


ROUNDTABLE

Archive/s, Methodologies, and Silenced Subjects in the Past, Present, and Future of Global Histories

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Mooring the global archive: a Japanese ship and its migrant histories. By Martin Dusinberre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 328. ISBN 9781009346535

On Thursday 7 March 2024, an initial roundtable discussion of *Mooring the global archive: a Japanese ship and its migrant histories* was held at the University of Oxford History Faculty, as a part of the ‘Moving Stories: Sectarianisms in the Global Middle East’ Seminar Series, chaired by John-Paul Ghobrial, with Jennifer Altehenger, Jessica Fernández de Lara Harada, Giuseppe Marcocci, and Filippo de Vivo in conversation with Martin Dusinberre. An open access copy of the book can be consulted here. The present essay takes Martin Dusinberre’s *Mooring the global archive* as a starting point to analyse, discuss, and elaborate distinct approaches to global archives; historical methods; forms, meanings, and reproductions of violence; the place of ethics in historical research and writing; and global, transnational, and local histories. This essay draws on the above-mentioned roundtable discussion, and whenever relevant refers to the contributions of the colleagues who also participated in it to acknowledge the fruitful discussion that inspired *The Historical Journal* roundtable publication. In this collection of essays, we expand and deepen the discussion with other academics and early career researchers. Together, the collection of essays aims to pose questions, identify blind spots, and build new perspectives that enrich our shared understanding.

This essay is organized into three parts. It first provides a broad picture of the historiography, by discussing vibrant scholarship that has elaborated historical methods to approach voiceless subjects of the past, and situating *Mooring the global archive* within it. It examines ‘brackishness’ as an in-between method proposed in *Mooring the global archive*. Brackishness approaches the history of its subjects as a ‘sketch of contours’ through various tours and detours. One of its strengths is that brackishness underscores the importance of recovering alternative and potentially incommensurate stories – the visual memory of a miner, the testimony of a captive

woman, and the songs of plantation workers, for instance – which are embodied as they are in the actual experiences of common people. Yet neither of these portrayals are synecdoche of these historical actors, whose lives are much more than can ever be represented. This limitation necessarily demands from global historians a careful approach to issues of representation, the place of ethics in historical research and writing, and an engagement with the communities about whom we write, as I discuss in the third and last section.

Second, the essay reflects on three themes central to researching and writing global histories involving the movement of people across times and spaces. These consist of: I. Ontologies, positionality, and referential knowledge; II. The problematic equivalency of the state and Japanese migrants, particularly in relation to settler colonialism – which is deemed a structure rather than an event – and the visibly absent issue of racism in *Mooring the global archive*; and III. An argument in favour of comparative and relational studies of migration and against the essentialization of Japanese diasporas. Lastly, the third section discusses some issues regarding the representation of historical actors, the place of ethics in researching and writing global histories, and community engagement in contexts of violence, racism, and dispossession raised by *Mooring the global archive*. The essay contends that brackishness, as a historical method, risks displacing key historical actors by foregrounding others, thereby limiting our perspective to arbitrary hierarchies of value among different groups of people.¹ By way of concluding, I share my hopes on where I see global history, and transnational Japanese history, going next. I emphasize the importance of ethics, global historians' self-reflection, and accountability to the historical actors and the communities at the centre of our work, as well as the need for a critical reevaluation of asymmetrical power relationships between researchers and historical actors.

I

First, *Mooring the global archive* seeks to follow the journeys of a single steamship, the *Yamashiro-maru*, to reconstruct the world it navigated and helped create. It claims that the *Yamashiro-maru* 'was synonymous with Japanese overseas migration' during the government-sponsored programme,² but later this claim is extended beyond to private migration companies. It further asserts its focus 'especially on its migrant passengers' to address societal transformation, alternative expressions of Japaneseness, and the 'complex imbrication of overseas migrants with Japanese settler colonialism' at the turn of the twentieth century.³ In attempting to flesh out a set of claims on Japaneseness through the words of non-elite Japanese migrants, who travelled on board the *Yamashiro-maru*, *Mooring the global archive* joins vibrant

¹This approach underlies most of the histories written in the book, but at times it is also made more explicit, for example, in chapter 2, when the author indicates: 'the article calls for different protagonists to be foregrounded in the history of Japanese–Hawaiian relations from those on whom I have focused thus far'. See Martin Dusinger, *Mooring the global archive: a Japanese ship and its migrant histories* (Cambridge, 2023), p. 76.

