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*AHR Forum*  
Another Set of Imperial Turns?

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The border where generations meet is always an area of turbulence.

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DEPENDING ON WHICH SCHOLARS you ask and in which subfields of history you read, the “imperial turn” and its close cognate, the “new imperial history,” are either in decline or just emerging.<sup>1</sup> The “imperial turn” is often defined as a turn from the study of domestic or national history toward a study of empire, thus complicating the presumed territorial, cultural, and political boundaries between empires and nations. The “new” imperial history pits itself as a revision of the “old” imperial history, and focuses on culture, gender, and race rather than high politics, the economy, or military expansion. Both terms are used sparingly, however (even by the contributors to a recently published reader on the subject), and there is far from complete agreement about what each represents.<sup>2</sup>

While there are diverse fields in which one might trace an imperial turn or attempt to explain the newness of imperial history, scholarship in British imperial history provides a particularly rich example, in part because debates on how to study empire and how to measure the impact of imperial history on British history have long been the subject of vigorous disagreement.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the institutionalization of imperial history in the British academy makes it unusual in comparison to other

This article originated as a conference paper given at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in San Diego in 2010, which was followed by a subsequent presentation to the Department of History at the University of Utah. I am especially grateful to my fellow panelists, Jay Cook, Judith Surkis, and Gary Wilder, particularly Judith, who read far too many drafts. Ray Craib, Tom Metcalf, Emma Rothschild, and Robert Travers were early readers of this essay, followed by anonymous reviewers for the *AHR*, María Fernández, Sara Pritchard, Marina Welker, and Wendy Wolford, all of whom made it a much stronger piece. Mistakes and omissions (of which there are many) are entirely my own.

<sup>1</sup> Antoinette M. Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham, N.C., 2003); Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London, 2010); Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2006). I contributed an essay to the Wilson volume.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Howe, “Introduction: New Imperial Histories,” in Howe, *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, 1–16, here 9; see also I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski, M. Mogilner, and A. Semyonov, “In Search of a New Imperial History,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2005): 33–55.

<sup>3</sup> Other historiographical essays on British imperial history include David K. Fieldhouse, “Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12, no. 2 (1984): 9–23; A. G. Hopkins, “Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History,” *Past and Present* 164, no. 1 (1999): 198–243; Stephen Howe, “The Slow Death and Strange Rebirths of Imperial History,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29, no. 2 (2001): 131–141; Richard Price, “One Big Thing: Britain, Its Empire, and Their Imperial Culture,” *Journal of*

national historiographies.<sup>4</sup> Although it is important to be both critical and mindful of the Europe-centered focus of the word “imperial” in the naming of the imperial turn and the new imperial histories, there is little denying the powerful hold that the European modern, or “hyperreal Europe,” has had on the founding and institutionalization of the discipline of history.<sup>5</sup> Many scholars have noted that the new imperial history does a great job of telling us about Britain—England and Scotland in particular—but it is relatively less informative about Africa, Asia, or Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Rather than mark this as a failure or declare the end of the imperial turn, we would do well to examine where future imperial turns might take us, particularly as we imagine a way to decolonize historical scholarship from its Europe-centered moorings. Gary Wilder’s essay in this forum suggests a different lineage for the imperial turn in France’s historiography, and there are other historical subfields that have turned toward thinking about their empires. Thus there are many more ways in which we might construct genealogies about the nature of imperial turns, the newness of imperial history, and their relationship to what are called “new imperialisms.”<sup>7</sup>

The British imperial turn has been the product of many historiographical changes over the last century, and in the last several decades it has engaged other historiographical turns—the global, the postcolonial, and the archival. From the height of Britain’s empire in the late nineteenth century (then considered a “new imperialism”) to our current moment, imperial history in Britain has shifted from the study of the British Empire toward world and global history in which the structuring effects of European colonialism are accorded less centrality than they once were. In tracking tensions between liberal and Marxist historiographies on empire, disagreements be-

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*British Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006): 602–627; Shula Marks, “History, the Nation and Empire: Sniping from the Periphery,” *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990): 111–119.

<sup>4</sup> British imperial history also has the unique distinction of having institutionalized imperial history in four named professorial chairs in Britain: the Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History and the Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History at Cambridge; the Beit Professorship of Commonwealth History at Oxford; and the Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at Kings College, London.

<sup>5</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J., 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty, “Beyond What? An Introduction,” in Loomba, Kaul, Bunzl, Burton, and Esty, eds., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham, N.C., 2005), 29; Price, “One Big Thing,” 604; Durba Ghosh, “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?” *Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (2004): 737–755.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, 2008); Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998); Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge, 2010); Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895–1910* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995); Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, N.C., 1993); D. C. B. Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven, Conn., 2001); Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2005); Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (New York, 2007); Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998); Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011). For the growing scholarship on a post-9/11 U.S. “new imperialism,” see David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York, 2003); Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York, 2006); Harry Harootunian, *The Empire’s New Clothes: Paradigm Lost, and Regained* (Chicago, 2004). *Radical History Review* 95 (Spring 2006) was devoted to the theme of “New Imperialisms.”

tween social and cultural historians, and differing views on the scale at which we should think about empires, we can see how one might write the histories of an imperial turn that goes global while being attentive to the states of exception to the norm that are produced from marginal, feminist, subaltern, and minority perspectives.<sup>8</sup> While proponents of the imperial/postcolonial turn attempted to radically transform historical methodologies by engaging in close reading, questioning the symbolism of language, and exposing archival texts to deconstructive techniques, this move was strongly challenged by some imperial historians, who claimed that their methods were based wholly in archival research and empiricism rather than “theorizing.” One might look to feminist and queer studies approaches to reading archives as a kind of archival (re)turn that requires close reading of marginal perspectives as well as deep and thorough archival research.

The debates within the imperial turn in British studies have been suggestively described as a “family quarrel.” “In my view,” writes Stephen Howe, “the ‘family’ of [the new imperial history] is large, quarrelsome, and perhaps quite dysfunctional; while some members seem not to talk to one another at all.”<sup>9</sup> We might gender this family metaphor and imagine the generational tensions between gray-haired patriarchs, younger matriarchs, and an unruly group of interdisciplinary graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and untenured faculty setting off on a long road trip in an overstuffed minivan (the “kids” in the title of James Cook’s essay in this forum). This conflation of familial dysfunction with academic hierarchies evokes the phrase that Ann Laura Stoler used to encapsulate intimacy in colonial communities: “tense and tender ties,” a term with which we might think as we follow the generational shifts, shared ground, and disagreements in scholarship on the British Empire.<sup>10</sup>

If one of the thrusts of this forum is to mark a shift in historical methodologies through the specter of generational change, it may be equally important to note that these battles within the imperial turn are largely battles within a shared political project—anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism—with disagreements about the value of different disciplinary methodologies.<sup>11</sup> Many of the male elders who trained or taught imperial history in Britain developed their liberal opposition to empire as members of a wartime and postwar generation of men who did compulsory military service in such places as North Africa, Rhodesia, Kenya, and Malaya or lived through the Suez Crisis in 1956.<sup>12</sup> The experiences of the “founding fathers” were different

<sup>8</sup> On the productive nature of the margins, see Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), 291–322; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J., 2000). The state of exception has been fruitfully explained by Giorgio Agamben in *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, 2005). The idea of exceptions and empire is worked through in Ashley Dawson and Malini Johar Schueller, eds., *Exceptional State: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the New Imperialism* (Durham, N.C., 2007); Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Howe, “Introduction: New Imperial Histories,” 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, N.C., 2006), chap. 2.

