

# INTRODUCTION: SEEING THE WORLD LIKE A MICROHISTORIAN\*

From its advent at the turn of the twenty-first century, global history has been a field in search of its soul. Reading Patrick O'Brien's contribution to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Global History* in 2006, one cannot but be struck by the optimism expressed in his vision of global history. Here, O'Brien called for the restoration of a 'modern' form of global history that promised to 'construct negotiable meta-narratives, based upon serious scholarship that will become cosmopolitan in outlook and meet the needs of our globalizing world'.<sup>1</sup> Only a year later, Dominic Sachsenmaier — writing in the much older *Journal of World History*, founded at the University of Hawaii in 1990 — struck a cautionary note when he wondered whether global history could really become the sort of 'ecumenical history' envisioned by O'Brien. What hope was there for a truly global history, particularly if historical writing remained structured around a 'nationally organised scholarly community' that was 'ill equipped to handle transnational or even global research agendas'? His prophecy still strikes a chord today: 'The question of whose world history, what perspectives, and what historiographical traditions are being applied will become even more pertinent than in the case of more localized

\* This volume originates in a workshop held in Venice in 2016, which was funded by the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick and a generous grant from the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. From 2018 to 2019, three subsequent meetings were held at Warwick, Florence and Oxford with the support of an AHRC Research Network Grant held by Maxine Berg, Jorge Flores, and myself. I am grateful to all those who contributed in such stimulating ways to these discussions. As for this Introduction, it is the product of conversations and correspondence with colleagues around the world who have been generous with their time and their critical insights. I acknowledge individual contributions in the notes that follow but also in my separate article in this volume. More generally, let me thank here Jeremy Adelman, Maxine Berg, David Bell, Emma Campbell, Martin Conway, Catherine Holmes, Andrew Hurrell, Giuseppe Marcocci, Giorgio Riello, Jack Tannous, Francesca Trivellato, Alex Walsham and Chris Wickham for their support at various stages of this process. It has been possible to make this entire volume open access thanks to funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 638578).

<sup>1</sup> Patrick O'Brien, 'Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, i (March 2006), 3 (abstract).

research'.<sup>2</sup> Anglophone scholarship was not alone in feeling this initial unease. In the pages of the French journal *Annales*, in May 2000, Roger Chartier posed an important question: 'To think the world', he wrote, 'but who thinks it? Men of the past or historians of the present?' Whatever the case, the editors of the *Annales* were sure of one thing: writing such a global history 'would be very difficult' indeed.<sup>3</sup>

It may be hard to remember that such cautionary voices ever existed, judging at least from the great momentum with which global history has established itself in western historical practice over the past decade. Journals, chairs and centres of global history have proliferated, along with conferences, workshops and research projects developed around its core themes. The early fruits of these endeavours are already available in a swell of single-authored publications but also notably in multi-volume collaborative works such as the *Cambridge History of the World* and its various counterparts in English, French, Italian, Dutch, German and Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most telling indicator of the field's success can be seen in the way in which global history has provided the materials for a reassessment of

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Sachsenmaier, 'World History as Ecumenical History?', *Journal of World History*, xviii, 4 (2007), esp. 465 for the citation. For similar concerns about the stakes involved in global history, see, for example, Jerry H. Bentley, 'Myths, Wagers, and Some Moral Implications of World History', *Journal of World History*, xvi, 1 (2005); Arif Dirlik, 'History Without a Center? Reflections on Eurocentrism', in Eckhardt Fuchs and Benedikt Stuchtey (eds.), *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in a Global Perspective* (Lanham, 2002); Arif Dirlik, 'Confounding Metaphors, Inventions of the World: What is World History For?', in Benedikt Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs (eds.), *Writing World History, 1800–2000* (Oxford, 2003); Richard Drayton, 'Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xvi, 3 (July 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Chartier, 'La conscience de la globalité (commentaire)', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, lvi, 1 (2001), esp. 122 for the citation; for the editorial foreword in the same issue, see 'Une histoire à l'échelle globale', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, lvi, 1 (2001), 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the seven-volume *Cambridge World History* under the direction of Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, with individual volumes edited by David Christian, Graeme Barker and Candice Goucher, Norman Yoffee, Craig Benjamin, Benjamin Z. Kedar, Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, John McNeill and Kenneth Pomeranz; the six-volume counterpart from Harvard University Press, *A History of the World*; Patrick Boucheron (ed.), *Histoire mondiale de la France* (Paris, 2017); Andrea Giardina, *Storia mondiale dell'Italia* (Bari, 2017); Karel Davids et al. (eds.), *Wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2018); José Paiva and Andreas Fahrmeir are now at work on, respectively, Portuguese and German versions. I am grateful to Sebastian Conrad for drawing the German and Dutch versions to my attention.

several fields ranging from medieval history to intellectual history to the history of material culture.<sup>5</sup>

All of this goes some way towards explaining why it is that David Armitage, the scholar of intellectual and international history based at Harvard, could declare in 2012 that ‘the hegemony of national historiography is over’. As he explained it (intending to be provocative, it seems):

If you are not doing an explicitly transnational, international or global project, you now have to explain *why* you are not. There is now sufficient evidence from a sufficiently wide range of historiographies that these transnational connections have been determinative, influential and shaping throughout recorded human history, for about as long as we’ve known about it.<sup>6</sup>

In 2016, Robert Moore went a step further, explaining the rise of global history as a natural result of ‘the collapse of every alternative paradigm’ in the late twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> As is often the case, the triumphalists have tended to drown out the voices of those who have been more careful and vigilant in their diagnoses of the state of the field. Sebastian Conrad, for example, has dedicated nearly three hundred pages of a book to the task of answering the question ‘What is global history?’ One of the most thoughtful reflections on global history to date, Conrad’s tone offers a rather refreshing alternative to the exultant globalists:

Not every research project requires a global perspective; it is not always the global context that is most central to the issue. Everything is not linked and connected to everything else. It would be a mistake, certainly, to regard global history as the only valid approach — either in terms of its historiographical perspective or in the reach and density of the entanglements it explores.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Jürgen Osterhammel, another bona fide global historian if ever there was one, worried in 2016 about the poverty of theoretical frameworks

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen (eds.), *The Global Middle Ages* (Past and Present Supplement no. 13, Oxford, 2018), editors’ intro.; Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History* (Columbia, 2013); Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds.), *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Martine van Ittersum and Jaap Jacobs, ‘Are We All Global Historians Now? An Interview with David Armitage’, *Itinerario*, xxxvi, 2 (2012), esp. 16 for the citation.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Moore, ‘A Global Middle Ages?’, in James Belich *et al.* (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford, 2016), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), 15–16.

in global history: 'Global history may be in danger of losing a sense of proportion by underestimating social structure and hierarchy'.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, in the pages of last year's Supplement to this journal, Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen presented their idea of medieval global history as a 'working hypothesis of the Global Middle Ages as a time of options and experiments' — presumably the assumption being that hypotheses can be revised.<sup>10</sup> If we consider this wide range of opinions, it becomes clear that neither unanimity nor uniformity exists among scholars who appear to see themselves as part of a shared intellectual endeavour.<sup>11</sup> That may be a good thing, but it is also a situation worth explicit attention from global historians.

Moreover, there is a distinct sense among some that the pillars holding up global history today are beginning to fracture under the weight of its critics. In 2013, David Bell, the historian of early modern France, questioned the future of global history: 'Perhaps the global turn, for all of its insights and instruction, has hit a point of diminishing returns'.<sup>12</sup> Such assessments are not the preserve of scholars working outside the field. Consider, for example, Jeremy Adelman, a historian of Latin America as well as an experienced teacher of world history and co-author of *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*, a pioneering university textbook of world history published in 2002.<sup>13</sup> In 2017, Adelman ruffled feathers with a trenchant reflection on what he saw as the uncritical celebration of globalism that lurked deep within global history:

If we are going to muster meaningful narratives about the togetherness of strangers near and far, we are going to have to be more global and get more serious about engaging other languages and other

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Global History and Historical Sociology', in James Belich *et al.* (eds.), *Prospect of Global History*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Holmes and Standen, *Global Middle Ages*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, Conrad cites Armitage only once in *What is Global History?*, when he writes that 'the telescope rather than the microscope' is the privileged optic of approaches to time in global history, Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 142; see also David Armitage, 'What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Durée', *History of European Ideas*, xxxviii (2012), 493–507.

<sup>12</sup> David Bell, 'This is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network: Review of Emily Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting: 1870–1945* (Harvard, 2012)', *New Republic* (26 October 2013); these initial ideas were developed at greater length in David Bell, 'Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution', *French Historical Studies*, xxxvii, 1 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Tignor *et al.*, *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the Modern World from the Mongol Empire to the Present* (New York and London, 2002). The book is now in its 4th edition.

ways of telling history. Historians and their reader-citizens are also going to have to re-signify the place of local attachments and meanings. Going deeper into the stories of Others afar and Strangers at home means dispensing with the idea that global integration was like an electric circuit, bringing light to the connected. . . The story of the globalists illuminates some at the expense of others, the left behind, the ones who cannot move, and those who become immobilised because the light no longer shines on them.<sup>14</sup>

Adelman's reflections went viral, carried like wildfire on an online digital infrastructure that represents yet another significant change in how ideas have come to circulate since the advent of global history.<sup>15</sup> In later iterations of his argument, primarily in an exchange with Richard Drayton and David Motadel in the *Journal of Global History*, Adelman worried that now 'global history includes just about everyone — and is therefore so overgrown as to be meaningless'.<sup>16</sup> None of Adelman's worries, it must be said, are new.<sup>17</sup> That such concerns have persisted for so long suggests that global historians are still trying to figure out not only what is global history, but what it is good for, and indeed, as Sachsenmaier asked so many years ago, who it is for. These questions become all the more important given how the world has changed since Patrick O'Brien issued his first call to arms in 2006.

# I

## COMING INTO FOCUS

Global history is definitely not in crisis, but it certainly is a family at war with itself. In part, this has something to do with the ragtag assemblage of tribes that have made a home for themselves, willingly or not, under the big tent of global history. On the one hand, there are the card-carrying proponents of

<sup>14</sup> Jeremy Adelman, 'What is Global History Now?', *Aeon* (2 March 2017).

<sup>15</sup> The controversy was certainly fed by the fact that the title of the article differed slightly, but importantly, from the URL which reads 'Is global history still possible, or has it had its moment?'

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Adelman, 'Replies to Richard Drayton and David Motadel', in Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, xiii (2018), esp. 19 for the citation.

<sup>17</sup> In a 2006 forum 'On Transnational History', the editors of the *American Historical Review* asked whether global history was 'in danger of becoming merely a buzzword among historians, more a label than a practice, more expansive in its meaning than precise in its application, more a fashion of the moment than a durable approach to the serious study of history'; see C. A. Bayly *et al.*, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', *American Historical Review*, cxi, 5 (2006), esp. 1441 for the citation.

global history in its many disguises — world history, transnational history, connected history, *histoire croisée*, international history, and more — who share a set of family resemblances immediately recognizable to outsiders. On the other hand, there are the assorted ranks of vassals and tributaries who seem less obviously comfortable in the shadow of global history: reconstructed imperial historians and deconstructed area studies specialists, philologists and local historians with decades of linguistic training, and vast clans of national historians eager to find a place to call home in departments where they might be the only individuals responsible for the teaching of (all) non-western history.<sup>18</sup> It was no surprise, therefore, that when Drayton and Motadel took up the cause of defending global history against what they perceived as ‘attacks’ from Bell and Adelman, they overlooked the salient point that some of these critiques reflected the wider concerns of several scholars who already see themselves as working *within* the field of global history. These concerns are worth singling out here in some detail, especially because this volume proposes that microhistory might help address at least some of these problems.