²*Ibid.*, p. xx.

³*Ibid.*, p. 3.

scholarship that has elaborated innovative methodologies to ‘recover the voices of the voiceless’, as I recall John-Paul Ghobrial put it in the first roundtable discussion. That is, to reconstruct the lives of marginalized subjects, who have been historically silenced or misrepresented in records, or about whom there is limited extant evidence.

To mention a few, in *Lose your mother: a journey along the Atlantic slave route*, Saidiya Hartman⁴ builds a ‘critical fabulation’ method to trace the history of the Atlantic slave trade by recounting a journey she took along a slave route in Ghana. Critical fabulation combines rigorous archival research with a personal reckoning on the impact of violence, and its echoes, on the archives.⁵ Camila Townsend’s *Malintzin’s choices: an Indian woman in the conquest of Mexico*⁶ employs what I call a ‘context as content’ method. It confronts the challenges of writing a traditional biography of historical actors, who did not leave a paper trail, by drawing on alternative records such as chronicles, annals, ethnographic, and legal accounts. These provide context and common perceptions to trace these historical actors’ lives. Some of these historians, and others,⁷ have also undertaken ‘footstepping’, a term often attributed to biographer Richard Holmes, which involves embarking on a physical journey into the life of a character to retrace their steps, recreate their milieu, and allow the imagination to conjure up how it would have been there in their time. While trying to overcome empirical limitations, these scholars have also recognized the risk of projecting their own concerns, motivations, and feelings upon their historical actors, and their ‘informed’ speculations, based on different types of sources and interpretations, shape their historical narrative to different degrees.

Similarly, *Mooring the global archive* proposes ‘brackishness’ – another term for ‘in-betweenness’ rooted in Yolŋu conceptions of saltwater⁸ – as a method to write about its evasive subject: the human histories it seeks to reconstruct from unexpected archival spaces. Accordingly, in seeking to reconstruct the histories of what it conceives as voiceless migrants from Japan to places like Hawai‘i, Australia, and Southeast Asia, *Mooring the global archive* contends that:

the production of global history emerges not only in archival breadth or archival silences – important though these are – but in the brackish spaces between archival sites, or between physical and digitized archives; in ontologies co-produced as a consequence of complementary agendas shared by record keepers across great oceanic distances; and also in the historian’s

⁴Saidiya Hartman, *Lose your mother: a journey along the Atlantic slave route* (London, 2021).

⁵See also Tiya Miles, *All that she carried: the journey of Ashley’s sack, a Black family keepsake* (London, 2023).

⁶Camila Townsend, *Malintzin’s choices: an Indian woman in the conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2006).

⁷Including Laura Cumming, *On Chapel Sands: my mother and other missing persons* (London, 2020), who reflects on family artworks to gain a better understanding of that which cannot be said and was not said. In doing so, Cumming brilliantly places emotions at the centre of human histories that have left no words, and arrives at a tacit understanding that admits uncertain, evasive, and uncomfortable reflections.

