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# Roundtable: the archives of global history in a time of international immobility

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Reading the acknowledgements section of any book that might be categorized as global history, one comes across a long and impressive list of archives, frequently spanning multiple continents. These books often historicize structures that facilitate or constrain global connections, mobility and interactions, and they often present narratives that are less Eurocentric than those they write against.<sup>2</sup> But they rarely raise the question of who gets to be a global historian. After all, the use of multiple archives across national borders has always relied on the possession of a strong passport and the funding of a wealthy institution. When these once marginal issues suddenly gained traction in March 2020 amid national lockdowns and restrictions on international travel, we were puzzled. Why did such issues become ‘global’ only when they started to impact particular scholars – notably those who had previously enjoyed the greatest access to resources and freedoms? Why did funding bodies start to think about these issues only once the pandemic hit? What does it mean to ‘do’ global history in a deeply unequal world? It was during an e-conversation about these questions that the idea for a seminar series entitled ‘The archives of global history in a time of international immobility’ was born.

Our hope for the seminar series was to provide both a practical forum to exchange ideas about new archival practices, in light of the pandemic, and a space for thinking creatively about ‘disconnection’, a topic of recent and ongoing conceptual discussion

<sup>1</sup> The seminar series on which this article is based was supported by the Institute of Historical Research. We would like to thank Catherine Clarke and Gemma Dörner especially. The series was co-convened by Bengü Aydın Dikmen, Nilina Deb Lal, Merve Fejzula, Sara Honarmand Ebrahimi, Ismay Milford and Mohamed Yehia. We would also like to thank all those who spoke on seminar panels: Reem Abou-el-Fadl, Daniela Agostinho, Felix Ajiola, Melodee Beals, Jennifer Bond, G. A. Bremner, Kate Brown, Nilina Deb Lal, Melody Delmar, Manikarnika Dutta, Yasmina El Chami, Hannah Elsi, Samah Gafar, Namrata Ganneri, Kieran Gaya, Kirsten Kamphuis, Sami Lakomäki, John Little, Áine McHugh, Alex Miskin Simple, Rim Naguib, Katharina Oke, Hussein Omar, Mezna Qato, Andrea Thal, Mark Tizzoni, Uğurgül Tunç, Aparna Vaidik, Tereza Valny, Katherine Vyhmeister, Curtis Wallace, Zhengfeng Wang, Andreas Weber and Rustin Zarkar. All contributors are listed alphabetically by second name.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this article, we use *global history* to refer to a range of approaches that open up dialogue between area specialisms, foreground non-Eurocentric histories and are interested in implications beyond national cases.

in the field of global history.<sup>3</sup> After being awarded an online platform by the Institute of Historical Research as part of their online Partnership Seminars, we organized eight roundtable-style Zoom events across 2021.<sup>4</sup> As a team of convenors, we invited a total of thirty-three speakers – researchers, archivists and practitioners – based in Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Finland, India, Ireland, Jamaica, the Netherlands, Nigeria, South Sudan, Turkey, the U.K. and the U.S.A. Seminar themes ranged from archiving violence to the architecture of global cities, with common threads relating to access, ownership and collaboration emerging throughout. Following the completion of the seminars, a number of speakers agreed to share responses to three major questions raised during the series, drawing on their own work, research and experience. These responses are presented in this opinion article, with the hope of capturing in written form the vibrancy of the conversations we enjoyed through a medium so characteristic – for some – of pandemic-era working life.

## 1. The archives of global history

*The inaccessibility of many traditional, paper archives during the pandemic is a prompt for us to think about archives in the most expansive sense. Across the series we considered the limits of state archives, in particular, for ‘doing’ global history, and heard about ambitious digitization projects that promise to reinvent official records and open them for public use, like Alex Miskin Simple’s outreach work at the South Sudan National Archives. Non-paper archives were a recurring theme: built environment as archive, landscape as archive (in Tereza Valny’s work), inaccessibility as archive. To capture these themes, we asked contributors: where are the archives of global history?*