<sup>11</sup> See the growing body of histories authored by Niall Ferguson, whose robust defense of the British Empire as a lesson for contemporary American policy departs from this lineage: *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2003); *Colossus: The Price of America’s Empire* (New York, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> I am speaking of John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson, Peter Marshall, Eric Stokes, and Thomas Metcalf, respectively. See Wm. Roger Louis, “Historians I Have Known,” *Perspectives*, May 2001; Peter

from those of the “matriarchs,” who also trained in imperial history, as well as post-colonial, feminist, and cultural studies.<sup>13</sup>

As Judith Surkis writes in her contribution to this forum, “a genealogical counternarrative can keep multiple strains of critical interrogation open for the historiographical future.” All of the essays in this forum challenge the presumption of closure that is offered by “turn talk,” and the marking of time, progress, and completion that it represents. My own compressed and selective genealogy is not intended to demonstrate past coherence but rather to argue for future possibilities, particularly in remaining critical of imperialism and its hegemonies. Although some historians of empire believe that history is an empirical and dispassionate discipline that can be “detached and apolitical,” studies of imperialism have in fact been profoundly shaped by political moments of colonialism that call for ongoing scholarly critique.<sup>14</sup>

IN BRITISH HISTORY, IMPERIAL HISTORY is often said to have begun with the publication in 1882 of John Seeley’s *The Expansion of England*, a series of lectures that were intended for undergraduates at Cambridge University. The book, which was coincident with Britain’s “new imperialism” and the “scramble for Africa,” was aimed at expanding the political history of domestic England by encouraging historians to study the history of Britain’s empire as part of a British political tradition or “Greater Britain.”<sup>15</sup> Seeley’s lectures marked a turn toward imperial history (which included

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J. Marshall, review of David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York, 2001), *Reviews in History*, June 2001, <http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Empire/reviews/marshall2.htm#1>; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Forging the Raj: Essays on British India in the Heyday of Empire* (Delhi, 2005), 5–6. In the interest of full disclosure, I should state that I was a Ph.D. student of Tom Metcalf.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Hyam, “The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge, 1881–1981: Founding Fathers and Pioneer Research Students,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29, no. 3 (2001): 75–103. Hyam’s “founding fathers” are distinct from those I have identified. Among the “matriarchs” are contributors to the groundbreaking edited volumes produced in the 1990s: Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities* (New York, 1999); Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992); Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998); Claire Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998); Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998). For further reading, see Margaret Strobel, *Gender, Sex, and Empire* (Washington, D.C., 1994); Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford, 2004); Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (Basingstoke, 2006). Intellectual autobiographies by two important figures in this field show how central the emergence of feminist history and critical race theory was to transforming imperial history: Antoinette Burton, “Imperial Optics: Empire Histories, Interpretive Methods,” in Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, and Teaching British Imperialism* (Durham, N.C., 2011), 1–23; Catherine Hall, “Introduction,” in Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago, 2002), 1–22.

<sup>14</sup> John Darwin puzzles: “it seems unlikely that we will be able to take a detached and apolitical view of Europe’s empire-building for a long time to come . . . It may be an age before we regard it more coolly as a phase in world history”; Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London, 2008), 23, 25.

<sup>15</sup> J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London, 1883). Seeley’s text is often cited as an originary moment in the field of British imperial history: Catherine Hall, “Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire,” in Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries—A Reader* (Manchester, 2000), 1–33; Howe, “Introduction: New Imperial Histories”; Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, N.J., 2010), 46–48; Kathleen Wilson, “Introduction: Histories, Em-

the study of the American colonies) at Cambridge; it was not until after World War II, however, that the subject of the empire was formally added to the undergraduate history curriculum, motivated in part by the return of ex-colonial officials as the decolonization of Britain's colonies began.<sup>16</sup>

A two-part undergraduate course known as "The Expansion of Europe from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War" was developed after the Second World War by several scholars at Cambridge, including Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, because they felt that the undergraduate reading list was too narrowly focused on Britain and its "white" settler colonies (Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States).<sup>17</sup> The authors of the well-known article "The Imperialism of Free Trade," Robinson and Gallagher went beyond Seeley's definition of the British Empire and urged that all of Britain's colonies be included in the study of imperial history. "The conventional interpretation of the nineteenth-century empire continues to rest upon study of the formal empire alone," they wrote, "which is rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line." Thus they called for an understanding of the particular ("submerged") histories of each region that the empire had engaged politically and economically through the long nineteenth century, including Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and the different nations of Asia.<sup>18</sup> When Robinson and Gallagher wrote their magnum opus *Africa and the Victorians* (with the support of Alice Denny), they focused on the political and economic history of different regions of Africa, offering an explanation of historical change that emerged from the colonies rather than the metropole.<sup>19</sup> Although they did not use the language of marginality, an examination of the proto-nationalist movements in African territories was crucial to their analysis, giving the history of colonized Africa a new kind of importance in generating historical change—a feature that was missing in Seeley's vision of "expansion," which presumed that Britain was at the center.

"The Expansion of Europe" integrated emergent scholarship on what was then called "extra-European history" in the United Kingdom and would later be called "area studies" in the United States. The course focused on Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America—the "rest" to Europe's "West"—and promoted the idea that the history of colonized areas needed further study if scholars were to gain a better understanding of the history of Europe and its colonialisms.<sup>20</sup> At the time, a colleague at Cambridge, E. H. Carr, a Marxist historian of the Soviet Union, noted derisively that the new syllabus did nothing to radically alter the average under-

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pires, Modernities," in Wilson, *A New Imperial History*, 1–26. The most detailed is Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, N.J., 2007), especially chaps. 4 and 6.

<sup>16</sup> Hyam, "The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge."

<sup>17</sup> These colonies included many indigenous peoples whose lives and histories were subsequently erased in the process of colonial conquest.

<sup>18</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 6, no. 1 (1953): 1–15, here 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> For more on Robinson and Gallagher's influence on the field of imperial history and area studies in Britain, see Wm. Roger Louis, "Introduction," in Robin W. Winks, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5: *Historiography* (Oxford, 1999), 38–41.

graduate's sense of history as a universal idea emanating from a putatively liberal and Western tradition that put Europe firmly at the center of historical change. "The candidate," Carr sneered, "is not invited to know anything of countries with an important and well-documented history like China or Persia, except what happened when the Europeans attempted to take them over."<sup>21</sup> In observing that history also existed in areas that had not come in contact with Europe, Carr astutely marked an elision within this school of British imperial history, an imbalance in historical scholarship that Eric Wolf and others would subsequently address.<sup>22</sup> Carr's comments further marked a cleavage between the universalizing claims of liberal and Marxist critics of empire, a disagreement that continues to surface in debates between historians who attempt to imagine how a history of Africa, Asia, or Latin America might be written without Europe as a referent.<sup>23</sup>

The Robinson and Gallagher thesis contested widely accepted accounts about the expansion of the British Empire by critics of empire such as J. A. Hobson, who influenced Marxist critics such as V. I. Lenin. Hobson felt that the free trade and anti-expansion liberalism of the mid-Victorian era had been abandoned by the late Victorians in favor of "economic imperialism." His sense of betrayal in the rupture between mid- and late Victorian liberalism was not shared by Robinson and Gallagher, who noted that throughout the nineteenth century, even when liberal leaders professed to oppose imperial expansion, they abetted it in times of crisis that were generated by local politics, economic depressions, and geopolitical rivalry.<sup>24</sup> They challenged Lenin's totalizing thesis on the relationship between monopoly capitalism and imperialism, and demonstrated that free-market liberalism could drive the expansion of capitalism into colonial monopolistic activity.<sup>25</sup> In leveling their criticisms against turn-of-the-twentieth-century thinkers such as Hobson and Lenin, Robinson and Gallagher argued from a position as Cold War democratic socialists, concerned as much about Soviet-style authoritarianism as about American imperialism, particularly in the aftermath of the Marshall Plan, the American response to the Suez crisis, U.S. involvement in the Korean War, and the growing tensions of the Cold War.<sup>26</sup> *Africa and the Victorians*, published in 1961, was a cautionary tale against the

<sup>21</sup> E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (London, 1961), 151.

