.

Thinking about place may also help. In specific locations, stratigraphic layerings of time can reveal both the everyday and the exceptional, potentially linking the local and the global. In order to provoke a wider conceptualization of where historical thinking might travel, I prefer “global” and “deep” to “big.” In relation to the cosmos, “big history” is helpful in reminding us of that great unfathomable happenstance, not to mention the strangeness of time itself. “Global” reminds us of the whole wide world, its diasporas and connections, as opposed to “international,” which sometimes loiters too long in the European zone. I like “deep” best of all, because it suggests expanses of time that don’t have to go backward and forward in linear fashion, but that can be located in spaces of temporal unpredictability. The second meaning of the word “deep” can be a desire to probe, reminding us to avoid those superficial readings of the remnants and surfaces that are the easiest to find and to observe.

**Kristin Mann:** I thank the Editor for launching our conversation with a stimulating first question. And thank you, Sebouh, for commencing it by thoughtfully charting

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Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *The Cambridge History of Australia* (Cambridge, 2013), 2 vols., vol. 1: *Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, 17–42; John Mulvaney and Johan Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia* (Washington, D.C., 1999); Peter Hiscock, *The Archaeology of Ancient Australia* (London, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Keith Wailoo, Alondra Nelson, and Catherine Lee, eds., *Genetics and the Unsettled Past: The Collision of DNA, Race, and History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley, Calif., 2011). The Inaugural Conference of the Harvard Initiative for the Science of the Human Past was held at Harvard University in November 2013. An interdisciplinary symposium, “Deepening Histories of Place,” was held at the Australian National University in June 2013; Mary-Anne Jebb and Ann McGrath, eds., *Deepening Histories in Place and Time* (Canberra, forthcoming 2014).

world history's multiple contributions to considerations of scale in history. To the issues you have raised, I want to add another: the desire of historians who have worked on new temporal, spatial, and topical scales—both very large and very small—to claim for history intellectual terrain that it had previously left to other disciplines. Examples might include deep history's preoccupation with evolution, energy, and ecosystems and smaller-scale history's narration of the imagined lives of individuals and families in the past, which commonly tests the limits of the use of evidence in historical inquiry and can yield what Natalie Zemon Davis has referred to as "history in the conditional tense."<sup>14</sup>

Deep history simultaneously manifests a commitment to countering a trend in many fields of history toward focusing on the modern and neglecting earlier times. The reorientation that it calls for challenges historians to move methodologically beyond the analysis of written texts. My own field, African history, fought that battle at its inception in the mid-twentieth century. In the process, it made important contributions to the use of oral traditions, in particular, in historical research.<sup>15</sup> Even so, since the late 1970s, most Africanist historians have gravitated toward the study of the modern (read colonial and postcolonial) eras. Awakening among historians and history students a wider engagement with a much longer past is perhaps overdue. (Smail calls the deep past "the new intellectual frontier of historical research.")<sup>16</sup> Insofar as that engagement empowers historians to make new and broader contributions to humanistic, social scientific, and scientific knowledge, it may speak to a yearning among members of our profession to broaden the reach and show the power of history in intellectual inquiry. These considerations inform the urgency and self-consciousness of historians' interest in questions of scale today.

Practitioners and advocates of "big" or "deep" history define their projects in compelling intellectual terms. Thus Christian argues for the comparability of big moments of change in the history of the universe, while Shryock and Smail write of the power of deep history to help us rethink the narrative motifs of progress and human mastery over nature that still shape much history (and other social science) writing today. The late Robert N. Bellah's book *Religion in Human Evolution*, which embraces big history and agrees that the distinction between history and prehistory is arbitrary, draws on biblical sacred history, mediated by Hegel, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx.<sup>17</sup> While not narrowly "presentist" in their concerns, these texts none-

<sup>14</sup> Christian, *Maps of Time*; Shryock and Smail, *Deep History*; Ian Morris, *The Measure of Civilization: How Social Development Decides the Fate of Nations* (Princeton, N.J., 2013); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York, 2006); Davis, *A Passion for History: Conversations with Denis Crouzet*, ed. Michael Wolfe, trans. Davis and Wolfe (Kirksville, Mo., 2010); Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton, N.J., 2011); Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago, 1965); Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, Wis., 1985); Joseph C. Miller, ed., *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, Conn., 1980); Luise White, Stephen Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001).

<sup>16</sup> See his home page on the Harvard University History Department website, <http://history.fas.harvard.edu/people/faculty/smail.php>.

<sup>17</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge,



theless speak compellingly to urgent contemporary world problems, from global warming, to ethnic, religious, and economic conflicts, to the need of humans to find ways to coexist on our planet with other organisms, whether large mammals or microscopic sea creatures. If each generation must write its own history, then it is perhaps not surprising that those practicing the craft today are searching for new approaches, defined in part by scale, that enable them to address compelling problems of our age.

Let me conclude my contribution to this opening exchange with a final observation. Computing technology, which has developed with lightning speed since about 1980, has greatly facilitated the collection and analysis of large bodies of data in historical and other research. Equally important, the World Wide Web has facilitated the collaborative sharing and analysis of data and the writing of books and articles across spatial and disciplinary boundaries. Both have opened new frontiers of research that are transforming history, including in its thinking about scale.

**AHR Editor:** I think we have assembled a number of reasons why we do, why we can, and why we should think broadly and deeply, in terms of both time and space, about scale in history. We *do* out of urgent concerns clearly global in scope, and more generally because of “globalization.” We *can* for reasons having to do with developments in the sciences and social sciences and the emergence of new technological capacities to process “big” data and foster scholarly collaboration. And we *should* because it has long been necessary for history both to unhook itself from the narrative of the nation-state and to follow any and all experiences across any and all boundaries, both spatially and temporally. Some of this is new, and some of it, as has been mentioned, has been evoked in previous generations. Among your many provocative comments, I would like to pick up on one—Ann’s statement that “as in human history itself, the micro and macro are not only companions, but can also be one and the same creature. A move to the macro scale does not require a move away from the moment, the minute, and the *minute*. Placed alongside each other, they are mutually informative.”

It may be useful to explore the implications of this comment. I recognize that the context of Ann’s statement has to do with “particles of a scale too small to be seen by the human eye”—specifically with humans on a cell or DNA level. But what about the “micro” of the integral human subject? In going both large and small in the ways posed in your comments, what happens to the “human” scale? Are the trends you endorse in line with a now no-longer-new move away from a human-centered perspective in the so-called human sciences? With the kinds of conceptions of scale adumbrated here, what happens to human identity, subjectivity, agency, and the like?

**Kristin Mann:** Ann’s statement also resonated with me. In going large, it seems to me, human scale can remain alive and well. While teaching early African history this

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Mass., 2011), x–xi; Steven M. Tipton, “Bellah, Robert,” in Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof, eds., *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*, 2 vols. (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2012), 1: 130.

semester, my students and I have talked about hominid and human evolution on the continent, innovations in hunting and gathering between 16,000 and 9000 B.C.E., and the independent development of food production and metalworking in specific regions as humans innovated and adapted to local ecosystems. Human actors were central in these transformations, if not the only variables in them. Thanks to the research of scholars in a variety of disciplines—archaeology, linguistics, biology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology, as well as history—we know the outlines of the cultures of a number of population groups that existed across the continent during these millennia, which enables us to begin to think about human subjectivity. We can explore questions of identity as we discuss encounters among different population groups when their members migrated or met for trade or other purposes. Few thought experiments have proven more stimulating to my students than trying to imagine the inner life of the first hominids who made tools, or humans in a specific culture who adapted to changes in their environment by experimenting with plant cultivation or animal domestication. This thought experiment, I hope, did begin to break down the walls between the students' imagined histories of themselves and of early Africans.

At the risk of being overly Africa-centric, I want to respond to another of Ann's comments from the perspective of my own field. In her opening contribution, Ann wrote that the historical timelines of today's settler-colonizer states continue to be shaped by national framings, and that this reality has robbed Australian Aboriginal peoples of a history prior to the arrival of European boats. So was the determination of scholars in the era of the nationalist struggle and decolonization to prove that Africans had a history prior to the arrival of European boats. Some of these researchers extended their timeline deep into the past in part to take on European imperial assumptions about the racial inferiority of African peoples.<sup>18</sup> A fortunate legacy of this particular national framing is that African history as a field continues to claim the distant past as part of its terrain, even if most practitioners now research the colonial and postcolonial periods. The regnant textbook on African civilizations to 1800 (written by a historian) devotes six chapters to the millennia before the arrival of European boats, and only two to the centuries afterward but well before European colonization.<sup>19</sup> The relationship of European imperialism and the subsequent birth of new nations to conceptions of time in the writing and teaching of history is indeed a rich subject. Expanding our spatial optic to investigate it across oceans and continents will yield new insights into the ways nation and time have been prefigured in the study of history around the world.

In reflecting on the imaginative leap necessary to think about the very small in deep time, I find myself having trouble eliminating human scale, although not at all moving

<sup>18</sup> For many years after its founding in 1960, the oldest and best-known serial in the field, the *Journal of African History*, regularly devoted the lead article to archaeological, historical linguistic, or other research that illuminated the very early African past.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville, Va., 2002). The African case is wholly consistent with Shryock and Smail's argument that "engagement with events and societies before European expansion, before textual evidence, is often considered politically irrelevant unless such events and societies can be interpreted . . . through intellectual lenses crafted during the great shift to colonial and postcolonial modernity" (8).

beyond written texts. Perhaps that is a product of my limitations as a particular kind of historian. I can do it when considering the methods of certain kinds of research relevant to the larger project or key moments of change, but not when reflecting on basic interpretive questions such as the co-evolution of hominids, humans, and other organisms as they coexist in ecosystems or the mutual constitution of nature and culture in specific environments. In deep history, human actors may not always be at the center of the story, but they surely remain important in it. Several questions recur as I mull these issues. Will the deep narratives we tell have the power to affect how our audiences imagine the past and themselves in the world? Can they inspire more of us to think beyond nation, ethnicity, race, and the human? Humans are exceptional in at least one sense: they alone read, watch, and listen to the history we produce. They alone can be persuaded by it.

Joyce noted that historians are not redefining scales of analysis all on their own, and Sebouh and Ann also refer to the turn to science. What are the implications for this new trend for the training of our students? How well are we equipping them to pursue these new research possibilities? Interdisciplinary training programs that seek to integrate knowledge, methods, and perspectives across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities abound in colleges and universities. Are historians appropriately involved in shaping them?

**Ann McGrath:** My previous comment was intended to speak to any historians who fear that “big history” is pushing them out into the cold—that somehow intimate microhistories are not important anymore. Rather, I am convinced that well-crafted intimate stories, if properly contextualized in time and space, can touch people’s hearts and are emblematic and instructive of larger stories and of the human condition. My comments were also to gesture toward the intricate relationship between the internal and external workings of human bodies in space—some of whose different worlds historians can understand a little, and some even less.<sup>20</sup>

The Editor has already started mapping out the potential dangers that may arise from a disciplinary desire to expand temporal scale. I see some different ones. For one thing, marking out sweeping tracts of time may be the latest strategy to reclaim and possess the grandiose. Grand narratives used to tell the stories of land-hungry imperial adventurers who mastered continents and oceans, apparently en route to publishers, and eventually to the government archives. Although delimited to “nation time,” historians of nation also wrote histories grand in scale. After social and cultural historians set about egalitarianizing and enriching history’s weave, certain battlers in the “history wars” took to lamenting the demise of the grand narrative.<sup>21</sup>

Memory studies and concomitant moves toward “a history of the present” offer strategies for connecting both the smallest and the grandest narratives with contemporary

<sup>20</sup> Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain*; Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, N.C., 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, 2004); Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York, 1997).

resonances. Then there are the pressing questions about how to write history.<sup>22</sup> Practicing a poetics of historical performance—as opposed to logic-burdened analysis—is no escape from the politics of history.<sup>23</sup> For practitioners such as myself, a desire to expand the temporal scale of academic history into the deep past follows a certain moral imperative to overthrow imperial chronologies. Let’s admit, however, that we share a professional fetish for applying indelible chronologies, whose enforcement becomes an indicator of scholarly rigor. Dates have long been accepted as the beginnings and endings of “history” in nation-states. Efforts in deep history could become another victim of this penchant for closing off eras and epochs that categorize the rise of and the beginnings and ends of, thus detracting attention from the complexities of what happened at the time and in between, with its inevitable mix of continuity, rupture, surprise, comedy, tragedy, and wonder.<sup>24</sup>

By the same token, we need to be wary of harnessing “deep time” as a new historical device with which to reassert white sovereignty over the pasts of dispossessed peoples.<sup>25</sup> In Australia, many Indigenous people cherish the richness of their deep past as one of their most valuable remaining assets, and they hope to deploy it as a means of creating jobs and other economic opportunities. They want to collaborate in research, and demand to have their families involved in the history game.