**Uğurgül Tunc:** Before asking where the archives of global history are, we need to question what constitutes an archive. Relying heavily on conventional archives is one of the main reasons behind the lack of diversity and problems of representation in historiography. If we want to create an historiography that gives voice to those whose voices have been silenced because of the gaps in conventional archives, then we need to learn how to read those gaps and search for the missing narratives of historically marginalized people. The work of Natalie Zemon Davis presents a good example of how we can find records of ‘ordinary folk’ through absences in conventional archives. We need to go one step further, though, to include those who may never have made their way into written records. We need to forego our heavy reliance on textual sources and treat remnants of material culture, archaeological and architectural evidence, folk literature, and oral records as pieces of the puzzle. In that sense, vast geographies in their entirety – with their buildings, stories told by their peoples, their traditions, their folklore and so on – contain the archives of global history. We also need to remind ourselves of our responsibility to archive our present era in such a way that ensures future historians’ easy access to information that reflects the experiences (that includes sensory experiences) and contributions of diverse groups of people.

**Hannah Elsi:** I agree with many of these points. The short answer to this question is that the most pertinent and underutilized archives of global history are *not* held in official buildings, nor comprised of letterheaded paper. They include: oral traditions that

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., the work of the Käte Hamburger Research Centre ‘Dis:connectivity in Processes of Globalisation’ <<https://www.globaldisconnect.org/>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

<sup>4</sup> See C. Clarke, ‘Timely interventions and conversations: IHR announces its new Partnership Seminars, 2021–22’, *On History*, 8 Nov. 2020 <<https://blog.history.ac.uk/2020/11/timely-interventions-and-conversations-ihr-announces-its-new-partnership-seminars-2021-22/>> [accessed 20 June 2022]; and ‘The Archives of Global History in a time of international immobility’, *Institute of Historical Research* <<https://www.history.ac.uk/partnership-seminars/archives-global-history-a-time-international-immobility>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

have transmitted historical memory in stories, legends and dinner-table conversations; material cultures and objects – family albums, obituaries, private letters, gravestones, transistor radios – whose circulation or preservation is not, or cannot be, contested by power; and literary, cinematographic and artistic canons that for far too long have been ignored as sources for historians, despite the fact that they are, to use Stephen Guth's phrase, 'frequently autobiographical', not least because they are more likely to evade censorship.<sup>5</sup> And, most importantly, individual and collective memory. My research looks into the history of incarceration in Egypt and the wider Middle East. Access to the Ministry of Interior and Justice's archives is all but impossible, with the effect that there are no extant maps and plans of postcolonial prisons, nor, say, lists of prisoners held in each cell and ward. The archive one must visit to reconstruct such maps, then, is the very memories of still-living former political prisoners, who may inadvertently reveal spatial descriptors of their confinement, such as: 'It was 2000 steps around the perimeter of the prison courtyard'; 'We slept in shifts, 40 lying one next to the other, and 40 standing on foot'; 'We were the only ward that could hear Farid Haddad being tortured'. Speculative maps and plans can then be produced by triangulating such statements, from thousands of sources (memoirs, interviews, party reports, letters smuggled on cigarette paper), and overlaying them with digital satellite and mapping software.

**Mark Tizzoni:** My answer to this question is very much rooted in my research on the late antique Maghreb. For those of us who work on the very distant past the archives are and have always been fragmentary, uneven and inaccessible, marked more by absence than by presence. Indeed, the archive as traditionally envisioned does not really exist for ancient historians. There has always been a need to supplement the 'conventional' historical archive with the 'non-conventional'. In the case of the ancient Maghreb this means poetry, theology and philosophy, and it means material culture too. The ancient archive needs to include the archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and visual; its compilation and use are inherently and necessarily interdisciplinary. The ancient archives, therefore, exist in situ in the field and in museum collections just as they do on the shelves of research libraries. It also means that there is both an archive that exists directly in the landscape in which it was created and an archive that exists in varying degrees divorced from its point of origin. There is, nonetheless, a great richness to the archives of a global late antiquity. For the decades surrounding 500 C.E., the Maghreb's archive includes tenancy and marriage agreements on wooden tablets excavated in Tunisia, inscriptions and monumental tombs attesting to Indigenous state-building along the old Roman frontier in Algeria, and an odd collection of poems providing a mirror on late-Vandal Carthage, surviving in an eighth-century manuscript from south-western Europe.