<sup>22</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1982); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 388–420. An argument for a "post-Eurocentric," "post-Marxist" historiography is John T. Chalcraft, "Pluralizing Capital, Challenging Eurocentrism: Toward Post-Marxist Historiography," *Radical History Review* 91 (Winter 2005): 13–39; Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "New Ways in History, 1966–2006," *History Workshop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2007): 271–294.

<sup>24</sup> J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (1902; repr., Ann Arbor, Mich., 1965); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916; repr., New York, 1933). For one of the best accounts of the development of "imperialism," see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans. P. S. Falla (New York, 1980). The Robinson and Gallagher debate is well encapsulated in Wm. Roger Louis, ed., *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (New York, 1976); George Shepperson, "Ronald Robinson: Scholar and Good Companion," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16, no. 3 (1988): 1–8.

<sup>25</sup> For a critical analysis of the imbrication of liberalism with empire, see Andrew Sartori, "The British Empire and Its Liberal Mission," *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 3 (2006): 623–642.

<sup>26</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, Amrita Basu, and Frederick Weaver, eds., *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World: Recasting the Area Studies Debate* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2003), tracks the shift from funding and scholarship in area studies to global or international studies and its close relationship to the United States' geopolitical aims.

liberal approach taken by the United States, which professed anti-imperial ambitions as it simultaneously provided economic and military aid to various areas of the world. Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny (who was American) were wary of U.S. foreign aid that was offered in the hope that it would promote democracy among people living under undemocratic regimes. These canonical historical arguments about empire were a form of political critique in the early 1960s, written in response to the political imperative of witnessing the rise of a “new empire” (the United States) by those who hoped to learn from the lessons of the “old” one (the United Kingdom).<sup>27</sup>

Over the years, the “Expansion of Europe” course at Cambridge has been significantly revised, and it is no longer as focused on Britain and Europe as it used to be. In 2009 it was renamed “Empires and World History from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War,” and the content was modified to cover world (rather than extra-European) history from a global perspective. It incorporates the study of different empires in order to fill the gap that Carr diagnosed: there are units on the Ottomans, the Qing, imperial Japan, and Russia.

As part of this shift in pedagogy, multiple and overlapping empires are presented as having existed simultaneously and having competed with one another from the early modern period onward. The revised course complicates the image of European expansion by thinking in global and transnational terms and promises to be more inclusive, more capacious, and, as Antoinette Burton frames it, a potential way of “getting outside the global,” away from a Eurocentric focus.<sup>28</sup>

This is not your father’s world history—a field that was widely excoriated a generation ago for its universalist presumptions about historical progress emanating from Europe. This “new” world history is increasingly shaped by our urgent need to understand and historicize our own globalized condition from the perspective of many locals.<sup>29</sup> As in much current writing on globalization, the new global/imperial history presumes a de-centered narrative in which there was no one driving force but rather multiple and unmanageable systems, processes, imaginaries, and contingent events that pushed a diversity of nations, empires, and communities, and their subjects, in different directions.<sup>30</sup> The impulse behind this newest iteration of world history offers agency, subjectivity, and history to those who participated in a global

<sup>27</sup> Louis, “Introduction,” 40. For a recent exposition of America’s experiments with empire during the Cold War, see Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, 2006), pt. 2: “America’s Turn,” 141–284.

<sup>28</sup> Two versions of an essay by Antoinette Burton offer a way to break out of the dominance of history produced from Europe and the United States: “Getting Outside of the Global: Repositioning British Imperialism in World History,” in Burton, *Empire in Question*, 275–292; and “Getting Outside the Global: Re-positioning British Imperialism in World History,” in Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland, eds., *Race, Nation and Empire: Making Histories, 1750 to the Present* (Manchester, 2010), 199–216. See also *Two, Three, Many Worlds: Radical Methodologies for Global History*, Special Issue, *Radical History Review* 91 (Winter 2005).

<sup>29</sup> See Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “Bodies, Empires, and World Histories,” in Ballantyne and Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham, N.C., 2005), 1–15; A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (New York, 2006); C. A. Bayly and Isabel Hofmeyr’s remarks in “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (December 2006): 1441–1464; Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, “World History in a Global Age,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (October 1995): 1034–1060; Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c. 1889–1950* (New York, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, 2004) constitute an imaginary for a new global order; for

economy and ecumene, and it fundamentally destabilizes the longstanding binaries of subjection and dominance in a range of historiographies between metropole and colony, core and periphery, and, perhaps most important, Europe and non-Europe.

Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper's *Empires in World History* and John Darwin's *After Tamerlane* urge us to compare empires within a larger time and spatial frame than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries so that the history of Europe's colonization of the rest of the world does not stand in for all of imperial history.<sup>31</sup> In the opening pages of their weighty volume, Burbank and Cooper provide a reason for their expansive treatment of colonial history, offering a numerical comparison: "Whatever was new or old about European colonialism in the nineteenth century, it was, from a historical perspective, short-lived: compare roughly seventy years of colonial rule over Africa to the Ottoman empire's six-hundred-year life span."<sup>32</sup> The "seventy versus six hundred" invites numerous counterexamples, which might be too easy a response given the volume's ambitious scope.<sup>33</sup>

Darwin goes beyond the exemplary statistic and compares the longevity of different empires to index their impact. When he asks, "But if empire is 'normal,' why has its practice by Europeans aroused such passionate hostility—a hostility still strongly reflected in most of what is written about the subject?" he situates European empires alongside a panoply of other empires and argues that empire is a structure of our collective history.<sup>34</sup> When Tamerlane's empire ended in 1405 after three centuries of Timurid rule, a competition was unleashed between Asian and European empires in which the dominance of the latter was temporally limited to about a hundred years. In contrast to Britain, whose empire devolved quickly after World War II, Darwin reminds us of the comparative "success" of the Qing's nearly three centuries of rule. Even though the Qing were supplanted in 1912, their territories conform to those of modern China.<sup>35</sup> These numerical comparisons help to situate particular histories of empire, but they raise the question of whether the impact of empire can or should be quantified in numerical terms.<sup>36</sup>

Somewhat narrower in chronology than Darwin or Burbank and Cooper, but in the tradition of thinking globally and imperially, is C. A. Bayly's *Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*. Through chapters in which he tracks conjunctures between a dizzying range of territories, Bayly shows that the global spread of major modern developments such as industrialization, technology, the study of religion, liberalisms, racialisms, and the classification of social hierarchies was a product of a global mod-

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criticisms, one might see Julian Bourg, "Empire versus Multitude: Place Your Bets," *Ethics and International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2004): 97–107.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J., 2010); Darwin, *After Tamerlane*.

<sup>32</sup> Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Although Germany had only a brief history of colonial activities, scholars have long used it to explain the country's trajectory toward state-sponsored racism in the twentieth century. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1951); Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal, eds., *Germany's Colonial Pasts* (Lincoln, Neb., 2005); Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, 2011); Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, N.C., 2001), especially chap. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.

<sup>36</sup> A. G. Hopkins, "Accounting for the British Empire," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16, no. 2 (1988): 234–247.

ern in the nineteenth century, one that was generated as much by what occurred in non-European parts of the world as by events in Europe proper.<sup>37</sup> Bayly explains the emergence of modernity as a global process rather than one that emanated uniquely from Europe, a shift in emphasis that grants the force of historical change not only to the center (Europe) but to the margins (non-Europe).<sup>38</sup>

By stressing the need for connections beyond the empires of Europe, Bayly, Burbank and Cooper, and Darwin offer the possibility that global historical change emerged from non-Western and formerly colonized territories whose histories were outside the narrative of the “expansion of Europe.” This new global history minimizes the importance of modern European colonialisms over a long chronology and across the globe. A global history built from imperial history thereby edges away from the presumption that studying the impact of European colonialism on culture, subjectivity, and history is crucial to understanding the modern world; rather, it presents empires in general as constitutive of modernity. In the move from imperial to global history, the question of that impact seems less important than it once was, even in the past work of Bayly, Burbank and Cooper, and Darwin.<sup>39</sup>

The following titles explicitly examine the connections between British imperial history and global history while keeping the structural forces of empire in play as they rely on postcolonial and cultural forms of analysis to read sources and human subjects.<sup>40</sup> These books are not explicitly comparative, but they share a commitment to thinking of imperial networks as an important vehicle for circulating, mobilizing, and subverting the effects of European colonialisms and hegemonies. In their more modest frames, they convey a sense of why the “imperial” matters, and they suggest how an imperial turn might resist the temptation to go global. This is by no means a

<sup>37</sup> C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass., 2004); see especially chaps. 1, 2, 5, and 7–11.