In the case of the National Museum of the American Indian, the product of much community consultation, it foregrounded histories on two scales—the macro continental hemisphere of two Americas and the localized geography of the cross-generational cultural. In a museological process that led, understandably, to a preeminent narrative of Indigenous cultural survival against great odds, many modules of the exhibition jump rather quickly over the painful political history of colonizer-sovereignty and its powerful state-making.<sup>26</sup> While it is difficult to generalize over so many rich exhibits, it is worth considering whether “big geography” history contributed to downgrading and partially shielding the ascendant nation-state(s) and their museum-visitor citizens from having to weigh the scale of responsibility for the ongoing legacies of past actions.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Maria Nugent, *Captain Cook Was Here* (New York, 2009); Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, *How to Write History That People Want to Read* (Basingstoke, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Greg Dening, *Performances* (Carlton, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Kirsty Douglas, “‘Forsaken Spot’ to ‘Classic Ground’: Geological Heritage in Australia and the Recuperative Power of the Deep Past,” *Environment and History* 12, no. 3 (2006): 269–296; Denis Byrne, “Deep Nation: Australia’s Acquisition of an Indigenous Past,” *Aboriginal History* 20 (1996): 82–107; Denis R. Byrne, “Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2003): 169–193; Ian J. McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Lanham, Md., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Muddle of Modernity,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 663–675; Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Past, Present, and Future: Challenges of the National Museum of the American Indian* (Washington, D.C., 2011).

<sup>27</sup> See also Ann Curthoys, “Does Australian History Have a Future?,” *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no. 118 (2002): 140–152, here 151–152.

On another tack, if a more inclusive history profession is serious about deepening the time span of human history, Kristin's references to falling into Africa-centrism may be the long-neglected continental "centrism" to which all humanities scholars should properly aspire. It is worth noting, however, that many Aboriginal Australians reject scientific explanations of humanity's African origins, stating that they have always been in their own country; they came out of a deep time that is continent- and place-specific. And after all, they have the "dreaming" or "everywhen" historical narratives to prove it.<sup>28</sup>

As academic historians, we might want to expand "history's time," but I think we also need to shake up seemingly stable notions of both time and history. Problematizing the human scale means challenging our temporal sense; it does not mean that we have to leave out the humans or their concerns, past or present. As David Armitage suggests, taking on at least two time zones, the "trans-temporal," is itself seen as a sufficiently risky practice.<sup>29</sup> Yet if we wish to test our historical imaginations in deep time, we will need to accommodate far more speculative and risk-taking approaches that challenge some of our fundamental preconceptions.<sup>30</sup> It will require that historians open their interpretive toolbox to tackle not only artifactual and environmental evidence, but also the diverse cross-cultural understandings of time and space that may contain essential truths for all.

**Joyce E. Chaplin:** It may be useful to keep in mind that historians have been using different scales to explain non-humans as well as humans, all the better to examine the full dimensions of the human experience. Different material scales help to demonstrate the materiality of the past, at the very least. In this regard, environmental historians have explored how differently sized zones can have different meanings, just as different scales of human experience do. We have already discussed the big geographies that may have recently caught historians' attention—the oceanic, continental, or even global—but smaller regions may be of at least equal interest as having intrinsic characters, much as human groups have had certain histories or even as individual humans have been thought to have biographies. Three examples of this trend within environmental history would be Richard White's *The Organic Machine*, Marc Cioc's *The Rhine* (subtitled *An Eco-Biography*), and David Day's *Antarctica: A Biography*.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> On Aboriginal concepts of time and place, see Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Kensington, 2011). W. E. H. Stanner coined the term "everywhen"; Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays, 1938–1973* (Canberra, 1981). *Message from Mungo* (Ronin Films, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> David Armitage, "What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the *Longue Durée*," *History of European Ideas* 38, no. 4 (2012): 493–507.

<sup>30</sup> Shryock and Smail, *Deep History*.

<sup>31</sup> Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995); Marc Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815–2000* (Seattle, 2002); David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (New York, 2013). Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), pursues the same kind of analysis in political rather than environmental terms. And historians of medicine, both academic and popular, have recently given diseases biographies, as well; see the Oxford University Press series that has produced biographies, so far, of asthma, cholera, diabetes, obesity, and thalassemia, <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/category/academic/series/medicine/bod.do>.

In a similar way, we could also consider studies of commodities or even individual objects, as operating within distinctive historical scales, typically in ways that are unexpected, therefore revealing. Even more so than in “biographies” of places, these object histories seem intended, much as Ann has explained for studies of humans, to show the merits of thinking on both small and large scales. Sidney Mintz perhaps pioneered this approach with his study of sugar as a hemispheric capitalist villain; Mark Kurlansky and others have popularized Mintz’s mode of analysis with studies of cod, salt, and different beverages in different glasses. Neil MacGregor, director of the British Museum, followed suit in his BBC radio broadcasts and later book *A History of the World in 100 Objects*.<sup>32</sup>

I will add two final points about this intersection of materiality and scale. First, surprisingly little about it is new. Scholars of literature point out the popularity of “it-narratives” in the eighteenth century, for example, in which semi-personified things travel great distances in order to make some point about the humans who think they control them. That genre continued with nineteenth-century consumer fascination with the migratory capacity of mass-produced objects, including Marx’s critiques of that fetishized fascination, an emphasis that continues in several recent global histories, such as Christopher Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World*.<sup>33</sup> Second, the examination of the large impact (and geographies) of individual, small objects has had a considerable popular audience, as my chosen examples should make clear. Which raises the big question: When academic historians choose a scale on which to work, what audiences are they thinking of for that work? Does the intersection of micro and macro, quotidian and grand, have a charmingness associated with popular writing? Is it for that reason avoided by academics? If we within the academy decide to stick with the smaller scales of the postnational histories of ordinary people, is this considered to be more valuable professionally, perhaps safer? If we choose to work on larger scales, do we do so in parallel with the obvious problems of global society, or to confront those problems?

**Sebouh David Aslanian:** One theme that stands out in the rejoinders of my colleagues is the enthusiasm I sense, and one that appears to be gaining ground elsewhere, for both “deep” and “big” history. This enthusiasm is understandable given the recent “marketing success” of deep history and may actually promise to hold the key to unlocking some of the problems that Ann and Kristin face in their respective fields. However, I would argue that the apparent urge to escalate scale (temporally and spatially) raises as many questions as it answers and brings with it its own methodological pitfalls.

<sup>32</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985); Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Saved the World* (New York, 1997); Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (New York, 2002); Tom Standage, *A History of the World in Six Glasses* (New York, 2005); Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (New York, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> On it-narratives, see Mark Blackwell, *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, Pa., 2007); Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, N.J., 2012). On commodities and commodification, see Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986); C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass., 2004), especially pt. 2.

Both big and deep history seem to leave little room for two intimately connected elements without which I would contend that our profession would lose much meaning: (1) “reading” primary sources (whether written or otherwise) as a way of reconstituting and interpreting/explaining aspects of the past, and (2) human agency, as in the way individual actors or communities “make” history by shaping or adapting to their environment(s). One of the risks inherent in supersizing our scales or optics when it comes to historical work is that we will eclipse philology, if not totally remove it from the historian’s craft. This brings us back to one of the problems faced by world or global history as a research field (as opposed to an undergraduate teaching one), namely that it has not, to date, come up with a compelling agenda for how world historians can and should conduct research. Professionalized historians working on the default scale or unit of analysis, that is, the national state, of course have the “archive” in which to work. Indeed, they are expected to cut their teeth in the very archive created or appropriated and centralized by the (European) nation-state from the mid-nineteenth century onward.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, to the extent that world or global history is a consequence of late-twentieth-century “time-space compression,” globalization, and the waning of the nation-state system, what would be an appropriate archive for world history?<sup>35</sup> If world history is to be more than a vigorously developing teaching field, as I think it ought to be, then it is legitimate to ask what is to be the archive of world historians. All these questions about the research dimension of our profession assume that professional research and critical inquiry into the past are salutary things and can and must be combined with large-scale macroanalyses of the past of the kind that is associated with the “new” world history movement since the 1980s. They also assume that research and critical inquiry are, deep down, fundamentally philologically driven pursuits.<sup>36</sup> They involve slowly reading and assessing documents, preferably in multiple languages, and constructing, on the basis of that reading, an internally coherent and *analytically* sound argument about the larger world-historical past that involves connections, comparisons, and exchanges. Now, if this has proven to be a thorny issue yet to be compellingly resolved by practitioners of world history, whose scale seems relatively minuscule compared to what recent trends portend, then I wonder how the problem will be dealt with when the scale is escalated or lengthened to encompass the Paleolithic or the Big Bang?

In this second question, we have been asked to ponder on “what happens to human identity, subjectivity, agency, and the like” when we supersize scale in historical analysis. My sense is that there seems to be an inverse relationship between scale and human agency; in other words, the greater the scale of analysis (temporally or spatially), the less room is left for accounts of human agency. I appreciate Ann’s sug-

<sup>34</sup> See the excellent treatment on the historical constitution of archives in Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2002), chap. 4.

<sup>35</sup> For the influential concept of “time-space compression,” see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1991), chap. 15. See Barbara Weinstein, “The World Is Your Archive? The Challenges of World History as a Field of Research,” in Douglas Northrop, ed., *A Companion to World History* (London, 2012), 63–78. For discussion of a plan to create a world archive in 1946 at the United Nations, see Emma Rothschild, “The Archives of Universal History,” *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 375–401.

<sup>36</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Intertwined Histories: *Crónica* and *Tārīkh* in the Sixteenth-Century Indian Ocean World,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 4 (2010): 118–145, here 120.

gestion (also echoed by Kristin) that “to expand the temporal scale of academic history into the deep past follows a certain moral imperative to overthrow imperial chronologies,” and Kristin’s thought on how “in deep history, human actors may not always be at the center of the story, but they surely remain important in it.” However, I would like to invite them to address more sufficiently the question of human agency and subjectivity and how deep history can help us understand this better.

In this connection, I would like to highlight, however provisionally, the way micro-history may actually better solve the issues brought up by the Editor in his question. Here I invite your attention to a very stimulating introduction to a special issue of the journal *International History Review* edited by Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, who point out that there are at least three related but distinct methodological and analytical (as opposed to purely recreational) advantages to introducing micro-scale analysis into what they call transnational history, which for our purposes here also includes global or world history. First, a microhistorical focus on global history “does allow for bringing actors and agency back into the analysis, something that is usually missing in macro-social analysis of cultures and societies.”<sup>37</sup> This seems, indeed, a very important way that microanalysis of the global can contribute to restoring a “human and individual dimension” to the largely impersonal and “Olympian” narratives of global history and globalization, which to date have focused on the establishment of global networks of exchange and circulation where pride of place is given to empire and state formation and the movement, circulation, and consumption of commodities (alluded to by Joyce) such as spices, silk, silver, South Asian textiles, diamonds, emeralds, and even ostrich feathers; little or no attention, however, has been accorded to human beings and their agency in comporting themselves to the global and impersonal forces around them.<sup>38</sup> Microhistory’s attention to details or “trifles,” to use Edward Muir’s phrase, promises to restore the role of human agency and subjectivity to the largely agency-devoid macro-narratives of social history that penetrated the discipline of world history at a time when it was on the rise in the 1990s and have pretty much rested there undisturbed and undetected since.<sup>39</sup>

Struck, Ferris, and Revel also point to a second contribution that a microhistorical focus can make to global history—namely, that through a focus on certain unusually cosmopolitan individuals who led “global lives” and on whom archival information happens to be abundant, the historian is able to use intense biographical study to illuminate in concrete ways worldwide forces of imperial, commercial, or biological expansion, integration, and connection in ways that would not have been possible without micro-scale analysis of an individual’s global life unfolding simultaneously in multiple locations around the globe.<sup>40</sup> Here one is reminded of Natalie Zemon

<sup>37</sup> Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, “Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History,” *Size Matters: Scales and Spaces in Transnational and Comparative History*, Special Issue, *International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011): 573–584, here 577.

