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History is Everything: An Interview with Alison Games

ANANYA CHAKRAVARTI and SUZE ZIJLSTRA

This interview took place in Washington, D.C., where Professor Alison Games is Dorothy M. Brown Distinguished Professor of History at Georgetown University. She had just returned from a research trip to Oxford, where she was conducting research for her book on the Amboyna massacre. Braving the sweltering heat of the D.C. summer, Professor Games met Ananya Chakravarti and Suze Zijlstra for a delightful lunch at the Kramerbooks & Afterwords Café near Dupont Circle.

Ananya Chakravarti is assistant professor of history at Georgetown University. Her first book, *The Empire of Apostles: Religion, Accommodatio, and the Imagination of Empire in Early Modern Brazil and India*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Suze Zijlstra is assistant professor of maritime history at Leiden University. Her research focuses on the development of seventeenth-century Suriname and New Netherland/New York.

How did you end up here as a historian? Can you tell us a bit more about how and why you became a historian?

I have a genealogical answer, which is that my mother had studied English in college and my father had studied government and both my brother and I became history majors, so we thought that perhaps this is what happens when an English major and a government major have children. A second answer is where I grew up, outside Boston in a town, Dedham, Massachusetts, that claimed to have the oldest standing timber-frame house in North America.[1] It may or may not be true about the house, but it was certainly a very historically oriented area. The town itself is one that most early American historians eventually learn about, because it was the subject of an important community study by the historian Kenneth Lockridge, a book that I encountered when I was in college.[2] I loved visiting historical sites in the area. Even as children, my brother and I would make our mother take us to places like Old Sturbridge Village (a living history museum in Sturbridge, Massachusetts that recreates the 1830s) and Plimoth Plantation (the reconstruction of the Plymouth

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settlement as it existed in the 1620s) over and over again.[3] When I went to college, I knew I liked history and I thought I might study it. I had studied history in high school, which I finished in 1981, but nowadays, I think high school students have the opportunity to encounter a wider array of course offerings, including subjects such as psychology or anthropology. When I got to college in the early 1980s, I started taking classes in anthropology and I had this idea of doing a double major in history and anthropology.

That's extremely prescient.

And a failure! I was told by the undergraduate history advisor at Harvard that I would have to write a thesis that would suit both majors. In 1982, I couldn't figure out how to do that. By 1984, I could imagine how one might proceed because, by then, Rhys Isaac had published *The Transformation of Virginia* and I had read Natalie Zemon Davis, and I came to understand how you actually could combine these two disciplines.[4] So I majored in history but I kept taking anthropology classes, which I still thought were fascinating. Of course, I wanted to be Margaret Mead, before she became unfashionable—the discipline of anthropology also changed in that period. At any rate, I did not go off to Micronesia.

Even then, I was interested in early American history and in women's history. In the 1980s, you could actually read everything that had been written in the field of women's history that interested you; that was an amazing feeling. I was also very politically active in a group called the Radcliffe Union of Students, which was the place for feminists at Harvard and Radcliffe to go, so I had a political interest in women's history as well. I wrote a senior thesis on evangelical women in eighteenth-century New England, because I was interested in looking at areas where women seemed to have some agency, some spheres of autonomous action. I thought maybe religion was one of those, so I profiled three different women.[5] These were women who seemed to show different kinds of expressions of religious activity, one of whom started her own sect, and then two others who were much more conventional but whose lives were nonetheless shaped by their faith. It's funny, as I think about it now, that one of my intellectual continuities is my interest in looking at people, and I was doing that even at college.

I applied to graduate school to study history. There was nothing else that really interested me in the same way as history. I think one reason I liked early American history (apart from my childhood excursions to endless sites), was a freshman seminar I took with Fred Anderson, who teaches at the University of Colorado, and who is a very prominent historian of the Seven Years' War. He had finished his dissertation at Harvard, on what became his first book, about the Massachusetts militia in the Seven Years' War.[6] He taught a freshman seminar in 1982 on war and society, and I applied to the seminar and was accepted. Fred had us move backwards chronologically. We started with the Vietnam War, which he thought was a more familiar starting place to us. We read works from World War I,

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and then he had us read some of the soldiers' diaries he worked with from the Massachusetts militia in the Seven Years' War. These documents were impenetrable as far as I could tell, and I don't think my classmates and I distinguished ourselves in any way talking about them, but I got really fascinated by the archaic language of these sources. These sources were from eighteenth-century North America, which I assumed should have seemed in some way familiar, but I didn't know any of these words and I couldn't understand what these people were talking about. And it was that gap, I think, between the familiar and the foreign that made me so interested in early American history. Americans have all kinds of assumptions about the familiarity of their history, and this past is, to me, a very strange and exotic place. This seminar confirmed my interest in early American history. I applied to graduate school to study early American history and I was fortunate enough to go to the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). You don't know when you make these decisions how right they might turn out.

And what made you apply to the University of Pennsylvania?