In the first place, global history has become a victim of its own success. In a field that has foregrounded connectedness, circulation and integration, there is an acute worry on the part of some scholars about the methodological downgrading of place-based knowledge and expertise in the writing of global history. As Stefanie Gänger has shown, global history has become privy to a language of ‘circulation’ that remains uncritical but also ubiquitous in its usages, despite the efforts of scholars to push back against what Sebastian Conrad has called an apparent ‘obsession with mobility and movement’.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the elision of place-based knowledge and the historical expertise that goes with it remains a risk for all historians given the increased prominence of digital technologies in contemporary historical research. Lara Putnam, the historian of Latin America, has written compellingly about how such technological changes ‘threaten to displace place-based research’, by

<sup>18</sup> There is a vast literature on this diversity of approaches within global history. For some examples, see Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York, 2003); Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, ‘Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization’, *Journal of Global History*, v, 1 (2010); Angelika Eppele, ‘Calling for a Practice Turn in Global History: Practices as Drivers of Globalization’, *History and Theory*, lvii, 3 (Sep. 2018), 390–407.

<sup>19</sup> Stefanie Gänger, ‘Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity and Liquidity in the Language of Global History’, *Journal of Global History*, xii, 3 (2017); see also Conrad’s critique of the ‘obsession with mobility’ in *What is Global History?*, 16 and 225–6.

which she means ‘research guided *by place*, in the sense of seeking multi-dimensional knowledge about a particular society, and research conducted *in place*, requiring actual residence in the locale under study’.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, Putnam argues that the digitization of both primary sources and secondary literature enables historians to ‘side-glance’ and ‘term-search’ their way through research fields that are very far from their own expertise. These concerns have a particular relevance to global history:

The more far-flung the locales linked through our discoveries, the less consistent our contextual knowledge. The place-specific learning that historical research in a pre-digital world required is no longer baked into the process. We make rookie mistakes.<sup>21</sup>

Such concerns are not simply an issue of how historians work with their sources, but rather they have important consequences for how global historians approach their field of study. In Putnam’s words, ‘We risk overemphasizing the importance of that which connects, and underestimating the weight of that which is connected: emplaced structures, internal societal dynamics’.<sup>22</sup> At stake here are also larger issues about how global historians relate to the scholars and ‘real people’ inhabiting the parts of the world about which they write.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, reading Putnam’s diagnosis of the current situation, one senses that the role of place-based knowledge in global history risks becoming even rarer in the future.

Secondly, even though global history has helped us understand circulation and connectedness in important ways, it has been less effective at explaining how change over time takes place in specific contexts and, more importantly, why this change happens differently in sites that are connected to one another. Bell gestured to this problem directly when he referred to global history’s treatment of what he calls ‘small spaces’.

<sup>20</sup> Lara Putnam, ‘Daily Life and Digital Reach: Place-based Research and History’s Transnational Turn’, in Debra Castillo and Shalini Puri (eds.), *Theorizing Fieldwork in the Humanities* (New York, 2017), 168; emphasis added. On this subject more generally, see Ted Underwood, ‘Theorizing Research Practices We Forgot to Theorize Twenty Years Ago’, *Representations*, cxxvii, 1 (2014), 64–72; Tim Hitchcock, ‘Confronting the Digital: Or How Academic History Writing Lost the Plot’, *Cultural and Social History*, x, 1 (2013), 9–23; and the response from Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘Historical Vision in a Digital Age’, *Cultural and Social History*, xi, 3 (2014), 343–8.

<sup>21</sup> Lara Putnam, ‘The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast’, *American Historical Review*, cxxi, 2 (2016), 377 for the citation.

<sup>22</sup> Putnam, ‘The Transnational and the Text-Searchable’, 377–8.

<sup>23</sup> Putnam, ‘Daily Life and Digital Reach’, 4.

'Small' spaces are not simply spaces that feel the impact of global forces. In some cases, they serve as profoundly intense, dynamic laboratories of change in their own right, and the processes of change that occur in them are much more than simple reactions to the global forces that impinge on them. Arabia in the age of Mohammed, Germany in the age of Luther, or Paris in the French Revolution are all spaces of this sort.<sup>24</sup>

Some might quibble with the idea of 'Arabia in the age of Mohammed' as a 'small space', but what matters here is Bell's point about how certain forms of global history prioritize the *movement* of global historical phenomena over the *explanation* of their occurrence in particular contexts. Accordingly, Bell argues that although global history might help us understand, for example, the way in which the French Revolution spread to different parts of the world, it does not explain how and why revolutions developed in the eighteenth century in the specific way they did in particular small spaces — and, I would add, why they developed differently.<sup>25</sup> The risk, therefore, is that global history prioritizes flows and movements on the global scale, while ignoring the diversity of processes and contexts that feed into, and are impacted by, those global processes as they developed in specific sites.

Thirdly, the great diversity of scholars working within global history means that the field has a particularly fraught interaction with important questions about its relationship to sources, theoretical frameworks, and its engagement with other fields, most notably the social sciences. As a field, global history seems now at more risk than ever of becoming a catch-all phrase for several highly divergent types of history, ranging from microhistories of objects to so-called 'big' or 'deep' history written at the level of planetary change. These debates revolve around significant differences in opinion over the appropriate methods, sources and goals of global history. Where some regard global history as a forum for writing large-scale syntheses based mainly on secondary literature, other scholars have insisted that global history must preserve a close engagement with philology, local context and, above all, primary sources at its core.<sup>26</sup> As a result, there are (at least) two distinct groups of

<sup>24</sup> David Bell, 'Replies to Richard Drayton and David Motadel', in Drayton and Motadel, 'Discussion', 17.

<sup>25</sup> Bell, 'Questioning the Global Turn'.

