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Editors' Introduction: Networks in Imperial History

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HISTORY is the midst of what David Bell has referred to as a “global turn.”¹ Over the past decade, historians have increasingly turned away from the study of issues connected to the history of the nation-state in favor of transnational topics, such as migration and diasporas, the development of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), global patterns of trade and investment, international development, human rights, and networks of political and social activists.²

¹ David Bell, “This Is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network,” October 25, 2013, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/114709/world-connecting-reviewed-historians-overuse-network-metaphor>.

² The literature on these topics is extensive. Significant examples include: Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organisations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2008); Anthony G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization and World History* (London: Plimlico, 2002).

Nowhere is this “global turn” more evident than in the field of Imperial History—a field of historical enquiry that has undergone a significant transformation in the last three decades. During the 1980s historians were predicting the slow demise of Imperial History, with its focus on administrative and diplomatic elites and the political and strategic interests of the metropolitan powers.³ In contrast, Area Studies, which emphasized the importance of studying African, Asian, and Latin American societies in their own right, restoring agency to colonial peoples, and debunking the myth of the Western civilizing mission, appeared dynamic and offered new perspectives on the relationship between the imperialist North and the colonial South.⁴

Given the sense of pessimism that surrounded the field in the 1980s, how can the resurgence in Imperial History be explained? It is partly because the advent of European imperialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has come to be regarded as a “precursor” or “first wave” of globalization.⁵ However, before examining what, if any, was the relationship between imperialism and globalization, it is worth defining what is meant by “Global,” “Transnational,” and “World” History and how these different approaches have been utilized by imperial historians. “Global” History is most commonly associated, though not exclusively so, with historians whose principal aim is to recover the historical origins of globalization.⁶ While most would accept that there is something distinct about the late twentieth-century phenomenon of globalization, global historians argue that evidence of global interconnectivity, whether in terms of trade, migration, or cultural and political exchange, can be traced back over the course of several centuries. For imperial historians, Global History has been a useful way of thinking about how the process of European imperial expansion was not only a product of globalizing processes, but also facilitated the growth of

³ D. K. Fieldhouse, “Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Back Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12 (1984): 9–23.

⁴ On the rise and fall of Colonial Studies and Imperial History, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 33–55; Stephen Howe, “The Slow Death and Strange Rebirths of Imperial History,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29 (2001): 131–141; Richard Drayton, “Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 46 (2011): 671–685.

⁵ Andrew S. Thompson and Gary B. Maghee, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22.

⁶ Bruce Mazlish, “Comparing Global History to World History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28 (1998): 385–395.

mechanisms—ideological, institutional, and technological—that contributed to increasing global integration.⁷

Although the term is occasionally used interchangeably with “Global History,” “Transnational History” is less concerned with taking the whole world as its focus and instead concentrates on the “people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in between polities and societies.”⁸ Simon Potter has warned imperial historians that they should be careful when applying the term “transnational” to colonial contexts “for the simple reason that studying empires often involves examining territorial units that cannot be described as nations without risking serious anachronism.”⁹ Potter’s point is well-taken, but there are topics in Imperial History that lend themselves to transnational approaches, such as the growing number of studies that focus on the role of international NGOs and regulatory agencies in colonial territories or on the exchange of ideas between anticolonial nationalist movements.¹⁰

As is the case with transnational historians, world historians are not preoccupied with the nation-state as a unit of analysis. Unlike global historians, however, world historians are not concerned with weaving history into a singular narrative of closer integration. Instead they focus on broad topics, such as the history of empires, slavery, or international commerce, often producing works that span several centuries—an approach that distinguishes them from transnational historians.¹¹ In the case of Imperial History, historians have adopted what could be described as World History approach to make the case that most of history has been dominated by imperialism and empire-building and that the nation-state as a form of political organization is a relatively recent phenomenon.¹²

⁷ Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, “Empire and Globalisation: From ‘High Imperialism’ to Decolonisation,” *International History Review* 36 (2014): 142–170.

⁸ Akira Iriye, *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History: From the Mid-19th Century to the Present Day* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xviii, cited in Matthew Hilton and Rana Mitter, Introduction, *Past and Present* 218, Supplement 9, *Transnationalism and Global Contemporary History* (2013): 19. For a history of the term “transnationalism,” see Patricia Clavin, “Defining Transnationalism,” *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 421–439.

⁹ Simon Potter, *British Imperial History* (Palgrave: New York, 2015), 111. For a useful discussion of Transnational History, see “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1441–1464.

¹⁰ Susan Pederson, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Sunil Amrith, *Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930–65* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹¹ Clavin, “Defining Transnationalism,” 435–436.

¹² See, for example, John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin, 2008); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Having distinguished among these different approaches, the question becomes, why is it that imperial historians have come to regard imperialism as a “bridge” to Global History, and is this a useful view to take?¹³ From the mid-eighteenth century onward, violent colonial conquest, geopolitical rivalries, the drive to access and secure new markets, and instability in Africa and Asia all contributed to the rapid growth of European empires, with the result that by the 1930s 85 percent of the world’s territory was either directly or indirectly under imperial control.¹⁴ This process of imperial expansion was facilitated by a technological revolution in travel and communication, as the development of the telegraph, the railways, and the steamship enabled people, goods, and information to travel around the world not only in greater numbers but with unprecedented speed.¹⁵

It could be argued that the division of the world into rival imperial systems appears antithetical to the concept of globalization. However, as Andrew Thompson and Martin Thomas argue, the process of imperial expansion was about more than “the physical compression” of the world; it was also about “imagination”—the perception among historical actors that they themselves were part of a system of interconnected global empires.¹⁶ Here the movement of people within and between empires played a key role in creating and sustaining cultural, social, and political networks that contributed to the shrinking of the world, whether this movement was of the Anglophone white settlers of the “British World,” of French imperial administrators with their assimilationist rhetoric, or of the Chinese and Indian laborers who established diasporic communities that crossed imperial boundaries.¹⁷ This position echoes the work of Christopher Bayly, who made the case for the long nineteenth century heralding an age of globalizing processes, particularly with regard to the relationship between imperialism and the emergence of “global” uniformities in terms of state organization, religion, economic practice, and political ideology.¹⁸

¹³ Shigeru Akita, “Introduction: From Imperial History to Global History,” in *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism, and Global History*, ed. Shigeru Akita (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.

¹⁴ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “Empires and the Reach of the Global,” in *A World Connecting: 1870–1945*, ed. Emily S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 285.

¹⁵ Tamson Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” *Journal of British Studies* 52 (2013): 448.

¹⁶ Thomas and Thompson, “Empire and Globalisation,” 143.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144–150.