I was an unusual undergraduate because I had formed some close friendships with several graduate students at Harvard, because I was geeky and I was always studying in the History Department library. Graduate students did a lot of teaching at Harvard, and one of them was an advisor of my senior thesis. She was very helpful to me in figuring out places to apply for graduate school. When you're a senior in college, you don't usually know about graduate school. I knew some things because I had these graduate student friends, many of whom seemed to be anxious a lot of the time, concerned about their work, studying for their comprehensive exams, trying to negotiate their relations with their advisors. I think that as a result I had a realistic notion of what graduate school life was like. I didn't have any kind of romantic ideas that I was going to go off and teach at some liberal arts college and live like Mr. Chips. I had a clear sense of the attractions and challenges of being in graduate school. At the time, Penn was becoming an exciting place to do early American history, largely because of what has become the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, but which was at the time the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies. It was a much smaller operation, but what it meant for me as a graduate student was that there were always these scholars from around the country passing through for seminars and especially graduate students from other institutions coming to live in Philadelphia. I was the only person doing early American history in my year at Penn—although I had a classmate working in the early national period—and it was not like there was a very large field cohort. Nonetheless, there was still an incredible community, with graduate students from all different kinds of institutions. I learned a lot from those people. I learned about how other institutions did graduate training, for example, and the friendships I formed with people in Philadelphia shaped my own thinking about early American history.

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You've been talking about yourself as an early American historian. Today, people think of you as one of the founders of the field of Atlantic history, and now you are moving towards global history. How did you make that transition? Also, how does your initial vision for a new emergent field stack up to what it is now?

A lot of the explanation for how I became an Atlantic historian (not that I knew I was doing that) has to do with how early American history looked at the time. I started graduate school in 1986 after I had spent a year between college and graduate school, being a bum and traveling around Europe living out of a backpack. In the mid- to late 1980s, early American historians and graduate students tended to have a place that they worked on, a particular colony. It might be Pennsylvania, it might be Massachusetts. It tended to be a colony on the mainland, almost exclusively. There weren't that many people who were working on the Caribbean, although— and this is another way that Penn was a special place— my advisor was Richard S. Dunn. His first book was on the Puritans, on the Winthrop family in New England.[7] His third book, *Sugar and Slaves,* was, of course, one of the foundational works on the British Caribbean.[8] He had been editing the papers of William Penn right before I started at Penn and he actually worked on all the different places of the British colonial world. Thus, there wasn't a sense that I should only look at the North American mainland, which would have been true at other institutions and is still true, of course, in many places in the field of early American history.

Still, I remember sitting in seminars at the Philadelphia Center, and people would be discussing a paper about a particular place, a town, a county, and the questions would start with somebody saying, "Well, in my county…," or "Well, in my town…." I sat there and listened and knew that, whatever I ended up doing, I didn't want to be a person who just worked on one place. So there was that sensibility. I had also discovered colonial Latin American history in graduate school. I took a couple of classes with Nancy Farriss at the University of Pennsylvania, one on ethnohistory and the other on colonial Latin America, and I also took a class with Dain Borges.[9] I remember thinking that if I had gone to graduate school knowing Spanish, *that* is what I would be doing, because I was blown away by the kinds of sources that were available in Latin American history to engage the kinds of questions that interested me in North American history, questions I couldn't otherwise seem to find ways to address. I started to bring these fields together and to think comparatively. I was also interested in British history. I had a lot of trouble actually figuring out a dissertation topic, because I wasn't sure what field I wanted to be in and I didn't want to work on a place, whether a town or a county or colony.

A lot of what ultimately shaped my interest in discovering what it could mean to be an Atlantic historian came out of the source I ended up working on in my dissertation. It was this list of 7500 people who sailed out of the port of London in 1635, and who went to all the English colonies and to the European continent. Some of them were soldiers, and some of them were merchant travelers as well. Now, as I look back

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on my research plan, it seems kind of crazy—I can't believe my advisor encouraged me, although I'm extremely grateful he did, because I didn't know what I was doing and I did not know what I was going to find. Occasionally, people would tell me that it was a crazy undertaking, especially when I was doing things like sitting in the State Archives in Richmond, Virginia, with a list next to me of two thousand names of people who went to Virginia in 1635, reading through the county court records, looking for a familiar name. I had a computer to take notes on but nothing was digitized at the time. It was insane, it was completely insane! Every time someone said to me that I was not going to find anything, though, that was like waving a red flag at a bull. One of my friends described the enterprise as five thousand people in search of a thesis. It just took a long time to find these people in surviving sources, and then to figure out what it was I had found. It was nitty-gritty social history. I created this big database, which is now in a computer program that I can't even recover. Occasionally, genealogists write to me with questions about somebody I talked about in the book and I feel terrible because I can't actually get into all the information that I found and I can't search it easily. I just loved doing the research. It satisfied my desire to work on many places, and it satisfied my passion for both early American and early modern British history. I also traveled around to do the archival research, and spent long stints in London, Richmond (Virginia), and Boston, and shorter visits to the archives in Bermuda and Barbados.[10]