⁸*Mooring*, p. 171.

imagination – or occasional failure thereof – as they try to bring different source collections into dialogue with each other.⁹

To find these brackish spaces, *Mooring the global archive* aims to consider, for example, Japanese migrants' alternative vocabularies to civilization, and suggests alternative temporal scales of lived landscapes for imagining the modern world in terms of a process encompassing parallel timelines.¹⁰

Brackishness, then, focuses on certain contexts, forms, and contingencies as fundamentally shaping the story they can tell.¹¹ As I recall that Filippo de Vivo put it in the first roundtable, 'in *Mooring the global archive*, the global archive is nowhere and everywhere; it pushes the idea of the archive by including visual, sonic and textual sources, which are read through comparisons, juxtapositions, speculations and guesses'. With a focus on proving other archives as (human) constructions¹² – whether accounts of state and non-state actors, Indigenous peoples, and the sea or the earth as non-paper records – *Mooring the global archive* is a sketch of contours, alongside detours and entertaining tours. Through brackishness, *Mooring the global archive* (dis)places the histories of the ship and its Japanese migrants to the sides with the contours of other stories remaining at the forefront. As Dusinberre writes, in chapter 6 – regarding a 1904 photograph of Nagasaki port, where a large *Siberia* ship launched, which is mentioned to consider what might have happened in 1900 at Wakamatsu port, where the smaller *Yamashiro-maru* docked in – the available empirical material is '[c]lose enough in both time and place that we may assume a similar process'.¹³

The proposition to consider brackish spaces in alternative – and potentially incommensurate – vocabularies, temporalities, and landscapes is compelling. It is also a welcome perspective particularly considering what I have emphasized elsewhere about how the world/s we inhabit are shaped by overlapping systems of structures that interact dynamically, at times unpredictably, across contiguous times, spaces, and senses, and in forms resembling palimpsests, or other unstable structures.¹⁴ Thanks to *Mooring the global archive*, we can learn about Sakubei Yamamoto's 1964 *Mining coal in a lying position*, one of a set of visual memoirs on Yamamoto's life and experiences as a miner in south-west Japan, Fukuoka, which are little known outside Japan. As suggested in chapter 6, Yamamoto's life and art offers a deeply moving reflection on how these labouring bodies have sustained, propelled, and spurred growth, even when these same bodies have been given the worst treatment in society. Chapter 5 discusses the transcription, translation, and distortions of Usa Hashimoto's narrative, in which her actual experiences of sexual exploitation are as if in a battle against the powerful interests of many mediators. These mediators include Japanese state officials invested in portraying Japan as a civilized

⁹Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹Ibid., p. 262.

¹²Ibid., p. 264.

¹³Ibid., p. 256.

¹⁴Iker Itoiz Ciaurriz, 'Interview with Jessica A. Fernandez de Lara Harada on othered histories of race', *History Journal* (Historical Association, 2023).

nation, who saw Usa Hashimoto as anathema to Japanese national power abroad and a problem that necessarily required women to bear in silence the brunt of injustices inflicted on them by smugglers, exploiters, and bureaucrats.¹⁵

Mooring the global archive also offers a fascinating glimpse into the collection of *holehole bushi* songs sung by Japanese plantation workers, even when the interpretation given in chapter 3 – which claims that circulation ‘facilitated the labourers’ understanding of their own mutation into commodified bodies’¹⁶ – reproduces the objectification, instrumentalization, and violence inflicted on them. Within the story of the *holehole bushi* songs, there remains another layer of history that is curiously absent from the book – or in the case of the ‘Story of the Hasegawa Family’ relegated to a mere footnote.¹⁷ The *holehole bushi* were preserved by Harry Minoru Urata, a Japanese American teacher who, like Setsutarō Hasegawa and many people of Japanese origins across the world, due to racism (of which more later), was impoverished, persecuted, and imprisoned as an enemy alien at one of the concentration camps established by the United States government during the Second World War.¹⁸ The songs were later conceptualized by Franklin Odo as short stories from the souls of common people. These alternative histories, included in *Mooring the global archive*, are a treasure, embodied as they are in the actual experiences of a miner, a woman, and plantation workers. And yet they are not synecdoche of any of them, for the lives of a miner, a woman, or a plantation worker are much more than what can ever be represented (more on this in the third and last section). This is a limitation of brackishness, as a historical method, with which global historians must reckon.