<sup>38</sup> See the responses to Bayly’s book in *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2005): Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “The Long Nineteenth Century Is Too Short,” 113–123; Gauri Viswanathan, “The State of the World,” 124–133; C. A. Bayly, “Reply,” 134–145.

<sup>39</sup> C. A. Bayly is the author of the influential monographs *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge, 1983) and *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1997). Frederick Cooper is the author of *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996) and *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005). John Darwin is an expert on African decolonization, having written *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (New York, 1988); *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford, 1991); and *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> This scholarship breaks apart the metropole/colony dyad to produce other models. For a seminal essay that analyzes “metropole and colony in a single analytic field,” see Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 1–56. An earlier version appeared in *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 609–621. See also Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995). Other models for understanding imperial networks that study multiple colonies within a single domain include Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (London, 2002); and Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2003). See also David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerings in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2006); Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001); Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, eds., *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 2010); Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge, 2009).

complete list, but these works are illustrative of the diversity of scholarship being produced at the intersection of world or global history with the imperial turn in British studies.

Sugata Bose's *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* and Thomas Metcalf's *Imperial Connections* focus on Indian subjects who worked and traveled across imperial sites in the Indian Ocean, from East Africa to Southeast Asia. In Bose's account, Indians such as Rabindranath Tagore sought pan-Asian connections that existed beyond and in spite of the hegemony of the British Empire.<sup>41</sup> In Metcalf's account, the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean can be understood through a study of British colonial subjects and territories throughout the region, as Indian soldiers, officials, and migrant workers spread imperial ideas, practices, and structures across an oceanic expanse even as they began to articulate nationalist and anti-colonial aims.<sup>42</sup> Bose and Metcalf work from India outward, examining how the British Empire's reach was both contested and consolidated by the mobility of subjects from the Indian subcontinent.

Others have shown how empire produced historical subjectivities that complicate the divide between colonizers and colonized. Clare Anderson's study of convicts and other subalterns across the Indian Ocean demonstrates how widespread and deep were the effects on non-elites of Europe's colonial activities and territorial contests.<sup>43</sup> Linda Colley argues in her biographical narrative of the life of Elizabeth Marsh that those who were considered colonizers lived unstable, unpredictable lives. Marsh is a kind of accidental tourist, both a heroine and a victim, and her relationship to Britain and its empire, however tenuous, is reinforced through her travel across imperial circuits.<sup>44</sup> Emma Rothschild's *The Inner Life of Empires* uses the history of an imperial merchant family to convey an understanding of the history of eighteenth-century globalization, examining the family's conflicting attitudes toward slavery, capital, and the rapid fluctuations in their global fortunes. Rothschild shows how the lives of elite British families were entangled with the lives of subalterns, such as Belinda, a servant/slave whose subjectivity is framed by the changes in the family's colonial fortunes.<sup>45</sup> In the spirit of a more inclusive world history, these monographs have subjects whose emotions, sentiments, lifeworlds, and sexualities are part of a complex narrative that is embedded within family structures and economic systems that were produced by colonialism and colonial activities.<sup>46</sup>

The global history of Anderson, Bose, Colley, Metcalf, and Rothschild is no-

<sup>41</sup> Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006). See also Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Calif., 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality and Colonialism in South Asia* (New York, 2004); Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge, 2012). I am very grateful to Clare Anderson for sharing the latter manuscript with me in advance of publication.

<sup>44</sup> Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York, 2007); see also Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York, 2011), which was published as this piece was being revised.

<sup>45</sup> Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, N.J., 2011). I am very grateful to Emma Rothschild for sharing the manuscript with me in advance of publication.

<sup>46</sup> See Ballantyne and Burton, *Bodies in Contact*; Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds.,

ticeably “microhistorical” rather than “world-historical,” following individuals across different regions, colonies, and national imaginings. By working at a smaller scale of world history, Anderson, Colley, and Rothschild are able to situate questions of gender, culture, race, mobility, and subjectivity more centrally. This method—evocative of a desire on the part of feminist and subaltern historians to recuperate the subjectivity of those who are less visible—enables these scholars to conduct archival and prosopographical research that is mindful of structures within empire and the subjects who were produced by empire.<sup>47</sup>

As one arm of an imperial turn, this scholarship is at methodological cross-purposes with the above-cited work of Bayly, Burbank and Cooper, and Darwin. Both groups of historians are working to destabilize Europe as the source of historical change, but rather than “de-centering empire,” Bose, Metcalf, Anderson, Colley, and Rothschild “re-center empire” and reinstate British colonialism as the dominant force in shaping individual subjectivities.<sup>48</sup> They keep the hegemonies of modern European colonialism in play as a part of global history; in the process, they offer a critique of the overlapping histories of globalization and colonialism and gesture to the costs of disaggregating the two.

The imperial/global turn presumes that empires were a product of global history rather than a driver of it, and that modern empires are an effect of global capitalism rather than an institutional or cultural project specific to the colonizers. The idea of privileging capital over colonialism has had a resurgence in recent years, particularly in thinking about how to historicize globalization.<sup>49</sup> In “Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name,” Geoff Eley expresses optimism that with “Europe” no longer dominating the academy, we might now be able to move away from a Europe-centered narrative that emanates from wage labor and the industrial revolution and begin thinking of how studies of slavery might produce a different historical narrative of capital and colonialism. In response, Antoinette Burton notes the presumptions behind Eley’s periodization of a post-1989 and post-9/11 era of globalization, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam comments on the absence of China and India from Eley’s vision. They argue that such new histories of globalization unintentionally reaffirm the place of Europe as the central point of reference.<sup>50</sup> When Burton, in a footnote, observes that “the debate about Europe and

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*Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana, Ill., 2009); and Bonnie Smith, ed., *Women’s History in Global Perspective*, 3 vols. (Urbana, Ill., 2004–2005).

<sup>47</sup> Conversations with Emma Rothschild and a workshop organized by Clare Anderson at the University of Warwick have enabled me to think this point through more clearly; notably, both cite Carlo Ginzburg as an important influence.

<sup>48</sup> Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy, eds., *Decentering Empire: Britain, India, and the Transcolonial World* (Hyderabad, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London, 1993); Shigeru Akita, ed., *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism, and Global History* (Basingstoke, 2002); Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*; Darwin, *The Empire Project*. Two works that examine the overlapping relations between capitalist and colonial discursive transformations are Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham, N.C., 2009); and Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Geoff Eley, “Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name,” *History Workshop Journal* 63, no. 1 (2007): 154–188; Antoinette Burton, “Not Even Remotely Global? Method and Scale in World History,” *History Workshop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2007): 323–328; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Historicizing the Global, or Labouring for Invention?,” *ibid.*, 329–334.

postcolonialism may yet find its most fertile ground in discussions about globalization and global history,” she reminds us that postcolonial critique should not be jettisoned in the imperial turn toward global history.<sup>51</sup>

For historians who work within global historical frames, balancing the histories of the parts of the world that were once colonized against the histories of those that did the colonizing is a daunting project that requires ongoing revision. As Micol Seigel trenchantly points out, it is hard to escape the constraints of a Europe-focused narrative. She despairs that postcolonial critics may have insufficiently theorized the impossibility of overcoming the dominant narratives of world history: “Dipesh Chakrabarty urges scholars to listen for histories outside the logic of capital, while Ashis Nandy supports ‘ahistorical’ constructions of the past, Ranajit Guha resists ‘Reason,’ and Walter Mignolo calls for macronarratives that begin from Aníbal Quijano’s concept of coloniality . . . History’s affinity for narratives makes these approaches difficult.”<sup>52</sup>

THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN THE imperial turn and postcolonial studies has not always been a smooth one. Among some historians, postcolonial studies has gained a reputation for being insufficiently careful about historical facts, empiricism, and archives. In conjunction with feminist, queer, and Subaltern Studies, however, it offers important methodological strategies for conducting archival research, particularly when it comes to understanding the productive place of exceptions, margins, secrets, and anxieties in solidifying colonial regimes.

