Do We Mean Global, When We Say Global?

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Following Samuel Beckett, I would like to ask: Do we mean global, when we say global?[1] I propose to explore this abstruse question to ruminate on the globality of architectural history.

In the summer of 2020, when the Black Lives Matter movement was reaching a boiling point, my Washington, DC, neighborhood park on Capitol Hill became the focus of national attention. People of all political persuasions huddled in Lincoln Park around a controversial statue that stands at its center. The Emancipation Memorial was erected in 1876 to commemorate Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, which many American textbooks credit with "freeing the slaves."[2] Set on a high pedestal, the monument depicts Lincoln as a towering savior and the unshackled slave kneeling in front of him as a grateful recipient of white benediction.

The people who gathered around the memorial—itself shielded by a police barrier—expressed a wide range of opinions about its political content. Some viewed it as an embodiment of white supremacy, a repugnant display of the systemic racial inequality in the United States, and insisted that it should be taken down. Others argued that it should be left standing as a physical reminder of America's quintessential birth defect: slavery. Meanwhile, the memorial's apologists asserted that it actually signals a mutually respectful

The Emancipation Memorial, Lincoln Park, Capitol Hill

convergence of white and black America. This group spoke of the promise of a new America represented by the slave's "rising"—*not* kneeling—before Lincoln. They seemed all too willing to ignore Lincoln's Moses-like pose and his downward gaze at the black man.

Amid all these interpretations, one thing became clear. Though sculptor Thomas Ball modeled the kneeling man after the former slave Archer Alexander, the monument minimizes Alexander's personal history and his traumatic escape to freedom. It is Lincoln's heroism, and not that of former slaves like Alexander, that is disseminated through an entrenched web of cultural consent, one that

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[1] Samuel Beckett, "Do we mean love, when we say love?" *Words and Music*, a radio play (1962), produced by Mark Lutwak and Leo Lutwak for Theatre For Your Mother (http://radioartnet.net/11/2011/07/05/samuel-beckett-words-and-music/).

[2] Christopher R. Eliot, "The Lincoln Emancipation Statue," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct. 1944).

both resists and renders insignificant counternarratives from below.[3] All kinds of historical contestations and subjective interpretations collided at the Emancipation Memorial that day. The political drama that unfolded there was a classic demonstration of the quirkiness of Americans' interpretations of history.

Around that same time, a debate of historic proportions was raging across the United States concerning Confederate monuments: Should they be removed from America's civic places? Architectural historian Dell Upton suggested that making moral arguments against individual historical figures (such as Robert E. Lee) is a "losing proposition," because good and bad coexist in individuals, and, in the end, it is impossible to make a reasoned case for any person's erasure from history.[4] He argued, "no final accounting convincing to everyone can be made." Some wondered why it would be important to convince everybody of the need to remove statues that symbolize a political ideology of racial domination.

Not everybody agreed with Upton. In Bristol, England, writing on the radical toppling of a statue of seventeenth-century slave trader and philanthropist Edward Colston, Oxford archaeologist Dan Hicks stated: "These statues were never 'just statues,' but part of an apparatus of racism. Statues were used to make racial violence persist. Today, their physical removal is part of dismantling systems of oppression."[5] The Society of Architectural Historians took an unprecedented policy position on Confederate monuments, publishing a statement that in many ways demonstrates a disciplinary shift, although by no means a uniform one, among the SAH community as part of the broader political exigencies of our time. The statement opens:

> The Society of Architectural Historians supports and encourages the removal of Confederate monuments from public spaces. In its eighty-year history, SAH has never before advocated for the direct removal of any historical resource, let alone listed monuments. As architectural historians committed to preserving significant elements of the built environment and cultural landscape, we have vigorously championed the preservation of such elements, even those associated with difficult aspects of our nation's history, such as Wounded Knee, Manzanar, and the Stonewall Inn. From those painful examples we can gain perspective about ourselves as Americans and learn from our past mistakes. In contrast, Confederate monuments do not serve as catalysts for a cleansing public conversation; rather, they express white supremacy and dominance, causing discomfort and distress to African American citizens who utilize the public spaces occupied by these monuments. Our inaction gives these monuments power. By leaving them in place, we allow the dead hand of the past to direct some Americans away from that which belongs to all of us. History has proven that progress is possible, but also that the persistent racial schism in our society will not be conquered without radical,