Still, I definitely didn't know at the time how to find a framework within which to fit what I was finding, because it didn't fit the national frameworks I had been immersed in. Even early American history then was still part of a history of the United States. I wasn't telling a national story, it wasn't a story of the United States, it wasn't a story about England, it wasn't a story about Barbados, it wasn't a story about any one of these places, because there was so much that went back and forth and from one colony to another, people and goods and all sorts of cultural exchanges. It was, in fact, other graduate students who helped me out, especially Alan Karras, who was a few years ahead of me at Penn and who was incredibly helpful to me in thinking about Atlantic history. He was one of the people articulating that as a kind of history, as an approach, very early on.[11] That context just seemed very liberating to me, to think that my geographic framework was not about a nation but was instead this much larger ocean basin. But it took me a while to get there. It was five thousand people looking for a thesis for quite a while.

Your own work is shifting away from the Atlantic now. Is that a shift within the field, or is that something that you are more interested in?

I think there are a couple of different things happening with the field of Atlantic history. To me, one of the most exciting things is the people, the graduate students now studying Atlantic history. So many of us in the 1990s and probably in the first decade of the twenty-first century came into Atlantic history from somewhere else. We were all recovering from national history, and we all brought with us frameworks

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of whatever our national histories might be. Whether it was the history of Spain, Portugal, or France, England, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Angola, I think we all had that particular national framework in the back of our minds. I think now that our graduate students are able to make Atlantic history their major field, they aren't coming to Atlantic history from someplace else. I think that approach is what it's supposed to be and it opens up all kinds of possibilities for new ways of reading across historiographies, making connections and seeing the big picture. So many of us in earlier generations were groping towards the big picture, but it was really hard, because you came with so many assumptions based on your training, and you had to first dismantle what you thought was the big picture you knew.

With regards to my own global trajectory—I suppose it comes out of that same sensibility that underpinned what I was trying to do to in my dissertation. What is the framework, the geographic framework, that helps me understand what is going on here? When I was finishing my first book, I noticed these colonial officials who kept popping up in multiple places, largely because of the research strategy I had pursued for the dissertation, in which I ended up reading the records for every English venture in the first half of the seventeenth century. Because I attended meetings of the North American Conference of British Studies, I was also talking to friends and colleagues who worked on something that seemed to them to be a very identifiable British Empire. In my own work, I saw a lot of Britons in motion, but I couldn't figure out where the empire was. I was interested in these people who seemed to be moving from place to place, and I knew that for historians of a much later British empire, that kind of population was important to them. What became my second book came out of an interest in those people and, actually, I originally envisioned that book as one that looked at different kinds of populations that moved but eventually I also got interested in places like Madagascar and Ireland and the Mediterranean, which in many respects was a reflection of my grounding in early American history.[12]

So, my own shift toward global history, I think, wasn't anything that was particularly planned or systematic, but it was almost more organic, because I was interested in chasing people down to understand careers over a longer haul. In US history—and I would get this question a lot about my dissertation—people wonder why would these people matter if they left the terrain that became the United States. It seemed to me that *that* was what mattered, that process of continued migration, but it was hard for me to articulate. People had longer careers that may have taken them from Virginia to the Indian Ocean. That was a story that seemed to me worth telling. That was also a story that was hard to see, because of all of the different kinds of institutional structures of how history works, how you get funding and how you are trained and how you get access to sources. It's that kind of research that's so hard to do.

It can be challenging for people who are more than (or less than) a national historian to find a job, but, luckily, I did not have to deal with that particular impediment. When I came to Georgetown, I was hired as an early American historian, but no one has ever discouraged me from pursuing whatever I want to pursue.

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Even though I ended up intellectually in a very different place, I still feel that early American history remains one of my great attachments. In fact, this concept of "vast early America" is the rage right now—a way of thinking about early America as encompassing a broad geographic and thematic framework. I think that the kind of history I do has been shaped by being an early American historian, by thinking about cultural encounters and collisions, the destruction and creation of new societies. The Georgetown department has been very supportive of that, but of course not every place is like Georgetown with its appreciation of an international, global orientation. That's another way in which we are all shaped—by where we end up working. I'm sure if I had been hired somewhere else, I might have felt that my second book had to be a different kind of book, that it couldn't be a global book, and I think I might have written something very different.

Which university would you say has influenced you most of the ones you have encountered in your career?

I have only four institutions that I've even been connected to: Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, Grinnell College (my first job), and Georgetown. I can't single one out. The training that I got at Harvard I think was invaluable—I got to imagine what it would be to be a historian. I learned a lot of history, taking more than twice as many classes as we expect our majors to do at Georgetown, for example. I did real archival research in multiple archives for my senior thesis and I just loved it. I knew that that's what I wanted to do, and I had great teachers there. There is still no place like the University of Pennsylvania for early American history. It is the most vibrant place, because of the McNeil Center—there's nothing like it for people passing through, for learning from everybody who came there. Every paper that I read from all the graduate students I met, some of whom are still my closest friends, influenced me. I was only at Grinnell for three years, but the history department was incredibly supportive and while it was teaching-focused, there were some distinguished scholars in the department, too.

