

Editors' Introduction

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CIRCULATIONS: FLEXING THE BOUNDARIES OF BRITISH STUDIES

This issue is about the flexible boundaries of “British” history. Through a variety of different studies of the circulation of people, things, and ideas through space, it demonstrates that British history cannot be confined to the British Isles alone. Our articles in this issue are all concerned with movement across boundaries—whether of petitions dispatched on ships to a distant imperial metropolis; of convicts sent to unruly receptions in increasingly unfriendly colonies; of a troubled English diplomat moving to the Mughal court; of contested concepts of citizenship, race, and humanitarianism circulating through time and space; of a fictional character moving between multiple representations in Britain, Europe, and America; or of Inuit visitors to London who on their return inadvertently facilitated the circulation of a deadly virus.

Taken together, these articles about circulation in diverse contexts enable us to explore histories that might begin or end in Britain but that also move beyond national history to explore linked spaces and movement, whether of peoples, debates, or objects, between these spaces. This movement may be termed transnational, but with the caution that the term *transnational* enshrines a concept of the nation that might not always be helpful: is “the nation” the best frame through which to understand eighteenth-century Inuit experience, for example, or the circulation of ideas among Caribbean migrants? Perhaps it is better to say *transregional*: the nation is of course not a reified given. Nonetheless, the processes of nation formation cannot be ignored, which these articles also suggest. Lurking behind many of the articles in this issue are in fact nations, empires, and processes of state building, as Australian colonies flexed their developing political muscle, for example, or as the English state began, however uncertainly, to send ambassadors to the Mughal empire. Several of the articles foreground power struggles among empire, colony, and nation, as well as between settlers and Indigenous peoples, while others look at how nations were imagined. Overall, however, the articles explore multiple frames of reference, not solely the national.

In this sense, the articles in this issue reflect a great deal of recent work in the field of the new British history that tries to move between different scales of analysis and to incorporate “global” and “British” history (however defined) into the same frame. British imperial history, for example, has long struggled to think about networks that unite different nodes of the empire to one another, rather than simply focusing on a dichotomous nexus between “metropole” and “colony.”¹ Recent discussions of the

¹ Richard Price, “One Big Thing: Britain, Its Empire, and Their Imperial Culture,” *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 (July 2006): 602–27; Tamson Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 2 (April 2013): 441–63.

possibilities enabled by envisioning *histoires croisées*, or “entangled histories,” echo similar preoccupations, as does the increasing disciplinary focus on global history. All this is not necessarily easy or obvious. How should histories reflect both transregional circulation and the particularities of place? How, also, can we not eviscerate from our narratives the realities of power imbalances in the process of transregional circulations of people, goods, and ideas?

One of the most evident forms of circulation is that of individuals moving between jurisdictions, as much recent work tracing transnational and imperial lives suggests. In “Diplomacy at the Edge: Split Interests in the Roe Embassy to the Mughal Court,” Rupali Mishra dissects the expectations and experience of Sir Thomas Roe as the first official English ambassador (under the auspices of the East India Company) to the Mughal court in the early seventeenth century. Roe may have seen himself as projecting English power overseas, and the story of his Mughal embassy has often been understood as the first chapter in the making of a British Empire in India, but his actual mission was marked by uncertainty over his relationships with the merchants of the East India Company (and thus lack of clarity over the lines of authority between state and company), as well as frustration over his relative lack of status in the Mughal court. Roe’s case suggests the difficulties, as Mishra puts it, of adapting the tools of early modern statecraft to England’s widening global reach.

In “The Iceberg and the Cathedral: Encounter, Entanglement, and Isuma in Inuit London,” Coll Thrush explores a different kind of individual circulation through space, taking a microhistorical approach to the voyage of five Inuit people to London in the late eighteenth century. He shifts the focus from how London understood the Inuit to how the Inuit understood London. Thrush argues that the Inuit were far from awed by their experience of the late Georgian metropolis. They were instead sometimes critical of what they found there. They also understood the city in terms of their own culturally specific language and logical frameworks that must be taken into account if we are going to aspire to anything like a full understanding of the Inuit encounter with London. Thrush helps us to trace, then, an entangled history of Indigenous and urban worlds by calling for “a new kind of scholarship that shows connections between Indigenous and urban histories at the transoceanic and imperial levels” (p. 59). This is an approach to Indigenous history that emphasizes mobility and entanglement, as well as the particularities of place, and in that sense it is an important corrective to any assumption that Indigenous histories are inherently only local.

A different form of circulation is that of political language and ideas. Two other articles in this issue examine how imperial “subjects” and “citizens” at different periods tried to seize available languages and political tools to redefine imperial statuses to their own benefit. In the process, these individuals framed ideas that are more commonly seen as emanating from the so-called imperial metropolis. In “Bonds of Belonging: Subjecthood and the British Empire,” Hannah Weiss Muller examines petitions from newly conquered territories in which petitioners claimed subject status in their appeals to the British Crown. She offers particular case studies of petitions from French-speaking Catholics in the territories of Quebec and Grenada, using these examples to make larger arguments about the malleability and utility of subjecthood in the eighteenth-century British Empire. She claims that the language of subjecthood was omnipresent in eighteenth-century British imperial discourse and

helped to create “bonds of belonging” that were, nonetheless, constantly negotiated and renegotiated by those who were defined as subjects.

