Born in Vancouver, British Columbia, I grew up in communities on the Pacific Rim. My first job after graduating from the University of California at Berkeley was as a researcher for Hawai‘i state Senator Mamoru Yamasaki. During one memorable lunch break from work at the capitol, I paused on a plaza in downtown Honolulu to listen to a visiting band from Puerto Rico. Following the performance, I was intrigued to hear the spokesman for the conjunto announce additional performances at two local Puerto Rican cultural centers later that evening. The existence of not just one, but two, Puerto Rican cultural centers on Oahu struck me as anomalous. What could account for the unexpectedly large cultural presence of Puerto Ricans in Hawai‘i? The answer is embedded in the complex events surrounding the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the legacies of an expansive American presence in the Pacific and Caribbean, which structured networks of investment and migration and drew the people of former Spanish colonies—Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam and the Philippines—into a web of economic, political and strategic relationships, not only with the emerging global power, but also with one another.

Since the questions prompted by my serendipitous encounter with Puerto Rican plena in Honolulu, my career as a historian has developed in relation to broad interests in the history of colonialism and imperialism. My work is distinguished by its focus on relations among colonies within a given empire. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago I pursued my interest in how imperial networks shape the flow of information, capital and labor through a study of the history of labor migration on the periphery of the U.S. Empire in the early twentieth century. I broadened my inquiries into the connections between colonies within a single system to include other historical examples. In particular I became interested in the role of New Spain (Mexico), which was itself a colony, in sustaining a three century colonial relationship with the Philippines, Spain’s only colony in Asia.

In graduate school in the 1980s and early 1990s, it seemed that I was pursuing such interests in the peripheries of empire and “intra-colonial” relations on the margins of my own discipline and in the hinterlands of the History Department at the University of Chicago. The Latin American history program in which I was a student was a dynamic center of research into the social history of the region. Discussions of peasant consciousness, rebellion and revolution animated the workshops I attended and dominated the research agenda of my peers. In contrast to today, the word “empire” was seldom used in relation to the history of the United States. Nor was “global” a word with much currency in historical scholarship at that time. Earlier work by Arnold Toynbee and William McNeill notwithstanding, the field of World History was only just coming into its own as a way of questioning and theorizing transnational interactions and global dynamics over time. Moreover, the theoretical tools and models available for someone with the kinds of interest I had in making sense of historical connections between far-flung territories within loose structures of political and economic power seemed to revolve around the problematic paradigm of Wallersteinian World Systems theory, whose
concept of “sub-imperialisms” I struggled to apply to the two-and-a-half century long global trading relationship brokered by Mexico with the Philippines, and ultimately rejected as inadequate to capture the significance of the cultural and commercial techniques innovated by a well placed and powerful Mexico-based merchant class, which I argued was responsible for maintaining the Manila galleon trade that provided the principal link between Spain and the Philippines. My article making this case was published in the relatively new *Journal of World History* in 1998.

As I searched for models of the kind of history I wanted to engage, I found myself drawn to the historical work of anthropologists such as Eric Wolf, Bernard Cohn, Sidney Mintz and Janet Abu-Lughod to explore the dynamics of culture and the manifestations of power in shifting histories of interaction among the peoples, nations and empires of the world. I developed an appreciation for methodological approaches being pioneered by anthropologists at this time to study “a world in motion” (Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo’s phrase in *Anthropology of Globalization*). I also developed a more personal connection to the discipline: I married an anthropologist.

In 1989-1990 I took a leave of absence from my graduate studies to accompany my husband to his fieldwork site in a village in Nepal. Adrift in an utterly unfamiliar material, linguistic and cultural world, at first I regarded the year in Nepal as an imposed time out from my own research agenda, with no real relevance for my scholarship. As it turned out, the experience of living the daily rhythms of an unindustrialized, agricultural, village-based society contributed tremendous insights into the fundamentally life-changing transformations in post-emancipation patterns of work and the definition of leisure that I examined in my dissertation, *Incorporating an Empire: from Deregulating Labor to Regulating Leisure in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawai‘i, and the Philippines, 1898-1909*. In the dissertation I cited E.P. Thompson’s classic work on the effects of industrialization on the making of the English working class, but my real education in the subject occurred during my participation in the rice harvest in Nepal when singing enlivened physically demanding work in the fields and the cessation of labor was indicated only by the setting of the sun.