II

Second, with regards to ontologies, positionality, and referential knowledge, Dusiñberre claims that place, situated knowledges, and context are critical to his reconstruction of the lives of Japanese migrants on board the *Yamashiro-maru*. His first-person narrative aims to show the traps and insights gained from alternating different archives and changing the lens with which we read them. Accordingly, *Mooring the global archive* moves across in-between, outside, multidirectional, gender, and environmental sources, and with these interventions it teaches us a great deal about hidden histories. Yet I kept thinking that oftentimes what is most visible to the eye remains unseen. By this unseen, but most visible, history, I refer to racism, understood as a global modern system that emerged and was consolidated with European imperial expansion and colonialism beginning in the fifteenth century. Whereas the United States (hereafter US), British, and European empires and colonialisms are minimized as the natural setting of the stories constructed in *Mooring the*

¹⁵ *Mooring*, p. 214.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Matt James, Jessica A. Fernández de Lara Harada, Masumi Izumi, Monica Okamoto, and Jordan Stanger Ross, ‘Separate national apologies, transnational injustices: Second World War oppression, anti-Japanese persecution, and the politics of apology in five countries’, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2 (2022), pp. 1–13; and Masumi Izumi, *The rise and fall of America’s concentration camp law: civil liberties debates from the internment to McCarthyism and the radical 1960s* (Philadelphia, PA, 2019).

global archive, their long-lasting systems of structures, with their classifications, hierarchies, and exclusions, remain strangely disconnected from the histories of Japan and the Japanese migrants the book seeks to reconstruct.

It is not only the archive that shapes how we see the world, but also the ideas, concepts, and theories, or ‘the geographies of intellectual choice’, as Dusi Berre terms them, on which we draw to interpret both the archive and the world. Analogous to Ann Laura Stoler’s claim that colonial archives produce colonial ontologies,¹⁹ colonial concepts and interpretations equally produce colonial ways of thinking, understanding, and defining the world and our archives. Take for example the arrival in 1853–4 of US Commodore Matthew Perry, who forced Japan into unequal treaties, after having waged war against Mexico (1846–8), in which Mexico had half of its territory taken by the US. While Dusi Berre claims to avoid a teleological discourse of civilization and its linear temporality that posits Japan as catching up with the West, the first referential knowledge he cites is Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the shogun’s city*.²⁰ The latter praises the arrival of US Commodore Matthew Perry as a republican mission to ‘save’ Japan, and particularly Japanese women, from the alleged barbarism of their patriarchal structures, thus enacting the civilizing mission implied in imperial projects criticized in other area and ethnic studies, but apparently not in Japanese studies.²¹ In other words, through citational practices, *Mooring the global archive* reproduces some of the traps that it seeks to escape, namely, the colonial knowledges that shape its lenses, its archival selection, interpretation, and historical writing.

By attempting to avoid the progressive narrative on Japan as catching up with the West and thinking about parallel times, *Mooring the global archive* sensitively posits five temporal regimes: Japanese imperial time, Gregorian time, international time, each individual Japanese migrant’s own life time, and Christian time. These expanded temporalities are an invitation to add material depth to histories of geographical breadth. For instance, in chapter 6, *Mooring the global archive* acknowledges the importance of focusing ‘attention less on Perry’s famous “black ships” than on the oft-ignored black smoke’,²² alluding to coal histories. However, it then takes Euro-American empires’ structures and discourses of civilization, race, and colonization to the background as if they were secondary actors and processes, thereby relativizing their primary role in making the world in which Japan negotiated its position, autonomy, and sovereignty as a non-white nation. Rather than weaving these alternative five time regimes together, the book’s discussion and analysis tend to foreground Japanese imperial time as determining the migrants’ lives, even when

¹⁹Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the archival grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

²⁰Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the shogun’s city: a woman’s life in nineteenth-century Japan* (London, 2021).