<sup>38</sup> Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York, 2007), 300.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Muir, “Introduction: Observing Trifles,” in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore, 1991), vii–xxviii.

<sup>40</sup> Struck, Ferris, and Revel, “Introduction,” 577. For a useful attempt to weave together a collection



Davis's essay praising the virtues of "decentering history" in a globalized world that "widens [the historian's] scope, socially and geographically, and introduces plural voices into the account."<sup>41</sup> It is easy to see how the exploration of the "spatial multiplicity of individual actors' lives and experiences" can complement her project.<sup>42</sup> The third advantage, Struck and company point out, is that "zooming in and out from grand and large-scale questions to microanalysis, case studies of individuals or small groups and vice versa enables the historian to fulfill his craft and the ethic of the discipline by working close to primary sources."<sup>43</sup> Once again, this is an issue that needs to be properly addressed. While I am sympathetic to the larger concerns of the world history movement and would in no way wish to dismiss the usefulness of synthetic research based on reliable secondary sources or of using sources beyond archival documents, I am also wary of the near-complete absence of philologically based, source-critical work that relies on spade work and careful interpretation of the "traces" that are at the disposal of the historian. A microhistorical turn in world history thus promises to deliver on most of the benefits associated with "big-picture," macro studies of the human past, but without turning its back on our profession's philological grounding.

**AHR Editor:** In our discussion thus far, most of the attention has been on the "wide and deep" scale, even when, as with this last exchange, there has been significant and interesting acknowledgment of how the microhistorical or individual could be blended into a global approach. All of you, in one way or another, are practitioners and exponents of what has been called "supersized" history; and you have presented persuasive cases for why and how today's historians should embrace this approach. The fact is, however, that many of our colleagues will resist or refuse configuring the past in these terms, finding reasons, some good, some less good, to teach and write history that remains encapsulated in the particulars of the nation-state, race, class, gender, ethnic groups, communities, and the like, without any compulsion to consider, at least in any rigorous fashion, broader or global trends and forces. One legitimate reason for this demurral returns us to the question of agency and subjectivity, which was addressed in the last round, but not, I don't believe, sufficiently. François Furet noted that historians are of two sorts: those like Michelet and those like Tocqueville. The first consider history from the perspective of historical subjects—their hopes, fears, and expressed interests; the second from the perspective of history itself—what happened not necessarily because of what people felt and thought, but often despite it. Here, then, is an assertion, posed deliberately categorically: Global or deep history is necessarily Tocquevillian in this sense. (I am, I realize, merely restating Sebouh's challenge "to address more sufficiently the question of human agency and subjectivity and how deep history can help us understand this better.") To be sure, as Kristin and Ann have noted (in somewhat different

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of biographies in the early modern period, though with very little methodological self-reflection, see Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World," *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (May 2011): 188–202, here 190.

<sup>42</sup> Struck, Ferris, and Revel, "Introduction," 577.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

ways), broad and deep history can restore to particular peoples a sense of their own past, one that “claim[s] the distant past as part of [their] own terrain,” or “overthrow[s] imperial chronologies.” But beyond this, it is virtually axiomatic that the more we are removed from the lives of actual people, the less we can reconstruct the contours of their lives and the meanings they create for themselves. And here I would cite as well Joyce’s provocative remark, which, it seems to me, suggests that with global history we might find ourselves, willy-nilly, in complicity with global trends: “If we choose to work on larger scales, do we do so in parallel with the obvious problems of global society, or to confront those problems?”

**Joyce E. Chaplin:** I agree that we still—and always—need histories of the local, the quotidian, the regional or national, the subjective. And I would disagree with any suggestion that we should all become historians of long chronologies and big geographies, just as I would disagree with any proposal that we should all do anything in lockstep. Any framework for research and interpretation works best when it is designed to answer whatever question a scholar asks. A diversity of scholarly questions (and therefore of scholarly apparatus) is a litmus test of strength in the profession.

But I don’t agree that “supersized” history must ipso facto neglect the individual or the local—nor that a focus on the individual or the local has to ignore larger implications or developments. I am suspicious of that correlation, even as I’m aware that the perception of a correlation is precisely what makes many historians suspicious about “big” history. (Though in fact, some practitioners of “microhistory” have used microcosms to examine change over long periods, as Carlo Ginzburg did with the witches’ sabbath.) I welcome Furet’s distinction, which I would restate in terms of emic versus etic perspectives on history. The former use actors’ categories, the assumptions and beliefs that were used by people in the past. In contrast, etic phenomena are not part of the world of historical actors themselves, but instead are visible to outsiders, including historians. This is slightly different from Furet’s distinction, but I think it gets at a fundamental difference among scholars as to how they think about the past. Do they begin with what people in the past thought? Or do they try to maintain a kind of objectivity by not paying attention to what past actors themselves knew or understood?<sup>44</sup>

My strongest objection to the new move to consider longer chronologies and bigger geographies is that it has tended to be etic, even though it doesn’t always need to be. There is often an acceptance that the big picture represents a perspective that historians can have but that the people they study may not have had. This assumption has been ingrained in most studies of the *longue durée* since Braudel. But it strikes me as patronizing, as if we somehow know much more than people in the past did, especially people outside the modern West. Yes, of course we have knowledge they didn’t (just as they had knowledge we have lost).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân

But whether people in past times did not have ways of thinking big is something we should investigate, not assume. The history of cartography has established that almost all human cultures have depictions of the whole world, as well as representations of particular localities within that larger geography. So too do human cultures exhibit a variety of ways to represent extended chronologies. Even the ideas of big-ness that historians are using today would have been familiar to at least some people in the past. Definitions of space on a planetary scale go back to antiquity in the Mediterranean world. Ideas of deep time go back in Europe to the late eighteenth century; Adrienne Mayor's work on Native American and classical Greek and Roman interpretations of fossils argues for the possibility of even older and culturally more varied comprehensions of deep time.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, these big views were not familiar only to the highly educated or privileged, but can credibly be used to explicate a great many human lives. In the European Middle Ages, for example, illiterate sailors used the concept of a large, spherical world to practice navigation. Their navigational knowledge may have been distinctive, but it wasn't unique. When European sailors began systematically to map the Pacific Ocean in the eighteenth century, they used the sophisticated knowledge that Pacific Islanders had already generated about the world's largest ocean. The history of one individual, the Polynesian priest-navigator Tupaia, who assisted James Cook with charting the Pacific, demonstrates all of this beautifully. We would generate flawed histories of past times by assuming that large and small units of analysis are mutually exclusive, or that our ability to think big now has no antecedents or comparands for the people we study.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, I want to amplify my point about globalization. Fundamentally, historians have not agreed about how to write global history because they can't agree as to whether they are writing a narrative of progress or of declension. It was economists who first defined globalization, and they defined it as a mostly positive development, pointing toward greater democracy and individual choice. For that reason, historians and cultural critics may regard globalization rather differently. If they think of globalization as the continuation of Western imperialism by other means, or else as a horrifying descent into commercialized mass culture and ecologically damaging con-

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Reynolds, 2 vols. (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), 1: 17–23; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992); Grove, *Green Imperialism*; Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Martin W. Lewis, "Dividing the Ocean Sea," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 188–214.

<sup>46</sup> Denis E. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore, 2001); Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (New York, 2008); Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1984); Martin J. S. Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Palaeontology* (London, 1972); Rudwick, *Scenes from Deep Time: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World* (Chicago, 1992); Adrienne Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); Mayor, *Fossil Legends of the First Americans* (Princeton, N.J., 2005).

<sup>47</sup> David Woodward, "The Image of the Spherical Earth," *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 3–15; Christine Garwood, *Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea* (London, 2007); Glyndwr Williams, "Tupaia: Polynesian Warrior, Navigator, High Priest—and Artist," in Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 2003), 38–51.

sumerism, they are unlikely to greet history done on a global scale as a welcome development. Indeed, historians' stated or silent suppositions on the matter may guide the extent to which they are accepting of large versus small canvases, and of who they are willing to portray within them. If they think that globalization is part of a progressive narrative, for example, then they may want to include as many people as possible within it. But if they regard globalization with horror, their position is likely to be different: why blame it on everyone, even implicitly, by cramming them into it? The writer Manuel De Landa has provided one very interesting solution in his presentation of *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, which interrogates the teleologies that underpin most interpretations of global human history. So far, historians have not followed De Landa's lead.<sup>48</sup>

**Kristin Mann:** Like Joyce, I resist the notion that historians should all embrace a single approach or that they need to do so for one or another type of history to make a meaningful contribution to our discipline. The Editor referred in his invitation to participate in this conversation to a "healthy, though somewhat unself-conscious eclecticism" that prevails in our discipline. He noted in his opening question the choices every historian makes concerning time and space when designing research. One hopes that these choices are thoughtful and carefully informed by the approach the scholar believes is best suited to the problem being investigated or most illuminating intellectually at a particular moment in time. In my view, our discipline is and should be capacious—broad enough to embrace diverse approaches and perspectives. Do we want all writers and teachers of history to adopt the same approach? I concur with Joyce that "a diversity of scholarly questions (and therefore of scholarly apparati) is a litmus test of strength in the profession."

Consensus appears to exist among us about the fruitfulness of combining the big and the small, the macro and the micro, the intimate stories and the larger narratives in the study of history. Struck, Ferris, and Revel's three arguments about the methodological and analytical advantages of introducing micro-scale analysis into transnational, global, or world history, as summarized in Sebouh's second response, make good sense to me. I stand with Joyce, moreover, in rejecting the idea that "super-sized" history must neglect the individual or the local, or that a focus on the individual or the local has to ignore the large. When considering these issues, however, we should perhaps distinguish analytically between transnational, global, or world history and the newer "deep" history. Where space is concerned, both approaches deploy optics that can zoom in to capture revealing close-ups or out to project broad panoramas. Deep history, though, is defined by a much longer time frame than global or world history normally considers.

Much good research of late has demonstrated that transoceanic and world history can incorporate the perspectives of "history itself" and "historical subjects," to pick up on the Editor's basic distinction. When individual subjects can be identified who

<sup>48</sup> Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York, 1997). See note 8 above, plus C. A. Bayly, Vijayendra Rao, Simon Szreter, and Michael Woolcock, eds., *History, Historians, and Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue* (New York, 2011); and William Coleman and Alina Sajed, eds., *Fifty Key Thinkers on Globalization* (London, 2013).

wrote texts that narrate at least episodes in their own stories, these sources facilitate the task of reconstructing “the meanings they create[d] for themselves.”<sup>49</sup> Historians who have studied non-literate subjects acting on a transoceanic or world scale have also managed, however, to recover subjectivity and meaning from a sensitive interpretation of behavior documented in the impersonal bureaucratic records of empires or nations.<sup>50</sup> Even when the identity of individual actors has in most cases been lost, creative scholarship has sometimes been able to demonstrate the agency of anonymous groups in shaping global processes and to draw conclusions about what inspired their actions. Quantitative analysis of slave voyages has shown, for example, that slaves embarked from the Senegambia were more prone to rebellion during the Middle Passage than those shipped from other regions of the African coast, particularly during the high-volume second half of the eighteenth century. Their resistance, inspired by changes in the political economy of societies close to the coast, led European and American slave traders to prefer other locations for their business. It spared other slaves in the region from export to the Americas.<sup>51</sup>

Where “big” or “deep” history is concerned, my responses to the Editor’s questions are different. The differences follow from “deep” and “big” history’s mission to move back in time before *Homo sapiens*, before speech, before writing, and from their conviction that history must move beyond an exclusive focus on humans, as well as from the interdisciplinary methods required to do both.<sup>52</sup> In narrating the past on such a vast scale, these historians have understandably selected big points of change or key themes and metaphors for investigation. Once humans enter the story, it is not so much that big or deep history cannot illuminate the lives of ordinary people. Surely an analysis of human food production has much to teach us about that subject—even if the absence of visual and verbal texts in many locations limits insights into subjectivity and meaning. In rare instances, individual lives in the deep past can be recovered and interpreted.<sup>53</sup> The decisive factor is rather that big and deep history have other priorities. I have already stated my belief that as a discipline, history should be capacious enough to welcome them, even if not all of us make the new turn. Whatever deep history’s own goals, tools and insights from it relevant to the role of caring, sharing, and helping or houses and home life in kinship have aided me in better understanding the creation of sodalities among African slaves and freed

<sup>49</sup> Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*; James V. H. Melton, *From Alps to Low Country: Confession, Community, and Slavery on a Colonial Southern Frontier* (New York, forthcoming).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, João José Reis, *Rebelião escrava no Brasil: A história do levante dos malês em 1835* (São Paulo, 2008), 485–495; Lisa Earl Castillo and Luis Nicolau Parés, “Marcelina da Silva: A Nineteenth-Century Candomblé Priestess in Bahia,” *Slavery and Abolition* 31, no. 1 (2010): 1–27; Scott and Hébrard, *Freedom Papers*. Legal records of different kinds have also been used to illuminate the subjectivity as well as behavior of non-literate transoceanic actors. See James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2011); Walter Hawthorne, “‘Being now, as it were, one family’: Shipmate Bonding on the Slave Vessel *Emília*, in Rio de Janeiro and throughout the Atlantic World,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45, no. 1 (2008): 53–77.