I wrote a book exploring aspects of the cross-cultural interactions I experienced during that year in Nepal. The book, called *In the Circle of the Dance: Notes of an Outsider in Nepal*, was published by Cornell University Press in 1999. The book has been adopted as a text in cultural anthropology courses as well as in undergraduate and graduate courses on writing ethnography. Most importantly, my experience of ethnographic engagement as well as the research I carried out after returning from “the field” in order to write the book provided me with a critical understanding of this technique of cultural engagement which is central to my current interpretation of the dynamics of cross-cultural encounter on the advancing frontiers of the American empire at the turn of the twentieth century.

With most of my book manuscript on Nepal drafted, and following the birth of my first child, I returned to work on my dissertation in 1992. I received grant support for research carried out in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. from a *Mellon Foundation Summer Research Grant* in 1993. Research in Cuba during that July was supported by a *John D. and Catherine T. Macarthur Foundation and Cuban Ministry of*
Higher Education Research Grant and by a Ford Foundation-Johns Hopkins University Cuban Studies Program Research Fellowship.

In 1995 our growing family moved to Minnesota, where my husband had taken an academic job. During the next few years I juggled writing the dissertation, freelance work writing history textbooks, and adjunct teaching at four different institutions with caring for young children. This was a challenging time for me to remain engaged as a scholar; it was also a period in which I developed a valuable outsider’s perspective on the academic culture in which I had been socialized, which I believe improved my independence of thought and my empathy as a teacher and as an historian. In spite of my feelings of exile from a professional career during this time, I was able to work on several articles which were later published, something I have found much more difficult to accomplish while teaching full-time. Most importantly I was able to finish and defend my dissertation.

Following the completion of my dissertation in 1998, I was awarded a Visiting Junior Fellowship by the University of Iowa’s Obermann Center for Advanced Studies to participate in an international research seminar which brought together scholars from Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines to examine the historical legacies of the War of 1898 and the commonalities of experience among the territories that were incorporated into the U.S. sphere. That conference provided an affirmation and reinforcement of a historical conceptual framework I had come to regard as idiosyncratic; it provided me with a stimulating introduction to a community of scholars working on similar questions across widely disparate geographical and disciplinary frames of reference. The conference also revived and refocused my interest in comparative colonialism and sparked a new interest in the legal aspects of transitions between successive colonial regimes. In 2001, as a community faculty member at Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis-St. Paul, I was awarded a Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship to carry out research on a new project on transitions between colonial legal regimes in Sri Lanka (Portuguese, Dutch and British).

I joined the faculty of Hamline University upon my return from Sri Lanka in 2002. My joint appointment in History, Latin American Studies and Global Studies as well as an institutional philosophy supportive of interdisciplinary and transnational approaches to understanding and teaching about the world have provided great scope and collegial support for developing my interests in the global dynamics and historical interactions on the margins that have fascinated me and informed my view of the world since I stood on a plaza in Honolulu wondering at the historical currents that had brought together people from distant islands in two oceans.

Besides core courses in Global Studies and Latin American history, I teach broadly comparative courses on topics such as environmental history, history of disease, comparative world empires, and torture and state terror. I also served as acting chair of both the History Department and Global Studies program before receiving tenure in 2007 and of Global Studies again from 2008-2011. Since 2008 I have been awarded three internal faculty development grants to support my research and teaching on topics related to the continuities between the domestic frontier and the colonial overseas expansion of the United States, which is the focus of my current book project.