According to various genealogical accounts, postcolonial theory (and studies) draws from fields as diverse as literary criticism, poststructuralism, Subaltern Studies, feminist historiography, and anthropology. From the generative work of Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, and Aimé Césaire in the middle of the twentieth century to the work of scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Walter Mignolo near the end of the century, the field of postcolonialism has positioned itself as critical of European colonialism and its role in producing scholarship that depicts non-Europe as backward, uncivilized, primitive, hypersexualized, and violent.<sup>53</sup> Postcolonialism has had a dramatic but uneven influence in the humanities, and some scholars have expressed concern that resistance to colonialism has become marginalized as a side issue.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, several academics identified by others as “postco-

<sup>51</sup> Burton, “Not Even Remotely Global?,” 327. For an opposing view, see Isabel Hofmeyer’s remarks in “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” 1444. See also Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley, eds., *The Postcolonial and the Global* (Minneapolis, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> Micol Seigel, “World History’s Narrative Problem,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84, no. 3 (2004): 431–446, here 434.

<sup>53</sup> Good introductions include Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, N.J., 1994); Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York, 1998); Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford, 2000); Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York, 1994); Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, “At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies: Part 1,” in Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, eds., *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (Durham, N.C., 2000), 3–23. The questioning among practitioners dates to much earlier: Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *Third World and Postcolonial Issues*, Special Issue,

lonial scholars” have expressed some nervousness about what being postcolonial means. They suggest that it may be time to move beyond the colonial and imagine new scholarship that is fully decoupled from Europe’s centrality to definitions of “colonial,” in terms both of governance and of the production of knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Although some historians are reluctant to admit to sharing ground with “theorists” of any stripe, postcolonial theorists and traditionally defined imperial historians do have a goal in common: both groups are working to decolonize scholarship by moving away from the grand narratives of “Europe.” One might note that global historians such as Bayly, Burbank and Cooper, and Darwin share this ambition as well, although they rely on a different scholarly apparatus.

By 1996, according to Dane Kennedy, postcolonial theory in its many forms had already transformed literature departments, but it had done little to shake the edifice of “imperial history” as it was practiced in Britain or in journals such as the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*.<sup>56</sup> Kennedy proposed a collaborative intersection between postcolonial studies and imperial history, bringing cultural history and discourse analysis together with empirical research on empires. His plea was heeded by some historians and roundly dismissed by others.<sup>57</sup>

The “family quarrel” between British imperial history and postcolonial studies was brought out into the open when the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire* was published in 1998–1999. Many reviewers noted the scant attention it gave to postcolonial scholarship or historical methods that relied on methods of analysis drawn from feminism, Subaltern Studies, critical race theory, or cultural history more broadly.<sup>58</sup> David Armitage, one of the contributors to the volume on the eighteenth century, noted that the volume on historiography was representative of “imperial historiography in its pre-postcolonial mode,” and that it “celebrated Gibbon, Macaulay, and Seeley as the precursors of the field. Throughout, Sir Keith Hancock,

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*Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 84–98; Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Postcolonial,’” *ibid.*, 99–113; Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1994): 328–356; Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> See Loomba, Kaul, Bunzl, Burton, and Esty, “Beyond What? An Introduction.”

<sup>56</sup> Dane Kennedy, “Imperial History and Postcolonial Theory,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 24, no. 3 (1996): 345–363; see also Antoinette Burton, “Thinking beyond the Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Domains of History,” *Social History* 26, no. 1 (2001): 60–71; Mrinalini Sinha, “Historia Nervosa or Who’s Afraid of Colonial-Discourse Analysis?” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2, no. 1 (1997): 113–122; Wolfe, “History and Imperialism.”

<sup>57</sup> For recent claims that postcolonial studies has lost its importance in imperial history, see, for instance, Matthew Connelly, “The New Imperialists,” in Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore, eds., *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power* (New York, 2006), 19–33, here 21; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Imperial and Colonial Encounters: Some Comparative Reflections,” *ibid.*, 217–228, here 222, 225, 226. See also Connelly’s remarks in in “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” 1450–1454.

<sup>58</sup> Antoinette Burton, review of Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3: *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), and Winks, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5: *Historiography*, *Victorian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2001): 167–169; Alison Games, review of Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 1: *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), and Peter J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 2: *The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), *Reviews in American History* 28, no. 3 (2000): 341–350; Howe, “The Slow Death and Strange Rebirths of Imperial History”; Dane Kennedy, “The Boundaries of Oxford’s Empire,” *International History Review* 23, no. 3 (2001): 604–622; Douglas M. Peers, “Is Humpty-Dumpty Back Together Again? The Revival of Imperial History and the *Oxford History of the British Empire*,” *Journal of World History* 13, no. 2 (2002): 451–467, especially 464–466.

Sir Reginald Coupland, Ronald Robinson, and Jack Gallagher are the most frequently cited giants of imperial history. Almost as often, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Edward Said appear to be its most menacing nemeses.<sup>59</sup>

The *Oxford History* emphasized the grand narratives of empire, focusing on political, economic, and military history, with chapters defined by colonial territories such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Antipodes; the volumes on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries focused on Ireland and the thirteen colonies. The organization and choice of topics seemed to suggest that traditionally defined (old) imperial historians wanted no part of newfangled historiographical innovations. A chapter in the historiography volume, “Disease, Diet, and Gender: Late Twentieth-Century Perspectives on Empire,” lumped together recent historical turns toward science, gender, and domestic consumption on the assumption that they would be fleeting concerns in comparison with the longstanding history of imperial history in Britain that started with Seeley.<sup>60</sup>

Most important, the *Oxford History* projected an air of scholarly detachment in favor of a long-established tradition of British imperial history. As Wm. Roger Louis noted with a tone of finality in the foreword that appeared in all five volumes, “Though the subject remains ideologically charged, the passions aroused by British imperialism have so lessened that we are now better placed than ever before to see the course of the Empire steadily and to see it whole.”<sup>61</sup> Louis did not explain whose “passions” were “aroused” or who the “we” were who were “better placed . . . to see the course of the Empire steadily,” but if the five weighty volumes were intended to be definitive or comprehensive, they instead generated more revisions.<sup>62</sup>

The subsequent declaration of a “new imperial history” drew in substantial ways on the dissatisfaction with the original volumes of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. In Kathleen Wilson’s definition, the new imperial history focused more on cultures of empire and on language, and was dependent on poststructuralist ideas in which discourses, narratives, and representations were as important as material “realities.”<sup>63</sup> It distinguished itself from the “old” imperial history by putting less

<sup>59</sup> David Armitage, review of Winks, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5: *Historiography, Economic History Review*, n.s., 54, no. 1 (2001): 195–196.

<sup>60</sup> Diana Wylie, “Disease, Diet, and Gender: Late Twentieth-Century Perspectives on Empire,” in Winks, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5: 277–289; Louis, “Introduction,” *ibid.*, 1–42.

<sup>61</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, “Foreword,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, all five volumes, vi–viii, here vii; see also Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 23–25; and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, “Imperial Measures: Grand Delusions in Defining the Dominators of the World,” *Times Literary Supplement*, September 24, 2010, 8–9.