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[3] Public commemoration of the enslavement and emancipation of African Americans remains an unsettling challenge. See, for example, Renee Ater, "Slavery and Its Memory in Public Monuments," *American Art*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring 2010).

[4] Dell Upton, "Monuments and Crimes," *Journal18* (June 2020), https://www.journal18.org/5022.

[5] Dan Hicks, "Why Colston Had to Fall," *ArtReview* (June 9, 2020), https://artreview.com/why-colston-had-to-fall/

sustained action. The removal of Confederate monuments is a necessary and important step in this process, and one that cannot wait any longer.[6]

What I found fascinating about this public debate on whether or not controversial statues should be removed from the American civic square was that history as a discipline—despite its commitment to, and to some degree fetishization of, evidence-based epistemological practices—is a great deal about taking a political position and attempting to solve a puzzle that eventually remains unsolvable. History is irredeemably corrupted by the chemical reaction of personal choices and the historian's covert desire to be an activist with myriad goals. Maya Angelou once stated: "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."[7] I have long wondered how a historian would internalize Angelou's notion of "courage." Is this courage about confronting the "wound" of history as it is and making its violence visible through the lens of an honest historical account? Or does this courage rest in the very nature of knowledge that is produced, assuaging the pain inflicted on a people and eventually lighting the way forward with the ethos of redemption and forgiveness?

Every time I visit Lincoln Park, I cannot help but feel that in the Emancipation Memorial's visual politics, Alexander is dehumanized through anonymity. He is reduced to a generic slave, without a name, without a past, without anything. Lincoln's presence is magnified through the slave's non-existence. This is what African American novelist Ralph Ellison called "invisibility"—a paradoxical condition that can imply both a fantasy of empowerment and a tragedy of powerlessness.[8] The notion of invisibility has a long and complex history in science, philosophy, literature, and visual culture.[9] Choosing to be invisible is an exercise of power, but imposing invisibility causes powerlessness. The practice of invisibility is intimately tied to how hegemony works in society. Raymond Williams explains hegemony as a process that relies on the stratagems of traditions, norms, societal patterns, and canons that weaken the power of counternarratives embedded in radical cultural productions.[10] The place from which hegemonic power is exercised often remains invisible. The clout of the ubiquitous center rests on the absence of locational specificity and all-encompassing diffusion through osmosis.

How we come to terms with invisibility—as a conflicted human condition, a trope, a desire, a fantasy, or a technology—can reveal both how we interpret and how we reinforce the world around us, the structures of society, and our moral ontology. From Plato's tale of the Ring of Gyges, which analogizes invisibility as a prism through which to view the moral contradictions of the human mind,

[6] Society of Architectural Historians, "Statement on the Removal of Monuments to the Confederacy from Public Spaces," SAH website June 19, 2020, https://www.sah.org/docs/default-source/preservation-advocacy/sah_statement_monuments-to-the-confederacy_19-june-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=39f3249b_10.

[7] Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of Morning," poem recited at Bill Clinton's Presidential Inauguration, 1993.

[8] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952). Also see, Michele Wallace, "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture," in Russell Ferguson et al, ed., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 43-44.