As we know from your recognition in 2016 at the Annual College Honors Banquet, where teachers with the highest number of student nominations for excellence in teaching are invited, you are clearly a very committed teacher, someone who has been very influential for students. How do you see your teaching and your scholarship working together and how do you influence your students?

Once I got into Atlantic history, I became an evangelist for the field. My teaching was very evangelical in nature just because I thought it was so exciting to have students make these connections, especially in the US where many of the students know only US history. Georgetown is a more cosmopolitan environment, with students from all over the world, but still a lot of students come into the class just knowing US history.

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They think about these key transitions of US history as only a national story. To yank them out of that nationalism and give them a much broader way of making sense of the world is just so exciting and I love doing that. At Georgetown, Atlantic history is one of our options for students fulfilling their college history requirement. I don't know any other institution in the US that teaches Atlantic history like it's world history or Western civilization, as a basic introductory class for novices. The students don't all want to be there, and you can't assume they know anything, so I was a little overwhelmed by those challenges when I started. It used to be that students at Georgetown all had to take a year of European history. When I started at Georgetown, the department was just in the process of broadening these requirements and Atlantic history and world history became new options. I really believe students should have an option; nobody should be in a required class; I feel very strongly about that.

So I developed this Atlantic history class in 1999 and eventually it led to the textbook.[13] I also basically created my own course reader, piecing together documents and articles, and that was the genesis of what became *Major Problems in Atlantic History*, which I co-edited with my Georgetown colleague Adam Rothman.[14] It was a lot of work when you're doing all of this for the first time for any class (writing lectures, developing reading)—much more so when it's a field that doesn't have any frameworks to work with, so in that way I think of those two books as a kind of scholarship, although they came directly out of teaching a course.

My book about witchcraft also came out of teaching. I have taught a class with Amy Leonard, a specialist in early modern European history and gender, for many years, on witchcraft. We start the class in Europe and then, about half way through the course, we move out of Europe into Africa and the Americas. The class puts witchcraft as a way of thinking about cultural interaction at the center of the analysis. That's not a way historians had been talking about witchcraft in North America, specifically witchcraft in the early American colonies, most of all in Salem. Witchcraft in colonial American history hasn't normally been framed as a story of cultural exchange or another way of thinking about the impact Europeans, Africans, and Americans had on each other. In fact, the intercultural aspect of witchcraft had been overlooked until some recent important works brought it to our attention. I thought it would be really fun to do a book that teachers could use for the US survey, the introductory North American history classes, that looked at witchcraft in that way and that encompassed the varied populations in the continent. I used sources for French and Spanish areas of settlement, in addition to material for English America, and tried to get at many notions of what witchcraft entailed. That book came directly out of teaching, and also out of my commitment to not let borders get in the way and to get as many actors into the conversation as possible.[15] There is this canard that teaching and scholarship are always in tension with each other—it drives me crazy. That's not been my experience as a student and it's not my experience as a teacher. They feed each other. It makes it exciting to teach if you are engaged in and excited about research.

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As for the question about influencing students—students would probably have a better answer to that. It's hard to answer that from my perspective, because I suppose it would be an aspirational answer of how I would like to think I could influence students and not necessarily the real answer of what I actually accomplish. I think that I can help students fall in love with history. This, I think, is all to the good, because I think history is everything. Everything that we do, every question and every answer is historical. I never understand people who say they don't like history because it's like saying you don't like the world. I love talking with students about history in its many aspects. For example, I have been taking students on walking tours for the past few years around Georgetown, which has been really fun for me. The town was established in the mid-eighteenth century (and the university itself in 1789), so there is a good history to draw on. Also, students enjoy getting a totally different kind of sense of the place where they live and how tangible and present the past is in every step they take. I teach a class about the American Revolution and do a walking tour for them. I've also done walking tours for a class I've taught on comparative empires, in which we look at Georgetown as a provincial town. Thanks to the resources in Washington, I also ask students to write papers based on museum exhibits and historic buildings, so they get many chances to think about history in fresh ways. I care a lot about writing so I don't know whether I terrorize students or inspire them, but sometimes they become really good writers. The other great thing I enjoy about teaching at Georgetown is that I work with students across all levels: from people in their first week of college to graduate students completing their dissertations—and even postdocs! It's incredibly gratifying to work with people with different kinds of interests and abilities and personalities.

Have specific professors been an example or an inspiration in your teaching?