<sup>51</sup> David Richardson, “Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 58, no. 1 (2001): 69–92.

<sup>52</sup> Christian, *Maps of Time*; Shryock and Smail, *Deep History*.

<sup>53</sup> Wolfgang Müller, Henry Fricke, Alex N. Halliday, Malcolm T. McCulloch, and Jo-Anne Wartho, “Origin and Migration of the Alpine Iceman,” *Science* 302, no. 5646 (2003): 862–866; W. von Groenman Waateringe, “The Iceman’s Last Days: The Testimony of *Ostrya carpinifolia*,” *Antiquity* 85, no. 328 (2011): 434–440.

people—ordinary men, women, and children fashioning new social relationships against great odds—following their forced migration to certain parts of the Americas.<sup>54</sup>

Ann raised the politics of chronology in history in her second response. She has acknowledged being drawn to the expansion of temporal scale into the deep past by a moral imperative to overthrow (European) imperial chronologies. Yet she cautions that “deep time” may as readily be harnessed to reassert white sovereignty over the pasts of dispossessed peoples as to illuminate the complexities of what happened during the imperial encounter. Her point about Aboriginal Australians’ rejection of scientific explanations of humanity’s African origins is well taken. In Africa, too, indigenous keepers of historical memory have voiced such opposition.<sup>55</sup> Joyce has inserted a related distinction between emic and etic conceptions of time, space, and chronology into the conversation. A productive way forward may lie in turning encounters over conceptions of time, space, and chronology between autochthonous or other dispossessed peoples and more powerful imperial or national actors into subjects of historical inquiry. Historians, of course, have already begun to mine this vein in studies of slavery, emancipation, empire, and resistance to colonial and post-colonial states.<sup>56</sup> Yet much remains to be learned. Work on African populations in certain parts of the Americas in the era of slavery reveals the negotiation of temporal work rhythms to permit ritual practices that helped preserve a spatial imagination large enough for gods and spirits, as well as humans, to survive and a temporal one expansive enough to accommodate the dead and unborn, as well as the living. Such African conceptions of space and time threatened the young Brazilian nation-state and became sites of conflict and contestation. They contributed powerfully, moreover, to the development and maintenance of a transatlantic African identity and community.<sup>57</sup>

In closing, I want to respond to Sebouh’s concern about the eclipse of philology. Big or deep history may challenge us to broaden our conceptions of sources and evidence, but so too do histories on smaller temporal or spatial scales that seek to incorporate the perspectives of subordinated or dispossessed peoples. I do not question the call for careful reading of primary sources, although I surely also value provocative new syntheses by talented “lumpers” built primarily on the interpreta-

<sup>54</sup> Thomas R. Trautmann, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, and John C. Mitani, “Deep Kinship,” in Shryock and Smail, *Deep History*, 160–188.

<sup>55</sup> The title character in Dani Kouyaté’s perceptive film *Keïta: l’Heritage du griot* (AFIX Productions, 1995) chides the parents of a bright Mande schoolboy, “There are several kinds of truth . . . So don’t tell [the boy] any more that his ancestors are gorillas.”

<sup>56</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, Conn., 1980); Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem with Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, 1992); Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1993); David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1991, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana, Ill., 1996); Reis, *Rebelião escrava no Brasil*; João José Reis, *Domingos Sodré, um sacerdote africano: Escravidão, liberdade e candomblé na Bahia do século XIX* (São Paulo, 2008).

tion of secondary works. I wonder, however, about the identification of primary sources that can be carefully read to construct “analytically sound arguments” with archives linked to empires and nation-states. These can be rich repositories, to be sure, but they are also limited. If we are to de-center history and widen its scope as well as its scale to include a broader range of actors and questions, then we stand challenged to reimagine our archives, press against their limits, and indeed discover ways to write “unarchived” histories.<sup>58</sup> Even new philologies exclude much and many from the historian’s view.

**Sebouh David Aslanian:** I too share Joyce and Kristin’s concern about maintaining diversity of perspectives in the historical profession. I do not think anyone here has suggested that we should embrace one-size-fits-all history, a size that happens to be quite large judging from the discussion. I think we all realize that the point of our discussion here is to assess the relative merits or disadvantages that come with changing scale or optics in historical research and analysis. We kicked off this conversation by addressing the Editor’s question about why size has become an object of scholarly inquiry in our discipline only in recent years and was not a “hot topic” in, say, the late 1970s or 1980s, when the reigning *Annales* paradigm of social history, which was itself grounded on the study of the *longue durée* structures using a macro optic that had no or little place for *l’histoire événementielle* or for that matter for the individual, was challenged by Italian *microstoria*. I think we were all in agreement that part of the reason why scale has become a matter of self-reflection now has to do with the trend in recent decades, from roughly the early 1990s, to increase the optic and scale from the default unit of the national state to larger spatial units of varying sizes accompanied by “deeper” and “bigger” temporal scales. Moreover, I would probably not be mistaken in assuming that all of us here share the view that it was necessary and useful for world historians like William H. McNeill, Lefton Stavrianos, the late Jerry Bentley, and others to call for a magnification of scale in order to be better equipped to answer questions relating to global or world history. In my opinion, it is a given that the “new” world or global history (and I don’t see a fundamental difference between the two) needs to operate with a scale of analysis that supersedes the conventional unit of the nation-state.<sup>59</sup> If as historians our interest is to ask questions about the nature of the globalized world in which we all live and to be interested in the genealogy and history of this world and how it came to be shaped, then we simply cannot do so without resorting to macro or large-scale analyses. Whether we should try to supplement this with microanalysis is another issue that I have earlier tried to address and will return to below as well. Such significant issues as cross-cultural exchange, long-distance trading networks, and diasporic social formations—just to mention topics about which I feel some degree of competence since I study early modern global Armenians—cannot simply be understood using a national optic. The same can be said for global population movements, Columbian exchange, state breakdowns in the early modern period, the circulation and movement of diseases and bacilli, as well as artistic motifs, like Chinese dragons, from one end of Mongol Eurasia to the other during the *Pax Mongolica*, and the similar move-

<sup>58</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *Unarchived Histories: The “Mad” and the “Trifling”* (London, forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup> For an alternative view, see Mazlish, “Comparing Global History to World History.”

ment of silver and porcelain in the early modern period, not to mention the elephant in the room, namely the “Great Divergence” or the “rise of the West.”<sup>60</sup> All of these are burning issues that continue to be debated in the discipline of world or global history, which as Jerry Bentley reminded us not too long ago “refers . . . to historical scholarship that explicitly compares experiences across the boundary lines of societies, or that examines interactions between peoples of different societies.”<sup>61</sup> These questions (from “the rise of the West” to long-distance trade and diaspora) have become central to our profession over the last decade or so, really, precisely because they are connected in vital ways to who we are at present, to the fact that we live in an age of extreme time-space compression and global integration. If the founders of our profession in the nineteenth century, men like Ranke and Michelet, were quintessential national citizens and even nationalists, then many of us today are global citizens and postnationalists. I am not trying to sing the praises of globalism here, but to emphasize that none of the questions listed above that have drifted to the center of our historians’ agenda could even be properly posed, let alone answered, without shifting scales and using a global optic. Even if one is not concerned with any of the above questions and wants to study, say, old-fashioned national history or the history of gender, for instance, a good case can probably be made that there, too, a global optic may sometimes be a more effective way of making sense of the local or the national; hence the success of the “global turn” that we are witnessing in practically every part of our discipline.

Now I would like to return to the Editor’s question regarding the “demurral” that some in the profession might have about “supersizing” history. Like my other colleagues, I certainly share his concern for agency and subjectivity that seem to diminish with an expansion of scale almost in an inverse relationship, as I stated in an earlier response. However, we should make a categorical distinction here between “deep” and “big” history, on the one hand, and global or world history, on the other. I think the agency problem becomes particularly acute with the most recent round of pushing the project that essentially began with the *Annales* in the 1940s and 1950s to its logical limits. I am, of course, referring here to both “big” and “deep” history, which, like the global or world history from which they grew, may be seen as step-children to this earlier *Annales* project, as the Editor suggested at one point. As with the *Annales*, these new trends in world history scholarship seem to be attracting

<sup>60</sup> On the movement of diseases and bacilli, see William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N.Y. 1976). On the circulation of Chinese dragon motifs across Eurasia, see Matthew P. Canepa, “Theorizing Cross-Cultural Interaction among Ancient and Early Medieval Visual Cultures,” *Ars Orientalis* 38 (2010): 7–29; and Dickran Kouymjian, “Chinese Elements in Armenian Miniature Painting in the Mongol Period,” in *Armenian Studies in Memoriam Haïg Berberian* (Lisbon, 1986), 415–468. On Mongol textiles and their role as vehicles of cross-cultural exchange, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge, 1997). For silver, see the influential work of Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, “‘Born with a Silver Spoon’: The Origin of World Trade in 1571,” *Journal of World History* 6, no. 2 (1995): 201–221; and Flynn and Giráldez, “Born Again: Globalization’s Sixteenth-Century Origins (Asian/Global versus European Dynamics),” *Pacific Economic History Review* 13, no. 3 (2008): 359–387. For porcelain, see Robert Finlay, “The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History,” *Journal of World History* 9, no. 2 (1998): 141–187; and Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, “The New World History,” in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza, eds., *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Malden, Mass., 2002), 393–416, here 393; see also Bentley, “Introduction: The Task of World History,” in Bentley, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of World History* (Oxford, 2011), 1–18.



many converts. For instance, I sensed an eagerness by Ann and Kristin especially to embrace “deep” history, with its temporal scale of several hundred thousand years, which makes the Annales concept of the *longue durée* (measured by millennia) look quite minuscule indeed. I recognized and respected both Ann’s and Kristin’s differing reasons for how deep history could be helpful to their scholarly concerns, but I remained and still remain skeptical about its usefulness for world historians such as myself who are interested in early modern globalization, diaspora, long-distance trade, and cultural history. I am willing to see how deep and big history might be useful as new entrants into our diverse profession and might be helpful in answering a specific set of questions, but I also want to be cognizant of the fact that they bring with them their own baggage of problems and pitfalls. I guess if I had to sum up my reservations about this escalation of scale that is usually associated with them, I would say that they pose a grave risk to our profession’s two pillars: philology (and primary source research) and agency, which, following William Sewell, I define as one’s capacity “of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree.”<sup>62</sup> Reading Kristin’s last paragraph, I now realize that in defending philology, I have run the risk of giving the impression that I am in favor of going back to the days of a naïve belief in archives as neutral repositories of information. It should go without saying that I do not espouse such views; nor am I opposed to including non-written sources in our toolkit of information regarding the past. What I find problematic with “deep” history is that it appears to have absolutely no place for what used to be called source criticism. The same can be said about its “big” sibling. No matter how one looks at it, some philology in archives, after all, remains integral to our profession. What is more, this erosion of primary source research comes at a time when as educators we find ourselves telling our students about the necessity of reading and interpreting primary sources.<sup>63</sup>

Do these problems connected with agency and philology also exist on the level of global or world history? Certainly they do. To a large extent this is because, as the Editor has suggested, “global or deep history is necessarily Tocquevillian” in the sense that it studies the past and “what happened not necessarily because of what people felt and thought, but often despite it.” Joyce has chosen to see this as a distinction between emic and etic, which is certainly helpful. It is also possible to see this in terms of agency and structure. In this connection, it bears noting again that most world and global history over the last two decades has focused on structure at the expense of agency. In this, an argument can be made that the early world history movement and its pioneers in the late 1980s and early 1990s (at precisely the time when Annales-inspired social history had reached its climax and was succumbing to criticisms) followed the work of social historians and the social sciences. In his superb analysis and critique of how social scientists have used the concept of structure in their scholarship over the last few decades, William Sewell notes, “Structures tend to appear in social scientific discourse as impervious to human agency, to exist apart

<sup>62</sup> William H. Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), 125.