¹⁸ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

If historians are increasingly linking the historical roots of globalization to the age of imperialism, they are less confident about the question of whether empires were agents or subjects of globalization. Shigeru Akita has argued that "the progress of globalization has been promoted and accelerated by the presence of hegemonic states in a capitalist world-economy, especially by the primacy of Great Britain in the nineteenth-century, the "Pax Britannica," and the predominance of the United States in the twentieth-century, the "Pax Americana."¹⁹ For Akita, the role of the hegemonic imperial state was to ensure international stability, uphold international law, and provide the conditions necessary for the free movement of trade and capital.²⁰ In contrast, Antoinette Burton, while being careful not to cast metropolitan policymakers in the role of "absent-minded imperialists," has warned against an approach that overestimates the power of the imperial state. In the case of the British Empire, Burton argues that while the "empire's global dimensions were always in the process of becoming hegemonic by design," the effects were always in "flux, rarely articulated, [and] perpetually in need of reiteration."²¹ Support for Burton's argument has come from an unlikely ally in the form of John Darwin. Instead of focusing on the internal dynamics of the British Empire to explain its rise and eventual collapse, Darwin argues that the empire was at the heart of a much larger British world system, which was shaped by external factors, namely, geopolitics and the global economy.²² Insofar as Darwin distances himself from the totalizing ideas of world systems theory, what emerges from his work is a sense that the British Empire was not so much governed from London as managed through it, with the imperial authorities, constrained by external forces and weakened by internal contradictions, never able to exercise true global hegemony.²³

Burton is also critical of the Western and, in particular, Anglophone bias in much of the literature on imperial globalization, which often

¹⁹ Akita, "Introduction," 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Antoinette Burton, "Getting Outside of the Global: Repositioning British Imperialism in World History," in *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, and Teaching British Imperialism*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 279.

²² Darwin is associated with the more traditional branch of Imperial History, while Burton is more closely associated with the form of Imperial History that draws inspiration from the "cultural turn," postcolonial theory, and gender and literary studies. Burton referred to these methodological differences in a blog post; see: 'Critical Histories of the Present—A Response to Working Paper No. 1,' <https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/2014/10/27/critical-histories-of-the-present-a-response-to-working-paper-no-1/>.

²³ John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013).

draws a seamless and teleological link between the eras of British and American imperial power.²⁴ The assumption in much of this work is that “the west sets the terms of the debate, that global capital acts the way imperial capital is presumed to have done historically (from west to east) and that the international system as it was conceived in the wake of the Congress of Vienna (with its discrete nation states and sovereign power) remains if not paradigmatic, then foundational in terms of ‘our’ understanding of modern world order.”²⁵ In opposition to these Western-centric approaches, historians have argued that the process of imperial expansion was not simply an expression of European power and exceptionality but was driven as much by factors outside of Europe as within it: Raw materials and labor from Africa, Asia, and the Americas fueled capitalist accumulation, industrialization, and consumerism in Europe; the mass movement of non-European peoples frequently shaped the colonized world in more profound ways than the direct actions of the European imperialists; European empires existed in combination and competition with non-European forms of imperialism, such as the Qing and Ottoman Empires; and political, cultural, and technological innovations did not necessarily originate in Europe but were often forged in empire and then brought back to West, with the result that the experience and representation of empires and imperialism became intrinsic to the development of European politics, culture, and identity.²⁶

Simon Potter and Jonathan Saha have warned recently that historians “should not assume that Imperial history can be folded simply and easily into Global history.”²⁷ Arguing for a “connected” approach to Imperial History, Potter and Saha make the point that historians should pay close attention to the links among empires, the contingent and varied experience of colonial rule for both the “imperial” and the “subaltern,” and the asymmetries of power that existed within many

²⁴ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); and *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

²⁵ Antoinette Burton, “Not Even Remotely Global? Method and Scale in World History,” *History Workshop Journal* 64 (2007): 325.

²⁶ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*. See also Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Simon J. Potter and Jonathan Saha, “Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories of Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16 (2015), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v016/16.1.potter.html.

colonial situations.²⁸ These are points that echo Mrinalini Sinha, who states that while the “‘world’ and the ‘globe’ may offer useful horizons for scholarship,” “as units of analysis that anchor actual historical narratives they can remain problematic . . . [owing to] the tendency of the bird’s eye view to flatten and totalize the diversity . . . of human experience.”²⁹ Such criticisms, as Burton and Tony Ballantyne argue, have three implications for historians interested in the global dimensions of empire.³⁰ First, imperialism could create new networks of interconnection but in ways that were often unequal or destroyed existing patterns of exchange. Imperialism, after all, was about the loss of political sovereignty and frequently resulted in dislocation as a consequence of violence, disease, migration, and dispossession. Second, for all the European empires’ claims to civilization and universalism, they were not “hermetically sealed systems”: inter-imperial interaction, in terms of the exchange of personnel, knowledge, and trade or competition resulting from struggles over land, resources, and cultural and political influence, was common place.³¹ Third, it should not be assumed that imperialism worked in precisely the same way as present-day globalization. Nor should imperial power be regarded as hegemonic, for it was always contested, with colonial subjects serving as “co-authors” in the process of imperial expansion and contraction, whether they did so as junior functionaries or anticolonial elites, or, as was often the case, both simultaneously.³²

With these warnings in mind, the remainder of this introduction surveys recent developments in the field of British Imperial History reviewing how historians have been influenced by the recent shift to Global History and their efforts to remain sensitive to the contingent, inequitable, and local character of imperialism. Following this discussion, the articles in this special issue will further elucidate particular points of empirical and methodological tension in these debates.³³ The articles by Amanda Behm and Felicity Berry highlight the contested

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Mrinalini Sinha, “Projecting Power: Empires, Colonies and World History,” in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 268.

³⁰ These three implications for historians are based on the points raised by Ballantyne and Burton, “Empires,” 305.

³¹ Potter and Saha, “Global History, Imperial History.”

³² The term “co-authors” is taken from Ballantyne and Burton, “Empires,” 303.

³³ The special issue emerges from the conference on “Networks in Imperial and Global History,” held at the University of Exeter in June 2014. The conference was hosted by the Imperial and Global Research Network, which was established to support postgraduate and early career researchers in these fields. The special issue represents a selection of the papers drawn from the conference.

nature of imperialism, demonstrating how migrants' understanding of "Home" (Berry) and concepts such as "Greater Britain" and "imperial citizenship" (Behm) often had multiple and conflicting meanings. The themes of marginalization and inequality also feature prominently in the special issue. The articles by Katherine Bruce-Lockhart and Emily Bridger demonstrate not only how ideas relating to gender, youth, and race were used by the imperial authorities (Bruce-Lockhart) and international advocacy networks (Bridger) to entrench preexisting inequities, but also how local actors displayed agency in their engagement with these networks. Finally, the special issue also considers the networks that existed outside the boundaries of formal empire. Charlotte Riley's article locates post-1945 colonial development policy within the wider context of Anglo-American relations and inter-European cooperation on imperial affairs, while Melissa Mouat considers the fragility of imperial networks in Qing China, where cultural, racial, and religious differences hampered British diplomatic efforts.

