

Response to Marco Mariano's review of *Historians Across Borders* for the *Ricerche di Storia Politica*.

At its heart, *Historians Across Borders* is a dialog. In practice it started as an exchange between a handful of European historians of the United States on the internationalization of US history, yet its avowed and constant vocation, through the many stages of the project, was to start and nourish a dialog between academics in North America, in Europe, and elsewhere, about what shapes historical scholarship, and what it means for the future of the history and historiography of the US, close to our heart, and more largely about our intellectual endeavors in a shifting academic world.

All that to say that, along with Cécile Vidal, Michael Heale and Stephen Tuck, I am delighted that *Ricerche di Storia Politica* decided to pick up this dialog. In his review, Marco Mariano has perfectly captured both the spirit and the main arguments of the book, and all there is left for us is to thank him wholeheartedly. So instead of going over those points again, I would like to offer here some thoughts about the two points that Marco Mariano discuss at the end of his text—the weight of the national framework and the paradoxical effects of “internationalizing” US history—as a way to further this dialog.

Let me address first what Marco Mariano quite aptly names the long “shadow of each of the national matrices (institutional and political-cultural, more than historiographical)” in the book. This is, in a way, a paradoxical consequence of our focus on location. A historian's nationality is not a theme we explored, partly because we thought we needed to move away from “identity” in our thinking about historiography. Rather, we set out to tease out the many ways our positions in the field shaped our intellectual endeavors and output, and that included the institutional and professional constraints and opportunities scholars navigate through their careers. What appeared quite clearly in our investigations in that, in Europe, those strictures are heavily national in character: university systems are public, mostly constructed and managed in a national framework; the profession, likewise, is generally regulated at that level; and language here is a powerful factor (although it does not strictly coincide with nation-states), especially when one think of the historian's audiences. European reforms and the globalization of academic norms and markets have only, so far, tempered this situation.

That said, we need to recognize that the national framework is only one, albeit an important one, of the many dimensions of academic positionality. As Marco Mariano points out, we very consciously gave a definition of the concept that did *not* hinge on the nation. Methodologically, we also chose to forego from the start any country-by-country approach precisely not to reify the national framework. Likewise, all the chapters are co-written by two to five authors from different regions of Europe to avoid the undue generalization of any one national system, and to confront each of us with both the diversity of situations across the continent and their commonalities. In that respect, it was striking that most of us were mainly familiar with two academic systems: the US and our home country. In spite of notable exceptions, it seemed evident that cross-European circulations of Americanists are less dense than bilateral movements across the Atlantic. More could and should be done about the non-national dimensions of positionality, however. Some we explored, especially in chapter 3, such as the weight of a handful of European institutions in the field—with small overall numbers of practitioners, even small groupings in key places can have a lot of sway. Yet academic systems are still shaped heavily by nation-states, and an exploration of the role of institutions in scholarship is bound to reflect that.

Linked but different is the question of the shadow of the nation on the scholarship itself, i.e. the nation as the framework for the research of (European) historians on North America. There is undoubtedly a tension throughout the book about what “American history” means; hence the sometimes too long, sometimes awkward phrases used to describe our object, be it

“the history of the U.S. and its antecedents,” or the “history of North American colonies and the United States.” We admit we did not resolve this tension; we did bring it to the fore, however, and this is probably a result of our location in Europe. Consider this: we have been talking for more than two decades about the “internationalization of American history.” This expression seems plain enough. And yet: include Spanish scholars in the discussion, and “American” suddenly becomes less clear; but add some early modern historians, and “US” will not work as a substitute for the pre-national era; meanwhile, “North American” would widen the net even more (too?) largely. Intellectual consistency might be that we should forego “American history” altogether, whatever we call it; yet professional strictures still mean that it is in the *Journal of American History* we aim to publish—not for vanity, but because it is where we are most likely to be read by our peers in the field.

This is not quite a contradiction between intellectual endeavor and professional requirements, but the tension in that little phrase is an apt symbol of the difficulties of the internationalization of American history project—a project well worth pursuing. David Thelen, in a debate around the book a few months ago, underlined that his aim when, as editor of the *JAH*, he reformulated and gave a boost to this endeavor, was to bring into light new agendas and new questions. The idea behind it was to enrich American history by bringing in fresh questions, new goals, other viewpoints to the study of the past of what is, today, the United States. Our own research suggests that, to be possible, such an endeavor needs an understanding of the institutional and professional strictures and opportunities that would, or would not, allow it to flourish. Our *experience* leading this project and editing the book, however, also taught us that the sort of collaboration we set up is one venue to make strides in that direction. The collaboration at each stage and each level—on the project itself, on its framing, on the table of contents, on each chapter (co-written by several authors, and discussed by the whole group at large)—might seem cumbersome, but it truly brought us to directions we had not foreseen when it all started.

It might be one way to avoid the risk, on which Marco Mariano concludes, that “the process of ‘internationalization’ of American history ... would move us away the intellectual cosmopolitanism that ... is one of the ‘noble dreams’” of historians. Positionality, after all, needs not be a handicap. And it might be worth building collaborative projects that explicitly build on its strength—not only to do research, but also to design the agendas for that research.

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