Lara Putnam explores some similar themes as she looks at the uses made of the language of citizenship by Caribbean men and women in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Her article, “Citizenship from the Margins: Vernacular Theories of Rights and the State from the Interwar Caribbean,” focuses particularly on migrants who were moving in large numbers elsewhere in the Americas and were already experiencing significant mobility restrictions. Putnam argues that Caribbeans helped force the British to adopt (however temporarily) a more expansive vision of citizenship than was available in other regions of the world, pushing the British to make concessions in the hope of maintaining imperial unity and support. She also examines the interface between narrower and more legalistic definitions of citizenship and broader cultural conceptions. The essay navigates between current scholarly theories of citizenship, the articulation of more formal theories in the immediate postwar era, and vernacular conceptions, demonstrating connections among them. Putnam also argues that an approach centered on Britain and its empire is not sufficient to make sense of these complicated threads. Rather, it is also essential to focus on Caribbean migrants themselves, to examine debates among them, and to trace their movement through space as they migrated for work to parts of the Americas that were increasingly pulling up the drawbridge of citizenship and excluding Caribbean workers of color. Both Putnam’s and Muller’s studies suggest that concepts such as citizenship and subjecthood were forged at least in part in the heat of power struggles and that people used the tools available to them to claim status within the empire in ways that redounded to their advantage.

Phil Harling and Kenton Storey look at empire in more conventional terms, in the sense of examining interaction between colonies and Britain. But they do so with unconventional arguments. In “The Trouble with Convicts: From Transportation to Penal Servitude, 1840–67,” Harling shows how the colonies themselves influenced imperial policy concerning convict transportation, as imperial power balances shifted between London and the settler colonies. While metropolitan critiques of convict transportation had been developing in tandem with other moral reform movements such as the antislavery crusade, his article argues that it was colonial opposition to transportation that ultimately made abolition of the practice an inevitable reality. The mid-Victorian turn from transportation to penal servitude was therefore produced by the entangled histories of the British metropole and its Australasian and southern African colonies.

In “Colonial Humanitarian? Thomas Gore Browne and the Taranaki War, 1860–61,” Storey revisits the topic of humanitarianism and imperialism in the 1850s and 1860s by offering a new interpretation, on the one hand, of the role of Sir Thomas Gore Brown in New Zealand’s Taranaki War and, on the other hand, of the imperial circulation of “humanitarian” narratives in the mid-nineteenth century. Some recent scholarship contends that colonial “humanitarianism” (a debated term), exemplified by abolitionism and by the aborigines’ protection movement in the 1830s, declined in the wake of the economic difficulties faced by the postslavery sugar colonies, the vicissitudes of colonial rebellions, including the Indian rebellion of 1857, and the entrenchment of settler colonialism. Storey agrees with recent trends in troubling the term *humanitarian*. He also contends, however, that a humanitarian language and humanitarian colonial aims permeated the politics of the opponents of the

more visible advocates of Maori land rights. In part, this was because Europeans in New Zealand were playing to an imagined audience of activists and Colonial Office officials in Britain, believed to be more supportive of Indigenous rights than was the case at this point. It was also because humanitarian narratives could in fact be adapted to support aggressive colonial intervention and because Gore Brown believed he was correct and moral in carrying out land purchases in Tarnaki, and hence was pursuing assimilative policies through another means. As this suggests, there were competing views of colonial humanitarianism in circulation, and all drew on variants of ideas about assimilation.

In contrast, Eloise Moss looks at the movement of a fictional character. In “How I Had Liked This Villain! How I Had Admired Him!": A. J. Raffles and the Burglar as British Icon, 1898–1939,” Moss explores the transnational peregrinations of a fictional character who became something of a cultural icon in the early twentieth century: namely, the glamorous British burglar Raffles. In this case, it is the image of a fictional character that circulates, but its perambulations around the Anglophone imagination tell us a great deal not only about changing literary and theatrical cultures but also about challenges to ideas of respectable masculinity from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Raffles's multiple representations suggest the valence of alternate models of masculinity, however fictive and escapist.

Our next issue will feature eight articles on a range of topics, including the demographic history of male to female sex ratios in late medieval England and two new articles on the political history of King Charles I's reign before the outbreak of the civil wars. It will also include an article on marital desertion among British soldiers during the eighteenth century, a study of clerical opposition to the 1832 Reform Act, and a new look at the debates between preservationists and “demolitionists” with regard to the churches of Victorian England. The issue will conclude with articles on lay-clerical relations in twentieth-century Ireland and the complex representations of class, gender, race, and generation in postwar London photographs.