**Curtis Wallace:** From the perspective of the work that I am currently doing on the history of policing in Jamaica (specifically the history of the Jamaica Constabulary Force, 1867–1962), the archives of global history are the records that have been created by the Jamaican police and the elite and subaltern groups that were in contact with them while the island was under British colonial control. These records include state papers that were generated by the British Colonial Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Jamaican Colonial Assembly and Legislative Council, Royal Commissions of Inquiry, and colonial courts. Along with the physical remains and visual records of sites and equipment that were used by the police, these archives provide important data on the ideological, legal, cultural and practical dimensions of policing in Jamaica up

<sup>5</sup> S. Guth, 'Why novels not autobiographies?', in *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. R. Ostle, E. de Moor and S. Wild (London, 1998), pp. 139–47.

to 1962. Given that they were often produced and/or preserved by state officials and active servicemen, however, they provide a limited state-centric view of the Jamaican police, as Hannah and Uğurgül note. A more balanced perspective is gained from the unofficial records produced by members of the public and active and inactive police personnel writing or speaking as private citizens. These include colonial newspapers, autobiographical writings and oral history. Both the official and the unofficial records related to the police are largely held in state archives in Jamaica and the United Kingdom, but some are also available in university and digital archives. Collectively, these records provide important data on the development of policing and associated sociopolitical changes in colonial Jamaica. They also provide insight into the unequal, conflictual and violent nature of the colonial economy and society.

**Namrata Ganneri:** In my most recent project I mainly drew upon the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) Smallpox Eradication Archives, even as I was trying to research and write a ‘bottom-up’ early history (pre-1967) of the W.H.O.-directed worldwide smallpox eradication programme.<sup>6</sup> Eradication efforts in India were centre stage in this period, as India had initiated an intensive programme a decade earlier. So I drew on Indian material (even published manuals) from the W.H.O.’s archive, primarily because the W.H.O. archive is digitized and most Indian archives have released very few post-independence documents despite the well-accepted thirty-year rule. As I mentioned in my talk, I do of course know the merits of the strategy advocated by historian of science Sujit Sivasundaram, among others, of experimenting with divorcing sources from their usual sites of contextualization – for example, reading a palm-leaf manuscript and murals within the context of European scientific sources to learn about Kandyan botany – to achieve a sense of balance, rather than simply complaining about the scarcity of sources stemming from a non-European perspective. But more importantly, accessing digitized material in my office in the U.K. and at the W.H.O. Library in Geneva made me return time and again to reflecting on the conditions and privilege surrounding my access. Would accessing this material in an Indian setting have had a different impact on my senses? Would this material have read any differently or offered me greater insights into the Indian perspective, had I read it sitting in an archive/library in India?

**Andreas Weber:** Some of the most hidden archives of global history are stored in natural history museums and herbaria in Europe and the U.S.A.<sup>7</sup> Often framed as ‘biodiversity heritage’, these are not only archives of nature, used by biologists to map and understand shifts in global biodiversity, but are also a shared heritage of a mobile colonial past.<sup>8</sup> However, in institutional discussions about future research on natural history, the colonial provenance of such collections is often not acknowledged.<sup>9</sup> This is truly astonishing, since in particular the large-scale digitization of specimen collections and accompanying archival holdings offers researchers access to a wealth of new source material that has the potential to shed fresh light on how natural history and empire co-produce each other from the sixteenth century to the present. This new type of source material allows global historians to deepen our understanding of the daily practices and polycentric networks

<sup>6</sup> Inventory available at ‘Smallpox Eradication Programme inventory’, *World Health Organization*, 3 May 2021 <<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/smallpox-eradication-programme-inventory>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

<sup>7</sup> This answer is a condensed excerpt of a longer text that has been published as A. Weber, ‘Natural history collections and empire’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, ed. A. Goss (London, 2021), pp. 80–6.

<sup>8</sup> This point is also made in *Mobile Museums: Collections in Circulation*, ed. F. Driver, M. Nesbitt and C. Cornish (London, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Notable exceptions are the projects ‘Humanities of nature’ and ‘Provenance research under spotlight’, based at the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin.

of collecting and natural historical knowledge production in former colonial areas. Or, put differently, natural historical archives and specimen collections are an underused starting point for global historical inquiries into the colonial roots of our present-day understanding of nature and its diversity.