FROM THE "CULTURAL" TO THE "GLOBAL" TURN IN IMPERIAL HISTORY

Among the first historians to emphasize the importance of decentring empire were those associated with what has become known as "New Imperial History," such as Catherine Hall and John MacKenzie, who argued for greater synergy between Britain's domestic and imperial histories.³⁴ Much of this work has been interdisciplinary in nature, taking its inspiration from literary criticism, cultural studies, ethnography, and human geography, as well as focusing on issues that were typically marginalized or neglected by "traditional" Imperial History, such as race, gender, and identity.³⁵ A classic example is Hall's *Civilising Subjects*,

³⁴ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Antoinette Burton, "Rules of Thumb: British History and 'Imperial Culture' in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain," *Women's History Review* 3 (1994): 483–501.

³⁵ Stephen Howe, "New Imperial Histories," in *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, ed. Stephen Howe (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 2.

which investigates the role of Baptist missionaries who were active in Birmingham and Jamaica during the mid-nineteenth century. Hall documents the exchange of ideas that took place across the Atlantic, examining how debates about slavery and emancipation shaped understandings of race and identity in both the metropole and the colony.³⁶

As Alan Lester has pointed out, the works associated with the “cultural turn” in Imperial History, with their emphasis on the way in which the colonized were perceived by the imperialists and the importance of imperial culture to metropolitan Britain, often have a distinct political agenda.³⁷ By highlighting the interdependency of British and imperial histories, “new imperial historians were not simply pointing out that popular British culture had an overlooked imperial dimension.” These historians were challenging “insular island narratives,” which, at best, ascribed fixed identities created in the peripheries to black and Asian Britons and, at worst, excluded these former subjects of empire from metropolitan citizenship altogether. The point was that by revealing the ways in which colonial subjects “were and are intrinsic components of Britain’s history,” historians could highlight how post-imperial Britain has always been shaped “by flows of people, ideas, practices, objects and images from other lands.”³⁸

The cumulative effect of this scholarship has been that historians have increasingly recognized that it is no longer sufficient to simply demonstrate how the West influenced the wider world. Rather, there is a need to investigate what Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper have referred to as “colonial circuits,” meaning the process by which ideas, people, commodities, and capital flowed not just between the metropole and colony but within and between empires.³⁹ The benefit of this approach to Imperial History has been immeasurable. Rather than regarding the European empires as homogenous entities, historians have been encouraged to challenge ideas of European exceptionalism, to reconsider imperialism as a product of driving forces originating in and outside of Europe, and to compare the differences and similarities among empires, focusing on the networks that connected and

³⁶ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

³⁷ Alan Lester, “Spatial Concepts and the Historical Geographies of British Colonialism,” in *Writing Imperial Histories*, ed. Andrew S. Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 121.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 28.

facilitated political, economic, and cultural exchanges among distant parts of the world.

One example of this approach has been the development of the “British World” concept. The term broadly refers to the political, commercial, and cultural experience of British settlers in the colonies, as well as the varied and contingent nature of British identity in the Anglophone world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Contributors to the literature on the concept have argued that the notion or idea of a “Greater Britain” was critical to the development of commercial, political, and cultural institutions among networks of British settlers.⁴⁰ In *Empire and Globalisation*, Andrew Thompson and Gary Maghee have documented how a shared sense of cultural identity among British settlers helped to facilitate trade, migration, and investment across the British world.⁴¹ This theme is also evident in James Belich’s *Replenishing the Earth*. Instead of focusing on imperial conquest or the establishment of formal colonial rule, Belich argues that it was the unprecedented and unrivalled migration and settlement of Anglophone settlers during the long nineteenth century that served as a key driver of global change.⁴² This point is taken up by Thompson and Thomas, who argue that the migration of European settlers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with migrants from Britain leading the way, was quantitatively and qualitatively different not only from earlier European migrations but also from the population movements associated with the “transcontinental empires of eastern Europe and western Asia.”⁴³ Between the 1870s and the 1920s outward migration from Europe averaged two million per decade. The global consequences of this mass movement were “profound.” Emigration was a key driver of “global economic growth integrating labour, commodity, and capital markets to an extent never previously seen,” as well as resulting in the “widespread dispossession and delocalisation of indigenous peoples.”⁴⁴

In the case of British migrants these structural changes were accompanied by a “transnational sense of Britishness,” with social, familial,

⁴⁰ Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

⁴¹ Thompson and Maghee, *Empire and Globalisation*. See also Kent Fedorowich and Andrew S. Thompson, eds., *Empire, Migration and Identity in the British World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁴² James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Thomas and Thompson, “Empire and Globalisation,” 145.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

and informational networks contributing to a sense among British settlers that they were part of a "global chain of kith and kin," which was almost exclusively "white" and bound up with notions of white racial supremacy and "Anglo-Saxonism."⁴⁵ This racial ideology, which gave the "Anglo-" or "British-World" its cultural cohesion and served to legitimize the process of colonial conquest, is explored in the work of Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds. In *Drawing the Global Colour Line* Lake and Reynolds trace the evolution and "spread of 'whiteness' as a transnational form of racial identification" which resulted from the cross-fertilization of ideas, practices, and debates in Australia, South Africa, and the United States.⁴⁶ In doing so, the authors demonstrate how these territories drew on transnational ideas concerning white racial identity to devise legislation designed to police racial boundaries and establish themselves as "white men's countries."

Although the literature on the British World is in keeping with the key theoretical and conceptual insights from New Imperial History, historians have suggested that the field should engage with broader understandings of British identity and imperial citizenship and move away from its primary focus on the relationship between white settlerism and notions of "Britishness"—an argument that is explored by Amanda Behm in this volume. Saul Dubow, for example, has stated that "Britishness . . . is better seen as a field of cultural, political and symbolic attachments which includes the rights, claims and aspirations of subject-citizens as well as citizen-subjects—'non-Britons' as well as 'neo-Britons' in today's parlance. Space is thereby created for the inclusion of colonial nationalists of various political stripes and colours who, paradoxically, may have chosen to affirm their Britishness even in the act of resisting British imperialism."⁴⁷ Similarly, Tamson Pietsch has argued that historians should think in terms of multiple and competing "British Worlds," where "Britishness" meant different things at different times to different people.⁴⁸ John MacKenzie has argued that a focus on British identity obscures the importance of imperialism in the shaping of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish ethnic identities, while others have emphasized the importance of investigating changing conceptions of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 146, 161.

⁴⁶ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynold, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

⁴⁷ Saul Dubow, "How British Was the British World? The Case of South Africa," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009): 3.

⁴⁸ Pietsch, "Rethinking the British World".