One of the critiques people make of a place like Harvard is that all the teaching is being done by graduate students, but I had great teachers who were professors and some of whom never led a discussion section. I took a couple of classes with Bernard Bailyn, who was a great lecturer—before he would tell a joke he would start to giggle to himself; it was just fantastic. I had classes with Drew McCoy, who was visiting at Harvard, and who led his own discussion sections, which were really exemplary in terms of getting students to walk out of the room with an entirely new way of thinking about the reading. I still marvel at how he did that week after week. I also met and worked with great graduate students. One of them is Peter Mancall, now at the University of Southern California and a lifelong friend. Of course, I have so many colleagues at Georgetown who are great models whom I don't want to embarrass by singling them out, and my list of good models would probably replicate the whole faculty roster. It's a pretty amazing department to be in because of our egalitarian culture. We all take turns doing all kinds of teaching, including the more challenging surveys. Colleagues who are really active and distinguished scholars are right there in the undergraduate classroom teaching general education courses, doing their own

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grading, which is also unusual for a major research university. There is a lot of work involved in teaching this way and everyone does it. I resent the labor sometimes, but it is the right thing to do; it's the right model.

We were both very interested to hear a little bit more about your experience as a student, especially with regard to the number of women teaching at that time. You know where we are going with this question.

I think of how different it must be for students now. I can't even imagine their experience, walking into the Georgetown history department and seeing all these women, chatting, working. It's incredible. I think I took only two classes in college from women with tenure: Sally Moore in anthropology, and Barbara Johnson in English and comparative literature. There were other women who taught me, but they were the only two who were tenured at Harvard. There was also no sexual harassment policy, and that was one of the things I was working on as an undergraduate, trying to get Harvard to pass a sexual harassment policy. There were graduate students, one in particular, Betsy Fisher, who were extremely important to me, a real role model. She taught my sophomore tutorial and then she informally advised my senior honors essay, despite holding a fellowship during that year and being free of teaching duties. In terms of women faculty it was such a different world.[16]

When you started teaching yourself, how was the experience? Was it different than how it is now?

When I started at Grinnell, which is a small college, there were eight people in the history department and three of them were women. It was a supportive environment overall and the other two women in the department were very encouraging. When I was on the job market during graduate school, one place that didn't offer me a job after a campus visit informed me in a phone call. The chair of the search committee said, "You know, we were under a lot of pressure to hire a woman." But they actually managed to resist the pressure and hired a man, and actually said that to me!

What about the cohort where you studied?

The University of Pennsylvania was unusual—it had a fairly even sex ratio among graduate students in the 1980s, so it was a much healthier place in that respect compared to Harvard or any other places I knew. I had a terrific advisor, who was committed to women and men equally. His wife was Mary Maples Dunn, also a historian of early America. Mary died in March 2017 and it has really been a huge loss for so many people to assimilate. She became president of Smith College right before I started graduate school and Richard was always going back and forth to Northampton, Massachusetts. I don't think I realized at the time what a remarkable

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model that was. Eventually, Mary became president of Radcliffe. Richard and Mary had edited the papers of William Penn together and later, they took a position as co-executive officers of the American Philosophical Society together. So, Richard Dunn was a great model, as was Mary, who was also a really important figure for me. They had an intellectual partnership and two high-powered and successful careers. I'm sure it was enormously challenging for them. But as a result of Richard's personality and character and this wonderful partnership, I never worried for a minute that I had an adviser who did not completely support me. That was really important to me.

At Harvard, you had an interest in women's history. It is now not your main focus. Was that because you were in a place where gender issues were not as problematic?

I don't, unfortunately, think it has anything to do with the declining problem of gender issues, because they continue to be omnipresent. I think partly it's a temperamental thing, in that I like to move on from one thing to another. That's true of my work—I feel like a cat, going from toy to toy. Also, I felt like I had read everything there was to read about early American women's history by the time I finished my senior thesis in 1985. Of course, since then there has been lots of new important work being done, but when I started graduate school in 1986, I wanted to try something different. I spent a lot of time in graduate school writing seminar papers for dissertations that didn't happen, in order to figure out what I wanted to do. I don't do women's history, but I always pay attention to women. My first book was about migration, which is a subject in which women are extremely important. Of course, my book on witchcraft dealt quite a bit with gender, too, and in my classes I always talk about women and gender as central aspects of the past, not side topics relegated to a single section of the class.

I've been thinking recently about ways I could do better in thinking more systematically about gender. For the project I'm working on now about the Amboyna massacre, I'm interested in English and Dutch traders living in shared houses in the Spice Islands and then meeting each other during torture. I've been trying to think more about the ways that a more systematic attention to gender might give me a deeper understanding of what's going on there, but I haven't really resolved that.

Georgetown feels like a healthy place, gender-balanced. Is that representative for the US? How does it compare to the Netherlands?

When I spent a semester at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies, I think I was vicariously traumatized, along with so many of the academic women in the Netherlands that I've been hearing about and talking to. It is not like you have to have women to have good role models, but I think it makes a difference in that it makes it possible to imagine pursuing that profession if you see other women doing it.