<sup>63</sup> I am grateful to Arash Khazeni for conversations with me on this point.

from, but nevertheless to determine the essential shape of, the strivings and motivated transactions that constitute the experienced social life. A social science trapped in an unexamined metaphor of structures tends to reduce actors to cleverly programmed automatons.”<sup>64</sup> I would contend that much of what Sewell states here about the social sciences seems to apply to historical writing by macro-oriented world or global historians as well. As we have seen, since at least the early 1990s, world historians have, rightly in my opinion, shifted optics or scale away from the conventional (small) units or nations to larger ones of hemispheres, continents, seas, oceans, and so on, ultimately encompassing the globe. They have done so because the conventional units of analysis deployed by professional historians seemed incapable of making sense of such large-scale processes as cross-cultural exchange and circulation, biological diffusion, population movements, and so on, much of which took place outside the boundaries of any given single state. However, one casualty of world historians’ increasing of scale is that they have left little room for agency in their big-picture accounts of the past focused on anonymous and impersonal processes (globalization, state formation, the growth of transregional networks of circulation and exchange, and so forth).

I will conclude by noting that the historiographic climate in world history today, characterized by the dominance of the “grand narrative,” macro approach to world/global history, is in some ways remarkably similar to the climate in the 1970s and 1980s, when the *Annales* paradigm of social history was challenged for leaving out micro events and individuals, and was supplemented and modified by new scholarship produced by proponents of *microstoria* in Italy.<sup>65</sup> Though several historians, whose work is otherwise not associated with the movement of world history, have recently navigated away from the “grand narrative” approach to global history to write more biographically centered studies, none of them has conceptualized the interface between the writing of world/global history and the tradition of *microstoria* associated with the influential work of Italian historians, especially Carlo Ginzburg.<sup>66</sup> Only very recently has such a conceptual exploration of the frontiers between microhistory and global or world history really begun.<sup>67</sup> It is hoped that more research

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> For background on the critique of *Annales*-style historiography by microhistorians in the 1970s and 1980s, see Jacques Revel, “Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social,” in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer et al. (New York, 1995), 492–502; Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, Conn., 2005), chap. 9. See also the influential essay by Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, “The Name of the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace,” in Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, 1–10.

<sup>66</sup> See Ogborn, *Global Lives*; Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*; Davis, *Trickster Travels*; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (New York, 1989); and Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*, trans. Martin Beagles (Baltimore, 2003). My thoughts here are partially influenced by Tonio Andrade, “A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory,” *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2011): 573–591.

<sup>67</sup> For a sophisticated theoretical formulation, see Francesca Trivellato, “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?,” *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq#>; for stimulating thoughts and absorbing vignettes from the world of early modern Eurasia, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Mass., 2011). For an early statement of pairing up global history with microhistory, see Andrade, “A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord.” Andrade’s intervention

and conceptual work of this variety will prove to be fruitful in addressing the vital issues of agency and philology or primary source research without losing sight of the big picture that global historians have become so adept at offering.

**Ann McGrath:** Twenty-first-century technologies provide access to outer-space vistas that Tocqueville obviously lacked. But will big history, as the Editor suggests, and huge data sets cause historians to gain a detachment beyond the dreams of that foreign observer of many nations? Although most *AHR* readers have viewed photos of Planet Earth taken from outer space and have seen innumerable satellite photos of landscapes, the non-human scale of such visions can be ameliorated with “street view.” Nonetheless, in archaeology, once history’s sister discipline, there are already concerns about the missing people. Global Positioning System (GPS)–linked data, ever-updated dating technologies requiring massive machines, and three-dimensional photography have improved the scientific rigor and testability of archaeological evidence. But these techniques have also served to depopulate their study sites, which often lack the sense that people have ever lived and breathed there. Some archaeologists are now attempting to address this problem by drawing upon the approaches of the Annales school.<sup>68</sup> To hark back to an earlier comment, could the move toward a larger scale mean that we are jeopardizing history’s greatest strengths? I don’t think so. At this point in time, our good writers excel at providing readers with opportunities to connect with the experiences of people in the past. Although we do not reject detached social science, we are masters of the anecdote and of the rich narrative.<sup>69</sup> As a profession, we cherish empathy.

If anything, and certainly compared to archaeologists, we may, however, be too tardy in embracing technological breakthroughs. Joyce has pointed out historians’ use of parish records and other data sets, but alongside analytical and evidentiary innovations, I think more branches of history could be engaging with digital delivery modes. After all, they offer zoom-enabled scale shifts in milliseconds. Digital animators can already provide interactive experiences in historical cities, with opportunities to climb history’s virtual walls and to walk down its rougher streets, seeing and hearing its sights and sounds. Historians should not be content to provide only the textural detail; they should be the directors and conceptual developers of such history delivery.<sup>70</sup>

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and original idea was a welcome breath of fresh air at a time when few people were thinking about “conjugating” microhistory with global history. However, Andrade does not tackle the body of scholarship produced by Italian microhistorians and misses an opportunity to deepen his insights by moving beyond the introduction of narrative into world history and exploring the *analytical* advantages that accrue when one uses a multiscopic lens accommodating both the macro and the micro.

<sup>68</sup> Simon G. Haberle and Bruno David, eds., *Peopled Landscapes: Archaeological and Biogeographic Approaches to Landscapes* (Canberra, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> These are just two examples of hundreds of masterfully written works: Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2006); Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Crow’s Nest, N.S.W., 2009).

<sup>70</sup> See Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving and Presenting the Past on the Web* (Philadelphia, 2006). An Australian Research Council–funded project, “Deepening Histories of Place: Exploring Indigenous Landscapes of National and International Significance,” developed a database and uses various multimedia to explore a time-layered approach to

The Editor's latest question highlights how the burgeoning histories of oppressed groups and of other specific communities have tended to neglect global perspectives. Taking up the tail of that question, theirs was an interventionist response of precisely the kind necessary to *confront* social problems rather than to simply travel along with them. Such thematic initiatives first took aim at national and local agendas; however, this field's push toward diasporic and global perspectives is already starting to gain momentum.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, what strikes me as a promising divergence in thinking "big" and "deep" is that it might lessen this field's propensity to take sides with one group rather than another—and here I count some of my own past work.<sup>72</sup> In our efforts to counter the power relations implicit in grand narrative precursors, such studies often reinscribed dichotomies, even where peoples are culturally, genealogically, and politically entwined and intermixed.

To extend this, Joyce's discussion of the "etic" recalled for me the self-conscious "othering" of the past resplendent in David Lowenthal's oft-quoted phrase "the past is a foreign country."<sup>73</sup> How does such fare survive in a deep-time context? I suspect that global or "big" history optics might trend toward rendering the past as "the same country." Airborne travel has changed our sense of terrestrial distance from each other, but the uber-long *durée* makes us see that humankind may be more similar than different.

Furthermore, what academic historians regard as a chasm beyond the capability of the historical imagination may be no gap at all. Hesitations about deep time are exaggerated when we pine for the familiar periodizations of historical training. Rather than nation-state timelines, current options include the potentially dehumanizing climatic chronologies. Alternatively, the "lithic" epochs of prehistory are defined by man-the-hunter tool types, with their unfortunate gendered baggage and cultural evolutionary assumptions.<sup>74</sup> However, nothing is stopping us from reconfiguring and enlivening these temporal categorizations. And yes, humans are using material things made from products formed in ancient time deep beneath—often with complicated processes, human crafting, and versatile, empowering journeys through space and time. Not only do these objects play a dynamic role in song-lines across continents or on ocean voyages across oceans and hemispheres, but in so

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landscape history. However, it lacks the capacity to build in this kind of interactive, experiential component. Deepening Histories of Place, [www.deepeninghistories.anu.edu.au](http://www.deepeninghistories.anu.edu.au).

<sup>71</sup> For transnational approaches, see John Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism* (Canberra, 2007); and Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln, Neb., 2009). The Native American and Indigenous Studies Association conferences have promoted international exchanges.

<sup>72</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath, and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation* (1994; rev. ed., Perth, 2006), chap. 1; Ann McGrath, ed., *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown* (St. Leonards, 1995). These works stop and start inside nationally defined chronologies and within geographical parameters.

<sup>73</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York, 1985).

<sup>74</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage* (New York, 2004).

doing, they become part of the story of what has made humans move and act as they do.<sup>75</sup>

Indigenous knowledge perspectives, which may lead to “insider” or emic histories, offer theoretically significant historiographical lessons. For example, they remind us that humans are present in worlds at once “natural” and historically enacted—that land is a repository both deeply wondrous and inspired—an archive of factual knowledge and affect.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Kristin draws attention to African ontologies, whose implicit spatial and temporal imaginations may expose the delimitations of academic chronologies. Perhaps the depth or longevity of a people’s history in a particular locale has contributed to the development of certain kinds of temporal sensibilities. When the Pitjanjarra people of Australia talk of *tjukurrpa*, what may first appear to an outsider as a flattened ecology of time and space is in fact a dynamic multi-generational space of being-in-place that acknowledges the short time of one human life amidst the vitality, longevity, and deep connectedness of multiple beings in a storied biosphere. Comprising plants, geological features, megafauna and other animals, modern and unfamiliar kinds of humans, and mythical creatures, the deep past is immanent; its proof and evidence is to be seen and felt in a “living” space.

Perhaps historically conceptualized epochs of deep time will encourage historians of many backgrounds to ponder humanity’s commonality. After all, we are constituted by the same cell life that evolved billions of years ago, and we must not forget that our *Homo sapien sapien* selves may not be an evolutionary end-point. As we stand against invisible gravity, we step on pieces of earth containing far deeper geochronologies than we may ultimately know.

Humans have lived far apart from each other for millennia, but in our bones, and in every lived moment, a common kinship and engagement with certain forces, things, and landscapes, and with each other, may unite more than separate us. Told from within and without, the deep past does not have to be a distant, foreign country, but it might be conceptualized as the *same* country. Deep histories could resurface in the one GPS spot, across migratory generations strange and familiar, in layers of sand, of time, and, last but not least, in multi-layered, ever-diverse historical tellings.

**AHR Editor:** We have considered many implications of scale, but most, it must be said, in terms of the “wider and deeper” dimensions of history. Given the nature of your research and writings, this is hardly surprising. And I suspect that all of you would endorse Sebouh’s assertion about the necessity of “a scale of analysis that supersedes the conventional unit of the nation-state.” Even with states (or other smaller units of scale), he adds, “a good case can probably be made that there, too, a global optic may sometimes be a more effective way of making sense of the local or the national; hence the success of the ‘global turn’ that we are witnessing in practically every part of our discipline.”

<sup>75</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C., 2010); Robert Paton, “Pelican Dreaming” module on [www.deepeninghistories.anu.edu.au](http://www.deepeninghistories.anu.edu.au).

<sup>76</sup> Donald L. Fixico, *Call for Change: The Medicine Way of American Indian History, Ethos, and Reality* (Lincoln, Neb., 2013); Martin Nakata, *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines* (Canberra, 2007).