British identity and imperial citizenship for non-white peoples.⁴⁹ David Killingray, for example, has explored the meaning of “British” identity for black colonial subjects across space and time in the British Empire. Killingray documents how service in the British army could foster a sense of “Britishness,” prompting black servicemen after World War I to make claims for greater political rights on the basis on their status as “imperial citizens rather than as mere colonial ‘subjects.’”⁵⁰ This idea of imperial citizenship, which could combine both imperial loyalty and a culture of claim-making, is also explored in Sukanya Banerjee’s *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, which demonstrates how moderate Indian nationals drew on the language and ideas associated with imperial subjecthood to lay claim to an equal place for themselves within the British Empire.⁵¹

The main critique of British World studies—namely, that it remains too focused on the experience of white settlers—has also been applied to New Imperial History, with Richard Price noting that some of the works associated with the field “fail to escape the metropolitan gaze.”⁵² In the case of gendered histories of imperialism, there has frequently been a focus on elite white women to the exclusion of African and Asian men and women. One of the first works to address this important gap in the literature was *Colonial Masculinity* by Mrinalini Sinha, who warned that in the rush to demonstrate the impact of imperialism on metropolitan society, the colonial context risked being underdeveloped. To remedy this, Sinha explored how two opposing conceptions of masculinity, the “manly Englishman” and the “effeminate Bengali babu”, developed in relation to one another in *both* late nineteenth-century Britain and India. As with Banerjee’s work on imperial citizenship, Sinha’s research

⁴⁹ John MacKenzie, “Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? The Historiography of a Four Nations Approach to the History of the British Empire,” in *Race, Nation, and Empire: Making Histories, 1750 to the Present*, ed. Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Anne Spry Rush, “Imperial Identity in Colonial Minds: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931–50,” *Twentieth Century British History* 13, (2002): 356–383. See also Daniel Lowry, “The Crown, Empire Loyalty, and the Assimilation of Non-British White Subjects in the British Empire: An Argument against ‘Ethnic Determinism,’” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31, no. 2 (2003): 96–120.

⁵⁰ David Killingray, “‘A Good West Indian, a Good African, and, in Short, a Good Britisher’: Black and British in a Colour-Conscious Empire, 1760–1950,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008): 363–381. See also Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, eds., *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵¹ Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁵² Richard Price, “One Big Thing: Britain, Its Empire and Their Imperial Culture,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 604.

examined how Western-educated Bengalis both accepted and challenged the representation of effeminacy, pointing to Indian opposition to the British authorities' refusal to allow Bengalis to serve in the native volunteer force as evidence of this.⁵³

Though historians have emphasized the importance of retaining gender and cultural history in accounts of imperialism's global dimensions, there has been a tendency among other historians to privilege economics and the associated flows of commodities and capital.⁵⁴ As Potter argues, this is partly a response to the importance attached to issues of race and gender in New Imperial histories but also because of global historians' interest in the origins of economic globalization.⁵⁵ Anthony G. Hopkins has referred to the "totalizing project" of the postmodernist approach to Imperial History, arguing that it has produced "a type of imperial history . . . that is confined to a narrow range of topics . . . and is frequently based on a highly selective reading of historical sources."⁵⁶ Hopkins, together with Peter Cain, developed the concept of "gentlemanly capitalism" to explain the rise of British imperial power. In contrast to John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson's ideas of the "official mind" and the "imperialism of free trade," Cain and Hopkins argued that British imperial expansion was driven by financiers in the City of London, who used their influence in policymaking circles to drive the process of empire-building in order to secure new markets and protect existing financial interests.⁵⁷

Cain and Hopkins's work has underscored the importance of metropolitan interests to imperial expansion but it pays insufficient attention to the role of regional dynamics and non-Europeans. Sugata Bose has documented the role of Chettiar capitalists in the mid-nineteenth century, who worked with European banks to finance the opium trade.⁵⁸

⁵³ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). See also Mrinalini Sinha "Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History," *Signs* 25 (2000): 1077–1082.

⁵⁴ Ballantyne and Burton, "Empires and the Reach of the Global."

⁵⁵ Potter, *British Imperial History*, 107.

⁵⁶ A. G. Hopkins, "Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History," *Past and Present* 164 (1999): 200.

⁵⁷ Peter Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (Harlow: Longman, 1993); Peter Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperial Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914–1990* (Harlow: Longman, 1993); Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981); John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6 (1953): 1–15.

⁵⁸ Sugata Bose, "Blackbirders Refitted? The Journeys of Capitalists and Labourers in the Indian Ocean, 1830s–1930s," in *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities: Compara-*

Bose also describes how during the second half of the nineteenth century the greater penetration of the Malayan peninsula by European capital reconfigured the regional economy of the Indian Ocean. The development of the rubber plantations and the tin mines in Malaya attracted large numbers of Indian and Chinese laborers. This outward migration served as a safety valve for the densely populated agricultural regions of South India and China and resulted in the development of the new rice growing regions of the Irrawaddy delta in Lower Burma, the Chao Phraya delta in Thailand, and the Mekong delta in Southern Vietnam—a process that was financed predominantly by Indian and Chinese capitalists.⁵⁹ In this respect, Bose's work highlights the transformative capacity of imperialism, but instead of seeing the impulse for this as being solely metropolitan in inspiration, he draws historians' attention to the role of preexisting networks and the agency of local actors in driving this process.

In addition to acknowledging the role of non-European forms of capital, historians have also begun to investigate the way in which imperial political economies were shaped by understandings of race, gender, and sexuality, as the recent special edition of *Gender & History*, "Gender, Imperialism, and Global Exchanges," demonstrates.⁶⁰ At the most basic level, it is clear that ideas of race and racial hierarchies existed in a symbiotic relationship with the systems of primary commodity production in the Americas and in the Indian Ocean, but this should not obscure the fact that a sense of global interconnectivity could also have an emancipatory quality. For example, Marie Brown has challenged traditional accounts of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, which typically relegate women to the domestic sphere. Instead Brown has argued that by wearing the *tobe*, a rectangular piece of imported cloth that was draped around the head and body, not only were Sudanese women able to actively participate in public life, but, "inspired by the foreign origins of the cloth and contemporary cultural references assigned to *tobe*," they also became part of "an imagined world of interconnectivity, exoticism, and adventure."⁶¹

tive Perspectives, ed. Jayati Bhattacharya and Coonoor Kripalambi (Singapore: Anthem Press, 2015), 5. See also Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean Region in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ Bose, "Blackbirders Refitted," 7.

⁶⁰ Michele Mitchell and Naoko Shibusawa, with Stephen F. Miescher, "Introduction: Gender, Imperialism, and Global Exchanges," *Gender & History* 26 (2014): 393–413.

⁶¹ Marie Grace Brown, "Fashioning Their Place: Dress and Global Imagination in Imperial Sudan," *Gender and History* 26 (2014): 510.