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The statistics about sex ratios among undergraduates in history in our department at Georgetown and in the country as a whole, for reasons I can't understand, show that the major is male-dominated.[17] I don't understand this; it doesn't make any sense to me, but this is nonetheless the case. For graduate students in the profession as a whole, it's only marginally more balanced.[18] Georgetown is not perfect, but when I started, maybe a third of the department was women and that was unusual at the time. The acting chair of our department was actually a woman when I was hired as well, and all those things mattered. Actually, the most important period in terms of gender equity on campus was when we had Jane Dammen McAuliffe (also a historian) as the dean of the college (1999–2008). She noticed women, and it was transforming that suddenly there was somebody in a major administrative position on campus who could *see* that there were women teaching and researching. It has actually been a real source of concern to me that we don't have more administrators who are women. So there continue to be issues that concern me.

What would solve the imbalances?

It takes a concerted and deliberate effort to attend to these issues. I've noticed over the past twenty years at Georgetown that if you do not pay constant attention to gender equity, then problems arise. The same is true with other kinds of diversity. Communities tend to replicate themselves, and it requires active intervention to stop this pattern. People need to be reminded or trained—whatever is necessary—to see that they have designed commencement or convocation programs without women featured in any formal role, for example, as has happened at Georgetown not infrequently. That's just one small example, but it is important symbolically.

Do women want to play it by the book and conform to existing gender ideas?

I'm not sure that that is necessarily the case—and of course men conform to existing gender ideas as well. There is no reason why a search committee wouldn't produce great women. It also has to do with the kinds of fields you advertise in. Some fields are more male-dominated, so if you are committed to diversity, you also have to think about what kind of positions you want to advertise.

You recently spent time in England for your current project, and before that you spent time in the Netherlands. Can you reflect a little bit on the difference between European and US academic culture?

I think the biggest difference is graduate training, because in both the Netherlands and the UK people specialize so quickly. I probably know the English system better. They specialize at such a young age: they go to college doing history and only history. In fact, I was talking to a Chinese historian who teaches in the UK. He mentioned that it's hard for him to recruit English graduate students who know Chinese well

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enough to start doctoral studies, because it's hard for the history students in England to take languages along with their history program. There's plenty of advantages to specializing so early, but the great disadvantage, I think, is in comparison to the US educational system, and perhaps you see it especially clearly at the graduate level. The main advantage here in the US is that graduate students are forced—they don't always want to do it, of course—to study a variety of fields, and to take formal classes. Some people feel it is slowing them down on their way to comprehensive exams, but I think it's a good thing. I think the breadth is essential. I am someone who benefited so much from reading different historiographies, and thinking about different ways that people in different fields approached and talked about a problem. I benefited from this kind of training so much so I like to think it must be salutary for other people. That is the biggest difference between the US and European system.

Of course, there are also important differences in the ways in which people get funding for graduate studies, where people in Europe apply to participate in specific projects, which seems especially the case the Netherlands. That is such a different funding model. It's hard to apply for your own project, and I worry about people who are not able to pursue their own interests. It's not healthy. I don't want my graduate students to see the world the way I see it. I want them to see past me; I want them to think differently, to do different things that are their own passions and interests. I think it is unhealthy intellectually to have people replicating your work, and that strikes me as one risk of the European funding model. There is so much more centralization in Europe.

How about differences in publishing practices?

One main difference is the practice of publishing dissertations without much revision. I think you may see this more in the Netherlands than in the UK. That can have mixed value for junior scholars—they are able to regroup and move on to a new project very quickly, but at the same time the dissertation may not have enjoyed the revisions that will make it a book with a larger and more lasting impact. A second difference is an emphasis on article publishing, and especially the pressure to publish for external assessment practices. When you see the lists of articles by European colleagues, I feel so lazy and shiftless! I think it's hard to send out an article when you are in the midst of research. It's scary; you feel so vulnerable. I suppose it always feels premature to publish anything. Sometimes I wish I could let go of things more quickly and earlier, because I feel like I can't. I find that really hard.

Do you think there is more pressure now than when you started?

Yes, there is definitely more pressure. Graduate students professionalize themselves very early on—there are so many more opportunities to give conference papers, for example, and students tend do to several of them. When I was in graduate school, I only gave two conference papers. Students also pursue publication more quickly and place articles while still in graduate school. There are also many more fellowships to apply for, and

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that is another round of applications (and possible rejections) for students to struggle with. I look at my own graduate students and think they are all much more professional and savvy than I was at a similar stage. I think the level of anxiety among junior scholars is probably the same as it has been for the past thirty years. If you're not tenured, you're such a wreck—when I was coming up for tenure I focused all of my anxiety on the department Xerox machine and whether it might skip a page in copying some vital aspect of my file. It became the source and the target for all my stress!

Would it be possible to change things to make academia more livable?