²¹Two things can be true at the same time: existing patriarchal systems across the world, including in Japan, and imperialism, the latter driven not for the unqualified benefit of the people it claims to save but for power, influence, and control. On sexual democracy – that is, the use of gender and sexual equality in the service of other ideologies – as driving some of these projects, see, for instance, Eric Fassin, ‘From criticism to critique’, *History of the Present*, 1 (2011), pp. 265–74. Fassin addresses contemporary sexual democracy in France and Europe as underlying sexual nationalisms, rather than colonialism; but his definition of sexual democracy can also be thought of in relation to colonial projects elsewhere.

²²*Mooring*, p. 231.

the migrants themselves incorporated distinct and varied new time regimes in the places where they worked, lived, had families, and made their lives alongside other groups, with whom they often intermingled.²³ Thereby it shifts attention away from the other parallel temporalities in which migrants lived their lives.

My first question is how we can approach, compare, and weave together the parallel times that Japanese migrants inhabited in a way that incorporates them all and avoids foregrounding one time at the expense of rendering invisible – and outside critique – the relevance of the others (Christian time, Gregorian time, international time, each individual migrant's life time).

On the problematic equivalency of the state with migrants, *Mooring the global archive* intervenes in three distinct fields that have broadly dominated the writing of the history of Japan, namely, empire, settler colonialism, and overseas migration. It joins reloaded efforts in Japanese studies to weave these separate fields together beyond the traditional East Asian sphere, including here places such as Hawai'i and Australia. As I have posited elsewhere, these efforts aim to establish an equivalency between Japan and Japanese migrants abroad, whether in East Asia or in Latin America, by allegedly tracing the circulation of ideas, networks and projects of imperial expansion, and inscribing them on the bodies of people of Japanese origins abroad.²⁴ For instance, Jun Uchida's *Brokers of empire*, Eiichiro Azuma's *In search of our frontier*, and Sidney Xu Lu's *The making of Japanese settler colonialism*, as well as works such as Pedro Iacobelli's and Sidney Xu Lu's *The Japanese empire and Latin America*,²⁵ tend to assume that so-called Japanese 'subjects' – regardless of their individual positions, motivations and actions – contributed to Japan's empire.

With this logic, this literature reproduces a tautological or inescapably circular way of thinking about empire and migrants as synonyms. In other words, this dominant scholarship in the writing of Japanese history, which equates the Japanese state and Japanese migrants, has failed to consider that Japanese people – and Japanese migrants in particular – are singular individuals, who have the human capacity to maintain distinct, oppositional, and changing positions, motivations, and actions throughout their lives, and even afterwards in the ways in which they are remembered, understood, and explained to others. These individuals have distinct identities and have often engaged in complex relationships with other groups that emerge from processes of cohabitation, marriage, and intermixing, which complicate, blur, or shift their positionalities. These complex processes have inevitably created a heterogeneity of positions that *resist* homogenization, obscure agendas to control people on the move, and political projects to confine individuals to state categories.

²³See, for instance, the experiences of Philippine-Japanese children made stateless after the Second World War, in NHK World Japan, 'Stateless: the Japanese left behind in the Philippines', Dec. 2025. See also Eri Kitada, 'Fragments of multi-layered settler colonialism: mixed-race children in Japanese schooling, the American Philippines, 1924–1945', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 13 (2023), pp. 555–74.

²⁴See Itoiz Ciaurritz, 'Interview'.

²⁵Jun Uchida, *Brokers of empire: Japanese settler colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Boston, MA, 2014); Eiichiro Azuma, *In search of our frontier: Japanese America and settler colonialism in the construction of Japan's borderless empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2019); Sidney Xu Lu, *The making of Japanese settler colonialism: Malthusianism and trans-pacific migration, 1868–1961* (Cambridge, 2020); Pedro Iacobelli and Sidney Xu Lu, eds., *The Japanese empire and Latin America* (Honolulu, HI, 2023).