My question, which takes off from this assertion, is really in two parts. The first is related to previous comments regarding the importance of sources, archives, and the like, to which I would add simply the element of scholarly expertise. How does a scholar really know that (to paraphrase Sebouh's comment) a global perspective will be truly useful in "making sense of the local or the national" unless one has a rather highly refined sense of what "the local or the national" is all about? Put differently and more provocatively, can or should we start deductively, by *assuming* that the global (or transnational) perspective is relevant and telling? And if we do, is there not a risk of reading into, or even analytically imposing upon, these narrower contexts forces and developments that a more inductive process *would not necessarily bear out*? The world as we perceive it today impresses us with the force and profundity of global trends. Are we so sure that trends of this scale worked with comparable force in the past? And if so, does our certitude reflect a reasonably sure knowledge of the local—that is, does it derive from evidence of those forces as they are experienced by actual people, communities, societies, and institutions, including state and imperial structures?

This question then suggests another one, but here the concern is with pedagogy, and ultimately with how we configure our curricula—or rather how these might be configured for us by deans and others with an eye toward the bottom line. As Ken Pomeranz will note in his presidential address at the 2014 AHA meeting, there is a danger that, especially as the embrace of world history can be justified by high-minded (and legitimate) principles of "global citizenship," global awareness, and the like, as well as by the need to attract funding, administrators may very well decide that with a cadre of faculty who can teach world history, they can dispense with area and national specialists in Asian, African, Latin American, and European history, etc. I can't imagine any faculty acquiescing in such moves, but it could be argued that a strong advocacy for world history—especially if it is conveyed in terms that seem to diminish smaller units of historical perspective—might justify this kind of streamlining of the curriculum.

These are two somewhat different questions, but they both ask whether reconfiguring history in global or wide-scale terms might result in losses as well as the obvious gains.

**Ann McGrath:** In this last question, the Editor challenges our high-minded globalist idealism, pragmatically calling for us to consider its possible dangers and the competing claims of our historical estate. His risk assessment is well heeded. At a time when some leading historians are signaling a crisis in the discipline, we must convince not only the academy of the value of history courses, but also those local and national players who make the funding decisions.<sup>77</sup> Symptoms of our disciplinary woes have been variously diagnosed: declining student interest, lack of public recognition of our authority as experts, and a prevailing presentist worldview that makes past and future immaterial.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, growing scholarly interest in contemporary memory stud-

<sup>77</sup> Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, eds., *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra, 2005), 13–15.

<sup>78</sup> In particular, I have in mind presentations by David Armitage, "Horizons of History: Space, Time

ies and “histories of the present” might be leading to an epistemological dead end, where historians can no longer study the lived-in past—only its representations. Yet, as a profession, most of us still want to do work that examines the past for itself, and which links past and present concerns in meaningful ways.

So back to the question. World history appointments could indeed be used as a rationale for efficiencies in the form of staff reductions. As the Editor attests, financial bottom-liners may wish to “dispense with area and national specialists in Asian, African, Latin American, and European history, etc.” Given the rising popularity of world history, how can we address this risk? For one thing, we must be able to articulate how the quality of any global history is demonstrably reliant upon local and national research. Specialist expertise in areas and eras is crucial to our disciplinary base; targeted training in languages, scripts, cultural understanding, textual critique, fieldwork techniques, and the use of pertinent theoretical and analytical tools requires immersion and years of dedication. To ensure that historians pull together to maintain diversity, we will need to create more synergies and collegial exchanges across area studies. Historical geospaces need to be both modular and better integrated.

The Editor’s remarks also serve to remind us, however, that the standard geographies featured in many history departments still omit much of the planet. As with flat-projected “Maps of the World,” which usually slice the Pacific in two, continuous routes of connection are consequently lost.<sup>79</sup> Taking global history seriously may mean reassessing which regions of our departmental world mappings have been relegated to the far corners or completely severed. This prompts kindred questions: Are we following the too-familiar rather than the most exciting routes? Have we paid too much attention to landed experiences, neglecting the deep oceans and variable straits that connect and disconnect us? If we do Atlantic history, shouldn’t we also be contemplating that much vaster and deeper ocean, the Pacific?<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, the weight of the Northern Hemisphere as the site of capital H History tends to skew the Global South. While I know it is difficult to justify fields that don’t have obvious political, economic, or strategic resonance in the home base, this is not merely a matter of sibling rivalry. Rather, “provincializing” the historical centers—those strongholds of the Western Hemisphere that include Europe and the United States—goes to the core of decolonizing efforts.<sup>81</sup> Will it be possible to eventually

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and the Future of the Past,” Australian National University, August 16, 2013; and François Hartog, “The Future of a Very Old Name?,” Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N.J., October 2013.

<sup>79</sup> David Armitage and Alison Bashford, “Introduction: The Pacific and Its Histories,” in David Armitage and Alison Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (Basingstoke, forthcoming 2014). See also David Armitage, “The International Turn in Intellectual History,” plenary lecture, New York University, August 10, 2012.

<sup>80</sup> And we tend to ignore our closest neighbors—in Australia, New Zealand history is little taught, and although I will need some verification, I have the impression that not a great deal of Canadian and Mexican history is taught in the United States.

<sup>81</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J., 2000).

create two-way or even five-way traffic between the local specificities of multiple centers as international sites?

Reversing back to the first part of this question, is it dangerous to start with the assumption “that the global (or transnational) perspective is relevant and telling”? Here the Editor highlights the risk that historians could inappropriately project wider forces and developments on narrower contexts. True, if researchers fail to unearth global links and sensibilities, pushing lines of connection to conform to analytical fashions will only warp historical understandings. It is difficult, however, to imagine the benefits of *not* thinking along global lines. Surely even in the most isolated historical locales, messengers and itinerants traveled between campsites and villages, witnessing once-imported, since-transformed religious practices and festivals, and circulating news of what they saw. As we have already discussed, human mobility transported genes, germs, technological innovations, ideas, songs, and stories that connected people with the shapes of the wider world. This *AHR* Conversation has only served to entrench my thinking that we simply cannot understand our human story—that is, in any depth—without at least attempting to think transnationally and globally. With the discipline of history being a veteran contortionist—having reshaped itself into a multiplicity of creative poses—I anticipate that a global optics is more likely to be another corrective rather than a malicious agent. Nonetheless, global approaches should not necessarily imply that all routes and journeys became enduring connections. Global relevancies will also include isolations, ruptures, and other disconnects. Not to mention the contrasting geohistorical conceptualizations of where the world and the skies begin and end.

The study of historiography is itself part of that global historical trajectory—enriched by its positioning as an international rather than a national or regional enterprise. Many historians, including feminist historians, for example, have learned incrementally of the value of global perspectives. From the 1970s, before the notion of “big” or “global history” had taken hold, they started to research what women had done in the past. Their quests were inspired by a political and personal desire to fill in a missing history, and to learn about women’s long struggle for human rights. At first, feminist historians just wanted to “do it for themselves,” but soon they became interested in exploring analytical categories that would enable their work to transform mainstream history. Then they realized that women in many different parts of the globe were doing the same. English feminists worked with the Marxist-inspired History Workshop group. The Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, an American enterprise, soon tolerated gatecrashers from such locales as Canada, Australia, and Sweden. In Europe, the International Federation for Research in Women’s History had established itself in the multilingual International Committee of Historical Sciences. When its conference was held for the first time in the Southern Hemisphere in 1998, the communion of women from Japan, Hawaii, various Pacific islands, Europe, the U.S., and Canada marked a shift in the ground of women’s history.<sup>82</sup> This

<sup>82</sup> “Women and Human Rights, Social Justice and Citizenship: International Historical Perspectives,” June 30–July 2, 1998, Melbourne, Australia. Geography and proximity counted, but good fundraising and organization by Pat Grimshaw and Sonia Smallacombe was crucial to its success. See Karen



group recognized the significance and efficacy of a long history of women's pan-Pacific and other international reunions and struggles. Global historical networks will not necessarily lead to global history-writing, but in this case, women historians welcomed the world flying in. Feminist and gender historians of various backgrounds and experiences of colonizing legacies theorized and critiqued women's conflicting roles in imperial trajectories, in the global oceanic, the continental, and the grounded local.<sup>83</sup> I suspect that other sub-branches of history such as environmental history will have similar globalizing stories.

To wind up, I would like to imagine that our conversation has developed a new low-tech optics that I will call the Global historical Positioning System (GhPS). Before announcing this innovation, we need some of you, our readers, to test it out. Simply select one of your past research projects and, using this device, consider what new and different questions that you would ask of your evidence. I tried out the technology myself. Every GhPS-generated question that I posed led me to arterial routes where the local, the national, and the global reverberated and remotely re-connected with each other. We may need to test GhPS for bias.

**Kristin Mann:** In the course of our conversation, I have advocated heterogeneity in historical research. I have done so, in part, for the commonsense reason that the approaches adopted by historians, including with regard to scale, need to be informed by the problems, places, periods, and processes they are studying. Equally compellingly, a multiplicity of perspectives is essential to troubling dominant chronologies and narratives, as Ann has reminded us, and to capturing the voices of diverse historical actors. In response to the Editor's question this round, I personally am wary of *assuming* in historical research, although there are surely places, periods, and problems—cross-cultural exchange, biological diffusion, global population movements, all named by Sebouh—where the historian can reasonably hypothesize that a “global (or transnational) perspective” will be relevant and telling. And yes, even this formulation requires “a rather highly refined sense of what ‘the local or the national’ is all about.”

One of the real pleasures of engaging in this conversation has been learning from each of the other participants. Sebouh has eloquently and effectively made the case for world history. Joyce's remarks in the last round about the importance of beginning with the categories, assumptions, and beliefs of one's subjects also arrested me. I thought in response, “Yes, that is the kind of history I want to write now.” For that reason, I am inclined to favor what the Editor has called a “more inductive process.” Like Ann in her fourth comment, I find it difficult to imagine the benefits

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Offen, “Founding the International Federation for Research in Women's History, 1987–2007,” *Women's History Review* 20, no. 4 (2011): 491–495.

<sup>83</sup> Some of the most expansive feminist scholars who then ventured into a more global orientation were originally “provincialists” in the sense of specializing in the study of India and countries of the British Commonwealth. They expanded these to connective imperial histories, transnational studies, oceanic travel, and mobility. Some examples are Antoinette Burton (Indian history), Patricia Grimshaw (Hawaii/New Zealand/Australia), and Catherine Hall (Caribbean and British history). See also Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*.

of not thinking globally. When doing so, however, beginning with the local and looking from the inside out can have great advantages. To be sure, it reduces the risk of superimposing an outside perspective. As a historian of a southern continent, to follow one of Ann's distinctions, beginning with the local appeals to me, moreover, because it counters the continuing dominance of northern perspectives in the U.S. academy. De-centering Europe and the United States is making progress, but it is proceeding slowly in North America.<sup>84</sup>

Starting with the local and interrogating the significance and meaning of global, transoceanic, or cross-cultural encounters from an inside perspective is also essential, however, to a more holistic understanding of the past—and one that reflects the diversity of global experience. Such an approach can empower historians and other humanists and social scientists to see the past through new lenses that provide truer focus, not only locally but also globally. Decades ago, in a reinterpretation of the causes of the prolonged nineteenth-century Yoruba civil wars and of British imperial penetration of the region, the historians J. F. A. Ajayi and Ralph Austen criticized an influential essay for being able to see Africa only through the lens of Western historical experience—in this case foreign commerce in slaves and later vegetable commodities. To Yoruba actors at the time, they argued, competition for control of foreign commerce was far less critical than rivalry to determine which new state would replace the fallen Oyo Empire as the center of political power and cultural influence in the Yoruba-speaking world.<sup>85</sup> Taking a different aggregate economic approach, David Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings concluded their assessment of the significance of western Africa's Atlantic commerce before the 1870s to Europe and West Africa with a related caution: "Domestic product, its consumption and exchange, was what mattered in Africa in the 1860s as well as the 1680s . . . [T]he key to understanding African economic history" in these centuries of the slave trade lies in developments internal to Africa.<sup>86</sup>

If evaluating the significance and meaning of global or transoceanic economic encounters from an emic perspective is important, the approach is essential when investigating institutions and culture. In West Africa, nineteenth-century Christian missionary teaching about the religious imperative of monogamy and, a hundred years later, Western demographers' coaching about contraception and family planning foundered for a similar reason. Both failed to grasp local ideas about the toll of childbearing and child-rearing on the female body.<sup>87</sup> In the realm of law, the suppression of ordeals by British colonial officers left East and Central African populations in peril, without means of dealing with witches. Only after decades of treating the resulting witch killings as capital offenses did liberalizing imperial public opinion pressure colonial legal authorities to view witchcraft as a mitigating cir-

<sup>84</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

<sup>85</sup> J. F. A. Ajayi and R. A. Austen, "Hopkins on Economic Imperialism in West Africa," *Economic History Review* 25, no. 2 (1972): 303–306.