I don't think that there is necessarily anything inherently unlivable about academia. I feel that the expectations here, at Georgetown, are not unreasonable. The expectation for tenure and promotion is that you produce a good first book, published with an appropriate and strong press, and that you show progress towards a new project. You have to demonstrate good success in the classroom and good citizenship in terms of service to the university and the profession as well. These do not strike me as unrealistic goals. The problem comes when those goals are not clearly articulated, or when they change during a professor's probationary period, as has happened over the past fifteen years as institutions including Georgetown have raised expectations for tenure. Luckily, on the tenure-track, at least at Georgetown and many other places, I think it's important to remember that you're not competing against anybody else. You're going to do the things that you have to do to get tenure, but it's not like there's only one spot for tenure. Georgetown's history department has also created a variety of mentoring mechanisms to help assistant and associate professors get the feedback they need to move toward promotion at each level. Of course, universities are different, and faculty have to be sure they know the expectations where they are.

Many faculty start jobs now with more publications than used to be the case fifteen to twenty years ago, in large part because there are a lot more postdoctoral fellowships than there used to be. The declining number of jobs and the growing number of postdoctorates mean that people tend to start on the tenure-track with many more publications, and often with a finished book manuscript. People who have been doing two or three years of postdocs will be so much further along in their scholarship. Of course, another enormous pressure is the lack of academic jobs, so there are all kinds of different, real anxieties and tensions in the profession now. One thing that has become clear over the past ten years is that there are many different ways in which one can be a historian. Georgetown has long had a practice of placing PhDs in a range of institutions, including government agencies (like the CIA and State Department) and think-tanks in Washington, so our department is open minded about the importance of pursuing a range of options. I worry about that a lot, how to help graduate students position themselves for all kinds of jobs, when I only have experience with one type of career path.

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You've been so conscientious about trying to move beyond boundaries, and in your recent work, you try to move beyond the Anglo-sphere, to look at the Dutch. Do you feel that this is a trend that is happening, or that needs to be consciously pushed? Is there too much Anglo domination?

Certainly, Atlantic history has been dominated by Anglo-US historians. I don't think that there is anything necessarily Anglo-dominated about scholarship that pushes beyond boundaries. I think the key thing is to make sure that graduate students learn lots of languages, which is challenging because there is now so much pressure in the United States for students to finish their degrees more quickly. Students will normally come in to study Atlantic history with at least one Romance language, and it may not be so hard if you add French or Spanish or Portuguese, but what if it's Dutch you need? It's hard to find a place to learn Dutch. That's one of the challenges.

Is this a logistical barrier that's at work here, or is it more an intellectual barrier?

In some respects, these issues are connected—the logistics of language acquisition, and being in an intellectual milieu where that pursuit is regarded as important. I think a lot has to do with advisors, and what they encourage their students to do. Georgetown requires graduate students who want to do Atlantic history to have two languages, so that helps in terms of making it clear that it is essential to acquire languages as core research tools.

Would it fundamentally change the field if one of those languages had to be non-European?

So, what would be a good research language that's non-European in Atlantic history? It's a chicken-and-egg issue: people's research agendas are of course shaped by what they are capable of reading and doing, but then they can't even imagine a different research agenda if they don't think about the possibilities of language acquisition, if the languages are much more challenging. Certainly, Africanists and other historians who use glottochronology have much to show us about the Atlantic world. And historians of Latin America have long acquired non-Western languages for their research.

I've never thought about Atlantic history much in terms of the non-Western languages for research purposes, since I'm normally so focused on the North Atlantic world. I was talking to a medievalist colleague in the Spanish department, and she says that now people in Spanish literature assume they need to know Arabic. That's really interesting that that's understood to be essential; that's a big change that is taking place. But how do we deal with the push for graduate students to finish in five years, which seems incredibly hasty to me in the US context, and think about this question of languages? This is especially the case for languages that are institutionally

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hard to acquire, where you need to go to another place and take the time and money to do it, where you might well need methodological and disciplinary skills beyond archival ones in order to make use of this language, when the funding is so scant for so many things that are important to our graduate students.

It's a really important issue. I don't know what the answer is. Learning Dutch in Washington was hard enough, and I live in a major cosmopolitan city: there is no place where you can actually take classes except the Belgian embassy (which is what I did). It shouldn't be so challenging to acquire a language so vital to researching Atlantic history.

Can you tell us more about your current book?

I'm doing this book about the so-called Amboyna massacre, what it was, what may have happened, how the English East India Company invented it as a massacre. It took place in 1623 in Indonesia, on Ambon Island, where the English and Dutch were in a trading partnership with the English as junior partners. The VOC traders became convinced that the EIC traders were plotting with Japanese soldiers who worked for the VOC to stage a coup. They ended up torturing or threatening to torture the alleged culprits, and twenty men were executed. It stopped being a Dutch story after 1654, when, under the terms of the treaty of Westminster, the VOC had to make payments to the English East India Company and to the estates of those who were executed and of the eight survivors, who were not executed and who came back and told their story. Last summer in Oxford, where I stayed for several weeks in Campion Hall thanks to an arrangement with Georgetown, I got interested unexpectedly in some woodcuts of the so-called massacre. The English East India Company published multiple versions of a pamphlet about what had happened in Amboyna and they included a woodcut with the very first edition. Then the EIC's Dutch language edition had that woodcut, and another woodcut, which in turn appeared in various forms. In 1632, another edition was published, with the woodcut from the Dutch language translation of the East India Company version.