Furthermore, with few exceptions, such as Takashi Fujitani's *Race for empire*,²⁶ most histories of empire, colonialism, and Japanese migrants have failed to address race as a critical analytical framework in their discussion of empire. This is so even though racism was deployed to solidify classifications, categories, and hierarchies among humans, nations, and states.²⁷ As Neil Gotanda has shown, racism, as a system of structures, enshrined whiteness as a norm, and the position of the Japanese as non-white.²⁸ Therefore, people of Japanese ancestry have not gained a degree of universality or normativity globally, are still differentiated racially as non-white, and the power of their state, Japan, does not necessarily protect them against racism nor does it give them unrestricted privilege or mobility. Establishing such equivalence, between state and migrants, therefore risks reproducing racism and state violence against racialized minorities of Japanese origins, many of whom may not even be considered fully Japanese within and without Japan.

Mooring the global archive's attempts to move beyond the binary settler/native are also welcome. Its engagement with discussions on the position of Asians as not immigrants but as settlers of colour, like all other foreigners and their descendants in Hawai'i, or as new *arrivants* is important. However, the idea that it is not colonial intent, but their unknowingly becoming a part of US colonialism that makes them complicit with settler colonialism and the US empire more broadly is fallible. For instance, during the period under study, had Japanese migrants and US interests been aligned, then why would the Second World War have erupted years later? A war in which Japanese migrants were given the treatment of enemy aliens or disposable army bodies. Bearing in mind that Indigenous studies have considered settler colonialism to be a structure not an event would also give more nuance and be fairer to the different positions that different groups of migrants occupy in colonial settings, beyond binaries such as native/settler. Some scholars have called for using a different conceptual vocabulary to explain the movement of non-white groups across white settler states, and the lived experiences of Japanese immigrants demand alternative grammars as well. For Japan is still under the occupation of US military bases and, as the history of Japanese migration overseas demonstrates, their position as white or honorary white is all but contested. The Japanese have not become the reference point globally to think about humanity and rights, in contrast to European peoples who have embodied these given their longer histories of global expansion and colonialism. Thinking otherwise would reproduce the idea that empire and colonialism are the natural order of things and Japan is another instance of a catching up.

My second question, then, is how we can acknowledge in our historical research and writing the agency of the historical actors whose stories we seek to reconstruct

²⁶Takashi Fujitani, *Race for empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley, CA, 2013).

²⁷See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'The West and the rest', in Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, eds., *Formations of modernity* (Cambridge, 1996). This definition of racism is capable of accommodating structural, relational, and intersectional formations of race across space and time, including, for example, the ways in which differences have been naturalized, instrumentalized, and reproduced to exclude stigmatized groups, other semi-colonial subjects, and disabled, gendered, and sexualized bodies in Japan.

²⁸Neil Gotanda, "'Other non-whites'" in American legal history: a review of *Justice at war*, *Columbia Law Review*, 85 (1985), pp. 1186–92.

and tell. In other words, as I remember that John-Paul Ghobrial put it, ‘while the context is arbitrary in a way, movement remains a decision by the actor’. Therefore, whether the right context to study the subjects may be debatable, how would you approach and account for how movement changes people over time from departure to destination, assuming these two points can be determined at all?

To conclude this second section, I would like to make an argument in favour of comparative and relational studies and against the essentialization of Japanese diasporas. Despite evidence that class, regional, and ethnic markers shaped differences among Japanese migrants, as *Mooring the global archive* acknowledges – particularly in chapter 2: ‘the ship remained an ambivalent space of nation-making’ shaped by prefectural belonging;²⁹ and later, when it states that in migration overseas, for instance, to Hawaiian plantations, ‘local differences remained central to the Japanese migrants’ daily lives’³⁰ – Dusiinberre continues to assert an equivalency of the state and migrants. Such equivalency has historically been weaponized to deploy racism, exclusion, and practices of dispossession against people of Japanese origins. Despite their centrality in the global history of Japan, the histories of racism, exclusion, and dispossession of people of Japanese origins are only hinted at and left to footnotes in *Mooring the global archive*. The discriminatory treatment of Japanese immigrants as settler colonialists risks this conflation. It further reproduces a binary between settlers and Indigenous peoples, as well as between land and labour, which obscures more complex relationships between racialized groups. That is, the entanglement of Asians, Indigenous, and Black people in the colonial division of humanity, whereby some groups are given full humanity whereas others are considered disposable, sub-human, or non-human, as Neil Gotanda, Lisa Lowe, and Sylvia Wynter³¹ have persuasively argued from different perspectives. Importantly, the equivalency of the state and migrants is not unique to the Japanese, as it has also been deployed in other contexts and time periods to reify religious, ethnic, and racial minorities as threats, regardless of their actual belongings.