[9] See, for instance, Philip Ball, *Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[10] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 115-117.

to postcolonial inquiries into the Other—simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible to the colonial gaze—invisibility has always posed a peculiar problem for historiography.[11]

"Globaling" Historiography and the GAHTC's Challenge

I would now like to turn to how the Global Architectural History Teaching Collaborative promised a pedagogical innovation in teaching architectural history surveys across professional architectural schools and departments of art history and the humanities. As a member of the GAHTC board during its first two cycles, I endeavored to understand both the urgency of the GAHTC "global" project's epistemological mission and the disciplinary challenges it faced. In many ways, the global was a critical historiographic exercise in revealing the networks of continuities and discontinuities among peoples, regions, ideas, cultures, economies, and interests, as well as the power dynamics that shape the nature of those relationships. To me personally, the global was a way of looking at the world without a center, a world that is crisscrossed by a complex network of mobilities, transactions, temporalities, and spatialities. The historian of globality must navigate the epistemological web of visibility and invisibility that complicates the relationships among human societies.

While the global as a pedagogical framework enjoys a higher rate of acceptability among historians today than it did two decades ago, teaching the history of architecture from a global perspective remains controversial. First, there is no consensus on what global history is or should be, partly because the perceptions of "global" ranges vary widely, with some seeing a global perspective as a necessary antidote to West-centrism and a euphemism for "non-Western" and others viewing it as part of a "liberal agenda" and a "neo-American hegemony." Second, global history warrants a structural transformation in the ways knowledge of the world is produced, revealing in new ways the interdependencies among regions, cultures, and human societies, and this transformation itself is an accusation against the canon's centralized authority; thus, it cannot be without political backlash. For example, in a study of colonial urbanism in British India, how does the historian balance the "wound" resulting from the colonial power's racialized "civilizing mission" in the colonized territory with the "wonder" aspect of cultural mediation between colonizer and colonized? Third, global historians often find themselves intellectually and morally challenged as they attempt to deal with the invisibility of certain subject matters, peoples, regions, and cultures without the condescension of a savior or the apologia of a well-meaning scholar. The global ambition of architectural history is complicated by the schism between institutional demands for including "marginal" peoples and their cultural productions in the syllabus and the development of enlightened research methodologies that acknowledge the agency of people.

Since the end of the Cold War and the attendant shifts in geopolitics, historians, and other professionals have struggled to reimagine the world's spatial patterning of human societies. As Martin Lewis and Karen E. Wigen explain in *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, the different building blocks that people use to order their knowledge of the world—such as East and West or First and Third Worlds—both constitute and perpetuate ideological structures.[12] The need

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[11] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47.
[12] Martin Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xi.

for new kinds of cartographic imaginings of the world—prompted by the rapid pace of globalization and the "disruptive" knowledge of postmodernism and postcolonialism—became a rallying cry across academic disciplines during the waning decades of the 20th century.

Global perspectives on architectural histories have been debated since the 1990s, although sporadically at best. In his editorial for the March 1990 issue of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural historians* (JSAH), then editor Tod Marder breathed a sigh of relief that "global awareness" had opened new opportunities for historians to overcome the false feud resulting from the competing ascendancy of Western European and American topics.[13] This was an ironic use of the term "global," deployed as a subterfuge to neutralize the competition between two Western camps for academic leadership. When a 1999/2000 special issue of *JSAH* sought to examine the status of architectural history in western academia, the result was curious. Among the twenty-five articles that made up the issue, titled "Architectural History 1999/2000," the near invisibility of such terms as "global," "globalization," and "non-Western" was a wake-up call.[14]

The past two decades have witnessed a variety of scholarly attempts and experiments aimed at increasing the inclusiveness of architectural history surveys. This intellectual urgency has derived from a complex mix of catalysts, including revisionist critiques of West-centrism and canon-debunking tendencies resulting from the theoretical trinity of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism; globalization and the new curiosities it has engendered; new technologies able to map remote corners of the world; and an activist-scholar mind-set of being more inclusive and fair-minded in the selection of content for architectural history surveys. Academic bureaucracies have needed to catch up. The National Architectural Accrediting Board, the oldest accreditation agency for architectural education, established in the United States in 1940, now demands that global awareness be part of an architecture student's critical thinking. The ambivalence toward nation-centric historiographies has caught on even in popular culture. Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates promoted the Big History Project—a macrohistorical narrative beginning with the Big Bang and ranging from Botticelli to artificial intelligence and beyond.[15] Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has recommended reading Islamic historian Ibn Khaldun's *The Muqaddimah*, written in 1377, as it presents "an early attempt to strip away biases of historical records and find universal elements in the progression of humanity."[16]