Influenced by these ideas of imperial exchange, as well as approaches from Global History and Human Geography, historians have increasingly started to think about empire and imperialism in terms of spatial metaphors, such as networks or webs.⁶² As Ballantyne puts it “[having] punctured the fiction that Britain was somehow insulated from the effects of imperialism, . . . [it] is important to recognise not only that the empire was comprised of networks and exchanges that linked the various colonies to the metropole, but also that its very structure was dependent upon a series of crucial horizontal linkages among colonies.”⁶³ Ballantyne suggests therefore that empire should be conceived “not in terms of a spoked wheel with London as the ‘hub,’ where the various ‘spokes’ (whether flows of finance, lines of communication, or the movement of people and objects) from the periphery meet, but rather in terms of a complex web consisting of ‘horizontal’ filaments that run among various colonies in addition to vertical connections between metropole and individual colonies.”⁶⁴

Lester makes a similar point, arguing that a networked approach allows historians to bring metropole and colony into a single frame of analysis, thereby highlighting the complexity of the imperial system, where multiple “cores” and “peripheries,” with overlapping and interactive systems of institutions, organizations and discourses, existed in combination with each other.⁶⁵ In other words, such approaches are more than works of simple comparison: Instead they allow historians “to think about the inherent relationality of nodal points or ‘centres’ within an empire.”⁶⁶ Such ideas are evident in the work of scholars who have used regional zones, such as the “Atlantic” or the “Indian Ocean,” to decenter empire and explore ideas of interconnectivity. In *Imperial Connections*, for example, Thomas Metcalfe presents India as a subimperial center, a critical nodal point within the British Empire, demonstrating how the subcontinent provided the soldiers, laborers, and

⁶² Zoë Laidlaw, “Breaking Britannia’s Bounds? Law, Settlers, and Space in Britain’s Imperial Historiography,” *Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 814. See also Alan Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 4 (2006): 124–141. The two leading proponents of this approach are Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), and Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁶³ Tony Ballantyne, “Rereading the Archive and Opening Up the Nation-State: Colonial Knowledge in South Asia (and Beyond),” in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 112.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lester, *Imperial Networks*, 197, n. 39.

⁶⁶ Lester, “Imperial Circuits,” 133.

administrators that Britain required to dominate the Indian Ocean region. In doing so, Metcalfe argues that far from reducing the Indian Ocean to the status of a “British lake”, British control in the Indian Ocean was possible only because of India’s role in sustaining the networks of trade and administration that crisscrossed the region.⁶⁷

The “spatial turn” within Imperial History has also led historians to emphasize the importance of cross-fertilization in the formulation of imperial policy. Historians have highlighted not only how metropolitan policies were translated into colonial practices, but also how colonial policy initiatives circulated within the empire and were even exported back to the metropole. Perhaps the most obvious example of interforce recruitment and policy exchange is in relation to imperial policing. Historians have pointed to the exportation of the Royal Irish Constabulary model to the colonies and, later, to the cross-posting of police officers between Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, and West Africa during the era of decolonization as evidence of how policing policies and practices were disseminated throughout the empire.⁶⁸ This has been taken to its logical conclusion by Georgina Sinclair and Chris Williams, who have argued that metropolitan and colonial policing models converged in the decades after 1945 as a result of the exchange of technical expertise between metropolitan and colonial police forces and the institutionalization of training methods in colonial practices for domestic officers.⁶⁹ Such trends echo Stoler’s argument that colonies could act as “laborator[ies] of modernity,” facilitating the testing of new ideas, technologies, and plans for social engineering before these were imported back to the metropole.⁷⁰

While historians have documented the networks that connected the British Empire and facilitated the application of imperial power, this control was never total. Such networks were only as strong as their constituent nodes: They depended upon “collaboration” with local intermediaries, and multiple imperial networks could exist in tension

⁶⁷ Thomas Metcalfe, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Region, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds. *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. chap. 1.

⁶⁹ Georgina Sinclair and Chris A. Williams, “‘Home and Away’: The Cross-Fertilisation between ‘Colonial’ and ‘British’ Policing, 1921–85,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35 (2007): 221–238.

⁷⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 15.

with each other, such as competing missionary, diplomatic, settler, or commercial interests. With regard to this latter point, Lester has argued that this is where the concept of an imperial network is particularly useful since it allows for “multiple . . . colonial projects,” which enables historians to side-step “the issue of competing models of imperial expansion such as those of Robinson and Gallagher’s ‘official mind’ or Cain and Hopkins’ ‘gentlemanly capitalism.’”⁷¹ It is also important to point out that colonial subjects could also create their own “counter-imperial networks” of resistance.⁷² Elleke Boehmer’s *Empire, the National and the Post-Colonial* highlights such a development, with her work examining how individuals writing in India and South Africa during the early twentieth century drew inspiration from comparable situations of colonial oppression in other parts of the British Empire.⁷³ Similarly, John Maynard has documented the links between Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association and Aboriginal political movements in New South Wales—underscoring how groups that were remote from each other in geographic terms could nevertheless forge meaningful connections across territorial boundaries.⁷⁴

One of the achievements of New Imperial History has been to restore agency to colonial peoples, as well as to shed new light on issues such as the representation of the colonized, processes of imperial exchange, and understandings of race, gender, and sexuality in colonial contexts. However, as Martin Thomas argues, historians are only just beginning to apply such insights to the study of decolonization.⁷⁵ Citing the emergence of the global human rights order, as well as the series of insurgencies and colonial conflicts that engulfed European empires after 1945, Thomas makes the case for a global and comparative understanding of decolonization, arguing that the process of imperial collapse cannot be understood as a colony-specific or even an empire-specific affair.⁷⁶ Understood in this context, the emergence of the nation-state as the dominant form of political organisation after 1945 can be seen as

⁷¹ Lester, *Imperial Networks*, 197, n. 39.

⁷² Lester, “Imperial Circuits,” 134. See also Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 53.

⁷³ Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷⁴ John Maynard, “Transcultural/Transnational Interaction and Influence on Aboriginal Australia,” in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2005), 195–206.

⁷⁵ Martin Thomas, *Fight or Flight: Britain, France, and Their Roads from Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4–5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

both a product and a vehicle of globalizing forces, thus challenging the assumption that the nation-state is largely irrelevant to histories of globalization.⁷⁷

That said, although the international system may have been largely comprised of nation-states by the 1960s, Frederick Cooper has warned historians of decolonization against drawing a teleological link between the collapse of imperial power and the rise of the nation-state.⁷⁸ Anti-colonial nationalist movements were not constrained, either physically or mentally, by the territorial boundaries of the colonial state. From the interwar period onward, nationalist leaders in the colonies appropriated and adapted internationalist discourses associated with anti-colonialism, group and individual rights, and Afro-Asian solidarity, often combining them with vernacular ideas or localized nationalist thought, in order to demand an end to imperial rule and forge links with other anticolonial movements across the globe. In Kenya, for example, Margret Frenz has demonstrated how the Gandhian idea of *swaraj* was transmitted via the South Asian diaspora and was combined with local forms of anticolonial resistance to produce what Matthew Hilton and Rana Mitter have described as a “transnational nationalism.”⁷⁹

This renewed emphasis on the agency of anticolonial leaders has implications not only for historians’ understanding of decolonization but also for the postcolonial state. Although the nation-state as a form of political organization was enshrined in much of the post-1945 international architecture, anticolonial leaders strove to imagine and articulate a variety of visions for the postcolonial state, which did not necessarily correspond with the plans set out by European officials in the imperial metropole.⁸⁰ Such visions could be localized in nature, as with Jean Allman’s classic study of Asante nationalism, or they could be broader and more internationalist in outlook.⁸¹ In French West Africa, African nationalists, influenced by the rhetoric of French

⁷⁷ McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 6.