**Yasmina El Chami:** In the context of missionary history, there is a difference in perspective depending on whether the aim is to study a particular mission's work globally, as opposed to the activities of an order at a specific site, and these two perspectives obviously overlap but also differ in the way that each then necessitates a focus on different parts of the 'archive', or even on different 'archives'. From the perspective of architectural history, which is the field I work in, the task of reconstructing the history of missionary institutions at a specific site or in a particular city entails working with an archive that is scattered between institutions, cities and continents, and also is not solely what is contained in an archive. My latest project looked at missionary competition in Beirut, and so necessitated access not only to the archives of several different orders, but also to the archives of the institutions that remain in Beirut, to the diplomatic archives of imperial/national hierarchies that missionaries had to engage with and to the buildings I was studying. In that sense, the 'archive' was both the documents scattered all around the world, which reflected the 'global' reach or composition of a particular missionary order, and the buildings they left at a particular site, in this case Beirut.<sup>10</sup> Even within the archive, different materials also pointed to this notion of the particular or situated practices of the mission in Beirut or Lebanon, as distinct from a more global institutional set of policies or procedures. For example, looking at how missionaries used new mediums and technologies, such as photography, to record and document their work and environments, but also to share their activities with the central 'home' institution or administration, shows us how missionary work was about not only creating or constructing these educational institutions but also creating knowledge about the region beyond, creating records of the landscape, the land, its people, its archaeology and so on. In that sense, the 'archive' of global missionary history is not only what is in the archive, but also the logic of why these records were created, as well as what survives today: for example, in my particular case, the buildings, the campuses, the photographs and even the organizational structures themselves.

**Jennifer Bond:** Missionary archives have been central to my work on girls' education in modern China too. My early research used missionary archives stored in the U.K. These archives are rich but, like many others, are affected by profound imbalances of power: what they cannot tell us – and many scholars have highlighted this – is how Chinese women experienced missionary education. To get to the perspective of Chinese women themselves, I had to learn to read Chinese, then look for these missionary schools within Chinese archives. Although there are fragments of missionary school history preserved within provincial and city archives in China, what remains is partial due to the large-scale destruction of documents during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the relationship between missionary archives and global history is not straightforward. Spending time consulting missionary-related sources in China, I have been struck by just how present the nation is and how present the state is. Missionaries, after all, were organized into national bodies and their papers archived in national contexts. In the Chinese context, what has been preserved has been curated and made available in ways that are of interest to the state – similar to the process Curtis describes with regard to the Jamaican police.

<sup>10</sup> A similar point was made by speakers in the 'Cities and buildings' seminar, notably Katherine Vyhmeister.

**Zhengfeng Wang:** Yasmina's point about buildings and Namrata's point about senses ring true for my research too. One chapter of my dissertation is on the Hong Kong Central Market (1939), designed by Alfred Walter Hodges, a R.I.B.A.-qualified architect working in the colonial Public Works Department. Supervised by the Public Health Department, the project epitomized the implementation of sanitary bureaucracy across the British Empire. In advance of the commission, the architect Ronald Ruskin Todd, chairman of the Urban Council, toured Shanghai and learnt from similar projects, notably the Municipal Markets in the International Settlement. So I visited the libraries and archives in these two cities and in London, and contacted several institutions, including the Library of Congress, the National Library of Scotland, the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries and the Museum of Asiatic Arts in Budapest, for their digital collections. Historical research is a fascinating journey in temporal and geographic terms. When locating these archival materials, I find that buildings are never static objects. The commercial projects that I am interested in were embedded in larger networks that facilitated the global movement of people, commodities, knowledge and capital. Architecture is about the spatial experience, including aspects such as scale, atmosphere and climate conditions. This connection can be personal, but I need to feel it before writing it down in my research. In a way, knowledge is abstract, and rational thinking is limited. We need imagination.