<sup>86</sup> David Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings, "Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World in the Pre-Colonial Era," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 4 (October 1988): 936–959, here 958–959.

<sup>87</sup> Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge, 1985); Caroline H. Bledsoe, *Contingent Lives: Fertility, Time, and Aging in West Africa* (Chicago, 2002).

cumstance in homicide trials, and governors, in some cases, to reduce death sentences to life-long imprisonment.<sup>88</sup> Some Niger Delta militants in oil-rich southeastern Nigeria have maintained that the black gold produced in their homeland derives from the bodies of slaves exported centuries ago who perished offshore. As the ancestors gave them the oil, so they want the Niger Delta people, not multinational oil companies or politicians in Abuja, the capital city, to benefit from it. The better world the Niger Delta militants imagine, were they to control the oil wealth, is Texas, known to them from imported American television programs and the international media.<sup>89</sup> In each of these cases, the meaning of global encounters to indigenous peoples can be unlocked only if one starts with local ontologies.

The Editor's second question, which previews Ken Pomeranz's upcoming AHA presidential address, articulates a serious concern. In this age of tightening budgets, increasing competition for institutional resources, and stagnant undergraduate enrollments in history, the threat that administrators may respond to fiscal pressures by homogenizing or streamlining history faculty and curricula, in the belief that world history can do the work of continental specialists, is real. Countering it will require vigilance, persistence, and creativity, as well as the mobilization of networks of support. The edifice of world history will, of course, only be as solid as the myriad local, regional, and continental building blocks from which it is constructed, as Ann has argued. The still-dominant Euro- or North-centric macro story is being challenged, moreover, by other narratives written primarily from an Asian perspective.<sup>90</sup> Deep place-based expertise is essential to each of these projects, a message that the profession must find ways to communicate persuasively. Some administrators are likely to remain unmoved, even so. Ann has called for more synergies and collegial exchange across area studies to better integrate geospaces. To this agenda can be added new and reinvigorated interdisciplinary collaborations that create allies within the academy. Here "big" history's engagement with economics and "deep" history's with the sciences are welcome, which leads us back to the subjects with which we began.

Joyce raised the question of audience in her second comment, and Ann issued a call in her third for historians to use new means of communicating history, including twenty-first-century digital delivery modes. She wrote of historians directing the creation of delivery modes that bring the past in its gritty complexity to life in interactive

<sup>88</sup> Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom, and the Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1998); Katherine Luongo, *Witchcraft and Colonial Rule in Kenya, 1900–1955* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Omolade Adunbi, "The Nation's Two Bodies: Nigeria's Oil Creeks of Violence and the City of Sin," Institute of African Studies Seminar, October 10, 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011); Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, 2 vols. (New York, 2003, 2009). On the debate these texts and others have provoked, see Joseph M. Bryant, "The West and the Rest Revisited: Debating Capitalist Origins, European Colonialism, and the Advent of Modernity," *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 31, no. 4 (2006): 403–444, plus comments by Goldstone, Elvin, and Andrade in subsequent issues of the serial. Jack Goody, in *Capitalism and Modernity: The Great Debate* (Cambridge, 2004) and earlier texts, has been a pivotal figure in the debate, but despite their early interest in some of its key questions, Africanist historians have as yet hardly entered the fray.

spaces.<sup>91</sup> It is perhaps time for more of us to take up these challenges, so that as a profession we can “make history matter” more widely and build a broader base of support for our work.<sup>92</sup> Such a turn will require, of course, that academic departments find ways to recognize and reward such productivity in their promotion and tenure processes. In addition, our departments and programs need to do a better job of helping undergraduates understand what they can do after graduation with a history major. Admittedly my pre-major undergraduate advisees have self-selected by expressing an interest in history. It is noteworthy, nonetheless, that among them two out of three say they would like to major in history but are pre-business, pre-health, or pre-something else because of concerns about finding a job after they graduate.

**Joyce E. Chaplin:** The way I see it, there is nothing wrong with being bilingual. That is to say, just as a great many people in the world today think of themselves both globally and locally, historians may find it interesting and rewarding to think of people who lived in the past in the same manner. This doubled scholarly mode, a kind of methodological bilingualism, would preserve more tightly focused studies, where those smaller units of analysis are absolutely the best ways to analyze some part of the past, while not relinquishing the ability to think bigger, in whatever way might be most relevant to a scholar’s subject.

For this reason, I am not convinced that big history is the biggest of the current threats to current academic practice. If only it were—and I take very seriously the exposition of risks that Ann and Kristin have elaborated in their responses—but I’m afraid my vision may be even darker than the Editor’s! If academic administrators perceive anything about history, it is that students aren’t interested in it, whatever form it takes. History does not seem as immediately relevant in today’s world, in which policy decisions about government and economics are crowding history out of spaces within the social sciences where area studies, with their own proposed connection between history and policy, may once have made a contribution. It is important to remember that area studies were instituted in the context of the Cold War and, particularly in the United States, during the Vietnam War. Within that context, area studies, which to a certain extent continued a traditional focus on the nation-state, though now with many more nations included than before, were themselves a novelty, an answer to the question: Why is history relevant?

Why not ask that question again? Or, in terms closer to our discussion, how might the several kinds of supersized history that we have discussed be relevant? My colleagues in this conversation have made excellent points about globalization, the social relations that existed over long distances, some of which have long histories, and some of these leading up into the global societies that exist today. Let me put in a

<sup>91</sup> With support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Michigan State University’s History Department and Matrix (the Center for Humane Arts, Letters and Social Sciences Online) have initiated *Biographies: The Atlantic Slave Data Network*, which is developing a platform for researchers to upload, analyze, and visualize data on the lives of individual slaves throughout the Atlantic world. One component of the project is an interactive electronic application, designed for use in public spaces, which enables users to trace the lives of individual slaves or networks of slaves in selected locations.

<sup>92</sup> “Make History Matter” is the motto of the excellent and innovative New-York Historical Society.

bid for something different: planetary history, meaning environmental history done on a big scale. I observed earlier that current concerns about nature, on a planetary scale, are one reason for the interest in big history. Environmental historians are beginning to take up this Earth-sized challenge. Several of their studies would argue against the Editor's skepticism when he asked, "Are we so sure that trends of this scale worked with comparable force in the past?" In *Deforesting the Earth*, Michael Williams delivered a resounding "yes" to this type of query or objection.<sup>93</sup> And in giving that answer to a problem of planetary dimensions, Williams ably identified how the loss of available wood in an accumulating number of places represented not only an ominously global trend but also a local problem for the "actual people" of the Editor's question.

This attention to the material and planetary has meant thinking in terms of novel time scales as well as geographic dimensions. Many historians continue to ignore this, however. There have been several mentions in this conversation of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*. Let me also add that we could be reading, with equivalent profit, Chakrabarty's essay "The Climate of History," which has suggested that the geologic scale of climate change fundamentally challenges how historians think of time, human agency, and historical periodization.<sup>94</sup> This is new; this is significant. And yet it is of interest only to people already interested in environmental history and the history of science—it is pushed to various sidelines, where most historians don't linger.

To an overwhelming extent, our conversation has centered around the human-to-human interactions that have been the bread and butter of modern history. That is true of the profession at large. But the idea that historians should think of their subject in terms of purely human relations may be passé. Nature has to be in the picture. Environmental history and inquiries from parallel disciplines, including, within literature, ecocriticism, have insisted that the connections between humans and non-human nature matter too, not least to understanding questions of material justice among humans. Global history looks at human-to-human relations over long distances; planetary history looks at human-to-non-human relations as well; both are necessary to comprehend the past. Thinking of the human place within the natural world, over long durations and over the extent of the whole Earth, is the biggest challenge to historians today, a pressing opportunity to propose new reasons for history's relevance. I will admit that I don't have a great scholarly interest in much of big (or deep) history. But I care very much about its promise to give us a better sense of how and where we belong on the planet. Now that we live in the Anthropocene, that comprehension is imperative.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Michael Williams, *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis* (Chicago, 2003).

<sup>94</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 197–222.

<sup>95</sup> Chaplin, *Round about the Earth*; Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, Ga., 1996); Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

**Sebouh David Aslanian:** The two sets of stimulating questions that the Editor addresses in his final challenge for us to extend the limits of our thinking on scale and its role in the writing of history are actually intimately related to each other. In a sense, both relate to the larger question of how “knowledge production” is accomplished in world or global history. In the concluding installment of this worthwhile exchange of views, I would like to respond to these issues by tackling three points. First, as we all know, for good or for ill, most macro-oriented world or global historians generate their knowledge of the past by consuming and then synthesizing a large volume of secondary sources in the form of studies carried out by specialists, many of whom have “paid their dues” by learning the relevant languages and training in “area studies” or mastering a more specialized nexus of knowledge. The work that a world historian does is thus in many ways limited by the quality of the preexisting body of specialized scholarship based on archival work on primary source documents in often difficult-to-read scripts or dialects. Of course, reliance on the solid scholarship of other scholars is something that affects all historians, but it is particularly the case for the global historian who wants to cover a lot of ground, so to speak, and make large-scale comparisons or study macro-level connections and encounters. As I tried to point out earlier, the problem of excessive reliance on secondary sources, which is generally and rightfully frowned upon in our discipline, can be largely side-stepped by world/global historians if they choose to adopt a multiscopic lens and combine a micro focus and attention to detail (either by limiting their study to a specific community, an individual biography in the tradition of Italian *microstoria*, or even a “commodity chain” or material object, as Joyce suggested at one point) with a macro view of global connections and comparisons. For instance, at the risk of tooting my own horn, in my recently published book *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*, I studied the long-distance trade networks of Armenian merchants from a tiny but wealthy commercial suburb of the Safavid imperial capital of Isfahan whose merchants had come to preside over one of the greatest trade networks of the early modern period, with trade settlements spanning from London and Amsterdam in the West to Canton and Manila in the East.<sup>96</sup> Though my book is macro and global in scope, my focus on one rather tiny but widely scattered diasporic community enabled me historiographically to encompass the same global space covered by many world historians. I even compare the mercantile practices of these men of commerce to the practices of, say, the European joint-stock multinational corporations of the type represented by the Dutch and English East India Companies, on the one hand, and their Sephardic Jewish counterparts in Western Europe and the Multani Indians in

<sup>96</sup> Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, Calif., 2011). For an exemplary model of work in this genre from which my own modest book was inspired, see Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, Conn., 2010). On commodity chains, see Steven C. Topik and Allen Wells, “Commodity Chains in a Global Economy,” in Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), 593–812; and Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr Frank, “Introduction: Commodity Chains in Theory and in Latin American History,” in Topik, Marichal, and Frank, eds., *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500–2000* (Durham, N.C., 2006), 1–24. For the role of the circulation of objects and commodities in world history, see Scott C. Levi, “Objects in Motion,” in Northrop, *A Companion to World History*, 321–338.

South Asia, on the other. My decision to restrict my focus to one community and the tentacular spread of its networks around the globe, coupled with the fact that unlike many or most other communities from the same period this one happens to have bequeathed to us an extraordinarily diverse corpus of more than 10,000 commercial documents written in its own, now largely extinct dialect of mercantile Armenian and scattered across a dozen archives around the world, allowed me to ground most of my findings on the firm bases of archival documentation. I mention all this not to promote my own scholarship but only to bring attention to the fact that a multiscope approach that zooms in and out from the micro to the macro brings with it the benefit of doing primary source research that many in the world history community do not engage in. So in a sense, to go back to the Editor's first question, the matter of how we can know whether a global optic may inform the national or the local without a "highly refined sense" of local knowledge ceases to be a problem when world history as a research field is developed along the lines of what I have been referring to as "global microhistory," one that is grounded on a thorough knowledge of primary sources.