⁷⁸ Frederick Cooper, “Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of African History* 49 (2008): 167–196.

⁷⁹ Margret Frenz, “*Swaraj* for Kenya, 1949–1965,” *Past and Present* 218, Supplement 9, *Transnationalism and Global Contemporary History* (2013): 151–177; Hilton and Mitter, Introduction, 16.

⁸⁰ Sunil Amrith, “Asian Internationalism: Bandung’s Echo in a Colonial Metropolis,” *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (2005): 557–569.

⁸¹ Jean Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in Emergent Ghana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993). For a more recent study that investigates the relationship among universal ideas relating to self-determination, freedom, and citizenship and local discourses, see Emma Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

citizenship and assimilation, made claims for greater political and social entitlements while also seeking enhanced autonomy within a federated French West African state.⁸²

These alternative visions for the postcolonial state were not limited to the colonized. Michael Collins has begun to explore the idea of a “federal moment” during the era of British decolonization. Collins examines how the imperial authorities regarded federal states, such as the Central African Federation or the West Indies Federation, as a means of promoting development, managing anti-colonial nationalism, and maintaining British influence.⁸³ The cumulative effect of these works has been to move the study of decolonization away from the structural causes of imperial collapse toward the political cultures of imperial officials and their anticolonial counterparts. Rather than regard the rise of the postcolonial nation-state as an inevitable consequence of isolated anti-colonial struggles or metropolitan infirmity, historians are interrogating the chronology and process of nation-state formation not just in the colonies but also in the imperial center. As a result, historians are paying closer attention to the multiple and competing aspirations that existed for the post-1945 global order, whether these were supranational or federated visions for the state or the influence of what Hilton and Mitter term “‘South-South’ dialogue” in shaping the political ideology of anticolonial movements.⁸⁴

It is clear then that the global approach to Imperial History has breathed new life into the field and opened up exciting new research possibilities. The danger, however, is that in tracing the flow of goods, capital, and people, the lived experience of imperialism is flattened, and the inequalities inherent to colonial rule are obscured.⁸⁵ One solution to this is to adopt what has been described as a “life writing” approach in order trace the lives and experiences of those individuals and families who moved within and across empires.⁸⁶ Life writing uses the lives of ordinary individuals to elucidate wider historical processes, as opposed

⁸² Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁸³ Michael Collins, “Decolonisation and the Federal Moment,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 24 (2013): 21–40.

⁸⁴ Hilton and Mitter, ‘Introduction,’ 16–17.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Saha, “No, You’re Peripheral,” July 18, 2013, <http://jonathansaha.wordpress.com/2013/07/18/no-youre-peripheral/>.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008); Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); David Lambert and Alan Lester eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerings in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

to biography, which studies the life of an exceptional person. The key difference is the position of power from which these historical actors operated. Traditionally the subject of a biography influenced historical processes directly, although in new biography studies the subjects are often high-profile historical actors who exercise limited influence over historical events. In contrast, the subjects of life writing were imbricated in power relations through which they mediated some agency. As a result, the subjects of life writing are usually people who were marginalized, through either their poverty, gender, sexuality or race.⁸⁷

It was not until the rise of New Imperial History in the 1990s that life writing was increasingly applied to people who were mobile across territorial boundaries. Zoë Laidlaw's *Colonial Connections* and David Lambert and Alan Lester's *Colonial Lives*, which explore the circulations of colonial administrators and their networks of correspondence, are good examples of this approach.⁸⁸ Similarly, in *Captives*, Linda Colley draws attention to the heterogeneous nature of those Britons who moved across the British Empire—from “nabobs” to so-called “white subalterns.”⁸⁹ A limitation of Colley's approach, however, is its focus on marginalized people as they were swept up in exceptional moments. Clare Anderson, on the other hand, has pioneered an approach that she terms “subaltern prosopography,” which uses life writing to reveal the ordinary convict experience when traveling through networks that spanned the Indian Ocean.⁹⁰ To achieve this, Anderson pieces together archival fragments from repositories across the globe to tell the partial lives of five subaltern people—four convicts and one jailor—as they traveled through webs of convict transportation and imperial governance. One drawback of life-stories, as Kerry Ward has noted, is that they are inevitably restricted to an individual's lifespan, forcing the often unbounded spatial network to be bound up with a limited temporal framework.⁹¹ Thus, in her own work, Ward adopts a more expansive approach, “peopling” the networks of forced migration—that included ordinary criminals and religious elites—to explore the dynamic and

⁸⁷ David Nassaw, “AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography—Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 576–577.

⁸⁸ Lambert and Lester, *Colonial Lives across the British Empire*, 1. Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–1845: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

⁸⁹ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 316, 370.

⁹⁰ Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

⁹¹ Kerry Ward, *Networks of Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9.

negotiated nature of governance by the Dutch East India Company, particularly as it intersected with indigenous networks.⁹² Collectively then, by making the experience of imperialism personal, life writing makes the complex spatiality of imperial networks easier to visualize by following individual trajectories of people—whether elite, marginalized, subaltern, or indigenous—as they traveled along and between many intersecting global networks. It is in this way that life-writing can use individual experiences to shed light on wider historical processes and restore agency to individuals, thereby avoiding reductionist narratives of globalization that characterize it as a dehumanizing process.⁹³

Other historians have taken a broader view of migration, highlighting the regional and global diasporas that crisscrossed imperial boundaries. Adam McKeown, focusing on patterns of Asian migration, has been critical of approaches that regard outward European migration across the Atlantic as being exceptional and as a consequence treat non-European forms of migration as largely irrelevant.⁹⁴ For McKeown such accounts elevate white settlers to the role of “pioneers” and characterize Asians as “backward and earthbound peasants” who migrate only when compelled to do so because of external factors.⁹⁵ In contrast to these accounts, McKeown has pointed to the variety, scale, and complexity of non-European forms of migration, such as the Chinese migrants who lived, worked, and traded in Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific.⁹⁶ He has also drawn attention to one of the paradoxes at the heart of the globalization narrative. McKeown argues that while migration facilitated closer economic and cultural integration between geographically remote areas of the world, it also contributed to a deepening perception of racial difference and a growing emphasis on fixed notions of residence, nationality, and citizenship through the introduction of immigration legislation and border controls.⁹⁷

⁹² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹³ Simon Potter, *British Imperial History* (Palgrave: New York, 2015), 118.

⁹⁴ McKeown, in particular, is critical of Timothy Hatton and Jeffrey Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and Economic Impact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), and their *Global Migration and the World Economy: Two Centuries of Policy and Performance* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005). McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 44–45.

⁹⁵ McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 43.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48–65. See also Adam McKeown, “Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842–1949,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 58 (1999): 306–337; Philip Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), and the articles in Bhattacharya and Kripalani, *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities*.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the paradoxes of migration and border control, see McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 1–18.