**Kirsten Kamhuis:** I personally think that most archives in the world can, in fact, somehow be categorized as 'global history'. I would say that this applies mostly to archives from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as these eras are most shaped by what we might call 'modern imperialism'. As I mentioned in my talk during the missionary seminar, my own research about Roman Catholic girls' schools in Flores, East Indonesia, brought me to archives in Rome, the Netherlands, Indonesia and Germany. This echoes the experiences of the other contributors and the scattered archives they mention. None of these archives really marketed themselves as 'global': the archive in Rome was essentially the house archive of a medium-sized order of women religious, and especially the National Archives in Jakarta imagine themselves as keepers of the 'story of the nation' more than anything else. I think that it would be useful if all stakeholders who are connected to archives became more aware of the 'global' or international and transnational aspects of the collections they work with. This could lead to more awareness about the history of the interconnectedness of places around the world, and, I hope, to more awareness about the legacies of empire in particular.

## 2. Pandemic inequalities

*Beyond day-to-day practical impacts, and alongside immeasurable personal loss and distress, the pandemic has given rise to altered research and teaching practices, as well as different ways of thinking about 'the global' and its inequalities. In our opening roundtable Kate Brown related how she had taken questions from her previous projects into her own neighbourhood, informing how she understood her position as a mobile researcher and academic. At the same time, as many of our roundtables highlighted, unequal (often racialized) systems that became topics of debate during the pandemic generally predated it and will persist far into the future, especially in terms of archival access. We asked contributors whether the pandemic had highlighted, for them, any particular issues related to working with global histories.*

**Nilina Deb Lal:** My background is primarily as a conservation architect and architectural historian. In February 2020, just before the outbreak of the pandemic, I took up a post looking after the archive of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (I.B.V.M.) Loreto

for the South Asia Province, housed in Calcutta. Calcutta was the destination of the first mission abroad of the I.B.V.M. in 1841, twenty years after the establishment of the Institute in Ireland. Archiving was not a priority for the twelve young sisters, who faced crises such as the third cholera epidemic while they went about setting up schools and orphanages. We have almost no records from this early period. When archival work began in the 1990s, the emphasis was on gathering what was available and continuing conservation efforts. To this day, the archive has no system for continued systematic acquisition or for making our records available, and our storage facilities are not of archival quality.

The pandemic has impacted this work in terms of my relationship with the sisters in Calcutta, but the support from the I.B.V.M. archivists' network has been fantastic. This is especially important given that I am not a trained archivist. In fact, pandemic-era Zoom discussions have facilitated a stronger relationship with networks elsewhere than might otherwise have been possible. We are now asking how far our future systems should be designed to make material available remotely to researchers. Is it still relevant to plan for a reading room and staff presence on-site? Should we reallocate funds towards digitization instead? With what controls and parameters? The fact that the archives of the I.B.V.M. are dispersed is hugely relevant. Many of the sisters arriving in India came from Australia, so records of their earlier life are in the I.B.V.M. archive there. The pandemic has made it ever more apparent that, as we go forwards, co-ordination between the various provincial archives is crucial.

**Yasmina El Chami:** I was fortunate to be able to finish most of my research before the pandemic started, but also to do this research within the framework of a Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge, which provided the needed resources and a relatively privileged position from which to apply for all the visas I needed, to justify why I wanted to travel to the Schengen Area, to France or to the U.S., and to reach the various archives located outside Lebanon. For me, especially as a Lebanese citizen attempting to reconstruct the transnational history of my own city, the pandemic simply reinforced what my experience as an academic and a student has always been: that of unequal and difficult access to resources, to travel, to grants and so on. In particular, the pandemic allowed all countries of the 'Global North' to shut down their borders and to stop granting visas indefinitely to people from the 'Global South'. This means that for the past two years, access to documents about the Global South, and about institutions often still operating in these regions, has continued to be inaccessible, difficult and costly to scholars from the Global South. Beyond simply the limitations of the pandemic itself, for me the pandemic put into sharper focus the deep structural inequalities that have always framed and continue to impact knowledge production and scholarship. Not only which histories we write, but who gets to write which histories – these questions are still dictated by hierarchies and legacies that I think scholars and institutions in the Global North are unwilling to acknowledge.

**Curtis Wallace:** For a researcher who lives and works in the Caribbean, or, more broadly, the Global South, gaining access to archives with data on policing in Jamaica has been a challenge. In the first instance, access has been denied by colonial state policy, which, at the time of Jamaican independence, ordered the destruction of records that had the potential to reveal compromising details about the activities of British and colonial administrations. Access to the remaining records has been limited by restrictions placed on the dates of their release, the location of some records in British archives, and the costs associated with travelling to Britain to view and copy the documents. These challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic, which has resulted in closed archives, the



cancellation of scholarships and travel restrictions that largely limit the entry of people from the Global South to the U.K. These limits have expanded global inequalities in knowledge production by silencing voices that add diversity to global history.