My first day in the Bodleian I saw this 1632 woodcut with red ink, and of course I got very excited. I consulted a librarian, who was a printer, and we talked about the red ink. Then I got the idea that I wanted to look at as many surviving copies of the 1632 edition, and I found five of them last summer with red ink on the woodcuts. The image shows stigmata and candle flames, and blood. I've gotten really interested in the history of the book now. I've also been looking at how these books were collected, because in Oxford—I went to seven of the college libraries—the librarians really know the provenance of their collections. I looked at what the books were bound with, and what people were connecting with the Amboyna episode, because printers kept producing and reproducing these texts.

I've gotten very interested in this incident because it had this incredible staying power. I've seen a reference, which I have not yet chased down, that during the Boer War, the English were still talking about the Amboyna massacre. Certainly, through

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the late eighteenth century, they still talked about it. The English actually conquered Amboyna in 1796 and held it for six years. So, it crops up again and again. Major eighteenth-century writers wrote about it, including Defoe and Swift. So did writers such as David Hume and Catherine Macaulay in their histories of England. In the nineteenth century, imperial history started to yoke Amboyna to the British empire: it came out of a national English and Dutch story and eventually became attached to a larger imperial story. I thought I would write a short book that looked at the history of this episode and then its legacies, but I'm finding its legacies unwieldy because I can't figure out where they end. I have this theory that during World War I, when the Dutch were neutral, the English might even have invoked it, although I haven't seen any evidence of that. Still, it would be very consistent with what I've seen. Thanks to databases, I've looked at every seventeenth-century book that mentioned Amboyna. I've also identified and sampled the eighteenth-century works, although I haven't read them all. Again, it shows up in plays and poems and a range of other texts.

Were any of the other empires talking about this as well, or is it really an English-Dutch story?

There was some initial interest in the 1620s, especially from states who hoped to see the English and Dutch alliance fall apart. The most active intervention came in the world of publishing, in which anti-Dutch publications about Amboyna were created in the Spanish Netherlands. There was one pamphlet, a version of the so-called *True Relation*, printed at the Jesuit printing press in St. Omer to drive a wedge between the English and the Dutch. Because they were allies, James I actually delayed signing another treaty of alliance right after he heard about the Amboyna episode. He waited for a week and then he signed it.

But overall, it was really an English thing. The English wrote about it in a variety of contexts. There was a Royal African Company official at Cape Coast Castle in 1705, who described the Dutch as those "Amboyna rogues." So it was often attached to the Dutch. But then it also showed up as metaphor for any kind of cruel behavior. The incident cropped up again in the 1760s, but it always seemed to be the English talking about the Dutch or talking about cruelty, because even after the Black Hole of Calcutta, the English were still writing about the Amboyna massacre. Though it wasn't the only such episode, it was another benchmark; it was a way of talking about cruelty. It crops up in some accounts I've seen of India—a letter from India that I've seen produced in a newspaper, from the mid-eighteenth century, talks about the Dutch "acting Amboyna" in India, or a fear that they would. It had an incredible salience, and I don't entirely understand why. That's what I want to make sense of. It's not like the Black Hole, also invented, where there's a pilgrimage site. The English didn't have a pilgrimage site of Amboyna, so it's also a way of thinking about history and memory.

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It seems to be taking you away from your earlier work in social history

It's been really fun! The first couple of chapters of the book are more like my earlier work, that familiar social history, working out how the English and Dutch lived and worked and competed, all in the fascinating context of the complex Indian Ocean trading world with its extensive cast of characters. Then it really takes me into thinking about all this printed material and these images, which are fascinating because they changed over the centuries. Even in the eighteenth century, there were these elaborate engravings of the Amboyna tortures, so it just didn't go away. I haven't yet really finished the research for the last chapter, which I hope will come up with some answer for the tenacity of this story.

You've been a really influential scholar because you've been so prescient. Are there intellectual trends that you see now that you don't see lasting?

That's a good question. I can't think of any trends likely not to last, or at least none I'd single out a public forum! I'd rather think about trends I see continuing. Given recent political developments in Europe and the United States, we are likely to see a resurgence of interest in timely topics such as populism, nationalism, economic and racial inequality, migration, and sovereignty. One field that I've also been reading for this Amboyna book is the history of emotions, which is really exciting. I think this field has great staying power. The history of emotions does something that I think is also true of environmental history, which I consider a booming field—both fields help us read sources in new ways. While it's always wonderful and exciting when historians find or draw on new sources, I'm always impressed by those who take sources familiar to many of us and find an entirely new perspective on them. Ultimately, I think the most important thing, in terms of creating a work that will endure, is not whether it is attached to something that seems fashionable at the time, but whether it is good history, chock full of good archival research connected to sound interpretations, and most of all conceptualized with an openness to questioning existing frameworks and a willingness to craft new ones if necessary.

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