Sunil Amrith has explored similar issues in relation to the Tamil diaspora, which stretched across the Bay of Bengal and included migrant communities in the British territories of Burma, Ceylon, and Malaya, as well as in the respective Dutch and French territories of Indonesia and Indochina.⁹⁸ Amrith documents the tensions and contradictions inherent in the migrant experience. Tamil migrants were often subject to harsh labor regimes, and, as low-paid workers in industries associated with primary commodity production, they were vulnerable to the vagaries of the global economy, particularly during the Depression era of the 1930s.⁹⁹ However, migrants were able to circumvent such exacting realities by returning home, by leaving the plantation to escape to the relative freedom of cities such as Singapore, and by maintaining existing or forging new forms of cultural, political, and religious association.¹⁰⁰

The story of Tamil migration within the Indian Ocean region also underscores the hybridity of imperial networks. In order to secure the necessary supply of labor for the plantations in Malaya, the European firms employed *kanganies*, middlemen or overseers, who were responsible for recruiting fellow Tamils in South India for work on the plantations. Although the *kangany* system emerged as a direct response to the development of the plantation economy, *kanganies* relied on their status and influence within their local South Indian communities in order to recruit labourers.¹⁰¹ The system is therefore an example of how imperialism could forge new networks but at the same time rely on preexisting forms of power and authority in order to sustain them.

Whilst many historians have been careful to emphasize the contingency of “networked” or “webbed” understandings of imperialism, pointing to their fragility, contradictions, inequalities of power, and the fact that such networks often existed outside the boundaries of formal imperial control, others have questioned the utility of such concepts altogether. They argue that by focusing on the hubs of connection, or what Darwin terms “bridgeheads”—the trading centers, diplomatic outposts, and the port and railway towns—there is a risk that imperialism will be

⁹⁸ Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*.

⁹⁹ Sunil S. Amrith, “Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal,” *American Historical Review* 114, (2009): 565.

¹⁰⁰ Sunil S. Amrith, “Empires, Disaporas, and Cultural Circulation,” in *Writing Imperial Histories*, ed. Andrew S. Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 224.

¹⁰¹ This discussion of the *kangany* system is based on Richard Baxtrom, “Governmentality, Bio-Power, and the Emergence of the Malayan-Tamil Subject on the Plantations of Colonial Malaya,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 14 (2000): 49–78.

reduced to an all-embracing, transformative force.¹⁰² Frederick Cooper cautions against such an argument, stating that "The world has long been—and still is—a space where economic and political relations are very uneven; it is filled with lumps, places where power coalesces surrounded by those where it does not. . . . Structures and networks penetrate certain places and do certain things with great intensity but their effects tail off elsewhere."¹⁰³ Historians of the colonial state have long argued that its reach was often limited. In an oft-quoted reworking of Foucault's treatment of power, Cooper argues that "power in colonial societies was more arterial than capillary—concentrated spatially and socially, not very nourishing beyond such domains, and in need of a pump to push it from moment to moment and place to place."¹⁰⁴ Developing Cooper's argument about the uneven nature of colonial power by looking at the connections between colonial strategies and arenas of penal power, Taylor Sherman identifies the "coercive networks" of law and punishment that helped maintain imperial authority, linking policing, prisons, and courts with broader methods of social control and labor mobilization. But as Sherman argues, even at this "sharp end" of colonial violence and authority, "practices which constituted coercive networks were defined not so much by discipline and regimentation, but by contradiction and the unpredictability which arose out of systems replete with tensions," thereby allowing space for colonial resistance.¹⁰⁵

In the rush to find examples of interconnectivity, there is also a danger that the insights gained from approaches pioneered by Area Studies will be lost. In his seminal work of historical anthropology, *Nuer Prophets*, Douglas Johnson highlighted the fitful presence of the colonial state in the southern Sudan, which was seasonal until at least the 1930s.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Johnson has rehabilitated the image of the Nuer prophets, arguing that they sought to create a moral community across ethnic boundaries, which was based on a vision of peace, not war as British

¹⁰² John Darwin, "Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion," *English Historical Review* 112 (1997): 614–642. On the risk of reducing imperialism to a totalising force, see Saha, "No, You're Peripheral."

¹⁰³ Frederick Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 190.

¹⁰⁴ Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1533.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor C. Sherman, "Tensions of Colonial Punishment: Perspectives on Recent Developments in the Study of Coercive Networks in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean," *History Compass* 7 (2009): 659–677.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 7.

colonial officials claimed. Johnson's work on the Nuer has added much to historians' understanding of an understudied people and region, but, as Saha warns, the increasing focus on issues such as connection and mobility means that studies of the periphery and seemingly "disconnected groups" are at risk of being "viewed at best as supplementary and at worst as irrelevant."¹⁰⁷ However, as Saha continues and as works such as *Nuer Prophets* demonstrate, high "histories of empires written across a huge chronological sweep . . . [do] not necessarily explain more than micro studies embedded in particular cultures and working to a human scale."¹⁰⁸

This is not to suggest that proponents of the network approach are unaware of its potential limitations. As Lester writes:

imperial historians should be aware, newly instituted networks have destructive as well as creative effects. If imperial networks allowed previously unconnected activities, lives and practices to be brought together, they also allowed previously connected ones to be wrenched apart. It is all too easy to imagine the networks instantiated by Britons of various kinds (settlers, officials, missionaries, natural scientists, etc.) as "originary," as the first means by which distanced places were ever connected. Not only would such a move unrealistically inflate the innovativeness and ingenuity of Britons, but it would also elide the significantly interconnected nature of the pre-colonized societies that were later "assimilated" into the empire.¹⁰⁹

This is a point that Cooper has made in relation to Africa, arguing that at first glance the scramble for the continent and its subsequent colonization appear to fit with the narrative of the integration of apparently isolated regions into a singular European- or Western-dominated world.¹¹⁰ However, according to Cooper, such a view not only obscures long-term historical trends and networks, such as pilgrimages from the Sahara to Mecca or the links that connected merchants in West Africa, Europe, and South America, but also ignores the fact that the processes of imperial conquest and colonization imposed national borders on long-distance networks, forcing Africans into imperial economic systems that focused on a single European metropole and isolating

¹⁰⁷ Saha, "No, You're Peripheral."

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Lester, "Imperial Circuits," 165.