<sup>62</sup> The editors subsequently commissioned a companion series to examine issues that had not been fully addressed in the chronologically organized volumes. William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, eds., *Environment and Empire* (Oxford, 2007); Robert Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford, 2010); Phillip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2008); Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford, 2010); Kevin Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004); Levine, *Gender and Empire*; Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, eds., *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford, 2004); Deryck M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward, eds., *Australia’s Empire* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, “Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities”; see also Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, “Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire,” in Hall and Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), 1–31; Hall, “Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire”; Howe, “Introduction: New Imperial Histories”; Kathleen Wilson, “Old Imperialisms and New Imperial Histories: Rethinking the History of the Present,” *Radical History Review* 95 (2006): 211–234.

emphasis on the role played by trade, commerce, warfare, and treaties in bringing about an imperial world. By moving away from the well-known big questions about the British Empire, the new imperial history reframed the scholarship through a new focus on subaltern, minority, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives. This dovetailed with the views of historians who were working from the perspective of Britain's colonies, particularly those associated with the Subaltern Studies Collective, a group of scholars of South Asia that was formed in the mid-1970s. For those in the subaltern school and in the new imperial history, writing "small" history or the history of many fragments has become an important way to challenge older imperial histories that claimed to be comprehensive.<sup>64</sup>

A brief detour through some of the scholarship that was inspired by the Subaltern Studies Collective can show how it relates to imperial history in Britain.<sup>65</sup> Although scholars influenced by Subaltern Studies and the new imperial history share a commitment to making the story of marginal subjects more prominent in explaining the emergence of dominant and hegemonic practices, they have distinct goals and distinct audiences. Those who work from within the new British imperial history have argued forcefully that empire mattered greatly to Britons and was constitutive of Britain's domestic history. This interest in challenging the domestic parochialisms of British historiography was not shared by Subaltern Studies scholars, whose audience was initially other South Asianists in India and elsewhere.

The members of the Subaltern Studies Collective initially defined themselves against histories of South Asia written from "colonialist" and "nationalist" perspectives. They rejected the "bourgeois-elitist" perspective of the dominant narratives of history-writing and those works' exclusive focus on the political history of colonial officials and nationalist leaders; instead, they urged a turn toward the "non-elite" and the "subaltern."<sup>66</sup> The collective is often described as having taken a postcolonial turn in the mid-1980s when the historian Ranajit Guha and the literary critic Gayatri Spivak collaborated to produce a reader of important articles from the first six volumes of *Subaltern Studies*.<sup>67</sup> Scholars who were critical of the collective's approaches decried the fading importance of Marxist approaches to history in preference to poststructuralist strategies and questioned whether "Europe" had become a more

<sup>64</sup> In "A Small History of *Subaltern Studies*," Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that Subaltern Studies was imagined as histories that "privilege the idea of the fragment over that of the whole or totality"; in Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago, 2002), 3–19, here 18, citing Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 27–55; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J., 1993); and Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995). See also Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 1998); Ranajit Guha, *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Ranikhet, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> The collective's interventions reached historians in other fields. See the contributions to the *AHR* Forum in *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," 1475–1490; Florencia E. Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," 1491–1515; and Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," 1516–1545. The collective's last publication appeared in 2005, and a workshop at Princeton University titled "After Subaltern Studies: Early Career South Asian Studies" was held during the Princeton South Asian Studies Conference, April 27–28, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> See Ranajit Guha's modestly titled manifesto "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India," in Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi, 1982), 1–8.

<sup>67</sup> Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York, 1988).

central concern than the agency and subjectivity of subalterns themselves, and whether the global success of the scholars who were part of the collective had muted some of the radical interventions that the group championed.<sup>68</sup> Scholars speak of “early” and “late” Subaltern Studies, with the two collections of selected essays from the edited volumes marking the shift from the study of Indian peasants, workers, and non-elites to the construction of colonial forms of knowledge, particularly archival knowledge.<sup>69</sup> But the “early” and the “late” were not fully closed off from one another; indeed, it was through the careful reading of archival fragments and vernacular sources and the close parsing of texts that members of the collective demonstrated how scholars could use literary analysis to inscribe fragments of subaltern consciousness where one might have presumed that there was little evidence of subaltern activity or action.<sup>70</sup> Although social historians were anxious about the loss of subaltern voice, agency, and consciousness that might come with a postcolonial turn, the collective’s engagements with postcolonial studies offered the possibility that “voices from below” might be recuperated and recast outside a frame of liberal historiography that was defined by disciplinary norms proposed by European colonizers.<sup>71</sup>

Anxieties about the influence of these other turns—cultural, postcolonial, linguistic—were shared among those who were critical of the historical methods proposed by the Subaltern Studies Collective and by the interventions of the new imperial history. In recent years, some historians of empire have initiated a new turn, arguing that the linguistic and cultural turns in its postcolonial avatar were ahistorical, indifferent to historical change, and prone to “story plucking,” “time flattening,” and “leapfrogging” in narrating historical events.<sup>72</sup> The challenge to an imperial/postcolonial turn and its reliance on discursive analysis came from scholars whose work remained resolutely autonomous, self-consciously based in “empirical” evidence. In this body of work, there are frequent calls to return to demonstrable “facts,” such as the economy, trade deficits, and import-export balances.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See Ramachandra Guha, “Subaltern and Bhadrakok Studies,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 33 (August 19, 1995): 2056–2058; Jim Masselos, “The Dis/Appearance of Subalterns: A Reading of a Decade of Subaltern Studies,” *South Asia*, n.s., 15, no. 1 (1992): 105–125; Tirthankar Roy, “Subaltern Studies: Questioning the Basics,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 23 (June 8, 2002): 2223–2228; K. Sivaramakrishnan, “Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Studies Project,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8, no. 4 (December 1995): 395–429; David Washbrook, “Orientalism and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire,” in Winks, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5: 596–611.

<sup>69</sup> The terms “early” and “late” are used by Tirthankar Roy, “Questioning the Basics”; Chakrabarty, “A Small History of *Subaltern Studies*”; Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis, 1997).

<sup>70</sup> Two essays exemplify a historical method that is attentive to popular and community discourses and subjectivities: Ranajit Guha, “Chandra’s Death,” in Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies V* (Delhi, 1987), 135–165; and Shahid Amin, “Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921–22,” in Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies III* (Delhi, 1984), 1–61.

<sup>71</sup> Among the critical essays are Sumit Sarkar, “The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies,” in Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi, 1997), 82–108; Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (January 1992): 141–167. Responses include Gyan Prakash, “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook,” *ibid.*, 168–184; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 14 (April 8, 1995): 751–759. The essays are reprinted in Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (New York, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 17–19.

<sup>73</sup> For instance, Andrew S. Thompson attempts to measure the impact of the empire on different

In 2006, Richard Price announced: “The imperial turn is unlikely to suffer the same fate as the linguistic turn.”<sup>74</sup> He distanced the imperial turn from the excesses of the linguistic turn and its professed attachment to literary criticism, continental theory, and postcolonial criticism and suggested that imperial history was grounded in archival evidence, rigorous argument, and material concerns rather than culture or language.<sup>75</sup> Price seems to reject Spivak’s (Derridean) deconstructionist mode of analysis and Saidian (Foucauldian) discursive analysis to remind us that British history’s method is empirical, imperial, and systemic, in contrast to French interventions in history, which are based on “theory.” In Price’s account, the imperial turn is its own scholarly approach, building on a set of analytic practices with their basis in British universalisms such as free trade, liberalism, possessive individualism, and the rule of law.