<sup>26</sup> Compare, for example, Patrick O'Brien's emphasis on 'meta-narratives' in the opening passage of this article with Sanjay Subrahmanyam who, in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, rejected the idea that global history could ever be a 'field where synthesis always prevails, rather than first-hand research on archives and texts': Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *On the Origins of Global History: Inaugural Lecture Delivered on*



scholars working in dissimilar ways within global history, sometimes even at cross-purposes. I am not suggesting here that uniformity or unanimity is in any way desirable. Even so, an important question remains: will global history be a house with many rooms, or rather will global historians find they have constructed for themselves a Tower of Babel?

Finally, there remain real questions as to whether global history has stood up to its own ambition of countering Eurocentrism. It is striking that the above debates about global history seem to be focused around the orbit of western historical writing, and it is not clear whether scholars in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa or Asia are interested in the same questions about 'the global' that animate debates taking place in universities in America, Britain and Europe. Until we have more evidence akin to Luke Clossey and Nicholas Guyatt's study of American history departments, it remains to be seen whether global history will prove meaningful — and if so, in what ways — to historians working outside Europe and America.<sup>27</sup> Judging from the case I know best — historical writing in Arabic — it is telling that in a cursory search for references to global history as a field in publications based in the Middle East, one of the only references I can find is an article published only four years ago in the launch issue of the Qatar-based historical journal *Ostour*.<sup>28</sup> On one level this is not at all surprising, given that for many

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Thursday 28 November 2013 (Paris, 2016), 13, <<http://books.openedition.org/cdf/4200>> (accessed 13 July 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Luke Clossey and Nicholas Guyatt, 'It's a Small World After All: The Wider World in Historians' Peripheral Vision', *Perspectives on History* (May 2013). But for some early soundings, see Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice around the World* (London, 2018), especially the contributions by Shigeru Akita, Q. Edward Wang and David Simo; Haneda Masashi, *Toward Creation of a New World History*, trans. Noda Makito (2019); and Julia Adeney Thomas, 'Why Do Only Some Places Have History?: Japan, the West, and the Geography of the Past', *Journal of World History*, xxviii, 2 (2017).

<sup>28</sup> Amr Osman, 'al-Ta'rikh al-'ālamī: mawḍū' wa-manāhij min khilāl ta'rikh al-ashyā' [World History: Themes and Methodologies through the History of Objects], *Ostour*, i (2015), 1–23. Of course, this may be an exception that proves the rule given Osman's training at Princeton. Interestingly, *Ostour* also appears to be the first Arabic journal to engage with ideas of Italian microhistory, primarily through the publication of Arabic translations of samples of Carlo Ginzburg's works: see Thaer Deeb's translations of 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know About It', in *Ostour*, vii (2018) and the foreword to *The Cheese and the Worms*, in *Ostour*, viii (2019). To be clear, my search was for works in Arabic that reflect the field of contemporary global history, not Arabic historical writing about the wider world of which there is obviously a long tradition dating back to the medieval period. On modern Arabic historical writing, see, for

historians of the twentieth century, Arab or otherwise, the focus has tended to be on the writing of nationalist histories. Even so, we need more evidence to know whether this apparent dearth indicates a larger phenomenon of indifference to global history. If so, the lack of interest is particularly striking when one compares it to the popularity of other methodological approaches outside of western academic circles, for example social history, cultural history and postcolonial studies.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps we should not be so surprised at the low take-up of global history, given the field's interest in what it admits were asymmetrical flows that circulated in uneven ways around the modern world. Whether living in London, Cairo or Goa, nobody wants their history, their city and their community to be reduced to a mere way station along the path of a global flow — a measly dot on a map, lacking any depth, agency or significance. The question remains: can global history itself really go global?<sup>30</sup>

The fate of place-based research, the ability to explain change, its relationship to sources and theoretical frameworks, and its record on Eurocentrism: these four issues are just some of the problems facing global history today, and they are as much a concern to people working within the field as they are to those working outside it. Without addressing these issues, global history risks becoming unsurprising in its narratives, uncritical in its methods, Eurocentric in its appeal and programmatic in its agenda. It is also a global history that risks losing its seriousness of purpose in an age of growing antipathy for globalization. The next section explores some ways in which microhistory and its methods could help to address these challenges. In doing so, this volume seeks to make a contribution to the work of writing a global history that offers, in the words of Jeremy Adelman, 'a little more humility and a lot more clarity'.<sup>31</sup>

## II

### CONNECTING MICROHISTORY AND GLOBAL HISTORY

Global historians have long expressed a somewhat ambivalent interest in microhistory. As early as 1997, in his classic article on connected histories, Sanjay Subrahmanyam dismissed the possibility of writing a macrohistory of

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example, Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (California, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Sachsenmaier, 'World History as Ecumenical History', 473–81; on the case of Arabic in particular, see Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> I am grateful to Feras Krimsti for our discussions on this subject.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Adelman, 'Replies to Richard Drayton and David Motadel', 20.

sixteenth-century millenarianism without ‘muddying our boots in the bogs of “micro-history”’.<sup>32</sup> Mud seems an apt metaphor judging from the mixed reactions of global historians to the use of microhistory. On the one hand, several recent works acknowledge the important role that microhistory could play in global history. Less common, however, is an attempt to explain what exactly this role should be, or what this marriage might look like in practice.<sup>33</sup> In part, this may have something to do with the more general fact that no single method dominates the field: although global history often claims some sort of inclination towards the study of comparisons and connections, this is not in itself a method but rather a way of disorienting and problematizing the familiar narratives and containers of national history.<sup>34</sup> Where unanimity does appear to exist in global history, it tends to coalesce around the pre-occupations of global history, such as its claims to counter Eurocentrism in historical writing,<sup>35</sup> or around global history’s object of study, as when Sebastian Conrad defines the field as ‘a form of historical analysis in which phenomena, events and processes are placed in a global context’.<sup>36</sup> In all of these formulations, the absence of a distinct approach to the identification and interpretation of sources means that the sort of microhistory described in

<sup>32</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia’, *Modern Asian Studies*, xxxi, 3 (1997), esp. 750 for this citation. This early gesture towards microhistory came to full fruition nearly two decades later in Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s masterful *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Mass., 2011), in which Subrahmanyam describes his method on 173 as ‘the case study, bridging as it were the gap between microhistory and world history’.