¹¹⁰ Africa is often marginalized in studies of Global History. For a useful discussion of the relationship between Africa and Global History see: Ralph Callebert, "African Mobility and Labor in Global History", *History Compass* 14 (2016): 116–127.

communities by dividing Africans into what were perceived to be distinct cultural and political units or "tribes."¹¹¹ What this suggests is that historians not only need to be sensitive to the limits of imperial power but they should also pay close attention to its destructive qualities, as well as the way in which it cannibalized, appropriated, and adapted existing patterns of power and interconnectivity.¹¹²

In summary, then, it is clear that Imperial History has undergone something of a revolution in the past three decades. The field has been reinvigorated by the rise of "New Imperial History" and historians' search for the historical roots of globalization—what Hopkins refers to as the quest for the "link between the history of empires, which embrace the world, and the universality of the problems that are the residue of their demise."¹¹³ What has emerged from this scholarship is a better understanding of how Britain's experience of empire shaped metropolitan culture, society, and politics, as well as the contingent and reciprocal nature of race, gender, and sexuality in both the colonies and the metropole. Drawing on this idea of imperial exchange, historians have increasingly sought to "eschew . . . colony- or nation-bound" approaches in favor of studies that decenter empire by tracing the intra- and inter-imperial connections that linked colonies within and among empires.¹¹⁴ Such approaches have highlighted the complexity of the webs and networks of people, commodities, and ideas that connected empires, as well as emphasizing the fact these connections often existed in combination and tension with each other. Nevertheless, it is important that historians remain attuned to the unevenness of imperial power and the specificities of the colonial experience for both colonizer and colonized.¹¹⁵ In this sense the challenge for historians is to trace the contours of imperialism's global reach, explaining why ideas, people, and commodities flowed between some places but not others, and to investigate how this history of inclusion and exclusion shaped societies' and individual peoples' experience of imperialism. It is this challenge that the contributors to this special issue have taken up.

¹¹¹ Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For?," 205–206.

¹¹² Ballantyne and Burton, "Empires and the Reach of the Global," 285–305.

¹¹³ Hopkins, "Back to the Future," 204, cited in Peers, "Is Humpty-Dumpty Back Together Again?," 455.

¹¹⁴ Laidlaw, "Breaking Britannia's Bounds?," 808.

¹¹⁵ Simon J. Potter, "Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007): 646.

STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

One of the key aims of the special issue is not only to examine the limits of imperialism's global reach (see the articles by Riley and Mouat) but also to investigate the issues that have been marginalized in mainstream accounts of imperial globalization, such as gender, race, and sexuality (see the articles by Behm, Berry, Bridger, and Bruce-Lockhart). In doing so, the collection moves beyond the "additive histories," which Elisa Camiscioli regards as the "addition of empire to a nation-based story through the addition of women to male-dominated historical narratives and, more specifically, with the addition of white women to historical accounts of empire."¹¹⁶ Instead, it analyzes how gender, race, and sexuality shaped discourse and action in the colonies, among colonies, and between colonies and the metropole. As Michele Mitchell, Naoko Shibusawa, and Stephan F. Miescher write, "gender—or perceptions of sexualised and embodied difference—could and did shape notions about power, human worth, economic interactions and diverse forms of work."¹¹⁷ Women, both Western and non-Western, had to negotiate racial and sexual boundaries in the highly phallogentric empire which kept them at the peripheries of both the physical and discursive empire.¹¹⁸

Amanda Behm's article further highlights some of the political and discursive tensions explored in this introduction to the special issue. Focusing on debates that surrounded the concept of a "Greater Britain" among public intellectuals and emerging academic historians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Behm highlights the multiple and contested meanings of imperial citizenship by focusing on how Indian nationalists and pan-Africanists appropriated Anglo-historicist rhetoric during the interwar period to make claims for greater political rights. While Behm concentrates on the networks that cut across the British Empire, Charlotte Riley examines how late-colonial development policy was shaped by intersecting international networks. Riley argues that the implementation of British development policy was a process of negotiation, influenced by the postwar dominance of the United States and Britain's relationship with the other European

¹¹⁶ Elisa Camiscioli, "Women, Gender, Intimacy and Empire," *Journal of Women's History* 25 (2013): 138–148.

¹¹⁷ Michele Mitchell and Naoko Shibusawa, with Stephan F. Miescher "Introduction: Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges," *Gender and History* 26 (2014): 394.

¹¹⁸ For examples from South Africa, see Lorena Rizzo, "Gender and Visuality: Identification Photographs, Respectability and Personhood in Colonial Southern Africa in the 1920s and 1930s," *Gender and History* 26 (2014): 688–708.

imperial powers. International diplomacy is also a theme addressed by Melissa Mouat's article on the Tongwen Guan language school in Qing China. During the nascent era of Sino-British diplomacy, the Tongwen Guan language school was established in order to train translators and overcome language barriers that were impeding diplomatic encounters. Mouat argues that while the school was unsuccessful in its efforts to train translators, citing inadequate resources and cultural differences as key impediments, it did serve as an important diplomatic symbol helping to forge important Sino-British connections.

Felicity Berry explores how different social understandings of the concept of "Home" resulted in the selective incorporation of British women into transnational social networks. Using two female emigrants, Elizabeth Campbell in India in 1826 and Eliza Stanley in 1840s Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), Berry examines settler attitudes to the British metropole. Critiquing the widespread assumption in imperial historiography that individual settlers "imported" their networks from home, Berry argues that the idea of "Home" was not a stable or static concept and that by the mid-nineteenth century it was an increasingly complex construction that represented many and often conflicting meanings both in Britain and in the empire. In this respect, Berry's article is an important reminder of the multiple communities and identities that existed within the "British World."

The analysis of women in imperial networks continues with Katherine Bruce-Lockhart's examination of the connections between the British metropole and women in Kamiti Detention Camp during the Mau Mau rebellion in 1950s Kenya. Focusing on the political, humanitarian, and religious debates concerning the treatment of female detainees in Kamiti, Bruce-Lockhart argues that female detention in Kenya became the focus for wider debates about the legitimacy of British imperialism. According to Bruce-Lockhart, these global debates about empire were fueled not only by the British former rehabilitation officer at Kamiti, Eileen Fletcher, who became a vocal opponent of the detention camp, but also by local actors in the form of female detainees, who drew on the rhetoric of the civilizing mission to question the legality of the camp and its practices. As with Behm's article, Bruce-Lockhart's examines the importance of networks that drew on discourses from within and outside of the imperial system, demonstrating how local actors were inspired by the emerging global language of rights.

This aim of analyzing the local in relation to the global is also explored in Emily Bridger's article on the "comrades"—a youth group within South Africa's anti-apartheid movement during the 1980s. Bridger points to a fundamental rift within anti-apartheid historiography, noting

how there still remains a divide between those historians who favor a history from below and those who focus on transnational connections to the exclusion of grassroots efforts. Bridger overcomes this artificial divide by documenting how the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) generated international support for the young black activists persecuted by the apartheid regime. In doing so, however, the AAM created a narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle that abstracted these youth activists from the realities of the local context. In other words, Bridger's article underscores the unequal power relations that can exist within networks and serves as a warning to historians about the importance of being sensitive to local specificities.

Some of the most recent and influential literature in Imperial History has focused on the idea of imperial exchange and the networks or webs that crisscrossed empire. The articles in this collection, while acknowledging the utility of the networked approach to the study of empire, emphasize the importance of problematizing the relationship between imperialism and spatial conceptions of empire. Collectively, the articles demonstrate that networks were only as strong as their constituent parts; networks could be subverted and shaped by local struggles; multiple and competing networks could exist within the same system; and local actors could create anti- or counter-imperial networks in order to undermine the imperial state. By exploring these complexities, the articles underscore the point that imperial networks could serve as a tool of both inclusion and exclusion, and to understand the often asymmetrical power relationships within these imperial webs, the global must be analyzed in relation to the local.