This recent critique of the role of postcolonial studies in the imperial turn has inspired a numbers-driven or empirical archival methodology that relegates the interdisciplinary possibilities of postcolonial studies to the sidelines, especially the role of margins or the fragment as a generative source of historical change. One might cite Bernard Porter’s ruthlessly empirical *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, which details how little Britons cared about empire at its height in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through a meticulous search of textual sources produced in Britain, Porter argues that the presence of empire barely registered in the reading material of a broadly construed reading public, thus challenging the claims of new imperial historians such as Catherine Hall and Kathleen Wilson, who have argued that a widespread imperial culture in Britain produced popular support for colonial expansion.<sup>76</sup> Porter’s book is provocative, and he clearly defines the opposition: postcolonial literary scholars, cultural historians, and others who take a shoddy approach to archival work that is inattentive to numerical evidence.<sup>77</sup>

In response to Porter’s work, the literary scholar Lee Sterrenburg generously noted: “Historians often count things; they pay attention to the numbers. We in literary studies and cultural studies often do not keep track of the numbers. But we sometimes write as if we do.”<sup>78</sup> While Sterrenburg presupposes that “we in literary studies” and other non-archivally based fields do not share a concern with archival

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categories of British citizens in *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Price, “One Big Thing,” 602. According to the Google N-gram chart in James Cook’s essay in this forum, 2006 was the year in which the imperial turn spiked.

<sup>75</sup> Price presumes the prior existence of the linguistic and cultural turn for the production of the imperial turn, but Bill Sewell notes that his own “conversion” as a young faculty member at Chicago was influenced by Bernard Cohn and Ron Inden, anthropologists who worked on India. William H. Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), 42.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004); Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003).

<sup>77</sup> Critical reviews occasioned an extended response from Bernard Porter, “Further Thoughts about Imperial Absent-Mindedness,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 1 (2008): 101–117; and a subsequent response by one of his interlocutors, John Mackenzie, “‘Comfort’ and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 4 (2008): 659–668.

<sup>78</sup> Lee Sterrenburg, “Significant Evidences and the Imperial Archive: Response,” *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2004): 275–283, here 277. Porter approvingly cited this passage in a response to his critics.

research and empiricism, his image of what historians do effaces the value of studying the margins, those in the minority, and those less numerous.<sup>79</sup>

The question of numbers and “keeping track,” or maintaining an account book of colonialism, invites investigation, particularly if we think of history’s growing distance from the numbers-driven, quantitative turn in political science and some branches of sociology.<sup>80</sup> Arjun Appadurai’s 2006 book *Fear of Small Numbers* examines the peculiar importance that small numbers take on in our social anxieties: there may be one terrorist flying on Christmas Day with explosives in his underwear, but he then becomes a cipher for a nationwide lack of trust between a majority and a minority population.<sup>81</sup> Appadurai’s paradigm explains how small numbers can produce disproportionate anxieties; his ratio can also help us understand how historical anxieties produced from the social margins of empire manifest themselves in the texts of colonial archives. (The definition of colonial archives need not be limited to texts; it could easily be expanded to include advertisements, films, posters, museum pieces, and children’s books.)<sup>82</sup> If archival deficiencies are an obstacle to understanding those who were less important in history, Appadurai’s model transforms the problem of archival material from a situation of lack to one of profusion and proliferation.

Calls for empiricism in the imperial turn have moved us toward an archival turn, something that has received a great deal of attention in colonial studies.<sup>83</sup> The charge that some historians are too lazy to visit archives is a standard refrain among those who are unmoved by the interventions of the cultural, linguistic, and imperial turns.<sup>84</sup> In a study of colonial India that was published in 2000, Richard Eaton noted that a majority of the research on India is conducted in a few archives. “Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s saw a sharp drop from levels of earlier decades in the number of historians who applied for support or permission to conduct research out in the *mufassal*—that is, in district archives, local libraries, private collections, zamindari records, and so

<sup>79</sup> On the continuing richness of the margins in imperial history, see Sameetah Agha and Elizabeth Kolsky, eds., *Fringes of Empire: Peoples, Places, and Spaces in Colonial India* (Delhi, 2009); Harald Fischer-Tiné and Susanne Gehrmann, eds., *Empires and Boundaries: Rethinking Race, Class, and Gender in Colonial Settings* (New York, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> See Mirsepassi, Basu, and Weaver, *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World*, 7–8. Wasserstrom reminds us that statistically driven history never emerged in the way it was once imagined; “New Ways in History,” 282.

<sup>81</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, N.C., 2006).

<sup>82</sup> See especially John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984); Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986); Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, N.C., 1996); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, Conn., 1994); David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995), chap. 5: “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising,” 207–231; Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, eds., *Photography’s Other Histories* (Durham, N.C., 2003); James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago, 1997).

<sup>83</sup> Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C., 2005); Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (New York, 2003); Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh, eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town, 2002); Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993).

<sup>84</sup> Howe, “Introduction: New Imperial Histories,” 3.

forth. Most ended up in London, and a few in national or state archives in India, studying colonial records that were then subjected to discourse analysis.”<sup>85</sup> Eaton suspects that historians of colonialism are getting soft; we used to be hunters and gatherers, “visiting the Indian hinterland,” but now we find ourselves sitting in arm-chairs in America or Britain “theorizing about texts.”<sup>86</sup> Matthew Connelly has expressed similar dismay about the lack of archival scholarship behind particular kinds of scholarly work: “When I work in the archives of the World Bank or the World Health Organization or the Ford Foundation, I find myself virtually alone (and wondering whether all the professed interest in ‘political economy’ in the cultural studies field is sincere).”<sup>87</sup> There is a whiff of archival machismo combined with disciplinary gatekeeping in Eaton’s and Connelly’s criticisms, but if historians did indeed welcome literary critics or cultural studies scholars into the archives, would our place in the academy as the hunters of “facts” be undermined?<sup>88</sup>

The centrality of archival research is an important problematic for all historians, but particularly so for those of us who rely on archives that were created by a colonial government. Many of us read “against the grain,” mining the archives for knowledge that no one else has found, producing evidence of lives lived in the past that demonstrates something new and original.<sup>89</sup> In rejecting the grand narratives of great men and their voluminous archives, much of the historical scholarship “from below” claimed its moral authority (and staked a claim to extreme forms of archival labor and prowess) from a position of absence: there were fewer documents on women, slaves, subalterns, children, and the disabled, and we found them. I am among those who regularly feel archivally superior (and, yes, even macho) because of my ongoing suffering in archives across India, where dust, a lack of air-conditioning, and frequent power outages are obstacles to research.<sup>90</sup> Against the challenges of archival deficiency, some of us have become archival swashbucklers.

The archival turn can be its own kind of closure, consolidating historians’ access to “facts.” But by examining how the archival turn draws from the imperial/post-colonial turn, and by considering the possibility of another set of imperial turns, we can resist this closure and return to archival research in a new spirit of interdisciplinary engagement and robust empiricism.

Archives are growing in importance to literary scholars, postcolonial critics, and anthropologists who work on European colonialisms. Two recent critical analyses were authored by scholars of literature who are historically minded: Betty Joseph’s

<sup>85</sup> Richard Eaton, “(Re)imag(in)ing Otherness: A Postmortem for the Postmodern in India,” *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 57–78, here 73; this sentiment was echoed by Price, “One Big Thing,” 608.

<sup>86</sup> Eaton, “(Re)imag(in)ing Otherness,” 73.

<sup>87</sup> “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” 1453.

<sup>88</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2002).

<sup>89</sup> The idea of “archival fetishism” has been analyzed through a gendered lens by Antoinette Burton, “Archive Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial Histories,” in Levine, *Gender and Empire*, 281–293.

<sup>90</sup> See Dinyar Patel’s four-part series on Indian archives and libraries in the *New York Times* blog *India Ink*: “In India, History Literally Rots Away,” March 20, 2012; “Repairing the Damage at India’s National Archives,” March 21, 2012; “India’s Archives: How Did Things Get This Bad?,” March 22, 2012; “The Parsis, Once India’s Curators, Now Shrug as History Rots,” March 23, 2012, <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/author/dinyar-patel/>.