**Hannah Elsi:** The onset of the pandemic raised the spectre of the panic that overtook Middle East scholars following the fallout from the Arab Spring. Researchers were concerned their projects were now unviable, supervisors worried they were admitting students with no prospects for fieldwork, and managers, especially following the torture of Giulio Regeni, fretted over legal liability should students be injured in the course of their fieldwork. For the most part, these anxieties were little shared or understood. In spring 2020 history educators had to deal with a vexed and pressing question, increasingly posed by anxious students who had no recourse for travel or access to local libraries and archives: what is a first-class dissertation that is based on little to no ‘traditional’ or unpublished primary source material? Suffice it to say, we did not develop a clear answer to this question; if anything, it highlighted a range of already existing fault lines in our profession, not least in drawing attention to the very different conceptions held by colleagues concerning the most basic question: what is history? In the event, the directors of undergraduate and postgraduate studies in history at King’s College London, Oxford and Cambridge – where I was working in some capacity (lecturer, D.Phil candidate, junior research fellow) – opted for the instruction that pandemic-era first-class dissertations would contain original theoretical insights and/or revision of secondary literature.

It quickly became clear that to avoid failing their students or producing an entire cohort of third-class graduands, lecturers would have to ‘widen’ and ‘soften’ their marking criteria. Unsurprisingly, these were precisely the epithets bandied about regarding attempts to decolonize curricula and diversify assessments. The consequences for workload were dire: supervisors would have to work at least 50 per cent overtime to effectively provide students with pre-packaged source collections and viable research questions. Yet for those already teaching and researching subjects marked by archival inaccessibility or unavailability, the pandemic was hardly news. Of the twenty-five students on my own special subject on gender and sexuality in the Middle East (1400 to the present), only a handful had taken even an introductory course on the region, and just one read any of its languages. Their scripts were still second-marked by the same metrics. In other words, the problems facing researchers and teachers working on, in and/or from the Global South suddenly became par for the course. One of the key effects of the pandemic, then, is the way in which it has flattened research ecosystems and obstacles that have historically affected different disciplines and groups – of non-hegemonic gender, class, race and citizenship status – differentially. The hope is that the lessons learned from that experience – critical pedagogy and solidarity highest among them – will not be forgotten as we ‘return’ to some measure of ‘normalcy’. The fear is that hyflex will stay, while the rest is thrown to the winds.

### 3. Collaboration and communication

*Despite recognition, throughout the series, that we were witnessing a bleak and sometimes worsening situation in terms of unequal access to resources and opportunities, each roundtable brought to our attention new projects that seek to address some of these issues. Of particular relevance to global history, where an emphasis on large-scale shifts can risk overlooking the specificities of place, we considered the relationship between particular communities and the records of global history housed by them. We heard from Mohamed Yehia, Samah Gafar and Andrea Thal, all working with the Contemporary Image Collection (C.I.C.) in Cairo, about the C.I.C.’s series of Arabic-language*

blog projects and city tours relating to the radically transnational history of the Suez region, material about which is largely inaccessible to Cairo's inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> Here we asked contributors about emerging opportunities for collaboration across communities and sectors, and for communicating global histories to new audiences.

**Kirsten Kamphuis:** Digitization is an obvious answer to these questions, and I think it opens up immense new possibilities, especially for scholars who may work with more limited resources than others in terms of research budgets and mobilities. But I think we should be careful not to present digitization of collections as an easy solution for all kinds of inequalities that exist among researchers. It takes a huge amount of money to keep digitization projects viable, for instance, and there will always be hierarchies regarding which collections are deemed 'important' enough for digitization and which are not. Beyond digitization, I think that historians would do well to collaborate more intensively with communities when they are doing archival research. A wonderful example is *Digital Pasifik*, the new website of the National Libraries of New Zealand and Australia, which explicitly engages in conversations with people 'in' and 'of' the Pacific.<sup>12</sup> The website starts from the idea that archival collections belong to the people with whom they originated rather than to the scholarly community, which I think is really inspiring.