The second issue I would like to tackle is related to the Editor's concern about global historians projecting backward in time assumptions of a globally integrated and compressed world. I believe this touches on a central problem of our field that has not been addressed sufficiently, namely how one gauges "integration" or connectedness/interdependence in the past. We world historians like to talk about globality, global integration and connected histories, circulation and exchange, and the like, but do we actually have adequate tools, a kind of "Global historical Positioning System," to use the name of Ann's ingenious new gadget, with which to measure integration, so vital a concept for world or global history? Is "integration," in other words, even a thing that can be gauged in a meaningful way, and if so, how does one go about doing it? How well integrated was the *Pax Mongolica*, for instance? Does it meet integration levels of "X" to qualify as a "globalized" or connected space? Does the answer lie in counting the number of caravans of camels traveling across the Eurasian landmass carrying a precious payload of commodities such as Chinese silk or in quantifying the gallop of Mongol horses transmitting information and communication through the sinews of the far-flung postal system known as the *Yām*?<sup>97</sup> The same question can be posed for the great Indian Ocean. Is the level of "sustained interaction" or integration that is often brought up by world/global historians in discussions of globalization across this significant basin of world history measurable by counting the ships crossing its liquid surface in their pursuit of the "country trade" there?<sup>98</sup> Even if we could do this for quantifiable objects like commodities, say the tonnage of silver pumped into the Pacific basin from the South American mine of Potosí during the first half of the seventeenth century, can we really say we can

<sup>97</sup> For a brief overview, see David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass., 2007), 90–94.

<sup>98</sup> "Country trade" refers to the port-to-port trade of the Indian Ocean, usually carried out by private merchants as opposed to the chartered East India Companies. For an attempt to quantify the movement of East India Company ships involved in country trade on behalf of Company officials who operated in the capacity of private merchants, see Emily Erikson and Peter Bearman, "Malfeasance and the Foundations for Global Trade: The Structure of English Trade in the East Indies, 1601–1833," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (July 2006): 195–230.

measure cultural flows or the circulation of ideas in order to discuss intelligently how a global optic can help in interpreting and analyzing local or regional developments in the sphere of cross-cultural history that we have alluded to in earlier phases of this conversation, for instance?<sup>99</sup> I guess the first time I began to think about these questions was when I read the following passage in one of the late Jerry Bentley's essays on maritime basins as frameworks of history: "There is no conventional standard, such as the Richter scale or Moh's scale of hardness," wrote Bentley with characteristic acuity and aplomb, "by which to measure social and economic integration, even on a relative rather than absolute basis."<sup>100</sup> I used to think initially that Bentley was absolutely spot on, that integration could not be usefully measured in a quantitative way. However, it occurred to me after reading a heated debate on the "birth of globalization" between economists Jeffrey Williamson and Kevin H. O'Rourke and historians Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giráldez that one possible way of measuring integration is through what Williamson and O'Rourke have called "commodity price integration," which is said to have occurred in the period after the 1820s with "time space-compression" that facilitated the "integration of markets across space."<sup>101</sup> The question provoked by reading the Editor's thoughts and Ann's invocation of the mysterious GhPS, I suppose, is the following: to the extent that integration and connectedness are two conceptual pillars supporting the edifice of global or world history today, must world historians interested in studying the history of these two things resign themselves to the fact that they can lucidly (upon empirical, quantitative evidence, that is) discuss them *only* for the modern post-commodity-price-integration period of the 1820s? In other words, must we accept as a reality that the period before commodity price integration is one for which we can at best speak only of "soft" globalization, as the economic historian Jan De Vries has suggested, where no one can really say to what degree things were actually integrated but only talk about integration as a "process"?<sup>102</sup> So perhaps Bentley was right after all?

Finally, as to the matter of the world history movement becoming an unwitting gravedigger of area studies or even of more conventional national histories, I am in agreement with all the fine points my colleagues have already raised. A future in which departments of history in our country eliminate area studies under the pretense that world historians can cover the same topic would indeed be very bleak and sad. I think

<sup>99</sup> For New World silver, see Flynn and Giráldez, "Born Again"; Flynn and Giráldez, "Born with a Silver Spoon."

<sup>100</sup> Jerry Bentley, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1999): 215–224, here 218.

<sup>101</sup> See Flynn and Giráldez, "Born Again"; Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "When Did Globalization Begin?," *European Review of Economic History* 6 (2002): 23–50; and O'Rourke and Williamson, "Once More: When Did Globalization Begin?," *European Review of Economic History* 8 (2004): 109–117. For a helpful discussion of the debate and an important, innovative contribution to globalization conceptualized in terms of the development of "global consciousness" or awareness of globality that first occurred in Western Europe during the eighteenth century, see David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2012), 36. See Jan De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World," *Economic History Review* 63, no. 3 (2010): 710–733, here 717.

<sup>102</sup> De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World," 717. See also the cognate notion of "archaic globalization" developed by C. A. Bayly in "'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750–1850," in Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, 47–73.



most of us would agree that world history as a teaching (as opposed to research) field is not even remotely equipped to do the kinds of things that area studies specialists are trained for over many years or decades. My sense is that the area studies experiment in the U.S. should not be categorically written off as a scholarly disaster, as some critics have made it out to be. It has, after all, allowed some smaller disciplines and the histories they seek to represent to survive in an environment dominated both by Eurocentric and Euro-American scholarship and by scholarship linked to large and recognized “civilizations” with imperial pasts to boast of. In this context, the establishment of Armenian Studies chairs at major universities such as Harvard, Columbia, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the one I currently hold at UCLA, to name a few, can justifiably be credited with rescuing Armenian scholarship and history from oblivion and safeguarding it from the catastrophic effects of the Armenian genocide.

Having said this, I do not wish to give the impression that area studies as a field is without its problems. The usual criticisms leveled at the field by world historians, namely that the emphasis on specialized training in languages and particular histories (studied for the most part autonomously from as opposed to interactively with other histories and regions) in some area studies fields has brought with it a certain insularity and parochialism, are something of which we need to be aware.<sup>103</sup> The ideal, in my modest view, is to preserve area studies but to encourage their specialists to embrace the “global turn” and engage with the methodological insights offered by world history and the cognate field of connected histories. That way, perhaps specialization and local knowledge can be placed at the service of transforming area studies from being largely concerned with isolated and autonomous histories to interactive and connected ones.

**AHR Editor:** It is interesting, though certainly not surprising, that this conversation, which has focused, after all, on professional and methodological concerns, has often referred to contemporary developments—primarily globalization and planetary climate change—as the explanation for the embrace of large-scale conceptions of history. Just as an aside, even the discussion of “Religious Identities and Violence,” the theme of the 2007 AHR Conversation, referred less frequently to the contemporary world, despite the obvious relevance to present history, especially in the Middle East. Historians in particular and scholars in general often wonder—or are frequently asked—whether what they think and write about has anything to do with the world in which they live. At least in this conversation, I think we have demonstrated a connection that strikes at the heart of how we research and teach history.

<sup>103</sup> See the seminal essay by Joseph Fletcher “Integrative History: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period, 1500–1800,” in Fletcher, *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia*, ed. Beatrice Forbes Manz (Aldershot, 1995), 1–46, here 5; and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Islamic Eurasia,” *The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400–1800*, Special Issue, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735–762.

It is fortuitous (and entirely unplanned) that, as I noted, Ken Pomeranz's presidential address at the Annual Meeting in January will touch upon many of the themes evoked here. We spoke about teaching and the wider concern for the future of the study of history in post-secondary curricula only in the latter part of the discussion, but our topic clearly relates to how we organize and configure our fields, the topics of our courses, the training of graduate students, the staffing of our departments, and more generally our contribution to the humanities and social sciences within the academy. Ken speaks more fully to many of these concerns; some are worrisome challenges, some are opportunities. In general, however, I think it is warranted to think of global, world, or "planetary" history not only as a way to discover new ways of doing history and addressing the historical dimensions of contemporary developments, but also as an opportunity to convince more people—students and the wider public alike—that the study of history is not only interesting but crucial as never before.

**Sebouh David Aslanian** received his Ph.D. (with distinction) from Columbia University in 2007. He is the Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair of Modern Armenian History (established by the Armenian Educational Foundation) and Assistant Professor in the Department of History at UCLA. He taught world history and Indian Ocean studies at California State University, Long Beach, as an Assistant Professor from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 after serving a year at Cornell University as a Mellon Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in World History. Aslanian specializes in early modern world and Armenian history and is the author of numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of World History*, the *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient*, *Book History*, the *Journal of Global History*, and *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. His book *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (University of California Press, 2011) received the UC Press Exceptional First Book Award from PEN Center USA and the Houshang Pourshariati Iranian Studies Book Award from the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) in 2011. Aslanian is currently working on a second book project, provisionally titled *The Voyage of the Santa Catharina: A Global Microhistory of the Indian Ocean*. In addition, he is conducting research for another project on early modern Armenian print culture and "book history" that seeks to study not only the diasporic production of early modern Armenian books from Amsterdam, Venice, and Constantinople to Madras and Calcutta, but also how these books were consumed and read by early modern readers.

**Joyce E. Chaplin** is the James Duncan Phillips Professor of Early American History at Harvard University. Her work has explored history on various scales, ranging from 1 to 500 years, and includes a regional study, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993); an Atlantic analysis, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Harvard University Press, 2001); a biography, *The First Scientific American: Benjamin Franklin and the Pursuit of Genius* (Basic Books, 2006); and a study of human planetary consciousness, *Round about the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit* (Simon & Schuster, 2012). Her shortest unit of analysis appeared in "1722: Benjamin Franklin's Silence Dogood Letters," in Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors,

eds., *A New Literary History of America* (Harvard University Press, 2009); her smallest, in “Roanoke ‘counterfeited according to the truth,’” in Kim Sloan, ed., *A New World: England’s First View of America* (British Museum Press, 2006). Currently, she is editing, with Paul Freedman and Kenneth Albala, a collection of essays, *Food in Time and Place* (University of California Press); writing chapters for a textbook, *Global America* (W. W. Norton); completing, with Alison Bashford, a monograph on “Malthus and the New World”; and beginning another monograph, “Renaturing History,” on the presence or absence of nature in historical writing.

**Kristin Mann** is Professor of History at Emory University, former Director of its Institute of African Studies, and former Chair of its History Department. She received her B.A. and Ph.D. from Stanford University, and then spent a year at Cambridge University, where she studied anthropology. Her research has focused on marriage, gender, and domesticity in Africa; law and colonial cultures; and slavery and emancipation in Africa and the Atlantic world. Her books include *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760–1900* (Indiana University Press, 2007); *Law in Colonial Africa* (Heinemann Books, 1991; co-edited with Richard Roberts); and *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (Frank Cass, 2001; co-edited with Edna G. Bay). She is currently writing a book titled *Transatlantic Lives: Slavery and Freedom in West Africa and Brazil*, which reconstructs the stories of two groups of males and females enslaved in West Africa in the early nineteenth century, some of whom were exported to Brazil but later returned as freed people to their homeland and reestablished relationships with those from whom they had been separated by slavery decades before.

**Ann McGrath** is Professor of History at the Australian National University and Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History. She is the Louise and John Steffens Founders’ Circle Member 2013–2014, School of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N.J. She was awarded an Order of Australia Medal and holds an Honorary Doctorate from Linneaus University, Sweden. She was granted the Archibald Hanna, Jr. Fellowship in American History by Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library and was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences. Her publications include *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country* (Allen & Unwin, 1987; ACLS Humanities E-Book), and she co-authored (with Ann Curthoys) *How to Write History That People Want to Read* (Palgrave, 2011). She has produced and co-directed films, including *A Frontier Conversation* (Ronin Films, 2006) and *Message from Mungo* (Ronin Films, 2014), and has worked at Monash University, the University of New South Wales, and the National Museum of Australia. She has contributed to a number of Aboriginal land claims and commissions of inquiry and served on the Council of the Australian National University and on the Advisory Committee of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Her current projects include a major digital history project, “Deepening Histories of Place: Landscapes of National and International Significance,” and a book project about an Aboriginal woman who lived approximately 50,000 years ago at Lake Mungo.