Similarly, *Mooring the global archive* inadvertently reproduces the xenophobic trope used against migrants as ‘invasions’, when it states: ‘by raw numbers, the arrival of government-sponsored Japanese workers – not only in Hana, but in the kingdom in general – could conceivably be described as an “invasion”’.³² However, the author does not indicate compared to what Japanese migrants are deemed an invasion. If they were compared with other migrations, for instance, from other countries in Europe, or the US, or with other diasporic groups such as Jewish, Indian, or Chinese, the claim would be challenged, but this is nowhere clarified. Interestingly, government-sponsored programmes – often invoked to differentiate Japanese migrations as state-driven and therefore as an expression of the equivalency between state and migrations discussed before – have regularly been adopted by non-Japanese states to facilitate the migration of their own citizens. This includes

²⁹ *Mooring*, p. 64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³¹ Gotanda, “‘Other non-whites’ in American legal history”; Lisa Lowe, *The intimacies of four continents* (Durham, NC, 2015); Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation – an argument’, *New Centennial Review*, 3 (2003), pp. 257–337.

³² *Mooring*, p. 114.

migrations from Europe and the Americas to Latin America, for example, but also from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to various regions of the world.³³ Situating migrations from Japan within this comparative and relational framework would illuminate how other states, for instance, the Netherlands, an often-overlooked empire in Asia, engage with their yet ‘invisible and somehow outside critique’ diasporas overseas and their competing agendas.

My last question is how we can engage in studies of Japanese migration with a comparative and relational perspective, to avoid the essentialization of Japanese diasporas as objects of states’ interests. And relatedly, how we can recognize the human dignity and capacity of people on the move to define their individual identities beyond the state and state categories.

III

Third and last, *Mooring the global archive* offers a valuable glimpse of the fascinating alternative records mentioned in the first section. And yet, non-elite Japanese migrants remain silently marginal for most of the book.³⁴ Other than a few lines about them recorded by either Japanese or Euro-American state and non-state actors, such as businessmen, bureaucrats, or artists, we rarely get a sense of the complex lives of the *Yamashiro-maru*’s non-elite Japanese migrants. In so doing, *Mooring the global archive* reinscribes the centrality of voices other than non-elite Japanese migrants on board the ship. Akin to Dusinberre’s insight in chapter 6 that ‘Siebold’s past participle was a grammatical occlusion’,³⁵ the book’s brackishness risks occluding the actual lives of Japanese migrants who were on board the ship. In contrast to what Dusinberre contends in the epilogue, ‘Japanese people on the move’³⁶ remain only a bit less nameless, faceless, and voiceless.³⁷ Or perhaps worse, for *Mooring the global archive* makes these non-elite Japanese migrants appear as if willingly becoming raw materials,³⁸ foot soldiers of empire unaware of this placement,³⁹ unmentioned ‘cargo’,⁴⁰ and/or a (racist) threat of unassimilable invasions,⁴¹ all while simultaneously being labelled complicit in advancing capitalism’s oppressive interests.⁴² Japanese migrants’ potentially changing perspectives, motivations, choices, decisions, life experiences, and trajectories remain absent by the centrality given to other ‘parallel’ processes.