<sup>33</sup> For references to microhistory among global historians, see Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 129–32, and his comments on the ‘overly abstract’ scaling of the past on 137; Maxine Berg, ‘Global History: Approaches and New Directions’, in Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2013), 11–12; and the varied opinions expressed by Nicholas Purcell, Robert Moore and Matthew Mosca in Belich *et al.* (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History*, on 78, 88 and 122–3, respectively.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected Histories’; Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004); and Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory*, xlv, 1 (Feb. 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Patrick O’Brien, ‘Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History’; Kenneth Pomeranz, ‘Histories for a Less National Age’, *American Historical Review* 119.1 (2014), 1–22; Jerry Bentley, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of World History* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 55.

this volume simply has not been a priority for the field. It is no surprise then that even when global historians such as Motadel and Drayton acknowledge that microhistory has ‘shed light on major historical phenomena and should not be easily dismissed’, they still stop short of saying why this is the case.<sup>37</sup>

For their part, microhistorians have a long, arguably more fruitful, record of thinking about how their craft relates to macro and, more recently, to global history.<sup>38</sup> This is not particularly surprising if we consider the long-term trajectory of microhistory. Here is not the place to engage in a detailed account of the origins of the field.<sup>39</sup> Suffice it to say that much like global history, several traditions of microhistory developed around distinct national schools of historical writing. Alongside the *microstoria* that emerged among Italian historians, for example, there have been practitioners of local history in England, *histoire de la vie privée* in France, and the German *Alltagsgeschichte*, to name only a few.<sup>40</sup> Across all of these traditions, there was

<sup>37</sup> Drayton and Motadel, ‘Discussion’, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Revel, *Jeux d'échelles: la micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996); Brad S. Gregory, ‘Is Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life’, *History and Theory*, xxxviii, 1 (1999); Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Latitude, Slaves and the Bible: An Experiment in Microhistory’, *Critical Inquiry*, xxxi (Spring 2005); Lara Putnam, ‘To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World’, *Journal of Social History*, xxxix, 3 (2006); John Brewer, ‘Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life’, *Cultural and Social History*, i (2010); Filippo de Vivo, ‘Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale: A Response’, *Cultural and Social History*, vii, 3 (2010); Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel, ‘Space and Scale in Transnational History’, introduction to *Size Matters: Scales and Spaces in Transnational and Comparative History*, in *International History Review*, iv (2011), 573–84; Francesca Trivellato, ‘Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?’, *California Italian Studies*, ii, 1 (2011), <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>> (accessed 13 July 2019); Hans Medick, ‘Turning Global? Microhistory in Extension’, *Historische Anthropologie: Kultur, Gesellschaft, Alltag*, xxiv, 2 (2016); Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, ‘Far-reaching Microhistory: The Use of Microhistorical Perspective in a Globalized World’, *Rethinking History*, xxi, 3 (2017); Angelo Torre, ‘Micro/macro: ¿local/global? El problema de la localidad en una historia espacializada’, *Historia Crítica*, lxix (July 2018); Giovanni Levi, ‘Microhistoria e Historia Global’, *Historia Crítica*, lxix (July 2018); and most recently, see the collection of articles edited by two contributors to this volume, Romain Bertrand and Guillaume Calafat (eds.), *Micro-analyse et histoire globale*, in *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, lxxiii, 1 (January–March 2018).

<sup>39</sup> But a useful introduction is Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> See Francesca Trivellato, ‘Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory’, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, xxxiii, 1 (2015). For some examples, see David Levine and Keith

always a distinct engagement with questions about how to relate the general to the particular, even if different traditions dealt with these issues in different ways. The French and Italian cases are particularly revealing, not least given the influence they have had on the writing of microhistory in English. As David Bell has described, French microhistory had a genealogy that stretched back to the vision of 'total history' put forward by Fernand Braudel and the *Annales* school.<sup>41</sup> In the quest for a genuine total history, however, Braudel's students increasingly had to restrict their focus to smaller and smaller objects of study, from single French provinces to individual villages such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's famous study of Montaillou.<sup>42</sup> For French microhistorians, a single microcosm offered a window into a total history, that is, an opportunity to see the world in a grain of sand. In doing so, they paradoxically contributed to grand narratives in which entire periods were imagined to resemble the very microcosms that had been given life in their local studies.

In many ways, this French tradition was rather different from the distinct Italian expression of microhistory that emerged in the 1980s in the works of such scholars as Carlo Ginzburg, Edoardo Grendi and Giovanni Levi. For them, *microstoria* was associated with a specific practice, or mode, of working with primary sources. Microhistorians reduced the focus of their analyses, reading their sources as if through a microscope, and thereby prioritizing small details, or clues, which they used to unravel the teleology and triumphalism of grand narratives. In doing so, microhistory challenged the large-scale paradigms that had come to influence the study of the past, for example

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Wrightson, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1997); Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (eds.), *Histoire de la vie privée*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1985–7); and Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer (Princeton, 1995), especially the chapter by Hans Medick.

<sup>41</sup> David Bell, 'Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms', in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (2008). See, also Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore, 1991); Jacques Revel, 'Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social', in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Histoires: French Constructions of the Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 1995); and Florike Egmond and Peter Mason, *The Mammoth and the Mouse: Microhistory and Morphology* (Baltimore, 1997). I am grateful to David Bell and James Amelang for their insights on this subject.

<sup>42</sup> Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, 1975); Bell, 'Total History and Microhistory', 265–6.