It was in this disciplinary context that the GAHTC began its journey in 2013 with a modest but effective mission to create a flexible template for an inclusive and discursive global architectural history survey. It is worth noting how the collaborative framed its pedagogical aspiration: "The ambition of the GAHTC is to address the needs of educators in diverse disciplinary contexts by providing practical lecture materials for teaching global architectural history at the survey and introductory level. This effort does not preclude more advanced level education, but the main

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[13] Tod A. Marder, "Note from the Editor*," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49, no. 1 (Mar. 1990): 5-6. See also Swati Chattopadhyay, "The Globality of Architectural History," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 74, no. 4 (Dec. 2015): 411-15.

[14] "Architectural History 1999/2000," special issue, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Sept. 1999).

[15] Tess Thackara, "We are Living in the Era of Big Art History," *Artsy* (February 26, 2016).

[16] Richard Feloni, "Why Mark Zuckerberg Wants Everyone to Read the 14th-Century Islamic Book *The Muqaddimah*?" *Business Insider* (June 2, 2015).

purpose of the GAHTC is to transform the discipline 'from below'—to help guide the discourse of architectural history by reshaping its teaching at the survey level."[17] In all this, the question of how to frame the global theoretically offered a broad opportunity for recalibrating the scope of the architectural history survey, particularly how it was taught at the undergraduate level.

At the GAHTC's annual meetings, we indulged in animated debates about how to articulate a flexible, "spongy" theoretical position for the global, yet we deliberately did not pursue another Sisyphean search to nail it down. This was in keeping with the humble aims of the collaborative's global project, which set out not to revolutionize historiography but instead to fight epistemological invisibility by expanding the geographical and spatial remit of the history survey. In doing so, we hoped to empower the GAHTC to produce a pedagogical globality that entangled human experiences deserved.

The notion of content expansion of course entailed more than merely adding volume to current syllabi or applying Band-Aids over gaps in the canon; we sought to creatively disrupt and reimagine the very methodologies of knowledge production. GAHTC members collaborated on creating course modules on a variety of topics—ranging from "Earth and the Environment in African Architecture" to "The Skyscraper, a Global History"—theoretically framed within a matrix of ideational mobilities across geographic and cultural boundaries. From this work emerged, slowly but steadily, a new generation of critical pedagogies of revealing and analyzing civilizational overlaps, infrastructures of exclusion, and serendipitous cross-pollination of ideas. It appeared that we were on the verge of a paradigm shift.

Teaching architectural history surveys ceased to be another obligatory ritual. Rather, it became a fun and stimulating challenge, propelled by a genuine interest in questioning the boundaries of disciplinary specialties. The GAHTC's global project became a critical forum for explaining and fighting epistemological "invisibility." Both the power and the promise of that project rested on the humility of its mission—to empower history survey teachers with an expanded vision of shared histories of humanity. A new intellectual commitment to complicate history teaching brought a large group of teachers together under the banner of the GAHTC. At a time when STEM's overtaking of the humanities seemed like a forgone conclusion, and many architectural/art history programs had begun to return to a nostalgic nation-centric model as a basic unit of historiography, the GAHTC's global emphasis seemed like a necessary intellectual call-to-arms. But exactly how the collaborative waged this campaign warrants reflection.