**Zhengfeng Wang:** I conducted my Ph.D. fieldwork before the Covid outbreak but have benefited a lot from digital collections. Digitization is a time-consuming and costly process, but it enhances availability, especially considering not everyone gets travel funding. And, of course, it has a positive impact on your carbon footprint. However, I am fully aware that physical sites and objects can always give you more information than a two-dimensional screen. When I visited a library in person, the staff showed me an album that contained the photo that I had requested rather than the image numbered individually in their online gallery. How the digitized materials are organized and presented is important. We can easily miss something because of decontextualization.

**Namrata Ganneri:** Several collaborative digitization projects come to mind. I know of the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme, a praiseworthy model of collaboration to preserve and invigorate decaying archival collections in various parts of the world.<sup>13</sup> But for a large and diverse country like India, intra-country collaboration of the kind promoted by initiatives like Archives & Access seems promising.<sup>14</sup> From my own personal experience, several institutions, libraries and even universities in India are increasingly digitizing their records, seeing the conversion of paper records into scanned copies as the panacea for all problems of access and conservation. However, it would be useful if institutions pooled their resources and thought about how they could collaborate to enable access to a broader constituency. For one, this would also diminish the problem of duplication of effort. For instance, the 200-year-old Asiatic Society of Mumbai digitized copies of *The Times of India*, despite the availability of that newspaper in the ProQuest database. Archival collaboration, drawing upon the resources and expertise of a variety of institutions in India (and around the world), would perhaps have checked this duplication.

**Rustin Zarkar:** As well as approaching archives as a user and librarian, I have been thinking about this question as an editor for Ajam Media Collective, an online platform

<sup>11</sup> In the same roundtable Rim Naguib talked about publishing her research in the form of graphic novels, in part thinking of the different audiences it would appeal to. See *Ola Shahba* (2018; pub. online 27 Jan. 2022) <[https://issuu.com/madamasr/docs/ola\\_english/r6](https://issuu.com/madamasr/docs/ola_english/r6)> [accessed 20 June 2022].

<sup>12</sup> See *Digital Pasifik* <<https://digitalpasifik.org/>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

<sup>13</sup> See 'Endangered Archives Programme', *British Library* <<https://eap.bl.uk/>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

<sup>14</sup> See Archive and Access <<https://publicarchives.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

that covers history, culture and politics in Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus – an area we call Ajamistan (a controversial term that we use to get people talking and thinking about alterity). My own part of the project, on which I work together with Mike Raybourne, is called Mehelle. Mehelle is about documenting neighbourhoods that are undergoing state-led beautification projects in the region, for example using 360-degree cameras and oral history methods, and trying to understand how people are dealing with this changing landscape. One focus has been Sovetski, in Baku, a neighbourhood of over 20,000 people, with 200 historic sites that were demolished to make way for a large public park. As others have mentioned, traditional models of digitization struggle to respond to the needs and expectations of people who have personal or historical relationships with the material being digitized, at the same time as those of institutions and grant-giving organizations. But increasingly, there are tools and approaches to address this, which we have been thinking about in the context of Mehelle. One example is post-custodial archiving: in Baku we invited members of the community to bring items or photographs to us to digitize and then return to them; this material formed the basis of a public exhibition. Related to this is our commitment to community-driven approaches. What this means is working with communities to build infrastructure and create training opportunities so that people can digitize material on their own terms. This is especially important when there is distrust of institutions, based on a history of materials being removed from the community without consent.

**Andreas Weber:** Similar issues arise for the holdings of natural history museums, which are often difficult to access for global historians. Links between handwritten archival holdings, visual material, specimens and published materials are frequently missing. Moreover, many institutions in the field are geared exclusively towards supporting the research of biologists, ecologists or life scientists interested in biodiversity. As a consequence, global historians have a hard time studying the colonial provenance and collection circumstances of natural history collections. I truly hope that the large-scale digitization of specimen collections and accompanying archival holdings sparks an interdisciplinary dialogue among natural history institutions and their curators, global historians, digital humanists, and publishers. The central question of this dialogue should be: how can we make sure that digitized natural history collections and archives become a *shared resource* for everyone interested in the colonial provenance of Europe's vast natural heritage, hidden as it is in the depots of natural history museums and herbaria?