Marxism, modernization theory, and the quantitative focus of certain approaches derived from the social sciences. Although they seemed less interested in ‘total history’ than their French counterparts, Italian microhistorians were always concerned with the question of how to relate the particular focus of their analyses to more general processes. As Levi wrote in 1991, ‘even the apparently minutest action of, say, somebody going to buy a loaf of bread, actually encompasses the far wider system of the whole world’s grain markets’.<sup>43</sup> When Carlo Ginzburg writes, therefore, in the *Cambridge History of the World* that microhistory ‘may in fact be regarded as an indispensable tool’ of global history, this should not be seen as some rearguard action intended to respond to the recent rise of global history — as has been the case in some other fields<sup>44</sup> — but rather a reflection of the genuine inclination of microhistorians towards some of the same questions being posed by global historians today.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the chief witness to contemporary interest in combining microhistory and global history remains the recent publication of a rich and wide-ranging body of works, increasingly gathered together under the nomenclature of ‘global microhistory’ or some variant of it. The first use of the term appears to date to a 2010 article by Tonio Andrade, the historian of China and its relations with the West. Here, Andrade calls on historians to ‘adopt microhistorical and biographical approaches to help populate our models and theories [of global historical structures] with real people, to write what one might call global microhistory’.<sup>46</sup> Since then, scholars, conferences and journals have been quick to take up the call.<sup>47</sup> Needless to say, such works have

<sup>43</sup> Giovanni Levi, ‘On Microhistory’, in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pa., 1992), 96; see also his *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (Harvard, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Microhistory and Global History’, in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (eds.), *The Cambridge World History*, vi, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE* (2016), part II, 446–73. For a unique exception to this, see Magnússon, ‘Far-reaching Microhistory’.

<sup>46</sup> Tonio Andrade, ‘A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory’, *Journal of World History*, xxi, 4 (December 2010), esp. 574 for the citation.

<sup>47</sup> For some examples, see Dagmar Freist, ‘A Global Microhistory of the Early Modern Period: Social Sites and the Interconnectedness of Human Lives’, *Quaderni storici*, clv, LII (2017); J. Bohorquez, ‘Microglobal History: agencia, sociedad y pobreza de la historia cultural postestructural’, *Historia Crítica*, lxxix (2018); and John-Paul A. Gbobilal, ‘The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory’, *Past and Present*, no. 222 (Feb. 2014). For a sense of the variety in use of the term, compare Mark Gamsa, ‘Biography and (Global) Microhistory’, *New Global Studies*, xi, 3 (2017); Jonathan

taught us a great deal, for example about the movement and mobility of people, commodities, practices and ideas; about exchanges between cultures, religions and societies; and about the connections that integrated the lived experience of different religions and empires in the early modern world.

In practice, these works have taken the form of one of two approaches, each of which reflects the distinct influences of French and Italian microhistory that I have described. The first entails a focus on the analysis of a single individual, object or place, which is then used as a sort of microcosm with which to explore general questions ranging across periods, places and modes of history (social, economic, cultural and more).<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the second approach takes its cue from connected history and it prioritizes the close

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Gebhardt, 'Microhistory and Microcosm: Chinese Migrants, Spanish Empire and Globalization in Early Modern Manila', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, xlvii, 1 (January 2017); and Adam Mestyan, 'Domestic Sovereignty, A'yan Developmentalism, and Global Microhistory in Modern Egypt', *Society and History*, lx, 2 (2018). For examples of conferences, the theme of the 2017 meeting of the American Historical Association was 'Historical Scale: Linking Levels of Experience'; in Germany, the theme of the bi-annual Early Modern History conference in Heidelberg in September 2015 was 'Globale Verflechtungen — Europa neu denken', and the event included specific panels on 'global microhistory'; see Margaret Hunt's conference report on 'All at Sea: The Prize Papers as a Source for a Global Microhistory', *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, xxxvii, 1 (May 2015); in March 2016, the International Seminar at the University of São Paulo's conference on 'Scales in Global History' also attracted scholars from around the world. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York, 2006); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London, 2007); 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, 2007); Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, 2011); Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (California, 2010); Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Harvard, 2012); Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (California, 2013); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2013); and Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Entanglements of a Man who Never Travelled: A Seventeenth-Century Chinese Christian and His Conflicted Worlds* (New York, 2018). Of course, not all of these works refer to themselves as global microhistories, or even microhistories, but they share the same attention to the analysis of microcosms for the purpose of teasing out a more general experience.

analysis of sources produced by human action as it occurred across multiple, connected contexts.<sup>49</sup> Where the first looks for the world in a grain of sand, the second sifts through many beaches around the same ocean with a fine-toothed comb. Despite the important differences between these approaches, what they also share is an aspiration to combine the study of global historical processes with a focus on the close analysis of primary sources as well as the work of contextualization necessary to decipher their meaning. In doing so, these works have presented an important alternative to the sort of synthetic meta-narratives offered by some global historians. Global microhistory, in other words, has become useful shorthand for a distinct mode of historical writing being carried out by scholars who already see themselves as working within the big tent of global history.

How, therefore, might we usefully combine a distinct *practice* and method of historical writing such as microhistory with a *field* of historical analysis such as global history? Or, put in another way, what is the analytical work required to bring these two fields together? How does combining global and microhistory oblige us to revise the questions we ask, the sources we use and the methods we employ? These are questions that are relevant to all kinds of historians, because they are essentially about issues of evidence, interpretation and generalization. They are not the preserve of scholars working on global canvasses. Nor have global historians or microhistorians yet provided a worked-out set of answers to these questions. The closest they have come is in a sizeable literature on the idea of the *jeux d'échelles*, or 'playing with scales', that is, connecting different scales of analysis, each of which reveals its own distinctive form of historical knowledge. Yet these works could do more to explain exactly how one should play the *jeux d'échelles*. As of now, it remains far too easy for the neophyte to get lost in a string of citations that refers constantly back and forth to the same handful of articles, leaving the reader feeling like a bee travelling from one flower to the next in search of nectar that never materializes.