The commitment to transform pedagogy—not by over-theorizing what "global" is or could be but by repositioning it as a perpetually open-ended process—became a catalyzing force. I was convinced that global history could only ever be a mind-set, an attitude, or an "accusation" against all kinds of nation-centrism, atavistic insularity, and reactionary nativism.[18] Global history is a reminder, not a theory. Its intellectual strength lies in its ability to resist closure. Theorizing the global and giving it a label would be *un-global*, strengthening, paradoxically, the very foes global history seeks to resist, such as Eurocentrism, universalism, totalitarianism, invisibility, exclusion, and self-righteous canonist loyalty. For this reason, the global project, as originally envisioned by the GAHTC, needed to avoid

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[17] https://gahtc.org/pages/about-gahtc
[18] Mark Jarzombek, "Architecture: The Global Imaginary in an Antiglobal World," *Grey Room*, No. 61 (Fall 2015).

falling into the trap of neo-panopticism, another Foucauldian vortex from which there would be no escape.

Instead, global history should embrace, say, a Gramscian position from which seeing the deferred light at the end of the tunnel, or, at least, enlightening a new generation of global-history-conscious students, would not seem like theoretical heresy. Manfredo Tafuri's condemnation of "operative criticism—which Kenneth Frampton later unapologetically developed in the opposite direction— was cleansed in the hot springs of the GAHTC's grassroots strategic mission.[19] In many ways, the GAHTC sought to use criticism to articulate a flexible language for new pedagogical narratives. Can the global project resist and liberate at the same time? Can global history both disrupt and construct? The liberating promise of the global project emerges from a post-instrumental language to be relevant in the public space. Poststructuralism's welcome critique of the disciplines in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences in the first wave of its reception in the 1980s and 1990s needed recalibration for a new era plagued by post-truth conspiracies, militant nativism, and the neo-Other. Thus, if the global project persisted in subscribing to a now-trite poststructuralist oppositional position—one buttressed only by an incestuous circulation within the fortified citadel of "critical theory"—then the global would reproduce itself only as a decorated corpse for fashionable academic display.

The promise of the GAHTC's global project lies in a new generation of tactical epistemic practices that empower history teachers to disseminate shared historiographies of a decentered world. "Global" can only be a verb, never a noun. "Globaling" historiography is the global project's mandate, one in which not even accusation is sufficient. The project must aspire to create a flexible web of knowledge communities without sacrificing the necessary power of criticism.

Wound, Wonder, and Wisdom:

Teaching architectural history surveys to both undergraduates and graduates for nearly two decades has offered me ample opportunities to speculate on what motivates students in a survey class. Of course, students' interests in a subject are not monolithic. Yet one can trace some consistencies through student evaluations at the end of a semester. For the past decade or so, I have been teaching architectural history survey part one, covering the period from the agricultural revolution to the Byzantine era and the advent of Islam. In addition to architecture students, for whom the survey is mandatory, my course attracts students from other disciplines. With a class size of 90-100, typically 60 percent of the students are architecture majors and 40 percent are from other disciplines. A large survey course, I reckon, must acknowledge its central challenge: the professor must teach a global range of material in the fifteen weeks of a semester to a multidisciplinary body of students of varying capabilities and attention spans. My experience tells me that students find a survey most stimulating when it includes the following three facets, although by no means exclusive: (a) the course comprises contents representative of both familiar and unfamiliar territories, all discussed as part of an entangled and contextual *human story*; (b) the course material is presented in an open-minded knowledge dissemination style—a freedom-to-think approach—that empowers the students to

[19] Mary McLeod, "Frampton in Frame," in Karla Cavarra Britton and Robert McCarter, *Architecture and the Life World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Frampton* (Farnborough: Thames and Hudson, 2020).

interpret the material as they deem fit; and (c) the professor shares personal experiences of and reflections on some of the architectural sites discussed—such experiential analysis helps students resituate historical sites and buildings away from their abstractive space of knowledge to a realm of immediacy and reachability.