*Reading the East India Company* and Anjali Arondekar's *For the Record*.<sup>91</sup> When we read those works alongside Ann Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain*, which is framed as "an ethnography of the archive," we start to see that how a colonial state maintained its archives makes a great deal of difference to historians' practices.<sup>92</sup>

Joseph, Arondekar, and to a lesser degree Stoler build on Gayatri Spivak's now decades-old expression of concern with the archives in an essay from 1985, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," in which she examined a moment in one woman's life, arguing that it was only when the woman became an object of concern for the colonial state that she was able to be recorded in the archives.<sup>93</sup> It was an important seed for Spivak's arguments in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," a canonical text in feminist and postcolonial studies in which she contends that the colonial archive was the voice of the liberal-imperial state and that it should be used with some caution in the quest for subaltern subjectivities.<sup>94</sup> Spivak's essay challenged one of the key tenets of Ranajit Guha's goal in founding Subaltern Studies, which was to unearth subaltern consciousness that was neither elite nor official; Guha called subaltern subjectivity "autonomous," an idea that was later revised (in conversation with Spivak's intervention) to consider the ways in which the subaltern or insurgent was produced as a historical subject by the colonial archives.<sup>95</sup>

In spite of Spivak's pessimism, the search for the female subaltern has continued. Joseph begins from the proposition that there are silences and gaps in the East India Company's archives that require careful reading. She challenges Spivak's occlusion and erasure of gendered subjects, arguing that "the partial and fragmented appearance of women can provide the occasion for a new telling that ushers in a new subject of history."<sup>96</sup> Joseph works from the assumption that if one reads carefully, there are silences to be excavated, subjectivities to be retrieved, and patterns of gendered domination to be discovered in the colonial archive.

Stoler and Arondekar go in a different direction, emphasizing the voluminousness of the colonial archive. "The official documents of colonial archives like the Netherlands Indies," Stoler notes, "are so weighted with fixed formats, empty phrases, and racial clichés that one is easily blinded by their flattened prose and numbing dullness."<sup>97</sup> Archival excess is never fully contained by the logic of the colonial state: in Stoler's detailed ethnography of one archive, she is struck by "how

<sup>91</sup> Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago, 2004); Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, N.C., 2009). Both build on the work of Richards, *The Imperial Archive*.

<sup>92</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, N.J., 2009); see also Nicholas B. Dirks, "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History," in Brian Keith Axel, ed., *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham, N.C., 2002), 47–65.

<sup>93</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985): 247–272.

<sup>94</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, Ill., 1988), 271–313.

<sup>95</sup> Ranajit Guha had anticipated some of Spivak's interventions in "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies II* (Delhi, 1983), 1–42. The Spivakian turn was most deeply felt in the essays by Gyanendra Pandey, which culminated in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990). For an exposition of Subaltern Studies' engagements with their critics, see Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, chaps. 1–2. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), chap. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Joseph, *Reading the East India Company*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 23.

much of what was collected was made irrelevant to what state officials decided, both to what they acknowledged they could do in practice and what about the Indies they claimed to know.”<sup>98</sup> Stoler rightly refuses to distinguish between the different values placed on the archive in historical, anthropological, and literary scholarship, noting that “the broader social life of an archive” makes it an important constitutive fact in both culture and history. She demands that the archive be seen not as a bank or a place of “extraction” or excavation, but as constitutive of a larger set of social relations that it can never fully contain.<sup>99</sup>

In the spirit of Stoler’s ethnography, Arondekar asks: “Can an empty archive also be full?” and she examines the process by which sexuality—ordinarily repressed by the colonial state—permeates the archive at multiple levels.<sup>100</sup> Situating herself at the intersection of queer and postcolonial studies, she conducts a close reading of Victorian advertisements and manuals for dildos made of “India rubber,” noting that “late nineteenth-century pornographic texts are plentifully available (albeit in ‘locked cupboards’ and ‘private cases’). Yet such plenitude eschews any simple turn to the rhetorical mystifications of presence and facticity.”<sup>101</sup> Arondekar’s challenge to facticity is suggestive of how archival plenitude might be calculated, particularly when it relates to a subject that is rarely the subject of history. Her primary focus is the “open secret” of homosexuality, but one might expand it further to encompass all the other open secrets that are embedded in the archive, but that are uncountable and unaccountable to a singular source of information.

The plentiful archival evidence of marginal populations animates Elizabeth Kolsky’s argument in *Colonial Justice in British India*. She begins from the study of a population that is often at the margins of colonial society: “poor whites,” who were insufficiently European to join the ruling classes. One might think that a marginal population would not have produced many records, but Kolsky discovered quite the opposite. She found an abundance of court cases documenting the crimes of a marginal population of poor or “mean” whites whose archival presence proliferated in spite of their small numbers. By reading an enormous number of court cases, criminal complaints, legislative documents, and official memoranda, she demonstrates how legal codification in India, imagined as a cornerstone of the putatively rational and emancipatory rule of law that underpinned British rule there, circumvented the liberal claims behind empire.<sup>102</sup> Her arguments build on Giorgio Agamben’s claims about the generative power of exceptions: although codification was intended to promote a rationalized bureaucracy for administering justice, it was based on a large number of exceptions authorizing a colonial rule of difference that became normative.<sup>103</sup>

The idea of a voluminous archive of the margins, exemplified by Stoler’s and Kolsky’s research, rather than one that is hard to access or somehow inadequate to

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>100</sup> Arondekar, *For the Record*, 1. See also Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s “History of Sexuality” and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C., 1995); Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002).

<sup>101</sup> Arondekar, *For the Record*, 99.

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Kolsky, “Conclusion,” in Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (Cambridge, 2010), 229–233.

<sup>103</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*.

the task of writing a well-researched historical monograph or dissertation, is a relatively new idea. Notably, this archival turn originated with scholars whose imperial turn is invested in postcolonial ways of reading, in gender and sexuality studies, and in following the minutiae of court cases, catalogues, and archival indexes. One might be tempted to classify the archival turn as a return to empiricism, as is encouraged by Price, Porter, Eaton, and Connelly, but it is not in the spirit of the arguments that we see in the work of Stoler, Arondekar, and Kolsky. This archival turn relies on strategies of “theorizing about texts,” while doing a lot of gathering at the same time.

ONE STRIKING FEATURE OF THE series of turns that the historiography on empires has taken is the focus on the profusion of information, the spread of knowledge, people, cultures, and practices across networks that are both global and imperial. In the multiplicity of these turns, in the imperial turn’s turn toward globalization, toward postcolonial studies, *and* toward the archive, there is a great deal of information that is unmanageable by a single actor.

As the other essays in this forum argue, using the language of the “new,” “after,” and “beyond” to describe historiographical turns seems premature. My compressed and selective account of British imperial history since the late nineteenth century to the present might seem parochial, particularly for historians working in other fields in which the coordinates and concerns of imperial turns are quite different. But since 9/11, drawing lessons from the late-nineteenth-century British Empire and applying them to the emergent American empire has become an important theme among historians of empire.<sup>104</sup> If we are to remain critical of colonialism’s new guises, or what Harry Harootunian has suggestively called “the empire’s new clothes,” we must continue to be self-reflexive about our current imperial moment, one that was born of our shared historical legacies and historiographies.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore, *Lessons of Empire*; Go, *Patterns of Empire*; Eric Hobsbawm, *On Empire: America, War, and Global Supremacy* (New York, 2008); A. G. Hopkins, “Capitalism, Nationalism and the New American Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35, no. 1 (2007): 95–117; Hopkins, “Lessons of ‘Civilizing Missions’ Are Mostly Unlearned,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2003, 5; Stephen Howe, “Afterword: Transnationalisms, Good, Bad, Real, Imagined, Thick and Thin,” *Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Resistance*, Special Issue, *Interventions* 4, no. 1 (2002): 79–88; Dane Kennedy, “Essay and Reflection: On the American Empire from a British Imperial Perspective,” *International History Review* 29, no. 1 (2007): 83–108; Timothy H. Parsons, *The Rule of Empires: Those Who Built Them, Those Who Endured Them, and Why They Always Fail* (Oxford, 2010). As this essay was going to press, an opinion piece appeared in a major American newspaper: Kwasi Kwarteng, “Echoes of the End of the Raj,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2012, A25.

<sup>105</sup> Harootunian, *The Empire’s New Clothes*; see also Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 6–34.

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