As *Mooring the global archive* acknowledges, ‘[w]e’ve come a long way from the actual experiences of those (Japanese) labourers such as Kodama Keijiro’,⁴³ which, like the Spreckelsville painting discussed in chapter 2, has the effect of distracting

³³See, for example, Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, ‘New waves of immigration and departure in modern Latin America’, *Latin American Research Review*, 56 (2021), pp. 946–57.

³⁴*Mooring*, p. 30.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 243.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 268.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 258.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 143–4.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 114 and 142.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 68.

the viewer from the realities of life for Japanese migrants. In chapter 3, Dusiemberre acknowledges that 'it's unlikely that a Murotsu migrant would have narrated the port's history with the language I have just used'.⁴⁴ Dusiemberre reiterates this when he writes that

[i]ndeed, by-employments in the particular context of Murotsu may have strengthened a worldview in which the natural order of things was characterized by circulation. In turn, this may have facilitated the laborers' understanding of their own mutation into commodified bodies which circulated – which, in the words of the *holehole bushi*, drifted down to the mill.⁴⁵

These accounts, and their underlying assumptions, are problematic. They project the author's own language onto the historical actors he attempts to write about, and turn migrants into mere raw materials devoid of agency. As discussed before, *Mooring the global archive* also inadvertently reproduces the xenophobic trope used against some migrants as 'invasions', even though there is no point of comparison to support this claim.

Bearing in mind the potentialities and limitations of the archives, methodologies, and the interpretations that *Mooring the global archive* offers, as noted above, by way of concluding this article, I would like to share my hopes for the future of history – whether global, transnational, national, or local. I would hope that as historians, we will necessarily require an engagement with the place of ethics in historical research, as well as with the historical actors and the communities we write about. This engagement should be respectful, dignified, and held accountable to research participants in the long term. This is particularly relevant when addressing difficult histories that have been shaped by violence, as is the case with *Mooring the global archive*. Despite not being addressed directly in *Mooring the global archive*, I have showed how racism and violence are central to this book. This underscores the importance of ethics, self-reflection and community engagement, as well as accountability in the future of global history. Accordingly, historians must reckon with important debates in relevant adjacent fields, such as sociology, anthropology, and geography, on what the focus of research about race, migration, and violence should be and most significantly to engage in a critical reevaluation of the relationship between researchers and racialized communities particularly where there exists an asymmetrical power relationship.

Scholars in the fields of race, migration, and empire, such as Martin Bulmer and John Solomos, have documented that in the aftermath of the 1960s civil rights movements, 'the subjects (of research) had changed from passive objects to active critics of the research process'.⁴⁶ This shift reflected a valid concern about researchers serving as agents of power structures, when they acted as outsiders to 'advance personal and institutional goals that were determined outside the community of study'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 102.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 102–3.

⁴⁶Martin Bulmer and John Solomos, *Researching race and racism* (London, 2004), p. 4.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 4–5.

In the case of Japanese Americans, Natasha Varner has evidenced that social scientists – including academics – have been part of the state surveillance machine and complicit in advancing its objectives at the expense of Japanese people on the move, who have already been victims of injustice and oppression.⁴⁸ Therefore, it is critical that people who have often been made the object of research and exploitation – like some of the *Yamashiro-maru*'s migrants – actively elaborate their own understandings of their historical experiences. Japanese migrants and their families, for example, ought to be able to write their own histories and to have their stories recognized as such, rather than being used again as raw material for academic extraction. Similarly, research participants should be protected against extractive methodologies, such as an unwanted intrusion into their privacy, for instance, into their 'Koseki' (family records), which can be employed by what Dusinberre rightly named as 'unscrupulous professional historians'. A historian's direct relation to the subject, research participants, and specific context should also ensure that their research is not driven by personal, institutional, or state agendas, nor by short-term and transactional interests, but that it is self-reflexive, held accountable to research participants in the long term, and committed to contributing to the communities we write about.

⁴⁸Natasha Varner, *Social science as a tool for surveillance in World War II Japanese American concentration camps* (Tucson, AZ, 2021; orig. edn 1946).