Thomas Cohen, a true devotee of microhistory, captured the situation perfectly in his 2017 review of the 'macrohistory of microhistory'. Asking

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien*; Ghobrial, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory'; Romain Bertrand, *L'histoire à parts égales: récits d'une rencontre, Orient-Occident (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 2011); Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (Yale, 2012); Amy Stanley, 'Maidservants' Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia, 1600–1900', *American Historical Review*, cxxi, 2 (April 2016); and Freist, 'A Global History of the Early Modern Period'.



whether global history could profit from a focus on ‘small things as well as large’, his answer is direct and to the point: ‘It is very hard indeed to see how not’.<sup>50</sup> In what follows, this volume seeks to make explicit the common sense that lurks beneath Cohen’s statement. In doing so, the contributors to *Global History and Microhistory* offer a working example of what the past looks like when these two fields are brought together in practice.

### III

#### SEEING THE WORLD LIKE A MICROHISTORIAN

What does it mean to see the world like a microhistorian? The contributors to this volume answer this question in different, and sometimes conflicting, ways. Perhaps the most visible distinction here lies in the opening pieces by Jan de Vries and Giovanni Levi, who have rather markedly different ideas about microhistory, global history and the fruitfulness of combining these approaches. Reading their contributions alongside one another, it is clear that although neither sees a fundamental opposition between microhistory and global history, they do disagree about the ability of microhistory to stand in for a more general, or global, vision of the past.<sup>51</sup> In part, this owes something to the rather different ways in which De Vries and Levi appear to define microhistory itself.

However, there are larger issues at stake beyond mere definitions. De Vries makes it very clear that he has little faith in the ability of microhistory to ‘aggregate’ to the level of macro or global histories. Moreover, he doubts that anything new can come from an alliance between microhistory and global history, particularly because both seem to prioritize synchronic over diachronic analysis. For this reason, he argues, global microhistory remains ill-equipped to ‘act on its full agenda’. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of the social sciences in taking the explanation of change over time more seriously, a subject he has written about in great detail elsewhere.<sup>52</sup>

For his part, Levi rejects the idea that social science theories or models offer the appropriate starting point for historical research. Rather, intensive study of primary sources remains crucial: history is ‘a science of general questions and their resulting specific answers, not generated mechanically but varying

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Cohen, ‘The Macrohistory of Microhistory’, in Thomas Robisheaux (ed.), *Microhistory and the Historical Imagination: New Frontiers*, in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, xli, 1 (2017), esp. 67 for the citation.

<sup>51</sup> Compare, for example, to Putnam, ‘To Study the Fragments/Whole’; de Vivo, ‘Prospect or Refuge?’; and Brewer, ‘Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life’.

<sup>52</sup> Jan de Vries, ‘Changing the Narrative: The New History That Was and Is To Come’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xlviii, 3 (2018).

according to the usages, institutions, actions and personal interpretations of individual human beings'. In this regard, Levi sees microhistory as a way of rejecting the 'too-general vision concealed in the concepts deployed by the social sciences' in favour of practices of historical research that will ultimately contribute to the creation of new general questions. On the one hand, lurking beneath the positions of De Vries and Levi are distinct attitudes to issues of sources, contextualization, and how scholars should treat outliers and exceptions.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, some readers may come away from the exchange thinking that the apparent space between the two historians is less vast than it seems.

In what follows, the space between De Vries and Levi marks out the analytical field in which the other contributors offer their own examples of ways of connecting microhistory and global history. All the contributions take as their main focus the early modern period stretching from the fifteenth to the late eighteenth century, a period referred to by some as the age of 'early modern globalization'. Early modern history has traditionally been a particularly fruitful period for experimentation in historical methodologies, microhistory chief among them. Moreover, this was a period of important political, economic and religious transformations that contributed to growing connections across the known world. This is not to say that the approaches on display here are only relevant to the early modern world, and it is hoped that scholars of earlier and later periods will find here examples of how to pursue similar questions in their own work. The articles reflect a wide range of interests and inspirations drawn from many contexts: the formative instances of trade and economic exchange in the Pacific world (Berg); the concentrated nodes of life in imperial cities (Bertrand); the practices of transcontinental diplomacy in the shadow of the Portuguese empire (Biedermann); the jurisdictional pluralism of the Western Mediterranean (Calafat); the dynamic hubs of Mediterranean information networks (de Vivo); the practical and scientific sites of knowledge-making and production (Easterby-Smith); the processes of mobility and identification that connected the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds (Ghobrial); the visual and material lattices of art and costume books (Riello); the accumulated traditions and practices of dynasties (Duindam); and the connected singularities of labour in the early modern world (De Vito).

<sup>53</sup> Some common ground might be found in the important work of Cerutti and Grangaud, cited by Levi but not De Vries: Simona Cerutti and Isabelle Grangaud, 'Sources and Contextualizations: Comparing Eighteenth-Century North African and Western European Institutions', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, lix, 1 (2017).

Taken together, the collection showcases a group of scholars thinking about a similar set of methodological problems across a rather diverse array of historical subjects. For this reason, I have tended to think of the contributions gathered here as a set of experiments conducted by scholars using, more or less, similar instruments. Like the approaches of global microhistory that I have described above, all the contributions display the work of scholars who combine the study of universal processes with a purposeful attention to the study of sources. Beyond that, there are three distinct approaches evident here, all of which offer good examples of a specific method of connecting microhistory and global history. First, at least two contributions explicitly take up the method of 'following' that lay at the heart of early forms of Italian microhistory. In 1979, Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni described a sort of 'nominative methodology' wherein by following identical names as they appeared in different Italian archives, historians could 'reconstruct the interconnections among diverse conjunctures'.<sup>54</sup> In this same spirit, Guillaume Calafat follows an 'itinerant dispute' across several Mediterranean courts and, in the process, paints a picture of a connected world of legal jurisdictions, frictions and practices. Similarly, my own study of a Greek archbishop and his travels across the early modern world reveals what microhistory can teach us about mobility and identification in this period. Inasmuch as it recalls the influence of 'multi-sited ethnography' on global history, this practice of 'following' resonates particularly well with the variety of questions asked by global historians today.<sup>55</sup>