Over the years I have learned that empowering students to interpret history's disparate lessons freely is critical to a survey course's pedagogical appeal. A predetermined historiographic methodology tends to diminish student enthusiasm. If "wound" implies a traumatic reading of a tragic episode in history and "wonder" symbolizes a conflated sentiment of amazement and curiosity, stimulated by exemplars of human ingenuity across historical eras, an architectural survey must avoid the either/or of wound and wonder. Without an empathetic understanding of history's wounds, learning becomes a hollow ritualistic practice and a wasted privilege. For instance, not teaching about or ignoring how the free labor of enslaved black people helped create the U.S. Capitol—often represented as a soaring symbol of American democracy—is to endorse a discriminatory view of history, and thereby help perpetuate the oppressive ideology that enabled slavery in the first place.[20] Wound must be historicized in the broader cartography of human journeys, tragedies, and experiences. On the other side, inspiring wonder among students about events, peoples, sites, buildings, and landscapes to cultivate a positive worldview is no doubt a noble pedagogical goal. However, wonder, with its romance and propensity for a sanitized view of the world, often tends to claim a peculiar space of entitlement, or rather white privilege, one that surreptitiously allows unearned freedom to articulate a self-justified narrative.

Based on my own trial-and-error experimentations with architectural history surveys, I would argue that teaching works best when the teacher focuses on triggering the students' cerebral ability—or wisdom—to see things in ways that are appropriate without being dogmatic about it. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it." Is he talking about wisdom? By covering a plethora of course materials from the east, west, south, and north, and revealing how they weave and choreograph a multifaceted, decentered narrative of humanity, global history has the best shot at cultivating wisdom that structures a historiographic space in which the wound and the wonder become an intertwined epistemological inquiry.

I would like to return now to the Emancipation Memorial at Lincoln Park. In 1944, Christopher Eliot, a descendant of the Eliot clan that provided shelter to Archer Alexander, wrote about the fugitive slave's daring maneuvers to help the Union forces during the Civil War.[21] Furthermore, recent family DNA research reveals that Alexander was in fact the great-great-great-grandfather of boxing legend Muhammad Ali. But his gritty story continues to be ignored in the official narrative of the memorial. How do we reconfigure his life—rendered invisible on the pedestal that Lincoln dominates with absolute authority—in a global history of enslavement, colonization of the black body, and the political economy of slave labor? Here I find useful what historian Tonio Andrade calls "global microhistory"—a kind of granular storytelling from below, starting with the invisible actors who inhabit the structures, spaces, and crosscurrents of globality but have traditionally been

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[20] Irene Chang, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2020), 25.
[21] Christopher R. Eliot, "The Lincoln Emancipation Statue," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct. 1944), 472.

denied a historiographic location.[22] Donald Wright's *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (1997) is a convincing example of global microhistory.[23] Wright presents a methodology of the global as a way of zooming out from the local, "a very small place," the Mandinka kingdom of Niumi, situated near the mouth of the Gambia River, to discuss broader historical developments in the Age of Exploration, the slave trade, European colonialism, and the gradual emergence of global economic systems. Wright's "small place" had already been catapulted to global attention two decades prior to the publication of his book. In 1976, Alex Haley, the author of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, traced back to Niumi the ground zero of his family ancestry with the story of Kunta Kinte, "kidnapped into slavery while not far from his village."[24]

Archer Alexander's global microhistory would perhaps enable us to better assess the anthropological and historical significance of the social justice movements that swept through American cities in 2020. In many ways, these movements were an accusation against the false histories of compartmentalized racial and social identities. As I take a stroll in Lincoln Park and breathe the fresh air that blows through a range of native and exotic trees—American elm, sawtooth oak, Norway maple, black locust, Chinese elm and saucer magnolia, among others—I am convinced that global history can make the world a better place by narrating humanity's shared experiences. I mean knowledge justice when I say global.

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[22] Tonio Andrade, "A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 2010). Andrade writes: "We've made great strides building powerful models of global historical structures and processes: global silver flows, strange parallels, divergences great and small. But we've tended to neglect the human dramas that make history come alive. I believe we should adopt microhistorical and bio-graphical approaches to help populate our models and theories with real people, to write what one might call global microhistory," (576).
[23] Donald Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (New York: Sharpe, 1997).
[24] Wright, 233.