**Uğurgül Tunç:** An inclusive 'global' history requires the opening of the field to diverse groups of storytellers. Archives are more accessible than many people assume they are. However, platforms encouraging and inviting all to explore these archives and to participate in collective writings of global history are scarce. At Koç University we are creating several oral history archives to document the senses of diverse groups of people and to facilitate an inclusive historiography that celebrates people's own narratives of history. We have a public archive to which everyone can submit recordings of their experiences during the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> My project, titled 'Birth as a sensory experience', is another such initiative, aimed at creating an oral history archive documenting the sensory experiences of people delivering babies in hospital settings. Projects of this nature will ensure that historians of the future have more than just news reports or official records of our present moment. These archive-creation projects can be merged with similar initiatives in other institutions around the globe to form an easily accessible and searchable database of global archives. Social media is also a useful tool: social media

<sup>15</sup> Another example of a similar project is StoryCorps <<https://storycorps.org/>> [accessed 20 June 2022].

posts comparing how the cities of St. Louis and Philadelphia responded to the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918 went viral in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, prompting people to look for photographs, newspaper clippings and other remnants of that era, which in turn resulted in the creation of a 'global community archive'. Of course, there are several ethical concerns associated with social media that need to be addressed before any project is initiated involving social media platforms both as an archival source and for collaborative writing. However, when used responsibly, social media has great potential to encourage collective creation, exploration and interpretation of the archives of global history.

**Mark Tizzoni:** My answer to this question comes from my work teaching the history of pre-modern Africa. I am approaching this question from my teaching because I think that the undergraduate classroom is a key part of the answer here, as Hannah suggests above. Pre-modern archives, especially in a global context, are challenging. They are in Classical Arabic and Coptic, Latin and Greek, Syriac and Hebrew (to name just a few that appear in the study of late antique Egypt and the Maghreb), and they require advanced skills, like palaeography. Presenting undergraduates with materials drawn from these global archives allows them the opportunity to start building these skills, or at least the awareness that they will want to and need to. This is facilitated, or perhaps rather enabled, by the work of making the archives more accessible through digitization and translation. Thinking of medieval Egypt, the multiple projects working on the ongoing publication of the Cairo Geniza, particularly the Princeton Geniza Lab, are quite literally building a trans-regional medieval and early modern archive centred on the Jewish community of Cairo. This is incredibly important work. Circling back to my own classroom, I have started to incorporate assignments that ask students to produce materials for primary and secondary school students, in partnership with local schools. These assignments aim to engage my own students in translating the archive for a new audience through different and varied methods of storytelling.

## Conclusion

One prompt for this seminar series was the fact that global history, as a project, has not yet devoted significant discussion to its archival practices. Despite the growing number of publications and seminars seeking to define the field, the 'archive of global history' has not been conceptualized or theorized to the same extent as, say, the archive of intellectual history, or the archive of African history. The breadth of the field, the lack of consensus over its parameters and the hesitancy to 'self-identify' as a global historian all probably have something to do with this. Indeed, in this series of Zoom roundtables, we did not ask whether, let alone stipulate that, speakers understood their own work as global history. Yet the seminar series highlighted that this is far from just a 'gap': scrutinizing the archival practices of global history is important if we want to take seriously the ambition to practise history more fairly and in ways pertinent to the world we live in.

That world – in 2021 – was distinct: a sense of drawn-out, indefinite crisis, various lived experiences of dis/connection, yet with some space for reflection since the shock of 2020. As the contributions here note, there was much about the pandemic that was not new. This serves as a prompt. The reflections offered in this article have opened up some possible routes towards a critical evaluation of the archives of global history; ways to think more deeply about what constitutes an archive, who gets to do global history, what our responsibilities are to future 'global historians'. If we accept that global history is more a set of practices, approaches and priorities than a well-defined methodology,

then conversations like those captured here are a good place to start. In other words, the place from which a theorization of global history's archival practices could emerge is precisely a forum of shared experiences of practitioners working across sectors – as archivists, curators, librarians and public historians, as well as academic researchers – and across geographical settings, with no claim to being representative or comprehensive.