The four contributions of Berg, de Vivo, Riello and Biedermann each grapple with deeper questions about the relationship between the local and the global and how that relationship varied across both space and time. They do so through a close study of specific contexts that open up to a more general reassessment of universal historical processes, for example, trade and information flows, the communication of material culture, and transcontinental diplomacy. In doing so, these contributions respond to Levi's invitation to use the specificity of local contexts to reassess the general questions that we

<sup>54</sup> Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, 'Il nome e il come: scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico', *Quaderni storici*, xiv, no. 40 (1979); here I cite the English translation, 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace', in Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 121. The classic work on the subject is George E. Marcus, 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, xxiv (1995); for a compelling approach to questions of perspective in global history, see Martin Dusenberre, 'Japan, Global History, and the Great Silence', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxxiii, no. 1 (2017), 130–50.

ask about universal historical processes. Rather than chart the trade of sea otters and iron from the prospect of global trade flows, for example, Maxine Berg's contribution focuses instead on a close study of the port of Nootka Sound, a site in which value and exchange were ascertained in specific ways that could also impact back on global trade flows. In a similar gesture, Filippo de Vivo seizes on contemporary accounts of one specific battle in the Mediterranean to argue that information was a 'transformational process' refracted through intensely localized and socially defined activities. This is a view of information flow that we struggle to see from the lofty prospects of global history. De Vivo's attention to the relationship between the local and the global is also shared by Giorgio Riello in his study of sixteenth-century European costume books. Riello's contribution is an important reminder of the risk of thinking about the 'global' in an uncritical or anachronistic way: for him, the 'world making' expressed in costume books was 'surprisingly void of connectivity'. Finally, in a thoughtful set of reflections on early trans-continental diplomacy, Zoltán Biedermann walks readers through three different ways of imagining the relationship between the local and the global, deftly pointing out the pitfalls and opportunities of each along the way.

Thirdly, two contributions in this collection pay special attention to small details in their sources that might otherwise be ignored by historians working only from a global vantage point. Romain Bertrand's lucid study of the eclectic language of an Inquisition trial record helps us recover a clear sense of the simultaneity of moral worlds in an imperial city such as sixteenth-century Manila. Similarly, Sarah Easterby-Smith argues for a global history of science that pays attention to the small details of local contexts, not just the tiny boxes upon which the movement of live seeds depended but also the social standing of the anonymous gardeners whose work proved so important to the development of French colonial botany. Both of these contributions, alongside that of Calafat, reflect the work of scholars who are particularly alert to what Carlo Ginzburg has described as the 'decisive importance of those traces, those clues, those details previously overlooked, which upset and throw into disarray the superficial aspect of the documentation'.<sup>56</sup>

*Following, contexts and clues:* these are three examples of how historians might begin to combine microhistorical and global historical analysis. This is not to say that all the contributors advocate these approaches, nor to suggest that these are the only options available to global historians. To this end, the volume concludes with two contributions that present alternatives to the sort of global microhistory that I have described here. Reflecting on his extensive research into the study of dynasties in a global context, Jeroen Duindam

<sup>56</sup> Ginzburg and Poni, 'The Name and the Game', 8.

makes a plea for comparative history as a way of writing a type of global history that allows us to salvage 'individual, regional and temporal particulars from the clichés' of general phenomena, in this case rulership. Interestingly, even Duindam's version of global, comparative history primarily built on the secondary literature of regional experts still retains an important place for the study of primary sources.<sup>57</sup> In the final contribution to the volume, Christian De Vito explicitly rejects the idea that historians are actually writing about scale when they use this term. In a sense, De Vito's contribution on the 'micro-spatial perspective' presents a third alternative to the positions sketched out by De Vries and Levi. Like both of them, De Vito's argument does not command the agreement of all contributors, but it offers one of the clearest examples of an attempt to provide a synthesis between the methodological approaches of microhistory and global history. It also offers a thoughtful reflection on the other contributions, and therefore is placed as a conclusion to the volume to provoke continued debate and exchange.

Can microhistory really save global history? Whether or not the field needs saving is a fair question, but nonetheless this volume does argue that micro-historical methods can offer what Francesca Trivellato has called a 'healthy dose of critical self-reflexivity into the practice of global history'.<sup>58</sup> It is hoped that readers will find in these contributions a collection of *maquettes*, or *bozzetti*, the small preliminary sketches sculptors make as a way of experimenting with forms and materials before setting their sights on the final product. These *maquettes* recall the *Ansatzpunkte*, or 'starting points', described elsewhere by Carlo Ginzburg, that is, 'concrete details' from which global, or general, processes can be 'inductively reconstructed'.<sup>59</sup> Whether it is global historians looking at small spaces for the first time, or microhistorians pushing their work into new spatial contexts, the contributions seek to unsettle, to surprise, and to oblige us to revise our traditional views of these subjects. There is also a fair bit of resistance and subversion at play in some of these articles. Levi, for example, critiques the dogma and orthodoxies of a certain brand of global history that has placed itself on a pedestal, seeing it as part of a larger political project of western (or American?) hegemony. De Vito offers what is perhaps the most determined rejection of scale anywhere in the literature. My own piece reflects on the

<sup>57</sup> See Cerutti and Grangaud, 'Sources and Contextualizations'.

<sup>58</sup> Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?', 1. Indeed, I regard this entire volume in many ways as a response to the important set of questions first developed in her seminal article.

<sup>59</sup> Ginzburg, 'Latitude, Slaves and the Bible', 666.

peculiar challenges historians face when their research carries them into areas beyond their immediate expertise. The debate will go on.

In sum, microhistory could play a role in carrying us one step closer to a more rigorous, reflexive and critical form of global history. This is a sort of global history that would merit further collaboration among the wide array of scholars who practise it; it would justify the huge amount of intellectual resources and funding from institutions that sponsor it; and it would deserve the attention of the worldwide audiences, especially students, who are interested in it. To this end, this volume has been made open access to download for free to any reader interested in global history, globally. It is also, I hope, a global history that will take us by surprise again.

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